Macpherson, R. J. S. (2025). Ethical and educative leadership to improve the quality of learning: Revising a pioneering theory using pragmatic holism. *International Journal for Leadership in Learning*, *25*(1), 1–41. https://doi.org/10.29173/ijll52

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

Reynold J. S. Macpherson

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.

References

Biesta, G. (2010). Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy. Routledge.

Bowers, A. J., & Santos, M. (2023). Examining distributed leadership in schools: A meta-analysis of its impact on student outcomes. *Journal of Educational Administration, 61*(2), 220-244. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-05-2022-0141

Brooks, J. G., & Brooks, M. G. (1999). In search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms. ASCD.

Bush, T. (2020). Theories of educational leadership and management (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Canipe, M. (2022). Transforming educational leadership: Theory, practice, and policy. Routledge.

Carr, D. (2021). Virtue ethics and moral education. *Journal of Moral Education, 50*(2), 169-181. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2020.1837947

Cooper, H., Hedges, L. V., & Valentine, J. C. (Eds.). (2009). *The handbook of research synthesis and meta-analysis* (2nd ed.). Russell Sage Foundation.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2021). Teacher education around the world: What can we learn from international practice? *European Journal of Teacher Education, 44*(1), 12-25. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2021.1845404

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2022). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/effective-teacher-professional-development-report

Desimone, L. M., & Garet, M. S. (2015). Best practices in teacher's professional development in the United States. *Psychology, Society, and Education, 7*(3), 252-263. https://doi.org/10.25115/psye.v7i3.515

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan.

Duignan, P.A. & Macpherson, R. J. S. (1991) Creating new knowledge about educative leadership. In P.A. Duignan & R. J. S. Macpherson (Eds.), *Educative leadership: A Practical Theory for New Administrators and Managers*, (p. 1). Routledge.

Evers, C. W., & Lakomski, G. (1991). Knowing educational administration: Contemporary methodological controversies in educational administration research. Pergamon Press.

Evers, C. W., Lakomski, G., & Walker, J. (1992). Epistemology and educational administration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *28*(3), 66-85. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X92028003005

Evers, C. W., Lakomski, G., & Walker, J. (1992). Epistemology and educational administration. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, *20*(3), 165-180.

Evers, C. W., & Lakomski, G. (1991). Knowing educational administration: Contemporary methodological controversies in educational administration research. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 27(3), 213-233.

Fosnot, C. T. (1996). Constructivism: Theory, perspectives, and practice. Teachers College Press.

Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (50th anniversary ed.). Bloomsbury.

Fullan, M. (1982). *The meaning of educational change*. Teachers College Press.

Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, *38*(4), 915-945. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038004915

Gay, G. (2020). Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.

Giles, D. L. (2021). Relational leadership in education: A pragmatic and holistic approach. *Journal of Educational Leadership*, *30*(4), 321-339.

Glass, G. V. (1976). Primary, secondary, and meta-analysis of research. *Educational Researcher*, *5*(10), 3-8. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X005010003

Grossman, P., Hammerness, K., & McDonald, M. (2019). Redefining teacher preparation: A practice-based approach. *Journal of Teacher Education, 70*(2), 113-127. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487117752214

Hall, G. E., & Hord, S. M. (1987). *Change in schools: Facilitating the process*. SUNY Press.

Hallinger, P. (2011). Leadership for learning: Lessons from 40 years of empirical research. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *49*(2), 125-142.

Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2023). Leading education: Enhancing leadership and management in schools. Sage Publications.

Hattie, J. (2009). Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement. Routledge.

Hattie, J. (2015). Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning. Routledge.

Jonassen, D. H. (1991). Evaluating constructivistic learning. *Educational Technology, 31*(9), 28-33.

Jonassen, D. H. (1999). Computers as mindtools for schools: Engaging critical thinking. Prentice Hall.

Kant, I. (1996). *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals* (M. Gregor, Ed. & Trans.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1785)

Kennedy, M. M. (2016). How does professional development improve teaching? *Review of Educational Research, 86*(4), 945-980. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315626800

Koehler, M. J., & Mishra, P. (2021). What is technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK)? *Journal of Education, 191*(3), 13-19. https://doi.org/10.1177/002205741319100303

Kraft, M. A., Blazar, D., & Hogan, D. (2018). The effect of teacher coaching on instruction and achievement: A meta-analysis of the causal evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, *88*(4), 547–588.

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2000). The effects of transformational leadership on organizational conditions and student engagement with school. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *38*(2), 112–129**.** https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230010320064

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2006). Transformational school leadership for large-scale reform: Effects on students, teachers, and their classroom practices. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *17*(2), 201–227. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243450600565829

Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management, 40*(1), 5-28. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077

Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership and Management, 40*(1), 5-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077

Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership and Management, 40*(1), 5–22.

Leithwood, K., Mascall, B., Strauss, T., Sacks, R., Memon, N., & Yashkina, A. (2007). Distributing leadership to make schools smarter: Taking the ego out of the system. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 6*(1), 37-67. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760601168158

Mayer, R. E. (2004). Should there be a three-strikes rule against pure discovery learning? The case for guided methods of instruction. *American Psychologist, 59*(1), 14-19. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.1.14

Neubert, M. J., Wu, C.-W., & Roberts, C. M. (2021). Servant leadership and its impact on teacher engagement: The role of trust and collective efficacy. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 49*(6), 1042-1061. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220982210

Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.

Northfield, J. (1992). Leadership to promote quality in learning. In collaboration with Ken Craze, Pat Duignan, Reynold Macpherson, Elizabeth McKenzie and Anne Pegum. In P.A. Duignan & R. J. S. Macpherson (Eds.), *Educative leadership: A Practical Theory for New Administrators and Managers,* (pp. 85–102). Routledge

Northouse, P. (2022). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (9th ed.). Sage.

Piaget, J. (1972). *Psychology and pedagogy*. Viking Press.

Quine, W. V. (1953). From a logical point of view: 9 logico-philosophical essays. Harvard University Press.

Quine, W. V. (1960). *Word and object*. MIT Press.

Richardson, V. (2003). Constructivist pedagogy. *Teachers College Record, 105*(9), 1628-1646. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9620.00372

Robinson, V. M. J., Hohepa, M. K., & Lloyd, C. A. (2021). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why*. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 57*(2), 211-242. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X20986595

Shepard, L. A. (2000). The role of assessment in a learning culture. *Educational Policy, 14*(3), 412-420. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543067001040

Spillane, J. P. (2006). *Distributed leadership*. Jossey-Bass.

Strike, K. A. (2010). Justice, caring, and universality: In defense of moral pluralism. *Educational Theory*, *60*(5), 589-606.

Sun, J., & Leithwood, K. (2015). Leadership effects on student learning: A review of the research. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 51*(3), 423-456. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X15584795

Timperley, H. (2023). Professional learning and development. In A. Hargreaves & M. O'Connor (Eds.), *International handbook of educational leadership and social (in)justice* (pp. 151-170). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20829-4_10

Tobias, S., & Duffy, T. M. (2009). Constructivist theory in practice: A critique of the constructivist theory of learning. In *Constructivist instruction: Success or failure?* (pp. 5-20). Routledge.

Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of the research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(1), 80-91. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.01.004

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Harvard University Press.

Walker, J., Evers, C. W., & Starr, K. (1992). Pragmatic holism: Epistemology and educational leadership. *Journal of Educational Administration, 30*(4), 5-24. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578239210022026

Walker, R. (2003). The constructivist perspective: A philosophy for effective teaching. In *Theoretical perspectives for teachers* (pp. 45-60). Routledge.

Zeichner, K., & Bier, M. (2017). Opportunities and pitfalls in the turn toward clinical experience in US teacher education. In K. Zeichner (Ed.), *The struggle for the soul of teacher education* (pp. 201–216). Routledge.

Biography

Reynold Macpherson completed his PhD at Monash University, served as a Senior Lecturer at the University of New England, and as an Associate Professor at the University of Tasmania. He was Professor and Director of the Centre of Professional Development at the University of Auckland before appointment as CEO of Waiariki Institute of Technology. He was then Foundational Chancellor, CEO and Professor of Strategic Management at Abu Dhabi University. He has held a range of international consultancies and published 17 books and 77 research papers.

Institutional Affiliation

University of Auckland, retired

reynold@reynoldmacpherson.ac.nz

Lisi, N., & Freisen, S. (2025). Leadership practices of middle school principals that promote collective teacher efficacy. *International Journal for Leadership in Learning*, *25*(1), 42-78. https://doi.org/10.29173/ijll58

Leadership Practices of Middle School Principals that Promote Collective Teacher Efficacy

Nancy Lisi
Sharon Friesen

Abstract

This case study investigates the leadership practices of middle school principals in schools with high Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE). The research aims to understand how specific leadership actions contribute to the enabling conditions that foster CTE. Using a qualitative approach, the study gathered data through semi-structured interviews with three middle school principals and focus groups with teachers from their schools in a large urban district in Alberta, Canada. The findings reveal four central themes: building and distributing leadership capacity, engaging the school community, driving school improvement, and the significance of principal deportment. Principals prioritized building teacher capacity through strategic alignment with the School Development Plan (SDP) and by fostering collaboration within Professional Learning Communities. They engaged in distributed leadership practices, creating environments where teachers felt empowered and supported. In terms of school improvement, principals used the SDP as a tool to guide instructional enhancements and align district mandates with school priorities. Notably, principal deportment emerged as a critical factor. The deportment of principals—how they carried themselves and embodied their leadership roles—played a pivotal role in building trust and enhancing the overall school climate. Principal deportment was not only crucial for fostering a positive school environment but is also integral to the creation and sustainability of CTE, demonstrating that effective leadership practices can intentionally cultivate this essential construct.

Keywords: collective teacher efficacy, middle school principals, school leadership, principal deportment

Introduction

Researchers have demonstrated that high collective teacher efficacy (CTE) benefits student learning and achievement, as well as teacher instructional practices and well-being (Arzonetti Hite & Donohoo, 2021; Bandura 1997; Donohoo, 2017; Donohoo et al., 2018; Eells, 2011; Hattie, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Hattie (2015) identified CTE as the second highest influence on student achievement, but following Eells' (2011) meta-analysis, he revised his ranking to place CTE as the top predictor of student achievement. Eells' (2011) meta-analysis reinforced this finding, showing CTE as a critical predictor of student outcomes across multiple studies.

Donohoo (2017) details a variety of benefits linked to high teacher collective efficacy. Staff in schools with high CTE maintain school environments in which students feel good about themselves and engage in more productive behaviours that support positive student outcomes. High CTE encourages teaching behaviors and learning environments characterized by greater teacher effort and persistence, especially with struggling learners, openness to new pedagogical approaches, high expectations, learner autonomy through student-centered practices, minimized disruptions through engagement, and increased parental involvement (Bandura, 1997; Donohoo, 2017; Donohoo et al., 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). In schools with high CTE, teachers are willing to be more persistent in supporting students, especially those who may be struggling. Teachers feel supported by their colleagues to continue to persist and find success with all their students; brainstorming and collectively finding alternate strategies and solutions (Donohoo, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). As well, individual teachers are more likely to approach new teaching strategies and approaches that are pedagogically sound and are also more likely to take on more challenging tasks and try new ideas (Donohoo, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004).

Staff with high CTE tend to be more committed, seem better able to understand their responsibility to their students, and thrive professionally and personally (Donohoo, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). High CTE is positively related to increased job satisfaction and reduced levels of burnout for educators (Donohoo, 2017; Donohoo et al., 2018). Teachers who are part of a highly efficacious staff tend to have high expectations of themselves and hence their students (Donohoo, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). They believe students are capable and support them in finding success. These teachers are more confident in their abilities to support student learning and are more open to student voice and choice in their learning, which leads to a more student-centred approach in the classroom which in turn increases student engagement (Donohoo, 2017). Increased student engagement also leads to a decrease in behavioural issues. When students find success, they become more focused on the learning task and become less likely to engage in negative attention seeking behaviours. Students receive greater support in their learning and teachers tend to be less critical of student errors, and offer support, compassion, and encouragement (Donohoo, 2017). Donohoo (2017) also highlights the Pygmalion Effect explaining that a teacher's beliefs about a student's ability to achieve becomes a significant predictor of student success. Finally, staff with high CTE also tend to be better able to manage student behaviour and tend to foster positive behaviours in their students. Teachers are more likely to have a uniform approach to address behaviours and have common expectations for all students (Donohoo, 2017; Donohoo et al., 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Moreover, parental involvement is higher amongst teaching staff with high CTE as these teachers are more likely to reach out to parents on a regular basis due to increased confidence in their own abilities (Donohoo, 2017).

Donohoo (2018) urged all educational leaders to make increasing CTE their first priority. When school leaders are faced with rolling out a new initiative or facilitating change of any kind,

being in a school with high CTE is beneficial. The more cohesive a staff, the more likely they are to understand each other's needs and challenges (Arzonetti Hite & Donohoo 2021; Donohoo, 2017; Donohoo et al. 2020). Staff with high CTE tend to be more cohesive, hence they are more in tune with each other and better able to support each other through necessary changes (Donohoo, 2018). The higher the CTE, the more involvement staff have had with decision-making and therefore they are better positioned to more readily accept changes of which they have had a voice in deciding (Donohoo, 2018). Goddard (2001) surfaced the important role of leadership in supporting the group to set and achieve collective performance goals. Building on this work, Goddard and Hoy (2004) explored how collective efficacy operates as an emergent property of organizational interactions, highlighting its impact on student achievement. Goddard (2001) explained that collective efficacy is an organizational characteristic and highlighted collective efficacy as a school construct that can be leveraged to increase pedagogical mastery leading to increased student achievement. Hoogsteen (2020) expanded on Goddard's (2001) conceptualization of collective efficacy, offering additional insights into its reciprocal relationship with student achievement. Hoogsteen (2020) offered an alternative conceptualization focusing on the reciprocal relationship between CTE and student achievement. He identified collective efficacy as the by-product of leadership practices that involve goal setting, collaboration, goal monitoring, and celebration which leads to pedagogical mastery and increased collective efficacy.

