



Engaging Students as Leaders to Reimagine School Safety: An Educator Case Story

*A companion to **Reimagining School Safety: A Guide for Schools and Communities***

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OVERVIEW

“Be brave. Try new things.” These simple yet ambitious instructions are the first listed in the syllabus of Professor Rachel Nelson’s Leadership for Social Change, a precollege course taught at Bard Early College of New Orleans (BECNO). The course asks students to examine their own lives and identities as they build their leadership skills and examine what leadership and transformation can look like on individual, community, and systemic levels.

Among the required texts on the syllabus is [Reimagining School Safety: A Guide for Schools and Communities](#) (*Reimagining School Safety* guide), developed by the national [Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety](#) at WestEd. The *Reimagining School Safety* guide offers a paradigm of safety that honors humans’ inherent indispensability, connectedness, and dignity and prioritizes student voice and agency. Nelson said she chose to include the text in her syllabus because “it provides a clear, holistic understanding of school safety and ties in with topics of social justice and identity,” which are key issues being addressed schoolwide at BECNO.

Designed for educators who work closely with students, this Educator Case Story

- shares Nelson’s approaches for using the guide in her class;
- provides insights from Nelson and others on how to cultivate the conditions for students to discuss challenging, personal topics like school safety;
- offers specific practices that were helpful for Nelson as she integrated the guide in her course; and
- includes appendices to support the inclusion of the guide in other settings.

Remember: There are as many ways to facilitate conversations about school safety as there are individuals; this case story offers a single educator’s approach. We invite you to consider the accompanying narrative, mindsets, and strategies as offerings, not prescriptions.

About Bard Early College New Orleans

Bard Early College New Orleans (BECNO) is a satellite campus of Bard College that offers tuition-free college study to students, particularly those from low-income and historically underrepresented communities, for their last 2 years of traditional high school.

Race/Ethnicity of BECNO students:

- 87% Black or African American
- 8% Latine
- 3% White
- 1% Asian or Pacific Islander
- 1% Native American
- 1% Multiracial

Gender of BECNO Students:

- 66% Female
- 34% Male

[Information provided on the [Bard Early College of New Orleans website](#)]



ADAPTING THE *REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY* GUIDE FOR A SECONDARY STUDENT AUDIENCE

School safety is a major concern for young people all over the United States, with one in five K–12 parents saying their children have expressed worry about feeling unsafe when they return to school, an 8-point increase since 2019 (Brenan, 2022). While safety is often viewed in terms of the absence of violence, the *Reimagining School Safety* guide draws on the scholarship and praxis of activists and movement makers, particularly those most impacted by systemic oppression, to reframe safety as the presence of “systems and structures that support mutual care, belonging, and interconnection” (Trout et al., 2022). Grounded in this revised paradigm of safety and centering the lived experiences of students and families—especially those who have not traditionally had access to institutional power—the guide provides prompts and examples that encourage readers to consider shifting paradigms as they work to design systems that are more equitable and sustainable. The guide contributes to a growing body of resources that promote comprehensive school safety, which focuses not only on physical aspects of safety but also the mental and emotional safety of individuals within a school building (Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction & Resilience in the Education Sector, 2022).

Nelson’s Leadership and Social Justice course was designed to reexamine the concepts of school community and student leadership at BECNO. Students had recently started asking for more voice and power on campus and in policy design, and the administration responded by asking Nelson to create a class that would support students to define what student leadership on campus could look like.

“What could it look like if we invited students into the process of community design as experts in their own experiences of justice, healing, and accountability?”

—Professor Rachel Nelson

Nelson used the *Reimagining School Safety* guide at the beginning of the course to help surface students’ existing beliefs and values about safety. For Nelson and her students, the guide was an “easily digestible” way for students to learn about and reflect on power and systems through the lens of their own experiences. The guide is scaffolded and organized so each section refers to an earlier section, which helped Nelson’s students make clear connections between ideas. The guide’s exploration of the evolution of school safety over the last several decades and conceptual frameworks like complex adaptive systems, restorative justice, and design thinking provided important background for the students as they considered their own lives and leadership aspirations.

Each section of the *Reimagining School Safety* guide concludes with Reflect, Practice, and Learn exercises to encourage readers to apply the ideas to their work in schools. Nelson adapted these prompts and asked her students to write academic responses (i.e., citing resources and using the terminology introduced in the guide) after they finished reading each section. She found that this was a positive experience for her students as they learned to share their personal stories with “empowered language” that would invite others to engage with and learn from them. As they discussed the reflection questions in class, Nelson also noticed that students’ responses helped them build community. She appreciated that by connecting their lived experiences to the concepts in the guide, students could begin considering solutions to improve school safety and discipline practices.

The final assignment in Nelson’s Leadership for Social Change course asked students to draw on their understanding of school safety and their developing leadership skills to select a school climate issue on campus that they wanted to address. Students worked in small groups to brainstorm possible solutions before choosing one to implement at Bard.

