REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING CHALLENGES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: NARRATIVES OF UPPER DIVISION HEADS IN QUAKER SCHOOLS

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A Quaker teaching-learning ethos grows from a worldview rooted in a sense of the sacred, in awe, compassion, and fellow-feeling with others –Paul Lacey, 2001

For:
Jim, Livy and Collier
My roots and wings

Gwyneth, Robert and Miranda
Educators and artists by example

Jim and Debbie Zug
Sponsors committed to encouraging growth and learning

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I started this program in the fall of 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, as a personal challenge to grow beyond my comfort zone of independent schools. The pandemic led me to question many basic assumptions about the purpose of school and reaffirmed the necessity of proximate community. The murder of George Floyd demanded that society take measure of its inadequate opportunities and the unequal experience for marginalized groups in every sector, including private schools like mine. Out of this urgent moment emerged my goal of documenting the reflections of Quaker school leaders during the pandemic.

This doctoral cohort program gave me the gift of stepping away from the intensity of leadership once a month to learn from others and of leaning into my own deficits in order to build my capacity to serve. My cohort colleagues taught me as much as the professors due to their diverse and extensive leadership experiences across education sectors. Furthermore, I could not have driven off campus early on Friday afternoons without the gracious support of my school colleagues who picked up the slack in my absence.

Professors such as Dr. Vazquez led the cohort in meaningful philosophical discussions on the purpose of schooling. Dr. Campano broadened my understanding of literacy and honoring identity in the classroom. Dr. Rigby and Dr. Quinn shaped my learning of organizational theory, and Dr. Bierbaum changed my perceptions of urban planning and community development. Dr. McKee led our cohort in sessions of restorative reflective practice. Dr. Nabors Oláh and Dr. Ravitch taught me research and proposal design, providing extensive feedback on my writing. Dr. Collins patiently sharpened my statistical skills. There are many more professors who profoundly influenced my learning in this program as well.

Mike Benner encouraged me to take the plunge into the land of doctoral work, and Marcia Halperin took many walks with me in the woods behind the school campus asking excellent questions to improve my research. Julie Rodowsky was my reliable walking partner throughout the pandemic as well, helping me process work and life moments.

The 11 participants in this study graciously shared with me their reflections on crisis leadership. They all care deeply about students, faculty culture and Quaker education. They trusted me with their stories and wisdom in hopes of providing insights for future leaders.

None of this would have been possible without the care and guidance of Dr. Diane Waff, my dissertation chair, and the thorough feedback of thought partners on my committee, Dr. Claudia Gentile and Dr. Earl Ball. Diane and Claudia met with me on a monthly basis to review my research proposal and methodology and to provide suggestions on each chapter. Their questions, reflections and support at each stage in the process refined my research, improved my findings and helped me reach my goal.

Lastly, I am eternally grateful to Jim, Livy and Collier for tolerating this midlife crisis. They bore the brunt of all the weekends away, the seemingly daily deliveries of books to the house, weekly Zoom meetings eating up the wifi bandwidth and stacks of paper everywhere. They inspire me daily with their own educational journeys and commitment to making the world a more humane place for all.

ABSTRACT

REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING CHALLENGES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: NARRATIVES OF UPPER DIVISION HEADS IN QUAKER SCHOOLS

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When most schools in the United States pivoted to remote instruction in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, education leaders faced an intense crisis of uncertain duration. For the next two years, they had to adapt and innovate to maximize learning opportunities for their pupils, while balancing the emotional needs of faculty, students and parents, as well as self-care. For Quaker school divisional principals accustomed to a participatory and collaborative style of leadership, the COVID-19 pandemic demanded new approaches to problem-solving. They needed to perform more top-down initiatives to address the rapidly changing situations impacting schedules, learning strategies and community morale. This narrative study of 11 upper school division heads in Quaker schools centers the stories of leadership in this challenging moment for education. While there is bountiful research on crisis leadership, there is no research exploring decision-making lessons in a Quaker school setting during such a prolonged time of challenge. This research unearths important insights about the importance of communication, teamwork strategies and input into decision-making. Leaders interviewed in this study with trusted relationships in their communities prior to the pandemic pivoted effectively to different modes of crisis decision-making. Findings from this research add lessons about how Quaker school leaders

with resonant leadership and distributed leadership skills navigated an enduring crisis and contribute to understandings about school leadership theory and practice.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In late February 2020, I was at the Heads Network annual conference in Jacksonville, Florida with about 60 other senior administrators from independent schools. The keynote speakers, Katty Kay and Beverly Tatum, presented on topics such as female leadership and diversity. For meals, we sat at big round tables with views of the ocean and swapped insights about everything from schedules to hiring, and we played the name game about people we knew in common. We were relaxed for a moment in time, enjoying one another and an escape from daily routines and meetings. A few days later, however, I was at the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) annual conference in Philadelphia and COVID-19 was all anyone was talking about. On long escalators in NAIS convention locations, I would typically wave and chat quickly with peers from other schools as we passed each other between sessions. This time, however, everyone was on their phones, canceling spring break student trips and calling emergency meetings back on campus. The impromptu session with the NAIS legal counsel in cavernous Ballroom A was standing room only. Schools in Asia had been remote for weeks at this point, so there was something to learn from their experiences. U.S. independent schools, however, were scrambling.

The Delaware governor sent students home on March 15, 2020, for two weeks, starting while Wilmington Friends, the school where I work, was on vacation. The leadership team at Wilmington Friends expected this announcement, so I asked students to take home all their school belongings the day we left for the break, and we were also lucky our technology director had installed Zoom on every laptop. In the first Zoom faculty meeting at the end of March, I looked at faces in the little boxes. People were afraid, and their stress emanated across the

screens. In a typical meeting, we would have deliberated extensively on decisions to change grading or schedules. Instead, teacher anxiety and fear signaled that they wanted me to make these decisions. They wanted to be told what to do. Their priorities were family and emotional survival, and it was my role as a school leader to make the decisions that would free them to focus on these priorities. I remember the palpable relief when I told faculty they could offer asynchronous lessons if that would allow them to care for their own small children at home. We would not go to pass/fail, but they could alter their pacing and redesign assessments as needed. I canceled final exams and changed the schedule to eliminate lessons longer than 50 minutes.

We had hours and hours of senior administrative meetings that spring where we continued to use collaborative decision-making strategies. This was draining and often felt like we were drifting without clear direction. We were waiting for the Governor to issue school guidelines, and we were continuing to include the whole leadership team in discernment on health and safety measures. However, for upper school faculty meetings, the clerks (faculty leaders) and I wanted sessions to be as short as possible (more time on Zoom after a long day of virtual teaching was not conducive to community morale). Communicating clear policy to faculty, students and families helped them deal with many other unknowns.

The murder of George Floyd by police in May 2020 escalated feelings of despair in the school community, and being isolated made it challenging to seek strength by coming together as we would typically have done. Quaker schools use Meeting for Worship as a way to listen and heal spiritually. Meeting brings everyone together in deep reflection where messages from the heart generate understanding and strengthen the community. However, this was impossible when we could not gather physically because of the pandemic. In addition, another school year was

approaching, and it was clear to me that more top-down decisions about schedules, virtual learning and faculty duties were needed. Reflecting about that time, I appreciated the stress of pivoting in my leadership approach to meet the needs of the people and the institution.

As a reflective practitioner, I am keenly aware of my positionality in my research. I am a Quaker and a school leader. I am a White cisgender woman of privilege whose children were students in my division at the time. I was curious to learn how others in similar leadership positions made sense of their decision-making experiences from 2020–2022 and what they learned to apply in their practice. This study deepens the scholarly research about the decision-making practices of school leaders. The COVID-19 pandemic created an urgency to innovate and respond to stakeholders. This study creates an opportunity to learn how upper school administrators in Quaker schools perceived decision-making and their reflections about changes to their leadership from that experience. This narrative inquiry centers the voices and stories of those division heads. Studying crisis leadership in Quaker schools provides insights into how those predisposed to a teamwork approach to decision-making handled the dynamics of an environment requiring a broader repertoire of decision-making methods.

Research Questions

Based on the context of adapting leadership approaches during a crisis, the following research questions for this study emerged:

1) What impact did COVID-19 have on upper-division leaders in U.S. Quaker schools' leadership and decision-making processes?
    a) What lessons emerged that are useful to prepare leaders and the organization for future crises?

b) In what ways do upper-division leaders think leader reflexivity on pandemic decision-making will influence their leadership approaches going forward?

2) How do upper-division leaders interpret the decision-making process in their Friends school?

a) What past leadership experiences influenced upper-division leaders' pandemic decision-making?

3) How did my experience as a leader during the pandemic, and the lessons I learned conducting this study, contribute to my decision-making as a school leader?

Definition of Key Terms

In this study that focuses on experiences in Quaker schools, it is important to define key terms. For the purposes of this study, the *COVID-19 pandemic timeframe* refers to the time period between March 2020 and June 2022 (I realize the pandemic did not end in June 2022, but this is the bounded framework for research purposes). *Quaker schools* are independent schools affiliated with the Society of Friends (Quaker). They are also referred to as *Friends schools. Upper school division leaders* are those who lead the division of grades 9–12 in independent schools. This is akin to being a high school principal.

Decision-making processes for school leaders take many forms. In a Quaker school, the decision-making culture often includes regular contributions and feedback in decisions from faculty (Larrabee, 2019). Faculty participate and collaborate in committees involved in making significant decisions, such as school schedule, curriculum design and expectations for students and faculty. The division leader or Head of School may ultimately make the final decision, but the process is significantly collaborative, deliberative and distributed. A hallmark of Quaker

decision-making is when participants in a decision do not vote and adopt majority-rule, but rather seek a "sense of unity" or "consensus." There are five tiers of decision-making typically identified that span from faculty making a decision to a purely administrative decision.

Background and Context

The research was situated in Quaker schools in the United States. I chose Quaker schools to connect my own experience as a practitioner with the research and surface new understandings of crisis leadership in education. For instance, my site of practice is Wilmington Friends School in Wilmington, Delaware. Founded in 1748 and originally just for Quaker students, the school was downtown in a building adjacent to the meetinghouse at 4th and West streets until the mid-20th century. This was the Friends meeting of Thomas Garrett, the abolitionist and active organizer of the Underground Railroad (*Wilmington Friends*, 1998). In the 1930s, the school moved north to undeveloped farmland. Today there are over 700 students on two campuses (about 30 acres) in a densely suburban location within the northern edge of the city limits. Less than 3% of the student body is Quaker (M. Brown, personal communication, October 25, 2021). There are also only a handful of Quaker faculty and staff members. This is important because it means that Quaker pedagogy must be consciously learned and taught through the intentional program and culture of the school community. The school's Quaker religious roots frame the mission of the institution:

> Wilmington Friends, a Quaker school with high standards for academic achievement, challenges students to seek truth, to value justice and peace, and to act as creative, independent thinkers with a conscious responsibility to the good of all. (Wilmington Friends School, n.d.)

The most unique feature of a Friends school is the weekly Meeting for Worship in which the community gathers for silent reflection. Students often chafe at this ritual at first because

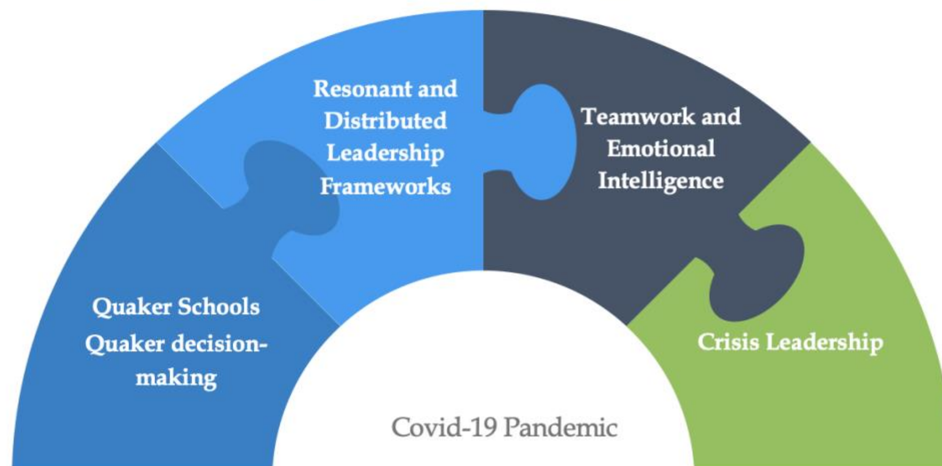
stillness is so unusual in our multi-tasking society. However, they come to appreciate the chance for quiet contemplation as a whole division. The commitments to peaceful resolution of conflict and a diverse community stem, as well, from the Quaker belief that there is God within each person. According to the Friends Council on Education (n.d.), there are over 70 Friends schools in the United States, whether preschool programs, K–8 schools or K–12 institutions, and Quaker schools are also located across the globe, from Australia, to Costa Rica, the United Kingdom and the West Bank (near Jordan). For this study, I surveyed and interviewed 11 upper divisional leaders in Quaker schools located in the United States. I wanted to learn from their reflections on decision-making during and since the pandemic.

Rationale and Significance

This dissertation explores the relationship between Quaker school decision-making, resonant and distributed leadership frameworks, teamwork and emotional intelligence, and approaches to crisis leadership. The integration of these themes deepens understanding of school leader praxis and sense-making related to pandemic decision-making. Drawing on theoretical frameworks and literature in the field, I developed a conceptual frame that connects and supports why this scholarly study matters (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Figure 1 illustrates how this dissertation research combines these frameworks and theories as puzzle pieces that join together to create understandings related to decision-making and leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. My conceptual framework unites the research questions, literature and methodological approach (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Figure 1

Decision-making and Leadership in Quaker Schools



Quaker Schools and Quaker Decision-making

Quakers understand decision-making as a spiritual process of seeking God's wisdom (*Faith and Practice*, 2002; McHenry et al., 2004; Sheeran, 1983). In a Quaker meeting when trying to discern a path forward on an issue, members share insights and use the intervening silence between messages to feel led towards a truth beyond individual voices (Muers & Burton, 2019). It is not a debate between points of view where one side "wins" over the other (Muers & Burton, 2019). The truth is greater than an individual's perspective. Even for non-Quakers in a Quaker school, the discernment involves reflection, waiting, listening and openness. "Consensus" can be interpreted as getting everyone to agree on a decision. However, discerning a "sense of unity" has a deeper component that cannot be rushed for efficiency's sake (Larrabee, 2019). The clerk or leader of a committee has the responsibility to interpret the silence and share

ideas towards a decision, and the participants' role is to trust the process and to create a safe environment for all voices to be heard. Those in attendance are to share a perspective and then "let it go" and wait for a greater truth to emerge (Sheeran, 1983). It is often possible to find one's opinion changed in this process.

Unity is not the same as unanimity (Larrabee, 2019). Unanimity would mean that everyone agrees for the same reason. Unity, however, means that the group can agree on a shared vision of a path forward that is right for the child or the institution, even if each member does not claim the same reasons for the decision. Of course, many decisions in Quaker schools are more routine and administrative and therefore do not require such listening and engagement from the collective group. Nevertheless, at Quaker schools, faculty are accustomed to a high level of engagement and feedback around, for example, the class schedule design or a change to the curriculum or grading system. This study explores the degree of familiarity the participating upper school leaders—many of whom were not Quaker, and some who were less experienced in Quaker school leadership at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic—had with such decision-making practices. This leadership phenomenon is relatable to directors of other organizational systems who must make sense of their cultures to be successful leaders.

Resonant and Distributed Leadership

This research analyzes the reflections from divisional leaders in Quaker schools using the frameworks of resonant and distributed leadership (McKee et al., 2008; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Resonant leadership includes an awareness of and management of one's emotions (Goleman et al., 2013; McKee et al., 2008). Listening deeply and responding authentically to co-workers inspires trust and a willingness to work collaboratively. Moreover, understanding one's

power in a leadership position and being attuned to how others relate to that power allows one to effectively wield emotional intelligence in decision-making in an organization (Goleman et al., 2013; McKee et al., 2008). The distributed leadership framework attributes leadership to situations rather than only to those with specific titles and positions (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). This fluid dynamic works in a school setting where the principal, rather than making unilateral decisions, designates a committee to investigate and propose a solution to a particular dilemma. The authority rests in the interactions and context of the issue, giving agency to teachers, not just administrators. Leadership, in other words, is a dynamic practice, not a static role in an organization (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). By using these two lenses of resonant leadership and distributed leadership, this study explores how divisional heads in Quaker schools navigated decision-making during the pandemic.

Teamwork and Emotional Intelligence

Both the Quaker Decision-Making and Resonant and Distributed Leadership frameworks rely on employing skillful teamwork strategies. Leaders build trust in their teams by being vulnerable and committing to open communication (Brown, 2018). They create a climate of accountability and shared purpose (Lencioni, 2002). According to Druskat and Wolff (2001), teams have emotional intelligence apart from that of individual team members, and the most effective leaders attend to that team dynamic. The research questions of this study unearth ways in which divisional leaders adapted their decision-making processes with their administrative and teaching teams during the pandemic. The interviews shed light on how reflections on past experiences in crises can prepare leaders for future situations requiring a repertoire of leadership strategies.

Crisis Leadership

This dissertation contributes to understanding of how crisis leadership in schools responds to a prolonged rather than acute period of distress, fear and change. Prior to 2020, studies prioritized decisive action (Smith & Riley, 2012). However, the sustained nature of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated leading with elevated emotional intelligence as well (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Kerrissey & Edmondson, 2020). Research available from early stages of the pandemic revealed the importance of reservoirs of trust and community connections for school leadership. Flux pedagogy (Ravitch, 2020) describes the climate of unpredictability and strain on leader responsiveness to others and to themselves. It urgently calls for educator self-care in order to support student well-being (Ravitch, 2021). Flux pedagogy responds to this crisis environment because it is a "constructivist, relational, adaptive, and reflexive… humanizing… inquiry-based" approach (Ravitch, 2020, p. 4). The theory takes the "ethics of care" a step further in the pandemic to channel empathy and mutual respect in the classroom towards actions to eliminate inequities and injustices (Noddings, 2012).

Findings from this study offer insights into how crisis leadership manifests itself in school settings. Quaker decision-making approaches affirm teachers in school settings by elevating their significance as problem-solvers. In a crisis, the inclusive and distributed culture nurtured by a resonant leader in Friends schools creates reservoirs of relational trust useful for responding to emerging needs. There is much the broader field of organization management and school leadership can gain from lessons in the Quaker context. This microcosm of Friends educational institutions has not been studied thoroughly enough to glean insights on leadership,

and the COVID-19 crisis time frame creates an opportunity for significant contributions to practitioner research and scholarship in this area.

In addition to using these frameworks to guide and inform this inquiry, this study used a narrative approach to data collection and analysis. Using a narrative approach centers the voices of practitioners (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Illuminating their reflections as critical data for analysis honors their wisdom and experience. This analytic approach involves the development of themes from the stories of participants expressed in response to interview questions and focus group prompts (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 21). Interviews with leaders captured emerging lessons learned and applied to praxis. Furthermore, reflecting on their leadership decisions helped divisional leaders make sense of change over the past several years. Taking time to process past incidents and decisions can be a form of self-care. Leaders in these stressful times have challenging expectations to meet. A 2021 study of independent school leaders (Griffin et al., 2021) found that heads were already feeling extreme pressures to meet the multiple demands on their time and energy from different stakeholders, and the pandemic added an additional layer of concern for their students and faculty, no less caring for themselves.

My own experience as a Quaker school principal aligns with this assessment of the increased demands on educational leaders. Maintaining relationships with colleagues and supporting student mental health could not be more important, while also juggling curriculum design, hiring and enrollment challenges. It has been instructive to my leadership practice to engage in this scholarship and conduct these interviews. It is all the more prescient in this

moment to explore and gain insights about how divisional leaders employed resonant and distributed leadership in a Quaker school setting.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic tested leadership skills in every industry and institution, including schools (Kerrissey & Edmondson, 2020; Netolicky, 2020). Divisional heads in Quaker schools, like myself, experienced the tension between their typically collaborative and distributed approach and the demands of leadership in the pandemic. There was less time for gathering multiple perspectives before implementing decisions and therefore a need to seek input creatively. It was all the more critical to practice and communicate empathy while also making more top-down decisions in response to teacher fatigue and the urgency of the crisis. This study was informed by past research and theory around Quaker decision-making, teamwork and crisis leadership. Resonant and distributed leadership are the theoretical frameworks that informed the analysis. A literature review of these topics buttresses the following research questions:

1) What impact did COVID-19 have on upper-division leaders in U.S. Quaker schools' leadership and decision-making processes?
    a) What lessons emerged that are useful to prepare leaders and the organization for future crises?
    b) In what ways do upper-division leaders think leader reflexivity on pandemic decision-making will influence their leadership approaches going forward?
2) How do upper-division leaders interpret the decision-making process in their Friends school?
    a) What past leadership experiences influenced upper-division leaders' pandemic decision-making?

