6-10-2020

Peace building through teacher leadership

Jill Bradley-Levine
Ball State University, United States

Seema Zainulabdin Lasi
Aga Khan University, seema.laasi@aku.edu

Recommended Citation

Bradley-Levine, J., Lasi, S. Z. (2020). Peace building through teacher leadership. *Journal of Peace Education, 17*(3), 308-323.
Available at: https://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_fhs_mc_hdp/1

Peace building through teacher leadership

Jill Bradley-Levine & Seema Zainulabdin

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Peace building through teacher leadership

Jill Bradley-Levine and Seema Zainulabdin

Ball State University, Muncie, IN, USA

ABSTRACT

This case study examines the motivations of, and processes used by teacher leaders to establish a peace program at their middle school. These teacher leaders creatively engaged students in transforming school culture using empowering strategies to build positive peace among students, administrators, and teachers. Theories of peace education are used as a framework to facilitate analysis of the data, which was collected through qualitative methods including observations and in-depth interviews. This study contributes to understandings of how teacher leaders promote positive peace in K-12 schools and their communities.

This case study examines the motivations and processes used by teacher leaders to establish a peace program at their middle school. These teacher leaders creatively engaged students in transforming school culture using empowering strategies to build peace and cooperation among students, administrators, and teachers. For this study, the teachers who initiated the process are considered teacher leaders because of the agency and advocacy they demonstrated through their work with students. The study of teacher leaders as advocates is in its early stages. Much of the research has focused on teacher leaders advocating for teachers and the profession (see Levenson 2014; Quinn and Carl 2015). However, there is a gap in research around teacher leaders who advocate for their students. These teachers utilize leadership to influence their colleague's beliefs about students, and to transform the overall culture of their schools (Bradley-Levine 2018). As such, they are teachers who share an interest in pursuing social justice (Crowther et al. 2002) through developing relationships with all members of the school community including teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community members (York-Barr and Duke 2004). This study examines teacher leaders' practice in the context of peace education to determine how these concepts interact to transform school communities.

Background

The most recent reports on school violence demonstrate a need for school-based programs that build a culture of positive peace. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015), school violence is a public health problem affecting many youths. In a survey of high school students conducted in 2013, 19.6% reported that they were bullied at school, 8.1% reported that they engaged in a fight at school, 6.9% reported that they were threatened or injured with a weapon, and 5.2% reported that they brought a weapon to school. The statistics on boys and young men of color are also bleak. According to the U. S. National Center for Education Statistics (2015), boys are expelled from school three times more often than girls, and black boys are expelled almost three times more often than white or Hispanic boys. Threatening others and causing physical injury are among the most common reasons for why students are expelled from school; these acts of violence are in clear conflict with peace. There is clearly a need for positive peace programs in secondary schools, and learning more about those that have been successful is essential to building peaceful schools, as well as peaceful local and global communities. This study examined a peace program that promoted peace in secondary schools and communities.

The peace program examined through this study was developed by three teacher leaders in response to increased conflict between African American and Latino Males across their district and in their community. Because the teacher leaders were concerned that this conflict could lead to significant consequences for the boys including physical and mental violence, expulsion from school, and disengagement in learning, they joined with the boys to develop a program focused on developing leadership skills and promoting cultural dialogue. The vision statement for the program outlines that it 'will also provide a way for students to become a support system for each other.' To promote this idea that boys from different racial and ethnic backgrounds could learn to love and respect each other, the teachers chose to include in the name of the program the word, 'Brothers;' this is the pseudonym I use for the program in this article. Since the founding of the Brother program in 2010, the teacher leaders have expanded its reach to include boys from all racial and ethnic backgrounds in the school. As a result, the Brothers program now includes boys from African American, Latino, Asian, Caucasian, and African backgrounds. Most have in common that they are from low-income families and likely would be the first generation in their family to attend higher education.

