Ethical and Educative Leadership to Improve the Quality of Learning: Revising a Pioneering Theory using Pragmatic Holism

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Abstract

The purpose of this theoretical paper is to report formative evaluation of a constructivist theory of educative leadership for quality learning pioneered three decades ago and to propose a revised theory mindful of recent research. The methodology comprises a review of the findings of practical research originally commissioned by three state school systems in Australia and more recent international research into initial teacher education, professional development and school leadership, as well as meta-analyses of the impact of teaching and learning strategies on student achievement. The findings identify the moral philosophies and potential practical contributions of relevant theories of school leadership. Discussion then develops a fresh methodology for educative leaders intending to improve the quality of learning in unique educational settings. A non-foundational epistemology of pragmatic holism is recommended to develop a web-of-belief with internal and external coherence and an appropriate ethical framework. A theoretical implication drawn is that ethical and educative leadership for quality learning can legitimately incorporate a range of ethics. A practical implication is that pragmatic holism is suitable for follow-up research and practice in school leadership because it has the capacity to accommodate appropriate ethical perspectives to assist with situational analysis and decision-making.

Keywords: educative leadership, leadership of learning, school leadership, initial teacher education, professional development, pragmatic holism

Background

This paper aims to evaluate a constructivist theory of educative leadership for quality learning, originally developed three decades ago, and propose a revised theory informed by recent research. The methodology includes a review of both historical and recent practical research, along with meta-analyses examining the impact of teaching and learning strategies on student achievement.

The constructivist model of pedagogy-enhancing leadership developed by Northfield et al. (1992) encourages teachers and leaders to become learners or 'constructivists' to continually reconcile new ideas to gain more satisfactory explanations of classroom and school change efforts. From the outset of the Educative Leadership Project, educative leadership theories were defined as those that were "*educative* in intent and outcome" (Duignan & Macpherson, 1992, p. 1), thereby including those driven by both deontological ethics (duties, rules and principles) and by teleological ethics (consequences).

This purpose reflected a specific policy context. In the early 1990s, Australian state education systems were encouraging greater school autonomy and school-based curriculum development, opening up opportunities for team, school and system leaders to develop effective and ethical frameworks to boost the quality of teaching and learning. The state school education systems of the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Victoria commissioned a series of international literature reviews and think tanks of leading researcher-theorists and practitioners to devise educative leadership models in a range of problematic areas.

When wider research was related to the knowledge of leading practitioners at a think tank focussed on leadership intended to enhance the quality of teaching, four conclusions were drawn (Northfield et al., 1992):

1. Leadership of school development must understand students' and teachers' expectations and build on them to improve the impact of effective teaching and learning.

2. Educative leadership is subtle and crucial in establishing and maintaining the conditions for teachers' professional development.

3. Educative forms of professional development are provided by many people, including teachers, as verified by the teacher development outcomes classified using the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall and Hord, 1987) and by extensive research and case studies that explored effective strategies for achieving meaningful reform in educational settings (Fullan, 1982).

4. Specific actions were recommended in the three state systems to support change, summarised in Table 1.

In sum, Northfield et al. (1992) recommend that educative leaders take responsibility for organising these conditions to develop the quality of teaching and learning. The most important condition they emphasise is that leaders, as learners, provide opportunities for participants, including themselves, to develop personal understanding through reflection on practice. It is notable that Monash University annually bestows the Jeff Northfield Memorial Award for Excellence in Teacher Research.

Table 1:

Areas where Actions have to be Taken to Support Change

Areas for Action	Description of Area for Action	Examples of Action
Developing Support Arrangements	Actions taken to develop policies, establish responsibilities, restructure roles, provided resources and manage staff.	Have a member coordinate the purchase of materials.
Teacher Development	Actions taken to develop knowledge, skills and resolve any problems that arise.	Plan workshops for staff.
Consultation and Reinforcement	Actions taken to encourage implementation, identify and resolve any problems that arise.	Hold staff meetings to review progress.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Actions taken to gather information about the change effort and impact on staff and students.	Administer questionnaire at the end of the year to students and staff.
External Communication	Actions taken to inform and/or gain support of individuals.	Hold parent-teacher meeting.
Dissemination	Actions taken to encourage others to see the value of the change.	Have teachers present ideas at workshops.

Formative evaluation of the Northfield et al. (1992) position began by considering recent research into the effectiveness of initial teacher education (ITE), in-service professional development (PD) and leadership education (LE) and their moral underpinnings.

The Effectiveness and Moral Philosophies of ITE Models

Recent research into the effectiveness of ITE models highlights several critical factors influencing the preparation and efficacy of new teachers with implications for school leadership. Studies indicate that the quality and structure of ITE programs significantly impact teacher preparedness and student outcomes.

For instance, Darling-Hammond (2021) emphasizes the importance of comprehensive, clinically based teacher education that integrates theory and practice. Such models, which include extensive field experiences and mentoring, are associated with improved teacher retention and effectiveness.

Another notable strategy is practice-based ITE, which focuses on providing prospective teachers with ample opportunities to engage in authentic teaching experiences. Zeichner and Bier (2017) found that programs emphasizing practice-based learning, where student teachers spend significant time in classrooms working alongside experienced mentors, lead to better preparedness and higher confidence among novice teachers. This approach aligns with the apprenticeship model, where learning is situated within the context of actual teaching practice, allowing for real-time feedback and professional growth.

A key issue is the role of collaborative learning and reflection in teacher preparation. According to Grossman et al. (2019), ITE programs that incorporate collaborative learning communities, where student teachers engage in reflective practice and peer feedback, enhance the development of professional competencies. This collaborative approach fosters a supportive learning environment and helps teachers build a professional identity rooted in continuous improvement and inquiry.