3) How did my experience as a leader during the pandemic, and the lessons I learned conducting this study, contribute to my decision-making as a school leader?

Quaker Schools and Decision-Making

Quaker Schools: To nourish and prepare for a more "truthful engagement" with the world (Faith and Practice, 2002, p. 45)

This section discusses Quaker schools, Quaker education and Quaker decision-making. Understanding the literature in these areas helped me interpret the findings from interviews of upper school division leaders. Quaker schools have similarities with other independent and religious schools and unique differences as well. This is also true of decision-making in the Quaker context.

Quakers in the British colonies originally formed schools in order to educate their own children with "moral and religious influence" from Quaker elders (Wilmington Friends School, 1998, p. 2). Today, there are 28 Quaker schools in the United States that include an upper division of grades 9–12 (Friends Council on Education, n.d.). There are over 70 Quaker schools in the country, including preschools and K–8 programs, plus over a dozen schools around the world (Friends Council on Education, n.d.). The two oldest Friends schools in the United States are William Penn Charter and Friends Select, both founded in 1689 in Philadelphia. Globally, there is a Friends school in Hobart, Tasmania, in Monteverde, Costa Rica and dozens in Kenya, Canada and the United Kingdom. There are Quaker colleges, such as Earlham in Indiana and Guilford in North Carolina, or those with historically Quaker roots, such as Haverford and Swarthmore in Pennsylvania, and several summer camp programs affiliated with Quaker beliefs. While some institutions have struggled with enrollment and closed, such as the Friends Meeting

School in Rindge, New Hampshire, new Quaker schools have opened in the last few years, including the International Friends School in Seattle, Washington. Most educational programs started as an outgrowth of a local monthly Quaker meeting.

The Friends Council on Education (2021) oversees a membership and renewal process in which a school forms a committee to cast a critical gaze on its Quaker practices, such as worship, governance, curriculum and equity. This self-study report becomes the basis of an accrediting visit. For example, I was part of a visiting team that went to a Friends school outside of Philadelphia. During my time on campus, I observed classes, spoke with community members and attended weekly worship. We witnessed the practices they wrote about in their self-study, and we crafted commendations and recommendations for growth. This school is "under the care" of the local Meeting, meaning the Meeting has some fiduciary and governance responsibility. An urban Quaker school where I taught for seven years is not under the care of a Meeting but hosts a monthly Meeting on its lower school campus. This exemplifies how schools nurture their Quaker roots in different ways. I did a membership renewal visit at this school in 2017, again observing, listening and reflecting on the strengths and challenges of that school's maintenance of its Quaker identity.

Quaker Education

The audacity to believe that education can change the world for the better, that it can create a more just and peaceful society (Garman, 2014, p. 37)

A hallmark of a Quaker education is the central belief that there is "that of God" in everyone (*Faith and Practice*, 2002, p. 16). The commitments to equity, social justice and peaceful resolution of conflict stem from this core tenet. Quakers often use the phrase "letting

one's life speak" in reference to those who embody these principles in their daily interactions and motivations. In a Quaker school, students learn alongside faculty in an ethos of curiosity and shared responsibility for seeking truth (Caldwell, n.d.). "Testimonies" and guiding "queries" help the community reflect on enacting and embodying the principles of simplicity, integrity, stewardship, equity, peace and community (*Faith and Practice*, 2002; Starmer, 2004; Wilmington Friends School, 2017). Common practices of a Friends school include weekly worship in community, whether as a whole division or in a classroom or smaller group, a commitment to service learning and active inclusion of student agency in their learning. Quakers worship in silence in order to hear the truth within. There is no formal ministry or mediating voice of clergy. If a worshiper is moved to share a message that holds meaning for the collective, that person speaks so that those gathered can reflect on that message. As Rich Nourie (2014), head of Abington Friends School from 2005 to 2024, writes,

> When we nurture our connection to our deep, inner lives, to the core of peace, strength, perspective, generosity, and love that reflect the divine spark in each of us, we approach the wholeness that represents us at our fullest, finest, and healthiest as human beings. (p. 91)

At the heart of Quaker education rests the individual spirit in the embrace of the community.

The search for wisdom and the call to social justice is strongest as a collective rather than as a solo pursuit for excellence (Heath, 1996). Quaker education fosters reflection and criticality about knowledge. Students learn to question assumptions in search of uncovering the invisible issues and marginalized in society (Starmer, 2004; Stever & Green, 2013). As a side bar, it is important to note what Quaker education is not: it is not a free-for-all pedagogy where anything goes, where individualism dominates community values. Quaker schools have rules and people in positions of authority, even in the context of honoring student agency, expression and joy.

Quaker Decision-Making

Quaker heads honor collective discernment in the way they lead. (Glendenning, 2014, p. 101)

Essential features of Quaker decision-making include a productive use of silence, the lack of voting or majority rule, and leadership through "clerking." Silence and deep listening play central roles in the decision-making process (Molina-Markham, 2014). Silence is not simply the absence of noise, or the fear of criticism in this case (Edmondson, 2019). Intentional use of quiet reflection centers and focuses the gathering; it strengthens the community by its powerful shared stillness. Silence between messages during decision-making fosters openness to new perspectives and understandings (Larrabee, 2019; Molina-Markham, 2014). In a study of the role of silence in Quaker meetings for business, Molina-Markham (2014) found that a "process based in silence, rather than its product, is the center of decision-making" (p. 170) because those pauses in dialogue framed new ideas and led to unity. To generate the most creative ideas without "group think," leaders introduce silence before discussion (Rogelberg & Kreamer, 2019). The deliberate use of silence creates space for deeper thought and reflection.

In addition to using silence as a methodology in decision-making, participants in this approach must be actively engaged (*Faith and Practice*, 2002). This is a format where group members cannot be passive and let the clerk do all the work (Larrabee, 2019). Group members should not speak too often, dominate the dialogue or argue for a point of view without seeking greater understanding stemming from collective wisdom (Sheeran, 1983). The leader "clerks" by maintaining the trusting environment where each idea is accepted and absorbed. The clerk, in fact, shares very little of an opinion and instead regularly checks with the group whether there is a growing "sense of unity" towards a decision. Quakers do not employ voting because they seek

unity in decisions rather than majority-rule (Dandelion, 2008). As long as there is no unity, or concord, the process of discernment continues (Sheeran, 1983).

Quakers use the term "as the way opens" to describe how truth can rise from a deliberative discussion based in trust and silence. Quaker decision-making differs from "consensus" because spiritual searching undergirds the seeking for truth (*Faith and Practice*, 2002; Lacey, 1998; Larrabee, 2019; Molina-Markham, 2014). A decision is not a compromise but rather a path forward based on trust in one another and wisdom greater than one person's agenda:

> discernment is the practice of listening to both the human voice and the divine, sifting the wheat from the chaff, and holding it all in the Light to be able to find where we are led as a group. Often, in a gathered Meeting for Business, where those present feel a strong presence of the Spirit, the meeting unites in a decision that no one predicted. It feels like something bigger than all of us is holding and helping us move to a deep sense of rightness. This sense of rightness is present only when all members of the meeting are able to say "we," not "they" made the decision. (Stever & Green, 2013, p. 42)

This type of deliberate decision requires leaders who understand the nature of the Quaker process. Such leaders intentionally hold up a mirror to the participants, reflecting back the current status of a proposal in front of the group. They create openings for quieter, more reticent voices to share their ideas. They skillfully create the condition of openness and possibility, inviting everyone to participate in finding the best solution to a thorny dilemma. A clerk does not isolate a naysayer but finds ways to include their concerns without impossibly impeding a decision supported by most of the participants (Sheeran, 1983).

Quakers also refer to "continuing revelation." This means a willingness to reconsider and acknowledge possible change. In a Quaker school, continuing revelation encourages the impetus to innovate programs or seek restorative justice in a disciplinary decision. It allows marginalized

voices to be valued and heard, and it embraces criticality and reflexivity. Nurturing the quality of the decision-making process creates possibility for new ideas to emerge (*Faith and Practice*, 2002). It is the process itself that improves proposed solutions and changes because the inclusive methodology invites the full investment of community members.

A well-known framework, or "levels," of Quaker decision-making in schools helps leaders and faculty engage productively. The Sidwell Friends Charter of Governance (2015) clarifies these tiers: In level 1, a leader makes a decision without input. There are not many significant instances when this would occur, but an example would be an urgent safety matter. Daily, mundane decisions at this level, where collective discernment makes little practical sense, include things like the cafeteria duty rotation schedule. In level 2, a leader consults with others before they make a decision. Examples at this level could include hiring personnel. In level 3, the decision is made collectively with stakeholders; an example would be changes to the bell schedule or the adoption of a new academic program. In level 4, a group, such as a faculty committee or department, makes a decision, such as recommending a student for an award, and seeks input from the leader. In the last level, level 5, the faculty make the decision and communicate it to the leader. Examples in this scenario include when the leader empowers teachers to design a professional development workshop for an in-service day.

Critical to all these tiers is a foundational belief in every school person investing in mission-driven solutions. Relational trust, built through consistent daily demonstrations of connection and engagement, creates the ethos for faculty engagement in problem-solving and distributed leadership (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Without a sense of belonging, faculty and students will not authentically share in a discernment process. Love and belonging, as Valerie

Brown (2022) reminds us, are fragile and need consistent nurturing. A supportive climate of trust and psychological safety are the bedrocks of positive school culture (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Edmondson, 2019; Supovitz & D'Auria, 2020). Leadership in a Quaker school requires a commitment to curiosity about new ideas, respect for and inclusion of as many voices as possible, and a use of silence and active listening (Brown, 2022). A high level of comfort and patience with waiting, listening and "productive struggle" will serve a leader in a Quaker institution well.

Resonant and Distributed Leadership Frameworks

Engaging the hearts and passions of the group is critical for creating resonant relationships, norms and cultures that can sustain collective success over time and during times of challenge or change. (McKee et al., 2008, p. 182)

In this section, I summarize the literature on resonant and distributed leadership theory. Understanding these frameworks, and research related to them, provides a foundation for interpreting reflections on decision-making in Quaker schools at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Resonant Leadership

Research on resonant leadership emphasizes the core principle of emotional intelligence (Goleman et al., 2013; McKee et al., 2008). Employing high emotional intelligence requires attuned self-awareness and regulation of emotions on the part of a leader (Druskat & Wolff, 2001). An emotionally intelligent leader does their best to not allow their own emotions to impact the productivity of the workplace and seeks personal work-life balance rather than opting

into cycles of excessive self-sacrifice (McKee et al., 2008). Shouldering all the responsibility of decisions in an organization creates stress and can isolate a leader from the stakeholders.

A resonant leader is well-aligned with their values, and their daily actions and relationships within the school align with these values (Evans, 2001). This type of leader embraces the institution's mission as the north star of their decision-making. Bryk and Schneider (2002) explain that leaders who care about relationship management build relational trust through regular daily interactions, and this ethos catalyzes "a collective sense of engagement among a faculty" (p. 29). Acting in accordance with one's beliefs is the hallmark of the difference between transactional and transformational leadership. As Robert Evans (2001) wrote, "Managers, it is said, do things right, while leaders do the right thing" (p. 148). Leading according to this framework requires dedicated practice and self-reflection in order to consistently act according to one's principles. As Mckee et al. (2008) put it,

> The best leaders *move* people. They engage people's hearts and minds and help direct people's energy, individually and collectively, toward a desired end. And resonant leaders create a climate that is ripe with enthusiasm, hope, mutual support, and commitment. In other words, they lead with emotional and social intelligence and create resonant climates that can, and do, support both leaders and followers as both groups engage in the hard work of achieving goals and bringing about change. (p. 212)

A resonant leader is one who authentically empathizes with others and promotes honest and direct conflict management. Rather than shielding themselves from vulnerability, this approach calls on adoptees to admit mistakes and create a climate of psychological safety (Brown, 2018; Edmondson, 2019). A leader who creates a culture encouraging intellectual risk-taking and inclusion leads to rich creativity and team investment in problem-solving (Edmondson, 2019). It is a culture where "people feel invited to be innovative, where they give their best" (Goleman et al., 2013, p. 248). Teachers report, not surprisingly, that leaders with

emotional intelligence positively impact school culture and morale by building a sense of shared purpose (Goldberg McKeown, 2022). In a study of 18 principals in New Zealand in the spring of 2020, interview data revealed the importance of relational management, attention to well-being and an attitude of optimism for constructive leadership (Thornton, 2021). According to Goleman et al. (2013):

> Resonant leaders know when to be collaborative and when to be visionary, when to listen and when to command. Such leaders have a knack for attuning to their own sense of what matters and articulating a mission that resonates with the values of those they lead. These leaders naturally nurture relationships, surface simmering issues, and create the human synergies of a group in harmony. (p. 248)

Emotional intelligence has significance for leaders generally, and specifically for those who manage teams of participants in a school or workplace (Stubbs Koman & Wolff, 2008). In Quaker schools, leaders practicing the qualities of this framework also utilize effective distributed leadership.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership theory refers to a system empowering individuals to solve problems regardless of title or position (Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). In other words, the tasks and decisions do not reside solely with the principal or other administrators. Leaders adopting this model must be intentional about building capacity among teachers and staff to create solutions (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). More become invested in outcomes for the larger community when distributed decision-making is utilized (Deflaminis & Jabbar, 2016; Williamson & Blackburn, 2019). Deflaminis et al. (2016) refer to this as leadership that is “stretched” (p. 8) intentionally across participants. When leadership is de-centered and spread among teams with a collaborative approach, problem-solving and innovation increase

(DeFlaminis et al., 2016). In teams exercising distributed leadership, capacity for leadership and reforms increas as well: “staff exchanges were dynamic and mission-related, and opportunities for faculty feedback increased. A healthy culture of risk-taking and initiative emerged amongst DL [distributed leadership] team members, as did an increasing orientation to innovation, adaptation, and teacher leadership” (DeFlaminis et al., 2016, p. 73). In a qualitative study of discourse patterns among members of two teacher teams, for example, researchers found that a team given clear direction and independence to design a solution functioned better than a team given less guidance (Scribner et al., 2007). The school team using active, expressive language in discussion with one another felt greater autonomy in problem-solving whereas the group that used more passive discourse with one another felt a sense of futility due to a lack of decision-making power. (Scribner et al., 2007).

Distributed leadership is a practice involving “interdependence and interaction,” and it shifts depending on the situation and context (Deflaminis & Jabbar, 2016, p. 8). In a case study of Baxter Elementary School in Chicago, researchers observed the conversations among teachers focused on math curriculum versus those discussing literacy (Burch, 2007). The math department head did not create an ethos of safety for multiple voices and perspectives. She remained the chair of the committee year after year and did the bulk of the work for the group. Her agenda and decisions met with little resistance but also little endorsement. In the discussions regarding literacy lessons, however, there was a free-flowing exchange of ideas and enthusiasm for innovation. The chair position in this group rotated every few years so there was less of a top-down atmosphere. The teachers felt empowered to lead workshops for one another during an in-

service day, and this led to more informal leadership practices among the faculty in promotion of literacy innovation (Burch, 2007).

In a different case study, of the Kelly Elementary School in Chicago, new teacher orientation and supervision occurred through a distributed approach (Diamond, 2007). Ms. Grant acclimated to her teaching position through close mentorship by a veteran instructor, Ms. Whitten. The principal did not need to observe Ms. Grant frequently because Ms. Whitten worked closely with the new teacher and provided feedback to the school administration. In her role as mentor, Ms. Whitten imparted the expectations for student performance at Kelly and provided regular feedback that supported Ms. Grant's adjustment to her new working environment (Diamond, 2007).

Effective distributed leadership, including the implementation of decisions made with this approach, relies on foundational conditions, often set by resonant leaders. There needs to be a culture of learning, of trust and accountability in the workplace (Supovitz & D'Auria, 2020). Encouraging diverse perspectives and creating psychological safety for all participants results in greater investment in solutions. This work climate aligns closely with the inclusive principles of Quaker decision-making explored in an earlier section, and it relates as well to findings from research on productive teamwork conditions in businesses and school settings.

Teamwork and Emotional Intelligence

If leaders want to unleash individual and collective talent, they must foster a psychologically safe climate where employees feel free to contribute ideas, share information, and report mistakes. (Edmondson, 2019, p. xvi)

In addition to understanding the literature on resonant and distributed leadership frameworks, this study involved the exploration of the literature on organizational teamwork. Distributed leadership entails understanding successful teamwork strategies. Lencioni's (2002) classic theory on the "Five Dysfunctions of a Team" posits that success outcomes are a function of a group that trusts one another, engages in generative conflict, demonstrates commitment to a shared purpose, holds one another accountable and focuses on results. Lencioni (2002) exemplifies the theory through a hypothetical company not meeting sales figures. In his scenario, a new leader, Kathryn, reorganized and trained the team to act as a unit to meet its market goal. She created practices that instilled commitment towards a common outcome. Through a shared purpose and group commitments established to support one another as well as maintain accountability, the team was able to prioritize and meet their set goals. In a comprehensive literature review across disciplines such as psychology and organizational theory, researchers found multiple studies on emotional behaviors on teams (Vijayalakshmi & Bhattacharyya, 2012). Cohesive teams can spread positive energy and attitudes to generate productivity (Vijayalakshmi & Bhattacharyya, 2012). Emotions are a part of life, and acknowledging this as a team in order to address individual and group emotional dynamics facilitates work effectiveness (Vijayalakshmi & Bhattacharyya, 2012).

Groups with a collectively high emotional intelligence perform tasks better than those with less attuned dynamics (Brown, 2018; Druskat & Wolff, 2001). Individuals need self-awareness, and as a group there should be regulation of emotions, norm-setting and assessments; it is not enough that individuals on a team possess high emotional intelligence (Druskat & Wolff, 2001). Task or project conflict can lead to generative results whereas interpersonal conflict can minimize productivity (Jordan & Troth, 2004; Lencioni, 2002). Fostering a climate where difficult conversations occur in order to improve relationships builds stronger morale, trust and psychological safety between colleagues (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Edmondson, 2019; Lencioni, 2002; Stone et al., 2010).

Karen Bicking's (2017) dissertation on virtual teams explores how those with high levels of emotional intelligence surmounted the obstacles of remote work through "perspective taking, information sharing, and monitoring and adjusting of team behaviors" (p. iv). In a laboratory experiment where two teams engaged in a decision-making task, the group with better conflict-management skills reported greater appreciation for the process than the group with weaker skills (Bicking, 2017). Similarly, Gundlach et al. (2006) found that a sense of collective team identity enhanced team performance. It takes intentional team-building to help collective purpose overcome strong individualistic tendencies in work groups (Gundlach et al., 2006).

In a quantitative study of 350 participants, researchers found that a "team's overall level of emotional intelligence and the collective ability of members to deal with their own emotions during a problem-solving exercise lead to higher performance" (Jordan & Troth, 2004, p. 211). Additionally, school teams that debriefed their ratings on the Team Functioning Scale, a 17-question online survey of team structure, focus, communication and shared decision-making,

improved their effectiveness and cohesion (Gaumer Erickson et al., 2015). Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, Robert Kelley (1988) emphasized that, in the business realm, when leaders set an example by being “good followers,” this improves organizational dynamics and outcomes. Good followers must trust one another and work in a culture where accountability is important; if not, a team risks the “Abilene Paradox,” where everyone privately disagrees with a poor group decision (Harvey, 1974).