Theoretical framework

The idea of educating for peace, or what is now called peace education, has existed for more than 100 years (Stomfay-Stitz 2008). Early contributions were made by education philosopher, John Dewey and doctor-educator, Maria

Montessori. Dewey advocated that children must learn how to collectively solve problems by 'living democratically' within schools where they would engage in 'establishing the rules by which their classrooms will be governed, testing and evaluating ideas for the improvement of classroom life and learning, and participating in the construction of objectives for their own learning' (Noddings 2012, 36). Montessori also promoted the need to teach students how to live peacefully, writing that 'the means to achieve this unity for peace are twofold: first, an immediate effort to resolve conflicts without recourse to violence – in other words, to prevent war – and second, a long-term effort to establish a lasting peace among men' (Montessori 1949, 27).

Despite the influence of Dewey and Montessori, most peace education occurred privately or within institutions of higher education until the 1960s, when political and social movements inspired the growth of peace education in elementary and secondary schools. For example, the Freedom Schools invited black students in the South to engage in experiential learning by collaborating 'on a peace and social justice project, balancing idealistic dreams with the realities of deprivation and violence that marred their everyday lives' (Stomfay-Stitz 2008, 4). The founding of national organizations including the Peace Education Commission by teachers further established the growth and importance of peace education within elementary and secondary schools (Stomfay-Stitz 2008).

Since the 1980s peace education has been integrated into the curriculum of many schools through programs in conflict resolution and peer mediation. However, Betty Reardon, founder and director of the Peace Education Center at Teachers College, Columbia University and seminal theorist on peace education, notes that such programs focus on 'negative peace,' or bringing an end to acts of violence (Reardon 1997). She argues, instead, for programs that develop a culture of peace within schools, or what peace scholars call 'positive peace.' Such programs focus on human dignity and rights as a way to end violence. For marginalized students including students from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds, students living in poverty, and students whose first language is not English, positive peace programs are particularly important. These students need concrete ways to relate to and understand the forms of violence they experience including physical, structural, political, and cultural (Reardon 1997). Further, positive peace programs allow students to 'begin to look at education not so much as handing on what we have decided is important, but bringing forth the capacity to deal with the unprecedented problems as well as some of the traditional problems in a new way' (Reardon 1985). This study uses the definition of positive peace as supported by Reardon.

School-based peace programs

The violence that youth experience in school settings, including verbal and physical assault, negatively impacts their lives. Harris (2000) found that many

students suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to experiencing violence in their school. Exposure to violence also influences children's mental health, behavior, and academic performance (Harris 2000). However, most schools focus on negative peace, which involves reducing violent behaviors among students rather than positive peace, which requires building and uniting communities and providing children ways to manage conflict without resorting to violence. For example, school interventions such as police presence, metal detectors, student searches, and drug testing are utilized to reduce violence (Harris 2000). Other types of interventions enable students to learn strategies to resolve conflict through non-violent approaches (Harris 2000). These interventions are led by teachers and administrators who identify and address root causes of violence and resolve them through strategies supporting positive peace (Harris 2000).

Research on peace education at the middle school level demonstrates that peace education is challenging and complex. One program focusing on reducing and preventing violence was implemented across several middle schools in Texas (Kelder et al. 1996). Students who participated in the program were mostly Hispanic (65%) or African American (19%). Curriculum for the program focused on violence prevention, and was delivered through a scaffolded approach where teachers, administrators, and staff modeled peaceful conflict resolution practices. However, researchers found the program had little effect in reducing aggressive behaviors, fights in school, injuries caused by fighting, or absences from class as a result of feeling unsafe (Kelder et al. 1996).

Another peace education effort that has been implemented at the middle school level combines conflict resolution curriculum taught by teachers, and peer mediation training for a small group of students selected by administrators and teachers (Smith et al. 2002). Researchers found no significant change in students' attitudes towards conflict and communication, or in teachers' attitudes about school climate. However, the number of disciplinary incidents per month declined, although the reduction was not found to be statistically significant (Smith et al. 2002). These examples of middle school peace education both focus more on negative peace than positive peace, leaving room for further research on programs that take a positive peace approach.

One study examined the approaches that teacher leaders took to implementing peace education in their classrooms following the terror attacks on 11 September 2001 (Joseph and Duss 2009). Teachers who participated in the study utilized peace pedagogy to foster a more inclusive classroom culture where students from all backgrounds felt welcome and valued. However, their work was limited in scope to their own classrooms (Joseph and Duss 2009). This research suggests a need to examine the ways that teacher leaders who implement peace education influence the overall school culture, as well as the motivations of teachers to become leaders of peace education.

