



# Confronting COVID: Crisis Leadership, Turbulence, and Self-Care

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School leadership during the pandemic serves as the contextual backdrop for this conceptual article. Specifically, we believe the preparation of today's school leaders must be re-examined to consider the inclusion of frameworks that consider not only how principals might navigate extreme crises but also how they look after themselves and their wellbeing in ways that may curb the chronic stress that often leads to professional burnout. In this article, we tie together three bodies of literature – crisis management, leadership in turbulence, and self-care – and introduce a conceptual framework that may help us reconsider the preparation of today's school leader. These bodies of literature, while not yet broadly studied in education, are key to our understanding of how school leaders can successfully practice their new day-to-day practices after experiencing turmoil under the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** leadership preparation, crisis leadership, turbulence theory, self-care, wellbeing, COVID-19, school leadership

## INTRODUCTION

This generation of school leaders has been forced to confront a number of significant crises. For example, over the last two decades, school leaders have been called to navigate the tragic circumstances surrounding school shootings (e.g., Sandy Hook, Parkland, and Santa Fe), the devastating effects of hurricanes (e.g., Katrina, Harvey, and Sandy), and the general upheaval caused by societal turmoil (e.g., teacher walkouts, racial injustices, and school closures). Yet, because of the severity and nuance of these crises, leaders might benefit from specialized preparation to traverse the sundry conditions associated with leading a school and school community during a pandemic. Nevertheless, during the 2020 spring break, district and school leaders received word that their schools would not physically reopen, as local and state governmental agencies suggested schools should transition to online platforms to reduce the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus.

As schools were asked to close, principals were tasked with serving a diverse range of roles such as chief communicator to school communities, provider of technology, launcher of an online learning platform, logistics manager for food distribution, tracer of the virus, and emotional support for anxious faculty, students, and caregivers. The abrupt interruption of school as “usual” quickly shifted to the “new normal,” where the stressors associated with school leadership increased dramatically. This is particularly significant, as even before the pandemic, scholars had drawn attention to the rising number of principals leaving the profession due to professional burnout attributed to increasingly demanding working conditions (Darmody and Smyth, 2016; Wang et al., 2018; Carpenter and Poerschke, 2020).

School leadership during the pandemic serves as the contextual backdrop for this conceptual article. Specifically, we believe the preparation of today's school leaders might benefit from the inclusion of frameworks that consider how principals might navigate extreme crises and how they look after themselves and their wellbeing in ways that may curb the chronic stress that often leads to professional burnout. In the following sections, we tie together three bodies of literature – crisis management, leadership in turbulence, and self-care – and introduce a conceptual framework that may help us reconsider the orientation of today's school leader to address unexpected and threatening events. While not yet broadly studied in education, these bodies of literature are critical to our understanding of how school leaders can successfully practice their new day-to-day practices after experiencing turmoil under the COVID-19 pandemic.

## CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND CRISIS LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

The purpose of crisis management is to design strategies that help organizations return to normal after a crisis or a risky, unsafe, unexpected event defined by its need for ongoing attention. Often, especially in business, crisis management is studied using cases where a mishap has occurred within or because of the organization (e.g., Coldwell et al., 2012; Jacques, 2012). However, in public services, such as in politics or education, crises regularly include external events that require an immediate response with a plan designed to address a threat and restore organizations and communities (e.g., Cohen et al., 2017). While crisis management, and in turn crisis leadership, might appear to provide an opportunity to prompt reform, the overall purpose is to return to normal rather than to promote change, which poses a challenge when attempting to transition a crisis response into sustained transformation (see Boin and 't Hart, 2003). Because crisis management is studied as a reaction to a disastrous internal event, this literature is connected to risk management and risk assessment. This connection explains the importance assigned to discussions about how to train leaders and staff to avoid organizational crises and how to reduce and evaluate risk once it occurs (McConnell and Drennan, 2006; Muffet-Willett and Kruse, 2009). Common crisis management strategies include goal development and environment analysis, strategy development and evaluation, and strategy implementation and control (Burnett, 1998; Jin et al., 2017). Crisis management research has been critiqued as overly focused on processes (i.e., operations and finance), so scholars have expanded the study of crises to the role of the leader (Jacques, 2012).