“They’re doing all of the interesting work in the class. ... I’m just unlocking the door.”

—Professor Rachel Nelson

By sharing her experiences, Nelson hopes to encourage other educators who might be interested in adapting the guide for use in a classroom setting. Appendix B includes several ideas for types of classes or settings where educators might want to integrate the *Reimagining School Safety* guide into their work with students. The recommendations below include overall mindsets and teaching approaches that support the cocreation of safe and supportive classroom environments, as well as practical strategies for introducing concepts of school safety and climate to students in high school and above.



MINDSETS AND APPROACHES FOR CULTIVATING SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

Before asking her students to engage with the complex topics raised in the *Reimagining School Safety* guide, Nelson wanted to ensure that her classroom was a safe and supportive learning community built on mutual trust and care. Drawing on culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy and identity-conscious teaching, the mindsets and approaches in this section invite educators to consider how they might cultivate a learning environment that allows students to make personal connections to the content and each other. Each approach includes a reflection from Nelson as well as questions and resources for educators to deepen their own learning.

Facilitating authentic conversations with students about school safety asks educators to continuously reflect on how identity, power, trauma, and oppression shape the individuals and relationships in the classroom ecosystem. Educators must consciously practice these reflective skills, knowing that their learning journey is never final. As Zaretta Hammond states, “Remember that it is not about being perfect but about creating new neural pathways that shift your default cultural programming as you grow in awareness and skill” (Hammond, 2015, p. 69).

Approach 1: Understand How Identity Differences Affect the Learning Environment

Educators must understand their own mindsets, motivations, and implicit biases before they attempt to facilitate discussions about school safety with students. Adult mindsets impact students in profound ways, including how students see themselves as learners and leaders and how comfortable they feel sharing authentically about their experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Mahoney et al., 2021). Cultivating an

“identity-conscious” practice includes recognizing that “who you are informs and impacts how you act, how you interact with others, and how you see the world around you” (Taluzan, 2022, p. 18).

Additionally, understanding power and positionality in a classroom will help educators invite their students to engage in discussions of school safety (Merriam et al., 2000; Takacs, 2002). Students’ feelings about authority figures, including historical and current experiences of racism and oppression at the hands of those in power, will impact how they respond to a teacher asking them to share personal (and potentially painful) stories. To create an emotionally safe environment, educators must practice self-examination so that they are prepared to meet students with authenticity and openness even—perhaps especially—when students are sharing viewpoints that challenge their own views, experiences, or values.

Nelson says:

There were 16 students in my Leadership for Social Justice class. They were all 17–18-year-old African American students who were raised in New Orleans in neighborhoods that are majority African American. They have attended charter schools their entire lives, and most of them come from a charter school network known for its rigid behavioral expectations and strict disciplinary practices. I am a White queer woman in my late 30s from the West Coast who has lived in New Orleans for less than 10 years. **These identity differences are in the room and in our conversations at all times, and it’s essential that students are empowered to address these differences and their impact.** Meaningful connection across identity differences is very possible, but it is not something that an educator can assume will “just happen” because of their good intentions.

Who you are as an educator matters. The relationships you have built with your students around how you discuss identity differences matters. If you don’t start this kind of conversation by analyzing how these topics impact classroom dynamics, then it can put the class at risk of reinforcing toxic patterns around race and power in education.



Reflect:

It’s important for educators to position themselves as learners before they design learning experiences for their students. These prompts are designed to get you thinking about your own learning journey in preparation to work with your class.

- How do you socially identify? (Consider completing a [Social Identity Wheel](#) (2021) if you have not done so before.) To what extent do these social identities differ from those of your students?
- In what ways might your identities affect your relationships with your students?
- To what extent do you recognize the role that power plays in your relationship with your students?

Want to Learn More?

Read the [March 2016 edition](#) of the *Equity Dispatch* from the Great Lakes Equity Center about the importance of critical self-reflection for equity (Moore et al., 2016).

Approach 2: See Students' Identities as Assets

To facilitate conversations about potentially contentious and challenging content such as school safety, educators must cultivate learning communities where students' differences are seen as assets, not deficits (Paris & Alim, 2014). Identity-conscious educators encourage students to draw on their own lived experiences and cultural and familial ways of knowing to make sense of complex current events and to take a curious stance toward each other's differences (Leslie et al., 2020). The extent to which students feel physically and psychologically safe in schools depends on many factors, including race, gender, sexuality, ability, and socioeconomic status. For instance, Black and Latinx students generally feel less safe at school than do their White peers, and Black students also feel consistently less safe in the classroom compared to their White and Asian classmates (Lacoe, 2015; Nakamoto et al., 2019). Therefore, educators must validate the range of responses students may have to discussions of school safety by acknowledging the inequities that impact students in and out of school (Hammond, 2015).

Nelson says:

I often think that my primary job as an educator is to hold and affirm the identities that are in my classroom so that **students feel seen and supported enough to engage with learning from a place of empowerment and belonging**. This feels important in all the classes I teach but when using the *Reimagining School Safety* guide, it became absolutely essential.

