ECE Leadership: Developing Resilience During Periods of Uncertainty in Hong Kong

Anika Saxena, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Betty Yau, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Abstract

The current COVID19 pandemic has required several, mostly at short notice, school modifications. School leaders and educators have always worked in a complex world to ensure continuity for students, families, and communities. This notion has contributed to controversies about when schools should be closed; what actions, protective measures school leaders should take to benefit the school community without stopping teaching and learning opportunities for students. In this study, we explore how leadership in the early childhood education sector in Hong Kong is coping during this period to build resilience. This paper uses constant comparative analysis to illustrate the role of school principals' immediate reaction, short-term recovery, and time for reflection. The data collected from surveys and interviews are organised through coding, and themes were generated and further supported by case studies from the field to develop conceptual understanding. The article closes with a conceptual analysis that focuses on three sets of factors: dispositional, emotional, and contextual, to explain the changing role of ECE principals in uncertain times to develop resilience in teams and the ECE community.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Organisational Crisis, Leadership, Emotions, Resilience, Teams, Health Care

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Introduction and Literature Review

Globally, the COVID-19 epidemic has affected education, alleviating regional and global inequalities before the pandemic's onset. This disturbance manifests itself in various ways, from widespread withdrawal in some countries to unequal access and a strong dependence on others' parental efforts. The pandemic's disruption of our educational system revealed its inherent chaos, a product of the system's capitalist philosophy. However, the disruption also offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine global education. Further global threats to educational provisions, such as extreme climate disasters, are likely soon. Thus, it is essential to understand how we can foster resilience, continuity, and equity in education in calm and crises.

Periods of Uncertainty and Their Effects on Schools (Protest and Covid19)

School leaders and teachers in Hong Kong endured a couple of unprecedented school years in 2019–2021, marked by widespread civil unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders faced significant stress as they navigated these events, with the school community having both face-to-face and virtual learning environments. School teams developed a crisis management system and built their resilience to overcome these challenges. It is noticed that even these circumstances increased leaders' and teachers' motivation by demonstrating a more significant commitment to teaching by taking care of everyone's wellbeing, team building, a strong desire to journey with students through adversity, and a desire to equip students with tools to navigate uncertain future circumstances that are building resilience (Wong and Moorhouse, 2020). These crises demonstrate how critical emergency preparedness and cooperation are for global communities. In times of such insecurity, clear and calm communication is critical.

Characteristics of Early Years Leadership in Hong Kong Kindergartens

In Hong Kong, most research on school leadership and resilience has concentrated on primary and secondary schools, with only a few examining leadership in early childhood education. The purpose of this paper is to share the results of a study on strategic leadership in Hong Kong's kindergartens. It discusses the difficulties kindergarten leaders in Hong Kong face and the importance of strategic leadership practice. The article then discusses the findings of a study on practices deemed valuable by kindergarten leaders in Hong Kong. Apart from the ability to plan and manage effectively in school, this study demonstrates that leaders' reflective, flexible, and systems thinking abilities, as well as their willingness to engage in ongoing professional and network development, are critical for leading today's kindergartens. Additionally, this study demonstrates the critical role of contextual intelligence in strategic leadership. The significance of this study is in its contribution to the investigation of leadership practices in early childhood education, the need for additional research into how well kindergarten leaders practice strategic leadership, and the implications for the development of principal preparation programs.

Leadership at Times of Crisis

Leaders from different industries were forced to make difficult choices: companies were closed, workers were laid off, and projects were left unfinished, among other dramatic changes to combat the virus's spread. Amid the crisis and school closures, education was supposed to continue in a virtual model. Yukl and Mahsud (2010) assert that resolving this crisis and

sustaining education in these difficult times will require strong, astute, adaptive, and innovative educational leadership.

Educational leaders' work is inherently complex. It entails policy, community, partnerships, management, activities, and dynamic decision-making involving numerous moving parts and often divergent stakeholder perspectives. Schools and school systems are also adapting to rapidly changing situations, the increasing complexity of the lives of those they represent, and external narratives throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. School leaders are judged by public, political, and media opinion. During this emergency, distance learning and teaching in ECE was not a well-planned and deliberate paradigm of best practice that we have shifted to – or "pivoted to," as common terminology suggests – but a temporary solution to a crisis. We are doing the best we can under the conditions, with little lead time and limited upskilling, and the majority of it is less than ideal. Through research and in our own lived experience of leading a teaching and learning team in a Hong Kong school, we examine the tensions that school leaders are currently experiencing in this state of global emergency.

In these crises, leadership knowledge alone is insufficient to foster resilience in the school community. Sensitivity to global change, cultural awareness, reflection, the capacity to ask critical questions, and compassion are also required of school leaders (Kochan and Locke, 2009; Lumby et al., 2009). School principals must be sensitive to changing school contexts and knowledgeable about a variety of 'non-traditional' leadership perspectives, behaviours, and skills to effectively address the challenges of globalisation and fluid social situations and to lead a school toward improvement (Ewington et al., 2008; Southworth, 2002; Wong, 2011). Meanwhile, it is believed that the prevalent leadership styles in schools are problematic as well (Bottery, 2001). Transactional leadership, which emphasises offering various forms of rewards contingent on members' performance (Blau, 1964; Burns, 1979), has been criticised for two reasons: first, it presupposes a stable and predictable environment in which the only variable is leadership. Second, it ignores the people-oriented mechanism by which employees may depart from their beliefs and culture.