Whether CTE is the catalyst that drives school improvement, or the by-product of school improvement practices, research studies do, overwhelmingly, highlight the benefits associated within schools with high CTE and their correlation on student achievement and teaching practices (Arzonetti Hite & Donohoo, 2021; Donohoo, 2017; Donohoo, 2018; Donohoo et al., 2018; Donohoo et al., 2020; Eells, 2011; Goddard, 2001; Goddard et al., 2000; Hoogsteen, 2020). A

number of these studies provide suggestions on how to achieve higher CTE, but few to none, outline the specific practices and actions of school-based leaders within schools with high collective teacher efficacy. This research study focused on understanding the leadership practices of school-based leaders in middle schools with high collective efficacy.

Research Question

Given the above issues surrounding CTE, the overarching question guiding this study was:

- What are the leadership practices of middle school principals within schools with high collective efficacy?

The secondary question was:

- What actions do middle school principals take to provide supportive leadership, establish goal consensus, empower teachers, support cohesive teacher knowledge, and promote reflective instructional practices?

This foundation underscores the importance of understanding leadership practices within high-CTE schools, which this study explored.

Literature

The concept of CTE is deeply intertwined with the broader body of literature on educational leadership and its impact on school outcomes. Understanding the dynamics of CTE requires examining the foundational elements of leadership practices that foster collective action and shared beliefs. The following sections explore these elements, beginning with an overview of school-based leadership and its pivotal role in shaping the conditions for high teacher efficacy.

School-Based Leadership

Educational researchers have extensively explored how school leadership impacts student learning, demonstrating that leadership influences outcomes, even indirectly. Leadership's

primary purpose was to improve teaching practices, thereby supporting student learning (Day et al., 2011; Hallinger, 2005, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2010, 2020; Robinson, 2011). Various studies identify common leadership dimensions, such as setting direction, building relationships, and improving instructional programs (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012; Robinson & Gray, 2019). The consensus is that effective leadership supports high-quality teaching and fosters environments where teaching and learning thrive.

Hallinger (2005, 2011) emphasized that successful leaders adapt their strategies to fit school-specific conditions, highlighting the importance of context. Similarly, Bendikson et al. (2012) differentiate between direct and indirect instructional leadership, highlighting context's role in determining which approach is more effective. Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) advocate for distributed leadership, where decision-making and improvement efforts are shared among educators, correlating with higher student achievement (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Robinson and Gray (2019) contend the need for leaders to build relationships with staff while remaining focused on student well-being and learning. Whereas, Leithwood et al. (2020) reaffirm the significance of leadership in influencing staff motivation, ability, and working conditions. They propose a theory of action, including the Four Paths Model, which outlines leadership practices that can indirectly support student learning (Leithwood et al., 2010, 2020). This model includes rational, emotional, organizational, and family paths, each with variables that leaders can leverage to enhance student outcomes.

Common themes among these studies emphasize the necessity of school leaders engaging with staff to enhance instructional practices that serve student learning and achievement (Day et al., 2011; Hallinger, 2005, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2010, 2020; Robinson, 2011; Robinson & Gray, 2019). These researchers consistently stress the need for leaders to create environments that

support effective teaching practices, which, in turn, foster high student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Robinson, 2011). This involves paying close attention to specific school contexts and developing a shared leadership perspective that supports teacher professional learning (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012).

The review of the selected literature identified six key leadership dimensions as essential for effective school leadership:

1. Setting Direction: Establishing a common vision, developing goals, and setting expectations to ensure that all members of the learning community have a shared purpose (Leithwood et al., 2010, 2020; Robinson, 2011; Robinson & Gray, 2019).
2. Fostering Relationships: Building a culture of relational trust, which is crucial for effective collaboration. Trust often emerges as a product of working together (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).
3. Developing People: Ensuring high-quality teaching by focusing on the professional development of teachers. This includes providing the necessary tools, resources, and opportunities for professional growth (Day et al., 2011; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012).
4. Improving Instructional Programs: Continuously refining instructional practices to meet the learning needs of students (Hallinger, 2005, 2011).
5. Refining the Organization: Ensuring that the necessary resources, including human resources, are in place to achieve the school's goals. This also involves keeping a pulse on stakeholders' perspectives to maintain alignment with the school's vision (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012).

6. Ensuring a Safe Environment: Creating a safe, caring, and orderly learning environment is paramount, as students need to feel secure to learn effectively (Robinson, 2011).

These perspectives on school leadership inform the relationship between school leadership and CTE. Understanding how leadership practices can support the development of CTE or vice versa provided a foundation for this research study.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory posits that human behaviour is influenced by the interaction of personal factors, behaviour, and the environment (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Central to Social Cognitive Theory is the concept of agency—the capacity to act intentionally to influence outcomes. Self-efficacy, a core construct within Social Cognitive Theory, refers to individuals' beliefs in their ability to succeed in specific tasks. These beliefs are shaped by four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1997). Mastery experiences, the most influential source, arise from successfully completing tasks. Vicarious experiences involve learning by observing others. Verbal persuasion includes encouragement from others, and physiological states refer to emotional and physical conditions influencing self-efficacy. Collective efficacy extends these principles to groups, reflecting their shared belief in achieving common goals.

Self-Efficacy and Collective Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to achieve desired outcomes through their actions (Bandura, 1997). These beliefs influence how people approach challenges, with high self-efficacy leading to greater persistence and resilience (Bandura, 1993, 1997). Self-efficacy is shaped by four main sources: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states, with mastery experiences being the most influential

(Bandura, 1986, 1997). Individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to engage in tasks and persist in the face of challenges, while those with low self-efficacy may avoid tasks and lack commitment (Bandura, 1993).

Collective efficacy extends the concept of self-efficacy to groups, defined as a group's shared belief in its collective ability to achieve goals (Bandura, 1997). Hoy and colleagues (2006) emphasized the role of school leadership in shaping collective efficacy, particularly through fostering shared goals and supportive organizational climates. It is not merely the sum of individual beliefs but an emergent property of group interaction and coordination (Bandura, 1997). Effective collective efficacy depends on group dynamics, including leadership, member interactions, and the organization of tasks (Bandura, 1997). In schools, collective teacher efficacy (CTE) reflects the collective belief of teachers that they can positively influence student outcomes (Donohoo, 2018; Goddard et al., 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004).

Collective Teacher Efficacy

CTE is crucial for student achievement, as it drives teachers' motivation and persistence, particularly in challenging contexts (Donohoo et al., 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Tschannen-Moran and Barr's (2004) model further elucidates the interplay between school climate and CTE, offering a framework for understanding how teacher collaboration fosters high expectations and shared responsibility. Schools with high CTE report better climates, collaborative cultures, and higher expectations for students (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Teachers in such environments often try new strategies, engage in professional learning, and support one another, thereby enhancing student learning (Donohoo, 2017). CTE also contributes to teacher job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and a greater sense of collective responsibility for student success (Donohoo, 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004).

Measuring Teacher Efficacy

While numerous tools have been developed to measure teacher efficacy, including those by RAND and Bandura (1997), no single tool is universally accepted (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). The Enabling Conditions for Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale (EC-CTES) by Donohoo et al. (2020) offers a method to assess the conditions that foster CTE within schools, focusing on factors such as empowered teachers and supportive leadership. While acknowledging that measuring CTE remains a complex challenge requiring further research, we ultized the EC-CTES instrument.

Research Design and Analysis

Methodology

For this study we employed a case study approach, as outlined by Merriam (1998) and Yin (2018), to explore specific practices by middle school principals that lead to high CTE within a bounded context. This approach was chosen because case study was particularly useful for understanding phenomena in depth, offering detailed, rich insights from the perspectives of those being studied (Merriam, 1998). The research sought to discover and interpret the processes that middle school principals used to create a culture of high CTE within their schools. The case was bound within the context of middle school leadership practices in schools that scored high on the EC-CTES instrument in a large urban public school district in Alberta, Canada. This aligns with Merriam's (1998) emphasis on case study as a methodology aimed at gaining insight, discovery, and understanding. We sought to produce a holistic and descriptive analysis to inform leadership practices in similar educational settings.

Participants

We employed purposeful sampling to select middle school principals from a large urban public school district in Alberta, Canada, focusing on schools with diverse student populations and varying programming offerings. Principals from five middle schools agreed to complete the EC-CTES instrument. From these five, the three schools scoring the highest levels of enabling conditions for CTE according to the EC-CTES results were selected. Each of these three schools had a 73% or higher completion rate on the survey, which is administered to the principal and teachers. We conducted interviews with each of the three principals, aiming to understand how they enabled CTE. The interview questions asked principals to describe their practices in providing supportive leadership, ensuring goal consensus, empowering teachers, fostering cohesive teacher knowledge, and supporting reflective practices, following the model identified by Arzonetti Hite and Donohoo (2021). Each of the principals had held that position in the school for three years or more. Focus groups were held with four to five teachers within each school to gain teacher perspective on the leadership practices within their school in relation to CTE.

Three middle school principals participated in the study, each bringing varied yet substantial experiences to their roles, which contributed to a rich data set reflecting diverse leadership practices. Principal Aisling had 43 years of experience in education, with 23 of those years spent within their current jurisdiction. Over their 10 years as an administrator, Aisling had served in both junior high and middle school settings. At the time of the interview, they were in their fourth year as principal of a middle school with approximately 700 students and a teaching staff of 36 members. Aisling's leadership was deeply rooted in building strong relationships with staff and students, and they emphasized the importance of creating a supportive and cohesive school environment. Principal Melville brought 23 years of educational experience, with 17 years

in administrative roles within the same jurisdiction. Melville had been a principal for 11 years and was currently in their third year at a middle school serving 650 students. A focus on instructional leadership and the strategic development of teacher capacity characterized their leadership style. Melville also had experience in system-level leadership, which informed their comprehensive approach to school management and improvement. Principal Robin had 28 years of experience in education, including eight years in administrative roles. Robin was in their third year as principal of a middle school with a grade configuration of 5-9, serving around 700 students. Robin's leadership was centred on fostering continuous improvement and aligning school practices with the broader district goals while maintaining a focus on the unique needs of the school community.

Teachers from each principal's school participated in focus groups, providing additional insights into the schools' leadership practices. The focus groups included 13 teachers, seven of whom were teacher leaders, and participants represented a range of teaching experiences and roles. Hummingbird Middle School had a focus group of four teachers with experience ranging from 6 to 23 years. The group included both new and long-serving members of the school, providing a broad perspective on the school's collaborative practices. The participants held roles in science, student services, humanities, and English language learning, reflecting the diverse academic environment of the school. Northern Creek Middle School also had four teachers in its focus group, with experience ranging from 9 to 20 years. This school was dual-track, offering both regular and early French immersion programs. The group's participants included teachers in French immersion, physical education, math, science, humanities, and student services, highlighting the school's multifaceted instructional approach. Ridgeside Middle School had a focus group of five teachers, one of whom had to leave early. Their experience ranged from 5 to 23 years, and their roles included math, science, physical education, music, band, humanities, and Indigenous studies.

The group provided insights into the school's emphasis on interdisciplinary learning and cultural inclusivity.

Analysis

We employed a systematic coding process for both principal interviews and focus group data, utilizing NVivo software for efficient data management. Each interview was transcribed, reviewed, and subjected to three cycles of coding: initial pre-coding to note significant elements, descriptive coding to assign specific codes, and a final cycle to categorize these codes into themes, reflecting patterns within the data (Merriam, 1998; Saldaña, 2016). A thematic chart was then developed to organize these themes, which were further refined and consolidated. To enhance the validity of these findings, we triangulated the interview data with research journal entries and analyzed documents provided by one principal to substantiate their claims made during interviews.

Findings

In this case study, we sought to answer the primary research question, "What are the leadership practices of middle school principals within schools with high collective efficacy (CTE)?" Through principal interviews, teacher focus groups, and document analysis, we identified several key practices that characterize leadership in high-CTE schools. Principals in these settings prioritized building teacher capacity, distributing leadership roles, engaging the school community, focusing on school improvement, and exhibiting a supportive leadership style that emphasizes relational trust and transparency. Their approach to leadership utilized a strategic use of collaborative school development planning processes to establish and achieve school improvement goals, ensuring alignment between district mandates and school priorities. Principals maintained a relentless focus on improving teaching practices, driven by a commitment to student learning and well-being. Their commitment was reflected in their deportment, which emphasized

visibility, trust-building, and a consistent alignment between words and actions. Together, these leadership practices created an environment where CTE naturally emerged as an outcome of effective leadership, contributing to the development and sustainability of collective efficacy within the school.

Building and Distributing Leadership Capacity

We found that principals in schools with high CTE prioritize building teacher capacity by aligning their efforts closely with the School Development Plan (SDP). The SDP served as a central tool in guiding the development and execution of strategies aimed at improving instructional practices. As Principal Robin explained,

> *The Look Fors were created by the staff… so if I walked in and I was looking specifically for word walls for the first part of the year... I would say, 'Well, I see you have a beautiful word wall. How are you using it in your practice?'*

This example illustrates how the SDP was not just an administrative exercise but a living part of the school's strategy to enhance teaching and learning.

To further support teacher development, principals structured Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to enhance collaboration among teachers, focusing on improving instructional practices in alignment with the SDP goals. A participant from Northern Creek Middle School shared, "It's been very impactful and supportive for my own practice... just the sharing of the resources and the reviews of what we have done," highlighting how these PLCs facilitated reflective practice and shared learning. Similarly, a participant from Ridgeside Middle School noted, "It's incredibly valuable to have a team of teachers that come together and just try to focus on how we can improve student well-being in the building," emphasizing the collaborative effort in professional development.

Principals were intentional in designing school structures that enabled and supported this collaboration. For instance, Principal Robin noted, “Creating those opportunities... has been a huge change in what people know about each other’s practice,” underscoring the deliberate efforts to foster an environment where teachers could collaborate effectively. At Hummingbird Middle School, a focus group participant emphasized the importance of common planning time, stating, “Having that built in has been huge... it brings forth all those informal things that we talked about,” which allowed for organic, yet crucial, professional conversations that enriched teaching practices.