The identities of the students in a classroom will have a profound impact on how and what you talk about when you talk about school safety. **Examining safety with students who are currently in school is not a neutral activity**. When we discuss school safety with students, we are discussing a current and lived experience for everybody in the room. It is not an abstract concept—it is the experience they are currently having that has real and profound ramifications for their day-to-day life.



Reflect:

- What identities, experiences, and ways of knowing do your students bring to the classroom?
- How might you draw on your students' identities as assets?
- What are ways that you can encourage your students to view each other's differences as assets rather than deficits?

Want to Learn More?

Explore inclusive, identity-conscious teaching strategies in [Navigating Social Identity in the Classroom](#) (Bartlett, 2022).

Approach 3: Prioritize Community and Relationships

The quality of relationships among students (peer-to-peer) and their teacher (student–teacher) will deeply impact the quality of sharing that occurs in the classroom. Investing time and care into fostering positive relationships is an ongoing process that will yield returns in building a positive school climate and encouraging student engagement (O’Malley & Amarillas, 2011). This begins with showing and cultivating genuine care for each other outside of the scope of academic learning (Hammond, 2015). Educators should create and continually reinforce classroom norms that focus on mutual respect, openness, and community care.

Nelson says:

Students will always move at the pace of the trust (brown, 2017) they have for each other and for you, their teacher. To have authentic conversations, **I needed to create a classroom dynamic where people felt comfortable** having those conversations. To facilitate a safe space for sharing, I prioritized community building circles (see Appendix C), and we did a lot of class reflection on vulnerability, who the individuals in the class were, and what they needed individually and collectively to feel safe and comfortable sharing. We used this as a way to create class norms that everybody could feel good about.



Reflect:

- What safe and supportive learning environments have you been a part of? What made them feel safe and supportive?
- What are the ways that you build positive relationships with students in your classroom? What are the ways that you build positive relationships between students?

Want to Learn More?

Browse the Facing History and Ourselves toolkit (2021) [*Back to School: Building Community for Connection and Learning*](#) and learn some new strategies for building community with your students.

Approach 4: Approach Conversations With a Clear Understanding of Trauma and Systemic Oppression

Understand that students bring their experiences with them when they enter any classroom. Adverse childhood experiences like poverty, neglect, and exposure to violence, including discrimination and racism, and other histories of trauma may impact how students respond to stress, especially in environments where conversations feel personal (OHSU Education, n.d.). Cultivating a classroom community where sharing personal stories feels safe for students will be impossible if individual students perceive, because of their histories, threats to their social or psychological well-being (Hammond, 2015). Thus, educators must ensure that their classroom norms include provisions that

help students with histories of trauma feel safe and supported. For educators as well as students, understanding how trauma impacts the brain and resulting behaviors can be helpful to recognize signs of emotional dysregulation in themselves and others and to build empathy for those who are experiencing a trauma-based response (RB-Banks & Meyer, 2017). For instance, chronic stress and trauma can affect the brain’s cognitive and memory centers, derailing learning and leading to behaviors such as fight, flight, or freeze (OHSU Education, n.d.).

In addition to individual trauma, educators should expect that systems of oppression and their role in causing historical and ongoing trauma to entire groups will be present in the classroom, especially in conversations about safety. “Oppression” refers to a combination of prejudice and power that creates a system that regularly and severely discriminates against some groups and benefits other groups, such as racism or sexism (Racial Equity Tools, n.d.). Educators engaging students in discussions like these must understand the larger social context of which they and their students are a part. Migliarini and Annamma state that, “When teachers understand (1) ways students are systemically oppressed, (2) how oppressions are (re)produced in classrooms, and (3) what they can do to resist those oppressions in terms of pedagogy, curriculum, and relationships, they can build solidarity and resistance with students and communities” (2020, p. 2). By creating positive and relational learning communities, educators can work to heal the harmful effects of trauma and oppression.

Nelson says:

Grounding conversations in basic understandings of trauma and systemic oppression is essential for students both to **understand and clarify their own experiences** for themselves when they are directly affected as well as to **build empathy for the experiences of others** who might be affected by safety issues differently. This also was very helpful in giving students ways to talk about issues of safety as depersonalized and systemic rather than only interpersonal experiences.



Reflect:

- What is your own understanding of how trauma can affect learning?
- To what extent are you aware of how systems of oppression manifest in your school? In your class?

Want to Learn More?

Read [*Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education*](#) (2021) by Alex Shevrin Venet for a comprehensive and accessible introduction to applying an equity-centered and trauma-informed lens to your work with students.

STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING STUDENTS IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SCHOOL SAFETY

Nelson made several key decisions in adapting the *Reimagining School Safety* guide for her class to ensure the discussions of school safety remained developmentally appropriate for adolescents. This section highlights four strategies that teachers can draw on in their own work with students. Each strategy includes Nelson’s perspective in addition to prompts and resources to encourage teacher reflection and application.

Strategy 1: Surface and disrupt traditional ways of thinking about safety.

