

Rethinking Social Justice: Promoting SEL Opportunities to Achieve a More Just Society

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Abstract

This article examines how Upward Bound (UB) program leaders promote socio-emotional learning (SEL) opportunities to further the social justice of federal policy aims. I examine five program leaders' efforts through a policy implementation framework, focusing on their capabilities. Results show that the program leaders' capabilities—values, interests, knowledge and skill, and dispositions—contributed to the leaders' will to promote SEL opportunities. The results also yielded an additional capability: planning power, or the ability to design a program schedule that aligns with the leaders' other capabilities and policy goals. I discuss implications of the results for programs seeking to enhance SEL opportunities.

Keywords: Social Justice; Socio-Emotional Learning; Capability in Policy Implementation; Educational Leadership

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“Social justice” has no agreed-upon definition but can be described as pertaining to a more just society. *How* we achieve a more just society is even more debatable. One of the largest movements to advance social justice occurred during the Civil Rights era. Premised on the idea that a more just society could be achieved by equalizing economic opportunities, Lyndon B. Johnson declared war on poverty (Brauer, 1982; Califano, Jr., 2015). In the realm of education, the movement led to the creation of programs designed to help students living in poverty compensate for any deficiencies they might otherwise experience in school. Among these programs was Upward Bound (UB), designed to help high school students acquire the necessary skills to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education and beyond (McElroy & Armesto, 1998; Upward Bound, 2019). While many researchers have examined UB through the lens of social justice, few have analyzed how UB might advance social justice by promoting socio-emotional learning (SEL) opportunities for program participants.

Since the creation of UB, studies have examined whether UB indeed help students achieve in postsecondary education. Researchers have analyzed whether UB narrows the poverty-achievement gap (e.g., Balz & Esten, 1998 regarding enrollment and attainment; Cowan, 2002 regarding enrollment rates), creates more opportunities for

impoverished students (Anderson & Larson, 2009), increases the participants' confidence in their ability to succeed in college (Vega, Moore III, & Miranda, 2015), increases college attendance and attainment rates (Pitre & Pitre, 2009), sustains the participants' persistence in school (Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2015), or improves skills beyond academic measures (Bakal, Madaus, & Winder, 1968 regarding self-regulation, increased motivation, self-esteem, and educational goals; O'Brien, Bikos, Epstein, Dukstein, & Kamatuka, 2000 regarding self-efficacy; Paschal & Williams, 1970 regarding self-concept and attitude). In essence, these studies analyzed whether and how UB met its social justice aim and thereby also conceptualized the construct "social justice" depending on the metrics of success the studies examined.

Social justice can be conceptualized through the SEL lens as well (see, e.g., Anderson & Larson, 2009; Hatcher, 2015). Socio-emotional skills are essential to academic achievement, sometimes lauded as equally or more important to academic and life success than other skills (García, 2016; Heckman, 2008; Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001; Heckman, Stixrud, & Urzua, 2006; Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Miyamoto, Huerta, & Kubacka, 2015). These skills can generally fall within five categories: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2017). College students with developed socio-emotional skills often outperform their peers (Caldwell & Siwatu, 2003). For example, they manifest better grades (Parker et al., 2004a; Parker et al., 2004b; Parker, et al., 2005a; Parker et al., 2005b) and higher retention rates (Parker et al., 2006) and degree attainment (Keefer et al., 2012). SEL also improves general well-being, lowering stress levels, lessening fatigue, diminishing social anxiety, and improving life satisfaction (Brown & Schutte, 2006; Extremera & Fernandez-Berrocal, 2006; Palmer, Donaldson, & Stough, 2002; Pau & Croucher, 2003; Summerfeldt, Koosterman, Antony, & Parker, 2006; Thompson, Waltz, Croyle, & Pepper, 2007), all important for academic success. These skills are especially important for students from low-income backgrounds who often disproportionately exhibit underdeveloped socio-emotional skills and lower student outcomes (see, e.g., Caldas, 1993; Eagle, 1989; Lambert, 1970; Murnane, 2007; So & Chan, 1984; Walker, Greenwood, Hart, & Carta, 1994).

In sum, SEL is not tangential to student success. SEL is essential to academic achievement. If educational achievement is important for social justice, and SEL is central to academic achievement, then promoting SEL is essential to achieving social justice.

Helping students develop socio-emotional skills is not new. John Dewey was dedicated to educating the "whole child" and developing skills beyond academic measures (Dewey, 1938). However, *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), promulgated during the Reagan administration, shifted the policy focus toward measurable outcomes, accountability, and high-stakes testing of academic achievement markers. Other skills moved to the back-burner (Heckman, 2008; Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001; Ravitch, 2016).

The emphasis on socio-emotional skills in the education field has reemerged. Since the early 2000s, researchers, policymakers, and educators have begun to emphasize SEL (García, 2016; Heckman, 2008; Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001; Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Miyamoto et al., 2015; Heckman, Stixrud, & Urzua, 2006). As of August 2019, all 50 states had adopted SEL standards at varying educational levels (CASEL, 2019), and over 30 state legislatures were considering SEL bills (SEL4US, 2019). Other specific examples include Massachusetts and Washington State, which adopted frameworks to help guide districts (Mass. Ann. Law. Ch. 69, § 1P; Wolpov, Johnson, Hertel, & Kincaid, 2009); and organizations such as P21 and CASEL, which offer support for

researchers, policymakers, and educators seeking holistic approaches to education (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2018). While different approaches use different phrases—e.g., “holistic development,” “21st century skills,” “social and emotional skills,” and “socio-emotional skills”—a review reveals much conceptual overlap among phrases (West, et al., 2016). In this study, I use the phrase “SEL” except when quoting leaders who use a different phrase to describe SEL skills.

At the district, school, and classroom level, educators promote SEL opportunities through curriculum, community-school approaches, and districtwide efforts (see, e.g., Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). This has yielded positive results. The efforts have helped students improve their socio-emotional and academic skills (Beelmann & Lösel, 2006; Conley, Durlak, & Kirsch, 2015; January, Casey, Paulson, 2011; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schelling, 2011; Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, Ben, & Gravestijn, 2012).