Staffing decisions were also strategic, aimed at creating effective teams and identifying the right leaders for key roles. Principal Aisling reflected on this process, saying, “With the right people together... they feed each other, and they’re hungry to talk and have that time.” This strategic placement of staff ensured that collaboration was not only encouraged but also productive, fostering a culture where professional growth was a shared priority. As a participant at Hummingbird Middle School noted, “Intentional team building created trust and allowed for better collaboration in classroom management, task design, and assessment.” This statement was echoed by participants in the other two schools as well, emphasizing how strategic staffing leads to a more cohesive and effective educational environment to further support the schools’ overall goals.

Leadership roles were distributed intentionally, with principals creating both formal and informal opportunities for teachers to lead. Principal Melville emphasized this by stating, “We knew that we needed to get the right people in the right seats on the bus.” This was reinforced by focus group participants who noted that the principals were deliberate in identifying and appointing leaders who had the passion and skills needed to advance school-wide teaching practices. This

distributive approach fostered a culture where leadership was shared, allowing teachers to contribute their expertise to the overall development of teaching practices.

Principals also utilized a variety of strategies to develop the capacity of teacher leaders. This included mentoring, providing authentic leadership experiences, and exemplifying effective team development. Principal Melville highlighted the importance of "digging in with [their] team of teachers to help them do a better job," and illustrating new protocols to build confidence among learning leaders (LLs). This hands-on approach was complemented by a reciprocal mentoring process, where principals learned from their LLs, as Principal Aisling pointed out, "I check in with them regularly, and we learn from each other."

The effectiveness of these strategies was evident in the experiences shared by focus group participants. A participant from Hummingbird Middle School described leading the integration of disciplinary literacy into science instruction, stating, "I led this initiative by collaborating with colleagues from other subject areas, and it really expanded our collective understanding." Another participant from Northern Creek Middle School School emphasized the growth gained from attending jurisdictional meetings, which enhanced their capacity to support school-wide development processes. These experiences not only built leadership capacity but also increased the self-efficacy of LLs as they observed the positive impact of their leadership on teaching practices.

We found that principals built and distributed leadership capacity by aligning teacher development efforts with the SPD, fostering collaboration through PLCs, and making intentional staffing decisions to create effective teams. They provided both formal and informal leadership opportunities, empowering teachers and fostering a shared sense of responsibility for school improvement. Additionally, principals employed mentoring and reciprocal learning strategies to

develop teacher leaders, which enhanced their confidence and effectiveness. These actions created a school environment where collaboration, trust, and professional growth were prioritized, directly supporting the development and sustainability of CTE.

Engaging the School Community and Demonstrating Leadership

Principals in high CTE schools actively engaged the broader learning community, seeking feedback on school operations and decisions. For example, Principal Aisling emphasized the importance of reconnecting with families after the pandemic, organizing a welcome-back BBQ to build informal connections and a sense of belonging, stating, "It's important. We have not been together as a community in all this time." This event served as a bridge to rebuild relationships and trust within the school community, reflecting the principals' commitment to creating a welcoming environment.

Similarly, Principal Melville focused on enhancing communication and creating a welcoming environment to rebuild trust between the school and parents. They worked diligently to ensure every visitor and inquiry was acknowledged, with the aim of demonstrating that "they are cared for and that they are valued." Focus group participants highlighted Principal Melville's personal approach, noting, "They know every kid's name, their parents' names, and their life history... they just have a knack for connecting with people." This personal connection showed Principal Melville's commitment to building strong relationships within the school community.

In addition to community engagement, the three principals employed collaborative decision-making processes, which actively involved teachers in school-wide decisions. At Northern Creek Middle School School, focus group participants described the culture as "very collaborative. There is really a culture that welcomes questions." Focus group participants from Ridgeside Middle School School echoed this sentiment, stating, "There's room for questioning

and it's welcomed," which underscored the collaborative approach used by principals across various contexts, from leadership team decisions to whole-staff discussions.

Transparency in decision-making was another key aspect highlighted by participants. Participants from Northern Middle Creek School participant indicated they valued the openness, stating, "Full transparency, which I think is just so important when making decisions with your staff." This transparency helped to foster trust and understanding among teachers, making them more supportive of decisions even when they were challenging or required significant changes in practice.

However, we also found that principals were willing to make unilateral decisions when they believed student learning was at risk or when they had strong convictions that required challenging the status quo. For instance, Principal Melville implemented an "Away for the Day" cell phone policy without staff consultation based on research indicating that cell phones negatively impacted student learning and well-being. A participant from Ridgeside Middle School School noted, "It was something they truly believed in and said, 'This is what we are doing,'" demonstrating the principal's commitment to making unilateral decisions when they believed student learning was at risk.

Similarly, Principal Robin made a significant change in the instructional model for grade five students, despite initial resistance. The significant change involved transitioning from a departmentalized instructional model to a more interdisciplinary, homeroom-based model. This shift aimed to enhance student-teacher relationships and provide consistent support for younger students. Despite initial resistance, the change resulted in increased parental satisfaction, with 90% expressing a preference for the new approach.

They explained their rationale to staff, saying, “Let’s give it a try... there’s nothing that’s set in stone, so let’s be vulnerable.” The change ultimately proved successful, with 90% of parents later expressing a preference for the new model, leading to continued implementation in grade six. Robin’s willingness to challenge the status quo, even in the face of resistance, highlights the importance of leadership courage in driving school improvement.

We found that principals in high CTE schools engaged the school community and demonstrated leadership by fostering strong relationships with families and staff, prioritizing transparent and collaborative decision-making, and, when necessary, making unilateral decisions to ensure student learning was prioritized. They actively sought feedback, created welcoming environments, and rebuilt trust through personal connections and community events. Additionally, their transparent and inclusive approach to decision-making fostered trust among staff, while their willingness to challenge the status quo underscored their commitment to improving student outcomes. These actions collectively strengthened the school community and reinforced the principals’ leadership roles.

Driving School Improvement

In high CTE schools, a collaborative school development planning process, involving teachers in setting and achieving goals, drove school improvement. The SDP process was deeply collaborative, with teachers playing a significant role in data analysis and goal setting. As Principal Robin described, “In June... we pull the data for them, so they don’t have to go mining for it,” allowing teachers to focus on interpreting the data and planning for the following year.

This process was mirrored in Principal Melville’s approach, where the leadership team was engaged in interpreting data trends and writing the SDP, which included specific instructional actions, resources, and measures to assess progress. Teachers appreciated the clear targets and the

support provided by principals. Hummingbird Middle School focus group participants noted, “We develop our school development plan pretty collaboratively across the school... and then we used that PLC time to work together and implement that in the most effective way possible.” This collaborative approach reinforced the ways in which the principals fostered a sense of shared commitment to achieving the schools’ goals through structured and supportive practices.

The alignment of PLC work with SDP goals was consistently mentioned by focus group participants. Participants from Northern Creek Middle School shared, “I feel like the students are more confident with their strategies, with their reading comprehension. And the way that I’m teaching it, I’ve become more confident in that as well,” reflecting the direct impact of the SDP on both teaching practices and student outcomes. Participants from the two other schools highlighted the flexibility within the instructional actions, noting that while teachers could tailor strategies to their students’ needs, they were still accountable for meeting the school-wide goals.

Principals strategically staffed their schools by creating balanced teams and appointing teacher leaders aligned with school priorities. Principal Robin emphasized the importance of adding value, stating, “We have to do the school development plan... what’s in it for staff and students, and how will people see the work we’re doing as value added, not another thing to do.” This approach ensured that mandates were integrated in a way that supported, rather than detracted from, the school’s existing efforts to improve student learning.

At times, principals would delay the implementation of certain district mandates if they did not immediately align with schools’ priorities. As Principal Aisling admitted, “I drag my feet on certain initiatives, taking the time to see how these mandates could be valuable within our context.” This careful consideration and strategic pacing ensured that teachers were not overwhelmed and that mandates were only implemented when they could genuinely support the schools’ goals.

Overall, principals in this study were deliberate in managing district mandates, ensuring that they did not overwhelm teachers or detract from the core work of teaching and learning. They sought to find meaningful purposes for mandates within their school contexts, making them more easily adoptable by staff. Of all district mandates, the SDP was the most naturally integrated and valued, seen not as an extra task but as a crucial tool for improving student learning through instructional practices.

We found that principals in high CTE schools drove school improvement by actively engaging teachers in a collaborative school development planning (SDP) process. This process involved teachers in data analysis, goal setting, and the creation of specific instructional actions. Principals like Robin and Melville ensured that the SDP was not just an administrative task but a living document that guided instructional practices and student outcomes. Focus group participants from various schools highlighted the alignment of PLC work with SDP goals, which fostered a shared commitment to achieving school-wide objectives. Additionally, principals were strategic in staffing and managing district mandates, ensuring that these aligned with school priorities and did not overwhelm teachers. This deliberate and thoughtful approach to school improvement reinforced the principals' leadership roles and supported the overall goal of enhancing student learning.

Principal Deportment

The deportment of principals—how they carried themselves and embodied their leadership roles—was central to creating an environment where student learning and teacher development were prioritized. Principals consistently modeled their core beliefs and values through their actions, setting a tone that emphasized the importance of student well-being and learning. Principal Robin, for instance, stated, "Everything I do… how I behave, what I say, what I do, how I work

with kids... demonstrated my beliefs and values." This alignment between words and actions not only communicated expectations to staff but also reinforced the principals' commitment to their educational mission. By being visible, engaged, and consistently upholding their values, these principals fostered a school culture where their priorities were clear, and their leadership was respected and trusted by both staff and students.

Moreover, the principal's approach to communication and relationships played a significant role in building trust and creating a supportive environment for both teachers and students. They were deeply committed to supporting their teachers, recognizing the importance of personal interactions in fostering a positive school climate. For example, Principal Melville emphasized, "My job really has been to say yes to things... and supporting the things I can," showing a genuine commitment to valuing teacher input and supporting their professional growth. Similarly, Principal Aisling highlighted the need to be "in tune with their energy" throughout the year, understanding the balance teachers needed between professional responsibilities and personal well-being. This supportive approach, coupled with their visible presence and engagement with the school community, helped build a foundation of mutual trust and respect, enabling a school culture where CTE could thrive and where both teachers and students felt valued and supported.

We found that principals in high CTE schools fostered a positive school climate by consistently aligning their actions with their core beliefs and values, thereby creating an environment where student learning and teacher development were prioritized. Through visible and engaged leadership, principals like Principal Robin, Principal Melville, and Principal Aisling built trust and respect among staff and students. Their commitment to supporting teachers, understanding their needs, and maintaining a balanced school environment reinforced the

importance of CTE. This approach not only strengthened the overall school culture but also ensured that both teachers and students felt valued and supported.

Summary of Findings

The findings highlight the key actions middle school principals in high-CTE schools take to provide supportive leadership, establish goal consensus, empower teachers, support cohesive teacher knowledge, and promote reflective instructional practices. Principals demonstrated supportive leadership by being visible, approachable, and actively involved in daily school activities. They fostered trust through transparent communication, genuinely cared about their staff and students, and encouraged risk-taking and innovation. Through collaborative processes like the School Development Plan (SDP), principals involved teachers in setting school improvement goals, leading to a shared sense of purpose and commitment. This involvement increased teacher investment and ownership, which was critical to achieving their SDP goals. The three principals empowered teachers by distributing leadership roles, involving them in decision-making processes, and providing opportunities for professional growth. They created leadership roles that aligned with teachers' strengths and school priorities, fostering a sense of agency and efficacy among teachers. Furthermore, the principals supported cohesive teacher knowledge through structured collaboration, such as PLCs, creating environments where teachers could share best practices and reflect on their instructional strategies. Reflective practices were embedded in the school culture, driven by the SDP and PLCs, ensuring continuous improvement in instructional practices. The leadership practices and actions of middle school principals in schools with high CTE were centred on creating an environment that supported teacher collaboration, empowered educators, and prioritized student learning, all of which contributed to the development and sustainability of collective efficacy.

Discussion

Building teacher capacity emerged as a critical theme, with principals identifying themselves as instructional leaders focused on ensuring quality learning through teacher development. This emphasis on teacher capacity aligns with extensive educational leadership research, which suggests that developing teachers' professional skills significantly impacts student learning and achievement (Day et al., 2011; Hallinger, 2005, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2010, 2020; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Robinson & Gray, 2018). Principals leveraged the SDP as a strategic tool to establish improvement goals and align PLCs with these objectives. The PLCs were instrumental in fostering collaborative learning and reflective practices, which are critical for CTE (Arzonetti Hite & Donohoo, 2021; Timperley, 2015).

Collaboration played a key role in developing teacher capacity, as principals intentionally designed school structures, including PLCs, to support this effort. This finding is consistent with Leithwood et al. (2020). These structures facilitated reflective professional learning, common task design, and collaborative problem-solving, aligning with the principles of collaborative professionalism as described by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018). The strategic design of meeting schedules and timetables maximized time for collaboration, providing embedded professional learning opportunities crucial for enhancing instructional practices and enabling CTE as noted by Donohoo et al. (2020) and Leithwood et al. (2020).

In addition to collaboration, principals were strategic in staffing, creating balanced teams and appointing teacher leaders aligned with school priorities. This strategic staffing fostered a collaborative culture and supported teacher professional growth, consistent with research on effective school leadership (Day et al., 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020). By deeply understanding their teachers' skills and aspirations, principals could assign roles that maximized instructional

improvement and leadership development, further enabling the conditions for CTE. Our study highlights the specific practices of principals in high CTE schools to strategically staff and build leadership capacity, suggesting areas for further research on the impact of these practices on teacher development and student success (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Donohoo & Velasco, 2016).

We found that principals distributed and developed leadership among staff through specific practices. They created school-based leadership frameworks that shared responsibilities and employed strategies to build the capacity of teacher leaders. These practices align with existing research indicating that distributed leadership, which values contributions from various formal and informal leaders, supports CTE by flattening the leadership hierarchy and empowering teachers (Arzonetti Hite & Donohoo, 2021; Day et al., 2011; Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Leadership teams composed of teacher leaders were instrumental in guiding school improvement efforts and supporting instructional practices, reflecting the idea that leadership is effectively "stretched over people" (Diamond & Spillane, 2016).