Methodology

The study was a qualitative case study, an approach that is appropriate for constructing a detailed account of how teacher leaders developed and implemented the Brothers program, and the ways their work influenced the culture of the school toward a less violent and more peaceful learning community. I collected data through observations and in-depth interviews to answer this guiding question for the study: How and why do teacher leaders develop a peace-building program for middle school boys?

Site profile

Spelling Middle School (SMS) serves 7th and 8th grade students in a large Midwestern school district located in a large city. A few more than 1,200 students attend SMS: 46% are white, 27% are Hispanic, 20% are black, 6% are multiracial, and 1% are Asian. About 84% of students qualify for free meals or reduced-price meals, 13.7% are English language learners, and 14.7% receive special education services.

Participants

I considered the three teacher leaders who founded the peace program the 'key informants' for the study, and will describe them here using pseudonyms they selected for themselves. Louis came to SMS after having taught in another district for three years. He was a social studies teacher at SMS for five years before leaving to become a dean at the district's high school. After only a year in that position, he returned to SMS as an assistant principal. He has also served in leadership roles including the district chair of the Habits of Success Committee, a PBIS school facilitator, a professional development coordinator, and a mentor. Additionally, he has served as a member of the district Big PAC, the district Equity Team, the Secondary Redesign Committee, and the AVID Site Team. Vince is in his 8th year of teaching Spanish. He is also a soccer coach and has worked as AVID Site Team Coordinator, a member of the Pearson Item Review Committee and the Men's Leadership Group, as well as serving as the summer school administrator last summer. Moses is a career changer who left the mortgage industry to pursue a mathematics teaching license. He was a student teacher at SMS, and has been a teacher there for seven years. Moses has served in several leadership roles including as a technology facilitator, an athletic event coordinator, and an AVID Site Team member. Both Moses and Vince have taught only at SMS.

In addition to the three teacher leaders, I interviewed a district administrator and a school administrator. I also interviewed two science teachers, one English language arts teacher, one technology teacher, and one social studies teacher at the school.

Recruitment

I learned about the Brothers program at SMS through a colleague who had carried out research about the students who have been part of the program. I asked her if she would introduce me to the three teacher leaders who had founded the program, and she did via an email. Once I made contact with them, I asked them if they were interested in participating in the study. They all agreed.

Next, I contacted the principal of the school, who I had already met during prior visits to the school to observe student teachers, to ask him if he would allow me to conduct the study. Simultaneously, I contacted the district administrator responsible for the secondary schools in the district, who also teaches as an adjunct at the university where I was then working and who I know, to ask him for permission to conduct the study. At the time that the study began, I no longer worked at that institution and so I did not consider conducting a study in this district or school a conflict of interest. Both the school principal and the district administrator were enthusiastic about the study, believing that it could inform efforts to start similar programs at other schools in the district.

I used snowball sampling (Creswell 2012) to recruit other teachers for interviews. As such, I asked the teacher leaders to provide the names of other colleagues they thought would either be important potential participants in the study or who would be interested in participating. I then emailed those teachers to request an interview. At the end of the first interview, I asked the teacher to recommend another teacher they thought I should interview, and I emailed those teachers to request an interview. Many more teachers were suggested by those I interviewed than agreed to participate in an interview.

Methods

First, I carried out observations in order to understand the design and implementation of the program. These occurred one to two times per week during the first two months of the school year, and again during the first two months of the second semester. I also attended events that occurred outside of the school day. Additionally, I observed several lunch periods and passing periods to explore the overall culture of SMS. I collected approximately 21 hours of observation data. For all observations, I followed a nonintrusive, hands-off and eyes-on approach, choosing not to participate in activities, and focusing on taking extensive notes to describe interactive patterns between students and teachers, among teachers, and among students.