By the time students reach high school, they have already had several years to come to their own conclusions about what school safety means. If educators hope to help students consider safety from a reimagined paradigm, it’s important to offer space for students to surface their initial thoughts about school safety and to help them understand what informs their worldview. To support students’ reimagination journey, consider offering examples of school environments that

reflect a different paradigm of school safety and help students ground abstract concepts in reality.

Nelson says:

My students were constantly asking for **examples of school environments that didn’t just illustrate the problems** but actively showed loving examples.



Practice:

Here are ideas for how educators might translate Nelson’s approach to their own contexts.

- Offer students the chance to engage in reflective writing about how they understand school safety at the beginning of the coursework to create a baseline.
- Try out the [“I Used to Think... Now I Think...”](#) Visible Thinking routine from Harvard’s Project Zero to explore students’ changing conceptions of safety.



Learn:

These resources take a deeper dive into the approach outlined in this section.

- **Listen to the Beyond SEL audiocasts.** WestEd’s [audio gallery](#) highlights brief stories from American public schools and districts that are taking innovative, evidence-based approaches to equitably serving the whole-person needs of their communities. Each of these audiocasts serves as an example of what school safety reimaged can look like.
- **Learn from the restorative justice work in Oakland Public Schools.** Oakland Unified School District is nationally recognized for their commitment to integrating restorative practices across the district. [The district’s website](#) has many resources (including videos, handouts, guides, etc.) that offer ways to consider school safety through a relational, proactive lens.
- **Share alternative approaches to education.** Many students’ conception of schooling only includes traditional public schools. Shifting students’ paradigm of what education can be might help broaden their understanding of school safety. Widen students’ horizons by introducing them to alternative visions of school, such as community schools, “unschooling,” “free school,” “microschooling,” etc.
- **Study historical examples of Augusto Boal’s *Theater of the Oppressed*.** In Boal’s *Theater of the Oppressed* (1994), “invisible theater” and “forum theater” offer different models for education and schooling outside of the classroom, where the entire community becomes both educator and learner simultaneously, and endless opportunities exist for structured group-think moments to solve systemic problems.

Strategy 2: Ensure discussions are grounded in students' experiences and communities.

A culturally responsive and sustaining approach invites teachers to draw on students' lives as rich sources of wisdom (Hammond, 2015). Grounding discussions of "safety" and "wellness" in students' own experiences and communities helps make the abstract concrete. The reimagined paradigm of safety centers the voices of community members, especially those who are not normally invited to make key decisions. Offering students the chance to collaborate with community members gives youth a leadership role and teaches them important skills about working with individuals both within and beyond

their immediate circles. Furthermore, tying the academic discussions of school safety to the personal and professional experiences of community members can help students understand the collective effort of creating culture change (Germán, 2021).

Nelson says:

The work of shifting **cultures of safety and belonging is intergenerational, is sustained, and is never done in isolation.**



Practice:

- Invite students to engage in projects dedicated to increasing safety and belonging on campus. Projects that came out of Nelson's class included a peer mediation program, an appreciation wall in the hallway where students could share shout-outs and gratitude for each other, and a student-created video welcoming new first-year students to the school and setting the student-generated norms for inclusion and peer-to-peer support.
- Be prepared to support students when and if they face disappointment as they advocate for structural and systemic change. Students may struggle with feelings of hopelessness if their projects don't work as they initially envisioned or if the adults they are trying to work with do not share their vision for school safety. One mitigating strategy is to offer impromptu workshops in response to students' project needs, such as communicating with administrators, navigating the different layers of bureaucracy in a school system, or engaging in productive discussions despite disagreement.
- Ask guest speakers to visit and share their perspectives on safety and belonging with the class, such as collaborators from community-based organizations, local politicians, and students' own families and community members.



Learn:

- **Browse project-based learning ideas.** [High Tech High Unboxed Project Cards](#) and [PBL Works Project Idea Cards](#) provide glimpses of inspiring projects designed by teachers and realized in collaboration with students. With an emphasis on codesign, these projects might help inspire educators looking for ideas to try with a focus on school safety.
- **Incorporate elements of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR).** When discussing community problems and possible solutions with students, consider drawing on the YPAR framework. The [Berkeley YPAR Hub](#) offers curricula and resources for conducting YPAR projects, including how to investigate a problem and tips for taking action.
- **Read *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation*.** Written by Shane Safir and Jamila Dugan, this book offers a framework for transforming schools by centering the student experience (or “street data”) as essential to understanding a school’s climate and health as opposed to standardized test scores. *Street Data* provides several different approaches that educators can use to collect and learn from the experiences of students and community members.

Strategy 3: Actively build fun, creative problem-solving skills.

Tackling school safety–related challenges can feel daunting due to their inherent complexity and many moving parts. Educators who choose to engage in school safety–related discussions with students have to be mindful of seeking youth perspectives without pressuring them to generate impossible solutions. Rather than expecting students to meet complex problems with new and exciting solutions right away, educators should take the time to share specific strategies and creative problem-solving skills and offer engaging lower stakes problems to contemplate

first. Students who have the opportunity to apply explicit skills to a problem are less likely to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge.