Distributed leadership frameworks involved teacher leaders in school-wide decision-making and empowered them with authority in their leadership areas, fostering a sense of efficacy and trust (Seashore Louis et al., 2010; Smylie et al., 2007). Trust emerged as a crucial component in the success of these leadership frameworks, with principals expressing deep respect for their leadership teams, reinforcing the relationship between distributed leadership and trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). We suggest that the practices employed by principals in distributing and sharing leadership responsibilities contribute significantly to the high levels of CTE observed in the schools that participated in this study.

In developing leadership capacity, principals invested considerable effort in supporting teacher leaders through coaching, mentoring, and providing authentic leadership experiences.

These actions extended opportunities for informal leadership, enabling teachers to engage in meaningful school operations, which empowered them and supported cohesive teacher knowledge (Leithwood et al., 2003; Arzonetti Hite & Donohoo, 2021). Principals also fostered a culture of risk-taking by encouraging teachers to lead initiatives they felt capable of, recognizing that growth often comes from stepping outside one's comfort zone (Bandura, 1998). This culture of growth and improvement was central to developing leadership capacity, ultimately contributing to the schools' overall CTE.

Principals valued the engagement of the broader learning community and actively sought feedback from parents and other stakeholders to inform school decisions. They recognized the importance of a strong home-school connection for student success, aligning with research that emphasizes parental involvement as critical to educational outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Leithwood et al., 2010, 2020). Principals implemented practices that encouraged parental involvement, designed inclusive engagement opportunities, and adjusted school structures to accommodate families' needs, demonstrating a commitment to fostering a welcoming and supportive school environment.

In decision-making processes, principals preferred collaborative approaches, involving teachers. This collaborative approach involved actively seeking their feedback. This aligns with distributed leadership models, where decision-making is shared among staff, empowering teachers and fostering a collective responsibility for student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). We found that when teachers were involved in setting school improvement goals, as in the SDP process, they felt a greater sense of agency and ownership over their professional growth, contributing to higher levels of CTE which is also noted by Donohoo (2017). Furthermore, principals maintained an

"open-door" policy, encouraging ongoing dialogue and feedback, which built relational trust and reduced resistance to change (Robinson, 2011).

While collaborative decision-making was the norm, principals were also willing to make unilateral decisions when they believed student learning or well-being was at risk, challenging the status quo when necessary. This practice, though less discussed in the literature, suggests that in schools with high CTE, principals may sometimes act independently to protect student interests. This finding indicates that principals in high CTE schools find a balance between collaboration and decisive leadership. Our finding contributes to the understanding of when and why principals might choose unilateral action, offering new insights into leadership practices in high CTE schools.

Principals' approaches to school improvement, involving teachers in the process, were important in identifying principals' practices and actions in high CTE schools. The findings revealed that principals used collaborative SDP processes to achieve school improvement goals, aligning with extensive literature that emphasizes the importance of setting direction and goals as a primary dimension of school leadership (Day et al., 2011; Hallinger, 2005, 2011; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012). The SDP process was identified as the primary vehicle for driving school improvement through supporting teacher professional learning, with both principals and teachers collectively determining school improvement goals and designing action plans. This collaborative approach fostered a sense of ownership among teachers, enhancing their commitment to achieving the goals and increasing CTE.

PLCs were integral to the SDP process, serving as platforms for instructional growth where teachers engaged in reflective practices, monitored student progress, and aligned instructional strategies. The consistent focus on the SDP process as the driver of school improvement underscored its importance in maintaining a steadfast commitment to identified priorities and goals

(Leithwood et al., 2020b; Donohoo, 2017). Teachers' engagement in the SDP process not only enhanced their professional development but also allowed them to directly contribute to student learning, thereby increasing their sense of efficacy and reinforcing CTE (Goddard et al., 2004).

The deportment of principals, or their way of being within their leadership roles, emerged as a critical factor in the success of their leadership and the creation of a supportive school environment. The study found that principals in schools with high CTE prioritized people and student learning, supported teacher development, and created conditions for a safe and caring learning environment. This was achieved through practices such as sharing and enacting beliefs, being visible within the school, demonstrating vulnerability, and building trust. Aspects of deportment are noted by Day et al. (2011) and Robinson (2011). The deportment of principals was not just about their actions but the way they carried out these actions, which communicated their values and priorities, thereby fostering a culture of trust and mutual respect.

Principals communicated their priorities through their everyday interactions, aligning their words with their actions, which reinforced their credibility and established clear expectations for teachers. The findings highlighted that when principals "walked the talk," participating in the daily life of the school, they not only emulated the expected behaviours but also validated their leadership through their visible and active presence (Leithwood et al., 2008, 2020). This deep involvement went beyond mere visibility, as principals engaged directly in classroom activities, providing support and reassurance, which contributed to a positive school climate and a sense of security among staff and students.

In fostering a culture of risk-taking and improvement, principals demonstrated vulnerability and encouraged teachers to take risks without fear of repercussions. This approach, supported by Day et al. (2011), promoted a culture of growth and innovation, essential for

developing CTE. We also found that trust was a cornerstone of this culture, with principals fostering relational trust through transparent decision-making processes and by showing genuine care for their staff and students. This trust was crucial in enabling collaborative environments where teachers felt valued and supported, aligning with the findings of Bryk and Schneider (2003) on the importance of relational trust in school settings.

To conclude our discussion, we highlight the pivotal role that school principals play in shaping and sustaining CTE through their leadership practices and, crucially, through their deportment. While existing research has extensively documented the importance of distributed leadership, collaborative processes, and strategic planning in fostering a positive school environment, findings from this study contribute a new dimension by emphasizing the significance of deportment to how these leadership practices are enacted.

The finding that stands out as the most significant contribution to knowledge is the critical role of principal deportment. Findings from this study reveal that the way principals carry out their leadership duties—how they embody their values, build relational trust, and maintain visibility and vulnerability—profoundly impacts both teacher efficacy and the overall school climate. The emphasis on deportment provides a deeper understanding of the interpersonal dynamics at play in effective school leadership, suggesting that the *how* of leadership is as crucial as the *what*.

This insight has important implications for the development of school leaders, highlighting the need for professional development programs that focus not only on the acquisition of leadership skills but also on the cultivation of relational and reflective practices. By prioritizing these aspects of leadership, schools can create environments where collective efficacy thrives, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes and more resilient educational communities.

Conclusion

In this study, we provided evidence that principals' leadership actions and practices in schools with high CTE inherently support the enabling conditions for CTE, even if they did not explicitly intend to cultivate it. Rather, their efforts appeared primarily directed at enhancing student learning through improved teaching practices. This finding aligns with Hoogsteen's (2021) assertion that CTE is often a byproduct of general leadership efforts rather than a deliberate focus of school leadership.

A key aspect of the principals' leadership that emerged from this study is their deportment—the way they embodied their leadership roles and communicated their values through actions. This deportment was central to creating an environment that prioritized student learning, supported teacher development, and fostered relational trust within the school community. The alignment between their words and actions, their visibility, and their genuine care for staff and students all contributed significantly to the overall efficacy of the school environment.

In the study, we illuminated how school leadership dimensions are operationalized through specific practices, suggesting that while CTE can indeed result from effective leadership, it can also serve as a guiding construct if intentionally prioritized. The alignment of the findings with the enabling conditions for CTE identified by Arzonetti Hite and Donohoo (2021) and Donohoo et al. (2020) highlights the potential for principals to purposefully leverage these conditions to enhance student learning by improving teaching practices.

In conclusion, CTE can function both as an outcome of effective leadership practices and as a construct that can guide leadership when intentionally cultivated. The significance of principal deportment in fostering an environment conducive to CTE and overall school success underscores the importance of further research into the intentionality behind leadership actions and the intricate

relationship between CTE and student achievement. Understanding these dynamics more deeply could offer valuable insights for developing leadership practices that both directly and indirectly bolster CTE, ultimately leading to stronger educational outcomes.

References

Arzonetti Hite, S., & Donohoo, J. (2021). *Leading collective efficacy.* Corwin.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.* Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1987). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman.

Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educational Psychologist, 28*(2), 117-148. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep2802_3

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control.* W.H. Freeman.

Bandura, A. (1998). Explorations in collective efficacy. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 89*(2), 79-82.

Bendikson, L., Robinson, V., & Hattie, J. (2012). Principals' instructional leadership and secondary school performance. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 48*(4), 634–670. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11436268

Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2003). *Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. Educational Leadership*, 60, 40-44.

Day, C., Sammons, P., Hopkins, D., Harris, A., Leithwood, K., Gu, Q., & Brown, E. (2011). *Successful school leadership: Linking with learning and achievement.* Open University Press.

Diamond, J., & Spillane, J. (2016). School leadership and management from a distributive perspective: A 2016 retrospective and prospective. *Management in Education*, *30*(4), 147-154. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020616665938

Donohoo, J. (2017). *Collective efficacy: How educators' beliefs impact student learning.* Corwin.

Donohoo, J. (2018). Collective teacher efficacy research: Productive patterns of behavior and other positive consequences. *Journal of Educational Change, 19*(3), 323–345. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-018-9319-2

Donohoo, J., Hattie, J., & Eells, R. (2018). The power of collective efficacy. *Educational Leadership, 75*(6), 40-44.

Donohoo, J., O'Leary, T., & Hattie, J. (2020). The design and validation of the enabling conditions for collective teacher efficacy scale (EC-CTES). *Journal of Professional Capital and Community, 5*(2), 147–166. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-10-2019-0025

Donohoo, J., & Velasco, M. (2016). *The transformative power of collaborative inquiry: Realizing change in schools and classrooms*. Corwin.

Eells, R. (2011). *Meta-analysis of the relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement* (Doctoral dissertation). Loyola University Chicago. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Goddard, R. D. (2001). Collective efficacy: A neglected construct in the study of schools and student achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 93*(3), 467-476. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.93.3.467

Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Hoy, A. W. (2004). Collective efficacy beliefs: Theoretical developments, empirical evidence, and future directions. *Educational Researcher, 33*(3), 3-13. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033003003

Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2000). Collective teacher efficacy: Its meaning, measure, and impact on student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 37*(2), 479–507. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312037002479

Hallinger, P. (2005). Instructional leadership and the school principal: A passing fancy that refuses to fade away. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 4*(3), 221-239. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760500244793

Hallinger, P. (2011). Leadership for learning: Lessons from 40 years of empirical research. *Journal of Educational Administration, 49*(2), 125-142. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231111116699

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2010). Collaborative leadership and school improvement: Understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. *School Leadership & Management, 30*(2), 95–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632431003663214

Hargreaves, A., & O'Connor, M. T. (2018). *Collaborative professionalism: When teaching together means learning for all*. Corwin.

Hattie, J. (2015). The applicability of Visible Learning to higher education. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, *1*(1), 79-91. https://doi.org/10.1037/stl0000021

Hoogsteen, T. J. (2020). Reconceptualizing collective efficacy: A transactional model of relationships and pedagogical mastery in schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *56*(3), 343-374. https://doi.org/10.1037/stl0000021

Leithwood, K., Anderson, S. E., Mascall, B., & Strauss, T. (2010). School leaders' influences on student learning: The four paths. In L. Bell, T. Bush, & D. Middlewood (Eds.), *Principles of Educational Leadership and Management* (2nd ed., pp. 13–30). essay, Sage. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X10377347.

Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management, 40*(1), 5-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077

Leithwood, K., Patten, S., & Jantzi, D. (2010). Testing a conception of how school leadership influences student learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 46*(5), 671–706. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X10377347

Leithwood, K., & Seashore Louis, K. (2012). *Linking leadership to student learning.* Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* Jossey-Bass.

Robinson, V. M. J. (2011). *Student-centered leadership.* Jossey-Bass.

Robinson, V. M. J., & Gray, J. (2019). Leadership, organizational culture and teacher outcomes: A framework for research and practice. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 47*(3), 423-440. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143217738942

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Smylie, M. A., Mayrowetz, D., Murphy, J., & Louis, K. S. (2007). Trust and the development of distributed leadership. *Journal of School Leadership*, *17*(4), 469-503.

Timperley, H. S. (2015). Continuing professional development. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed., pp. 796–802). https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.26011-1

Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. W., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research*, *68*(2), 202–248.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Barr, M. (2004). Fostering student learning: The relationship of collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *3*(3), 189–209. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543068002202

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage.

Biographies

Nancy Lisi

Dr. Nancy Lisi is a principal with the Calgary Board of Education in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. She has 27 years of experience in education, including 17 in administrative roles. She has served as principal in a variety of school settings at the middle, junior, and senior levels, and has also held leadership roles at the system level. Dr. Lisi holds an EdD in Educational Leadership from the University of Calgary, where her research focused on the leadership practices of middle school principals that foster collective teacher efficacy (CTE). Her research highlights CTE as a key driver of student success, emphasizing the role of leadership in supporting teachers to build efficacy both individually and collectively. Additionally, Nancy is a sessional instructor at the University of Calgary, where she teaches courses graduate courses on educational leadership and leading professional learning, areas closely aligned with her research on CTE. Her scholarly focus extends to identifying effective leadership practices that support teachers amid increasing classroom demands. Her work is grounded in the belief that empowering teachers to thrive is central to improving student achievement and that effective leadership is essential to both student success and the broader success of school communities.

nancy.lisi@ucalgary.ca

Sharon Friesen

Dr. Sharon Friesen, PhD, is a Professor at the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. She was the co-founder and president of the Galileo Educational Network, a network dedicated to brokering and mobilizing knowledge through continuing professional learning and participatory research. She served as the vice dean of the Werklund School of Education for

eight years. Dr. Friesen's body of research encompasses several key themes: innovative pedagogies and inquiry-based learning, educational leadership and systemic change, design-based professional learning, and technology integration in education. Her research often transcends these boundaries, reflecting the interconnected nature of these themes.