The integration of technology in ITE is also gaining attention. Koehler and Mishra (2021) argue that incorporating digital tools and resources in ITE programs not only prepares teachers to use technology effectively in their classrooms but also enhances their ability to engage students and differentiate instruction. Technology-rich ITE models provide prospective teachers with skills to navigate and integrate various digital platforms, which is increasingly crucial in modern educational contexts.

Furthermore, cultural competence and inclusivity are highlighted as essential components of effective ITE programs. Research by Gay (2020) underscores the necessity of preparing teachers to work in diverse classrooms by embedding culturally responsive pedagogy in the teacher education curricula. Programs that emphasize cultural competence help future teachers develop the skills and dispositions needed to create inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Overall, recent research underscores the multifaceted nature of effective ITE models. Successful programs are characterized by strong clinical experiences, practice-based learning, collaborative reflection, integration of technology, and a focus on cultural competence. These elements collectively contribute to the preparation of well-rounded, adaptable, and effective educators.

The moral philosophies underpinning effective ITE and training models reflect various ethical frameworks that emphasize responsibility, care, equity, and professionalism. These philosophies guide the design and implementation of ITE programs, shaping the values and principles that future educators carry into their teaching practice.

One particularly significant moral philosophy is the ethic of care (Noddings, 2013). This perspective prioritizes relational aspects of teaching, emphasizing empathy, compassion, and the importance of nurturing student well-being. In the context of ITE, programs grounded in the ethic of care focus on preparing teachers to build meaningful relationships with students and to create supportive, inclusive classroom environments. Such models encourage prospective teachers to understand and respond to the diverse needs of their students, fostering a sense of community and mutual respect.

The principle of justice and equity is another major moral philosophy evident in ITE. Rooted in theories of social justice, this perspective calls for addressing systemic inequalities and promoting fairness in education (Freire, 2018). ITE programs that emphasize equity aim to prepare teachers to recognize and challenge discriminatory practices and to advocate for all students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. This moral commitment is evident in culturally responsive pedagogy, which seeks to validate and incorporate students' cultural identities into the learning process (Gay, 2020).

Virtue ethics, derived from Aristotelian philosophy, also plays a crucial role in shaping ITE models. This approach focuses on the development of moral character and the cultivation

of virtues such as integrity, honesty, and courage (Carr, 2021). ITE programs informed by virtue ethics emphasize the formation of teachers who not only possess strong pedagogical skills but also embody ethical virtues in their professional conduct. These programs advocate for reflective practice, where prospective teachers critically examine their values and actions to ensure they align with ethical standards.

Kantian deontology, with its emphasis on duty and adherence to moral principles, provides another ethical foundation for ITE. This philosophy asserts that educators have a moral duty to uphold the rights and dignity of their students (Kant, 1996). ITE models influenced by deontological ethics stress the importance of professional standards and ethical codes of conduct, ensuring that teachers act with integrity and responsibility in their interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader community.

Finally, the philosophy of pragmatism, particularly as articulated by Dewey (1938), underpins many effective and contemporary ITE models. Pragmatism emphasizes experiential learning, reflective practice, and the continuous improvement of educational practices based on empirical evidence. This approach aligns with practice-based teacher education models, which prioritize real-world teaching experiences and the iterative refinement of teaching skills through feedback and reflection (Grossman et al., 2019).

To summarize this brief review, effective ITE models are grounded in a blend of moral philosophies, including the ethic of care, justice and equity, virtue ethics, Kantian deontology, and pragmatism. These ethical frameworks collectively inform the principles and practices that can guide the preparation of future educators, ensuring they are equipped to foster equitable, supportive, and reflective learning environments.

The Effectiveness and Moral Philosophies of In-Service PD Models

Recent research on the effectiveness of in-service PD models highlights several key factors that contribute to the ongoing growth and success of teachers. High-quality PD is seen as crucial for enhancing teacher skills, improving student outcomes, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement within schools.

One of the most effective models is job-embedded PD, which integrates learning opportunities directly into teachers' workdays. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2022), job-embedded PD, which includes coaching, mentoring, and collaborative planning, is particularly impactful because it allows teachers to apply new strategies in their own classrooms and receive immediate, context-specific feedback. This form of PD is sustained over time and closely aligned with teachers' instructional needs and school goals.

Collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs) are also recognized for their effectiveness. Vescio et al., (2008) found that PLCs, where teachers regularly meet to share practices, analyse student work, and collaboratively solve problems, lead to significant improvements in teaching practices and student achievement. The collaborative nature of PLCs fosters a sense of collective responsibility and support among teachers, which enhances their motivation and commitment to professional growth.

Technology-enhanced PD is another area receiving increasing attention. Desimone and Garet (2015) highlight the potential of online PD platforms and virtual communities to provide flexible, personalized learning opportunities for teachers. These platforms can offer a range of resources, from interactive webinars to online courses and discussion forums, enabling teachers to engage in PD at their own pace and according to their individual needs.

Effective PD models also emphasize active learning and practical application. Kennedy (2016) points out that PD activities that involve active participation, such as hands-on workshops, simulations, and lesson study, are more likely to lead to changes in leadership

practices. As with teachers learning, these activities allow leaders to experiment with new approaches, reflect on their experiences, and refine their techniques in a supportive environment.

The role of school leadership in supporting PD is recognised as a critical factor. Leithwood et al., (2020) underscore the importance of principals and other school leaders creating a culture that values continuous learning and provides the necessary resources and support for effective PD. Leadership that prioritizes professional growth encourages teachers to take risks, innovate, and collaborate, thereby enhancing the overall impact of PD initiatives.

Lastly, the alignment of PD with educational standards and goals is essential for its effectiveness. Garet et al., (2001) emphasize that PD should be coherent and aligned with teachers' instructional contexts and the broader goals of the education system. When PD is aligned with curriculum standards and school improvement plans, it is considered more relevant and likely to be implemented effectively.