The concept of crisis leadership has stemmed from crisis management research. Perhaps, the most prominent role of a leader during a crisis is to claim responsibility for communication. A leader is responsible for communication at critical moments, particularly early in the crisis or pre-crisis, sometimes at the height of the crisis, and when transitioning out of the crisis (Ulmer, 2001; Demiroz and Kapucu, 2012; Jin et al., 2017). Due to the extreme nature of crises, leaders

need to communicate with the community and stakeholders proactively and prepare to engage with media (Lerbinger, 1997; Jin et al., 2017). A leader should portray a singular, cohesive message to prevent confusion, demonstrate involvement, and openly invite constant feedback from community members and stakeholders within the sensitive context (Lucero et al., 2009; Boin et al., 2010). Communication is not the only responsibility of leaders during a crisis. Muffet-Willett and Kruse (2009) explain that leaders who are effective in routine, day-to-day situations are not necessarily successful in a crisis. In fact, due to the nuance of unexpected and risky events, scholars and practitioners question how to train leaders for these unsafe and unfamiliar circumstances. Leaders in a crisis must make decisions in an unknown and complex environment containing possible severe threats while under increased stress and scrutiny (Muffet-Willett and Kruse, 2009). Boin et al. (2005) identified five critical tasks of crisis leadership: sensemaking to diagnose the situation, decision making for a strategy, coordination of implementation, meaning-making to motivate others to move beyond the situation, accounting giving to achieve closure by taking responsibility and learning from response efforts. Further, scholars have emphasized the importance of values and ethics as the foundation for how leaders engage others during a crisis (see Seeger and Ulmer, 2003; Bauman, 2011; Ulmer, 2012). Overall, leaders must address safety, psychological stress, a plan for stability as well as restoration, and work laterally with the community and other organizations (e.g., Marcus et al., 2006; Demiroz and Kapucu, 2012; Dücker et al., 2017).

## CRISIS LEADERSHIP OUTSIDE OF THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Much of the crisis leadership literature, whether in business, communication, or public administration, focuses on responding to a crisis. Because of this focus, many scholars connect actions to outcomes that signal a movement toward resolve. For example, in business, strategies are related to a company's reputation or share prices (Coldwell et al., 2012; Varma, 2020). In communication, the purpose, source, extent, and dissemination of information are related to the preparedness to manage a crisis (Neely, 2014; Houston et al., 2015; Jin et al., 2017). While communication is essential during a crisis, leaders who regularly practice open, two-way communication to build relationships, transparency, and decision-making capability with an ethical orientation are more prepared to navigate threats and unfamiliar circumstances (O'Keefe, 1999; Fairbanks et al., 2007; Cohen et al., 2017). Communication is a central leadership practice that transcends pre- and post-crisis. However, communication from formal leaders or a within-organization strategy is not enough to restore communities affected by a crisis.

Communities must develop resilience when faced with potentially harmful circumstances. "Community resilience denotes a community's ability to lead itself in order to overcome changes and crises" (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 119). Along with the expansion of leadership as an inclusive interest, community resilience also consists of collective efficacy, cohesion, place

attachment, infrastructure, and resources (Cutter et al., 2008; Ungar, 2011; Cohen et al., 2013, 2017). A community's satisfaction with its public administration has been found to influence resilience (Cohen et al., 2017). Yet, this perception of confidence through effective communication may not completely address the challenges that confront community members most devastated by a crisis. Community members most affected by traumatic events may not have the ability to recover on their own (Dückers et al., 2017). Therefore, an explicit focus on the care of these individuals is necessary for restoration.

Values, ethics, and spirituality help explain leaders' intentions behind how they resolve a crisis (Prusan, 2008; Bauman, 2011; Crumpton, 2011). In best practice, a leader uses shared values to create a common vision and virtue to guide decisions. Further, spiritual leaders respect others' values, have concern for others, and utilize listening, introspection, and reflection (Reave, 2005). More specifically, Bauman (2011) argues for the "ethic of care" to acknowledge harm, apologize, and express emotion for those affected, and act to make amends. While not every crisis is caused by a business or organization, the ethic of care still applies to external events. It deliberately focuses on reaching the individuals impacted by the circumstances.

This deliberate attention is also found in the overlap of crisis leadership and psychosocial needs. Dücker et al. (2017) argue for leaders to meet psychosocial needs within plan-do-study-act cycles of improvement while progressing through the stages of crisis management. They have identified several characteristics of psychosocial supports such as assessing needs and problems, considering risk and protective factors, utilizing and strengthening existing capacities, providing information and basic aid, promoting a sense of safety, calm, efficacy, connectedness to others and hope, positive social acknowledgment of experiences, evaluation of supports, and implementing lessons to improve continually. This overlapping approach allows leaders to build a community of supports to surround individuals who may not recover from a crisis on their own.