***Corresponding author**: Dr Sharon Friesen (sfriesen@ucalgary.ca)

Wu, P-H. S., & Chua, S-K. C. (2025). Driving programme quality with pedagogical leadership: A case study in Singapore. *International Journal for Leadership in Learning*, *25*(1), 79–111. https://doi.org/10.29173/ijll64

Driving programme quality with pedagogical leadership: A case study in Singapore

Sandra Wu

Catherine Chua

Abstract

The preschool education landscape in Singapore comprises diverse operators that offer various care and educational services for children from birth to six years of age. This diversity has resulted in varying levels of quality and standards in early childhood education. Since positive child outcomes are strongly linked to high quality early childhood educational programmes, this paper discusses how a competent preschool leader establishes quality programmes through pedagogical leadership. The authors posit pedagogical leadership as a key driver for programme quality. By examining the effectiveness of pedagogical leadership using a case study, this article offers valuable insights into the roles and practices of a childcare centre principal that contribute to good teaching and learning practices in her centre curriculum. The case study investigates the enactment of pedagogical leadership through multiple perspectives – the principal, a kindergarten one teacher, six kindergarten one children and eight parents. Employing purposeful sampling, an exemplary childcare centre with the Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK) Commendation Award was chosen for this study. Data collection included artefacts, classroom observations, questionnaires, interviews and a survey. Analytic induction, coding and qualitative content analysis were used for data analysis. Through detailed descriptions, the narrative account provides insights into how an effective pedagogical leader has advanced programme and centre quality. Overall, the findings illustrate how this pedagogical leader had led her centre to achieve the SPARK Commendation Award for teaching and learning, and provided high quality programmes for the children in the centre.

***Keywords*:** Pedagogical Leadership, Leadership Roles and Practices, Programme Quality, Early Childhood Education

Introduction

Early childhood is a critical period in which children grow, learn, and develop rapidly. In early childhood education (ECE), the holistic development of children in the cognitive, social, emotional, physical and language domains is promoted and supported through the preschool educational programmes they attend. In Singapore, ECE spans from birth to six years of age before children enter primary school at the age of seven. Preschool education prepares children for formal education in areas that they will come to learn in primary school. It lays the important foundations for each child's later learning trajectory and future outcomes. The early years determine children's educational continuum for positive outcomes. Beyond educational goals, preschool education ought to be developmentally appropriate and support children's learning and development. Globally, there have been increased government efforts across countries to promote and provide access to quality preschool education as it is regarded as an important investment in the generation of human capital for the country. From an economic perspective, Heckman (2012) argued for the investment in early childhood education from birth to five to reap the highest returns for quality early childhood development for later success in life, reduced social costs and economic growth.

The Singapore government has uplifted the quality of preschool education over the years with over $13 million invested in training early childhood teachers and leaders to give children the best possible start in life (Ang, 2022; Teng, 2022). This is because while the preschool landscape is government regulated, it comprises a wide range of providers of uneven quality where stark fee differences contribute to unequal levels of access to preschool education (Wu, 2022a, November; Dikshit et al., 2021; Lipponen et al., 2019). Despite prevailing government subsidies, parents continue to grapple with the choice of centres that they can afford according to their financial abilities and socioeconomic standing. This is due to the marketisation of preschool education

which contributes to social inequalities amidst government efforts to uplift quality (Lim, 2017) as a diverse market driven landscape that affords choice and variety to parents also creates barriers to entry such as access issues due to expensive school fees, demand for reputable centres and the proliferation of enrichment programmes.

The complex relationship between the best interests of the child and the quality of preschool education within a market model has important implications on children's lives and future outcomes. In the market system, private operators maximise profits by cutting down on costs, which inevitably affects teacher salary, as it is one of the running costs for centre operations. While there have been government efforts to peg early childhood educators' salary to market rate, manpower issues persist (Ng, 2022). This in turn affects programme quality due to teacher quality, high attrition rate and turnover issues as teachers are the direct implementers of curriculum (Lipponen et al., 2019). Although the market model offers parents choices, it also creates an illusion that price equates to quality. The demand for quality preschool services and market forces inevitably pushes up the costs of ECE services coupled with inflation in recent times. Consequently, the Singapore government pledged greater support in the preschool sector with the aim "to improve access to quality and affordable preschools, and give every child a good start" (ECDA, 2022, October 29).

Given the issues confronting the ECE field, preschool leaders need to manage and come up with creative solutions to circumvent or resolve numerous challenges in their centres. The role of leaders thus becomes more complex as they keep up with the many policy changes and developments in the sector, manage centre operations such as enrolment and staff retention, meet quality standards, and fulfil the profit-driven expectations of their organisations (Lipponen et al., 2019). Research indicates that effective leaders are key drivers for quality, hence, one postulation

is that good preschools are led by good leaders (Aubrey et al., 2013; Fullan, 2021; Hallinger, 2003; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Macfarlane et al., 2011; Sergiovanni, 1998). Likewise, preschools with high quality programmes are attributed to effective leaders.

Overview of Singapore and its Preschool Education Landscape

Singapore is a Southeast Asia country located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. It is a multiracial and multicultural nation with a population of about 5.9 million as of June 2023, with four primary ethnic groupings: 75.6% Chinese, 15.1% Malay, 7.6% Indian and 1.7% other ethnicities (National Population and Talent Division, 2023). With a landmass of about 728 km^2 (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2022), the island state is also devoid of natural resources. Hence, its population's skills and trade are the primary bases for its economic development. The Singapore government recognises the importance of education in developing the country's only resource and best asset – its people for human capital.

The role of education, that is, literacy is strongly tied to the Singaporean Government's narrative of national survival (Chua, 2008). Since Singapore gained independence in 1965, education has been an ongoing national priority to equip its people to participate in the workforce and global economy. Given the importance of education in Singapore's economic growth and success, preschool education, a precursor to compulsory education becomes a national priority when the government realised how quality preschool education affects children's later learning trajectory and future outcomes.

Prior to compulsory education which begins at Primary 1 at the age of seven, children receive preschool education which begins from 18 months to six years of age, and at least 99% of children have received one year of preschool education (Karuppiah & Poon, 2021). However, one year of preschool education would not adequately prepare children for the demands of primary

schooling and most parents would send their children for early childhood education (ECE) as soon as they are able and can afford to. Over the years, numerous policies were rolled out to raise the quality of ECE. In 2013, the government set up the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) to oversee ECE, harmonising a once fragmented early childhood education sector that used to be under two different ministries in charge of childcare centres and kindergartens respectively. In the same year, the Singapore Pre-school Accreditation framework (SPARK) was also set up to provide a set of quality assurance guidelines and benchmarks for preschool education settings. The National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC) was formed in 2018 to standardise teacher training for the sector. These major milestones in ECE are significant as they signal the government's commitment towards the quality of ECE before children enter primary school.

Primary to pre-tertiary education fall under the centralised education system of the Ministry of Education (MOE). MOE "formulates and implements education policies on education structure, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment" for all government-run primary, secondary and high schools (MOE, 2021). Historically, ECE was overseen by two ministries but with the formation of ECDA, the sector was unified. In addition, MOE began setting up MOE kindergartens (MK) since 2014 to offer access to affordable quality preschool education to five- and six-year-old children and with 62 kindergartens to date, MOE has successfully penetrated the ECE sector with their flagship kindergarten programmes applying the Nurturing Early Learners framework to demonstrate how the framework translates into practice and to offer good quality kindergarten education for the masses (MOE, 2024).

Despite so, the market-based system had created and perpetuated social inequalities and gaps in children's early childhood education because the transition to primary school depends on the quality of preschool education received. As quality varies in the preschool education landscape,

every child enters primary school with varying abilities, depending on a range of factors such as their family background, socioeconomic status (OECD, 2018). Theoretically, the market model seems to be sound in ensuring quality. In reality, the varying quality of ECE services suggests the self-regulatory mechanism of the market system does not work for preschool education.

Three prominent studies, Starting Well, Vital Voices for Vital Years One and Two on the ECE landscape reflected the issues confronting the sector (Watson et at., 2012; Ang, 2012; Lipponen et al., 2019). The Starting Well report ranked Singapore at 29th out of the 45 countries assessed according to international preschools standards while two Vital Voices for Vital Years reports discussed quality issues such as EC leadership, manpower shortage, teacher training and teacher quality (Watson et al., 2012; Ang, 2012; Lipponen et al., 2019). While the government had invested in the quality of ECE and increasing the access, affordability, and availability of EC services for children, quality issues persist (Wu, 2022a, November).

The ECE landscape comprises childcare centres and kindergartens that offer preschool care and educational services for children under seven years of age. Childcare centres provide infant-toddler care programmes for infants aged two months to 18 months, and childcare services for children from 18 months to six years of age. They offer full-day, half-day, and flexible programmes (ECDA, 2020). Kindergartens serve Kindergarten 1 and Kindergarten 2 children aged five and six years, and some may also provide Playgroup, Pre-Nursery and Nursery services. Most kindergarten sessions are between two and four hours (ECDA, 2020). Under the 2017 Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDC) Act, both childcare centres and kindergartens are also known as ECDC and are licensed and regulated by ECDA-(SSO, 2017; 2018). There is a range of operators that consists of private operators, government funded operators, namely Anchor

Operators (AOps) and Partner Operators (POps), MOE kindergartens (MKs), voluntary welfare organisations and religious operators (Wu, 2017).

Children learn in two languages, with English as the first language, and their Mother Tongue Language (MTL), which can be Chinese, Malay or Tamil as their cultural language that is tied to their ethnic group (Wu, 2018). As preschool education prepares children for formal schooling when they enter primary schools, it facilitates a crucial transition to primary schooling. The emphasis on academic achievement has always been a priority for Singapore where people are regarded as the nation's natural resource and human capital. As such, a child's English language proficiency has serious implications on their learning as most of the subjects they learn in primary school are taught in English, other than their MTL (Wu, 2018). There are many curriculum models in the sector, which is why children who attend different programmes enter primary school with varying levels of preparedness and proficiency (Wu, 2022b, November).

Since parents choose the kind of centres that they wish to send their children to, invariably, operators market themselves according to the perceived needs of the society – success and academic achievement, and parents would send their children to the 'best' early childhood development centres that they can afford for their children's future. Consequently, preschool leaders are often caught between promoting programmes that are developmentally appropriate and meeting parents' expectations of academic preparation for primary school, which directly fuelled the pressure that preschool leaders face in ensuring that the delivery of quality programmes that meet the expectations of parents as well as the needs of young children.

The Importance of Preschool Leaders

Preschool leaders play a critical role in the provision of quality care and services to children and families and manage organisational and teachers' professional development needs to meet the

needs of their stakeholders (Aubrey et al., 2013). They are responsible for the quality of care and education that the children receive. Furthermore, with the shifting needs of society and the increasing demands of the global economy, preschool leaders also need to meet the evolving needs of parents and children and deal with parentocracy (Lipponen et al., 2019). In their centres, they play a critical role in ensuring that they meet the expectations of parents, the government and the society at large. They need to run their centre operations, guide their teachers and oversee staff development to ensure that the curriculum and programmes are developmentally appropriate and aligned with their centre's philosophy and curriculum model. At baseline, they are expected to safeguard the health and safety of the children and promote the holistic development of every child.

In the ECE settings, there are five dimensions in the leadership framework for the early years, which are 1) Administration, 2) Pedagogy, 3) Advocacy, 4) Community and 5) Conceptual Leadership (Kagan & Bowman, 1997). This demonstrates the multifaceted role of preschool leaders as they need to manage the administration of their centres; ensure that developmentally appropriate programmes and pedagogical practice are delivered; advocate for children's best interests and rights; collaborate and form partnerships with parents, families and the community to support children's learning and development; and have the vision to set the direction and goals for their centres to achieve the desired outcomes of preschool education (Kagan & Bowman, 1997).

Pedagogical Leadership in Early Childhood

As discussed, preschool education should facilitate children's learning and support children's holistic development. Preschool curriculum includes both care and educational components, which are essential to the healthy and positive development of young children. The care component means that preschool leaders are take on the role of a pedagogical leader with a strong knowledge of child development and the skills to plan for programmes that promote young

children's learning and development. The educational component requires preschool leaders to advance programme quality and ensure that sound pedagogies are in place in their settings. Pedagogies are the "approaches to curriculum, learning and teaching that recognise the complex interconnectedness of health, welfare and education in young children's lives" (Cheeseman, 2007, p. 244). Pedagogical leaders ensure that educators align their practice with the centre's philosophy and curriculum model. In ECE, pedagogical practice is closely linked to child development, health and safety, and the quality of programmes and curriculum.

Pedagogical leadership is defined as "leadership focused on curriculum and pedagogy with an emphasis on educational purposes such as establishing educational goals, curriculum planning, and evaluating teachers and teaching pivotal for children's learning and development" (Ord et al., 2013, p. 1). Pedagogical leaders should possess the necessary knowledge and skills to lead their team of teachers towards quality programmes, positive child outcomes and educational goals. They need to be equipped with sound knowledge in child development that foregrounds their pedagogical knowledge to implement a holistic and developmentally appropriate curriculum. This knowledge base is critical to supporting teacher implementation of the centre curriculum and its accompanying pedagogies. Therefore, they need to provide leadership in the design and delivery of the curriculum especially when positive child outcomes are highly dependent on the quality of ECE services children receive in the early years (Ang, 2012). As operators and preschool leaders are responsible for the quality of programmes in their centres, pedagogical leadership becomes significant towards promoting positive child outcomes as the centre curriculum can have a major impact on young children's learning and development, and later trajectory in life.