In summary to this point, recent research underscores the importance of job-embedded PD, collaborative learning communities, technology-enhanced PD, active learning strategies, supportive leadership, and alignment with educational goals. These elements contribute to PD models that effectively enhance teacher skills and improve student outcomes.

The moral philosophies underpinning effective in-service PD models for educators are deeply rooted in ethical frameworks that emphasize collaboration, continuous improvement, equity, and professional responsibility. These philosophies guide the principles and practices that shape PD strategies, ensuring they are designed to foster a supportive, inclusive, and reflective professional learning environment.

One significantly evident moral philosophy is the ethic of care (Noddings, 2013). This perspective prioritizes relational aspects of PD, emphasizing empathy, support, and the importance of nurturing professional relationships among educators. PD models grounded in

the ethic of care focus on creating a collaborative and supportive atmosphere where teachers feel valued and respected. This approach fosters a sense of community and mutual responsibility, which is essential for effective professional growth.

The principle of justice and equity is another widely apparent moral philosophy in PD. Rooted in theories of social justice, this perspective calls for addressing systemic inequalities and promoting fairness within educational systems (Freire, 2018). PD programs that emphasize equity aim to ensure that all teachers, regardless of their background or school context, have access to high-quality PD opportunities. This moral commitment is evident in efforts to provide targeted support for teachers working in underserved communities and to address disparities in educational resources and outcomes.

Virtue ethics, derived from Aristotelian philosophy, also plays a crucial role in shaping PD models. This approach focuses on the development of moral character and the cultivation of virtues such as integrity, honesty, and commitment to lifelong learning (Carr, 2021). PD programs informed by virtue ethics emphasize the importance of reflective practice and ethical professional conduct. These programs encourage teachers to critically examine their values and actions, fostering a culture of ethical responsibility and continuous self-improvement.

Kantian deontology, with its emphasis on duty and adherence to moral principles, provides another ethical foundation for PD. This philosophy asserts that educators have a moral duty to uphold the rights and dignity of their students and colleagues (Kant, 1996). PD models influenced by deontological ethics stress the importance of professional standards and ethical codes of conduct, ensuring that teachers act with integrity and responsibility in their PD activities.

The philosophy of pragmatism (Dewey, 1938) underpins many contemporary PD models. Pragmatism emphasizes experiential learning, reflective practice, and the continuous improvement of educational practices based on empirical evidence. This approach aligns with

job-embedded PD and collaborative learning communities, which prioritize real-world experiences and iterative refinement of teaching practices through feedback and reflection (Grossman et al., 2019).

Finally, the principle of social constructivism, as described by Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes the importance of social interaction and collaboration in the learning process. PD models grounded in social constructivism encourage teachers to learn from one another through collaborative activities such as PLCs. This philosophy supports the idea that knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue and shared experiences, making collaboration a central component of effective PD.

To summarise this section, effective in-service PD models are grounded in a blend of moral philosophies, including the ethic of care, justice and equity, virtue ethics, Kantian deontology, pragmatism, and social constructivism. These ethical frameworks collectively inform the principles and practices that guide the professional growth of educators, ensuring PD and LE initiatives are supportive, equitable, and reflective of professional and ethical standards.

The Effectiveness and Moral Philosophies of LE

Recent definitions of leadership education (LE) in educational settings emphasize the structured process of developing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for effective leadership. This process includes cultivating the ability to lead schools or educational programs, support teacher development, and improve student outcomes. LE in education focuses on enhancing the capacity of educational leaders to create positive learning environments, implement evidence-based practices, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

According to Canipe (2022), LE in education involves developing competencies in areas such as strategic visioning, instructional leadership, change management, and community engagement. The goal is to equip future leaders with the ability to drive systemic change, support teacher growth, and enhance student learning through informed and effective practices.

As described by Harris & Jones (2023), LE in education is characterized by a focus on developing leaders who are capable of navigating and transforming educational settings through strategic thinking, instructional leadership, and collaborative practices. It encompasses the development of skills and knowledge necessary to lead effectively, support professional growth among educators, and enhance the overall educational experience for students.

Recent research underscores the impact of LE on enhancing ITE, teacher PD and improving learning outcomes. This body of work emphasizes how effective leadership models and strategies can significantly influence educational quality and teacher efficacy.

Leithwood et al. (2020) provide a comprehensive analysis of distributed leadership, arguing that this model, which decentralizes leadership responsibilities, promotes a collaborative culture within schools. Their research indicates that distributed leadership fosters a more inclusive and supportive environment, leading to improved professional development opportunities for teachers and, consequently, better student outcomes.

Instructional leadership is another critical focus. Robinson et al. (2021) explore how school leaders engaged in instructional leadership practices—such as providing targeted feedback, setting high standards, and facilitating professional development—positively affect teaching quality. Their study demonstrates that principals who actively participate in the instructional aspects of leadership can drive significant improvements in both teacher performance and student achievement.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) emphasize the role of effective PD programs in supporting teacher growth. They argue that high-quality PD, characterized by sustained,

collaborative, and practice-based learning, is essential for enhancing teaching practices. Their findings suggest that such programs, which integrate ongoing support and collective learning opportunities, are far more effective than traditional, one-time training sessions.

Additionally, Timperley (2023) highlights the importance of leadership in cultivating a culture of continuous learning within schools. Her research underscores that leaders who foster a learning-oriented culture—by encouraging reflective practices and evidence-based decision-making—can substantially enhance teacher development and improve educational outcomes. This approach helps in building a strong foundation for effective teaching and learning.

Collectively, these studies highlight that LE models which promote distributed and instructional leadership, coupled with well-designed ITE and PD programs, are critical for advancing teacher effectiveness and student success. Emphasizing collaborative, sustained, and evidence-based practices in leadership can significantly improve both teaching quality and learning outcomes.

