

## Othermothering Leadership within an Elementary Science Network

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**OVERVIEW:** This case study explores how an othermother, who is an elementary principal, employs radical care through her leadership of science for children of her community.

**AUDIENCE:** Administrators (K-12), District science coordinators, Policymakers, Researchers/Researcher supervisors, Science education leaders

### KEY POINTS

- Othermothers play a critical role envisioning and advocating for elementary science education.
- Policies (can) limit the potential of the vision of science an othermother has for her community.
- An othermother draws on her community to inform science instruction decisions.
- Othermothers care in ways that have the potential to be transformative in science education

**INTRODUCTION:** Although key decisions concerning time, resources spent, and professional development are made by elementary principals many principals are offered minimal professional learning about science education. While professional learning is needed (e.g. on current philosophies, practices and pedagogies in science education, interdisciplinary approaches, etc.), there are elementary principals, like othermothers, who make decisions grounded in their radical care for children, which includes: (a) cultivating authentic relationships; (b) strategically navigating the sociopolitical and policy climate; and (c) embracing the spirit of radical hope (a state of resiliency, courage, and “imaginative excellence” during times of despair and devastation). Othermothers are those who share mothering responsibilities with bloodmothers. Othermothering is also an act of love in that decisions of an othermother are an act of care for their community. This study examines how an othermother, Principal Loper, strategically navigates the socio-political and policy climate of schools in relation to leading and teaching elementary science within the local community where she was raised and lives. This study is guided by the following questions: 1) What is an othermother's vision for science education; 2) What is an othermother's perception of her role in science education; 3) How is an othermother inhibited as she strives to support science education?

**FINDINGS** An othermother's way of being and knowing guides her presence with and for Black children. This study indicates that othermothering also applies to science education. Principal Loper's social consciousness, her authentic relationships, othermothering, and her radical hope for all *her children* mobilized decisions that were grounded in her visions for the local community.

The lens of an othermother is especially important given the current state of elementary science, as it is often deprioritized in relation to English/ Language Arts and mathematics. This study specifically found that othermothers view science as a potential means to transform lives and fulfill the needs of the local community; that science policies (can) limit the potential of the vision of science an othermother has for the community; and othermothers draw on their network to guide equitable science instruction.

### TAKEAWAYS

Researchers and leadership educators need to support principals and aspiring principals in navigating how to support science systemically so that science will be taught in elementary schools. Importantly, we can learn from educational leaders like othermothers who are making decisions for equity, despite the limited support currently offered for elementary principals. This study also offers a conceptual framing by which to understand the motivations and decision-making of leaders informed by their community and network.