## CRISIS LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Crisis leadership, as a theoretical and research concept, has not been studied as extensively in education. Many education scholars discuss "crisis" and "leadership" in terms of schools struggling, or a crisis, to recruit, train, and retain effective leaders (e.g., Malone and Caddell, 2000; Rhodes and Brundrett, 2005). Fewer scholars have used crisis leadership to explain how educational leaders address an unforeseen and threatening event requiring ongoing attention. For example, Smith and Riley (2012) extend traditional crisis management theory, defined as two-way communication, to cycle through the steps of detection, preparedness, resolution, recovery, and learning, to include key attributes of crisis leadership in education. They categorize these critical attributes as communication skills, procedural intelligence, decisive decision making, creative/lateral thinking, synthesizing skills, empathy and respect, intuition, flexibility, and

optimism/tenacity. Like scholars outside of education, they argue that the main challenge for effective leadership during a crisis is preparing and training leaders for the unknown and harmful circumstances (Smith and Riley, 2012). Similar leadership attributes are discussed by Sutherland (2017); however, he emphasizes the need for trust to build collaboration within the community affected by the crisis. Finally, Mutch (2015) identified three sets of factors influencing leaders in a crisis, dispositional, relational, and situational, which was used to analyze how principals handled an emergency, such as a major earthquake.

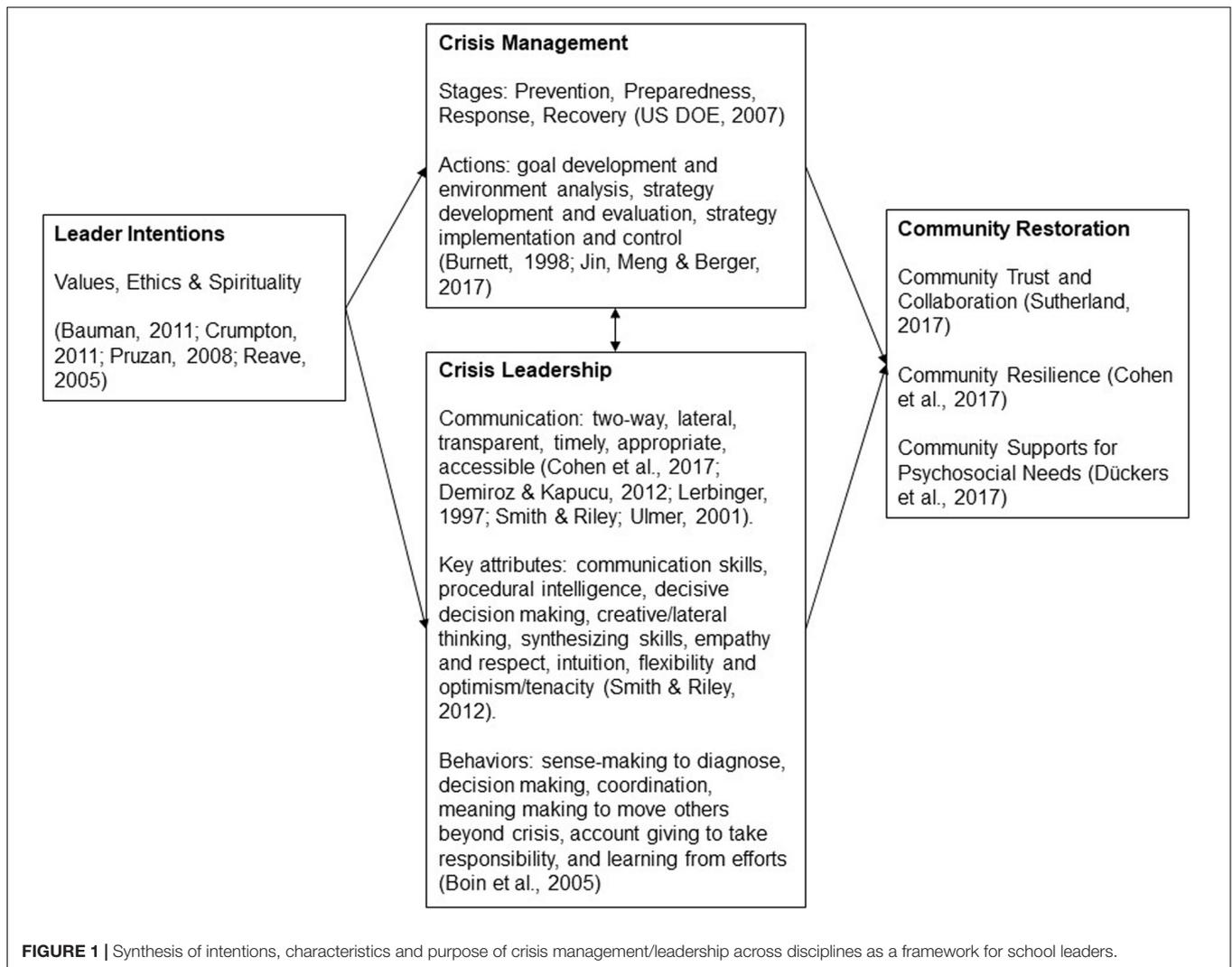
Natural disasters have been used within education to understand how leaders respond to emergencies (e.g., Lee et al., 2008; Mutch, 2015). Scholars have also studied leaders' responses to more indirect or silent unfamiliar and pressing circumstances, such as homelessness, to describe moral, resourceful, and lateral decision making (see Shields and Warke, 2010). Most explicitly, the U.S. Department of Education (2007) has offered traditional crisis management guidance in planning documents that outline action steps for each stage of prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. This national crisis planning is designed to direct schools facing a crisis such as natural disasters, terrorism, and pandemics. Since the start of COVID, the Center for Disease Control, states, and school districts across the United States have also created similar crisis management guidance specific to the pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars have quickly published conceptual and informative articles to guide educational leaders, policymakers, and other researchers on navigating the threats specific to this context. In this case, scholars have discussed tensions between school autonomy and levels of government (Eacott et al., 2020), the roles of leaders and teachers (Kidson et al., 2020; Pollock, 2020), emergency response plans (Moyi, 2020), costs for online learning (Iyiomu, 2020), technology infrastructure (Ahmed et al., 2020), inequities for special education students (Nelson and Murakami, 2020), and the value of communal caring (Stasel, 2020). These topics are examples of issues or tasks germane to crisis leadership that has manifested during COVID-19. Understanding crisis leadership theory can help school leaders, policymakers, and researchers more purposefully comprehend leader intentions and pinpoint management stages and strategies as well as leadership responses to reach the outcome of community restoration (see **Figure 1**).