Brené Brown’s (2018) extensive research on individual vulnerability and wholeheartedness extends to team dynamics as well. A team that is willing to “rumble,” or authentically engage in difficult conversations, will emerge more aligned and committed. Brown suggests strategies such as “permission slips” that elevate open communication productively in meetings. Articulating emotions and practicing empathy in teamwork improve relationships, and therefore, work outcomes. Another idea would be to always ask at the end of a meeting: “Is anything left unsaid?” to ensure that all voices get heard and no good idea is ignored by group think dynamics (Moorhead et al., 1991; Reeves, 2020). Effective team leadership is a central tenet of leadership in a Quaker school. Combining prior experience with group dynamics with Quaker decision-making strategies is critical for the success of a divisional leader in a Quaker community. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, put stress on those practices in school settings.

Crisis Leadership

Contains and interprets what’s happening in times of uncertainty (Petriglieri, 2020)

In March 2020, schools scrambled to adopt remote learning, connect students equitably with technology and continue with academic instruction. School leaders had to communicate rushed plans to families, staff and students. There was no road map for creating a sense of safety

and normalcy in those uncertain times. In the summer of 2020, in preparation for the following school year, leaders were again creating schedules, hybrid and remote learning plans as well as health and safety protocols with no playbook.

Theories about crisis leadership in schools prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic focused on responses to urgent and short-term disasters (Smith & Riley, 2012). The tragedies included events such as tornadoes, fires, floods or public relations scandals. A leader needed to be decisive and communicate effectively and regularly (Smith & Riley, 2012). A long-term crisis response, as we have learned in the recent pandemic, demanded additional skills and mindsets (Harris, 2020; Kerrissey & Edmondson, 2020; Netolicky, 2020; Ravitch, 2020). School leadership in the COVID-19 pandemic has required levels of empathy, relational care and flexibility at unprecedented levels.

Understanding crisis leadership research will help inform the current study on how leaders in Quaker schools made sense of their leadership practices during the pandemic. Research on crisis leadership falls into three categories for this literature review. There is theory from pre-2020 about components of leadership during times of crisis. Next, there is research on school crisis leadership from the pandemic and finally, there is the broader context of crisis leadership research and theory since 2020.

The pre-2020 research on crisis leadership in organizations focused on decisiveness (O'Brien & Robertson, 2009; Smith & Riley, 2012). Smith and Riley (2012) posited that school leaders in times of crisis should be comfortable with top-down decision-making. Leaders should seek facts and act on their intuition if facts are ambiguous. In a study of a school with a student fatality, researchers found that trust between the school community and the administrators broke

down due to a lack of faith in leadership (Sutherland, 2017). In times of uncertainty and fear, it is the foundational trust leaders have built with their communities that helps members face the unknowns. Without trust constructed over time through relationship-building, a crisis will quickly rupture the bonds in an organization (Mishra, 1996; Sutherland, 2017). Trust works multi-dimensionally: subordinates and leaders must trust one another so that in crisis situations they can collaborate effectively (Mishra, 1996). Moreover, a leader can delegate decisions to colleagues in a crisis when there is clear communication and a shared mission (Sutherland, 2017).

Recent research reveals that crisis leadership in schools during a long-term and unchartered crisis scenario has changed understanding of the skills and priorities for school leaders (Parveen et al., 2022; Striepe & Cunningham, 2022; Sum, 2022; Thornton, 2021). In a qualitative study of 18 secondary principals in New Zealand in spring 2020, respondents focused on the importance of supporting teacher and student well-being above all else. Additionally, a comfort level with the unknown and transparent communication with community members assuaged fear and promoted trust in decisions (Thornton, 2021).

Flux pedagogy is an emerging framework for supporting school decision-making, relationships between school and community, and the need for radical care and empathy (Ravitch, 2020). This integrated framework and "humanizing pedagogy" emphasizes practitioner inquiry (Ravitch, 2020, p. 4). Teachers and administrators need to be adaptive and receptive to taking action in times of uncertainty. Their actions should advance social justice that strives to eliminate systemic oppression. By building relational trust and reflexively examining biases,

school members can build stronger, more sustainable and nurturing communities for students and families.

A qualitative narrative study of four school leaders in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic supports this pedagogy of care (Sum, 2022). In focus group interviews, administrators reflected on the importance of caring for staff well-being and the increased efficacy of peer networks for idea collaboration. Using the lenses of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA), the researchers found that leaders shed the state testing requirements and other "compliance" measures in favor of sustaining social and emotional contact with students and families (Sum, 2022). They knew their communities well and were able to provide a level of reassurance to families; they could partner with local organizations in support of students (Sum, 2022). This illuminates the importance of developing and sustaining relationships within and beyond school communities; leaders' networks and the trust in the authentic connections helped them face the crisis adaptively and collaboratively.

In a mixed methods study of heads and board chairs of U.S. independent schools, including 409 survey responses and 13 in-depth responses, engaging peer networks emerged as a central strategy in crisis leadership (Griffin et al., 2021). Leaders reported an increase in dialogue between institutions regionally to share ideas and support (Griffin et al., 2021). These priorities of empathy and reassurance differed from the pre-pandemic best practices of decisive action in crisis leadership (Smith & Riley, 2012). School leaders in the pandemic confirmed prior research findings that agility and communication are paramount but found that their community networks and relationships catalyzed creative solutions on behalf of children (Netolicky, 2020; Sum,

2022). Empathy and support for families, staff and students mattered most (Parveen et al., 2022; Ravitch, 2020; Sum, 2022).

Two literature reviews of leadership challenges for schools further demonstrate the impact of the pandemic on administrator priorities. At the time of this review, there has not been much empirical research on crisis leadership related to schools and COVID-19 (Parveen et al., 2022; Striepe & Cunningham, 2022). However, in a scoping review of peer-reviewed empirical research from 2010–2020, Striepe and Cunningham (2022) found that caring for community and staff took most of a leader's attention and energy. In a systematic literature review of 138 articles and 41 primary studies, Parveen et al. (2022) reported that both emotional support and equity gaps for students with challenging home environments or a lack of technology were leadership priorities during the pandemic. Disrupted learning threatened to destabilize inroads in gender equity as well, creating challenges for leaders trying to maintain educational access (Parveen et al., 2022) Administrators had to collaborate in new ways to create solutions and delegate responsibilities in a distributive fashion in order to respond as flexibly as possible (Parveen et al., 2022). Focus on emotional care was more important than decisive action (Parveen et al., 2022; Striepe & Cunningham, 2022).

Emerging research on school leadership in crises aligns closely with theory and studies in different sectors. It correlates with research in other industries requiring high emotional intelligence from leaders, such as medicine. A recent focus group study of medical staff at the University of Colorado found that leaders with consistent action and beliefs could mitigate burnout among nurses (McPherson et al., 2022). Leader empathy and self-awareness improved morale (McPherson et al., 2022). Fernandez and Shaw (2020) report on how emotional

intelligence and “servant leadership” from medical school directors can help staff weather the taxing trauma of a pandemic. The leadership skill of “holding,” where a director acknowledges the emotional stress and attempts sense-making of the unknowns, can reassure stakeholders (Koehn, 2020; Petriglieri, 2020). The need for training and crisis management practice emerged from a qualitative study of decision-makers across industries in Mosul, Iraq (Al-Dabbagh, 2020). Leaders need more experience with systemic decision-making and judgment protocols to avoid rash choices (Al-Dabbagh, 2020). In order to avoid burnout, school leaders need more self-care and permission for life–work balance (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Supovitz and D’Auria (2020) conclude that leaders in this era need to build on trust relationships with faculty to listen, maintain curiosity rather than rigidity, and embrace the discomfort of disagreement in order to create a path forward. James and Wooten (2022) affirm the primacy of trust and teamwork for the crisis-prepared leader as well. There is a greater need for empirical studies of school leadership during long-term crises where decision-making approaches have to shift situationally and sustain over lengthy amounts of time.

This study on divisional leaders in Quaker schools and their reflections on decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic contributes to our understanding of educational responses to crises. The themes that emerge from the data analysis provide greater awareness of how to prepare and support leaders when future crises arrive. Answering my research questions through interviews, archival documents, research journal reflections and focus groups provides insight into how leaders reflect on, and make sense of, leadership transitions needed when a crisis emerges. Educational leaders in any institution will need to be prepared for the next crisis

that requires a broader skill set of strategies and approaches for supporting a community through uncertainty.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter outlines the methodology and research design for this dissertation study on leadership and decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic in Quaker schools. This research was designed as narrative inquiry to honor "lived experience as a source of important knowledge" with a focus on foregrounding practitioner knowledge and insights (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 21). Using constructivism as an overarching theory, this research explores leader sense-making about their growth and journeys between March 2020 and June 2022 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Study data emerged from leaders' reflections on the Quaker decision-making process, their prior leadership experiences and their reflections on expressions of lessons learned from the pandemic. This approach centered on analytic induction to develop grounded theory from the patterns emerging from the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Utilizing an inquiry stance as a practitioner researcher, the study prompted me to question, reflect upon and improve on my own leadership knowledge and criticality (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Lytle et al., 2018).

The frameworks of distributed and resonant leadership, crisis leadership studies and Quaker decision-making informed the methodological approach (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The leadership frameworks were the primary analytic lenses through which I sought to better understand the stories of the participants as knowledge makers with key insights about leadership during a world crisis. The purpose of this dissertation study was to gain deep insight into what leadership strategies leaders in Quaker schools used and developed during the pandemic. This

research contributes to the broader disciplines of educational leadership, organizational and management theory. The study addresses the following research questions:

1) What impact did COVID-19 have on upper-division leaders in U.S. Quaker schools' leadership and decision-making processes?
   a) What lessons emerged that are useful to prepare leaders and the organization for future crises?
   b) In what ways do upper-division leaders think leader reflexivity on pandemic decision-making will influence their leadership approaches going forward?
2) How do upper-division leaders interpret the decision-making process in their Friends school?
   a) What past leadership experiences influenced upper-division leaders' pandemic decision-making?
3) How did my experience as a leader during the pandemic, and the lessons I learned conducting this study, contribute to my decision-making as a school leader?

In the following sections, I first define terms and outline factors related to site and participant selection. Next, I describe the research design, methods of data collection and data analysis. Finally, I address issues of validity, triangulation of data and my positionality as a practitioner-researcher.

Site and Participant Selection

This qualitative dissertation on leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic focused on upper school divisional leaders in Quakers schools who held the position between March 2020 and June 2022. This purposeful sampling was consistent with the research questions (Maxwell,

2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Divisional leaders (as opposed to other administrators) deal most directly with faculty in decisions requiring feedback and discernment. These are the types of decisions that were likely to have required a different kind of leadership and approach during the pandemic.

In the northeast, mid-atlantic and midwest regions, there are 28 U.S. Quaker schools with an upper division, grades 9–12 (Friends Council on Education, n.d.). The participants in this study were administrators who led a Quaker upper school during the COVID-19 pandemic timeframe (March 2020 to June 2022). All upper school leaders in these schools received a welcome email inviting their participation in the study. Those who responded and whose tenure fit the time frame were sent a survey, and we arranged a mutually agreeable time for an interview. I intended to interview 10–12 participants, and 11 leaders responded who not only met the criteria but represented a range of leadership experiences, school sizes and locations. Table 1 presents key demographic information about the participants in the study, including pseudonyms. I include myself as an additional participant (without a pseudonym) at the bottom of the table.

Table 1

Participants in Study

Pseudonym	Years in Position	Quaker	Race/Ethnicity (self-defined)	Gender	Age
Jennifer	1–3	Yes	Black	Female	36–45
Courtney	1–3	No	African-American	Female	36–45
Marcus	4–6	No	White/European	Male	46–55
Eric	4–6	No	Caucasian	Male	56–65
Robert[a]	7–10	No			
Ralph	7–10	No	White	Male	56–65
Shawn[b]	7–10	Yes	White	Male	46–55

Doug	7–10	No	White	Male	46–55
Daphne[b]	7–10	No	White, Non-Hispanic	Female	46–55
Paul[b]	11+	No	Black-African	Male	56–65
Colin	11+	No	White	Male	46–55
Rebecca[c]	11+	Yes	White	Female	46–55

[a]Full information was not available for this participant because race, gender and ethnicity were optional categories Robert chose not to complete.
[b]Participants with longer tenures in different roles at their current schools
[c]My actual name

All the participants had a master's degree, and the focus of their undergraduate and master's degrees ranged from Classical Civilizations to Special Education. Prior administrative experience included serving as a dean for students, a department chair or a diversity/social justice coordinator. Robert and Eric were previously divisional leaders in other schools. Three participants were no longer at their Quaker schools at the time of data collection: Jennifer worked for a Quaker non-profit organization and Courtney had joined a different independent school as a senior administrator. Colin was now Head of School at a non-Quaker independent school.

Many participants had experience with Quaker education before their current role and school: Robert attended a Quaker school as a student and had taught English at a different Friends school. Doug had also taught at another Quaker school and attended a Quaker college. Marcus had been a dean at another Friends school before assuming the division head position at his current school. He had transitioned into a different administrative role at that school at the time of data collection. Robert had also moved out of divisional leadership when interviewed but was still at his Quaker school. Three participants, Daphne, Shawn and Paul, had been members

of their school communities for over 20 years. I, Rebecca, was raised Quaker, attended Quaker high school and have worked at three different Friends schools as a teacher and school leader. I served on the Friends Council on Education board for eight years and have also been a school trustee at two Quaker schools.

Gathering narratives from those with a range of experience and educational background in their divisional headships provided a breadth of insight in response to my research questions (Light et al., 1990). Their reflections on decision-making in this time period, and the lessons learned, produced compelling data for my research. For example, data was collected both from those new to Quaker schools in the pandemic time frame and from some veterans of Quaker school leadership. This range surfaced some patterns of leadership lessons related to experience and familiarity with Quaker practices.

Because of my tenure in Quaker schools, there were several participants I knew personally. I had worked closely with one at a former school and knew two others because we had participated together in a leadership program run by the Friends Council on Education. Of the 11 participants, four were people I had not met or spoken to before. These layers of familiarity were part of my reflections on positionality as the researcher, and I was sensitive to my discourse with people who I was meeting for the first time versus those with whom I had an established collegial relationship. I took care to address this potential bias and reactivity during interviews and to consider it during data analysis (Maxwell, 2013).

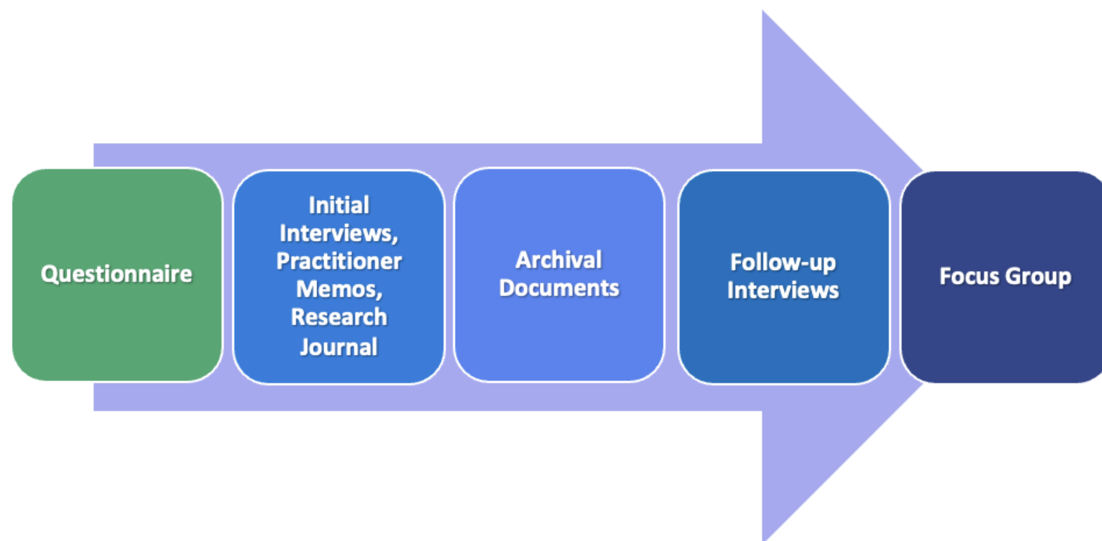
Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods used in this study were purposefully designed to deepen the quality of the findings (Maxwell, 2013). The methods included an initial survey, semi-structured

interviews of upper divisional leaders, and follow-up interviews and focus groups, as depicted in Figure 2. Participants had the option to contribute archival documents, such as letters to families, emails or minutes from administrative meetings. These sources of data enriched insights and helped strengthen the triangulation of findings. Memos and research journal entries that I wrote after each interview provided key information and context.

Figure 2

Data Collection Process



Initial Questionnaire

Each upper divisional leader received a welcome email and then a short questionnaire (Appendix B) in order to gauge their interest in the research project. The participants entered data regarding their years of experience in education, educational background, years in their current role, school size and location. Demographic data on age, gender, race and ethnicity from participants was optional; all but one participant, Robert, provided the information. Each school

leader in the study signed a separate consent document that was sent electronically (Appendix A).

Interviews

The 11 in-depth interviews occurred over Zoom. They lasted 45 minutes to an hour each. We arranged them for a mutually-agreeable time during work hours when participants could concentrate on the questions. I began each interview with an explanation of the research goals. I received verbal consent to record the interview and reminded each participant that I would de-identify them and their sites of practice as much as possible. Each interview was recorded and transcribed by an artificial intelligence program and then checked by me for accuracy. Interviews were semi-structured (Appendix C), with varied follow-up questions that allowed for flexibility to pursue further conversational threads through a process of "customized replication" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 126). Topics in the interviews included: experience with Quaker decision-making; examples of leadership and decision-making during the pandemic; lessons learned from the pandemic; and ways that reflections might influence a leader's future leadership.

Interviews provide "deep, rich, individualized, and contextualized data," and thus were appropriate as the main source of data collection for this study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 126). Participants were able to share perspectives and provide examples from decision-making in these one-on-one sessions. Because interviews create opportunities for participant story-telling and sense-making, to "uncover, understand and engage," this methodology was best to develop findings related to the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 129).

Interviews require relational trust between the interviewer and the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To work to foster this trust, I clearly explained the nature of my inquiry and

reviewed the consent form with each participant. I shared that their responses were to be kept confidential and that I would send them updates on the themes and patterns emerging from the data. This form of a “member check,” as part of the confirmatory stage of qualitative data analysis, gave them the opportunity to review my interpretations and make any necessary adjustments (Maxwell, 2013). During the interviews, I contributed some examples of my own experiences as a leader in the pandemic. I also let participants know that I would employ dialogic engagement with thought partners to develop findings from the data throughout the research process. Moreover, because interviews are never neutral, it was important to remind participants of my role as an upper division leader in a Quaker school and leave time for participant questions at any time during the interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

I piloted the interview protocol with two upper divisional leaders to refine the instrument before interviewing the rest of the participants. Testing the questions ahead of time and reviewing the interview instrument with members of my committee proved extremely useful as I learned how to improve the cadence of questions and wording of the prompts in order to elicit the most reflective responses (Light et al., 1990; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Interviews ranged from 45 minutes in length to an hour each.

Practitioner Memos

After each interview, I prepared one-page practitioner memos that documented the setting and the flow of conversation, and my reflections captured time-sensitive data for ongoing review. These added thick descriptions as part of the data for analysis and helped triangulate the material from the interviews and focus groups (Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Reflective Research Journal

In addition to the practitioner memos written immediately after each interview, I documented my own reflections throughout the data collection period. As an upper division leader myself, my school experience during the pandemic has fueled my passion for this study. These journal entries afforded me the opportunity to reflect on stories from the participants in relation to my own recollections of leadership in the pandemic time period. Engaging in this inquiry deepened my practice and my research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Lytle et al., 2018). My narratives regarding decision-making from the time period and lessons learned were added to the data from participants in order to address the research questions. This reflexivity is a critical component of the study and the data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Archival Documents

School leaders recorded their decisions and leadership communications in multimodal ways during the pandemic. Examples included meeting minutes, letters to constituents in the community, blog posts or social media videos, just to name a few. I gave participants the option to submit communications from the time period. Three participants—Robert, Jennifer and Colin—provided materials such as welcome-back emails to faculty from September 2020, faculty meeting notes and messages about decision-making process. These archival documents provided an additional source for analysis and validity checks (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). They helped shed additional light on decision-making and leadership emerging from the interview and focus group data.