Additionally, *transformational leadership* has been criticised for its association with a non-rational charismatic leadership style used in anti-educational ways to gain followers' commitment (Bottery, 2001; Nye Jr, 2014). The vision for an organisation may be determined solely by senior management rather than through a democratic decision-making process. The concept of transformational leadership has omitted the possibility of followers participating actively in the leadership process, and "there is a risk that transformational leadership will be abused, with followers encouraged to adopt a vision that is not right or appropriate" (Leeson et al., 2012: 228). Pisapia et al. (2009) emphasise the importance of school leaders having a firm grasp that traditional practices of 'looking in' should be replaced by an awareness of 'looking out' as the educational environment develops the complexity. Principals should be strategic leaders capable of strategically leading their schools in response to external changes and challenges. There is no one-size-fits-all definition for strategic leadership. The majority of theoretical and empirical work on strategic leadership has been conducted in non-educational settings over the last decades, and scholarship on strategic leadership in education remains exceptionally scarce. Numerous researchers have questioned what competencies strategic leaders should possess in addition to the necessary abilities of information retrieval, developing shared visions, teamwork, strategic planning, driving to excel, and improvement (Aydin et al., 2014; Carter and Greer, 2013; Eacott, 2011; Freeman and Wilmes, 2009; Gu and Johansson, 2012; Russette et al., 2008).

According to Pisapia, *strategic leadership* is related to a leader's capacity and wisdom in making "significant decisions about ends, actions, and tactics in ambiguous environments" (cited in Aydin et al., 2014: 3). Gibney et al. (2009) distinguish strategic leadership for a knowledge-based economy from traditional hierarchical leadership by emphasising collaboration, interdisciplinarity, integrated vision, bringing diverse networks together, time-consuming, holistic, people-centred, and openness. College leaders must "satisfy a diverse range of stakeholders in an increasingly complex educational arena" and take into account "not just curriculum and attainment goals, but broader community issues," according to discussions of strategic leadership in college management (Iszatt-White, 2010: 414). Eacott (2011: 40) emphasises the importance of examining how cultural, social, historical, and political forces interact in a given context. Strategic leaders must develop an understanding of how different groups conceptualise the organisation and overcome the challenges posed by divergent and sometimes conflicting stakeholder expectations by seizing opportunities as they arise, carefully considering external factors, and carefully planning the pace and scale of change wherever it is appropriate for their organisation (Carter and Greer, 2013; Eacott, 2011; Papastephanou et al., 2020). Apart from opportunities for reflection and networking, studies on leadership preparation indicate that contextual intelligence, or awareness of societal and organisational culture, is another critical competency of influential aspiring school leaders (Lumby et al., 2009). Caldwell (2009) asserts that strategic leadership in school administration is defined by the leaders' ability to identify megatrends and stay current on threats and opportunities in educational settings. Nye Jr (2014: 121) also believes that, in addition to the conventional soft and hard powers, effective leadership requires 'the skills of contextual intelligence, an intuitive diagnostic ability that enables a leader to align strategies and tactics with objectives in order to create smart policies in new situations.' Contextual intelligence is thus critical for strategic leadership because it entails the ability to "distinguish trends in the face of complexity" (Nye Jr, 2014: 121). Contextual intelligence implies that leaders should view their organisation and its problems holistically when exercising strategic leadership. This is a reference to the application of systems thinking to organisational leadership.

Systems thinking can provide a new perspective on problems and objectives by viewing them as components of larger structures rather than isolated events (Senge et al. 2000: 78). Eacott (2011: 41–44) concurs with Senge that "the individual significance of any event or action is but one element in a continuous continuum of historical events and actions and future events and actions," and that "a single snapshot is an unreliable predictor of future success..." Strategic leadership places a premium on viewing the organisation holistically, and strategic leaders must connect the dots between the parts and the whole and the present and the past and future when confronted with problems and changes. Apart from systems thinking, Pisapia et al. (2005) and Pang and Pisapia (2012) argue that reframing and reflection are the cognitive processes required for strategic leadership practice. Reframing is the process of examining the same situation from a variety of angles, while reflection is the process of unpacking the assumptions and values that underpin practices. It is necessary to stand sufficiently apart from existing values and beliefs to engage in reframing and reflection. Strategic leaders must engage in reflective dialogue with themselves and others to uncover hidden assumptions, think creatively, and contextualise scenarios to gain a clear picture of the situation.

Lumby et al. (2009) emphasise the importance of *maintaining connections* to the field when developing leadership preparation programs. The establishment of networks is a form of social capital development that contributes to the sustainability of a business, and thus the establishment of networks for managing external relationships is critical for strategic leadership (Maak, 2007). Improved social networking will increase knowledge sharing,

exposing leaders to alternative perspectives and broadening their horizons (Cheuk, 2007). Connecting with a broader field of practice and other leaders stimulates new thinking about the issues and challenges confronting leaders. Consistent with this view, Hitt and Ireland (2002), believe that strategic leadership contributes to the development of social capital and thus contributes to an organisation's value creation. As a result, developing a professional network that facilitates leaders' communication and connection to the outside world would become another aspect of strategic educational leadership.

Literature Conclusion

Contemporary research on leadership in schools is also beginning to emerge in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is still too early to make sense of schools' responses to the pandemic, scholars are attempting to comprehend the crisis's early stages. However, a substantial portion of this work has been theoretical or conceptual rather than empirical. Bagwell (2020), for example, noted that the pandemic is "rapidly redefining schooling and leadership" (p. 31) and urged leaders to lead adaptively, build organisational and individual resilience, and establish distributed leadership structures to ensure optimal institutional response. Similarly, Netolicky (2020) identified numerous tensions faced by school leaders during the pandemic. These tensions range from the need to quickly and slowly balance equity with excellence and accountability to consider human needs and organisational outcomes.