## TURBULENCE FRAMEWORK

Turbulence is a term taken from air travel that describes flight conditions caused by changes in air pressure. Turbulence can produce anxiety and fear in passengers, especially when the changes are particularly extreme. All leadership experience conflict, change, and competing priorities – turbulence (Putnam, 1991). Milton Friedman, Nobel Prize-winning economist, wrote, "Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change" (1962, p. ix).

Turbulence constrains and sometimes catalyzes organizational behavior and performance. Organizational environments can be decomposed into three main categories:



munificence, complexity, and dynamism. Munificence describes the economic resources a private or public organization has at its disposal. Complexity refers to the heterogeneity or homogeneity of the external conditions that affect an organization. Dynamism is the change over time in munificence and complexity. These three elements influence how an organization will experience turbulence and determine how extreme the turbulence might be (Boyne and Meier, 2009).

Steven Gross has developed and expanded turbulence theory (Gross, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2020; Gross and Shapiro, 2004; Shapiro and Gross, 2013) over the last three decades. Borrowing from air travel, Gross describes four levels of turbulence. Light turbulence is common and can be handled easily. Causes of light turbulence could be regional isolation or minor communication limitations. Moderate turbulence refers to issues that might be more widespread such as the rapid expansion of the organization. Moderate differs from light turbulence in that moderate turbulence is not part of normal operations and most likely has everyone’s attention in the organization; however, with focused effort, moderate turbulence is manageable. Severe turbulence

threatens the existence of initiatives. An example of severe turbulence might be a conflict in the values of an organization. In severe turbulence, typical leadership or administrative practices seem insufficient, and new approaches are needed. Extreme turbulence threatens the existence of the entire organization. This typically occurs when cascading pressures lead to the collapse of the organization. Multiple internal and external turbulence elements that might not be explicitly identifiable can lead to organizational collapse (see **Table 1**).

## TURBULENCE THEORY OUTSIDE OF EDUCATION

Literature across public and private sectors demonstrates a perception that turbulence is increasing (Putnam, 1991; Wheatley, 2002; Marta et al., 2005; Salicru, 2018; Taysum and Arar, 2018). As organizations increasingly deal with turbulence, researchers are identifying increasing overlap between spirituality and work (Wheatley, 2002), the use of storytelling to manage the

**TABLE 1** | Types of turbulence (based on Gross, 1998, 2002, 2020; Gross and Shapiro, 2004).

Degree of turbulence	General definitions
Light	Associated with ongoing issues, little or no disruption in the normal work environment, and subtle signs of stress
Moderate	Widespread awareness of the issue with specific origins
Severe	Fear for the entire enterprise, the possibility of large-scale community demonstrations, a feeling of crisis
Extreme	Structural damage to the school's normal operation is occurring – the collapse of the reform seems likely

associated challenges (Salicru, 2018), and the effects of planning (Marta et al., 2005). Due to turbulence, leaders respond to questions that have historically been answered through religious traditions: How do we find meaning in our lives? How do we cope with uncertainty? Why are we doing this work? How can we act with courage and integrity? What are our values (Wheatley, 2002)?