Follow-up Interviews

I conducted the initial interviews between March and May of 2023. After an initial analysis of the narratives, I had additional questions based on emerging themes and elements in need of further inquiry related to decision-making and crisis leadership. Out of 11 participants, seven participated in focus group interviews. Two engaged in a second follow-up interview on Zoom in July of 2023, recorded by artificial intelligence and de-identified. This data deepened my understanding of their stories and provided additional data for analysis. These interviews lasted 45 minutes to an hour.

Focus Groups

Out of 11 participants, seven interviewees agreed to participate in two focus group discussions as part of this research study. Similar to prior data collection, these were conducted on Zoom, recorded with consent, and the transcripts were de-identified. Participants acknowledged their commitment to holding the shared information confidential. The collective dialogue addressed the research questions by developing leader reflexivity about the pandemic and lessons learned for future leadership in crises (see Appendix D for focus group questions). Listening and engaging in story-telling together as a form of dialogic engagement triangulated and refined the emerging findings further (Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). These conversations lasted from 45 minutes to an hour in length.

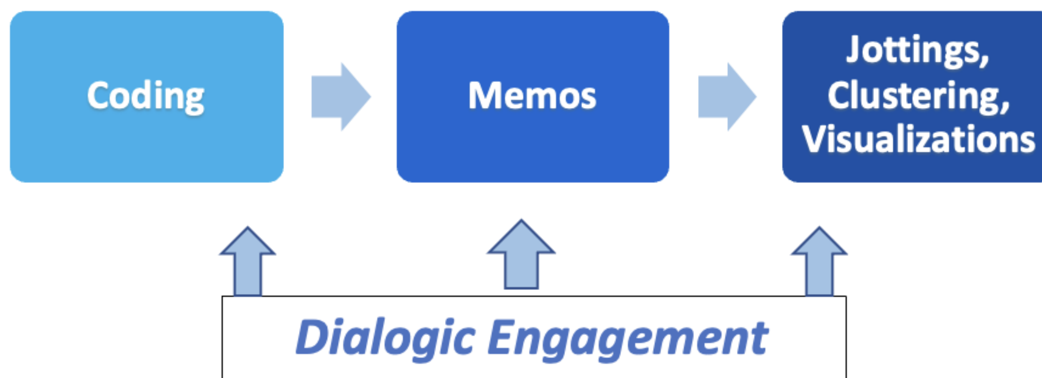
Data Analysis

Data analysis started with “data condensation,” or the “process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data” from all the sources (Miles et al., 2020, p.

8). Figure 3 illustrates the use of dialogic engagement throughout the distillation of themes from coding, memos, jottings/clustering and visualizations.

Figure 3

Data Analysis Process



Using thematic and narrative data analysis approaches helped me to unearth insights related to the guiding research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). After each interview, I wrote a practitioner memo and recorded annotations in a spreadsheet. I read over all the interview transcripts and memos several times to absorb the narratives and pay close attention to the emic language of the participants. I started with some initial codes, based on the distributed leadership and resonant leadership frameworks, but then refined these as patterns started to emerge.

Second and third data analysis readings using descriptive coding and in vivo coding helped further develop insights from the material (Miles et al., 2020, p. 65). I grouped codes into pattern sets in this stage, as themes emerged (Miles et al., 2020, p. 79). Appendix E presents a sample codebook. Putting phrases and codes into matrices where I could sort and process by code, by participant, by interview question and by theme contributed to data analysis. Creating

visual displays of the participants' experiences recorded from the questionnaires added to analysis as well (Miles et al., 2020, p. 137). "Jottings," or "mental sticky notes," in my folder of memos and on the transcript documents improved my interpretations of the interview material (Miles et al., 2020, p. 86). I read and re-read the interview and focus group transcripts, remaining open to interpretations.

The "clustering" or "distilling" of the data eventually led to thematic insights about the impact of the pandemic and lessons learned by divisional leaders (Miles et al., 2020, p. 276). Additional data from the follow-up interviews, archival documents, my research journal and the focus group were also coded and triangulated with prior data in order to deepen insights. Throughout the data analysis, I conversed with committee members and thought partners to test my theories and readings of the data. This dialogic engagement, concurrent with other analysis, improved my understanding of findings.

Validity Strategies

The data collection methods support the validity of findings from this study. The pilot interviews improved my questions and protocol for the official set of participant interviews. In memos and sessions with committee members, I reflected regularly on my positionality and reactivity in the research (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). The goal, as Maxwell (2013) points out, was not to "verify" conclusions but to "test" the validity of conclusions through the data (p. 125).

By conducting multiple interviews, including my own journal reflections, as well as focus groups, I triangulated findings to check for existing biases and assumptions, which are present in any study. Analyzing archival documents, writing reflexive memos and employing dialogic engagement helped advance my analysis and indicated that I am part of the world of this research

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I challenged myself to remain open to "identifying and analyzing discrepant data and negative cases" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 217). This is what Ravitch & Carl (2021) call "disconfirming evidence," looking for "outliers" and themes that "complicate my findings" (p. 285). Member checks with participants excavated better findings and ensured reciprocal trust as well (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Researcher Role and Positionality

As a colleague and fellow Quaker school leader, it was central to the validity of this study that I was transparent with participants throughout the research (Miles et al., 2020). Some participants I knew already from the small world of Quaker schools. Others I met for the first time in the interview process, and it was essential that I followed protocols in order to honor their narratives about decision-making and leadership. The consent form and explanation before recording interviews and focus groups helped ensure that participants understood the nature of the study and that their contributions were voluntary. My hope that leaders would be eager to contribute to this study was affirmed by the generous gifts of time and care contributed by the participants in this research.

Ravitch and Carl (2021) point to the "relational" aspect of qualitative research and the central role of the researcher: "to engage in research with a receptive sensibility, meaning that you are open to changing your opinions, your approach to the research, and even the critical aspects of the research as you learn with and from the research" (p. 194). With the help of thought partners, I tried to uncover insights while acknowledging and minimizing my biases. As a school leader investigating decision-making, including my own, my positionality was always

part of the sense-making of the findings. Being open to different perspectives, and being vulnerable myself, were central to this investigative endeavor (Brown, 2018).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

As I sought insights related to the research questions of this study, several significant themes emerged. These insights arose from analyzing the narratives of participants in their interviews, focus groups, and archival documents. These themes include:

1) Awareness of and preparation for Quaker decision-making
2) Seeking faculty/staff input and teamwork when making decisions
3) Supportive relationship with the Head of School
4) Communication strategies to build community and reduce anxiety
5) Resonant leadership skills
6) Reflections on student mental health and leader self-care

In this chapter, I will describe each of these themes and provide examples from the data to illustrate them.

Theme 1: Awareness of and Preparation for Quaker Decision-Making

When asked to define Quaker decision-making in their schools, the participants in this study most often focused on the process of decision-making. Many referenced the commonly held understanding of five levels of Quaker decision-making. In a level 1 decision, the leader makes the decision almost exclusively without input from others. In a level 2 decision, the leader or administrative group seeks some input but ultimately makes the decision. Examples at level one or two could be issues related to pay, faculty duties or safety enforcement. Level 3 decisions are those made more collaboratively between a leader and stakeholders. There is significant investment in co-creating proposals and seeking unity at this level. Paul, a veteran division head

in an urban Quaker school shared: “the decision-making is complicated, but it's really thoughtful” (Interview, March 10, 2023). He continued:

> I like what they call the third mode of decision making is when you are all in it together and making the decision together, be it, should we have cell phones on, should students be allowed to use cell phones in the academic building or not. Those are the type of decisions I love to bring to the upper school faculty. And we decide and I’m a participant because when everybody comes to unity on that; I think it’s the best thing. (Interview, March 10, 2023)

In level 4, the decision is made by “sense of unity” or “consensus” among the faculty with leader input. In level 5, the teachers make a decision on their own and let the leader know. An example for a level 4 decision might be choosing the format of semester grade comments, and an example of a level 5 decision might be when the math department designs their midterm exams. In all cases, it is critical that faculty and staff understand from the outset the decision-making level and therefore what kind of participation is expected of them.

Colin, who had been an upper school head for over a decade and was now the Head of School at a non-Friends school, said Quaker decision-making was an “explicit adherence, explicit to the levels of decision making, you know, a la Arthur Larrabee where we’re setting the agenda, whether it’s at leadership, team meetings, upper school faculty meeting… there’s a common understanding and practice of using the levels” (Interview, March 29, 2023).[1]

Participants also identified the mindset of Quaker decision-making. Daphne, an experienced school leader from a Quaker day and boarding school, talked about the need for “trust and openness and that kind of believing that you are all moving in the same direction” (Interview, May 8, 2023). She continued:

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[1] Arthur Larrabee is an experienced Quaker educator who taught workshops on Quaker decision-making for Meetings as well as schools for many years in the Philadelphia area.

> We're all moving towards a collective decision, you know, unity and a decision. But, I think this is the part that makes it hard in a school or in a business situation rather than in a meeting. You have to have that spiritual willingness [as part of the process]. (Interview, May 8, 2023)

Daphne highlighted the importance of listening, including multiple perspectives and using silence to help decisions emerge from the group.

Many leaders in the study demonstrated familiarity with unique elements and terminology from the Quaker process. Jennifer, a Quaker herself, came to her divisional role having had many opportunities to engage in the Quaker process, from committees as a Quaker school board member, or in her prior Friends school as a faculty member, or as part of her monthly Quaker Meeting. As upper school director, Jennifer introduced processes such as "worship sharing" and used "queries" to guide conversations (Interview, March 20, 2023). She clerked (a Quaker term for "chaired" or "led") the faculty meetings during her tenure at the school. Jennifer's community continued to use a consensus-driven process during the height of the pandemic because her Head of School did not want to abandon their approach in a crisis (Interview, March 20, 2023). Jennifer described significant tension and trauma because of how the faculty continued to struggle with making decisions using consensus about returning to in-person learning. They wrote a "minute" (a Quaker term for a statement of beliefs on a particular issue) about the privilege of returning to in-person learning when public schools could not do so.

Participant responses made clear that each school had a slightly different relationship with Quaker decision-making in their culture. For example, at Jennifer's school the division head was called "Head Teacher," and the small faculty operated using consensus for most decisions. At Paul's school, the two campuses and multiple layers of administration were associated with a more formal relationship with Quaker decision-making. At his school there was a formal charter

of governance articulating all the responsibilities of each administrative position and faculty committee. Daphne described how pre-pandemic culture was informal on her boarding school campus, and collective decision-making could occur at the dinner table as well as in an official faculty meeting session. These cultural differences related to decision-making impacted leadership in the COVID-19 pandemic. A school relying on frequent and casual interactions as the bedrock of decision-making had a more challenging pivot to the isolation of remote work and virtual meetings. A leader accustomed to seeking unity with teachers for most decisions had a more difficult shift to level 1 and 2 decision-making.

Moreover, each interviewee expressed varying levels of familiarity with Quaker school leadership and processes. Some had attended Quaker school as students, such as Shawn, Jennifer and Robert, or had worked in more than one Friends institution, such as Marcus, Doug and Robert. In almost all cases, however, the leaders shared common knowledge about the ethos of decision-making, including active listening, inclusion of multiple perspectives and time for discernment. Most participants described patterns of seeking collegial and faculty input, even when using more top-down tiered decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants either recalled an important mentor who had coached them in Quaker process or recalled attending workshops such as the Arthur Larrabee clerk training. This workshop, led by a sage Quaker educator, was a day-long program through Friends Council on Education on how Quakers avoid voting and majority-rule and on how clerks should set agendas, listen for all voices and seek a “sense of unity” among the collective members of a gathering. Another common mention was the Institute for Engaging Leadership program offered through Friends Council on Education. Paul, Daphne, Marcus, Robert, Shawn and myself had all participated in

this two-year cohort experience earlier in our educational careers (Robert, Daphne and I were in the same cohort in 2005–2007).

School leaders reported familiarity with Quaker decision-making, and this knowledge depended on school culture, leader tenure in the position and personal experience. Common understandings included tiers of decision-making and the importance of collaboration and faculty input when possible. The findings relate to distributed leadership theory as well. These participants delegated decisions to a committee or task force, depending on the situation, and also adapted themselves to make judgments differently in response to the crisis. The regular practice of including faculty in the design of programs, and the expectation for their engagement with decision-making, overlaps with the tenets of distributed leadership.

Theme 2: Seeking Faculty/Staff Input and Teamwork When Making Decisions

The importance of constructive input facilitated by a leader emerged as a significant theme from the participants' reflections on leadership in the pandemic. In some cases, the divisional leader employed a team or was part of a COVID-19 taskforce to generate decisions. In other cases, a leader found ways to gather input from school staff and faculty before making a decision. The feedback and shared problem-solving helped leaders and faculty navigate the frequent administrative decisions of the crisis with greater trust and a plurality of voices included. These characteristics are similar to those of distributed leadership. A leader who maintained a supportive team of teachers or staff in the crisis could generate timely decisions based on their input. A leader who had already created an ethos where feedback was expected and appreciated could pivot in the pandemic to top-down decisions most effectively.

Ralph was an experienced division director with long-standing relationships in his suburban Friends School. In the interview and follow-up interview, he related several instances of effective team dynamics where he facilitated collaboration and referred to the importance of trust. He shared that he increased communication and collaboration:

> I would tend to get affected members together in small groups to test [a communication] out… I would be very deliberate about setting up quick meetings with not even just Dean's groups, but sometimes I'd even get the faculty together for fifteen minutes to just test out something with them. And people were very flexible about doing that. (Interview, April 26, 2023)

In his school there were daily morning meetings of the administrative team, including the Head of School, the Associate Head and Ralph. They returned to their physical offices just two months into the pandemic; the proximity made a big difference in their teaming ability. Ralph said:

> so a lot would have changed for me had I not had some highly competent people around me who stepped up… I had good working relationships with key players, like the guy who ended up being the kind of COVID czar was our tech director who's somebody I trust a lot and work very well with. And then the nurse, you know, again, who was hired, worked directly with him and with me. So that was a great team. I think I trusted my assistant head and my head who were never interfering and were always just trying to do best by the team and by the school. (Interview, April 26, 2023)

In our follow-up interview on Zoom, Ralph spontaneously asked the assistant director to join the conversation. She left her office and joined the video call; she confirmed that they met regularly during the crisis to problem-solve challenges about, for example, hybrid instruction. Their high-functioning relationship was evident in their collegial interaction on Zoom and in the descriptions Ralph provided of how he collaborated with his team to make and implement decisions.

Marcus was dean of students for several years at an urban Quaker school before joining his current institution in the fall of 2019 as upper school director. He described how his Head of

School formed a health and safety team to include many perspectives from the faculty and staff. This was not a small group of administrators but a "fairly large committee and we really thrashed through things there" (Interview, April 17, 2023). Marcus explained:

> The pandemic caused us to meet more urgently than even usual to make sure that as many voices and perspectives as possible were being considered and heard. And not only to, you know, for the wisdom of the group… we did not want it for it to, like on top of the scariness of the time, for people to feel completely disempowered and like they had, they had no say in terms of the direction the ship was going in. (Interview, April 17, 2023)

The Head made the decisions, in consultation with the committee's input, in a manner that supported Marcus's leadership of the division and allowed teachers to contribute ideas and share concerns. Marcus reported that since the pandemic he had continued to check in regularly with the other division heads: "The pandemic has really made it so that I'm in their offices all the time, just taking the temperature" (Interview, April 17, 2023). A lesson of the pandemic, he said, was the importance of "broad, deep collaboration" (Interview, April 17, 2023).

In Daphne's situation, the Head of School utilized the administrative team of division heads and staff to meet regularly to make decisions. This group also included some "department chairs and just some people who were just weightier and had kind of been here for a while who we thought that their opinion would be really helpful" (Focus Group, June 29, 2023). There was input, in other words, beyond the formal leadership group. Nevertheless, Daphne reflected on the loss of typically more collaborative decision-making and teamwork. In her school, the small faculty size and living together on campus had created a casual culture of communication and gathering; the necessary isolation of the pandemic, however, weakened the ethos of generating ideas and teaming that had worked before:

> Suddenly these structures that we had been relying on for years to just flow and get us the information we need, no longer were working effectively. So I felt like there were times

> that I had to kind of just make a decision and I felt like I was just making it on my own and I would try my best to test it with other people. (Interview, May 8, 2023)

While a trusted leader in her community for more than two decades, Daphne noted she still had challenges pivoting to different decision-making modes in a crisis.

Colin found a way to continue to gather input from faculty during the spring and fall of 2020 when gathering in-person was not allowed. He shared proposed ideas for the fall reopening plan, for example, with faculty over Google documents. They utilized the comment feature to communicate and revise. There are 21 separate comments in a four-page document illustrating how teachers opined positively or had questions (Archival documents). In his focus group session, Colin shared:

> They appreciated having a chance to see the plans, comment on them, know that I was going to take input and make some refinements and then they would see some of that in place and we would get on these Zooms where I would kind of walk people through how we arrived at these particular things. It wasn't perfect, but I think that faculty voice and input into decision-making, at least it approximated that during a time when you can't do that in person. (Focus group, June 22, 2023)

This lean towards seeking feedback stemmed from Colin's years of collegial work with the faculty, and the teachers were receptive to the creative use of Google documents as an alternative to an in-person discussion.

In contrast, Courtney matter of factly described a lack of teamwork in decision-making. Courtney arrived in her urban Friends school, without prior Quaker school experience, at a time when she needed to downsize the staff due to low student enrollment. Her ability to generate trust and goodwill, therefore, was non-existent before the pandemic started. In the fall of 2020, she was given decisions to share with the faculty, and there was no chance for input:

> I became a leader who really didn't ask very many questions or what people wanted. I just became a leader who shared, "this is what we're going to do." That was the way that

> I saw through it. I was told what needed to happen, and I told colleagues what needed to happen. And I didn't really and I didn't invite discussion. (Interview, May 17, 2023)

This was not Courtney's preferred approach to leadership. She said she would prefer to be more collaborative and resonant, but this was the unilateral climate of crisis decision-making in her context.

Jennifer related how there was too much input from faculty and staff during the pandemic, to the point that decision-making stalled and trust eroded. Her Head of School emphatically insisted that the crisis would not change the school's culture of collective decision-making: "our head of school felt really clear that she wanted the staff to be the decision makers" (Interview, March 20, 2023). This meant that returning to any in-person instruction in the 2020–2021 school year required agreement from all the faculty and staff of the division. Jennifer, an experienced Quaker and facilitator of different aspects of Quaker decision-making, desperately wanted the Head to announce that difficult decisions about in-person instruction and student interactions would require level 1 and 2 (more top-down) decision modes. Faculty, she said, felt the same way:

> There were staff who were saying we would love for the administration to just make these decisions. Like we are not experts in this. You know, we appreciate your hearing our feedback, but we don't have to make this [decision collectively]. (Interview, March 20, 2023)

Instead, Jennifer described how the adults would meet over Zoom repeatedly without coming to any agreement, and their emotional stress increased because of the stagnation. She pointed out that adopting a decision-making mode that is more top-down can also be considered part of the Quaker decision-making process. Not all Quaker decision-making is based on full participation and consensus. Executive decisions are also appropriate in certain circumstances, and the level of

collaborative input required should be communicated clearly before any decision is made. In addition to the lack of decision-making flexibility in her context, Jennifer, who was new in her role (she started at the school in the fall of 2019), had not established trusted relationships over time with teachers.

The theme of input and teamwork surfaced repeatedly in the data collection process. Most participants sought ways, even in a crisis decision-making mode, to gather input from faculty and staff. Similar to a distributed leadership approach, leaders adapted processes and included teachers in decision-making according to the situation at hand. They themselves were also called upon to design pandemic responses through participation on task forces or senior administrative teams. Whether it was from utilizing existing committees, such as dean groups or department chairs, or reaching out to faculty with proposals in Google documents, teachers had opportunities to share ideas and concerns. They did not make the decisions regarding health and safety, but they were not left in the dark. There were a few cases where input was either too overwhelming or non-existent; participants from these schools expressed how this lack of effective teaming and input negatively impacted faculty morale and their leadership.

Overall, functional teamwork and strategies of gathering input arose as important insights from the participants regarding their leadership and decision-making approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders reflected on criteria that allowed them to pivot among different modes of decision-making, including the nature of their relationship with the Head of School.