The resilience of a leader and members of an organisation is critical to its success during crisis times. Resilience can be described as the capacity to revert to a state of normalcy (Holling, 1973) or as an emergent property that occurs when an entity learns to adapt to adversity and, in doing so, enhances its capacity to resolve future challenges (Wildavsky, 1988). In times of organisational crisis, leadership is essential and is often conceptualised as the process of exercising social authority (Mumford, Freidrich, Caughron, & Byrne, 2007). Apart from mounting an effective tactical response to an organisational crisis, leaders must also meet a symbolic need for direction and clarification on their constituents (Boin, Kuipers, & Overdijk, 2013).

Research Questions

RQ1: What are some potential *challenges and opportunities* that ECE leaders have experienced during uncertainty in Hong Kong?
RQ2: What *leadership strategies* do ECE leaders use during class suspension to develop the entire team and community's resilience?

Research Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach. The study collected data quantitatively and qualitatively, including case studies, survey questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The case study method is generally utilised to collect more in-depth field experience. The case study technique was chosen to comprehend a phenomenon or event (Merriam,1998). Individuals, students, or staff members of schools who are members of a school community may be chosen as cases (Creswell, 2011). Case study data is utilised to completely describe a case in real life (Yin, 2012). Case studies were triangulated with data from interviews and open-ended survey questions to enhance reliability and validity. The data collection process was staged, beginning with online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to elicit more

detailed information. The data were examined using established standards for evaluating observation objects and indications (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants

Participants in this study were 16 kindergarten leaders and 63 teachers from local and international kindergartens in Hong Kong. Figure-1 indicates that these participants are appointed in different roles in the kindergarten leadership team.
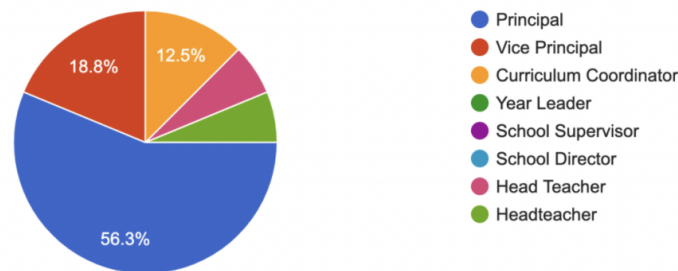

Figure 1: Participants Role in Kindergarten

Figure-2 indicates the equal distribution of classroom instructors of local and international kindergarten types, i.e. eight local and international kindergarten leaders participated in filling the survey questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed online using a Google Form.
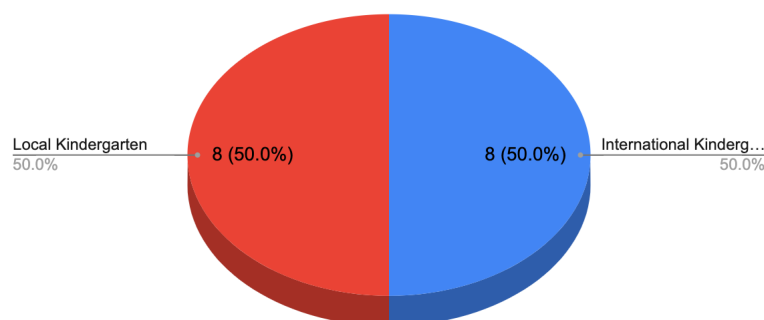

Figure 2: Participants Distribution Through the Type of Kindergarten

Figure 3-4-5 indicates demographic characteristics such as gender, length of teaching experience, and teacher's education level. Figure 2 indicates that 93.7% of female and 6.3% of male respondents participated in the study.
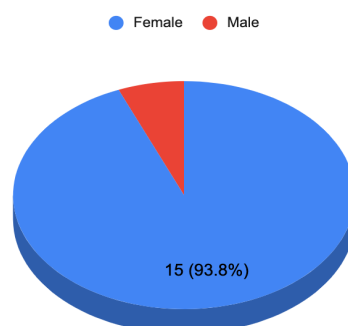

Figure 3: Gender Distribution

Figure-3 indicates that most teachers have 11-15 years of teaching experience, with over 65% of participants having more than 11 years of teaching experience. Figure-4 indicates that most of the teachers who participated in this study hold a postgraduate degree.
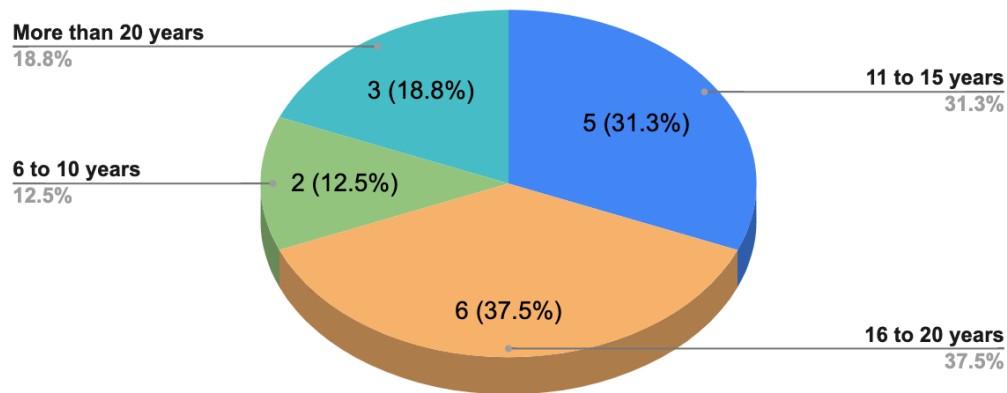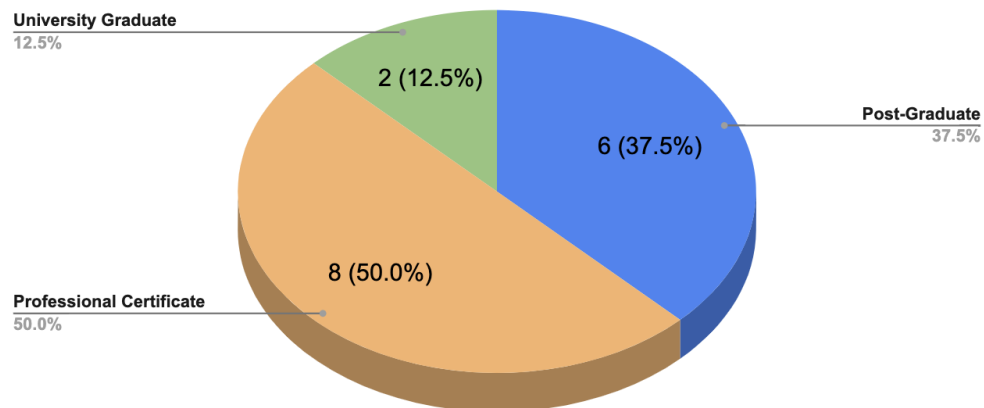