As leaders and members of organizations sense increased complexity and adaptive challenges (Heifetz, 1994), they are also attempting to make sense of turbulence through storytelling. Humans connect with others through storytelling and, therefore, find meaning and stability through stories (Salicru, 2018). Both storytelling and looking for deeper meaning through spirituality are ways of coping with increasing turbulence.

Regardless of organizational context, planning is an additional way to manage turbulence. Plans require people to identify elements of their organizational environment and context to leverage opportunities for improvement. Additionally, plans provide a framework for responding to adaptive challenges, and increasing turbulence typically leads to improved planning activity. However, severe and extreme turbulence can render plans useless if external changes alter the environment to the extent that the plans are irrelevant. The composition of a group developing plans becomes particularly relevant during times of turbulence. Heterogeneous groups develop higher-quality plans than homogenous groups when multiple changes were introduced. However, homogenous groups produced higher-quality plans when no change occurred. “Thus, diversity apparently helps groups cope with change, particularly in terms of quality, when plans must be developed for addressing the kind of novel, ill-defined problems” (Marta et al., 2005, p. 111). These collaborative and diverse groups used for decision-making are essential to create and to continue to adapt plans to respond to turbulence.

## TURBULENCE THEORY IN EDUCATION

Schools' responses to turbulence are similar to those of organizations in other sectors. Turbulence can be caused by external pressures, conflicting values, disjointed communities, poor working conditions, and ineffective communication (Gross, 1998). Turbulence occurs in micro-level issues such as day-to-day policies, procedures, and experiences, as well as macro-level

issues such as externally imposed organizational changes (Myers, 2014). These conditions rarely occur in isolation and could result in a cascading effect that increases the sense of turbulence (Gross, 2006, 2020; Shapiro and Gross, 2013). According to turbulence theory, positionality, stability, and the cascading nature of crises influence an organization's and an individual's experience with turbulence (Gross, 2006). First, positionality refers to where a person sits, or their specific role or groups (i.e., teachers, principals, etc.), within the turbulence (Norberg and Gross, 2019). Second, cascading is defined as the ways in which multiple situations compound to determine their impact or severity (Norberg and Gross, 2019). Finally, stability indicates the organization's sensitivity to turbulence based on the fragility or strength of its foundation (Norberg and Gross, 2019). For example, when these three drivers interact in a school, a principal will possibly view external pressures or communication differently than a teacher would. Additionally, the internal stability of the organization would increase or decrease the effect of cascading crises that create severe and extreme turbulence.

While turbulence is experienced differently based on position and micro and macro-level issues, research generally demonstrates that turbulence has a negative effect on performance in schools (Boyne and Meier, 2009; Beabout, 2012; Gross, 2020). In fact, turbulence's negative effect on performance is compounded by internal organizational change. Particularly in severe or extreme turbulence cases, significant internal organizational changes compound the adverse effects of turbulence. Leaders can mitigate those negative effects of turbulence in the external environment by maintaining internal structural stability. Additionally, schools “may be able to dampen the extent of volatility through creating networks of environmental actors in other organizations, especially those on which they are dependent for resources” (Boyne and Meier, 2009, p. 820). These networks can help schools navigate turbulence while maintaining some internal stability. Additionally, internal stability and the ability to survive and even thrive through turbulence is dependent on the grassroots participation of teachers and staff (Taysum and Arar, 2018).

## TURBULENCE THEORY AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS

Given the increasingly complex environments for schools, turbulence is inevitable for school leaders (Fullan, 2009). The roles of the people experiencing the turbulence will significantly influence their responses (Gross, 2006; Myers, 2014). The cascading effect of multiple elements of turbulence requires significant leadership acumen and capacity. Some researchers have suggested that the school leader must consider when to intentionally elevate the level of turbulence within an organization to create urgency and accelerate change (Shapiro and Gross, 2013; Myers, 2014). This seems contrary to the notion that internal stability should be maintained to survive turbulence; however, the degree of turbulence matters. School leaders who can use light, moderate, or even more severe turbulence to help

others see a need for change or catalyze grassroots support can be successful. Accepting some level of turbulence does not mean that leadership should de-stabilize a school. In fact, the schools' relative instability could enhance a leaders' ability to be flexible in ways that allow them to turn turbulence into opportunities (Shapiro and Gross, 2013; Myers, 2014).

School leaders who can build a positive frame around turbulence are likely to be more effective. A principal who believes that risk-taking creates a certain level of turbulence is more likely to build confidence among teachers, administrators, and the school community (Myers, 2014). Turbulence leads to perturbation. When school communities begin to experience turbulence and come together to make decisions, they begin to ask what comes next. This questioning of what is next is perturbation. Leaders interested in improving schools should foster perturbation while minimizing the harmful effects of severe and extreme turbulence (Beabout, 2012).