Theme 3: Supportive Relationship with the Head of School

The tenor of the relationship between the Head of School and the division director emerged as another significant theme from the collected data. A Head with resonant leadership

practices, such as resonant awareness and self management, and fluency with different modes of decision-making created a positive ethos for a functioning senior administrative team. Furthermore, a Head with years of experience had time to build relationships and trust prior to a crisis. Based on the data, a supportive Head–Division Head relationship relied on trust and decision-making clarity. The examples from the interviews and focus group conversations illustrate the importance of this relationship for division heads when they reflected on their pandemic leadership.

Robert arrived at his current school with prior experience as a division head. He and his Head had a well-established rapport from participating together in the Friends Council Engaging Leadership cohort from 2005–2007. Their mutual respect for one another facilitated a positive working relationship. According to Robert, his Head focused on the health and safety logistics during the COVID-19 pandemic, and he could channel his strengths as a more pastoral (emotionally supportive) leader:

> We had a strong working dynamic and relationship and a strong understanding of each other and a strong understanding of each other's strengths and challenges. And I think if [she] were in this room with us, she would probably acknowledge what I'll acknowledge from my perspective, which is that she was so on top of everything about COVID from a logistical standpoint that that I didn't really have to; I can't; I can't imagine if I had been in a situation where I had to be on top of all of those things. Logistically, I'm not sure I would have survived. But I was able to then be really present for people in our community at a kind of emotional leadership level, which is my strength. And I think that [she] probably was thrilled and delighted that I was there doing that and she could focus on the logistics. So I think we were, we were lucky in the sense that there was a great balance to all of that. And, I think each of us were able to lean into our zones of strength and comfort in a way that was probably good for our school. (Focus Group, June 22, 2023)

This excerpt illustrates the trusting and collegial partnership between Robert and his Head and the articulated division of roles. Robert could focus his leadership of the upper school effectively due to the clarity in his teamwork with the Head of School.

Moreover, Robert observed, fearful faculty and those who might potentially question decision-making processes had little basis for criticism because of his familiarity with Quaker education (he had been a student at a Friends school and had taught English at another Friends school for several years), and his Head's fluency with Quakerism and Quaker education (she was Quaker and had worked for over a decade at a different Quaker school as a teacher and administrator):

> So I'm just thinking that in a Quaker school context, there's a dynamic to faculty culture and leadership where if a faculty, if a faculty doesn't love a decision or approach or process or person in leadership, there's room for a faculty with its sort of steeped in Quakerism-ness over time as a whole to kind of leverage that as this doesn't work because it's not that. And um, and I think that COVID probably amplified some of that too. I imagine in some contexts. I mean, I think that was one of the things [the Head] and I were fortunate about in our context was, you know, [she] is Quaker and has been doing the Quaker school thing for a long, long time. And I'm not a Quaker, but I've been doing the Quaker school thing for a long, long time. And there was no room for anybody to say, you're not doing that right. And so I think that took a piece of the puzzle out of the equation that I imagine in some other Quaker contexts became part of the conversation was this, this this isn't working because it's not Quaker. (Focus Group, June 22, 2023)

Robert's reflection emphasized how helpful it was that he and the Head teamed well and that their combined comfort with Quaker education strengthened their leadership among the faculty.

Paul described crisis leadership with his Head of School as a joint endeavor. Paul's narrative reflected how he and his supervisor met and conferred regularly. In his interview, he repeatedly referred to how he and the Head talked through an idea or made

a decision. When the faculty, for example, protested returning to in-person instruction in the fall of 2020, “[the Head] and I had to make it optional” (Interview, March 10, 2023). When the situation called for enhancing online teaching, “faculty did things that [the Head] or I told them to do and they did because it was the pandemic” (Interview, March 10, 2023). In this context, the Head was a former faculty member, and he and Paul had worked together for many years as colleagues, so there was a well-developed foundational relationship supporting crisis decision-making.

Doug’s narrative emphasized clarity in the Head’s positionality. Doug had prior teaching experience at another Quaker school before moving into the leadership role at his urban institution. He and his Head had worked together for several years before the onset of the pandemic. It was the Head who made the difficult health and safety decisions, with input and feedback from the administrative team. The Head, however, left the daily organizational management of running the division to Doug:

> The head, you know, brought together… a big group of people to make the decisions. But he ended up making all the decisions. But just like he would want to hear from everybody, what do we do about blah, blah, blah? And then we would all talk about it and then he’d make a decision. We’d move on. So in that way it was nice because unlike [in Jennifer’s case], I didn’t feel like I was the face of it exactly. I felt like he was he communicated everything. He would have big Zoom meetings, communicate everything. He'd send out a letter that the communications team wrote. He would defend it all. He would explain it all. He would even say to people like, we’re just not going to agree on this, but this is what we’re doing, blah, blah, blah, you know, move on. So I felt like I was freed up to tend to just like the students and the faculty and relationships with parents and stuff like that. I appreciated his leadership in that because he was making really hard decisions that I would not have been wanting to make, wouldn’t have made the ones he made probably. And yet he stuck by them and like really got us through it in a decent way. So that that felt pretty good overall. (Focus Group, June 29, 2023)

Doug appreciated that the Head decided the stressful decisions about reopening in-person and communicated them to the community. His Head sought input before committing to a path forward, and he used a committee to design the implementation of decisions. Doug felt affirmed and supported in that he understood the Head's role in the crisis and had support for his own role as leader of the division. Their functioning partnership, based on trust, could flexibly adjust in the COVID-19 pandemic.

In her interview and focus group contributions, Daphne reflected on a collaborative and supportive relationship between herself and the Head of School that had developed over many years of teamwork. Her Head employed a committee to brainstorm ideas, but he, ultimately, made decisions regarding health and safety. She felt he trusted her, however, to use her own decision-making strategies for the upper school regarding, for example, the class schedule. Daphne articulated the relationship and the clarity of the Head's role:

> So there was a lot of shoulder to shoulder in terms of working out the best solution. That said, then there were also these public facing moments where our Head like had weekly zooms with parents just like, let's chat. And so you know, he took a lot of hits there and you know occasionally I'd jump on and be like, hey, let me let me back you up. Let me bail you out of this mess. Um, so so when it came to our Head putting forth decisions, he was able to say this was a team decision, but he also put himself out there, as you know, the target, the bull's eye. So, you know, he could just absorb all the negativity. He didn't necessarily always have the answers to the questions parents had, but he made himself available in that way. (Focus Group, June 29, 2023).

Daphne was perfectly willing to accept responsibility and problem-solve in this crisis. Knowing, however, that her Head was engaged fully and willing to bear the brunt of the toughest decisions that would not please everyone, enhanced her efficacy under these stressful circumstances.

Leadership from the Head of School in the COVID-19 crisis created possibilities for the divisional leaders to focus their energies on decision-making in the upper school. When the Head

provided clear support and expectations, the division director could channel energy into the necessary communication and teamwork required to implement logistical and schedule details for remote or hybrid instruction. Critically, participants appreciated Heads who took responsibility for the most challenging decisions, thus giving division leaders bandwidth and opportunity for tending to the upper school community.

Theme 4: Communication Strategies to Build Community and Reduce Anxiety

Divisional leaders employed different strategies to maintain a sense of community when everyone was learning remotely and also to mitigate anxiety about the crisis. Several also mentioned the importance of communication as a lesson learned from the time period. Communication included email messages, videos, blogs and letters to the wider community. Division leaders referenced the importance of Head of School communications as well as their own internal messages to faculty and students.

Shawn, a Quaker and veteran teacher in his small urban school before assuming the upper division leadership role, made daily videos in the spring of 2020. He shared that his goal was to explain the daily schedule and build community creatively:

> I made daily videos to students about what today was going to be like. I can't believe how many days. I mean, I thought I was doing it for two weeks, but I did it for half a year… I made Fridays "Name That Tune" day, so that people would listen to the messages… I had to think outside the box about ways that I could continue to connect and have sort of a personal touch in a very impersonal medium. (Interview, April 27, 2023)

Shawn's artistic outreach was part of his leadership approach to connection and maintaining relationships. The videos provided students and faculty with necessary information in the months when leaders were juggling so many changes and updates, and they also offered some levity.

Robert also found ways to creatively reach his constituents, both faculty and students. As a poet and former English teacher, poetry was a natural medium for him. Sharing poetry helped him authentically communicate in those months of virtual learning. For example, on June 1, 2020, after the murder of George Floyd, he wrote to the school community about his sorrow and outrage. He ended the message with three poems: "Dreams" and "Harlem" by Langston Hughes, and "A Small Needful Fact" by Ross Gay (Archival documents). On August 30, the day before the first day of the fall 2020 semester, his email to faculty was full of exclamation points and signatures such as "see you all soooOOOOON" (Archival documents). His warmth and connection with faculty were readily apparent in these messages. He wrote: "I will be holding you all-us all-in the light big time tomorrow. I'm even gonna get up extra early to start my light holding as the sun comes up!" (Archival documents).

Marcus, the leader who assumed the division director role in the fall of 2019, responded in his interview that he felt an important lesson of the pandemic was about increased communication:

> Yes, especially in terms of that health and safety team, like understanding what broad, deep collaboration looks like or certain communication, because we decided like we would just err on the side of more communication rather than not enough and make sure that the community knew what was being decided, why it was being decided, by whom it was being decided. I think that communication piece, you know, and you can look at that at the school level, at the national level. Right. Like better communication generally can head off many problems, if not all. So I think, yeah, the understanding just how deep and broad collaborative collaboration can be and understanding the importance of really good early communication I think is really important. (Interview, April 17, 2023)

This was similar to Doug's perspective about the importance of transparent communication so that fearful faculty would have as much information as possible. When Doug reflected on how

his Head made decisions with input, he expressed the view that leading the upper school faculty meant sharing what he knew:

> I at least owed it to faculty and families and students to be as transparent as I could. So it got me very comfortable with being transparent and taking the risk of being very transparent about that and even to the point of like. I don't totally agree with this, but this is what we're doing. So it was interesting in that way. Like it felt like some of the decision making was taken away from me. Some of it was centralized with me, but it did trigger this desire on my part. I remember feeling like, Oh, I better tell people as much as I can about these decisions, even if none of us can do anything about them. (Interview, May 1, 2023)

Robert also echoed these sentiments about transparency. It was important to him to be "really clear with people" about decisions and process (Interview, April 18, 2023). Colin learned from the pandemic about the need for "consulting people on decisions" and "inviting voices around the table" (Interview, March 29, 2023). A powerful communication strategy he shared was that he wrote handwritten notes to each faculty member at Thanksgiving in 2020 to convey his gratitude and recognition of their efforts on behalf of students.

Communication strategies surfaced as a common theme leaders discussed when reflecting on the pandemic. The importance of connecting and sharing, even when there were no special updates, meant that a community felt included rather than isolated and forgotten. Especially in the months when everyone was virtual at the start of the pandemic, it was critical to hold Zoom meetings, send daily emails or reach out in other ways authentic to each leader. Frequent and varied communication helped reduce anxiety and the potential for misunderstandings and in the process built community.

Theme 5: Resonant Leadership Skills

The participants interviewed for this study articulated awareness of and use of resonant competencies. Resonant leadership traits from the data included self-awareness and adaptability, relationship management, cultivation of trust and prioritization of listening. Leaders found these behaviors helpful in navigating decision-making and leadership in the crisis.

Self-Awareness

Leaders' acknowledgement of their own skill sets and capacities allowed them to engage thoughtfully with colleagues and families. For example, Paul, the leader who planned to retire at the end of the 2023–2024 school year after 30-plus years at his institution, shared that one of his key strengths was being adaptable to people and situations. He called this "existential flexibility" (Interview, March 10, 2023). Shawn, the division director who assumed the role after many years on the teaching faculty, highlighted qualities such as "being calm and being thoughtful and being communicative and open to dialogue" (Interview, April 27, 2023). He said that being "consistent and familiar in as many ways as we could" helped students and families reduce anxiety in the crisis (Interview, April 27, 2023). Robert, the leader had been a division director at two different schools, expressed self-awareness when he defined his leadership style as "collaborative, inclusive, processing things out loud with other people" (Interview, April 18, 2023). For Marcus, being a "servant leader" allowed him to lean into being "supportive and nurturing" when faculty were stressed (Interview, April 17, 2023). These leaders could articulate ways they intentionally adapted their strengths to their roles. Their self-awareness allowed for greater emotional intelligence in relationships. It also facilitated their reflections on crisis leadership and relationship management in the research study.

Relationship Management

Leaders paid close attention to strengthening relationships with faculty and administrative colleagues. Leading without those positive connections might be possible but not nearly as sustaining in a crisis. Interviewees reflected on the importance of supporting colleagues as part of leadership. Shawn, for example, reflected that "positive relationships are really, really important and get you through difficult situations because you have built this sort of foundation that allows you to be tested" (Interview, April 27, 2023). Colin, now a Head of School in a non-Friends school, emphasized the "pastoral part of the job" as the top priority (Interview, March 29, 2023). During the pandemic he missed the "informal touchpoints, the organic connections that you make just in the walkabouts and visiting people's classrooms" (Interview, March 29, 2023). Robert sought opportunities for growth for his stressed faculty, such as the Friends Council on Education program, Spirited Practice and Renewed Courage (SPARC) cohort experience. Because of his high-functioning relationship with the Head of School, Robert could focus on being emotionally present and available for the faculty (Interview, April 18, 2023). In fact, his new role at the school became "Assistant Head for Mission and Values" because the Head understood his resonant strengths and gave him more opportunities to lead from that angle. He said: "I am focused differently on what really is important and being present and stepping out of like a role in a script and more into the one of like, let's just get to the real humanity of all of this" (Interview, April 18, 2023).

Marcus's leadership style meant that he built relationships through helping others, especially as he was new in the division head role in the fall of 2019 and had not had time to establish himself as a known quantity:

> I would cover, like, especially for the folks who had little kids at home during the pandemic. Right. What a nightmare they went through. I was covering classes left, right and center, even during hybrid and then even sort of coming out of it into last year, I'd covered a lot of classes and I was really like, Let me know if you need something. And I swooped in and I wasn't trying to be an enabler, but I was certainly trying to make it about like, Look, I want you to see just how much I'm going to go to bat for you so that on the other end of this, we have a lot of good faith between us. (Interview, July 25, 2023)

Being a "servant leader" enabled Marcus to establish connections and trust with his colleagues.

Doug referred to preserving relationships as his "north star" in the crisis:

> My whole goal of this time period is we have to preserve our relationships, no matter what is happening. Like that has to be the North Star. And so it did. It shifted my leadership in that way because I think like pre-pandemic I was like, I was interested in, like, this initiative. And of course I cared about people and everything else. But like, it was, it was like it crystallized for me this sense of if you can't take care of the team doing the work and if you can't get them all heading in the right direction with you and feeling like they belong and they're heard, like you're not really going to do great work together. (Interview, May 1, 2023)

In the interviews and focus group conversations, the priority of relationship building and maintenance surfaced as essential leadership work. Without trust, however, relationships lack a strong foundation.

Trust

Authenticity and predictability over time cultivate trust. Being present with a person builds the trust of resonant leadership. As Ralph, a leader with significant tenure at his school and well-established relationships, reflected about his community,

> people needed a lot more emotional, social and emotional support as individuals. So, you know, I tend to have that on the front burner. But I, I had to put it even further because you just couldn't anticipate or know how much they needed and they didn't always communicate that well. (Interview, April 26, 2023)

Nurturing trust played a critical role in crisis leadership for Ralph: "I think I trusted my assistant head and my head who were never interfering and, and, were always just trying to do best by the

team and by the school. I had the trust of the parents already" (Interview, April 26, 2023). In a follow-up interview, Ralph expanded on a leader's tendency towards listening and trust:

> Well, when people have the disposition to listen when they, when they're trusted by the faculty. Yes. Even if what they're saying not everyone agrees with. Well that's right. They're trusted. It's accepted better. Yeah. As I said, it's not directly correlated with longevity in the position. No, it has a lot to do with disposition. (Interview, July 24, 2023)

Colin also acknowledged that trust played a role in his relationship with his Head, and his ability to execute crisis plans in his division: "my head was, he kind of trusted me, to kind of run that division. And I had kind of built up, I think, a good track record of credibility with that team" (Focus group, June 22, 2023). Colin's Head had to focus energies on the lower school division where teachers were in-person daily, unvaccinated, with children, and dealing with parents anxious about learning loss; it was helpful he could leave Colin to make decisions about hybrid and remote instruction, for example, in the upper school while he managed tensions in other parts of the institution.

In the focus group, Robert articulated intentionally cultivating trusting relationships with faculty:

> I feel like I was the person who created the faculty culture, like, I nurtured the faculty culture. I mean, part of it was there when I got there; it was a place I wanted to be. The culture made some sense to me. But then also I'd been there long enough and doing, you know, doing the work long enough that it was like I felt like it was a culture that I had nurtured and tended. And so that worked. (Focus group, June 22, 2023)

Jennifer attempted to develop a robust trusting culture in her school as well. She met regularly with faculty and listened to their concerns about returning in-person in the pandemic. When it came to creating a new schedule, she "worked so hard to hear from every single person in and out of meetings" and "did so much clerking between the meetings to be like, what do you need and how can I make sure that you're being heard" (Interview, March 20, 2023). Jennifer wanted

to honor the perspectives of all teachers in her small division. Faculty feared decisions would be driven by parent demands for in-school instruction rather than health precautions. Teachers could not unite around a schedule redesign process, no matter who clerked the meetings. As someone who started in her school shortly before the onset of COVID-19, however, and with a Head who resisted making any level 1 or 2 decisions in the crisis, Jennifer struggled to cultivate enduring trust during her tenure.

Listening

Jennifer, from the outset of her short tenure, consistently adopted a listening approach with her colleagues. Resonant leaders listen to the ideas of others as part of decision-making. They appreciate the importance of absorbing perspectives, and they understand how listening to stakeholders deepens relationships. Marcus, a new divisional leader in the fall of 2019, reflected on the importance of listening and including others:

> I'm paying a little closer attention to who are the people who aren't speaking up or the people who are going to speak up in the faculty lounge and not the most positive ways. Right. But aren't going to speak up when it counts or have that they're going to say they don't have a voice, but they're also not taking advantage of where their voice is being asked for. And I have been much more proactive about making sure that they kind of follow through or know they can follow through. (Interview, April 17, 2023)

Paul reflected on the importance of "really listening carefully and deeply" as a leader (Interview, March 10, 2023). At the time of the interview, he felt that the did more "calling in than calling out" when faculty acted inappropriately (Interview, March 10, 2023). Paul shared that he listened to faculty who reacted emotionally from a place of fear before there were vaccines available. He respected their points of views and held a mirror to their behavior in order for them to restore frayed relationships. Getting someone to reflect and apologize starts with trust and listening. Ralph also emphasized the importance of listening:

> I tended to understand that people were in different places and that you just had to be patient and and do a lot of listening and try to be clear and ask other people's opinions before you make a decision and be clear about why you're making the decision that way and then, you know, be on time with the decisions and then and then iterate where needed. (Interview, April 26, 2023)

These competencies of resonant leadership are interrelated. Self-awareness strengthens a leader's ability to cultivate relationships with co-workers and stakeholders. Understanding one's strengths, or one's tendencies in various situations, creates emotional intelligence for working with others. Transparent and creative communication strategies deepen relationships and improve decision-making because faculty and families do not fear they are being kept in the dark. Nurturing trust with one's team occurs, in part, through listening to the perspectives on the team.

Theme 6: Reflections on Student Mental Health and Leader Self-Care

In each interview, I encouraged leaders to reflect on their own leadership and to consider lessons learned. The importance of student mental health and leader self-care arose as two significant themes among the responses.

Student Mental Health

Paul emphasized that school is about the "human dimension. School is about socializing. It's the social dimension. Not just about metrics and content. It's where people learn to be people as they grow, and we lost it" (Interview, March 10, 2023). Jennifer lamented that her struggles reaching consensus with teachers regarding returning to in-person school in the 2020–2021 school year centered on the importance of social contact for students rather than academic content that could be delivered remotely (Interview, March 20, 2023). Parents angrily claimed that the isolation of the pandemic was hurting their children's wellbeing (Interview, March 20,

2023). There were still lingering resentments in that school community at the time of the interview, she thought, because of the disconnect between parents fearful for their children's mental health without in-person school and faculty who feared returning to campus instruction.