Figure 4: Length of Teaching Experience

Figure 5: Leaders' Educational Level

Data Collection

The data collection process was divided into two stages. The first part involved surveying kindergarten leaders in Hong Kong. The survey consisted of twenty questions, ten of which were demographic, and ten were research-related. It was administered via a Google Form. The questions were structured per the appropriate literature and the research's purpose: to study the educational, psychological, and social dimensions of the classroom instructor. The survey was conducted with 16 respondents from December 15, 2020, to March 23, 2021. Following collecting survey data, a transcript of each respondent's responses with initial codes was created.

The second data-gathering stage was interviewing 12 kindergarten leaders who answered semi-structured, open-ended questions in the survey. The researchers developed interview themes based on the primary code collected from the findings of the first stage. Online Zoom interviews were performed online for 30-45 minutes for each respondent.

Data Analysis

To define, appraise, and establish a theme shared by participants, we used inductive and thematic analytics ((Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Each participant's responses, particularly in the initial stage, were coded using keywords to avoid recurrence. The NVivo 12 software was used to assist researchers with coding and categorization. Nodes and cases were used to organize the data from surveys and interviews. Thematic maps depict the organization of concepts at various levels and then examine possible connections between concepts. The study team then considered both codes and categorizations and the possibility of combining codes to streamline them. This inductive approach enabled the identification of themes from participants' responses to the research questions (Liu, 2016).

Findings and Discussion

The findings are divided into two sections following our study questions. The next part addresses the difficulties and possibilities ECE leaders have encountered and highlights the instructional practices leaders have utilised to build the resilience of their school community. Additionally, findings will be compared and contrasted between behaviours in kindergartens that follow domestic and international curricula, prior use of technology-integrated lesson delivery, and practice during the class suspension.

RQ 1: What are some potential challenges and opportunities that ECE leaders have experienced during uncertainty in Hong Kong?

Figure 6: Themes from Data (Word Cloud)

1.   School-Wide Challenges for Leaders

Figure 7 outlines the fourteen school-wide challenges for school leaders. Maintaining quality teaching and learning, and partnerships with parents are the main categories that were highlighted amongst survey and interview findings and will be referred to throughout both of our research questions. Business sustainability, staff morale and motivation, and financial instability were also very common perceptions of leadership challenges in given crises. It is a common problem discussed by leaders that looking at school closures parents often withdrew

their children from kindergarten. Some leaders reflected that parental understanding to develop online learning is also a challenge.

"Parents have a misconception that understanding online learning means teachers are not doing much. However, the reality is that teachers have to do a lot of preparation to make this online learning accessible and productive for young learning."

88% of leaders were convinced that social interaction within the staff, parents through online meetings and in online lessons was very time consuming and was a cause of stress. Staff training to use new platforms was also a challenge. However, schools conducted many online and face-to-face workshops to train teachers. The other major areas of the challenge were to provide a consistent learning and teaching environment for students; to enhance parental participation as they might also be struggling with work-family life balance situations. Digital devices and software was not a major concern raised by leaders but in some schools that was also a problem. The last but not least challenge was to deal with logistics and handle everyday situations, to solve problems that were new to everyone. The frequency of themes and related words and phrases can be seen in Table 1.
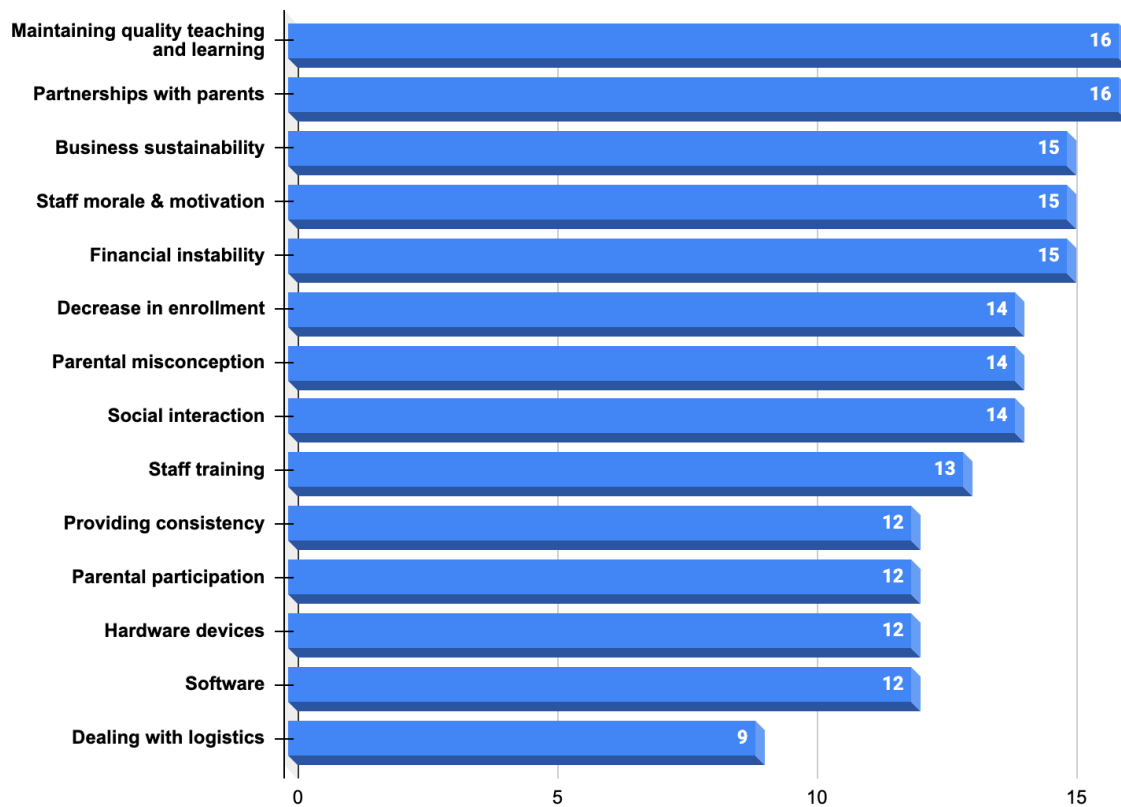