This analysis also indicates the presence of four major moral philosophies, each underscoring different ethical principles and values that can guide ITE, PD and LE. First is utilitarianism, a moral philosophy that advocates for actions that maximize overall happiness or well-being, is evident in the emphasis on improving leadership services, teacher PD and student outcomes. Leithwood et al., (2020) argue that distributed leadership fosters a more inclusive and supportive environment, which can be seen as aligning with utilitarian principles by aiming to enhance the well-being of leaders, teachers and students through collective efforts. This approach is intended to produce the greatest overall benefit by improving educational quality and student achievement.

Second is virtue ethics, which focus on the moral character of individuals and the cultivation of virtues such as honesty, courage, and integrity, is reflected in active instructional leadership and PD. Robinson et al. (2021) highlight the importance of principals engaging in

instructional leadership practices that support high standards and provide constructive feedback. This emphasis on LE that fosters growth and development aligns with virtue ethics, as it prioritizes the cultivation of virtues in leadership roles, contributing to the moral and professional growth of educators.

Third is deontological ethics, which emphasizes duties and principles regardless of the outcomes, is evident in the commitment to providing high-quality, sustained PD as described by Darling-Hammond et al. (2022). Their research findings argue for the importance of sustained, collaborative, and practice-based learning, which reflects a deontological approach by prioritizing the inherent duty to provide teachers with ongoing, effective support and training, regardless of the immediate outcomes. This focus on adherence to principles of PD underscores a commitment to ethical responsibilities in education.

Fourth is communitarianism, which emphasizes the importance of community and collective well-being, is apparent in the discussion of distributed and instructional leadership. Timperley (2023) stresses the role of leadership in fostering a culture of continuous learning and collaborative practices. This aligns with communitarian values by prioritizing the collective good and the shared responsibilities of educators and leaders in enhancing the educational environment. By focusing on building a supportive and reflective community, these leadership models promote the common welfare of both teachers and students.

Methodology

Having briefly reviewed the effectiveness and moral philosophies evident in ITE, PD and LE models, it is evident that their relationship with student achievement is complex and has to be nuanced by context. This rules out a grand theory of educative leadership for quality learning suitable for all circumstances (Bush, 2020, Northouse, 2022). Nevertheless, it raises two questions:

1. What options do school leaders have to develop an ethical theory of educative leadership of quality learning that address both intentions and outcomes?

2. How can they develop a trustworthy theory sensitive to the unique challenges they face?

Answers to the first question, with respect to intentions, will be provided by an analysis of the moral philosophies underpinning constructivism and the leading current theories of leadership styles found to be most relevant to quality learning. With regard to outcomes, the findings of meta-analysis research will be summarised. Answers to the second question will need to outline an appropriate epistemological strategy that can be used by educative leaders to construct trustworthy theories of educative leadership in different contexts.

To address the first research question, an analysis of moral philosophies underpinning constructivism and key leadership theories will be conducted. Constructivist philosophy emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing knowledge, aligning with leadership theories that prioritize collaboration, distributed decision-making, and ethical responsibility (Spillane, 2006; Strike, 2010). Leading theories such as transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership have demonstrated relevance to enhancing quality learning, but their moral and ethical underpinnings require further exploration (Hallinger, 2011). By synthesizing findings from moral philosophy and leadership theory, this study aims to identify ethical principles that leaders can adopt to align intentions with desired learning outcomes.

Meta-analyses on leadership effectiveness provide robust evidence to inform this inquiry into outcomes. For example, Hattie (2009) identified leadership behaviours that significantly impact student achievement, demonstrating the need for context-sensitive strategies. These findings will be integrated to highlight how ethical intentions can lead to effective outcomes.

The second research question necessitates an epistemological strategy that empowers leaders to construct trustworthy and context-sensitive theories. Pragmatism, with its focus on practical outcomes and problem-solving, offers a relevant framework (Biesta, 2010). Moreover, a holistic perspective that incorporates cultural, social, and systemic factors will ensure the approach is adaptable to diverse educational contexts (Giles, 2021).

This methodology acknowledges the limitations of universal theories while equipping leaders with tools to develop nuanced, ethical, and context-specific leadership practices. By integrating moral philosophy, empirical evidence, and epistemological insights, the study seeks to contribute to the development of actionable and trustworthy theories of educative leadership.

Findings: The Moral Philosophies of Constructivism

Constructivism is a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that individuals, be they students, teachers or leaders, construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiences and reflection on those experiences (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Fosnot, 1996; Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978). This approach emphasizes active learning, where learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous understanding (Jonassen, 1999; Walker, 2003).

Five moral philosophies are embedded in constructivism:

1. Individualism and Personal Growth: Constructivism promotes the idea that learning is a deeply personal process, reflecting individual experiences and perspectives. It respects and values the unique contributions of each learner, encouraging personal growth and self-awareness (Brooks & Brooks, 1993).

2. Empowerment and Agency: By emphasizing learner autonomy and self-directed learning, constructivism empowers learners to take charge of their educational

journeys. This philosophy fosters a sense of agency, enabling learners to become active participants in their own development (Fosnot, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978).

3. Collaborative Learning: Constructivism often involves collaborative learning, where learners engage in dialogue, share perspectives, and co-construct knowledge. This reflects a moral commitment to community, cooperation, and the collective advancement of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978; Jonassen, 1999).

4. Reflective Practice: The emphasis on reflection in constructivism aligns with the moral philosophy of continuous improvement and ethical responsibility. Reflective practice encourages leaders, educators and learners alike to critically examine their actions and beliefs, fostering a culture of lifelong learning and ethical consideration (Walker, 2003).

Research indicates that constructivism has four main strengths:

1. Active Engagement: Constructivist approaches encourage active engagement, which can lead to deeper understanding and retention of knowledge. Learners learn by doing, which often results in more meaningful and lasting learning experiences (Fosnot, 1996).