Similarly, flux can be an opportunity to move an organization forward (Gross, 1998, 2006), particularly if leaders effectively network with key people outside of their schools to better understand the turbulence's intensity and source. Knowing community leaders, state and local policymakers, and others who might understand contextual factors has a significantly positive effect on performance (Goerdel, 2006). Using networks to get early warnings through environmental scanning about shifts, particularly in munificence and complexity, could be a complementary strategy to help schools navigate turbulence (Boyne and Meier, 2009).

Mentoring, particularly mentoring in ethical leadership, can help leaders bring turbulence into moderate ranges where the effects can be more manageable. When mentors help leaders use a range of ethical lenses (e.g., ethic of justice, ethic of care, ethic of critique, or ethic of profession), leaders can more effectively manage turbulence (Gross and Shapiro, 2004). This type of mentoring and these ethical considerations identified in Standard Two of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) ground leaders in ways that stabilize schools even in times of crisis.

Turbulence also affects students. Elevating student voices to participate in response to turbulence builds efficacy and can improve school conditions. Conditions can improve in at least three ways. First, students can provide fresh ways of seeing issues because of differences in their positionality (Shapiro and Gross, 2013). Second, based on cases from the United States and Australia, student voice can increase tension and focus on pressing issues. Third, increasing agency and collective student efficacy can reduce organizational turbulence and individual turbulence during adolescence. Turbulence can "be a force for positive change and needed energy to launch an emerging adult into the wider world beyond home and school" (Mitra and Gross, 2009, p. 538). The use of student voice, networks outside of schools, and mentoring in ethical leadership can transform turbulence into change.

Overall, Gross (2020, p. 47) recommends a five-step process for leading through turbulence. First, leaders should reflect on the causes of turbulence. Second, as a part of their reflection, they

should determine the role of the three drivers of turbulence – positionality, cascading crises, and stability. Third, identify the general level of turbulence. Fourth, decide whether to escalate or de-escalate the turbulence. Fifth, organize and effectively communicate constructive advice that responds to turbulence. If leaders do this, they are more likely to develop an effective systemic response to turbulence.

## SELF-CARE FRAMEWORK

While the self-care industry continues to grow at an astronomical pace, school leaders' self-care is often reserved for private conversation, not a subject to be conflated with job expectations or professional effectiveness. The normed silence on topics such as self-care and wellbeing in the workplace is particularly problematic for school leaders. Today's principals are one of our nation's most stressed and burned-out cohorts of professionals, leaving the field at alarming rates (Yan, 2020). As highlighted by Ray et al. (2020), school leaders, in place of self-care, often embrace the role of the caretaker for others, choosing to "adopt a disposition of self-sacrifice" which may provide short term benefit to those they serve but is not a sustainable professional disposition (p. 435).

While the field of education and educational leadership is woefully behind in its empirical examination of the importance of self-care and its practitioners, the areas of nursing and social work have made steady progress. Butler et al. (2019) outline two specific aims of self-care: (a) to "guard against, cope with, or reduce stress and related adverse experiences" and (b) to "maintain or enhance wellbeing and overall functioning" (pp. 107, 108). The authors then propose six self-care domains largely founded upon Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs (see **Table 2**). By presenting a broad range of domains, the authors acknowledge that professional life is inhabited across multiple contexts and embodied spaces (e.g., home, work, social, etc.). Butler et al. (2019) highlight the interplay amongst each domain while identifying the conceptual link that ties each frame together as "mindful attention" and "intentional action" to self-care needs and activities in both work and private settings.

## SELF-CARE THEORY OUTSIDE OF EDUCATION

The nursing and social work fields have led the empirical and theoretical examination of self-care. Each, which houses many jobs often labeled as "helping professions" (Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison, 2014), have long recognized the need to address the burnout-related effects of the accumulated stressors associated with working in high-intensity contexts. As a result, researchers in both fields have launched many studies focused on self-care interventions to alleviate their clinical practitioners' burnout and turnover.