Figure 7: School-Wide Challenges for Leaders

Table 1. School-wide challenges for leaders		
Main Category	**N, ~ %**	**Representative words, phrases, statements**
Maintaining quality teaching and learning	16,100%	Provision of online learning, whilst also providing in-person child care; managing expectations of stakeholders; supporting teachers workload in delivering online and offline learning engagements.
Partnerships with parents	16, 100%	Working to lead and support parents to deliver online learning activities at home; Finding innovative ways to enhance teaching resources available to parents during a pandemic situation - availability of library books for borrowing and learning packs of materials sent home.
Business sustainability	15, 94%	Decreased enrollment, maintaining a positive facade whilst battling for the survival of the school; Student withdrawal and decrease in enrollment.
Staff morale & motivation	15, 94%	A huge challenge, especially when the team were required to take some unpaid leave; constant changes made it difficult to keep staff positive as every aspect of life was subject to new adjustments.
Financial instability	15, 94%	Survival of school sustainability given constantly falling enrollment; unpredictable cash flow; need to keep staff on payroll.
Decrease in enrollment	14, 88%	As families moved overseas to avoid the Covid virus, there was a steep decline in enrollments, which had a huge impact on school sustainability, as well as team morale; dark times were unprecedented.
Parental misconception	14, 88%	The parent community were very much reliant on social media streams to find information; schools were reactive to the changing situation, rather than proactive.
Social interaction	14, 88%	Strictly limited and controlled due to social distancing regulations, even parents waiting outside schools to collect children was deemed as a 'gathering' - impact on school operations, as well as consistency for children, parents and school staff.
Staff training	13, 81%	Creativity required to maintain ongoing professional development; new modes of delivery of online learning required staff training for use of platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom and video call etiquette.
Providing consistency	12, 75%	Social routines being maintained was essential to children's development; schools provided a care model over an education model, to best provide routines and consistent relationships for young children.
Parental participation	12, 75%	A high level of parent support was required to ensure children had ongoing learning experiences in home settings; parents had to multitask and support children's home learning, as well as work from home - extremely challenging.
Hardware devices	12, 75%	Families with siblings had limited access to electronic devices to support remote learning, and timings were tight - older siblings had priority to access hardware to support their learning.
Software	12, 75%	Software provision in place was a real benefit - online applications were quickly adopted to facilitate communication and provision of ongoing learning - teachers were creative with different means of utilising software to make a positive impact on teaching to support learning.
Dealing with logistics	9, 56%	Changing circumstances made this all the more challenging, flexibility and transparency in decision making were key to finding ways to continue operations.