Most research has focused on promoting SEL opportunities within the school system. Yet, in 18 years of schooling, students spend approximately only 14% of their time in school (see SASS, 2011-2012). This percentage underscores the need to understand how these compensatory education programs, designed with the aim of creating a more just society, help underprivileged students succeed. Compensatory education enables some underprivileged students to spend their summers on college campuses, participating in an UB summer program (Upward Bound, 2019).

This article provides an empirical basis for examining educational leadership efforts to create a more just society by promoting SEL opportunities in a compensatory education program – Upward Bound (UB). Most studies examining UB in relation to SEL have focused on student outcomes and on a few skills, such as self-concept, self-regulation, and self-efficacy (e.g., Bakal, Madaus, & Winder, 1968; Harris & Marquez Kiyama, 2015; O’Brien et al., 2000; Paschal & Williams, 1970; Vega, Moore III, & Miranda, 2015). This study analyzes program leaders’ efforts and uses a broader conceptualization of socio-emotional skills, examining social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (see CASEL, 2017). This article thereby addresses two gaps in the literature. First, it offers rich empirical data on how leaders in compensatory education promote socio-emotional skills. Second, it provides a theoretical contribution by illustrating the usefulness of using “a policy implementation” lens to analyze leaders’ efforts to promote a more just society by supporting the development of SEL.

Conceptual Framework: Capability in Policy Implementation¹

This study is rooted in a policy framework focused on the significance of capability in implementation (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Cohen, Moffitt, & Goldin, 2007). This article is premised on the concept that capability helps practitioners meet the goals of the program-level policies or of those federal policies that are often far removed from the implementation level. Specifically, practitioners’ values, interests, skill and knowledge, and dispositions may help increase or frustrate fidelity in implementation (Cohen et al., 2007; Cohen & Moffitt, 2009).

Policy Implementation and Capability

How do practitioners implement policies? This seemingly straightforward question has been met with few straight answers. McLaughlin (1987) explained, “Perhaps, the

¹ Capability, in part, has often been referred to in the literature as capacity. These two concepts are different but do overlap; I use the terms interchangeably in this study.

overarching, obvious conclusion running through empirical research on policy implementation is that it is incredibly hard to make something happen, most especially across layers of government and institutions” (p. 172). Given this difficulty, much of the research on policy implementation has focused on what does not work (Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). Challenges to effective implementation include lack of clarity of the policy, capability (such as knowledge and skill), resources, and proper organizational arrangements (Gross, Giacquinta, & Berstein, 1971). A lack of organizational coordination and unity, improper communication amongst organizational members, and lack of time and proper planning also complicate implementation (Browne & Wildavsky, 1984; Peters, 1986). Policy implementation is also difficult because education is decentralized, and educators enjoy substantial discretion (Fusarelli, 2002; Smith & O’Day, 1991). To illustrate, the policy governing UB outlines required and permissible services and individual UB programs and practitioners retain discretion to adopt (extra) curricular activities as they see fit (see Upward Bound, 2019).

Cohen et al.’s (2007) framework describes the dilemma that often occurs between policies and their implementation. Implementation is not linear (Elmore, 1980; Rowan, 2002) and depends on the policy resources and practitioners’ capabilities. Cohen et al.’s framework offers a tool to understand the significance of capability in implementation. According to this framework, policies bring resources to practice through the mechanism of policy instruments. These resources might include mandates, inducements, capacity-building tools, and system changing elements (see also McDonnell & Elmore, 1987).

Practitioners and the environment bring resources to policy in the form of personal and social capabilities (Cohen et al., 2007). Personal capabilities include values, interests, dispositions, and skill and knowledge. These capabilities reinforce or weaken the practitioners’ will to implement; practitioners can only implement a policy if they have will and ability. The environment also aids or frustrates implementation—e.g., resources aid implementation.

A key aspect of the dilemma Cohen et al. (2007) described is the relational feature between policy and practice. Capability varies in relation to the policy resources. For example, a change in a policy’s aims or resources can outstrip prior capabilities, because practitioners might no longer have the training or knowledge to implement the reform. Capabilities are also not static and can improve to help practitioners achieve policy goals and aims.

The Role of Educational Leaders’ Capability in Policy Implementation

Educational leaders play a central role in policy implementation, given their position as practitioners who interpret the federal and state policies before their staff (see Honig, 2003, 2006, 2012; Marsh & Wohlstetter, 2013; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Woulfin, Donaldson, & Gonzales, 2016). Yet, the field of education still lacks empirical and conceptual research on how the leaders’ role aids or frustrates implementation (Woulfin, Donaldson, & Gonzales, 2016). Understanding the capabilities leaders bring to practice, and how they build their staff’s capabilities, is critical to effective policy implementation.

In the context of educational leadership, the research on capability and capacity can be categorized into two lines of inquiry. Earlier research focused on identifying capacities that contributed to effective learning and teaching (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Newman & Wahlage, 1995; Newman, King, & Rigdon, 1997). Subsequent research focused on how to build capacity to improve student outcomes (King & Newman, 2001; Smith & Thier,

2017; Spillane & Louis, 2002). Even short-term capacity-building investments; such as better resources, information, and assistance; help practitioners align practice with policy goals (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Scholars, including Smith and Thier (2017), recommend increasing capacity and will to improve implementation. One of the capabilities recognized as paramount to policy implementation is skill and knowledge (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Strunk & McEachin, 2013). To underscore the importance of educational leaders' role in implementation, consider CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI), first-ever initiative to promote district-level SEL standards in large, urban districts. The NoVo Foundation and Einhorn Charitable Trust Fund supported CDI, which "focuse[d] on district systems, district strategic vision that includes SEL, SEL standards, professional learning, and continuous improvement to implement and integrate SEL into districts' ongoing efforts" (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016, p. 2). Even with small investments, the leaders' efforts led to "consistent gains in school climate; four of six measured districts showed improvement in third graders' social and emotional competence; and, across the eight districts, GPA improved in four and discipline improved in six . . ." (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016, p. 2).