Robert's primary lesson he imparted was about student mental health:

> I feel like as an upper school division director, the pandemic brought into high relief the important questions that we're always facing around social, emotional health and wellness for our student body and for our teachers in some ways, too. And, you know, during the pandemic, it was impossible not to focus on those things. And I think that that was in some ways productive because I think it lifted up for everyone how important those things really are. (Interview, April 18, 2023)

Re-centering school on positive relationships and student emotional health surfaced as a priority for Robert after months of remote learning and social disruption. This mirrored Marcus's concern: "we're in the middle of a nationwide mental health crisis among adolescents. It is unlike anything I've ever seen. Students with learning disabilities are especially vulnerable" (Interview, April 17, 2023). In Shawn's school, the newest class schedule (at the time of the interview) prioritized time for student and adult connections: "we're going to dedicate this part of our schedule to being together, and we're going to have co-curriculars and different things that teachers are interested in. And it's all going to be about connecting" (Interview, April 27, 2023).

Leader Self-Care

Many participants emphasized self-care as a lesson from leadership in the COVID-19 pandemic. Paul reflected that he had to "let a lot of things go" during the crisis (Interview, March 10, 2023). He felt he had learned "existential flexibility" (Interview, March 10, 2023). The pandemic created an opportunity for "creativity" and to focus on "what matters really" (Interview, March 10, 2023). Ralph reflected on the importance of self-care for his well-being and leadership stamina:

> So I would say from a personal standpoint I'm much more deliberate about my routines and rituals. By the way, another benefit I didn't say that I became more disciplined. I was always disciplined. Like, I'm a disciplined guy to a degree, but I became disciplined about every part of my life, including, you know, my health, physicality to be more effective and present during the pandemic. So like my own schedule, my own rituals, my own and reflection is very much a part of that, whether it's at the beginning of the day, whether it's once I've sort of finished the workday. (Interview, April 26, 2023)

Carving time out for reflection and these healthy habits improved Robert's self-care as well:

> In the last two years, I have figured out how to. Focused differently on what really is important and being present and stepping out of like a role in a script and more into the zone of like, let's just get to the real human humanity of all of this. And in a way that I actually feel grateful for. You know, I mean, I feel like it's been positive. (Interview, April 18, 2023)

Robert expressed that there were different pathways towards renewal, for faculty as well as leaders. For him, it was a job change in the same school community:

> if people, anyone who, who got kind of wrung out by the pandemic in various ways, which I think probably almost everyone did, how does how do people get kind of reanimated? Um, I mean, for me, part of that has come through a job change. (Interview, April 18, 2023)

Daphne's advice to future leaders was to "take more naps" and to "relax a little more because certainly being worried and anxious" does not improve concentration (Interview, May 8, 2023). Courtney admitted that she allowed the pandemic stress to remove focus from her family: "If I'm being honest, I think I lost my way with family, with my own family, and I chose the job at times more than I chose my family" (Interview, May 17, 2023).

The leaders interviewed for this study were eager to share their stories with me. They welcomed the opportunity to contribute to greater understanding of leadership in Quaker schools in the pandemic, and they were receptive to their colleagues in focus groups. It was apparent in each session that these leaders cared deeply about their chosen vocation and their school communities. The period between March 2020 and June 2022 took a considerable toll on

everyone, including school leaders who needed to sustain morale while managing programs for students, faculty and families. Insights supported the efficacy of distributed leadership approaches and resonant leadership characteristics. Fluency with different modes of decision-making, combined with functioning teamwork and systems for gathering input from colleagues, served to facilitate leadership in the pandemic. When the leaders felt confident in their relationship with the Head of School, they could focus on delivering the mission of the division knowing their boss supported and trusted them. Another insight from the data was that creative and transparent communication maintained community bonds in a time of uncertainty. Additionally, division leaders who demonstrated self-awareness developed relationships in their schools based on trust and listening to multiple voices and perspectives. Finally, the participants in this study gave thoughtful advice regarding the importance of student mental health and leader self-care.

In the following chapter, I use my research journal and practitioner memos to draw connections to these themes from my own leadership reflections.

CHAPTER FIVE: MY REFLECTIONS

The genesis of this study was my curiosity about how Quaker school leadership adjusted to a pandemic setting where collaborative decision-making was more challenging. The previous chapter uncovered several themes from the interviews and focus group sessions with 11 upper school heads of Friends schools. This chapter includes my own reflections on leadership and how to improve my practice. After each interview and focus group, I wrote in my research journal and also completed a practitioner memo. In reviewing the data, I noted the places in the interviews where I shared connections from my site of practice during the dialogue. In my research journal, I also reflected on my experience as a Quaker school leader and referenced several archived documents from the time period of the study. In this chapter, I will share findings from my reflections related to the themes from participant data:

1) Awareness of and preparation for Quaker decision-making
2) Seeking faculty/staff input and teamwork when making decisions
3) Supportive relationship with the Head of School
4) Communication Strategies to build community and reduce anxiety
5) Resonant leadership skills
6) Reflections on student mental health and leader self-care

Theme 1: Awareness of and Preparation for Quaker Decision-Making

Data from this study revealed the importance of familiarity with Quaker decision-making. Leading a Quaker school requires a collaborative and open mindset because of the culture of collective discernment (Larrabee, 2019). Most of those interviewed either had tenure in their role before the COVID-19 pandemic or had worked in other Friends schools in different capacities

prior to the pandemic. Attending workshops on clerking also enhanced their skills. This familiarity with Quaker ethos helped bolster their faith in creatively seeking input for decisions when operating in crisis mode. I reflected on my own experiences with Quakerism and Quaker decision-making in school settings in my research journal after interviews and focus group sessions. While I have much room for growth, my own fluency with Quakerism, Quaker schools and Quaker decision-making processes facilitated my ability to pivot with the upper school faculty and senior administration in order to maintain learning during the pandemic.

Born into a Quaker family, I attended Quaker Meeting all through my childhood. I attended a Quaker boarding school for high school and have worked at three different Friends institutions in my career as a teacher and a leader. I have served as a trustee for two Quaker schools and also for the Friends Council on Education, a non-profit organization promoting collaboration and professional development among Quaker schools. Like many participants interviewed, I was selected to join in the two-year Friends' Council on Education Institute for Engaging Leadership. Robert, Daphne and I were in the same cohort between 2005–2007. Furthermore, like others interviewed, the Arthur Larrabee workshops on clerking helped me prepare for leading meetings in the style of Quaker decision-making.

During a focus group, I nodded affirmatively when Robert, a leader with experience from several Friends schools, shared that his familiarity with Quaker decision-making deepened trust among the faculty. I too felt that my credibility as a seasoned Friends educator increased faculty confidence in my leadership style during the pandemic. After the interview with Jennifer, the leader who faced such opposition from faculty and a paralyzing lack of decision-making frameworks, I wrote in my research journal: "She has a lot of prior Quaker experience so I can't

imagine what it would have been like for a non-Quaker person to be leading that school during the pandemic" (Research journal, March 20, 2023).

My experience as a Quaker accustomed to implementing various decision-making approaches in Friends schools aided my leadership before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. As someone attuned to listening and discerning a path forward based on multiple perspectives, I was able to seek creative ways to implement these approaches, even in a crisis. For instance, when we had virtual Wednesdays in 2020–2021, I organized small online groups of faculty, each with a facilitator taking notes, to provide feedback on ways to improve their workload and the student experience. While no one probably relished more Zoom meetings, this approach provided an opportunity to share ideas and co-create solutions, whether revising the report-writing format or making a homework-free night. The narratives from participant interviews and focus groups illustrated that many effective leaders in Quaker schools had deep understanding of process. Their stories provided a window into how prior Friends school leadership experience, whether as a dean or a department chair, mitigated uncertainty among constituents in this lengthy crisis.

Theme 2: Seeking Faculty/Staff Input and Teamwork When Making Decisions

Participant narratives illustrated that maintaining channels for feedback in a crisis facilitated leadership. Additionally, interview data provided examples of functional teamwork that strengthened decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyzing the narratives and reading my research journal encouraged my own reflection on teamwork as a leader.

I sensed the anxiety among teachers in spring 2020 and adopted more level one and two decision-making with less input and design from teachers. For instance, changing the class

schedule to increase breaks from Zoom and eliminating final exams typically would have been joint decisions made with the faculty. In the spring of 2020, however, I "read the room," and I saved teacher energy for their families and students by adapting to decision-making with less input from so many stakeholders. Rather than convene the full faculty more often that spring, I regularly met with department chairs over Zoom, as well as with the Dean for Students. These thought partners provided helpful feedback on initiatives before implementation. Ralph's narrative about the strength of his team at school and their daily meetings was not my own experience in the spring of 2020; staff newer to my school and with family obligations did not communicate with me as often as his team did. By September of 2020, however, the Wilmington Friends staff were back in-person in our adjacent offices, and we met daily to discuss students of concern and programs for safe community gatherings.

The Head at my site of practice convened the senior administrative team twice a week for two-hour Zoom meetings from March 2020 through February 2021. These sessions kept us connected but often felt as if we were not fruitfully making decisions about how to safely re-open or plan for an alternative graduation. After the interview with Courtney, I wrote:

> She also talked about something I can relate to: the endless senior admin Zoom calls that were inefficiently using collaborative decision-making. Those Zoom calls could have been triaged and decisions made by the Head or legal team that would have allowed the division heads to use time and bandwidth differently. (Research journal, May 17, 2023)

It would have been more effective to create subcommittees related to reopening protocols, for example, or create proposals and then test them with the group.

In mid-July, I suspected many upper school faculty expected we would remain remote in the fall, and I needed to make them aware that school would likely reopen in-person in September. I called a summer faculty meeting and had almost 100% attendance on Zoom

(Faculty meeting minutes, July 23, 2020). There was palpable emotional tension when I shared that we would be using the gymnasiums and other large spaces as classrooms in order to socially distance for in-person learning. This was not a faculty decision, and many expressed fear and anxiety (Faculty meeting minutes, July 23, 2020). As I wrote after listening to Jennifer's interview: it was

> an unprecedented July faculty meeting that I don't recall fondly. There was a lot of anger and fear in the Zoom meeting. I did not even have all the answers at that point but just saying that we were trying to figure out how to convene in-person made people anxious. (Research journal, March 20, 2023)

I asked for feedback and questions and felt battered by the stream of concerns for which I had no reassuring answers. Teachers wanted to know how eating lunch would work safely. Were we monitoring traffic in the hallways to keep students masked? Would faculty be expected to risk their own health to interact with students, or could they instruct behind glass partitions at the front of the classroom? Were we taking student temperatures? How were we planning on keeping students apart outside of school? Sports? The questions tumbled into the chat with an expectation I would solve them.

Faculty were invested in decision-making differently, however, by the spring of 2021. A group wished to capitalize on the pandemic as an opportunity to creatively reshape the weekly schedule. I kept in touch with their design process, but it was a faculty-initiated proposal to adopt a late start on Wednesdays in order to let teens sleep a bit later and also to carve out some unscheduled community time a few times a week. This collaborative decision-making energized me with hope that we had rebounded to prior levels of distributed faculty engagement (Scheduling committee minutes, March 28, 2021). In fact, a few months later I had no volunteers for a committee of teachers interested in revising the semester report card. Pre-2020 teachers

would have volunteered to draft a proposal out of a sense of investment in the community. We have to rebuild an ethos of co-creating school culture, and this will require explicit encouragement and intentional effort. Recently, for example, I distributed the task of recreating the Model United Nations club to a new history teacher and asked a veteran member of the department to offer guidance and support. Getting them to collaborate on this project that will benefit students will, I hope, knit together faculty through this co-curricular effort and provide them with leadership opportunities.

Colin, the former division head who had transitioned to leading a non-Quaker independent school, shared in his interview that he felt faculty had not returned to pre-pandemic levels of decision-making engagement. I concurred:

> He and I agreed that teachers have lost their bandwidth for committee work, task forces and the engagement with decision-making overall. That just happened at my school where I asked for interest in a committee to update semester reports and there was silence… or rather, there were concerns about the current format but no one came forward to create a proposal. We wonder if that will bounce back or if teachers, even in Quaker schools, will have less interest in the decision-making of pre-pandemic times. (Research journal, March 29, 2023)

There are signs of renewal, but it is not consistently back to pre-pandemic levels. It is up to leaders to clarify an expectation for faculty involvement in decision-making and program design and to listen to what they need, whether that is time in the school day, a reimagining of non-classroom duties, or even stipends, in order to rebuild that capacity.

The other divisional leaders and the assistant head for academics provided me with the best team throughout the crisis. We already had a highly effective working relationship, based on mutual respect, trust and accountability. We were honest with one another, and many times we met together to creatively design events or propose ideas when decisions were stagnating in the

larger body. I counted on weekly walks with the lower school division head as we processed school issues and brainstormed solutions together. We did our loops through her neighborhood on Sunday mornings in order to prepare our minds for the days ahead.

Reflecting on this theme, I realized that I pivoted to different decision-making strategies and gained input from various faculty and staff via small online meetings or emails during the crisis. Trusting relationships, listening and transparent communication supported an ethos of collaboration and feedback, despite the need for alternative gathering modes.

Theme 3: Supportive Relationship with the Head of School

Participants with an engaged Head of School who made and communicated difficult decisions reflected appreciation for this support in their interviews. Paul, for example, felt his Head did not shrink from tough decisions, and Robert understood his role was to provide pastoral care to teachers while his Head focused on logistics of safe reopening. Daphne was grateful her Head absorbed negativity from parents. Heads who led collaboratively and provided clear expectations allowed divisional leaders latitude for making decisions and prioritizing resonant care with their respective faculty.

I reflected on this relationship in my own context as well. The Wilmington Friends Head of School and I have known each other since we taught together in 1995 at George School in Newtown, Pennsylvania. He was a chemistry and physics teacher living in a boys' dormitory, and I was a history teacher living in the main girls' residential hall. Decades later, he and I served together on the Friends Council on Education board, and then he joined Wilmington Friends as Assistant Head for Academics in 2014, four years after I arrived, and became Head in 2015. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he made himself available regularly via Zoom to the

senior administrative team. He, and the school's board of trustees, wanted to follow the Delaware Governor's guidelines for reopening schools in 2020, as well as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines. As school leaders, therefore, we were in limbo waiting for these government leaders and agencies to publish protocols for us to follow.

The Head preferred collective decision-making with senior administration. He weighed many perspectives and options for decisions such as a delayed 2020 graduation or whether to return to remote learning after some COVID-19 infections on a sports team in fall 2020. His deliberative approach meant that decisions were well-crafted but often took time to emerge. With so many unknowns about health and safety, and with no medical expertise on the team, we could make suggestions without clear resolution for quite a while. He and I led together when I asked him to jointly host a town hall meeting on Zoom with senior parents in April 2020; it was challenging to navigate all the fear and frustration from the parents as they filled the chat with questions about aborted senior traditions, such as the farewell meeting for worship or the final assembly with student speeches and prizes. They wanted assurances he could not provide about these final moments; the Head and I repeatedly reminded them we would communicate as soon as decisions were made by the administrative team. The Head provided support when I asked him to be present for a difficult conversation with a teacher; the emotions of a faculty member had been unsettling other teachers in Zoom meetings, and he helped me lead this colleague to understand the impact of her behavior on others.

Reflecting on this theme has made me realize the importance of clear expectations, trust and support in the Head–Division Head relationship.

Theme 4: Communication Strategies to Build Community and Reduce Anxiety

Another theme from the data relates to communication strategies. An increased cadence of communication bolstered school leadership in the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders nurtured trust with faculty and other constituents when they creatively and transparently communicated updates to their community. After analyzing the research data, I reflected on struggles and improvements in this component of crisis leadership.

In the spring of 2020, I missed opportunities for communication to students and families. When I heard Shawn say he made a daily video about the school schedule for students, I recognized how those missives knit the community together. I wrote in my research journal:

> This Head of Upper School did daily videos for students in the spring of 2020. That is so impressive! It reminds me of the importance of communication and of teamwork. There needs to be a team to help generate these kinds of ideas, and then a community of relationships to help make them possible. (Research journal, April 27, 2023)

Looking back, I wish I had engaged with seniors early in April 2020 about ideas for making their final months special in alternative ways. Canceling the prom was a significant blow for many seniors and their parents. One senior wrote to me: "To be completely honest it was very disappointing and disheartening to wake up on a Saturday morning to learn that the prom had been completely dismissed" (Email, April 19, 2020). After talking to Marcus, I wrote:

> I wish I had opened up Zoom to just listen to parental concerns and worries earlier, and that I had done videos or blogs to students and faculty sooner than the Cameo [a customized celebrity video] I bought for seniors at the end of April. (Research journal, April 17, 2023)

I implemented a variety of communication strategies, although I wish I had started earlier or done them more frequently. For example, I hosted Zoom "Friday Happy Hours" in the spring of 2020, some with a theme such as sharing baby photos or high school prom pictures. We made

video tributes to seniors in lieu of their traditional Meeting for Worship farewell. Once the school year started in September 2020, there was greater expectation for a return to a substantial academic and extra-curricular program, and less forgiveness, I felt, for school leaders "doing the best they could." I wrote more weekly messages to parents so they could understand our daily routines better. Seven teachers taught virtually for most of the fall and spring semesters, and I had bi-weekly meetings with them on Zoom in order to help them feel included when everyone else was back on campus interacting in-person. There were many families angry with one another when rumors spread about those who were allowing sleepovers and playdates in violation of our expressed wish for social distancing. For example, one parent angrily shared: "This evening I discovered that there was another sleepover among the 9th grade boys - more kids than the last time…I am fuming because these families are so self-centered and cannot say no to their children" (Email, October 25, 2020). I heard about this loudly from faculty who felt unsafe and also from parents in the regular surveys we sent to gather feedback (Survey, February 1, 2021). Surveys worked well for taking the temperature of different stakeholders about the student bell schedule and protocols, whether it was holding performances out-of-doors or allowing only two spectators per athlete during contests.

Communication, even when a leader does not have answers, serves to maintain connections in a community. Students, families and teachers need accessible leaders and creative communication in an increased cadence that reaches more stakeholders in times of uncertainty. I learned that I need to pro-actively utilize my team to expand my communication strategies in a future crisis.

Theme 5: Resonant Leadership Skills

Resonant leadership skills emerged as central characteristics described by participants during their reflections of school between March 2020 and June 2022. Quaker school leaders benefitted from self-awareness, relationship management, listening and building trust with colleagues. Because Friends schools nurture collaborative decision-making, leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence adjusted more easily to their stakeholders' needs. I also reflected on examples of resonant leadership and room for growth in my practice.

Similar to Marcus, the former Dean of Students who joined his school as head of upper school in the fall of 2019, I defined my leadership approach in the COVID-19 pandemic as "servant leadership." After his interview, I wrote in my research journal:

> I was a servant leader to faculty when I gave them permission to be asynchronous to put their families first in the spring of 2020, and when I said there would be no finals or no midterms. I was a servant leader to figure out lunch duty outside, getting the camp chairs, the white boards and configuring classrooms. (Research journal, April 17, 2023)

I saved my reservoir of humor and patience for work and was often short-tempered at home after a long day of pitching in to cover study halls or lunch duty wherever possible. I could glower at my laptop screen at home and vent to my husband while we walked the dog together, but I stayed positive and cheerful in the school hallways. At Thanksgiving, I made a loaf of pumpkin bread for all faculty and staff, and I gave them boxes of stress-relief tea.

In addition to self-awareness, I reflected on ways I maintained relationships with faculty and staff in the pandemic. I continued engaging teams for input in decisions, making it clear what level of involvement was expected. Functioning relationships with the Dean for Students and the upper school administrative assistant helped me plan and deliver programs for the division, from advisory activities to spirit week dress themes or queries for Meeting for Worship

gatherings. We met in person on a daily basis once we returned to on-campus learning; we texted and emailed regularly. My practitioner memos from interviews mention how often I related to stories of collaboration with their administrative teams.