2. Adaptability and Relevance: Constructivism allows for a curriculum that is adaptable to the needs, interests, and **prior** knowledge of learners, making learning more relevant and personalized (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

3. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: By engaging learners in problem-solving and critical thinking activities, **constructivism** helps develop these essential skills, preparing students for real-world challenges (Jonassen, 1991).

4. Collaborative Skills: Constructivist settings often utilize group work and discussions, which help **learners** develop important social and communication skills (Vygotsky, 1978).

Conversely, research has also identified four limitations to constructivism:

1. Resource-Intensive: Implementing constructivist approaches can be resource-intensive, requiring significant time, effort, and materials to create and sustain engaging learning environments (Tobias & Duffy, 2009).

2. Teacher Training: Effective constructivist teaching requires intensive ITE, extensive PD and ongoing support for teachers, who **must** be skilled in facilitating rather than directing learning (Richardson, 2003).

3. Assessment Challenges: Traditional assessment methods, such as standardized tests, may not **effectively** measure the outcomes of constructivist learning, requiring the development of alternative assessment strategies (Shepard, 2000).

4. Variability in Learner Outcomes: Given the individualized nature of constructivist learning, outcomes can vary widely among learners, which can be challenging to manage in terms of ensuring consistent educational standards (Mayer, 2004).

To summarise this section, constructivism offers a powerful framework for enhancing the quality of leadership, teaching and learning by prioritizing learner agency, active engagement, and reflective practice. However, in practice, the successful implementation of constructivist approaches requires significant resources, ITE and PD for teachers and LE for leaders, and innovative assessment methods. It can also embed constructivism as foundational to all knowledge claims about leadership for learning, when educators and leaders must balance these demands against others to create unique educational environments that foster deep, meaningful learning experiences for all learners.

Findings: Leading Leadership Theories and their Moral Philosophies

Leadership theories in education play a crucial role in influencing the quality of learning by shaping instructional practices, fostering supportive environments, and impacting student

outcomes. Among these theories, several have been identified as particularly effective in enhancing the quality of student learning.

Transformational leadership is characterized by a leader's ability to inspire and motivate educators through a compelling vision and commitment to educational excellence. This approach emphasizes personal and professional growth, innovation, and a collaborative culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Transformational leaders positively impact student achievement by enhancing teacher motivation, improving instructional practices, and creating supportive learning environments.

Transformational leadership is fundamentally supported by virtue ethics, which emphasizes the development of moral character and the cultivation of virtues such as integrity, courage, and wisdom. This ethical framework focuses on the leader's role in inspiring and motivating others through exemplary behaviour and a compelling vision. Transformational leaders aim to foster personal and professional growth among educators, promote innovation, and build a collaborative culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). The moral emphasis in transformational leadership is on embodying virtues that enhance the leader's effectiveness and drive positive change in educational settings.

Instructional leadership focuses on improving teaching and learning by directly engaging with curriculum development, instructional practices, and assessment. Leaders in this model prioritize the enhancement of classroom instruction and the implementation of effective teaching strategies (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Research indicates that effective instructional leadership is associated with higher student achievement due to leaders' support for teachers, clear educational goals, and conducive teaching conditions.

Instructional leadership aligns with deontological ethics, which prioritizes adherence to rules, duties, and professional obligations. This moral philosophy focuses on the leader's responsibility to enhance teaching and learning through structured processes, direct

engagement with curriculum development, and the implementation of effective teaching strategies. Deontological ethics underscores the importance of fulfilling educational responsibilities and following ethical guidelines to ensure high-quality instructional practices and improved student outcomes (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). The moral focus here is on dutifully carrying out responsibilities to achieve educational goals.

Distributed leadership suggests that leadership responsibilities are shared among various members of the educational community, rather than being concentrated in a single leader. This approach fosters collaboration and utilizes the collective expertise of the school community to address educational challenges (Bowers & Santos, 2023). By leveraging diverse skills and knowledge, distributed leadership can improve school performance and student outcomes through enhanced collaboration, shared decision-making, and collective problem-solving.

Distributed leadership is informed by consequentialist ethics, which evaluates actions based on their outcomes and the overall impact on the community. This philosophy emphasizes the benefits of sharing leadership responsibilities and fostering collaboration among various members of the educational community. By leveraging collective expertise and engaging in shared decision-making, distributed leadership aims to improve school performance and student outcomes through inclusive and effective problem-solving (Bowers & Santos, 2023). The moral emphasis in this model is on achieving positive results and enhancing the collective well-being of the educational environment.

Servant leadership emphasizes the leader's role as a facilitator and supporter of others' growth and well-being. This model is characterized by empathy, listening, and a commitment to the development of both educators and students (Neubert et al., 2021). Servant leadership enhances the quality of learning by creating a supportive and empowering environment that fosters teacher and student engagement, trust, and collaboration.

Servant leadership is rooted in the ethics of care, which highlights the importance of empathy, compassion, and nurturing relationships. This moral philosophy focuses on the leader's role as a supporter and facilitator, emphasizing the development and well-being of others. Servant leaders create supportive and empowering environments that foster trust, collaboration, and engagement among educators and students (Neubert et al., 2021). The ethical focus in servant leadership is on caring for others and addressing their needs to enhance the quality of learning and promote a positive educational atmosphere.

These four leadership theories provide valuable frameworks for understanding how leadership practices can directly influence the quality of learning in educational settings. Each theory offers a unique perspective on how leaders interact with their teams and influence educational outcomes. Each leadership theory is associated with distinct ethical principles that guide its practice. The moral philosophies underlying these leadership theories provide a framework for understanding how educative leaders could influence their schools and achieve their goals.

Findings: Meta-Analysis and Educative Leadership

Hattie (2009) presented a comprehensive synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating educational practices to student achievement, incorporating studies that collectively involve millions of students worldwide. Meta-analysis is a statistical technique for combining the findings from independent studies to identify patterns, discrepancies, or overall effects across a body of research on a particular topic. This method aggregates the results of multiple studies to provide a more comprehensive and reliable estimate of the effect size, which is a measure of the strength of the relationship between variables (Glass, 1976). The main stages of meta-analysis are:

1. Systematic Literature Search: A thorough and systematic search of the literature to identify all relevant studies on the topic of interest.