In this study, meeting the federal UB's policy aim of social justice envisioned in the 1965 legislation, in part, occurred through the leaders' capability to promote SEL opportunities. This article analyzes how the UB Program Director and administrators (hereafter "leadership team" or "program leaders") used their capabilities to promote SEL opportunities during their summer program. It focus on four capabilities: values, interests, skill and knowledge, and dispositions. Table 1 provides a summary and a definition of each of these concepts.

Table 1
Definitions of Capability Concepts at the Implementation Level

Capability Concept	Conceptual Definition
Values	Things, ideas, or concepts to which practitioners attach a higher degree of importance, weight, or preference compared to other things, ideas, or concepts.
Interests	Things, ideas, or concepts which practitioners care about.
Skill and knowledge	Individual information banks that aid practitioners in implementation.
Disposition	"[D]eterminers of behavior, constellations, or personal meanings from which behaviors spring" (Weiner & Cohen, 2003).

Methods

I conducted a qualitative case study of an extreme and critical case (Yin, 2009). The purpose of extreme cases is to "obtain information on unusual cases, which can be . . . especially good in a more closely defined sense," while the purpose of critical cases is to "achieve information that permits local deductions of the type 'If this is (not) valid for this case, then it applies to all (no) cases'" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). The latter leads to "most likely" or "least likely" deductions. For example, Flyvbjerg explains, researchers studied whether people working with solvents located at a site where all regulations had been fulfilled suffered brain damage. If the researchers found brain damage, then "most likely" other sites less compliant with regulations had the same problem. As an extreme case, here, all staff demonstrated a commitment to promote

SEL without a mandate and the case identifies implementation that worked. As a critical case, if the leaders in this case struggled with implementation, then other programs less committed to SEL are likely struggling with similar issues.

Study Site and Sample

The UB program was housed in a large, public university in the northeast. The program served a diverse group of approximately 115 students from rural and urban areas. The students were from lower socio-economic backgrounds and neither of their parents had attended college. The summer program occurred in 2017 and included students from both UB Regular and UB Math and Science. All students enjoyed the same curricular opportunities during the summer, including the opportunity to take science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses. The only differences between the programs was that the STEM students were required to enroll in math and science courses.

During the summer program's six weeks, students attended classes Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The courses included "deliberations" (an English course with a debate project), capstone (a class with a research project), science, math, and college preparation (a class designed to help students in 10th-12th grade develop college skills, such as time-management, and prepare college applications). After school, students enjoyed *siesta* time after which they spent the evening playing sports, completing homework, and/or socializing with staff and students. Every Friday, the students left home and returned Sunday afternoon.

The sample (the leadership team) included the Program Director, Assistant Director, and three counselors. They oversaw more than 60 staff members and 115 students. The leaders planned the summer program and worked for UB year-round. Two counselors worked on campus and the third worked at one of the high schools the students attended. The leaders had varying levels of experience with college access programs or student populations similar to the student population at UB. Some had over 10 years of experience including migrant students in UB, while others had two years of experience. The leaders were also ethnically and gender diverse.

The leaders participated in the program in varying ways but, together, promoted SEL opportunities. The Director and Assistant Director had less contact with UB students. They focused on providing resources to the staff, ensuring the staff executed the program, and handling disciplinary matters. Counselors interacted more with the students where three taught a college preparatory class and one ran a fitness program. The counselors held a unique position such that one participated in the summer staff hiring process, two worked on room-assignments for a New York City trip, and all three spent time with the students during the evening activities.

The leadership team did not train for their summer roles. However, they attended annual conferences and trainings. One counselor reported no prior training on SEL, another reported prior training on trauma-sensitive education, and yet another reported attending regional conferences where other UB program leaders shared strategies of what had and had not worked.

Data Collection

Data were obtained from three sources: interviews, observations, and documents. I interviewed the leaders twice: once prior or after the beginning of the UB program and once at the end of the program. The interview began with questions about the program and followed with more difficult issues. In the first interviews, I covered three areas: goals to promote SEL, extent and quality of staff-student interactions, and staff-staff

interactions and wellbeing. The post-program interviews covered the same areas but reflected the leaders' summer experience. In total, I conducted 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews that each lasted approximately one hour.

I also conducted 38 field observations of the UB leaders and staff at work, totaling approximately 66 hours. These observations helped me understand how the leaders promoted SEL opportunities, both through their planning and action. To avoid influencing any of the activities due to my presence, I maintained sufficient distance so as to avoid interrupting the students or the leaders. Table 2 lists my observations. I consistently interacted informally with the leaders as well, visiting the site daily and observing while taking copious notes on the leaders' verbal and non-verbal expressions.

Table 2
Field Observations and Time Spent at Each Observation

Observations	Time Spent Observing
Deliberations information session	2 hours
Pedagogy staff training	3 hours
Residential mentors training sessions	3 sessions, 2 hours each
Student information welcome session	1 hour
Regular staff meeting for team leaders	1.5 hours
Evening time at residential common halls (no student issues arose)	2 days, 2 hours each
Evening time at residential common halls (staff responded to student-student issues)	2 hours
Staff seminar on leadership	.83 hours
Faculty-student event to help students learn about the faculty members' career paths	.5 hours
Deliberations class presentations	2 sessions, 2 hours each
Study hall sessions (unstructured class where students could complete their homework assignments or study for their classes)	3 classes, .83 hours each
Guest speaker talk, state's sec. of education	1 hour
Class visits	14 classes, from .67 hours to 3 hours each
Residential mentors-led seminar	.83 hours
Unplanned event in response to cultural and racial tension amongst the students: exercise with entire student body to underscore the importance of inclusion	2 hours
Unplanned event: responding to student disciplinary matter	3 hours
One-on-one discussion with instructor who shared frustration on how to handle difficult issues, including students' lack of self-motivation and racial tension	2 hours
Students awards ceremony	2 hours
Students talent show	3 hours