Nelson says:

Sometimes the **conversation around “youth voice” can put all the pressure on students to solve problems** that generations of adults have failed to solve.



Practice:

- Use improv exercises, like the ones included in Appendix C, to help students build camaraderie and develop flexible thinking in an engaging and lighthearted way.
- Try out different design-thinking warm-up activities called “Stokes,” a term from design thinking. This [Stoke Deck](#) offers warm-up activities designed to boost energy, build connections, foster empathy, support collaboration, and cultivate creativity.



Learn:

- **Explore the role theater education can play in nontheater classrooms.** Consider the role that improv and other theater-based exercises can play to build community with students by reading “[Bringing Theater into the Classroom](#)” (2021).
- **Learn more about design thinking.** Download [IDEO’s Design Thinking for Educators Toolkit](#) to engage with a process, overview, methods, and instructions that help put design thinking into action.
- **Read the [Co-Designing Schools Toolkit](#).** A collection of 40 activities, frameworks, and practices, this toolkit invites participants to consider different ways into a collaborative, equity-centered design process to rethink and reimagine school.

Strategy 4: Cultivate opportunities for joy and celebration.

Thinking about issues of safety, systemic inequality, and school violence can make many students feel hopeless or overwhelmed, especially students for whom these issues hit close to home. When engaging students in discussions about potentially heavy topics like these, educators should be mindful to weave in opportunities for shared joy and celebration. As Muhammad (2023) defines it, “Joy is the practice of loving self and humanity” (p. 77). Creating space for students to pause and take care of their needs, offer appreciation for each other, and reflect on their learning helps cultivate a

supportive learning environment for grappling with challenging content.

Nelson says:

School safety is a necessary conversation because of the absolute miracle of the people who are inside a school. When we talk about safety, it’s so easy to center fear and apprehension. ... Remember that a **school is inherently a vibrant group of young people who are all learning and building relationships with each other.**



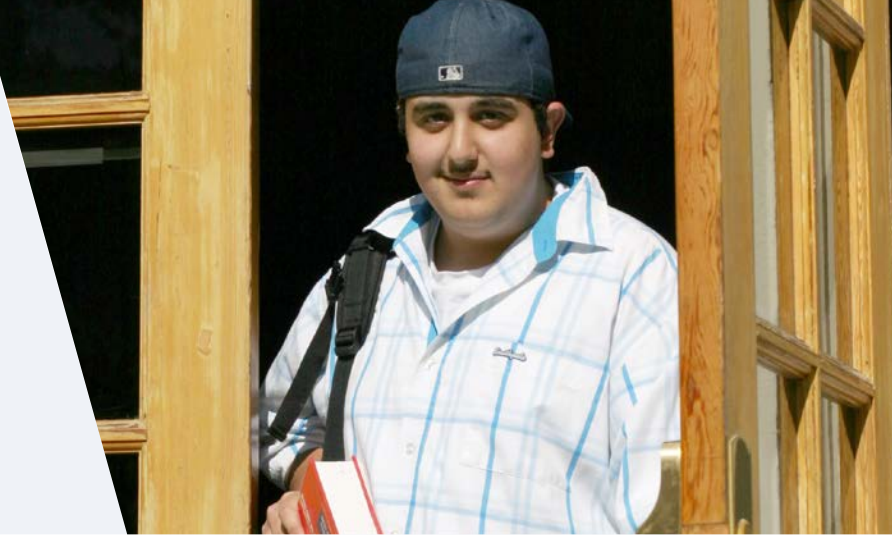
Practice:

- Offer students time to pause and take a break when processing challenging content.
- Create opportunities for active somatic breaks as needed (e.g., stretching, body scan, meditation, etc.)
- Check in with students during and after challenging conversations. Nelson started referring to these moments in her classroom as “Baby on Board,” which became shorthand for reminding her students of how precious they were. “Baby on Board” served as a quick way to mark that something sensitive might be happening in the group and encourage students to treat each other with kindness.
- Offer space for expressions of appreciation, such as sharing in a gratitude circle or inviting students to write letters of appreciation to each other.
- End the unit or project with celebrations to share the work students have done.



Learn:

- **Explore exercises to deepen gratitude.** [Greater Good in Action](#) offers several short exercises to encourage the cultivation of gratitude in adults and youths.
- **Read *Unearthing Joy: A Guide to Culturally and Historically Responsive Teaching and Learning*.** Dr. Gholdy Muhammad’s book details how cultivating joy, which she defines as wellness, beauty, healing, and justice, can give all students a powerful purpose to learn and contribute to the world.



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APPENDIX A. COURSE SYLLABUS: LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

"Leadership is the ability to translate vision into reality."