In a market driven preschool education landscape, a deeper investigation into good preschools is needed to find out how effective pedagogical leaders establish high quality

programmes in their settings. More importantly, the relationship between effective leadership and school quality substantiates the need to explore pedagogical leadership and programme quality in the ECE field amidst the multiple roles of preschool leaders. In preschool education, programme and curriculum is one of the key indicators of quality as it affects children's learning and development and future outcomes. As such, this paper presents a case study that investigated pedagogical leadership in Singapore's preschool context to examine the roles and practices of pedagogical leadership. While there are other studies on pedagogical leadership, they were situated in the Western context (Cheeseman, 2007; Heikka, 2013; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Jäppinen, 2012; Macfarlane et al., 2011; Ord et al, 2013). In this study, the following eight dimensions were used to investigate pedagogical leadership based on literature:

1. Vision and goal setting
2. Values based leadership
3. Motivation
4. Capability building/human capital
5. Management, and knowledge of curriculum and instructional programmes
6. Cross-disciplinary work in Early Childhood Care and Education
7. Collaboration, partnerships and relationship building
8. Child outcomes

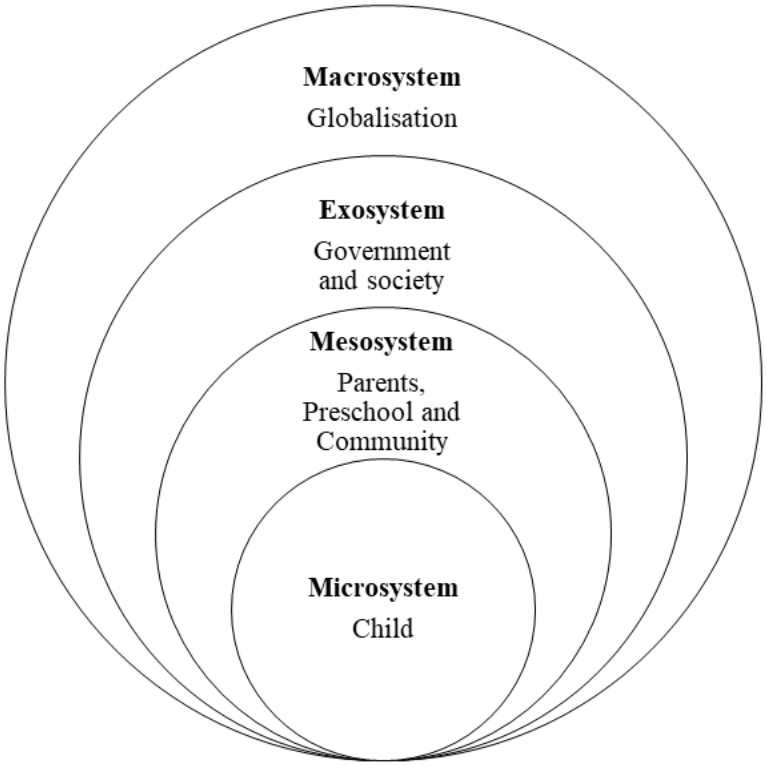
In exploring pedagogical leadership, these dimensions were mapped against the roles and practices of a preschool leader in a case study.

Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory as the Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory emphasises the child at the centre of the ecosystems and provides a lens to examine the interactions and the impact of the different levels of the ecosystem on the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This theoretical framework provides the lens to examine the structures of society impacting on the child at varying levels (Wardle, 2009) and exemplifies how they come to affect child development. The varying levels of ecosystems can affect the child, for example, through policies at the country's level; the quality of relationships the child has with their parents, caregivers, teachers and peers in context of the child's home and centre surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Ecological Systems of the Preschool Landscape (Adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1994)



According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), human development and socialisation are influenced by the mediating influences of the different levels of the ecosystems that are underpinned by three

key assumptions – an individual is an active agent who can exert influence over one's environment; one can adapt to the conditions and boundaries of the environment that one is in and the environment has different entities across the ecosystems in reciprocal relationships. It provides a broad overview of how different ecosystems interact with and exert influence, power and pressure across and between one another. The child is at the centre of this framework surrounded by the ecosystems situated in the sociocultural context of the child. The child-centredness thus aligns with the pedagogical leadership model which has a strong emphasis on the 'whole child' (Wardle, 2009).

Methodology

The research site chosen for this study is an Anchor Operator (AOp) childcare centre, a government funded centre that operates in a public housing estate. ECDA offers AOp centres funding to ensure that fees are kept affordable for families and to promote access to ECE (Wu, 2022a, November). The choice of a government-funded centre is to find out how effective pedagogical leadership can be enacted in an early childhood development centre that caters to the average Singaporean child in a market system. It was chosen because the centre's demographics is more representative of children who come from an average Singaporean family living in public housing as most Singaporeans live in Housing Board Development (HDB)[1] flats. This site is located in the largest town in the Western part of Singapore, and houses an estimated 258,100 HDB residents (HDB, 2022a). The demographics of the resident population in this municipality tend to be middle class families.

[1] Over 80% of Singapore's resident population live in HDB flats, which makes up the majority of the Singaporeans (HDB, 2022b).

The centre serves 125 children in this suburban area of Singapore and has a total of five classes: Toddler, Playgroup, Nursery, Kindergarten 1 and 2 (see Table 1) at the point of data collection.

Table 1
Centre Demographics

Class type	Age group	No. of children	No. of teachers
Toddler	18 – 30 months	24	3
Playgroup	30 – 42 months	24	3
Nursery	4 years	26	2
Kindergarten 1	5 years	27	2
Kindergarten 2	6 years	24	2

In this centre, the leader is addressed as the principal and the teacher of the selected kindergarten 1 (K1) class for this study is addressed as K1 English teacher. There are two K1 teachers in the class and the English teacher is selected as the case study looks at the curriculum aspects of the K1 programme in English. The K1 class was selected as children of this age group can express themselves better than younger children. K2 children were not selected as they would be graduating and preparing for Primary school, as such, conducting research would be disruptive to their transition.

Four types of data are collected for this study – artefacts, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and parent survey. The artefacts collected from the research site include SPARK reports, notes of meetings, curriculum plans, daily schedule, teacher observations, samples of children's works, children's portfolios and communication booklets, principal's teacher observation notes for coaching. A questionnaire was first administered with the principal and the K1 teacher to understand the profiles of the participants through questions such as age, gender,

years of experience, qualifications, personal beliefs, values and philosophy in ECE to inform the design of the interview questions. The interview questions were crafted according to the eight dimensions of pedagogical leadership such as vision and goals setting, capability building and curriculum and programme tailored according to the principal and teacher profiles. Classroom and teacher observations were conducted and documented through field notes and a set of rubrics that was developed based on the eight dimensions of pedagogical leadership. A parent survey was administered with the parents of selected K1 children in the class to solicit their perspectives on their child's preschool experience, centre leadership, relationships and partnerships with the centre, teacher and principal. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal and K1 teacher to uncover the enactment of pedagogical leadership in the centre, and informal interviews were conducted with children to find out about their perceptions and feelings about their preschool experience. The interviews were audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy of transcription and to capture direct quotations from the participants about their personal perspectives and experiences on pedagogical leadership to form the case study (Patton, 2002). The parent survey gathered parents' perceptions of the centre programme and leadership, as well as their child's preschool experience.

The data was analysed using interpretive analysis methods of analytic induction, coding and categorical aggregation, and triangulation. An interpretive analysis of the data was used to construct meanings through "making inferences, developing insights, attaching significance, refining understandings, drawing conclusions and extrapolating lessons" (Hatch, 2002, p. 180). As the analytic induction began early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of data collection, data collection and analysis occurred concurrently (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). At each phase of data collection, a progression of data analysis helped to build up the case. Codes were written during

the analysis of the data such as interviews and survey, observation notes and artefacts like curriculum and lesson plans, and the SPARK reports according to the dimensions of pedagogical leadership. Three key roles emerged from this case study to shed light on the roles and practices of the principal as a pedagogical leader and provided insights to the practices that have led to the attainment of the SPARK commendation certification. The themes were triangulated against the SPARK reports in 2012 and 2015 to track the progress made in the three years. The SPARK report in 2012 indicated that the centre had attained emerging level in the SPARK Assessment, with areas for improvement stated for the centre to work on, and the report in 2015 SPARK Re-certification Report indicated that the centre had achieved the standard for SPARK certification (Commendation) in its assessment outcome. The findings were validated using Leximancer, a text mining software to ensure that the themes identified through qualitative content analysis are accurate (see Appendix 1 for sample concept analysis). Leximancer facilitates both conceptual and relational analyses where in the former; it can locate the presence and frequency of concepts and in the latter, measures how concepts are related to one another in the text data.

As this is an exploratory study, the findings of this study are not generalizable, however, the narrative accounts of this in-depth inquiry provide useful insights to the roles and practices of effective pedagogical leadership in the Singapore preschool context.

Key Findings

In this section, the enactment of pedagogical leadership is discussed according to the key findings from the case study. The main theme that emerged from the analysis was programme and curriculum for positive child outcomes, which consists of three dimensions of pedagogical leadership: 1). To manage and is knowledgeable about curriculum and instructional programmes; 2). Engage in cross-disciplinary work and 3). Support and promote positive child outcomes. Under

the main theme, three roles and the accompanying leadership practices of effective pedagogical leadership were identified.

Effective pedagogical leadership was found to be one of the main drivers for programme quality. The three roles – a gatekeeper, a reviewer, and an assessor demonstrated that the principal's leadership practices supported the delivery of programme quality through the teacher's classroom implementation that in turn lead to positive child outcomes. These three roles also corresponded to the principal's knowledge of curriculum and instruction underpinned by her knowledge of child development theories and her leadership in the design and delivery of the curriculum that has led to the quality of programme and curriculum in her setting.

Role as a Gatekeeper

The study found that the principal's primary role was to ensure the centre's teaching practices uphold curriculum quality according to the expected standards. For example, the principal made sure that teachers start their lessons on time and the classroom curriculum and environment are in line with the centre curriculum.

> I'm like the gatekeeper so I make sure the teachers start the class on time, make sure the children are not drinking water for 10 minutes, 20 minutes, you know. I think that is the kind of thing I do in terms of curriculum, environment set up… Quality must be throughout the centre… Purposeful play should look the same from toddler class to K2, and the English to the Chinese.

This was validated by the SPARK report, which stated that there was evidence of progression in the centre's curriculum plans from nursery to kindergarten levels. It corroborated the principal's role in ensuring that there is progression, and quality is consistent throughout the centre's curriculum. In addition to the smooth running of the centre curriculum, the principal also

demonstrated requisite knowledge of child development and developmentally appropriate curriculum through programme evaluation through her assessment of children's behaviours in the classrooms when she does a centre walkabout. She shared that she would look at children's level of engagement, the quality of interactions in the classroom and the emotional, physical, and cognitive well-being of children, which reflects a child centred approach that prioritised children's holistic development, which is one of the care components of pedagogical leadership.

This child-centred approach also received positive feedback from parents. For example, one parent commented that her daughter was learning well at the centre, she "can speak, count and write well" and "is able to help her friends, share her things with others and play along well in a group". She was able to see that her daughter had acquired language, literacy, numeracy, and pro-social skills and reflected that her daughter "is developing well holistically".

Role as a Reviewer

The second role that the study found was that the principal emphasised teachers' pedagogical practice and interactions with children where she made sure that her teachers were clear about the centre curriculum and the accreditation criteria for centre programmes and quality. In leading the design and delivery of the curriculum, she used a centre-wide approach to help her teachers stay knowledgeable about the criteria for the SPARK accreditation framework. At the time of the research, the SPARK framework was only available in English, and she had translated the document into Chinese for her Chinese teachers to ensure alignment and consistency in the centre's bilingual programmes.

> I took a good 3 months to translate the SPARK into Chinese… Quality must be throughout the centre; everybody is on the same page. Purposeful play should look the same from toddler class to K2, and the English to the Chinese. So it

> cannot be that only the English teachers are doing it but the Chinese teachers are not… So I say, 'teachers you need to know what is in this book, so you can better your own teaching in terms of the Chinese language'… this is why I call myself a reviewer. To me, I am looking at the bigger picture. For the teachers, of course they are just looking purely on curriculum but I'm looking as a whole… how everything affects the centre's curriculum.

The principal's dedication was indicative of an integrated programme and a holistic curriculum where her leadership practice clearly showed an effective translation of policy for quality assurance in her centre.

This was confirmed by the K1 teacher who shared that the principal would go through the centre curriculum and discuss learning outcomes with teachers to support them in their curriculum planning and classroom implementation. The principal also empowered her teachers according to their abilities, for example, senior teachers would do their planning before reviewing them with her while more guidance and support were given to less experienced teachers. The K1 teacher shared that,

> Before each term starts, we actually have to do our termly plan. So there's this learning goals and learning outcomes that we want the children to achieve. So usually, we will just list out the learning goals we want the children to achieve… So, before the term starts, [the principal] will go through it with us, then she will give us additional pointers like what you can improvise, what you can do better. Then sometimes she will like, give us other alternatives to implement the curriculum in a better way.

Such an approach adopted by the principal was also congruent with the SPARK assessment report that indicated an integrated and holistic curriculum in the centre.

Role as an Assessor

The study also found that the principal acted as an assessor. As an assessor, the principal attended teachers' meetings to guide her teachers' discussions and conducted classroom observations to review how lessons are carried out in the classes, which showed that she was responsible for the quality of programme and curriculum in establishing and maintaining teacher quality in her centre.

> I say I am an assessor because how well the teachers are delivering the curriculum, is not about whether you deliver or not, but how well, you know. That comes in when I have the classroom observations. When teachers have the meetings, I actually sit in the meetings to listen what the teachers discuss about, you know, putting in my fair share. So that I know, ok, based on my conversations, or the teachers' conversations, this is the level the teachers are. So, are they reaching the next level or are they still maintaining?

Through classroom and teacher observations, the principal would help teachers improve by giving them feedback and guidance. She also shared that these observations were useful for helping her gauge teacher quality and the quality of lesson delivery. The K1 teacher shared that the classroom observations with the principal had been useful in improving her practice. This was in line with the SPARK report which stated that the principal had conducted classroom observations with written feedback on teachers' teaching strategies with follow-up actions and this was an improvement from the SPARK assessment report in 2012.