Total: 38 observations,
approximately 66 hours

In addition to observations, I also reviewed internal and external program documents for context and to understand both how the leaders planned to promote SEL opportunities and how they communicated their plans to outside audiences. The documents included the 2017 summer program design planning materials, federal law and regulations governing the program, and training and course materials. The documents detailed the value the leaders placed on socio-emotional skills and shed light on leaders' vision.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using NVivo software, a program to facilitate the management and analysis of qualitative data. First, I analyzed my data inductively, reading each pre- and post-program interview and making the equivalent of marginal notes in NVivo. The notes summarized participants' responses, underscored particular word choice, and identified recommendations for program improvement. I also bolded sentences or phrases that indicated areas of weakness in their efforts to promote SEL opportunities. I frequently wrote memos to track my initial codes and reviewed the memos and notes to better understand the leaders' efforts. Then, I re-read each leader's pre- and post-program interview transcript and my observational notes and wrote a profile summary for each leader. These profiles included the leaders' backgrounds, training on SEL, and their interactions with other staff and students. I also noted the leaders' discussions of summer challenges and the response to these challenges. I reflected on the profiles to understand how each leader fit into the leadership team, specifically, and into the summer program in general, and to gather commonalities and divergences in their responses. Finally, I wrote memos on how each promoted SEL, and I created an initial coding tree, which included different codes to capture the leaders' ability to design a summer program that systematically supported SEL.

Second, I analyzed my data deductively. My initial coding tree was guided by the four capabilities in the Cohen et al. framework, my research question into how the leaders promoted SEL opportunities, and CASEL's definitions of socio-emotional skills. After coding my interviews, I revisited my coding tree to consolidate the codes I identified from the inductive and deductive analysis and made changes where appropriate, such as when multiple codes indicated the same phenomenon. I repeated the same process until I arrived at a coding scheme that reflected the data and had no additional codes to capture the program leaders' efforts in promoting SEL opportunities. Through this process I identified planning power, a fifth capability that helped the leaders promote SEL opportunities.

To help ensure the validity of my analysis, I triangulated my data with multiple data sources and met with a qualitative research instructor, who shadow-coded approximately 40% of my coding. We discussed each code and reconciled any differences in interpretation until we reached a consensus. I compared my analysis of the in-depth interviews with my observations, reflections, and internal/external program documents. The interviews captured the leaders' perspectives, my observations reflected my perceptions of the leaders' interactions with staff and students, my reflections provided a reflective lens to the leaders' interactions, and the documents provided background and context to understand the leaders' efforts.

Conceptualizing Educational Leadership's Capability in Policy Implementation

This section provides a detailed analysis of how the leaders promoted SEL opportunities and includes a suggested conceptual definition of each capability in this context, along with examples of how each capability helped implementation. The findings also include an additional capability: planning power, which proved critical in

the leaders' efforts. Table 3 summarizes the findings detailed in the remainder of the article. See Table 1 for a definition of each capability.

Table 3
Summary of Capability in Policy Implementation, Promoting Socio-Emotional Skills

Capability	Capability in promoting SEL opportunities
Values	– Socio-emotional skills
Interests	– Academic and socio-emotional student success
Skill and knowledge	– Prior knowledge from prior program participation and experience working with similar student populations
Disposition	– Experience-driven
Planning	– Hiring staff members with similar values and interests
Power	– Trainings staff members on SEL skills – Designing a summer schedule that encapsulated the program leaders' aim to promote SEL opportunities

Values: Socio-Emotional Skills

The program leaders valued socio-emotional skills. The Assistant Director, Truman, conceptualized socio-emotional skills as 21st century skills and skills necessary for global citizenry.² Truman displayed a strong commitment to helping students build skills necessary in a rapidly-changing, interconnected society. When discussing general goals, Truman explained:

[W]hat I told the students was that to develop them into 21st century global citizens [is a summer goal]. It's the challenge of going beyond that rural bubble in their communities, or that migrant bubble beyond our communities, or that urban bubble, or whatever that bubble is, and be able to engage the global community. . . . (Truman, personal communication, June 16, 2017)

Some of the skills he saw as necessary to succeed included “communication,” “be able to work as a team,” and “leadership” (Truman, personal communication, June 16, 2017). He acknowledged the federal policy was vague in its requirement to promote 21st century skills, explaining “we have no regulations [in] the grant say[ing] we have to apply things with the 21st century standards” in UB (Truman, personal communication, June 16, 2017). The promotion of SEL opportunities in UB thus becomes leader-dependent. As the Assistant Director, Truman, sought to promote these skills without a clear mandate in the federal policy/regulations, which underscored the value he placed on these skills. He also noted that he did not make explicit to other leaders his goal to promote 21st century skills. However, ensuring the program helped the students develop

² These skills are similar to socio-emotional skills as defined by CASEL inasmuch as both focus on critical-thinking and higher-order problem solving, effective communication, effective interpersonal skills, ethical decision making, self-management, cultural awareness, and self-awareness (CASEL, 2017; Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2018). Moreover, though these concepts have different foci, they often refer to the same conceptual space (Jones & Doolittle, 2017; West, et al., 2016).

these skills organically became part of the planning process, because all leaders valued these skills.

The Director, Rosie, also strongly valued, and was committed to, the development of the students' socio-emotional skills. She shared:

[The program is] supporting them socially from the minute they enroll. . . [W]e try to make each of the smaller groups of students the residential groups, racially ethnically balanced. . . . Trying to encourage them not to sit with their friends—step out. . . . We do a lot of one-on-one conversations [and] smaller group conversations Just yesterday was a whole day of icebreakers for the sophomores and juniors, getting them to recognize their leadership potential, develop leadership skills, and all while they're socializing with other kids that they may not have socialized with before. (Rosie, personal communication, June 15, 2017)

The Director's comments convey an intentionality to engage students in well-thought out activities that foster cultural and social awareness, two of the five socio-emotional skills identified by CASEL. Similar to the Assistant Director, the Director explained "none of what we do [around socio-emotional skills] is mandated" (Rosie, personal communication, June 15, 2017). Given that the program leaders had no clear mandate, they had to create venues through which to promote SEL opportunities after or while they complied with the program's mandates.