Second, I conducted interviews with the three teacher leaders, five other teachers in the school, and two administrators. During the fall semester, I interviewed the three teacher leaders, two teachers, and two administrators. During the spring semester, I interviewed the three teachers leaders a second time, as well as three teachers. The interviews with the teacher leaders focused

on three areas of interest: (a) their background characteristics and experiences; (b) the design and implementation of the Brothers program; and (c) how the teacher leaders used agency and influence to advocate for their students through the Brothers program. Interviews with administrators and other teachers at SMS allowed me to gain an understanding of the ways the teacher leaders advocate for peace on behalf of their students, how their advocacy influences their colleagues' thinking about and behaviors toward students across the school, and whether the teacher leaders inspired others to become advocates for peace within the school. Interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes each, for a total of approximately seven hours of data. I audio recorded and transcribed all interviews verbatim.

Analysis

Analysis was ongoing and systematic. It was ongoing because I analyzed data following each stage of data collection. In other words, I analyzed observation notes after completing the first round of observations during the fall semester. Next, I analyzed the interview data that I had collected after completing the observations during the fall semester. Then I carried out further observations during the spring semester, and analyzed that data before conducting further interviews during the spring. In this way, each stage of data collection could build on prior data analysis.

The system I followed was to first upload observation notes or interview transcripts to MAXQDA analysis software. Second, I conducted a preliminary exploratory analysis (PEA) to attain an overall knowledge of the data (Creswell 2012). The PEA process involves a thorough reading of all data to create a list of preliminary codes. Third, I re-read all data a second time in order to label text segments with codes developed during PEA, adding in-vivo codes during this process. These processes were used during each round of analysis. Once data collection was complete and the code list was finalized, I re-read all data documents to make sure that codes added during each round of analysis were integrated across the data. Finally, I examined the text segments for each code to determine how data were related and to examine patterns throughout the data. From this examination, I grouped similar codes and patterns together to develop thematic summaries of the data.

Throughout data analysis, I conducted several validity checks of analysis documents and theme summaries. First, I shared interview transcripts with each participant for initial member checking of the data. In addition, I distributed analysis documents to participants, including coded data segments, data associated to specific codes, and thematic summaries for member checking. Further, I asked colleagues to review these analysis documents, as well. I invited both participants and peers to examine these documents so that they may check my processes and provide insight about my interpretations of the data.

Findings

Several themes emerged in the course of data analysis: teacher leader characteristics, administrator support, program design, and positive peace.

Teacher leader characteristics

The three teacher leaders described how their experiences influenced their desire to develop a peace-building program for middle school boys. They shared common characteristics including all having started their teaching careers within three years of each other, as shared above. Their expertise areas all define the teacher leaders in some way. Vince's position as a Spanish teacher connects him to the Brothers who are Latino, as well as their families and the Latino community as a whole. An administrator described that Vince 'has immersed himself so deeply into that culture and language, that is why [his colleagues, students, and their parents] think he is Latino.' Louis became a social studies teacher because the most influential teacher in his life was also a social studies teacher, and he believes that it is important for students to know and understand history:

> I chose social studies because I felt that's where the true education happened. You don't know where you are going until you know where you've been. If I truly made sure that each kid knew their own individual story and challenged them to develop their own passions, I could do that through social studies.

Finally, Moses's experience as a mortgage broker prior to the housing crisis provides him with extensive real-world examples to use when teaching math to his students. One administrator called him a 'math genius.'

All three teacher leaders also are fathers, although only Moses talked about his three sons, who are all members of the Brothers program despite that they attend a school in a different district. He described that because his sons were about the same age as the boys in the Brothers program when Moses started working with the program, it made sense for them to be involved. It also allowed the boys in the Brothers program to identify Moses as a father figure. Vince and Louis also identified their mentoring role with the boys. Vince explained:

> I'd say [the boys need] a male mentor figure because there are not many males in education. Just a male mentor to show them – I've been there. I've been pushed through it. I know that you may not have the resources but we can get you to where you need to go.

Vince shared that one of the reasons he became a teacher was 'to give kids … something that I feel I didn't have, to be that advocate for those who don't have a voice and to give kids that power of their voice.'