—Warren Bennis

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

—Proverbs 29:18

CLASS DESCRIPTION | In this course we will examine what leadership is, how it is created, and how it can be used for positive social change, as well as the potential effects of harmful leadership. We will begin by analyzing contemporary examples of leadership and organizing for social change in the United States over the past century, with an emphasis on principles of Restorative Justice and Kingian Nonviolence. We will examine our own lives and identities and use that as a way to reflect on leadership, power, and transformation on individual, community, and systemic levels.

In the second half of the semester, we will begin practicing these strategies for ourselves, with a special focus on Restorative and Transformative Justice, Intuitive Mediation, and Kingian Nonviolence. Using these leadership and conflict-negotiation strategies, we will turn our focus to our own campus, where we will design a community-focused leadership project to enact positive social change. The final section of this class will be devoted to implementing and documenting this project and gathering community feedback for potential future iterations of this project.

HOW TO SUCCEED IN THIS CLASS | Be brave. Try new things. Read everything, twice if you can. Talk about the class with your friends. Let new ideas get under your skin; let them change you. Ask questions. Notice what you love, notice what makes you feel uncomfortable, notice what you hate, and learn from that. Know that confusion often means you are learning and growing. Show up on time. Come to office hours. Ask questions when you're confused. Own your opinions. Take risks. Surprise yourself. Be kind to each other. Be kind to yourself. Turn in your work on time, and communicate early and well if you need help or an extension. Edit. Rewrite. Let your individual journey of learning be unique, rigorous, and rewarding.

CLASS SCHEDULE | The class is divided into three sections, designed to take you through a sequence: (a) expose you to new strategies of leadership and conflict management, (b) practice these strategies for yourself, and (c) collectively create and execute a community project on the BECNO campus.

UNIT ONE: Reading, Learning, and Reflecting on Social Justice Leadership | We will begin by reading *Healing Resistance* by Kazu Haga and (along with supplemental readings from a variety of other texts) will use it as a way to reflect on our personal identities and experiences, how this shapes our value systems, and what that means in regard to how each of us will develop our individual leadership styles.

Major texts used:

- *Healing Resistance* (Kazu Haga)
- *Reimagining School Safety* guide (Lauren Trout, Christina Pate, Krystal Wu, Joe McKenna)
- *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Paulo Friere)

Major Assignments: Individual reflection paper, Kingian Nonviolence presentation

UNIT TWO: Flexing: Practicing What We Preach | Next, we will delve deeply into examples of embodied leadership. What are specific strategies and actions to mediate conflict, solve problems, and bring communities together? How might those strategies apply to the Bard campus? We will focus on identifying and exploring social issues in a given community as well as learning about possible creative solutions and leadership strategies.

Major texts used:

- *The Apology Lab: The Four Parts of Accountability* (Mia Mingus)
- *Colorizing Restorative Justice: Voicing our Realities* (Ed. Edward C. Valendra, Wanbli Waphaha Hoksila)
- *Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* (dir. Stanley Nelson)
- *The D School: Design Thinking*

Major Assignments: Individual Reflection Portfolio

UNIT THREE: Our Legacy | Finally, we will use these new strategies to address campus issues and will select a specific issue that we would like to address. As a group, we will utilize our new strategies to create solutions and will implement these solutions on the BECNO campus.

Major Assignments: Final group project and documentation of final group project

ASSIGNMENTS

READING QUIZZES: 15% of final grade

There will be several reading quizzes over the course of the semester to test your reading comprehension and make sure we're all (literally) on the same way.

END-OF-UNIT SURVEYS: *5% of final grade*

There will be several Google Surveys at the conclusion of each reading unit. These will be interpretive questions designed to get you thinking about the core issues in the readings

REFLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY: *10% of final grade*

Using *Reimagining School Safety* as a touchstone, you will write a two-page biography of yourself, through the lens of societal power structures, and how your experiences and identity have contributed to your own unique sense of the concepts of justice, power, and leadership.

NONVIOLENCE PRESENTATION: *15% of total grade*

After we finish *Healing Resistance*, you will create a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation to share with the class where you explore one of the principles of Kingian Nonviolence and talk about the effects of this on the levels of personal change, community change, and institutional change.

DESIGN THINKING PRESENTATION: *15% of total grade*

At the conclusion of Unit Two, you will choose one of the leadership strategies we have studied and discussed that you think is especially effective in addressing a specific issue of social change, and you will create a 10-minute presentation that uses design thinking to explore the issue and possible solutions.

FINAL GROUP PROJECT: *20% of total grade*

Your final project will be selected by the group, and you will plan and execute it on behalf of the Bard community. The project can be anything, but it must (a) be completed by the end of the semester, (b) address a poignant social need in the Bard community, and (c) respond using techniques and pedagogies learned over the course of the semester. We will be creating a short documentary of the final project, as well as a series of data captures from the class and the project. This data will be combined into a portfolio record that future iterations of the class will be able to use and reference.