The counselors did not have the same planning role as the Director and Assistant Director, but shared the same values to help students develop socio-emotional skills. For example, one of the counselors, Talin, took a student-centered approach to help students develop their social skills. His goal was to "introduce [the students] to a more well-rounded perspective on the world, on their relationships" (Talin, personal communication, June 16, 2017). A second counselor, Holden valued promoting SEL just as much. In discussing general goals for the summer, she quickly pivoted to describe helping students develop socio-emotional skills:

[T]here's social and emotional needs. Sometimes, it's a lot of [what] counts. It's not just what grades they're getting. I look at the whole student. . . It's providing a lot of support and guidance for them, emotionally. Sometimes, we are the only adult in their life that really pays attention to them or is involved. . . . We're involved from 9th grade to 12th grade, so we know them for such a long period of time that we're the only constant in their life. (Holden, personal communication, June 16, 2017)

Her interactions with the students revealed her strong commitment to promote SEL. She engaged students about their well-being and challenges and was dedicated to assist the students beyond academics. The third counselor, Cecile, also valued socio-emotional skills and saw her role in helping students grow personally as a bigger role than academic advising. Note her shift in focus from academics to supportive mentor when discussing her role in the summer program:

I don't think I have a role academically. . . . Socially, I think I am a mentor throughout the summer for them. I'm their person from their town I think having me around makes them know that home is closer. Socially, I just try to see if they are doing okay, emotionally. (Cecile, personal communication, June 20, 2017)

Her primary focus on promoting socio-emotional development is telling, because her role did include an academic component. She also saw the theoretical connection between helping the students socially and emotionally, and academic achievement. She explained:

I think most of my conversations are towards the academics . . . most of it, *I talk to them on how to avoid obstacles so their academics are not hindered*. Basically, I'm talking to them about making good decisions and those decisions have to do with relationships and people around them. (Cecile, personal communication, July 28, 2017) (emphasis added)

Cecile's commitment to promote SEL opportunities helped her form bonds with, and become a support system for, the students. She engaged students during free time, discussing classes and relationship concerns, and built rapport with the students, such that students confided in her. In sum, all leaders displayed a commitment to promote socio-emotional skills, despite a lack of mandate. This commitment evidenced the value they placed on socio-emotional skills.

Interests: Academic and Socio-Emotional Student Success

The leaders were interested in promoting both academic and socio-emotional growth. When asked to describe how they planned to support the students academically and socially, they articulated specific goals and action plans. What follows is a description of the leaders' interest in promoting both academic and socio-emotional growth.

Promoting academics and social opportunities. The leaders provided examples of how they helped students academically and socially. For example, one of the counselors, Cecile, visited the residential halls to help students with homework and discuss their experience. She proudly shared a time when she helped a student further develop his social awareness and relationship skills:

[W]hen they have their music on, it's not as diverse as I think it should [be]. . . . I told him, "I need you to play other music because I need you to include other people." . . . "I just want to point out, most of the [students] here in this bus are Mexican, Salvadorian, Guatemalan, or Central American. Can we make a range of different music from their culture?" He said, "Yes, I have some." Then I told him later on the trip, "Can you do me another favor . . .?" When you set up your speakers and you do your party," . . . "I need you to include the [rural students], the other schools." . . . I just wanted him to be more culturally-aware of his surroundings (Cecile, personal communication, June 20, 201)

While she described academics to a lesser extent, I observed her help students with classes and homework. During her class, she helped students fill out college applications and answered their questions. The third counselor, Holden, also explained her interest in promoting academics and social and emotional needs, which she saw as counting more for the students:

A lot of the goals of mine, . . . is getting them to college right after their high school . . . [S]ometimes, I can't focus on that, because it's not right for the student. . . . There are also all these goals that really aren't counted in the grant that we have. For example, there's social and emotional needs. Sometimes it's a lot of what counts. (Holden, personal communication, June 16, 2017)

She also provided examples of when and how she helped the students. Academically, she helped students with individual projects and was a liaison between teachers and students. Socio-emotionally, she advocated for shy students or those with any diagnosed syndrome. For example, she helped a student with Asperger's syndrome draft emails and set a meeting with a famous researcher on campus. The student was so thrilled about the meeting and could not thank her enough for making his wish a reality. As a counselor, Holden was similarly delighted. Her greater accomplishment, she shared, was helping the student strengthen his relationship skills.

The third counselor, Talin, was also interested in promoting academic and social growth. He provided examples of how he helped the students both academically and socio-emotionally:

If a student came to me and was complaining about the rigor or the complexity of their homework, I would be there as some sort of encourager, providing encouragement, providing motivation. (Talin, personal communication, August 2, 2017)

His presence was constant. When not participating in sports alongside students, he spent the evenings talking to the students one-on-one and often accompanied the students to dinner. His interest in promoting socio-emotional skills was also evident as he led by example:

I helped our students see that it's okay to . . . interact with students who may not look or talk or behave like you. . . . I never said, "Hey guys, I think it's better to interact with people who don't look like you, maybe, you should." . . . I tried to display this through example [interacting with people who don't look like me] and hope that some student picked up on it. (Talin, personal communication, August 2, 2017)

His interest in helping academically and socially extended to all student interactions. For example, he met with a student to discuss alternatives to college. He valued academics but cared about helping the student find suitable goals and reach a conclusion on his own.

The Director and Assistant Director also remained strongly committed to helping the students develop academically and socio-emotionally. To determine whether the Assistant Director's interest was strong enough to follow through with action, at the end of the summer program, I asked him whether he had achieved the goals he established at the beginning. He asserted:

I think that somehow, interwoven throughout the courses, the classes the students took in some way, shape, or form, some of those skills we developed. Also, during one of our course prep seminars, . . . they really focus on leadership and those other type of 21st century skills that are needed. . . . I think that with . . . the deliberations' piece, that teamwork and communication aspect is already woven within it. It's almost intentional in that case. (Truman, personal communication, July 20, 2017)

His example stressed how interested he remained in helping academically and socially. His role in the summer was considered administrative: he helped plan the program and provided resources for the staff. Through planning, he helped the students academically and socially.