In addition, the teacher leaders described their work with the boys using spiritual ideas. Vince explained that prior attempts to start a program similar to

the Brothers program at the school had failed because 'this has to be a calling.' He went on to describe, 'You can't just be asked to do this work because if you are not passionate about it, you are going to do the kids a disservice.' Louis agreed that 'the three of us have a similar passion because we had lived experiences that drive what we do every day, why we teach and why we work with [the boys in the program].' Moses portrayed his transition to teaching as a work of 'providence' because he suddenly found himself without a job and a letter came through the mail to recruit for a new transition-to-teaching program. He felt it was the work of a higher power. An administrator described the teacher leaders as 'very deep in faith,' and noted that 'this is a common denominator of all of them.' A teacher agreed that 'they all just have a passion for helping kids.'

Although the teacher leaders all faced adversity when they were growing up, their stories are somewhat different. They have in common that they all lived in working class or poor neighborhoods. Vince grew up in a neighborhood near SMS and attended schools in the district. An administrator referred to him as the 'anchor' of the group because of his 'historical perspective of everything that is going on' within the district and community. Louis and Moses also grew up in urban neighborhoods, but Louis lived in a city three hours north while Moses lived in a neighborhood across town. An administrator described Louis as the 'urban warrior' of the group because he understands what it is like to live in a city where boys of color face 'all kinds of adversity.'

Their experiences as students differ considerably. Vince described himself as a 'straight A' student whose immigrant parents kept him close to home. He said his father was particularly strict because he wanted to keep Vince 'out of trouble.' Moses shared that his parents were both educators who worked in city schools. However, they chose to send him to a prestigious private school in an affluent area of the city. The school was outside his neighborhood, and a space where he learned how to 'code switch,' or speak and behave in a way that helped his white classmates feel comfortable around him: 'I can kind of assimilate or kind of smooth the transition so that they are comfortable as far as interacting with me.' Louis explained that he felt 'disenfranchised' in school, and as if he 'was the victim of prejudice … because of the neighborhood that I grew up in, the friend group that I hung out with, the clothes that I wore.' As a result, he 'started to run with gangs at a young age.' This experience is something that motivated Louis to found the Brothers program: 'I see the handshakes. I see the colors. I see the rags … It's a gang culture that is pulling our kids.'

Administrator support

The Brothers program was supported from the start by district and school administrators. Louis shared that 'the blessing that we had was that administration was all supportive of it.' When a few teachers questioned that the

Brothers program was exclusively for African American and Latino boys during the first few years, school administrators explained that this program actually offered a space for boys who were largely not represented in other clubs in the school. Nevertheless, when the teacher leaders decided to invite boys of other races and ethnicities to join, administrators remained supportive. Vince explained that starting the program took some courage since the teacher leaders were developing something that had never been done before:

> The one thing I love about [SMS administrators] is they have really let us take responsible risks, and they don't care if we fail to an extent … We are never really scrutinized [about] what we want to do, which is really nice, because we have that support from the administrative level.

District and school administrators gave the teacher leaders the freedom to create a program to meet a need without trying to control their work. In addition, administrators have consistently given credit to Louis, Moses, and Vince for the success of the program. A district administrator noted that 'these things kind of grew organically,' and therefore:

> We want the buildings to own them because if they own them, then they are going to commit to them … If I get too heavy handed in this and say you are going to do it this way and this way, people get frustrated and say, 'I'm not doing it; that's not our program anymore.' So it really has been more than anything else we try to highlight these groups … so they get recognition … creating a sense, 'This is valued. This is important for the district' without trying to tell them how to do their work.

A teacher recognized that having administrator support at the school level is key to implementing a program like Brothers: 'Any time anybody has an idea like that, our principal always says, "Just let me know what you need and how I can help." So he is very supportive.' The school administrator confirmed, 'I view my role as support them, enable them, and a lot of the time just get out of their way.' District and school administrators agreed that the key to successful programs is to allow teacher leaders to do the work they feel passionate about, to provide support, and to not try to control the work.

Program design

There are two important goals of the Brothers program according to the teacher leaders. First, they hope to develop leadership skills in the boys. This goal begins in the recruitment process itself. The recruitment process begins when teachers are asked to nominate boys. The teacher leaders are looking for a variety of boys, as Louis explained:

> We have some kids who are very high achieving and very strong leaders already. We have those that are kind of the middle of the road, they get by. They don't ruffle any feathers … Then you have those who are on the lower end … academically, but have

that charisma about them that people gravitate to them. We put that together … and the positive parts of what they bring to the table start to mitigate throughout.