APPENDIX B. ADDITIONAL IDEAS FOR ADAPTING THE *REIMAGINING SCHOOL SAFETY* GUIDE FOR A SECONDARY STUDENT AUDIENCE

Engaging students in developmentally appropriate conversations about school safety can be a healthy way for them to share concerns, brainstorm solutions, and advocate for changes. As Nelson’s case story reveals, the *Reimagining School Safety* guide offers several entry points for educators interested in broaching these conversations with secondary students. Here are some additional ideas for how educators might draw on the guide in their own contexts.

Where might educators use the guide?

Educators can draw on aspects of the guide in any course, situation, or content area. However, there are a few scenarios where it might be relatively straightforward for educators to integrate the *Reimagining School Safety* guide into existing curricula:

- in a **leadership/student government class** (per Nelson’s example in this brief) where students are tasked with creating policy, advocating for collective student concerns, and serving as liaisons between the student body and school leaders
- in a **health class** where students are learning about the importance of physical, emotional, and social safety
- as a companion text in an **English language arts course** where students are considering the concepts of belonging and safety in literature
- in a **social studies/civics course** where students can explore the history of school safety as we know it today and student activism
- in an **after-school or another extracurricular program** where students are deepening their understanding of who they are and the agency they have to create change in their communities
- in an **advisory class** where social–emotional learning and community-building are the focus

How might educators use the guide?

There are countless ways that educators and students might draw on the ideas in the *Reimagining School Safety* guide. Here are several jumping-off points:

- **Make the guide a central text.** As Nelson shared, the *Reimagining School Safety* guide is accessible enough to use in its entirety for high school students. Nelson made it approachable for her class by inviting her students to pause at each section break for discussion and to complete selected Reflect, Practice, and Learn prompts.
- **Use selected excerpts for discussion.** Educators could also adapt the guide by choosing key excerpts for students to explore in conversation or writing. Educators could invite students to explore just one section of the guide, for instance, or could use the highlighted pull quotes for a [Chalk Talk](#) exercise.
- **Consult the guide for guidance.** The guide can offer helpful insights and considerations in situations that call for heightened discussion of school safety or a renewed focus on school safety, especially in response to recent incidents of school violence.
- **Use the Reflect, Practice, and Learn prompts.** Many of the Reflect, Practice, and Learn prompts at the end of each section could be used with students even without reading the content in the *Reimagining School Safety* guide. The Reflect exercises could be used as journaling prompts or to encourage discussion. The Practice exercises could be turned into short- or long-term assignments that can be completed solo or in groups. The Learn exercises offer different resources to deepen what students might initially consider when thinking of school safety, and the videos and podcasts would make an especially rich choice for an all-class study.
- **Engage students in a complete design process to reimagine school safety.** With the right time and relationships, educators and students could move through the design thinking cycle to reimagine what school safety looks like at their sites. To adapt the process for students, start with Step 1 “Assemble Your Team” on p. 22 and skip the more adult-oriented Step 2 “Assess Readiness” and Step 3 “Examine Implementation Drivers.” The “Key Questions to Ask” at each stage of the design cycle (starting on p. 25 in Table 2) will be especially important to center.
- **Move through a condensed design cycle.** If time is limited, educators might move through a shortened design process by focusing on the first three stages only: Empathize, Define, and Ideate. These three stages will still offer students the chance to flex their design muscles and ensure they practice the skills of learning from impacted community members, defining the problem, and brainstorming creative solutions.
- **Use the glossary to ground conversations.** Finally, educators might consider using the glossary as a resource as they develop curricular materials or facilitate discussions related to social–emotional well-being, equity, and belonging.

APPENDIX C. SAMPLE LESSON PLANS

This case story invites educators to use the *Reimagining School Safety* guide in whatever ways they feel called to engage in discussion of school safety with students, with the expectation that cultivating relationships and affirming student identities are central themes. The sample lesson plans below are examples of how Nelson intentionally created opportunities in her class for students to build connections, share their values and personal experiences, and take a team approach to problem-solving. Some of the activities are rooted in theater, which can help students explore and consider each other's viewpoints.

Community Building Circles

The process for a community building circle is very simple: Participants sit in a circle where they are able to see all other participants clearly and easily. The prompt is read, and the first respondent volunteers. The first respondent chooses which direction to go around the circle, and everybody responds. If somebody wants to pass, that's totally OK. Once the circle has been completed, you can come back to the participants who passed to see if they'd like to share now that they have listened to the others.

Example prompts:

Easy community building:

- What is the part of your personality that feels the most important to you for other people to see? Why?
- What's a part of your personality that ...?
- What's your favorite holiday, and how do you like to celebrate it?
- If you were a color, what color would you be and why?
- What's your favorite TV show from childhood? What did you love about it?

More in-depth:

- What makes you feel safe in a school environment? What makes you feel unsafe?
- Do you think mental health is an important issue in your family? How has it been dealt with?
- Do you think mental health is an important part of school safety? How do they connect?
- What's one thing that you want adults to know about what's important to your generation?

Check out [CASEL's Community Building Circles Guide](#) to learn more about implementing Community Building Circles.