As a Director, Rosie exerted much influence over the direction and focus of the program. Her interest in promoting academic and socio-emotional development was evident throughout the entire program. She talked to students one-on-one, provided opportunities for students to develop cultural awareness, and hired leaders who shared the same interests. She shared:

[H]aving awareness of all [socio-emotional skills] and having a student developing him or herself in all of these areas would make their academic year much more successful . . . and make anything that they do . . . much more successful. . . . Your goal [as an instructor] may be to do calculus, but in the process, of doing calculus, . . . I want them to be developed as better world citizens. (Rosie, personal communication, July 20, 2017)

Promoting both academic and socio-emotional growth simultaneously were an interest of the program leaders, which they followed with action.

Skill and Knowledge: Information Banks Leaders Drew on When Promoting SEL

The program leaders lacked explicit skill and knowledge about socio-emotional skills and how to promote SEL opportunities. Skill and knowledge are important because practitioners cannot implement what they do not know (Cohen et al., 2007). By corollary, training and knowledge dispersion is important to help staff promote SEL opportunities. The program training on socio-emotional skills was lacking, and the leaders relied on their prior knowledge and experience when promoting SEL opportunities throughout the summer program.

The counselors received sporadic UB-related training throughout the academic year, which some found helpful. For example, Cecile received “[n]o training, for [her] class” (Cecile, personal communication, June 20, 2017) but attended other trainings to remain informed about policies. The trainings were “not sponsored by TRIO” (Cecile, personal communication, June 20, 2017). Cecile found these opportunities on her own. Regarding socio-emotional skills, she replied “I don’t think I have [training]. What [are] socio-emotional skills?” (Cecile, personal communication, June 20, 2017), and explained she had worked with migrant students before. That work required training on cultural competence; which she found made her more aware of cultural differences. As a counselor, Talin similarly relied on his experience visiting the students at school, rather than training sponsored by the summer program itself or its federal sponsors. Regarding socio-emotional skills, he explained, “No, I have not [received training]. I have had zero counselor training. No counselor training from Upward Bound, but I learn through experience.”

The third counselor, Holden, described training for other staff, not herself. She relied on her decade-long experience as a trained social worker. She was attuned to student challenges and identified the skills she hoped to help the students with: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills. Notably, CASEL identifies these four skills as well.

While the Director and Assistant Director did not receive training for the summer, they attended regional conferences and had experience working with students. The Director explained, “prior to the summer, we meet with a couple of institutions and we kind of say, ‘What are you doing this year, what kinds of things are you bringing in this summer, to work with the students?’ And then, we do a post-summer debriefing with the same groups” (Rosie, personal communication, June 15, 2017). The Director was attuned to the students’ needs, having worked with high school students her entire career and with UB for nearly ten years. She spoke in more detail about the training she

provided other staff. Similarly, the Assistant Director, Truman, explained that the training in the program was more in relation to the summer staff. His experience and knowledge came from “summer programs before where I only dealt with college students . . .” (Truman, personal communication, June 16, 2017).

Dispositions: Personality Characteristics That Led Leaders to Promote SEL

Largely, the leaders manifested one personality type: experience-driven. They were experience-driven leaders with extensive experience working with low-income, potentially first-generation students and this experience informed their belief about the importance of SEL. The leader with the least experience, counselor Talin, seemed largely driven by a mission to help students develop socio-emotional skills, but also drew on his experience to promote SEL opportunities. Similarly, leaders with extensive experience also had a mission to promote SEL opportunities. However, the distinction highlights what made each leader more likely to promote SEL opportunities. Given the leaders were primarily experience-driven, I focus on this particular personality type.

These experience-driven leaders often referenced prior situations when discussing how they would respond to similar situations. To illustrate, in describing a situation where she tried to help students, counselor Holden transitioned back and forth between her experience and how that informed her disposition to do the same in the 2017 program:

I feel like a lot of it, too, is we provide this atmosphere that’s very supportive. If a kid’s having problems, we just don’t kick them out. . . . [We] talk to them about their potential and give them chances to succeed without just saying, “You need to go home” . . . into the same environment that they came from. We try to give them chances to succeed here, which is a lot of positive reinforcement. Giving them leadership things. . . . If they know you could trust them to do leadership things, I feel like their confidence just gets better and they start to control themselves a little better. We have a residential mentor here that was a student [in the program], and he talks about how angry he was when he first started But he said a lot of his anger disappeared because he met a group of friends here. . . . All these issues they have to get through to be successful here. I feel like it teaches them coping skills to use in the real world. (Holden, personal communication, June 16, 2017)

Counselor Cecile similarly referenced past experiences and her disposition to continue promoting SEL opportunities during the 2017 summer program. She explained:

[If] you’re saying, “There’s too much. I can’t handle it. It is overwhelming.” . . . I would ask them, “Tell me how you feel. Tell me what’s going on? And then, I’ll try to ask more questions too, so they can break down their feelings I just want them to be more relaxed with me. Then, I want them to express calmly what’s going on. . . . And, [I’d] say, “Okay. This you can do at this time. Don’t worry about that. The things you need to worry about are things that are due tomorrow. Now, just manage your day and break it down.” . . . I’m an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher I’m used to [breaking things down] in any other situation. . . . I just have to figure out what’s causing [them to feel overwhelmed]. Is it . . . the academics? Or is it more family? Because some kids say they’re overwhelmed also by emotions. . . . A lot of students can handle the load, it is just, I think they just need more management skills. (Cecile, personal communication, June 20, 2017)

Cecile offered similar examples throughout the interviews and in informal conversations. The Director, Rosie, also shaped much of her dispositions based on past experiences:

[UB is] supporting them socially from the minute they enroll, and . . . we try to intermix all the groups. . . . [W]e try to make each of the smaller groups of students, the residential groups, racially/ethnically-balanced. . . . [W]e try to make sure that in those small groups . . . they're meeting new people We bring all the students to campus [W]e're trying to help socialize them a little bit among each other by doing team building activities, icebreakers We do a lot of one-on-one conversations Just yesterday was a whole day of icebreakers for sophomores and juniors, getting them to recognize their leadership potential, develop their leadership skills and all the while they're socializing with other kids (Rosie, personal communication, June 15, 2017)

What she knew had worked before informed her disposition to help develop SEL opportunities in the 2017 program. Finally, the Assistant Director, Truman, was the fourth leader whose disposition was experience-driven. He promoted socio-emotional skills because, in his experience as a program leader at the college-level, these skills were important for college success. He had extensive experience working in student support programs at the college level—more than any other leader—and he often planned UB programming based on the skills he knew the UB students would need in college:

Discussing 21st century skills: [T]he reality is, that when they go on to college, and go on to life, they're going to be in some way shape or form involved with global culture.