The next step is for the nominees to complete an application, which they submit to the current boys in the program. Then the boys conduct a blind review of the application materials to select those applicants who they would like to interview. Vince shared that he, Louis, and Moses 'empowered' the boys to conduct the interview process in order to 'develop their own questions and work as an interviewer.'

Another method used to develop the boys' leadership skills is to study leadership principles and apply these by presenting at education conferences, to the school board, and for community organizations. For example, I observed the boys as they studied effective presentation strategies, select information about the Brothers program they wanted to include in their presentation, and prepare a visual to facilitate the presentation. They planned to give the presentation to potential funding agencies. Further, these skills have been put to use in the last few years when the boys have acted as co-teachers with an education professor teaching a multicultural education course at a local university. Vince said the boys were recruited because they were considered 'experts' of what 'teachers need to know' to be effective. Louis pointed out that 'the majority of those teachers are white, middle-class teachers, talking to urban youth about how to best serve them.'

Developing leadership positively influences the boys' aspirations. As an administrator described, 'We want these kids to become leaders, and when they become leaders, they are going to dream really, really big dreams, which means they are not going to put limits on themselves.' Another important activity that contributes to raising the boys' aspirations are visits to institutions of higher education each year. The teacher leaders believe that showing the boys several types of institutions including state and private/independent universities will help them realize that college is an option for them. Nevertheless, an administrator noted that raising aspirations 'is not just going to college; it is much bigger than that … They are going to do something in life and be a leader.' A teacher noticed that the program provided the boys with a different view of 'what their future might entail.'

The second goal relates directly to the conflicts the teacher leaders noticed in the school and the surrounding community, which motivated them to start the Brothers program. They want the program to facilitate intercultural dialogue. Louis described what such dialogue was like when the boys engaged in it:

> We had critical conversations about race, critical conversations about privilege, culture because what we had to establish was an understanding. You know, what are the things that are significant to African American culture, background, upbringing, living, family dynamics? What is [significant] of a Latino population? The conversations went even deeper as we kind of diversified what the Latino population looked like because we have Hondurans; we have Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Peruvians. So [we] had so many different cultures. It was eye opening for even our African American [boys].

Vince referred to 'critical cultural dialogue' that the boys had 'about the importance of each culture.' These dialogues, which occur as a regular part of the program result in a sense of unity among the boys. Louis pointed out that 'there was so much cooperation if you look historically between African Americans and Mexicans, and just Latino culture overall.' For example, Moses led a conversation with the boys during one observation where he asked them what it felt like to be racially profiled. The African American boys talked about their own or family members' experiences with police in particular whereas the Latino boys spoke about people assuming they were all undocumented Mexicans. Through this discussion, the boys came to realize that they shared the experience of being stereotyped because of the way they look. A teacher at SMS noticed how these efforts affected the Brothers' relationships to one another: '[Louis, Vince, and Moses] started to help kids, especially in the African American versus Latino [communities] see each other [as] people.'

The teacher leaders decided that if they could help the boys discover their similarities, they would understand each other better and begin to see each other as true 'brothers.' To facilitate the feeling of brotherhood, the boys are always part of the program, even after they move on to high school and college. For instance, there is an annual 'lock-in' where the current cohort of boys and all the previous cohorts meet at SMS to play games, discuss important issues, and complete team-building activities. This is an opportunity for older boys to 'be a model of how they act like Brothers' to the younger boys, according to an administrator.

Culture of peace

The school culture at SMS became more peaceful as a result of the Brothers program according to participants. That peace started among the boys themselves. Vince share that he, Moses, and Louis worked to 'bridge this cultural gap' between the African American and Latino boys in the program 'without alienating each group.' The effect has been a strong sense of unity among the boys. A school administrator described the boys as a family:

> Blood is thicker than anything. So, you know, you see a family that has some person in it that is really a mess, but they are still family. There is a love that is unconditional, and that's what we wanted to get to, was a level of unconditional love among these kids. The respect that in born out of unconditional love, it's iron; it's armor. It can't be defeated. And we have seen this bond with our [boys]. It is amazing.