Story Circles:

These are slightly different styles of community building circles and are extremely good for building deeper community and talking about emotional subjects. The emphasis is on storytelling, not just responding; this can move participants away from feeling like they need to be "smart." This is a great process for getting people out of an academic headspace and into an empathetic space. The process

is similar to a community building circle, with some key differences. Participants are encouraged to tell a story that has a beginning, middle, and end, which is a helpful way of keeping people engaged.

This process is taken from [The Free Southern Theater and Junebug Productions in New Orleans, LA](#).

- Tell us a story about a time that you felt really supported in an educational environment.
- Tell us a story about a time that you felt really unsupported in an educational environment.
- Tell us a story about a moment that changed your life forever.
- Tell us a story about a time that you felt like you belonged.
- Tell us a story about a time that you felt excluded.
- Tell us a story about a time that an adult really showed up for you.
- Tell us a story about a time that you saw something change that you thought would never change.
- Tell us a story about a time that you changed or grew in an unexpected way.

Variations:

- You can do another round after the initial circle where participants can reflect on “windows and mirrors” from other people’s stories. “Windows” are something from the person’s story that gives you insight into something new, while a “mirror” is something from the person’s story that you directly relate to.

Check out [Oregon State University’s Story Circles Toolkit](#) to learn more about implementing Story Circles.

Improv Exercises for Communal Problem-Solving

The following are a series of improv exercises that are designed to be used to limber up the minds of young people and get them out of fixed mindsets. They can be especially helpful as a way to invite a group of young people to think creatively and expansively as a group.

Activity One: “Anything but a Chair”

Participants sit or stand in a circle around a chair. The chair should be as simple as possible and light enough that people can easily move it. The rules of this game are simple: Participants move to the chair and move/interact with the chair to transform it into anything but a chair. The participant will interact with the “chair” in its new form until the group can guess what it is, and then another participant jumps in. Examples include placing it on its side and it becomes a boat, turning it upside down, and holding it over their head and it’s a hat, etc.

Academic tie-in: After the group has done this for several minutes, have them brainstorm about what makes it more successful. Typically, people will say things like “It’s more successful when we have fun with it” or “It’s more successful when we let every idea be considered.” These can be a great group of “guideposts” for group thinking around systemic problems.

Key Takeaways:

- Solutions are only limited by our imaginations.
- One new idea can lead to another.

Modifications/Troubleshooting:

- With a new and/or quieter group, show some possible examples before you begin to get the juices flowing.
- If there are mobility issues for any participants, you can do this in pairs in which one person has an idea and “guides” the other by telling them how to move the chair and how to interact with it.

Supplies:

- chair
- room to move

Activity Two: “Human Machine”

The participants all stand in a circle. One person enters the circle and starts making a motion and a sound that matches it. It can be anything as long as it’s repetitive and simple. A second person comes in and adds their own sound and motion. The only rule is that it has to be connected in some kind of way to the first sound and motion. This continues until the entire group is involved. You can make this more complex by having one person who can tap people in and out once everybody is involved.

Academic tie-in: This is a great early community building exercise that also explores ideas of interdependence. It can be a great way to start conversations about complex adaptive systems, especially when you ask people to reflect on the experiences of (a) figuring out how to include themselves, (b) doing their own motion and sound while interacting with the group, and (c) determining how it felt when people were tapped in and out. How did that change the group?

Key Takeaways:

- Interdependence is both cool and hard.
- You never know where something is going to go by looking at the very beginning.

Modifications/Troubleshooting:

- To accommodate mobility issues, you can easily do this around a table using just your hands to participate.

Supplies:

- room to move around

Activity Three: "I've Got an Idea"

This is a variation of Forum Theater from Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*. It's best to do this with participants who know each other fairly well and once they have a problem they are trying to solve that is complex and/or systemic and that they are all familiar with. Here's a good example of a problem that could work: *Our school has a growing issue with houselessness. We're really aware of the issues it's causing for students, but we're having trouble thinking of good solutions that the school could actually use.*

- Note: This activity is most successful (and equitable) when at least a few people in the room have first-hand lived experience with the problem.

As a group, the participants make a list of all the "characters" involved. Cast people as each character. Place the characters in a "scene" that illustrates the way the problem surfaces in your community. For each character, identify what they want and need in the scene that is about to happen.

Let the participants play out the scene as it currently happens in your community. The observers all stand together in a circle around the scene and watch. Don't let people sit down; it's key they feel like they are involved! Do the scene a couple of times while people watch. They are looking for "catalyst points," which are anywhere they have an idea for a solution.

Now do the scene again, and anybody in the room can call out "freeze" and jump in to replace a character, who will make a different choice. The entire scene will still be acted out, with participants using it as a way to explore a new dynamic. Do this as many times as the group wants. Talk through all possible solutions, and see if there are any that feel possible to implement.

Key Takeaways:

- Solutions are only limited by our imaginations.
- One new idea can lead to another.

Modifications/Troubleshooting:

- With a new and/or quieter group, show some possible examples before you start.

Supplies:

- chair