Discussing the summer research project: I am very purposeful in every chance I get to make it clear to the students that when they go into college, they got to do a capstone[.]

Discussing self-awareness and self-management: Second week, . . . the students should know now when they need to get up for breakfast; where they need to go to their classes, what they need to do in those classes. Again, that's what college students do. That's what happens in college, right? . . . It's those types of socio-emotional things that are going to be necessary to be successful in college.

Discussing relationship skills: [I]f they have a conflict with a teacher, to be able to stand up and not be aggressive but to own up and say, "Okay, I know that I made a mistake in your class. I'd really like to talk about it. Your opinion or your view may or may not be correct, and this is what's going on." . . . That's got to be necessary in college.

Discussing mental health issues: [A] lot of the instructors that we hire . . . were trained to teach undergrads. Now, there's that parallel again, what do you do with a college student who has full-blown Asperger's? What do you do about the college student that has a depression issue? What do you do about the students . . . very soft-spoken and shy versus the ones very boisterous and they want everybody to notice them?

He proceeded to provide an explicit example of a student who fell asleep in class during the 2017 summer program and again drew an analogy to his experience with college students:

I tell my colleagues, . . . there's a perception that college students are different than 9th through 12th graders. It's not really all that different. The difference is that when you're dealing with a college student, . . . you're seeing them as an adult. . . . [I]t's on them, versus 9th through 12th grade, you're going to probably do something about it. You walk through with the young man, "Why were you sleeping in class? Were you up late last night?" . . . Obviously, just like in college, where a professor has the right to remove or dismiss a student from their class, . . . the same thing applies here. (Truman, personal communication, June 16, 2017)

Though the Assistant Director provided numerous more examples, the excerpts provided above illustrate his disposition to promote SEL opportunities based on his prior experience.

Planning Power: Ability to Design a Program That Encompasses the Program Leaders' Values, Interests, Skill and Knowledge, and Dispositions

The leaders displayed a highly coordinated planning power, each exerting different influence in the process. Their planning power can be categorized into three themes: 1) hiring staff with similar values and interests, 2) training staff members on socio-emotional skills, and 3) designing a summer schedule reflective of the staff's interests and values. This section focuses on the Director and Assistant Director because they planned most of the summer program. I will describe the roles of the counselors when appropriate.

Hiring. Director Rosie intentionally hired staff who reflected her interests and values. For example, she valued social and cultural awareness, and this was reflected in hiring: "I think we have a very diverse instructional staff, ethnically, racially, and just diversity of thought, diversity of programming" (Rosie, personal communication, June 15, 2017). One of the counselors, Holden, provided the rationale for the hiring decisions, explaining "Our staff is pretty diverse. That's one of the things that we do on purpose, really. . . . We wanted to make sure . . . the kids have someone that look[s] like them, too" (Holden, personal communication, June 16, 2017).

Training. The summer training remained uneven in length and content, depending on the summer staff's role. The leaders offered four different trainings for the summer staff. Teachers received two non-required training sessions on pedagogy, which covered techniques regarding students' self-awareness and self-management. Those who attended might have benefited from the techniques focused on the "growth mind-set," a belief that one's cognitive abilities can be further developed (Dweck, 2006). The trainer explained her approach:

[T]alking about things like student motivation and giving students feedback, . . . those types of topics are important. Because many of these kids, maybe, don't feel motivated in school or they don't have family members or other mentors to make them feel motivated . . . I would say I spent about 50% of the time talking about feedback, setting goals, motivation, where these students are at in their lives. (Brooklyn, personal communication, June 20, 2017)

The Director shared the same sentiment, describing the pedagogy class as one "intentionally developed to assist our instructors who may have not worked with high school students from backgrounds such as our students" (Rosie, personal communication, June 15, 2017). The leaders also provided some informal training that helped the staff learn about the goal of the program and the leaders' approach and expectations. The Director, Rosie, explained:

Some of [the training] is what we expect and some of it is history about what our program is and how holistically [we] serve [the students]. Even though it's an academic program, we kind of want them to be aware that, if they have an issue with the students' behavior, for example, it's not like high school where you would send them to the principal and principal would switch classes with them. It's not like college where you can kick someone out and they're done. We have a very important job in . . . not sending them home to repeat the same thing. Anyway, some of that message is shared with the instructors, too; because in the middle of the year, if they just have a student that is just not working for them, we don't want them to think, "We're just going to take him home and you won't have to deal with him." (Rosie, personal communication, June 15, 2017)

Along with this informal training, she described a final training: ethical literacy. The training was on how the instructors could incorporate ethical decision-making content in their curriculum. The training included lessons on moral and ethical dilemmas, and the trainers asked the instructors to consider potential outcomes and how the students might engage with similar material. Two instructors who attended the training described it as more "food for thought" and "lacking in follow-through." This training was also not mandatory for instructors.

Finally, the residential staff received an intensive training. The staff oversaw the students after classes. Before the program started, the staff trained for an entire week during which they learned about the rules, regulations, and how to help students with SEL. Each day, Monday through Friday, the staff trained session from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm.