A teacher also noted that the Brothers program provided an alternative to the gang life that some of the boys might have pursued in order to feel part of a family. Through the program, the teacher leaders developed among the boys a love so strong that when they left SMS to attend high school, and found that a similar group there did not accept Latino males, some of the African American

boys refused to join. The boys also stay connected with both the program and the school even after they graduate, keeping in touch with teachers, administrators, and other boys who were in the program with them.

Participants also reported that the Brothers program improved the culture of the whole school. Both district and school administrators noticed a change within the school that they attributed to the Brothers program, and especially the leadership development that the program provided. A district administrator described the influence that the boys in the Brothers program have on school culture:

> The [boys] are asked to take a leadership role in the school … when they start talking about people that aren't getting along … they are asked to really demonstrate leadership and try to help solve some of these problems so that they don't blow up and become a big issue.

A teacher agreed that the boys in the program 'exemplify what a student should act like' by 'having the courage to say things when it's not the most popular' and 'fostering those relationships and just treating everyone with respect.' For example, a teacher witnessed one boy, who was an immigrant to the U.S himself, helping 'another immigrant student open his locker, find his classes, and things like that.' She said:

> [It] was pretty cool to see because the [new] student had never been to America before … He knew English because that is the language that he was taught in his education previously, but you know, it is still scary to move to a totally different country and you don't know where you are going, and then [this boy] helped him out a little bit in that passing period.

Another teacher shared that the boys who are in the program and in her classes have been willing to stand up to their classmates when 'there is another kid who is basically not doing the right thing or not being respectful.' Teachers have also noticed that although the boys in the Brothers program are not perfect, they hold themselves to a higher standard than the typical student. For instance, one teacher revealed that when a boy in the program makes a 'bad choice,' she does not 'have to give a punishment.' Instead, she just calls attention to the behavior, and 'they think about it and it is very reflective. They will take it upon themselves to apologize, to change the behavior, and start being a leader again.'

Discussion

This study addressed the problem of an increase in school violence that negatively impacts boys of color in particular (see CDC, 2015; NCES, 2015), and the need for peace programs in schools to address this problem. The three teacher leaders who founded the Brothers program recognized that gang violence was negatively affecting the school culture at SMS. They feared that their African American and Latino boys would get caught up in the gangs, and this would have dire consequences for the boys. The teacher leaders' personal experiences

allowed them to see the problem and act on it for the sake of the boys. They saw themselves in the boys at their school, which motivated them to take the measured risk to found a peace-building program. They recognized themselves as potential mentors for their male students, and they identified the program as a 'calling' beyond their role as teachers. Their work as advocates on behalf of the boys of color at their school demonstrates both leadership and advocacy in pursuit of social justice (Bradley-Levine 2018; Crowther et al. 2002).

The teacher leaders presented their idea to school and district administrators, who provided them with necessary support to develop a school-wide program, which allowed them to move peaceful pedagogy beyond their classrooms (Joseph and Duss 2009). Most of these actions were in the pursuit of 'negative peace,' or ending a particular type of violence (Reardon 1997). Louis, Moses, and Vince developed the program to stem violence between two specific groups of boys, and to help the boys learn to resolve conflict in peaceful ways (Montessori 1949). The teacher leaders addressed this need by facilitating intercultural dialogue among boys in the program. The recruitment and selection process also provided the boys with opportunities to learn how to solve problems through democratic practices, as advocated by Dewey (Noddings 2012). At face value, the program appeared similar to other peace education efforts (see Harris 2000; Kelder et al. 1996; Smith et al. 2002).

However, because the Brothers program design incorporated a focus on human dignity through intercultural dialogue and leadership development, the boys in the program were able to see each other as human and recognize each other's dignity. They also developed confidence in their own abilities to affect change in their school. This created a space where the boys were able to encourage respect and regard across the student body through their own leadership and modeling. The program provided the boys with concrete ways to respond to the forms of violence they experience and witness in their school and community in a positive way. Therefore, the peaceful school culture described during interviews is an outcome of the Brothers program, and the actions taken by teacher leaders, as well as administrators. This culture is one of 'positive peace' (Reardon 1997).