In addition to assessing teacher and classroom quality, the principal also assessed children's learning and development through the children's portfolios. The K1 teacher used an observation log and checklists to record children's learning and learning goals, and these were reviewed by the principal. The observation schedules were used as a guideline for the learning areas to look out for documentation, and the teacher would also collect samples of children's works for evaluation and reflection to assess if the learning goals set for each lesson were met. These documentations were vetted by the principal before sharing with the parents, which was indicative of the principal's accountability in tracking children's learning and development and is confirmed by the SPARK report 2015 which stated that teachers observed and used a variety of methods to record children's holistic development.

The positive responses in the parent survey and from the children reinforced the quality of the preschool programme as most parents reported that their children were learning well and the children also shared that they enjoyed learning in their centre. The positive responses from the children and their ability to share on the activities they enjoyed in class were evident of their positive learning experiences in the classroom. For example, one child described her positive relationship with her teacher and positive learning disposition of perseverance when faced with challenges.

> I like squares… Like pink square and yellow square and blue square don't have. But dark blue square have. *(Interviewer (I): So what do you do with all these squares?)* I build a princess. *(I: Can you show me later how you build a princess?)* Yes, but it's very hard. But I can still build. Because teacher learning *(she meant teaching)* words… I don't know how to mix the words and don't know how to

do… *(Interviewer: So do you like teacher's teaching?)* Because teacher got learn *(she meant teach)* us new words and try to teach us new words.

The positive responses from the children and their ability to share on the activities they enjoyed in class were evident of their positive learning experience in the classroom, which were reinforced by parents' survey responses. Children were able to cite their favourite activities and resources that they enjoyed playing with as well as communicate the learning that took place through recounting what they have learnt.

Discussion

This study highlighted that the key roles of a pedagogical leader are a gatekeeper, a reviewer and an assessor to ensure programme quality and that the centre principal embodies these roles in her leadership practice coupled with her conviction and commitment towards early childhood education and the teachers and children under her care. The principal used a child-centred approach and upheld children's rights and best interests. This study showed that leaders who build teachers' capability translate into quality programmes and curriculum in their classroom practice as the 'care' component is crucial to supporting and promoting positive learning and development in young children (Moen & Granrusten, 2013) Teacher quality is central to classroom implementation as teachers play a critical role in programme quality, and they too, take on the role of pedagogical leadership through working collaboratively with centre leaders and colleagues to develop and implement quality programmes (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Macfarlane et al., 2011; Watsons et al., 2012).

This study showed that effective pedagogical leaders develop intellectual capital that enables teachers to become more effective in enhancing the learning and development of children by putting in time, structures and resources for their professional development (Sergiovanni, 1998).

More importantly, pedagogical leaders ensure that their teachers are able to understand and implement the different policies and curriculum reforms by translating and communicating them effectively. Essentially, the component of care and a child-centred approach set pedagogical leadership apart from other leadership theories. In the delivery of a high-quality programme that contributes towards positive child outcomes, the centre leader played a critical role in driving and ensuring centre quality. Pedagogical leaders drive quality by having in place a strategic plan, setting the vision and goals for their centres while keeping it bite size for teachers to help them understand and implement them in the classrooms. As the centre principal shared:

> Frankly speaking, teachers do not know the full scale of it because I don't think the teachers are at the level of understanding the strategic plan and if I put the strategic plan to them, as in the full piece, I think they will freak out, and yah, I don't think they will be motivated or (they will be) be very stressed out. So what I do is, I actually break out into pieces, to slowly engage them in the action plan of it.

In the pedagogical leadership model, there is an emphasis on the whole child and child-centred pedagogy, which is "a relational and holistic approach to working with people and within pedagogy, learning, care and upbringing are interwoven and connected" (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011, p. 503)

In the Singapore context, pedagogical leadership becomes pivotal to driving programme quality given the capitalistic nature of the market system which the preschool education landscape operates in. Interestingly, this case study also revealed tensions that the principal experienced in ensuring quality while meeting key performance indicators such as enrolment numbers for profitability and sustainability. The clash of values between the principal's personal beliefs in

providing quality ECE was evident when she shared that she was willing to compromise the centre's financial performance and the organisation's focus on enrolment numbers, which translates into income for the organisation in order to safeguard the best interests of the children and her teachers. Similar tensions can be seen in some of the parents' emphasis on academic achievement as compared to the principal's focus on children's holistic development in her centre programme. Parents who felt that their children did not meet their expectations in terms of academic achievement from the centre would send their children for enrichment classes to supplement their learning. Social inequalities surfaced in a market system that privileges the rich, thereby creating differentiated access to quality programmes for young children. For parents who feel that the centre programme does not fully prepare their children for primary schooling, they would turn to enrichment centres to prepare their children's academic learning for primary education. While this AOp centre offers quality programmes, compared to private centres that have more resources and better qualified teachers that charge a premium fee, children from a higher socioeconomic status (SES) and background tend to have an advantage over those who attend AOp centres that cater to the masses simply because the parents can afford to send their children to such private centres and are able to give children more exposure to experiences and resources compared to parents of children from lower SES who cannot afford.

Having said that, while the preschool education sector operates in a market system and is impacted by the macrosystem forces at work, such as globalisation, the economy and market forces, this case study demonstrated that in a diverse landscape where standards vary across early childhood settings, effective pedagogical leadership can lead to a high-quality centre programme. The role of the pedagogical leader is thus central to positive child outcomes as many factors need

to come together to support children's best interests, and it is only with an effective leader that these factors can work towards the same goals.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses that in Singapore, pedagogical leadership is pivotal to driving programme quality, as seen in this case study. This is because in a diverse landscape, quality standards vary, resulting in unequal starting points for children entering primary school, as the centres they are enrolled in are not the same. In addition, centres under the same organisation may differ because of teacher quality and centre leadership. Without a centralised system to ensure quality standards are uniform across preschool education settings, the market system continue to perpetuate social inequalities. Nonetheless, the study effective pedagogical leadership plays a critical role in ensuring a high-quality centre programme and can make a difference in children's lives regardless of their family backgrounds.

In summary, this paper demonstrates the pedagogical leader role is pivotal to promoting positive child outcomes. Essentially, the roles of pedagogical leaders are gatekeepers, reviewers, and assessors, and early childhood leaders play these roles to ensure programme quality and that their centre curriculum promotes positive child outcomes with children at the heart of the work that they do. Pedagogical leaders adopt a child centred approach and uphold children's rights and best interests. They emphasise values such as integrity, nurturance, relationship building, service excellence, and teamwork. Pedagogical leaders are able to inspire and motivate their teaching staff by setting goals and extending an ethic of care towards for teacher well-being. They build their teachers' capability by supporting them in their professional development and putting in time, structures and resources that support this. Pedagogical leaders build relationships with their teachers, parents and children, encourage teamwork among teachers, facilitate clear

communication and build partnerships with parents. They engage community partners to collaborate with the centre to provide children with opportunities to be involved in their community. Pedagogical leaders are a game changer in a market system as they are key drivers of programme quality in early childhood education.

References

Ang, L. (2012). *Vital voices for vital years: A study of leaders' perspectives on improving the early childhood sector in Singapore*. Lien Foundation. http://www.lienfoundation.org/pdf/publications/vitalvoices.pdf

Ang, H. M. (2022, February 18). *Budget 2022: Singapore to continue 'investing heavily' in children to give them 'best possible start in life'*. Channel News Asia (CNA). https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/kidstart-uplift-budget-2022-children-preschool-subsidy-low-income-2506456

Aubrey, C., Godfrey, R., & Harris, A. (2013). How do they manage? An investigation of early childhood leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *41*(5), 5-29.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. R. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods (5th ed.)*. Pearson Education Inc.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *International encyclopedia of education*, Vol. 3, 2nd edition. Elsevier.

Cheeseman, S. (2007). Pedagogical silences in Australian early childhood social policy. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *8*(3), 244-254.

Chua, C. S. K. (2008). Singaporean educational planning: Moving from the macro to the micro. In: A. J. Liddicoat & R. B. Baldauf, Jr. (Eds.), *Language planning in local contexts* (pp. 183-198). Multilingual Matters.

Department of Statistics Singapore. (2022). *Environment*. https://www.singstat.gov.sg/find-data/search-by-theme/society/environment/latest-data

Dikshit, A., Sukumar, D., Lim, T. J., Kaur, S., & Goh, Z. A. (2021). *Preschools for the people: An examination of Singapore's early childhood education landscape* (part 1). https://roosevelt.commons.yale-nus.edu.sg/2021/08/03/preschools-for-the-people-an-examination-of-singapores-early-childhood-education-landscape-part-i/

Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA). (2020). *About us*. https://www.ecda.gov.sg/pages/aboutus.aspx

Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA). (2022, October 29). *Government announces key preschool moves to better support families and boost early childhood careers.* https://www.ecda.gov.sg/news/press-releases/government-announces-key-preschool-moves-to-better-support-families-and-boost-early-childhood-careers

Fullan, M. (2021). *The right drivers for whole system success*. Centre for Strategic Education. https://michaelfullan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Fullan-CSE-Leading-Education-Series-01-2021R2-compressed.pdf

Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *33*(3), 329-352.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. University of New York Press.

Heckman, J. J. (2012). *Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy.* Heckman the economics of human potential. https://heckmanequation.org/resource/invest-in-early-childhood-development-reduce-deficits-strengthen-the-economy/

Heikka, J., & Waniganayake, M. (2011). Pedagogical leadership from a distributed perspective within the context of early childhood education. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, *14*(4), 499-512, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2011.577909

Heikka, J. (2013). Enacting distributed pedagogical leadership in Finland: Perceptions of early childhood education stakeholders. In E. Hujala, M. Waniganayake & J. Rodd (Eds.), *Researching leadership in early childhood education* (pp. 225-273). Tampere University Press

Housing & Development Board (HDB). (2022a). *About us: Jurong West.* https://www.hdb.gov.sg/about-us/history/hdb-towns-your-home/jurong-west

Housing & Development Board (HDB). (2022b). *Public housing – A Singapore icon.* https://www.hdb.gov.sg/about-us/our-role/public-housing-a-singapore-icon

Jäppinen, A. K. (2012). Distributed pedagogical leadership in support of student transitions. *Improving Schools*, *15*(23), 23-36, http://imp.sagepub.com/content/15/1/23

Kagan, S. L., & Bowman, B. T. (1997). *Leadership in early care and education*. National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Karuppiah, N., & Poon, K. (2021). *Early childhood education in Singapore*. In L. P. Symaco & M. Hayden (Eds.), *International handbook on education in South East Asia*. Springer International Handbooks of Education book series (SIHE). https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-16-8136-3_4-1

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2000). Transformational school leadership effects: A replication. *School Effectiveness & School Improvement*, *10*(4), 451-479.

Lim, S. (2017). Marketization and corporation of early childhood care and education in Singapore. In Li, M., Fox, J., Grieshaber, S. (Eds.), *Contemporary Issues and Challenges in early childhood education in the Asia-Pacific region*, 17-32.

Lipponen, L., Ang, L., & Lim, S. (2019). *Vital voices for vital years 2: Perspectives on early childhood development in Singapore*. Lien Foundation.

Macfarlane, K., Cartmel, J., Nolan, A., Keevers, A., & Clark, J., A. (2011). *Developing and sustaining pedagogical leadership in early childhood education and care professionals*. Australian Learning and Teaching Council, Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. www.ecceleadership.org.au

Moen, K. H., & Granrusten, P. T. (2013). Distribution of leadership functions in early childhood centers in Norway following organizational changes. In E. Hujala, M. Waniganayake & J. Rodd (Eds.), *Researching leadership in early childhood education* (pp. 76-96). Tempere University Press.

Ministry of Education Singapore (MOE). (2021). *Introduction*. https://www.moe.gov.sg/about-us/our-mission-and-vision

Ministry of Education Singapore (MOE). (2024). *MOE Kindergarten (MK)*. https://www.moe.gov.sg/preschool/moe-kindergarten

National Population and Talent Division, (2023, September 24). *Population In Brief*. https://www.population.gov.sg/files/media-centre/publications/population-in-brief-2023.pdf

Ng, W. K. (2022, October 29). *Pre-school educators' pay to rise by 10-30% amid review of working conditions.* The Straits Times. https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/parenting-education/pre-school-educators-pay-to-rise-by-10-30-amid-review-of-working-conditions

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2018), "Overview: Promoting quality early childhood education and care, child development and learning", in *Engaging Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/engaging-young-children_9789264085145-en.html

Ord, K., Mane, J., Smorti, S., Carroll-Lind, J., Robinson, L., Armstrong-Read, A., Brown-Cooper, P., Meredith, E., Rickard, D., & Jalal, J. (2013): *Developing pedagogical leadership in early childhood education*. Childcare Association.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods (3rd ed.).* Sage Publications Inc.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1998). Leadership as pedagogy, capital development and school Effectiveness. *International Journal of Leadership. Education, 1*(1), 37-46.

Singapore Statues Online (SSO). (2017). *Early Childhood Development Centres Act 2017*. https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Acts-Supp/19-2017/Published/20170511?DocDate=20170511

Singapore Statues Online (SSO). (2018), *Early Childhood Development Centres Regulations 2018*. https://sso.agc.gov.sg/SL-Supp/S890-2018/Published/20181228?DocDate=20181228

Teng, A. (2022, July 13). *Over $13 million invested in training early childhood educators: Sun Xueling.* The Straits Times. https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/parenting-education/more-than-13-million-invested-in-training-early-childhood-educators-sun-

xueling#:~:text=SINGAPORE%20-%20The%20Early%20Childhood%20Development%20Agency%20%28ECDA%29,Social%20and%20Family%20Development%2C%20on%20Wednesday%20%28July%2013%29.