Table 1. School-Wide Challenges for Leaders

2.   Personal Challenges for School Leaders

Figure 8 outlines the seven personal challenges for school leaders. Personal fatigue and stress and work-family life balance are the main categories that were highlighted amongst survey and interview findings and will be referred to throughout both of our research questions. Maintaining positive communication with different stakeholders; balancing the role by being empathetic at the same time maintaining agility, and time management were issues raised by 87% of school leaders. Keeping things up to date and flexibility required to fit in various situations were leading to the deficit in morale and motivation added by 81% of the participants. 75% of leaders agree that the impact of dealing with day-to-day situations is unhealthy for the well-being of school leaders. The frequency of themes and related words and phrases can be seen in Table 2.
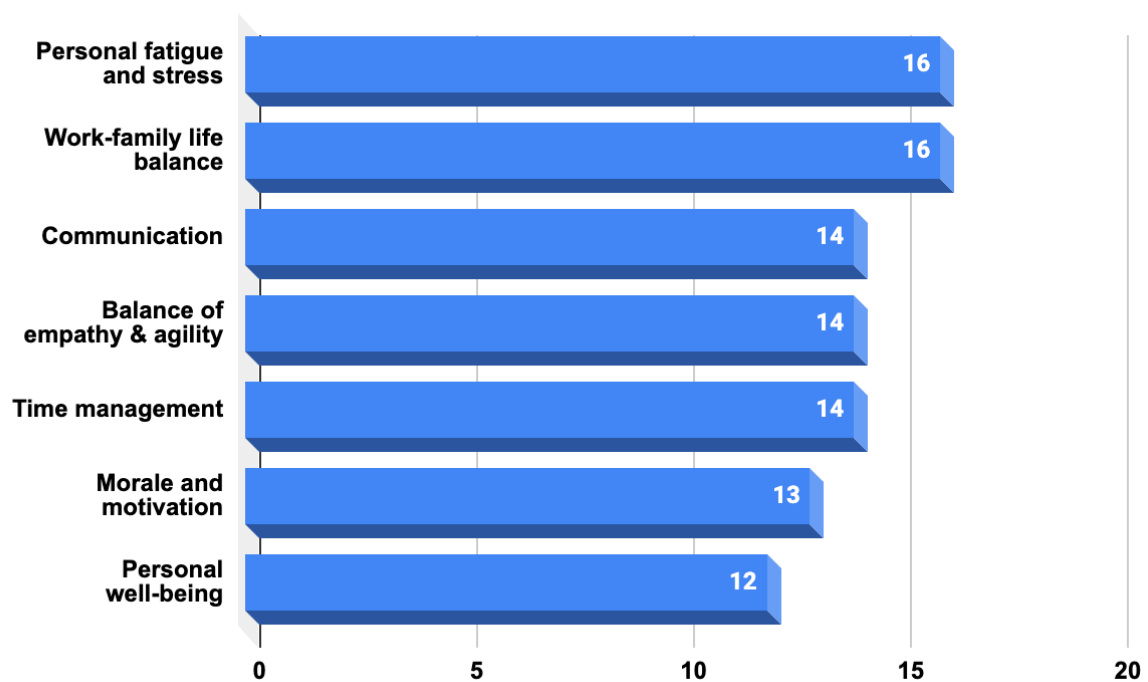

Figure 8: Personal Challenges for School Leaders

Table 2. Challenges: Leadership and me		
Main Category	**N, ~%**	**Representative words, phrases, statements**
Personal fatigue and stress	16, 100%	Unprecedented pressure to maintain a positive facade at times when everything was constantly changing. As a leader, it was extremely tough, yet there was no choice but to continue moving forward for the sake of the team's morale and motivation.
Work-family life balance	16, 100%	As part of a very digital era, continued access to news streams and being available online meant the work-life balance was constantly skewed towards work. Personal decision taken to reduce exposure to certain news channels, otherwise overkill on negative data and information.
Communication	14, 87%	Clear communication - transparent and decisive decision making were all key to delivering news during the pandemic. Open door policy is vital to maintaining strong communication channels.
Balance of empathy & agility	14, 87%	Empathy to different stakeholder interests is vital, different perspectives to be understood, with consequences of decisions made requiring flexibility - team and management agility were vital for school survival.
Time management	14, 87%	Maintain work-life balance; necessity to check news sources, and to manage various demands on time; very stressful times!
Morale and motivation	13, 81%	Keeping self-motivation high was hard, finding ways to stay mentally strong when social and physical outdoor opportunities were severely limited; leaders needed to lead, failure was not an option.
Personal well-being	12, 75%	Supporting myself and others, checking in with peers to connect and support each other. Taking time to 'take a mental break' by having a change of scenery, such as a walk outdoors, or having treats - coffee, cake, and volunteering.

Table 2. Personal Challenges for School Leaders

RQ2: What *leadership strategies* do ECE leaders use during class suspension to develop the entire team and community's resilience?
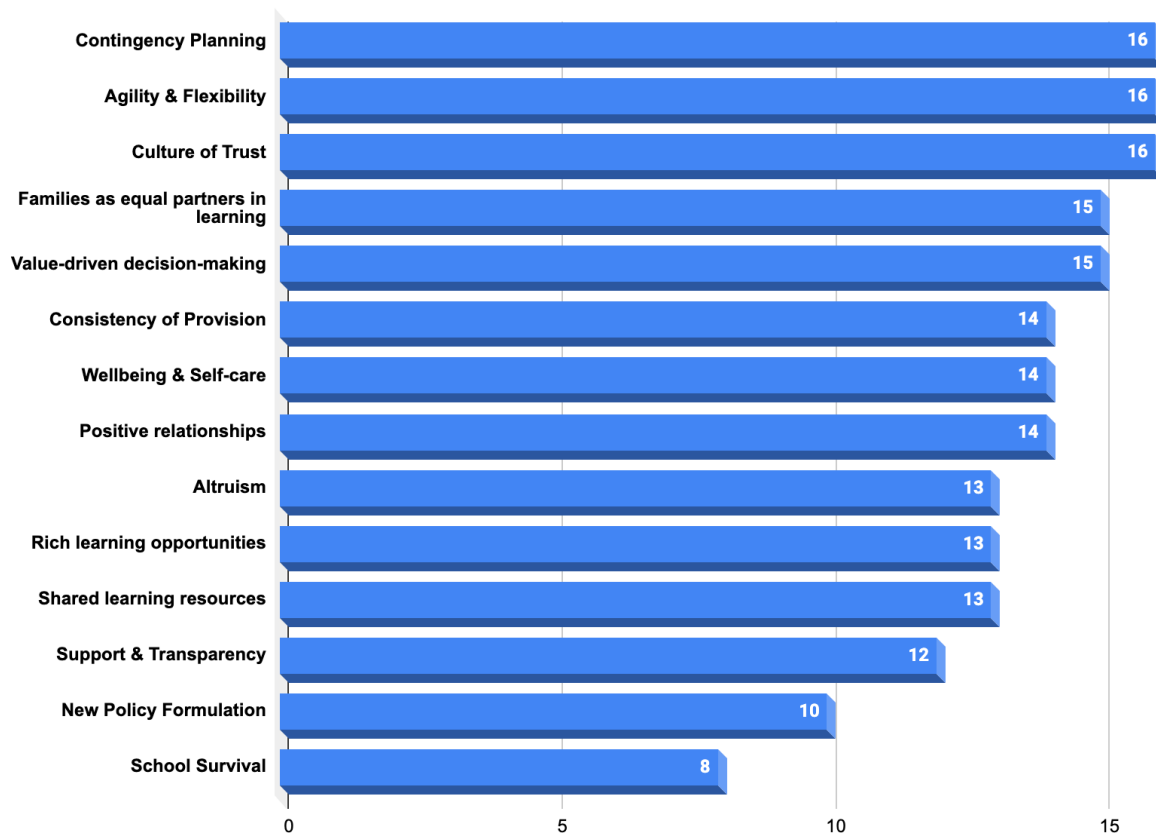