Conclusion

This study examined how teacher leaders, with administrators and student leaders developed a school culture of positive peace through a program for boys of color (Reardon 1997). An important goal that has developed as a result of this study is to provide a model for how teacher leaders in other communities might develop peace programs similar to the Brothers program. When I asked Louis, Moses, and Vince about how the Brothers program could be scaled up, they agreed that it would be challenging and did not have easy answers. The findings of this study, however, help to identify some key elements for carrying

out this work. Administrators can tap into the individual characteristics of teacher leaders, and/or create an environment where teachers are encouraged to take risks and pursue passions when those may result in positive outcomes for students. Developing programmatic goals that are both responsive and constructive will also allow teachers to react to current needs in the school, but also create something visionary and new.

Disclosure statement

Funding

Notes on contributors

Jill Bradley-Levine, Ph.D., is associate professor in the department of educational studies at Ball State University, where she also directs the Master of Arts in secondary education and the Hoosier STEM Academy teacher education program. Her scholarship centers on curriculum and instruction in practice, and has developed around three areas: (a) teacher agency through the practice of leadership, (b) innovative instructional practices, and (c) teacher development of and participation in communities of learning.

Seema Zainulabdin is a doctoral candidate in the department of educational studies at Ball State University.

References

Bradley-Levine, J. (2018). "Advocacy as a Practice of Critical Teacher Leadership." *International Journal of Teacher Leadership* 9 (1): 47–62. https://www.cpp.edu/~ceis/education/interna tional-journal-teacher-leadership/documents/bradley-levine.pdf

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2015. "Understanding School Violence." http:// www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/school_violence_fact_sheet-a.pdf

Creswell, J.W. 2012. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Crowther, F., S.S. Kaagan, M. Ferguson, and L. Hann. 2002. *Developing Teacher Leaders: How Teacher Leadership Enhances School Success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Harris, I.M. 2000. "Peace-building Responses to School Violence." *NASSP Bulletin* 84 (614): 5–24. doi:10.1177/019263650008461403.

Joseph, P.B., and L.S. Duss. 2009. "Teaching A Pedagogy of Peace: A Study of Peace Educators in United States Schools in the Aftermath of September 11." *Journal of Peace Education* 6 (2): 189–207. doi:10.1080/17400200903086615.

Kelder, S.H., P. Orpinas, A. McAlister, R. Frankowski, G.S. Parcel, and J. Friday. 1996. "The Students for Peace Project: A Comprehensive Violence-prevention Program for Middle

School Students." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 12 (5): 22–30. doi:10.1016/S0749-3797(18)30233-2.

Levenson, M. R. 2014. *Pathways to Teacher Leadership: Emerging Models, Changing Roles*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Montessori, M. 1949. *Education and Peace*, Trans. H.R. Lane. Chicago, IL: Henry Regerny.

National Center for Education Statistics. 2015. "My Brother's Keeper Key Statistical Indicators on Boys and Men of Color." https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/my-brothers-keeper-key-statistical-indicators-on-boys-and-men-of-color

Noddings, N. 2012. *Philosophy of Education*. Boudler, CO: Westview Press.

Quinn, R., and N.M. Carl. 2015. "Teacher Activist Organizations and the Development of Professional Agency." *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 21 (6): 745–758. doi:10.1080/13540602.2015.1044331.

Reardon, B. 1985. "Making Peace a Real Possibility." *The Quest for Peace Series*, University of California, Irvine. https://www.lib.uci.edu/quest/index.php?page=reardon

Reardon, B. 1997. "Human Rights as Education for Peace." In *Human Rights Education for the Twenty-first Century*, edited by G. Andreopoulos and R. Pierre Claude, 21–34. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Smith, S.W., A.P. Daunic, M.D. Miller, and T.R. Robinson. 2002. "Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation in Middle Schools: Extending the Process and Outcome Knowledge Base." *The Journal of Social Psychology* 142 (5): 567–586. doi:10.1080/00224540209603919.

Stomfay-Stitz, A. 2008. "A History of Peace Education in the United States of America." *Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, Teachers College, Columbia University. http://www.tc.edu/centers/epe/

York-Barr, J., and K. Duke. 2004. "What Do We Know about Teacher Leadership? Findings from Two Decades of Scholarship." *Review of Educational Research* 74 (3): 255–316. doi:10.3102/00346543074003255.