In nursing, up to 37% of nurses were identified as having experienced burnout (McHugh et al., 2011). Much like the social work field, nurses are often exposed to workplace-specific

**TABLE 2** | Six domains of self-care (Butler et al., 2019).

Domain	Description
Physical	Tending to the needs of the physical body in order to achieve or support optimal functioning and to avoid breakdowns or deterioration within systems
Professional	Managing or preventing work-related stress and stressors, reduce the risk, or mitigate the effects of burnout and other workplace hazards
Relational	Efforts made to maintain and enhance our interpersonal connection to others
Emotional	Practices engaged in to safeguard against or address negative emotional experience as well as those intended to create or enhance positive emotional experience and wellbeing
Psychological	Pursuing and satisfying intellectual needs and purposeful and reflective efforts to understand and attend to the overall needs of the organism
Spiritual	Creating space to reflect on our own inner needs and our role or place within the world and universe

stressors for long periods, which ultimately affects wellbeing and reduces commitment to task performance (Akkoç et al., 2020). In terms of self-care, the nursing field has identified how deliberate attentiveness to a broad array of self-care domains such as body, mind, emotions, and spirit are empirically sound ways to address stress-induced issues associated with clinical nursing.

Social work is also grappling with the consequences associated with the increasing burnout of their professionals. For example, social workers are often negatively affected by workload, rewards/wages, resources, time limitations, etc. that often influence a social worker's perceived job satisfaction (Wilson, 2016). Additionally, social workers are more likely than other professions to be impacted by the complexities associated with compassion fatigue, secondary trauma, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Wagaman et al., 2015; Wilson, 2016).

## SELF-CARE THEORY IN EDUCATION

The increasing turnover of school leaders is of growing concern to school districts and educational leadership scholars. This concern is with good reason, as principals, second only to teachers, are a primary factor in students' academic success (Young et al., 2007). Goldring and Taie (2018) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimate that school leaders' turnover rates are nearing 18% nationally. In light of this number, many scholars have been working to determine precisely why principals leave (Fuller and Orr, 2008; DeAngelis and White, 2011; Snodgrass Rangel, 2018; Grissom and Bartanen, 2019), and a growing number of scholars have begun to examine how self-care specific interventions that may help prevent principal turnover (Mahfouz, 2018a,b; Carpenter, 2020; Liu, 2020; Ray et al., 2020). To date, no known study has directly incorporated self-care theory into its examination of possible interventions for school leaders. The Ray et al. (2020) comes closest, as its purpose was to examine how principals were able to attend to self-care practices amidst the array of job-embedded demands of today's school leader.

## SELF-CARE THEORY AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) recently conducted a study to examine school leaders' responses to the critical incidents induced by COVID-19 during mid to late March of 2020 (CPRE website). As a part of that study, three scholars (Anderson et al., 2020) examined how school leaders addressed their wellbeing during a time of such immense stress for communities, school leaders, teachers, and students. They found that principals experienced high levels of stress due to the litany of tasks associated with closing down schools, launching online-only instruction, monitoring sickness, delivering food and other school-provided services, and ensuring students could access the Internet. Principals also had difficulty separating their work from their home life, as working from home suddenly transitioned to living at work (Anderson et al., 2020).

While the Anderson et al. (2020) study highlighted several ways in which principals sought to attend to self-care (exercise, spiritual foundations, and time with family), there was no consensus as to the importance of self-care, nor the ability to prioritize self-care amongst the range of duties associated with leadership during the crisis. Subsequently, it is perhaps time that the field of educational leadership incorporates the scholarly body of work in social work and nursing to launch a more significant number of qualitative and quantitative studies that would seek to determine the role of self-care for school leaders.

## A NEW CONCEPTUAL FOCUS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic have magnified the need to frame and study the work of school leaders as navigators of crisis. While school leaders have faced extreme challenges leading up to the pandemic, natural disasters, racial injustice, fights for funding, professional shortages, among others, the broader conceptualizations of the field have understood leadership in terms of guiding academic success rather than recognizing a more prevalent role as caretakers of much larger social and health crises. Through crisis leadership and turbulence theory, we can continue to expand these broader conceptualizations of educational leadership to include a primary focus on the restoration of the profession and the communities served through a movement toward self-care, and in turn, flourishing, the realization of this restoration and care. **Table 3** summarizes the goals and characteristics of these bodies of literature to frame how leaders might tackle pressing challenges.

As stated in the introduction, school leaders have faced numerous crises over the last several decades. While the pandemic was undoubtedly the most universal crises faced by school leaders, it will certainly not be the last time a nation and its schools will be forced to respond to an external set of factors requiring dexterity in the face of extreme circumstances. With this in mind, we suggest leadership preparation programs author and implement a three-pronged curricular strand that provides conceptual frameworks necessary for leaders to