Figure 9: Leadership Strategies to Develop Resilience

Findings from frequency chart figure-9 indicate that 100 % of participants indicated that leaders should have contingency plans; agility & flexibility, and a culture of trust developed in their school. 94% of participants indicated that families should be treated as equal partners in learning and leaders should adopt value-driven decision making during crisis situations. 88% of participants indicated that leaders should develop positive relationships from the school community; develop consistency of provision in order to develop shared trust through interactions and shared values and vision, and should adopt strategies to support the well-being of self and others. Altruism, rich learning opportunities with respect to the shared learning culture of the school community and sharing of learning resources in terms of staff, students need to conduct online teaching and learning is recognised by 81% of participants. 75% of participants stated that support and transparency entail staff and parents to be well informed to share positive and negative feedback. Some participants 62% shared that the formation of the new policy can lead to a strategic implementation contingency plan so new policies needed to be put in place in order to cope with the changing situation. 50% of the participants indicated that it was hard for schools to survive as there is a large dropout rate with reduced enrollment compared to 'normal' times. Table 3 shows leadership strategies to develop resilience and explains real themes, with a number of participants, percentage and short description of themes.

Theme	N, ~%	Description
Contingency Planning	16, 100%	The purpose of contingency planning is to position an organization to respond effectively to an emergency and its potential humanitarian consequences. Creating a contingency plan entails making advanced decisions about human and financial resource management, coordination and communication procedures, and being aware of a range of technical and logistical responses.
Agility & Flexibility	16, 100%	Flexible leaders have the ability to change their plans to match the reality of the situation. As a result, they maintain productivity during transitions or periods of chaos.
Culture of Trust	16, 100%	Trust is a highly effective leadership skill. Indeed, leaders who earn their employees' trust are more likely to implement changes that improve organizational performance. Establishing a culture of trust begins at the top and necessitates a candid and transparent leadership style.
Families as equal partners in learning	15, 94%	Family Engagement is a collaborative effort between families, educators, and community partners to advance children's learning and development.
Value-driven decision-making	15, 94%	Values-based decision-making helps ensure that everyone in the organization understands why a particular choice was made and how it refers to the company's overall mission.
Consistency of Provision	14, 88%	Consistency in provision refers to the process of establishing and reinforcing individual and organizational trust through interactions, structures, and strategies that demonstrated alignment with values and vision and resulted in success. It has been achieved through distributed leadership, where those share responsibilities and accountability with relevant skills and expertise.
Wellbeing & Self-care	14, 88%	Leaders should take care of their health and well-being and their team's, as it will impact the effectiveness and engagement. Instead of working to exhaustion, leaders should start developing a self-care strategy to manage the job's demands.
Positive relationships	14, 88%	Building strong work *relationships* with both the people leaders manage and get directed is essential to be *healthy and* efficient. Positive relationships within the team, parental community and territory wise kindergarten community is essential.
Altruism	13, 81%	Altruistic leadership is defined as the act of guiding others in order to improve their well-being or emotional state. The Altruistic Leadership style is founded on empathy, kindness, active listening, and selflessness. An Altruistic Leader should possess these abilities or characteristics, in addition to general leadership characteristics.
Rich learning opportunities	13, 81%	Effective schools are communities of learners with a collaborative culture and shared responsibility for developing effective teaching practices and increased student achievement at their core. Teachers cannot be expected to foster vibrant learning communities among their students if they lack a parallel professional community to nourish them (Department of Education & Training, 2004b).
Shared learning resources	13, 81%	Leaders think about resources not only to conduct online learning but also on the other side if students have access to the learning and teaching online and other resources to perform learning tasks.
Support & Transparency	12, 75%	Transparency in leadership entails keeping employees informed, sharing positive and negative feedback (but not excessively), and accepting sincere feedback from team members.
New Policy Formulation	10, 62%	Strategic implementation of any new company policy or program requires the involvement of all affected stockholders and clear execution guidelines.
School Survival	8, 50%	School leaders today face two necessary questions: how to survive and how to capitalize on new opportunities.

Table 3. Leadership Strategies to Develop Resilience

Discussion

This research aims to examine how a small sample of ECE leaders based in Hong Kong attempt to develop a model of resilience in the face of the current crisis. In response to the first research question, the findings indicate that resilience-building is critical for leaders professionally and

personally. Despite the apparent overwhelming nature of these challenges, the leaders who participated in this study demonstrated that the more time and effort they devote to resolving them, the more opportunities for practical resilience-building approaches they create.

The study observes various strategies used to develop a solid and robust school community in response to the second research question. These strategies are based on success stories and amplify the ability to provide practical and high-quality Early Childhood practice and 'wellness & care' for the school community. Leaders' strategies provide opportunities to deliver educational content while maintaining a healthy level of contact with students, shared opportunities and resources, sustainability through peer learning opportunities even in the absence of training, and almost no prior experience dealing with remote or distance education while remaining confident as a team to support one another and the community.