Part of my effectiveness at maintaining relationships stemmed from my long tenure and consistency in my role. People knew what to expect and could trust predictability from their leader. After one focus group, I wrote: "I had the trust of the teachers that I would be open with them about the solutions of the pandemic" (Research journal, June 29, 2023). I developed greater comfort with engaging in difficult conversations around accountability and faculty behavior. For example, when faculty were texting during online meetings and their messages revealed hurtful comments, I followed up with those colleagues about professionalism. In prior years, I had sustained morale and led difficult conversations among staff, demonstrating that I cared for the way they treated one another. For instance, I brought two teachers together to repair misunderstandings about job responsibilities chaperoning a trip together, and I established the practice of setting group commitments to guide conversations in department gatherings. After listening to Marcus describe how handling complicated discipline situations as a Dean prepared him for crisis leadership, I concurred in my journal: "I do feel that I have a high tolerance for decisions that are misunderstood or that make some folks frustrated" (Research journal, April 17, 2023). Rather than email an upset parent, I call them in for a meeting, even when I know they will be upset. It has taken practice to offer constructive feedback on a veteran teacher's lesson where students were not engaged or seemed confused by instructions. I am not perfect at handling difficult decisions by any stretch; I am aware, however, of how to lean into my discomfort with conflict and seek common understanding and resolutions to issues.

Deepening trust and building effective relationships involved listening. I regret that I did not do enough to listen to students and faculty in the spring of 2020, as well as the frequent times I sat in my office the following school year, listening to one or another upset and stressed teacher. They were scared and, while I could not change their situations or mindsets, simply making myself available must have helped them feel heard. Students were not wearing masks properly, or it was unfair that some faculty were allowed to work from home for medical reasons while others shouldered the burdens of managing student behavior on campus. In the interview with Robert when he was describing his leadership style, I affirmed his point of view: it was important to be "really present. And when you don't have the answers to just make yourself available. And that's really hard when as a leader, you're just totally fried yourself" (Interview, April 18, 2023). Being in-person created more opportunities for check-ins that nurtured relationships. I may have been exhausted, but cheerful greetings each morning to parents and students at drop-off knitted together some community connections frayed from prior months.

Building capacity as a resonant leader helped leaders in this study navigate the crisis with their faculty and staff. Similarly, my own development of self-awareness ensured teachers could count on me to manage (mostly) my own emotions and stress in a highly stressful time. Because of trust built over many years of relationships, I was able to lean into difficult conversations, listen and provide some comfort at pivotal moments in the crisis. Reflecting on my own skills and areas of growth will improve my future leadership.

Theme 6: Reflections on Student Mental Health and Leader Self-Care

Student mental health needs surfaced as a theme among participants and a priority from my own experience in the COVID-19 pandemic. I have witnessed a rise in anxiety among teenagers, and many of them use social media excessively outside of school in order to mediate their relationships and to evaluate their self-worth. During the pandemic, we worried that some who chose to remain virtual in 2020–2021 developed school anxieties in addition to their physical health concerns. At Wilmington Friends, we added a counselor on the main campus in 2021, and she has been an essential source of support for students. Her expertise offers a beneficial resource for staff as we consider ways to teach resilience. A student group, QuakerCares, raises awareness about mental health in order to de-stigmatize feelings of anxiety or hopelessness. We have started a task force across all divisions to learn from each other about the greatest needs in our program. Listening to the divisional leaders in this study affirmed the concern I have about building self-awareness, empathy and relationship management skills among our students.

An important lesson for my own leadership practice is to seek opportunities for renewal and collaboration. In the fall of 2020, I hired an executive coach and applied to the Mid-Career Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of Pennsylvania. The murder of George Floyd inspired online postings about racial injustice in all kinds of settings, including independent schools. In the summer of 2020, Wilmington Friends students and alumni wrote on Instagram about their experiences while at school. The stories about interactions with other students or incidents on athletic teams or in classroom activities were heartbreaking to read. Students of color shared about times they felt marginalized, misunderstood and unseen by other

students and teachers. Quaker Meeting for Worship, typically a healing spiritual practice creating a safe space for building community, did not work effectively for processing this feedback in a remote setting that summer.

Faculty and administrators, already anxious and exhausted by remote teaching, blamed themselves for these stories of discrimination on campus and could only come together on Zoom to seek restorative justice. We lacked the connection and the relationships, within our little boxes on Zoom, to engage us effectively in listening as well as action for improvement. In this context, I asked an executive coach to help me deepen awareness of my leadership strengths and areas of growth, such as cultural competency and leading difficult conversations. This professional development was a form of renewal and self-care. She met with me every two weeks to help me set goals and reflect on dilemmas I shared. I leaned against my "nice white racism" of fragility and defensiveness (DiAngelo, 2021). I made myself available for small group online listening sessions with any student or teacher who wished to share their stories with me. I worked with the Head of School to facilitate conversations for alumni, staff and parents, and we invested in a climate assessment with an outside consultant. Collaborating with an executive coach helped me develop greater self-awareness (an ongoing process) and coach others.

Joining the doctoral cohort at the University of Pennsylvania broadened my perspectives on education and reinvigorated my commitment to addressing inequities. The coursework, whether on organizational theory, literacy or policy led to energized dialogue. The mix of urban and rural, public and charter, independent and non-profit leaders created intense learning for the group. For example, our second year "exam" was to create a proposal for the superintendent of a struggling southern city school system who felt pressure to respond to larger societal issues, such

as crime and violence. In diverse teams we worked through the weekend to strategize, utilizing past course materials and our own experiences. Learning alongside my professors and other school leaders provided me with a new challenge that pushed me beyond my comfort zone and bubble of private school education.

Collaboration is another form of self-care and an area of professional growth. I agreed with Robert about how it was helpful to confer with other Quaker school division heads at times during the pandemic about problems and solutions. I wish I had connected more regularly with the leaders of local independent schools as well. Illustrating the desire for collaboration, the focus group participants continued discussing issues with one another after I stopped recording for the sessions. They expressed shared appreciation for the opportunity to reflect together on crisis leadership. Looking back, however, I felt siloed at times during the pandemic and wished I had done more to talk with others in a similar role. This doctoral program has been an additional step towards renewal and inspiration. It has been a privilege to participate in insightful coursework and research with professors and cohort colleagues.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my experience leading a Quaker school during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the genesis of this study. Making sense of my narrative of that time period addresses the third research question of this project: *How did my experience as a leader during the pandemic, and the lessons I learned conducting this study, contribute to my decision-making as a school leader?*

My experience with Quakerism and Quaker schools provided familiarity with the culture of shared decision-making. Furthermore, my relatively long tenure in the division head role and

emotional intelligence as a fairly resonant leader facilitated crisis leadership. I felt both confident in my relationships and ability to seek solutions and also woefully unprepared at times to dig into deep reservoirs of sustained creativity when the day-to-day management of school life took so much of my energy and focus. The racism revealed in the Instagram stories in 2020 shook my faith at first in the Quaker ethos, and in my own leadership.

Listening to the leaders in this study, writing in my research journal and analyzing the data for emerging patterns, however, helped remind me of my most effective moments during the crisis when I was able to be fully present for a stressed teacher who needed a listening ear while she processed a difficult day. Or when I found a way, with the help of the performing arts department, for the whole student body to sing the "12 Days of Christmas" together via video, even when we could not be in a crowded gymnasium for the traditional holiday celebration. I also could reflect on the difficult faculty meetings when I realized there could have been more communication of a decision ahead of time or the moments when I bore the full anger of anxious parents who disliked our hybrid schedule.

The leaders in this study of Quaker school upper-level division heads reminded me of the inspirational governance happening in so many schools, often by unappreciated leaders and teachers who put students first in small and significant ways. The dedication of these participants to care for their communities surfaced in all their stories. Moreover, while I focused in my reflections on all the areas where I can learn and improve as a leader, I also came to see evidence of where I had led my division by centering relationships through joy and collaboration.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study yielded several important lessons about school leadership. The participant narratives surfaced reflections and lessons related to decision-making and upper school leadership in Quaker schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders with prior experience in Quaker schools created mechanisms for teamwork and seeking input, despite the limitations of remote work at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Quaker schools routinely engage in decision-making where faculty serve in leadership positions on committees or as department chairs or grade deans. During the crisis period, leaders continued to seek input from teachers and staff. Leaders with strong relational skills and confident Heads of school maintained trust, even when tensions were high. Those in non-Quaker school contexts can learn important lessons on leadership and decision-making from this study; the themes from the data, while all from a Friends school ethos, can be applied in other venues by those who prioritize creating cultures of trust, relational awareness and teamwork. When considering the research questions, many implications from the data addressed more than one. For instance, the importance of relationships applies to pandemic impact, leader lessons and leader reflexivity. The questions are restated below but the implications are presented without adherence to individual ones. In this chapter, I codify implications for leadership practice, including my own. I then address the limitations of the study, and finally, I pose some thoughts for further research.

Research Questions

1) What impact did COVID-19 have on upper-division leaders in U.S. Quaker schools' leadership and decision-making processes?

a) What lessons emerged that are useful to prepare leaders and the organization for future crises?

b) In what ways do upper-division leaders think leader reflexivity on pandemic decision-making will influence their leadership approaches going forward?

2) How do upper-division leaders interpret the decision-making process in their Friends school?

a) What past leadership experiences influenced upper-division leaders' pandemic decision-making?

3) How did my experience as a leader during the pandemic, and the lessons I learned conducting this study, contribute to my decision-making as a school leader?

Analyzing the data from this study revealed several important lessons to prepare leaders and organizations for a future crisis. A significant disruption to school life requires attention to self-care, student mental health and community re-building. Effective teamwork, clear levels of decision-making and relationship management positively influence leadership. Frequent and creative communication, as well as demonstrations of empathy, develop trust and confidence among faculty, students and parents. Leaning into prior experience improves crisis leadership responses. All these lessons apply to my own leadership, especially continued attention to fostering a culture of belonging for all students.

Self-Care

As illustrated in Chapter Four, participants identified a need for leader self-care and also to prioritize student mental health. Leaders experienced pressure to create remote and hybrid versions of brick-and-mortar school during the pandemic. They had to provide emotional support

for students, teachers and parents when there were no easy answers or assurances. They suffered from a lack of downtime and extreme imbalance between work and personal life. Participants referenced examples of endless Zoom sessions all summer in 2020 and tense faculty and parent meetings. The narratives demonstrated how leaders, infused with an ethics of care, strove to heal communities full of fear and anxiety (Noddings, 2012). Their reflections revealed the importance of self-awareness and self-management, two critical competencies of emotional intelligence and resonant leadership (Goleman et al., 2013; McKee et al., 2008). Being attuned to their own emotional state, and then maintaining a positive and optimistic outlook, allowed leaders to sustain morale in their communities. Looking back on the time period, many highlighted that in a future crisis they would be more deliberate to protect their own emotional core and to increase physical exercise, family time and mindfulness practices. These insights emphasize the importance of emotionally resonant leadership competencies and flux pedagogy, the emerging theory of leader self-care and equity-focused work in crisis situations (McKee et al., 2008; Ravitch, 2020).

This study supports the current research on leader burn-out in a crisis and the importance of self-care (DeMatthews et al., 2021; McPherson et al., 2022). Avoiding self-sacrifice in a future crisis would help preserve the emotional reserves of leaders and would allow them to attend to the emotional needs of their faculty (McKee et al., 2008). Deep attention to one's inner needs and accepting that this vulnerability strengthens one's emotional core extends a person's ability to lead through shared caring and purpose (B. Brown, 2018; V. Brown, 2022).

Student Mental Health

Attending to student mental health is another lesson of the pandemic for participants in the study. Leaders noted the increased anxiety among young people and prioritized strengthening wellness curriculum, including the development of self-awareness and self-management skills. In my school, we have a cross-divisional committee reviewing the scope and sequence of health topics, from preschool through grade 12. Students created a club, QuakerCares, that destigmatizes mental health issues through education and awareness campaigns. We have increased professional development for faculty around recognizing signs of student anxiety and strategies to mitigate their stress. Those closest to the student health issues, such as the nurse, the counselor, the dean for students and the athletic trainer, meet weekly to share information and develop support plans for individual adolescents. Quaker schools have embedded practices that build self-awareness and relationship skills. For example, participants found that the use of silence and reflection as regular routines helped students increase self-regulation. In other words, Quaker school leaders can strengthen existing practices as part of a campaign to meet this challenge.

Community Rebuilding

Past research surfaces that coming together for Meeting for Worship strengthens community connections through shared purpose (Nourie, 2014). Quaker school habits of listening, collaboration and collective discernment encourage students to think beyond themselves (Nourie, 2014). Practicing empathy connects students (and adults) to issues beyond themselves and to civic engagement (Mirra, 2018). In this study, leaders learned from the COVID-19 pandemic that many students during remote learning phases needed community

engagement to feel connected. One participant recalled the need for in-person student socializing when faculty were resisting ideas for returning to campus. Several participants referenced ways in which they have been making concerted efforts currently to intentionally rebuild community traditions in their schools since the pandemic, such as Homecoming events and outside speakers on campus and field trips. One participant shared about the renewed focus on advisory group time and celebratory events. Another participant reflected on her renewed commitment to rebuilding a faculty culture that had weakened in the height of the pandemic when onboarding programs were virtual. In my site of practice, we have returned to off-campus service-learning projects and "buddy relationships" between seniors and first graders. We have expanded counseling staff in this area and provided more programming for parents and guardians regarding managing adolescent anxiety and building resilience.

All students deserve to feel a sense of belonging in our schools. Community rebuilding, therefore, must also acknowledge the painful issues in the narratives shared by marginalized students and alumni in the "Black@" Instagram posts of the summer of 2020. No student should feel like a guest in their school, and yet the stories of microaggressions in hallways or locker rooms or inappropriate classroom discussions revealed that many do, in fact, feel excluded. I wrote my first-year doctoral exam about a situation in an English class where a student secretly recorded another student reading aloud from a Shakespeare play, *Twelfth Night*, and shared the video with classmates when the student stumbled on the word, "niggardly." Without preparation about the language of the scene, and without a teachable moment to process what happened, all students missed an opportunity to affirm what classroom culture should be and how to make all feel like they truly belong (Reisman et al., 2020). The student who read aloud felt victimized and

ridiculed; the student who recorded on her phone had prior experience with the reader and felt he was racially insensitive. The classroom should have been a space to unpack the language of Shakespeare's time from the outset, and when this incident occurred, the teacher told me he panicked and could not effectively stop the class to engage students in the roots of the tension and the violation of class norms. As Howard Stevenson (2014) explains, to grow in racial literacy, a person needs to locate the stress physically, breathe, and acknowledge the stress before addressing the situation. This incident unearthed the need for culturally responsive training for teachers (Muhammad, 2023):

> We need humanizing pedagogies that center the genius, justice, joy, love, and humanity of our children. That means we must *search for and unearth ourselves* and search for people, places, things, histories, movements, events, and moments that we have failed to teach because we didn't learn them ourselves. (Muhammad, 2023, p. 21)

Faculty must deepen their own understanding of their identities and create brave spaces for curiosity, learning and growth for all (Cobb & Krownapple, 2019; Stevenson, 2014; Talusan, 2022). We have since started a faculty inquiry group that studies texts on literacy and openly critiques each other's lessons. These intentional learning communities courageously seek to center all students, to make visible those who have felt like the "other" (Cobb & Krownapple, 2019, p. 150). Rebuilding community, therefore, requires examining curriculum, traditions, systems, and practices such as admissions criteria, professional development and grading equity, all with the goal of ensuring all students and families feel a sense of belonging.

Importance of Input and Teamwork

This study reified a need for clearer decision-making processes during times of crisis. Leaders in schools where the levels of decision-making were well-known and routinely practiced could pivot more flexibly in a crisis situation. Study participants from school cultures where tiers

of decision-making were not used felt stymied by an inability to be transparent or pivot to different modes of decision-making. Clarity in schools with articulated Quaker decision-making levels, on the other hand, meant a leader could openly acknowledge a shift in a decision-making approach due to the urgency of the crisis, and colleagues appreciated the recognition of change. Extant literature on Quaker decision-making emphasizes the centrality of silence, clerking and seeking unity in decisions (*Faith and Practice*, 2002; Sheeran, 1983). Insights from this study add the importance of the awareness of and use of decision-making levels. Especially in a crisis, transparency about who is making a decision helps a community adjust when accustomed to more collective engagement.

Even when making more administrative decisions, leaders in this study found ways to seek input from faculty discernment. Whether it was using the comments feature in Google docs or bringing department chairs or grade deans together on Zoom for a regular check-in, leaders valued feedback from teachers during the crisis. In a future crisis, leaders should be prepared to creatively collect input from teachers and staff, even if in-person gatherings are not possible.

Additionally, the division heads themselves participated in leadership teams led by their Head of School. When division leaders felt these senior administrative teams operated with trust, accountability and purpose, they also felt the positive influence of distributed leadership.

Looking back, as I described in Chapter Five, effective teamwork was a significant lesson of the pandemic for my leadership. I felt most successful as a leader when I connected with colleagues and gathered feedback on changes to, for example, the schedule, or protocols for having a socially-distanced dance (good in theory, terrible in practice). My familiarity with

levels of Quaker decision-making meant faculty understood expectations for their involvement and appreciated that transparency.

Methods for seeking input in a Quaker school context add credence to the research on successful teamwork. A team where relationships are nurtured and members share a common goal performs effectively (Lencioni, 2002). Quaker school division heads in this study provided examples of close and collaborative working relationships, either with their own staff or with a senior administrative group, that improved their crisis leadership. School leaders relied on department chairs, dorm leaders or grade clerks to help make and implement decisions in the pandemic.

Research indicates that teams have their own collective culture and that when there is trust among teams and leaders of teams, necessary adaptations develop more fluidly (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Supovitz & D'Auria, 2020). Study participants reflected on the role of trust when making decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders with longer tenure in their role and resonant leadership skills found ways to address the crisis in their schools. There was friction and fear from constituents, but this was mitigated by practices of listening and seeking input, even when making decisions that typically would have included more discernment from a broader group of participants.

The organic inclusion of teacher input, even in a crisis, demonstrates the regular implementation of distributed leadership in Quaker schools. A hallmark of Quaker school culture includes empowering faculty to serve as clerks of committees (Larrabee, 2019). These committees develop proposals related to curriculum and school policy, thus distributing the responsibility for design and implementation. Distributed leadership theory emphasizes how

leadership is situational rather than based on a role or person (Deflaminis & Jabbar, 2016; Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Supovitz & D'Auria, 2020). When given responsibility to generate solutions, faculty are more invested in school culture and outcomes. Furthermore, in an ethos where input and consultation from faculty help improve administrative decisions, faculty approach their positions as professionals with respected expertise (Supovitz & D'Auria, 2020). Data from this study support the argument that distributed leadership improves morale, develops teacher agency and deepens investment in school decisions.

Relationship Management

Distributed leadership and resonant leadership depend on collegial relationships based on trust (Deflaminis & Jabbar, 2016; Goleman et al., 2013; McKee et al., 2008). Cultivating this dynamic arose as another lesson of crisis leadership in the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants identified the importance of being known and trusted by staff as part of their effectiveness in responding to changing community needs. Tending to relationships before the pandemic allowed division heads some grace when conditions of the crisis strained faculty resilience. However, those with shorter tenures in the role or in the school described community feedback on leadership as more tense and fractious. One leader had to let some faculty go in her first months on the job due to downsizing pressures. Another reflected on how the pandemic exacerbated distrust between teachers and administration already present from before he assumed the principal position; he had not had enough time to dedicate to building and maintaining relationships to improve that dynamic before March 2020. Moreover, divisional leaders appreciated Heads of School with high levels of relationship awareness and emotional intelligence. Heads who shied away from conflict or left division heads to handle the contentious

faculty or parent gatherings did not garner trust on senior administrative teams. Participants praised the Heads of School who clarified their roles in relationship to division heads, as well as those with high levels of emotional intelligence.

Relationship awareness improved my leadership during the pandemic. I was fortunate to have been in my role for 10 years when the COVID-19 crisis started, and I had already led the division by employing emotional intelligence through listening and spending time getting to know faculty and staff. I had to develop skills regarding difficult conversations (and still do), and I learned how to celebrate teachers with food and small gifts acknowledging their dedication. During the pandemic, those habits of relational awareness helped me support colleagues through their fears and exhaustion and tend to those relationships.