2. Selection Criteria: Clear criteria for including or excluding studies from the meta-analysis to ensure consistency and relevance.

3. Data Extraction: Extracting key data from each study, such as sample sizes, effect sizes, and statistical significance.

4. Statistical Analysis: Using statistical techniques to combine the data, calculate an overall effect size, and assess the variability among the study results.

5. Assessment of Heterogeneity: Evaluating the degree of variation in the study results to understand whether the differences in findings are due to chance or underlying differences in study designs, populations, or other factors (Cooper et al., 2009).

6. Publication Bias Assessment: Assessing the potential for publication bias, where studies with significant results are more likely to be published than those with nonsignificant results.

The four main strengths of meta-analysis are:

1. Increased Statistical Power: By combining data from multiple studies, meta-analyses can provide more robust estimates of effect sizes, often with greater precision and confidence than individual studies.

2. Generalizability: The aggregated findings from diverse studies can enhance the generalizability of the results to broader populations and settings.

3. Identification of Patterns: Meta-analyses can reveal patterns or trends that may not be evident in individual studies, such as the consistency of effects across different subgroups or conditions.

4. Resolving Discrepancies: By synthesizing the results of multiple studies, meta-analyses can help resolve discrepancies and provide a clearer understanding of the research question (Glass, 1976).

Conversely, the limitations of meta-analysis can include:

1. Study Quality: The overall quality of the meta-analysis depends on the quality of the included studies. Poorly conducted studies can bias the results.

2. Heterogeneity: Significant variability among studies in terms of populations, interventions, and methodologies can complicate the interpretation of results.

3. Publication Bias: Meta-analyses are susceptible to publication bias, where studies with significant findings are more likely to be published and included in the analysis.

4. Complexity: Conducting a meta-analysis requires advanced statistical expertise and can be time-consuming and resource-intensive (Cooper et al., 2009).

Hattie's findings offer profound insights into the effectiveness of various leadership practices and models and their impact on student achievement, most specifically:

- Visible Learning: Hattie (2009) emphasizes the importance of educative learners making learning visible to both teachers and students. Effective feedback, clear learning intentions, and success criteria are critical components that significantly influence student outcomes, and moreover, components that educative leaders can organise.

- Collective Teacher Efficacy: One of the highest impact factors identified by Hattie (2015) is collective teacher efficacy. This concept aligns with the principles of distributed leadership, where the collective belief in the ability to influence student outcomes is substantial, again arrangements that educative leaders can make.

- Instructional Leadership: Hattie's findings underscore the importance of instructional leadership, which has a pronounced impact on student achievement. Leaders who would be educative are deeply involved in guiding and improving instructional practices (Hattie, 2009).

- Professional Development: Effective PD, a cornerstone of instructional leadership, is essential for improving teaching practices and student outcomes (Hattie, 2009).

Educative leaders can use Hattie's findings to plan and deliver PD for teachers and LE activities for themselves because they identify teaching strategies and their respective effect sizes, which are measures of their impact on student learning outcomes. Effect sizes (d) greater than 0.40 are generally considered to have a significant positive effect on learning, while negative or low positive effect sizes indicate less effective or even counterproductive practices. The use of effect sizes allows for a clear comparison of the relative impact of different practices, offering practical guidance for educators, leaders and policymakers on where to focus their efforts to enhance student outcomes.

To illustrate, the ten teaching strategies with the greatest positive effect on student learning are:

1. Self-Reported Grades/Student Expectations (d = 1.44). This strategy involves students predicting their own performance, which enhances self-efficacy and motivation.

2. Piagetian Programs (d = 1.28). These programs are based on Piaget's stages of cognitive development and help promote logical thinking.

3. Response to Intervention (RTI) (d = 1.07) RTI involves early identification and support for students with learning and behaviour needs, significantly enhancing their educational outcomes.

4. Teacher Credibility (d = 0.90). The importance of students believing in their teachers' competence and character is underscored by this strategy, leading to improved learning.

5. Providing Formative Evaluation (d = 0.90). Continuous assessment through formative evaluations provides feedback essential for improving student learning.

6. Micro-Teaching (d = 0.88). Involves teachers conducting short teaching sessions that are then analysed to improve their teaching skills.

7. Classroom Discussion (d = 0.82). Encouraging active participation through discussions enhances understanding and retention of material.

8. Comprehensive Interventions for Learning Disabled Students (d = 0.77). Targeted interventions designed to support students with learning disabilities show significant positive effects.

9. Teacher Clarity (d = 0.75). Clear and structured teaching helps students understand learning objectives and expectations.

10. Feedback (d = 0.70). Providing effective feedback helps students understand their progress and areas for improvement (Hattie, 2009; 2015).

Conversely, the ten teaching strategies with the greatest negative effect on student learning are:

1. Retention (Holding Students Back) (d = -0.16). Retaining students in the same grade negatively impacts their academic and social progress.

2. Summer Vacation (d = -0.02). Extended breaks without academic engagement can lead to learning loss.

3. Student Mobility (d = -0.01). Frequent changes of schools can disrupt learning continuity and negatively impact academic performance.

4. Whole Language Programs (d = 0.06). This approach to teaching reading emphasizes meaning and strategy instruction but may lack the structured skill development provided by phonics.

5. Teaching Test Preparation (d = 0.18). Focusing extensively on test preparation rather than deeper learning can be counterproductive.

6. Web-Based Learning (d = 0.18). Online learning without sufficient interaction and engagement can lead to lower outcomes compared to traditional methods.

7. Individualized Instruction (d = 0.23). While tailored instruction can be beneficial, it may not always lead to better outcomes if not implemented effectively.