The research establishes conclusively four key themes: construct, create, mentor, and engage. All educational leaders must implement these in order to strengthen the school community's resilience. Table 4 summarizes the theme, its components, and the dimension's description.

Theme	Components	Related Leadership Resilience Dimension (Specific to ECE)
Construct	Building Blocks - Contingency Planning - Agility & Flexibility - Culture of Trust	*Re-design and redefine building blocks in crisis situations:* • Identify and re-design a plan designed to take account of possible pros and cons or circumstances • use available resources to teach remotely as well as provide child care services • Respond to the rapid change of practice, including planning and delivery • Incorporate a 'leadership framework for building resilience' when supporting the community and responding sensitively to the changing circumstances of individual families.
Create	Create is to put new dimensions into existence -New Policy Formulation -Consistency of Provision	*Implementation of new procedures to support school community;* *provide rich learning opportunities* • Implement policies that provide equal opportunities • Pedagogy: Play into practice through a virtual lens • Curriculum coverage, including ongoing assessment • Routines and protocols to provide safe learning settings

Mentor	Provide constructive support and advice - Support & Transparency - Wellbeing & Self-care	***Reflect and share good practice;*** ***families as equal partners in learning*** ● Reflect on teaching practices and provide flexibility to the team ● Check-in regularly with teachers, parents, children, peers ● Enhance two-way communication from parents, staff and other community members
Engage	Involve school community - School Survival - Altruism	***Embed learning within caring communities and cultural contexts.*** ● Ensure stability for the school and the team ● selfless concern for the well-being of others.

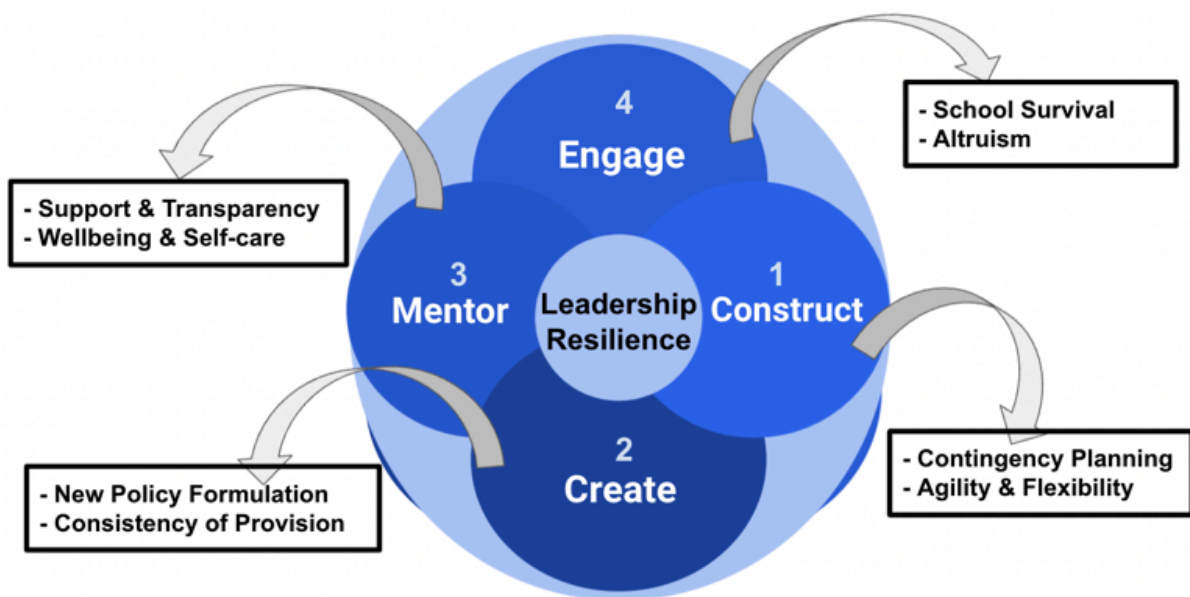Table 4. Leadership Strategies to Develop Resilience

Figure 10: Leadership Framework for Building Resilience (CCME)

Conclusion

A theoretical framework termed the 'Leadership framework for Building Resilience (CCME)' (Figure10) emerged and was established due to the data and extended findings from both the research questions. It is critical to note that the 'Leadership Framework for Resilience (CCME)' evolved from progressive leadership strategies used during the school suspension period. Nonetheless, the validity of this framework can and should be extended to include resilience-building during times of crisis and as a routine leadership practice in general.

Future Directions

Given the small sample size used to generalize findings, it is proposed that future research focus on eliciting more detailed findings from educators across a variety of disciplines in order to address issues (such as those caused by a pandemic) that appear to be beyond our current perceptions and experiences. Such in-depth research may provide a helpful lens through which to view our educational trajectory in the future.

Additionally, the study proposes that leaders' primary focus should be on community resilience-building rather than external challenges. In other words, effectively addressing unexpected change brought about by external factors such as this pandemic will eventually accelerate resilience-building leadership practices in schools.

It is critical to involve the entire school community in the process of change management. In that regard, the study emphasizes the importance of flexibility and an openness to new practices in successfully guiding learning through unpredictable times. Additionally, such a response must include functional partnerships with families and other stakeholders.

Finally, prioritizing relationships, developing instructional leadership strategies, building organisational capacity and giving attention to self-care and care for others should be employed during such times and must serve as the foundation for future dealings with similar external uncertainties. That is to say; this is unlikely to be the last crisis or educational challenge educators face. In that regard, the sustainability of new strategies must be ensured.

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Contact email: Anikareena@gmail.com