Three aspects of the residential staff's training were specific to promoting SEL opportunities. First, each training began with an ice-breaker, which promoted relationships skills and modeled activities the staff could use with their students. Second, the training included a nearly two-hour session on developing trusting relationships, helping students enjoy their summer, and drawing healthy boundaries. Third, the training included about two hours on listening skills and a discussion on disciplining students while being responsive to their needs. The trainer emphasized being assertive but open to compromise and ending each conversation with an invitation for further discussion, improving the situation not punishing the student.

Designing the schedule. The summer program and some of its programming was grant-required and the leaders could promote other skills only after providing these services. Against this backdrop, the leaders' efforts to promote SEL opportunities through required and permissible services were impressive. The required services included academic courses, such as science, math, English, research classes, and college preparation courses. These core courses occupied the majority of the students' time. Yet, the leaders were intentional in promoting SEL opportunities throughout these courses: "[Promoting SEL is] interwoven throughout the courses. . . . For example, the deliberations piece, that teamwork and communication aspect is already woven within it" (Truman, personal communication, July 20, 2017). The Director shared the same goal. She explained "[the] goal may be to [do] calculus, but in the process of doing calculus, . . . 'I want them to be developed as better world citizens'" (Rosie, personal communication, July 20, 2017).

The leaders were even more intentional in promoting SEL opportunities through the permissible services. The summer schedule was infused with extra-curricular activities

that promoted SEL opportunities including community service opportunities where students might have learned empathy and a dreams/goals interactive seminar where the students could become more self-attuned to their own dreams and goals. In total, the leaders offered 25 extra-curriculars, varying in length and frequency, from daily 50-minute sessions to one-time, two-hour events.

The rationale undergirding the design of the schedule was to further SEL opportunities. For example, the Director shared one instance in which she changed the schedule to further SEL:

[We] adjusted the schedule so . . . they had *siesta* time as a choice, that's giving them the ability to choose what they want to do. They have some freedom in study hall to choose what they want to do [as well.] (Rosie, personal communication, July 20, 2017)

She intended to give students the liberty to practice self-awareness and self-management. The Assistant Director, Truman, also described a field trip as an activity that promoted "teamwork and communication" and "problem-solving," i.e., relationship skills and ethical decision making. Counselor Holden described the intentionality in providing these permissible services as follows:

[W]e do things intentionally, like as far as having smaller groups. [The instructors and residential mentors] get to know that certain group [of students] better. . . . We do a lot of team-building. We have the [residential coordinator] . . . [who worked to] make it a community in the dorms." (Holden, personal communication, July 28, 2017)

While less of a focus of this article, the larger study supports that the design of the summer schedule did lead all summer staff to consistently promote SEL opportunities.

Discussion

Several points are worth noting based on the data analysis. First, this case study illustrates the significance of planning power as a capability that helps educational leaders implement policy aims. The leaders shared similar values, interests, and dispositions, and these reinforced their will to implement. However, will alone is not enough; it takes an impetus to transform will into action. The planning power was the impetus here. The leaders had the ability to plan and execute a highly coordinated summer program that would promote SEL opportunities.

Second, as a critical case (Flyvbjerg, 2006), this case suggests that if the leaders in this program, all who were highly committed to promoting SEL opportunities, struggled with gaps in skill and knowledge, less committed programs are most likely struggling with similar gaps. Extant research documents the importance of developing skill and knowledge as a capability in successful implementation (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Cohen et al., 2007; Strunk & McEachin, 2013). At the same time, that the leaders were effective in promoting SEL opportunities regardless of these gaps was likely attributed to their values, vision, and resources. This study, then, also suggests that skill and knowledge by themselves might play a lesser role than generally thought.

One explanation for the leaders' success in promoting SEL opportunities is the concept of coherence (Glaser, 2005). According to Glaser, high performing organizations are in large part successful because they are coherent across their organizational system—a coherence generally driven by similar vision and goals. In this case, the program was

coherent vis-à-vis the leaders' capabilities. While the leaders did not articulate to each other their goals to promote SEL opportunities, they were driven by similar capabilities (interests, values, and dispositions) that led them to promote SEL opportunities consistently throughout the summer. Subsequently, the leaders' planning power helped them implement that vision and follow through with their goals.

Another potential explanation of the leaders' capability to support SEL learning is the concept of compensation. Though the leaders lacked knowledge and skill about SEL, they were able to promote SEL opportunities because other capabilities compensated for their lack of skill and knowledge. The idea of compensation supports Cohen et al.'s (2007) description of relational capability: "Capability is relational It waxes and wanes in interaction with the aims that the policies set, the instruments that they deploy, and the environment in which policy and practice subsist" (p. 540). In this study, the leaders lacked specific knowledge and skills about promoting SEL opportunities, but other capabilities in relation to skill and knowledge supported their efforts. The leaders' ability to promote SEL opportunities was possible only with the interaction of all capabilities.

Implications

This study has implications for theory, research, and practice. Theoretically, this case illustrates the usefulness of using a policy implementation framework to understand efforts toward a more just society. The study also underscores the importance of planning power as a capability that transforms will into action. As for research, this study provides an example of successful policy implementation, albeit with some gaps described above, and underscores the significance of leaders in the process. The study leaves further questions open: Were the leaders' efforts successful in helping students develop socio-emotional skills? How can leaders build their staff's capability? Are some capabilities so essential that, if missing, they cannot be compensated for via other capabilities? Regarding practice, the results suggest that leaders might be more successful in policy implementation by trying to achieve more coherence in their educational efforts through, for example, hiring staff who share similar interests, values, and dispositions. Coherence across these programs can promote access for underrepresented students who stand to benefit from consistent practices that further socio-emotional skills and, in turn, social justice.

Conclusion

This article offers a missing piece in rethinking social justice. Extant research now shows that socio-emotional skills are essential to academic and life success (e.g., Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Therefore, helping students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, develop these skills becomes critical. This study illustrates how a compensatory education program promoted SEL opportunities. The case is an example of successful policy implementation amidst admitted weaknesses and a lack of clear mandates in the program's federal policy to promote SEL opportunities. The case serves as an exemplar for other programs in similar contexts and warrants further investigation to better understand how to improve weaknesses.

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