8. Ability Grouping (d = 0.12). Grouping students by ability can lead to lower expectations and outcomes for lower-ability groups.

9. Inquiry-Based Teaching (d = 0.31). While promoting critical thinking, it may not be effective if students lack foundational knowledge.

10. Home Environment (d = 0.52). The home environment's influence can be complex, with negative effects occurring in less supportive or resource-poor settings (Hattie, 2009; 2015).

A crucial issue to educative leaders concerned with improving the quality of learning is the extent to which different school leadership models and Hattie's findings cohere or differ. In brief:

1. Transformational Leadership: The focus is on **i**nspiring and motivating change. Hattie's findings strongly support collective teacher efficacy and reflective practices. It provides high levels of motivation and innovation. On the other hand, it demands exceptional leadership skills and can be resource intensive.

2. Distributed Leadership: The focus is on shared leadership and collective responsibility. Hattie's findings are highly aligned with the concept of collective teacher efficacy. It promotes empowerment and collaboration although it can offer challenges to coordination with potential for conflict.

3. Instructional Leadership: The focus is on direct involvement in teaching and learning processes. Hattie's findings directly support the importance of effective feedback, clear learning intentions, and PD. It has a strong impact on student achievement. It can be narrowly focused on academic achievement, potentially neglecting other educational purposes.

4. Servant Leadership: The focus is on supportive relationships and professional development, which enhance teacher-student interactions and engagement (Neubert et al., 2021). Using a different approach, Hattie's research provides direct, quantitative evaluations of teaching strategies (Hattie, 2009).

In sum, Hattie's meta-analyses provide invaluable insights into the factors that influence student achievement, implying the importance of educative leaders making learning more visible, boosting collective teacher efficacy, and organising instructional leadership and PD. When considering different leadership models, it is evident that approaches promoting collaboration, teacher empowerment, and a focus on instructional quality align well with Hattie's evidence-based recommendations. Nevertheless, each of the four leadership styles discussed has inherent strengths and limitations, and the effectiveness of any approach depends significantly on its implementation within the specific context of each school or educational system. This highlights the need for a trustworthy method of constructing a situationally specific educative leadership theory.

Discussion

Constructivism continues to offer valuable insights into improving leadership, teaching and learning through learner-centred approaches, aligned with humanistic values. It emphasizes individual potential, personal growth, and self-actualization by considering students, teachers and leaders as active participants in their own learning process, thereby respecting their individuality and autonomy. School leadership models, particularly transformative leadership, instructional leadership, distributed leadership and servant leadership, each suggest additional strategies that could be highly appropriate in specific circumstances, with each bringing a different array of ethics to the "intent" of educative leadership to achieve different preferred outcomes.

Meta-analysis, which highlights the significance of visible learning, collective teacher efficacy, instructional leadership, PD and LE, reflects a pragmatic approach to achieving the locally preferred outcomes of educative leadership. It values practical outcomes and relies on empirical evidence to inform educational practices, thereby enhancing the quality of leadership, teaching and learning through data-driven decision-making.

The challenge now is how to theorise a practical theory of educative leadership when the foundational moral philosophies of "intent" in leadership theories are at odds with the equally foundational moral philosophy of consequentialism embedded in "outcomes" that can be defined and measured empirically. The answer suggested, and a key argument advanced by this paper, is not to choose between these options and to employ both of them in a web-of-belief theory without foundations about the most ethical approach in context about the educative leadership of quality learning.

Pragmatic holism, an example of non-foundational epistemology (Evers & Lakomski, 1991; Evers et al., 1992), is recommended as an approach to develop contextually specific theories of educative leadership for quality learning. This web-of-belief method constructs

theories by developing them iteratively by recursively conducting situational analyses, strategic analyses of options, internal and external coherence tests, and negotiations using touchstone (Walker et al., 1992). A convincing and enduring web-of-belief theory would have particular characteristics; beliefs with mutual support and revisability, empirical content, internal and external coherence, and conceptual relations, with no absolute certainty and with context-dependency (Quine, 1953; 1960).

Pragmatic holism offers a flexible, context-sensitive framework for addressing the complexities of educative leadership, teacher education, and professional development. Its emphasis on iterative theory construction aligns well with the challenges inherent in reconciling moral intentions and measurable outcomes. By integrating reflection, negotiation, and empirical testing, pragmatic holism bridges the philosophical divide between constructivist ethics and the consequentialist orientation of evidence-based practices. This synthesis provides valuable insights into the development of contextually relevant and ethically grounded theories of leadership and learning.

In initial teacher education (ITE), pragmatic holism supports reflective and learner-centred pedagogies that align with the principles of constructivism. Prospective teachers, guided by this approach, are encouraged to actively engage in constructing their understanding of teaching practices through situational analysis and reflection on ethical dilemmas. These processes enable them to consider the interplay between individual autonomy, diverse classroom contexts, and systemic educational goals. Incorporating iterative cycles of feedback and revision fosters adaptability and prepares educators to navigate complex and evolving educational environments. Recent research emphasizes the importance of such adaptive and reflective training in preparing teachers for diverse and dynamic classrooms (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

In professional development (PD), pragmatic holism enables educators to enhance their practices through cycles of action research and collaborative inquiry. Teachers are guided to reflect on the moral dimensions of their instructional strategies while grounding their decisions in data-driven evidence of student outcomes. This iterative process helps educators align their moral intentions with empirical goals, fostering both individual and collective efficacy. Current studies highlight the significance of sustained, collaborative PD frameworks that prioritize teacher agency and evidence-based improvement (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Kraft et al., 2018). Pragmatic holism, by integrating ethical reflection and empirical validation, strengthens these frameworks and contributes to their effectiveness.