Upon reflection, many themes about effective leadership are interrelated. Adopting clear decision-making processes helps develop trust, and trust and accountability lend themselves to effective teamwork and distributed leadership (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Edmondson, 2019; Supovitz & D'Auria, 2020). In a Quaker school ethos, faculty engage frequently in stages of decision-making and therefore invest in problem-solving issues that arise. Including a plurality of voices and perspectives leads to greater wisdom when addressing issues. Embedding intentional use of reflection and silence develops empathy for how decisions impact others. When a crisis strains the ability to fully enact these practices in a Quaker school, the well-tended foundations help sustain morale and support for the necessary adaptations to leadership and decision-making.

Communication

Prior research on crisis leadership made visible the centrality of communication for building trust in an organization's response (Kerrissey & Edmondson, 2020; Netolicky, 2020). Leaders in this study emphasized the need for regular, creative, and transparent communication throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Frequent messages in a crisis provided some reassurance to faculty, students and families. Leaders who made themselves accessible for questions and concerns generated trust in the school's response to the crisis. Leaders in this study wrote emails, made videos or held virtual town hall sessions in order to maintain connection in the pandemic. Some gave examples of how they mimicked in-person events or forums in an online space. Others created new and creative communications, such as daily videos about the schedule. Upon reflection, in a future crisis I will know to connect with faculty, students and parents frequently. Even when I do not have answers, making myself available and inviting questions would help knit the community together during times of uncertainty. The reassuring presence of a leader, whether through written messages, online video or in-person gatherings, increases confidence in a future resolution.

Empathy

Crisis leadership research prioritizes leader empathy and relational awareness in order to support fearful stakeholders in times of uncertainty (Ravitch, 2020). Quaker schools prioritize seeing "that of God" in all people, thus seeking peaceful resolution to conflict through listening, dialogue and embracing equity (*Faith and Practice*, 2002). Leaders of Quaker schools, therefore, must lean into building capacity for empathy in themselves and others (Garman, 2014). Empathy that leads to action goes beyond individual sympathizing and considering multiple perspectives;

empathy for civic engagement bolsters crisis leadership (Mirra, 2018). Participants in this study reflected that in future crises, being present for others would be as important as being decisive. They embraced leading through their missions of equity and justice in the future. This study expands research in empathy and crisis leadership by including the Quaker school dimension. Extending grace to others and gathering collectively to listen to one another are practices that are also useful in non-Quaker contexts during a crisis. Being decisive can gain the confidence of constituents in times of uncertainty; this study confirms, however, that a leader can strengthen a shaken community by being present and accessible, even when there are no actions to take.

Prior Experiences With Traumas in Quaker Contexts and Beyond

The study participants expressed familiarity with Quaker decision-making and shared that prior school traumas shaped their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. As explained in Chapter Four, leaders articulated levels of decision-making useful in Quaker schools, as well as common characteristics such as listening, inclusion of multiple perspectives, time for reflection, committee involvement and distributing clerking among faculty. When asked about past experiences that prepared them for crisis leadership, leaders referenced their exposure to Quaker school decision-making, whether as a faculty member, student or administrator. Almost all study participants had prior experience in Quaker schools or a tenure of more than four years in their leadership role. Only one study participant had no prior Quaker school experience, in addition to having started her position in the year the pandemic started. A few participants mentioned that they had led their division during other traumas, such as the death of a student or a scandal. One referenced his time in a school in a war-torn area of Europe in the early 2000s. The prior experience in Quaker schools prepared them for the kinds of discernment typical in Friends

institutions. Exposure to other crises prepared them to extend empathy towards others, but also to have a thick skin when it came to conflicting and intense constituent feedback. Non-Quaker school leaders can learn these lessons as well.

Implications for Practice

Some suggestions for practice emerged from the findings and implications of this study. They are a further distillation of the data resulting from the interviews, focus groups and reflections in my research journal. I hope these may be helpful to leaders across all types of schools, not just Quaker schools. Strengthening practice in these areas will improve leader responses, including my own, should another crisis arise in the future.

Develop Clarity Around Decision-Making Culture

When exploring a problem and the process for solutions, articulate who is making the decision, and what is asked of faculty in that process. Participants will appreciate the transparency so they can be prepared, whether that is by rolling up their sleeves to take ownership of research and solution design or through giving thoughtful feedback on a proposal shared with them. It is respectful of their time to articulate the decision-making structure ahead of time. The more a leader cultivates a culture of distributing ownership for innovation, the more there will be investment in outcomes.

Establish Regular Meetings With the Head of School During the School Year

The most effective relationships between the division leader and Head are those associated with high expectations and support. Just as a resonant division leader creates a teamwork ethos based on trust, accountability and shared vision with their faculty and staff, so should a Head with their administrative council. Routine meetings to review goals and ask for

feedback and support ultimately benefit the leadership of both parties, and thus the learning environment for students. Heads with high emotional intelligence will naturally engage in this teamwork. A division leader can nurture this partnership through regular communication as well. Create shared understanding of what strategies are most effective for each other: for example, some Heads may appreciate written agendas ahead of time or reading material on problems to solve, while others may prefer to work in an informal impromptu setting.

Nurture Relationships With the Faculty and Staff

Come around from behind the office desk to sit with a faculty member who shares a concern. Put aside the emails and phone calls to be fully present. The “tell me more” approach demonstrates curiosity and a willingness to listen. Small gestures mean a great deal, whether that is recognizing birthdays, treating staff to surprise hot chocolate on a winter’s day or starting meetings with a “turn and talk” icebreaker. Nurturing relationships requires vulnerability and candor. Remember that embracing difficult conversations with faculty about their instruction supports creating a joyful learning ethos for all students. Ask for, and accept, feedback on your own practice, to demonstrate that growth is essential for everyone.

Develop a Creative and Flexible Communication Cadence With Your Community

Look for ways to diversify the communication strategies of your division, whether that is making short videos, interviewing different members of the staff and sharing their stories, or celebrating student poetry. Offer monthly in-person and virtual sessions with parents/guardians, and feature the athletic director or student leaders of a club. The greater the tool kit of communication, the easier it will be to connect with stakeholders should there be a crisis requiring leader response.

Prioritize Student Mental Health and Belonging

Student well-being and belonging should be at the center of our school missions. Without well-being and belonging, students cannot reach their fullest potential. Schools by themselves cannot address the mental health crisis among teens, yet schools can reframe and re-design with student belonging in mind. Leaders should regularly ask departments to examine curriculum and pedagogy through the lens of inclusion. Youth participatory action research (YPAR), for example, allows students to design learning that is meaningful to their lives (Mirra, 2018). Christopher Emdin (2016) promotes "cogens," or co-generated discussions between teachers and students that elevate the student perspective on school climate. Embracing student-centered learning approaches, along with culturally-responsive teacher training, can improve student mental health and sense of belonging. Raising awareness of adolescent anxiety and stress, and prioritizing skill-building for well-being, must be leader priorities as well.

Practice Self-Care

Many teachers and administrators feel demoralized by the overwhelming pressures on education, whether that is because of the pressure of preparing students for standardized tests or the need to respond to accusatory emails from parents (Santoro, 2018). A "work-life balance" can seem impossible to define, no less achieve. Developing rituals that reduce stress and support health, however, allow for perspective on the challenges of leadership. Build time in the day and week for reflection, whether this a spiritual practice or a quiet walk in the woods. Create technology-free moments, whether to dine with friends, read a book or enjoy live music. Volunteer in the community, or start a hobby. These can be important ways to gain perspective

and find joy outside the job. Focus on relationships at home and with friends. Put away the laptop and spend time with a partner or children. Relationships and connections make us whole.

Implications for My Own Leadership

The final research question emphasizes my reflections: *How did my experience as a leader during the pandemic, and the lessons I learned conducting this study, contribute to my decision-making as a school leader?* Chapter Five focused on these findings, such as my challenges with communication at the start of the pandemic and my methods of building relationships and maintaining teamwork in my leadership. In addition to the lessons described in that chapter, there are further implications for my own leadership practice. Learning to reframe and grow in my inclusionary actions for all students have been the most significant lessons for me. A critical constructivist approach to leadership means that social reality is constructed and that school leaders have significant power to decide what counts as knowledge (Anderson, 1990). My "inner eye" (Anderson, 1990) is shaped by my experiences, my class, race and gender. It is the schema through which I interpret my world, and I can train it through practice and reflection to observe and process differently:

> Because administrators in most organizations are in a better position to influence what "counts" as knowledge than other organizational members, they are to a great extent the managers of organizational meaning, the custodians of organizational legitimacy, and the definers of organizational and social reality. (Anderson, 1990, p. 43)

The joint crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the "Black@" Instagram posts from independent school students and alumni describing their painful experiences of exclusion catalyzed my decision to investigate my own biases through executive coaching, support a culture climate study at school and embark on leadership study through this doctoral program. Reframing challenges in my site of practice has helped me train my "inner eye" to seek more

voices in decision-making and develop self-awareness about my own biases. My leadership practice continues to evolve through reflection, listening and the generosity of others who provide the feedback to help me grow.

Limitations of this Study

My positionality as a division head leading a Quaker school during the COVID-19 pandemic drove my keen interest in this research project. While my own experience and passion for Quaker education kept me focused, it also undoubtedly created bias. I have done my best to practice fidelity towards the narratives of the participants, in surfacing both themes unrelated to my experience and those confirming my reflections about decision-making and leadership. As a first-time doctoral student, I realized many moments in the data collection process where I wished I had asked a different question or pursued a follow-up thread in a different way with a participant. Moreover, the fact that I knew several participants in the study due to the small overlapping world of Friends schools could be both an advantage and a limitation. Leaders were eager to share their stories, however, whether we were familiar colleagues or meeting online for the first time. This desire to contribute to this study, I believe, stems from the deep care for Quaker schools and also the significant strain on these leaders from the pandemic time period.

Implications for Further Research

Further research could be done to compare Quaker and non-Quaker school leadership and decision-making. By choosing to explore division heads in Quaker schools, I unearthed rich reflections from that particular educational ethos. Additional research could be done to analyze data from non-Quaker school upper school heads from the same period. After reading Dr. Jessica Flaxman's (2022) dissertation on "literacies" of female headship, I believe it could be insightful

to explore the stories of women in positions of leadership in Quaker schools to better understand patterns and themes that could contribute to organizational management theory. Furthermore, there is more to understand regarding the creation and maintenance of faculty culture. This study did not include interviews with teachers, and more could be learned from including their voices about the COVID-19 pandemic. While some core insights emerged from this research, there is more to learn from the wise practitioners in the field.

Conclusion

This study centering Quaker school division heads reflecting on leadership in the COVID-19 pandemic adds insights to research on Quaker decision-making, teamwork, distributed leadership, resonant leadership and crisis leadership. Leaders in non-Quaker settings can learn from these themes and apply them in their respective contexts as well. In a school, not all decisions will be made through collective discernment; the levels of decisions, therefore, clarify for all involved at the outset what is expected from participants. This study also adds insights related to teamwork dynamics. Because of the collaborative nature of decision-making, Quaker school faculty culture relies heavily on trust and psychological safety. Study participants found that their trusting relationships with colleagues, while strained by remote work and health crises, could sustain a need to change decision-making approaches. When there was less trust between colleagues, however, the crisis frayed teamwork dynamics.

Quaker schools naturally lean towards distributed leadership because of the common use of committees to design academic or student-life proposals and the responsibilities traditionally given to faculty deans and department chairs to clerk groups towards decisions. In a crisis, participants in this study found ways to invite input from a distributed network of personnel,

even when the leaders were making more decisions unilaterally. Additionally, this study supported the research on the efficacy of resonant leadership characteristics for building effective work culture. Leaders demonstrated self-awareness and high levels of emotional intelligence in relationships. In the COVID-19 pandemic, these leaders adapted these skills towards supporting their scared communities. Finally, studying Quaker schools in the period between March 2020 and June 2022 supports crisis leadership research about the centrality of relationships and responsive leadership in a long-term time of uncertainty. More than decisiveness, leaders demonstrating empathy gained the trust and confidence of stakeholders.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the Research Study: Reflections on Leadership and Decision-making Challenges during the Pandemic: Narratives of Upper Division Heads in Quaker Schools

Protocol Number:

Principal Investigator: Rebecca Zug, [phone number], [email]

Dissertation Committee Chair: Dr. Diane Waff, [phone number], [email]

You are being asked to take part in a research study for a doctoral dissertation. Your participation is voluntary which means you can choose whether or not to participate. If you do not understand what you are reading, do not sign it. Please ask the researcher to explain anything you do not understand, including any language contained in this form.

What is the purpose of this study?
The study seeks to understand how upper-division leaders in Quaker schools experienced decision-making and leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 to June 2022.

Why was I asked to participate in this study?
You were asked because you were an upper school division leader in a Friends school in the United States in March 2020.

How long will I be in this study?
If you chosen to volunteer, you would:

- Complete one short questionnaire
- Participate in one interview lasting approximately 45 minutes in April-June 2023
- Agree to a follow up interview and/or a focus group with other divisional leaders for up to 1 hour.

What are the risks?
There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this study. Nevertheless, the following measures have been incorporated into the study design to minimize the possible occurrence of such risks:

- Your school will be de-identified as much as possible and given a pseudonym.

- You will choose a pseudonym and that will be used in all written records associated with this study, such as transcribed recordings of interviews and follow-up interviews.
- Participant and school pseudonyms will also be used when discussing participant narratives, in writing and otherwise with thought partners in my mid career cohort and with my dissertation committee.
- All audio recordings and transcriptions will be filed in an electronic file system that is password protected.
- For the focus group, we will establish group commitments to create a safe and confidential space for conversation. While the researcher will never share what is expressed, there is a risk that members of the group will inadvertently share what is discussed.

How will I benefit from the study?
Your insights will contribute to a greater understanding of how Quaker decision-making impacts crisis leadership. You may also find that reflecting on your past leadership experiences improves your own practice in the future.

What happens if I choose to not join the research study?
There is no penalty if you choose not to join this project. You will lose no benefits or advantages that are now coming to you, or would come to you in the future.

What is the study over? Can I leave the study before it ends?
Data collection for this study is scheduled to conclude in August 2023. You have the right to drop out of the study at any time. You have the right to ask clarifying questions about the study at any time during your involvement in the research.

If you no longer wish to be in the research study, please contact Rebecca Zug, at [email] or [phone number], and inform her that you would like to withdraw from the study.

How will confidentiality be maintained and my privacy be protected?
Pseudonyms will be used for both all study participants and their schools. I cannot guarantee full confidentiality or total privacy. Your personal information may be given out if required by law.

Who can I call with questions, complaints or if I'm concerned about my rights as a research subject?
If you have questions, concerns or complaints regarding your participation in this research study or if you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you should speak with the Principal Investigator listed on page one of this form. If a member of the research team cannot be reached or you want to talk to someone other than those working on this study, you may contact

the Office of Regulatory Affairs with any question, concerns or complaints at the University of Pennsylvania by calling (215) 898-2614.

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for filling out this short survey. I am upper school head at Wilmington Friends and in the Penn Mid-Career Doctoral program in Educational Leadership. For my dissertation, I hope to interview other upper school divisional leaders in Quaker schools about their experiences with leadership during the pandemic. I would be grateful for your responses below. Interviews, if you are willing, will be recorded and be conducted on your campus or on Zoom.

Full Name
School
Leadership position
Years of experience in that position:

- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-10
- 11+

Years at the school

- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-10
- 11+

Prior administrative experience

Please list the different administrative roles you've held before your current position and how many years you held those roles.

Educational degree(s)
Please check all of the degrees you currently hold and indicate your major or discipline.

- Bachelor's degree
- Masters degree
- Doctoral degree

Are you a Quaker?

- Yes
- No

What is your race/ethnicity?

What is your gender?
What are your pronouns?
What is your age?

- 25-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 66-75

Would you be willing to share your experiences about leading in a Quaker school during the Covid-19 pandemic? All interviews will be confidential and entirely voluntary. Interviews, if you are willing, will be recorded and be conducted on your campus or on Zoom.

Are you willing to be interviewed as part of this research on decision-making in Quaker schools?

- Yes
- No

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction Script:
Thank you for speaking with me today about your leadership experiences during the pandemic. My name is Rebecca Zug and I am conducting research for my dissertation in the Mid-Career Doctoral program in Educational Leadership at the University of Pennsylvania. I expect this interview to take about forty-five minutes. I will be recording this interview so that it can be transcribed later.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of leaders in Quaker schools as they reflect on how the pandemic may have impacted their decision-making during the pandemic and since.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If at any time you need to take a break or stop, just let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Let's begin. Please state your name, your school and leadership position.

How would you describe the decision-making approach in a Quaker school?
Please provide an example of a decision made using the Quaker process and the role that you played.

What experiences or influences helped you understand Quaker decision-making?

Did you learn from a mentor?
Did you read about it?
Did you attend a workshop?
Could you teach it to someone else?

In what ways did the pandemic influence decision-making processes during the time period? Share an example.

In what ways did the pandemic influence your leadership during that time period? Share an example.

What among your leadership practices stayed the same during the pandemic?

What among your leadership practices changed during the pandemic?

What leadership experiences prior to the pandemic prepared you for the leadership required in a time of crisis?

Are there leadership lessons from the pandemic that you think will prepare your organization for future crises? If no, why not? If yes, share an example.
In general, how did what you experienced during the pandemic change the way you lead and make decisions? Provide an example.

How does reflecting on your leadership practices influence the approach you take to leadership going forward?
Does reflection help you cope better with challenges during crises? Do you have examples to share?

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Remind people about keeping comments private. Remind about anonymity.
Want to hear all voices and respect each person's perspective.

What were the most important lessons you learned about leadership from the pandemic?

What were the most important lessons you learned about decision-making from the pandemic?

Please tell me how your leadership and decision-making was influenced by the culture of the faculty at your school.

Please share more about the relationship of the division head and the Head: did this influence your leadership, and if yes, how so?

How does/did being in a Quaker school influence your leadership and decision-making during the pandemic? Provide an example.

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE CODING

	Code	**Description of**
Decision-making process		
Head making decisions with input	DM:input	decisions involving input
Disrupted	DM:Disr	The pandemic disrupted decision-making modes
Stayed the same	DM:Same	decision-making modes stayed the same during 2020-2022
Top-down	DM:TopD	Decision-making became top down in the pandemic
Covid committee	CovComm	School formed a Covid task force to make some decisions
Return to pre-pandemic	Ret.PreP	Decision-making returned to pre-pandemic modes
Faculty less invested	fac less inv	since the pandemic, faculty are less invested in participatory decision-making
Teamwork		
Effective teamwork	team:effective	strong team, effective team dynamics
Ineffective teamwork	team:ineffective	ineffective, dysfunctional teamwork and team dynamics
Head and Head relationship		
Positive, collaborative	Head:positive	Division head defines relationship with Head as positive

Clarity of roles	Head:clarity	Head uses clear decision-making modes
Hesitant, unclear	Head:hesitant	Head lacks clarity and transparency in decision-making
Faculty Culture		
Trusting	FC:trust	faculty trust administration
Fearful	FC:fear	faculty reacted in fear to the pandemic
Fractured	FC:fracture	faculty were divided in reaction to the pandemic
Empowered	FC:empower	faculty feel or felt a sense of empowerment regarding participatory decision-making
Unprofessional	FC:unprof	texting during meetings; chat culture inappropriate
Reflection		
Thicker skin	thicker skin	division head grew to make difficult decisions with less emotional sensitivity
Self care	self care	need to take care of oneself emotionally and physically
Prior Experience		
Prior administrative roles at other schools	Prior:other	prior administrative experience at other schools
Prior administrative roles at current school	Prior:current	prior administrative experience at current school
Prior traumas	Prior:trauma	prior traumas personally or at school

Communication		
Executive communication	Comm:head	head communicates and is out front
Creative communication (Comm:creative)	Comm:creative	division heads added innovative communication approaches in the pandemic
Increased in pandemic (Comm:increase)	Comm:increase	division heads increased communication
Transparent (Comm: transpar)	Comm:transparent	reference to honest, open communication
Leadership		
Emotional support	relational	prioritizing relationships
listening	listening	listening, humility, openness
Self care	self care	prioritizing one's health and wellness
psychological safety; trust	trust	division head emphasizes trust

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