**TABLE 3** | Overview of framing from crisis leadership, turbulence theory, and self-care.

	Crisis leadership theory	Turbulence theory
<b>Theories to guide leadership during uncertainty and stress</b>		
<i>Degree of Circumstances</i>	Extreme	Light, moderate, severe, extreme
<i>Leadership Role</i>	Communicator	Storyteller
<i>Leadership Tasks</i>	Goal development, environmental analysis, strategy development and evaluation, strategy implementation and control, sensemaking to diagnose situation, decision making for a strategy, coordination of implementation, meaning-making to motivate others to move beyond the situation, account giving to achieve closure by taking responsibility, and learning from response efforts	Planning, maintaining organizational stability, building external networks, develop grassroots participation, ethical mentoring, networking externally, elevate student voice
<i>Community and Organizational Characteristics</i>	Resilience	Munificence, complexity, dynamism
<i>Ethic of Care</i>	Attend to psychosocial needs	Spirituality through storytelling
<i>Influential Factors on Leaders</i>	Dispositional, relational, and situational factors	Heterogeneous teams, positionality
<i>Goal</i>	Return to normal and restoration	Improvement through perturbation
<b>Self-care: necessity and lever for improvement through crisis and turbulence</b>		
<i>Domains</i>	Physical, professional, relational, emotional, psychological, and spiritual	
<i>Causes of stress through COVID</i>	Closing schools, launching online instruction, monitoring sickness, delivering services, internet access for students, and work/life balance	
<i>Goal</i>	Cope with stress, maintain wellbeing	

successfully navigate during stress-specific contexts associated with crisis and turbulence while maintaining their overall health and wellbeing. Further, we argue that educational leadership programs' standards should move beyond an intense focus on instruction alone and reorient to also value the work of school leaders as caretakers of impending turbulence from either longstanding crises or unexpected, emergency events. Crisis leadership theory describes how leaders can reduce risk, navigate planning to return to normal, and reach community restoration. Turbulence theory provides a framework for transforming these circumstances into change and improvement for our schools and communities. Self-care literature explicates what needs are associated with wellbeing so that we can build a flourishing profession, school, and community. Taken together, leaders can use crisis leadership and turbulence theory to guide their efforts to embed self-care, or more extensively, flourishing, as a central purpose of schools. This new focus requires a movement beyond simply learning successful leadership practices but a careful examination of intentionality, or the ethics, values, and spirituality, which guide the "how," "why," and "what" of leadership in schools. The leader who can address uncertainty, care for others and restore crises is motivated by her desire to lead for flourishing.

In conclusion, we synthesize four main lessons from these frameworks to apply to how we train and support educational leaders as they navigate crises in schools.

## LESSON 1. PRIORITIZE COMMUNICATION

Leaders who maintain open, two-way, transparent, and ethical communication can prevent and reduce threats. While situations and context may change and become unpredictable, encouraging

transparent and collaborative approaches to communication creates consistency before, during, and after a crisis. Further, turbulence theory promotes the communicative vehicle of storytelling as way to allow humans to find shared meaning. Through sharing and soliciting the stories of crisis participants, leaders surface the perceptual understandings of actors and highlight narratives that provide stability amid crisis response. Storytelling is also a form of communication that can promote spirituality and a sense of shared ethics, which may promote trust, stability, and shared values for the community.

## LESSON 2. ESTABLISH VALUES

Leaders need to focus on the collaborative process of defining shared values within their community. These values, guided by ethical frames, can serve as the foundation for the construction of a common vision to guide decision making. By centering community resilience as a focus, stakeholders are empowered to own and lead the restoration of their communities and organizations. Leaders can fortify self-directed communities by addressing the psychological needs and care of others. The use of mentoring to support the use of ethical lenses helps to establish these shared values, resilience, and care.

## LESSON 3. INTEGRATE PLANNING

The nature of crises and turbulence requires leaders to question what is next. The questioning of what is next orients leaders and stakeholders toward the collaborative planning of action steps that may in fact reduce risk and extend into progress toward restoration and positive change. Leaders can analyze select action steps using dispositional, relational, and situational frames as they move through each stage of crisis. Importantly, leaders must

focus on building collaborative and diverse groups during the creation and adaptation phase of planning, including highly diverse networks of actors and grassroots participation from teachers, staff, student voice, and community stakeholders.

## LESSON 4. PROMOTE SELF-CARE

Due to the stressful and extreme circumstances inherent during crisis and turbulence, leaders and the surrounding community should attend to the physical, professional, relational, emotional, and psychological aspects of self-care to avoid burnout and mitigate the adverse effects induced by the chronic stressors associated with threatening and unexpected events. Leaders

must normalize the practice of and discussions about wellbeing. Further, leaders should develop interventions for themselves and others that focus on a holistic imagining of wellbeing that includes the various aspects of body, mind, emotional, and spiritual health.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

AU took primary responsibility for the final completion of the manuscript. BC organized the project and facilitated the creation of the manuscript's outline. JE participated in each phase of the manuscript development. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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