Leadership development also benefits from the application of pragmatic holism. School leaders, confronted with diverse and context-specific challenges, can use the web-of-belief approach to construct and revise theories of educative leadership. This methodology emphasizes the interplay between ethical commitments—such as equity or student well-being—and outcome-driven decisions informed by evidence. Leaders are encouraged to engage in iterative situational analyses, coherence testing, and strategic planning to ensure that their leadership practices remain relevant and contextually appropriate. Recent research underscores the need for leadership development programs that balance ethical reflection with practical outcomes, enabling leaders to adapt effectively to complex organizational environments (Leithwood et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2021).

Pragmatic holism has distinct strengths that make it a compelling framework for contemporary education in international contexts. Its context-sensitive approach allows for adaptation to diverse educational settings, while its iterative processes encourage continuous reflection and improvement. The integration of ethical reasoning with empirical evidence bridges moral and practical dimensions, fostering collaboration among stakeholders to co-construct shared goals.

However, the framework is not without limitations. Its complexity demands significant cognitive and organizational resources, which can pose challenges in resource-constrained settings. Furthermore, its non-foundational nature, emphasizing revisability and context-dependence, may be disconcerting to stakeholders who seek definitive solutions or universal principles. Despite these challenges, pragmatic holism's strengths in fostering flexibility, collaboration, and evidence-informed practices outweigh its limitations.

Ultimately, pragmatic holism provides a robust theoretical and practical foundation for advancing ITE, PD, and leadership development. By acknowledging the complexities of modern education and bridging the divide between constructivist and consequentialist philosophies, it enables educators and leaders to construct adaptive, ethical, and contextually grounded practices. As education continues to evolve in response to diverse challenges, the iterative and integrative nature of pragmatic holism offers a vital pathway for sustained improvement and innovation in leadership and teaching.

Conclusions

The research reviewed confirms that constructivism remains a valuable framework for enhancing leadership, teaching, and learning through its learner-centred approach. This framework aligns with humanistic values by emphasizing individual potential, personal growth, and self-actualization. It views students and teachers as active participants in the learning process, thereby respecting their individuality and autonomy.

However, to construct a practical theory of educative leadership in a specific educational context, the contributions of various school leadership models such as transformative, instructional, distributed and servant leadership should also be considered. Each of these models offers strategies that can be highly appropriate in particular

circumstances, albeit with distinct foundational ethics shaping their approach to educative leadership.

Transformative leadership, with its focus on social justice and empowerment, seeks to inspire and engage all stakeholders to achieve positive educational changes. Instructional leadership emphasizes utilitarian principles, aiming to maximize educational outcomes through evidence-based practices and ongoing PD. Distributed leadership promotes democratic ethics, fostering inclusivity and shared decision-making among teachers, staff, and students. Servant leadership prioritizes the growth, well-being, and empowerment of educators and students through empathetic, supportive relationships and a focus on collaborative development.

Meta-analyses highlight the importance of visible learning, collective teacher efficacy, instructional leadership, and PD. These findings advocate for a pragmatic approach, valuing practical outcomes and empirical evidence to inform educational practices. This approach enhances the quality of leadership, teaching, and learning through data-driven decisions, reflecting a consequentialist philosophy that prioritizes the outcomes of educative efforts.

Referring to the original objective of the Educative Leadership Project, that is, to define "what is 'good' or 'excellent' educational leadership?" (Duigna & Macpherson, 1992: 1), a major challenge in constructing a practical theory of educative leadership lies in reconciling the foundational moral philosophies that underpin the "intent" of transformative, instructional, distributed and servant leadership theories with the equally foundationalist and consequentialist philosophy embedded in "outcomes" defined empirically by meta-analyses.

The proposed solution to this challenge is to adopt a non-foundational epistemology, specifically pragmatic holism. Pragmatic holism allows for the integration of various ethical perspectives—humanism, utilitarianism, democratic ethics, communitarianism, and virtue ethics—into a cohesive web of belief. This non-foundational approach eschews the rigid adherence to a single moral philosophy, instead embracing a flexible and adaptive stance that

considers the specific context and needs students, teachers and leaders of the educational environment.

Pragmatic holism supports the creation of practical theories of educative leadership by emphasizing the following approach:

1. Contextualization: Recognize that educational contexts vary significantly and require tailored leadership strategies. Pragmatic holism encourages leaders to consider the unique cultural, social, and institutional dynamics of their educational settings when developing leadership approaches.

2. Flexibility and Adaptability: Leadership strategies should be adaptable to changing circumstances and responsive to new insights. Pragmatic holism promotes continuous learning and adjustment, allowing leaders to refine their approaches based on emerging evidence and shifting contexts.

3. Ethical Pluralism: Instead of adhering to a single ethical framework, pragmatic holism integrates multiple ethical perspectives. This approach allows leaders to draw on the strengths of various moral philosophies, aligning their leadership practices with the ethical principles most relevant to their specific context.

4. Empirical Evidence: While remaining flexible and context-sensitive, pragmatic holism values empirical evidence and practical outcomes. Leaders are encouraged to use data-driven decision-making to inform their practices, ensuring that their strategies are effective and grounded in real-world results.

5. Collaboration and Inclusivity: Pragmatic holism emphasizes the importance of collaborative decision-making and shared leadership. By involving teachers, students, parents, and community members in the leadership process, leaders can foster a sense of collective responsibility and ensure that diverse perspectives are considered.

In conclusion, developing an effective theory of educative leadership tailored to specific educational contexts requires advancing beyond traditional epistemological frameworks and embracing a pragmatic holism approach. This non-foundational perspective integrates diverse ethical viewpoints and empirical evidence, leading to leadership practices that are both adaptable and contextually relevant. This means fostering team, school and system leaders who are adept at reconciling different moral philosophies and are equipped to respond flexibly to the unique needs of their changing educational environments. This approach underscores the importance of cultivating leaders who are not only theoretically well informed but also practically prepared to navigate and lead in the complexities of modern educational settings.

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Biography

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