Wardle, F. (2009). *Approaches to early childhood and elementary education: Education in a competitive and globalising world series*. Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Watson, J., Vadaketh, S., Suresh, T., & Vohra, M. (2012). *Starting well: Benchmarking early education across the world, Economist Intelligence Unit*. Lien Foundation, http://www.lienfoundation.org/pdf/publications/sw_report.pdf

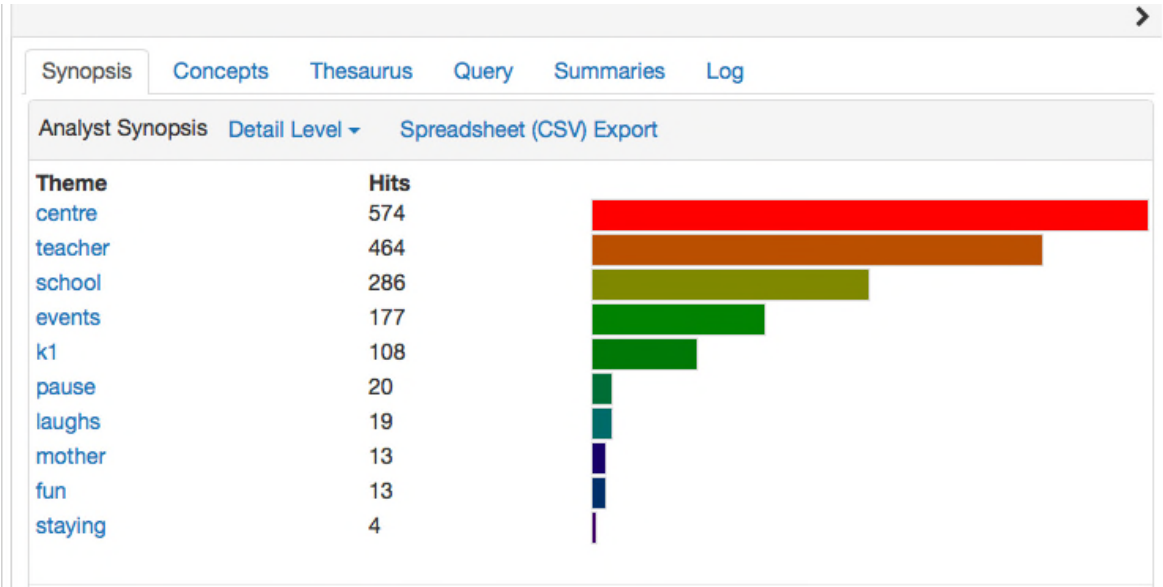
Wu, P-H. S. (2017). *Exploring pedagogical leadership in the early childhood context of Singapore*, EdD dissertation, Nanyang Technological University.

Wu, P-H. S. (2018). Translation of language policy from pre-school to primary school. In Chua, C. S. K.; Chew, P. G. L.; Taylor-Leech, K., & Williams, C. (Eds.), *Un(intended) Language Planning in a Globalising World: Multiple Levels of Players at Work* (pp. 267-289). De Gruyter Open.

Wu, P-H. S. (2022a, November). Access in Early Childhood Education (Singapore). *Bloomsbury Education and Childhood Studies*. Bloomsbury, 2022.

Wu, P-H. S. (2022b, November). Bilingualism and Multilingualism in Early Childhood Education (Singapore). *Bloomsbury Education and Childhood Studies*. Bloomsbury, 2022.

Appendix 1 Leximancer Concept Analysis



Theme: **centre**

Concepts: centre, centre, centre, benefit, children, children, children, child, child, child, teachers, teachers, teachers, learning, learning, learning, parents, parents, parents, curriculum, curriculum, curriculum, terms, things, things, development, development, development, activities, activities, activities, holistic, chinese, chose, previous, language, language, english, experience, experience, teaching, mrs, programme, child's, check, quality, spoken, values, answers, parent's, values, values, character, cognitive, enrolled, goals, preschool, home, needs, bring, class, read, understand, felt, environment, outcomes, care, student, comes, indicate, look, perspective, able, parent, best, different, course, plan, effective, preparing, relationship, survey, start, working, improve, enrolment, spark, results, change, hands, feedback, hq, coming

Hits: **574**

On the scale of (0 to 10), the centre effectiveness in preparing for primary is 5 out of 10 on the scale. The reason why is school curriculum seem more on child development and activities, not much for primary preparation in terms of learning.

Preschool experience
In terms of parents��? perception of their child��?s overall preschool experience and holistic development, six parents gave positive responses while two reported that it is average and a NIL reply for holistic development. The gaps indicated were reading ability of child, moral education and the lack of gym equipment for children.

Preparation for Primary School
Out of the eight respondents, six parents felt that the centre adequately prepares their child for primary school, while one felt that the centre focused on child development and activities instead of preparation for primary school learning.

Programme and Curriculum
Seven parents reported positively on the curriculum and teachers whereas the last parent felt that his child was more active in nursery class. In terms of centre programme, six reported positively although one parent indicated that the programme and curriculum needs improvement and the centre is not bright and colourful enough.

So I took the liberty, ok, lets look at the SPARK programme, SPARK book, change it all into chinese as best as I could, and explaining to the chinese teachers, yes you are only focusing on chinese language but, but, lets take it this way. When you do activities in your chinese lesson, do you not include math?

Biographies

Sandra Wu

Dr Sandra Wu is lecturer and programme leader for the Doctor in Education programme (Educational Leadership and Change) at the Policy, Curriculum and Leadership department in the National Institute of Education, an institute of the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She is involved in teacher education and professional development programmes. She currently teaches preservice teachers, postgraduate students, and supervises doctoral students. She conducts professional development for educational leaders such as the Management and Leadership in Schools programme for key personnel in schools and Principal Matters Plus programme for early childhood education leaders. She also serves at the Singapore Centre for Character and Citizenship Education. She has conducted research in the local pre-school and primary school contexts. Her research interests include policies and leadership in education and character education. She has published on the image of the Singapore child, quality of infant-toddler programmes, various pre-school curriculum models, values education in early childhood, pedagogical leadership in early childhood education, religious harmony and multiculturalism in Singapore.

Email: sandra.wu@nie.edu.sg

Catherine Chua

Dr Catherine CHUA is a Senior Education Fellow at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Singapore. Her research expertise includes educational policy, work-integrated learning, leadership development, language policy and planning, globalisation and educational reforms. She holds a PhD in Education from the University of Queensland, an MA in English from the University of

New South Wales, and a professional teaching qualification from the National Institute of Education Singapore. Catherine worked as an Assistant Professor with the National Institute of Education Singapore from 2006 to 2016. In 2016, she joined the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary, where she taught graduate courses in leadership and policy studies. Her current research focuses on the impact of SkillsFuture initiative on continuous learning, skills development, and workplace transformation in Singapore.

Email: catherine_chua@np.edu.sg

Campbell M. V., & MacGregor, S. (2025). Gender and sexually minoritized system educational leaders and the team-based development of equity policies: A Framework. *International Journal for Leadership in Learning*, *25*(1), 112–151. https://doi.org/10.29173/ijll59

Gender and Sexually Minoritized System Educational Leaders and the Team-Based Development of Equity Policies: A Framework

Mathew V. Campbell

Stephen MacGregor

Abstract

Inequities experienced by minoritized groups are one of the greatest challenges facing education systems today. Accordingly, system educational leaders are responsible for developing equity-related policies that have far-reaching impact on school systems, which situates these leaders at the forefront of delivering solutions that improve outcomes for minoritized students. Yet, because of extant oppressive structures that reinforce hegemonic power norms and exacerbate social inequities, educational leaders are often complicit in perpetuating inequities. This is complicated further by the fact that most of them are dominantly located (i.e., White, cisgender, male, heterosexual), which results in a limited frame of reference when making decisions that impact minoritized groups. It is salient, then, to seek more understanding about how equity-related policymaking takes place in the context of system educational leadership teams comprised of both dominantly located and minoritized leaders. More specifically, because contending with inequities experienced by gender and sexually minoritized (GSM) individuals is often viewed as a lower priority relative to other equity-deserving groups, focusing on policymaking through the frame of this specific minoritized group is particularly relevant. This article presents a conceptual framework that establishes coherence between the various facets of team-based, equity-related policymaking, which include team dynamics, the degree to which leaders adopt equity-oriented leadership practices, and the unique contexts in which the policy is crafted. Moreover, the framework highlights how these policymaking factors are influenced by a coalescence of the identities; lived experiences; and dispositions, beliefs, and assumptions of the dominantly located and GSM leaders involved in the policymaking process.

Keywords: Equity, system educational leadership, gender and sexually minoritized leaders, equity-oriented leadership, team dynamics, policymaking

Introduction

The inequities experienced by minoritized groups are one of the greatest challenges facing education systems today (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018; Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021; United Nations, 2020; Ward et al., 2015). Globally, there is a growing disparity in education outcomes between dominantly located and minoritized groups (OECD, 2018; United Nations, 2020). In the context of this work, the term dominantly located describes individuals whose social locations are closely aligned with the societal norms attached to prevailing power holders. This includes those who are White, cisgender (internal sense of gender matches the sex that was assigned at birth), heterosexual, male, English- speaking, and in a socioeconomic position of middle class or higher. A raised moral and ethical consciousness for a more socially just education system has emerged in recent years (Gumus et al., 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Shields, 2018); however, so too has a more polarized society (Strom et al., 2018) which, together, engender a complex and, at times, enigmatic education landscape. Although there is widespread agreement that educational equity is of great importance, significant inequities in education systems worldwide continue to be reproduced and expanded (Croizet et al., 2019; Shields, 2018; Valencia, 2010).

Educational leaders are at the forefront of delivering solutions that increase equity in education and, as such, play a pivotal role in improving outcomes for minoritized students (Leithwood, 2021). However, education systems are rife with oppressive structures, reinforcing hegemonic power norms, which refer to the dominant social norms associated with prevailing power holders, that ultimately exacerbate social inequities (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Shields, 2018). This places educational leaders in a paradoxical position: They are key players in improving equity yet often complicit in perpetuating inequities. This paradox is underscored by the fact that

the majority of educational leaders are dominantly located (i.e., White, cisgender, male, heterosexual, middle class, English-speaking), which results in a limited frame of reference when making decisions that impact minoritized groups (Shields, 2018). Relatedly, when faced with equity-related decisions, educational leaders are influenced not only by their practical experiences and theoretical knowledge but also by their values, virtues, dispositions, and assumptions, all of which are framed by their unique contexts (Day et al., 2016). It is salient, then, to consider the experiences of minoritized educational leaders who, by virtue of their lived experiences of oppression and discrimination, bring a divergent frame of reference to developing equity solutions. More specifically, although matters of equity for all minoritized groups are of great importance to the field of educational leadership, there is a dearth of research related to the experiences of gender and sexually minoritized (GSM) educational leaders (deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Fassinger et al., 2010; Payne & Smith, 2018; Tooms, 2007). This gap is undergirded by a concern that while education systems are becoming more attuned to confronting oppressive forces that subjugate individuals who are not dominantly located, the GSM community is often viewed as a lower priority relative to other equity-deserving groups (Payne & Smith, 2018). Considered alongside the rising prevalence of education policies that negatively impact the GSM community (Atterbury, 2023; Wearmouth & Ranger, 2024), there is a timely need to understand more about how GSM-identifying educational leaders make sense of their contributions to equity solutions, particularly in the context of working alongside dominantly located colleagues in a team-based context.

The purpose of this article is to present a conceptual framework that can be used to understand the complex act of equity-related educational policy development when it is undertaken by a team that is composed of both dominantly located and GSM-identifying system education leaders. We chose to focus specifically on the act of policymaking at the system level for two

primary reasons: (a) policy is a significant lever of change in terms of the widespread transformation of education systems (Harris et al., 2021; Honig & Honsa, 2020); and (b) there is a paucity of scholarship related to equity-oriented, system education leadership. The framework was developed through a sense-making exercise among the authors (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017), reviewing three core areas of scholarship informed by scoping review methods (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005): equity and equity-oriented leadership, GSM topics in educational leadership, and system leadership in team-based policymaking. This process involved iterative discussions and analysis to synthesize the relevant literature and identify key themes that inform the experiences of GSM system education leaders in equity policy development. The resulting framework intends to establish coherence between the various facets of team-based, equity-related policymaking, which include team dynamics (Zaccaro et al., 2001), the degree to which leaders adopt equity-oriented leadership practices (Braun et al., 2021; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014), and the unique contexts in which the policy is crafted (Hallinger, 2018; Roegman, 2017). Moreover, the framework highlights how these policymaking factors are influenced by a coalescence of the identities; lived experiences; and dispositions, beliefs, and assumptions of the leaders involved in the policymaking process (Day et al., 2016; Gumus et al., 2018; Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Theoharis, 2007). The framework informs policymaking in a practical way by offering system education leaders and other decision-making agents a reflective model that they can utilize when undertaking equity-related policy development. It also provides a cogent representation of the complex conceptual and theoretical notions situated at the nexus of leader positionality, equity-oriented leadership, team-based dynamics, and policymaking.

To introduce the framework, we first provide an analysis of the literature that underpins its design. Then, we describe the framework's components and make clear how it brings together

areas that have been historically disconnected in the scholarly landscape. Finally, we conclude the article with an overview of how the framework can inform system leadership practices and future educational research.

Literature Review

Defining Equity

Broadly, when education is viewed through an equity lens, there is an acknowledgement that minoritized students experience systemic oppression both in and out of school. This demands a socially just and fair education system that addresses differences in needs and circumstances. Beyond this generalization, the debate on defining equity can be bifurcated on two fronts: equity as a matter of opportunity or outcome (Galloway et al., 2015).

The OECD, along with other scholars and organizations (see United Nations, 2020; Szolowicz, 2020; US Department of Education, 2023), situated equity as a matter of access and opportunity in which all students, regardless of their social or economic backgrounds, are more likely to have equal access to education. In other words, equally talented students have the same chance for success in school despite any disparities in their backgrounds (Bøyum, 2014). When equity is viewed as a matter of opportunity, however, no attention is paid to the level of achievement that students are experiencing and, as such, ongoing inequity in outcomes is widely accepted (Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021). As a middle ground between equity of opportunity and outcome, some consider the notion that all students should receive an adequate education to be a worthwhile aim (see Anderson, 2007; Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021). Instead of focusing exclusively on ensuring equal access, proponents of adequacy suggest that all students should be educated to the degree that allows them to be independent in adulthood and contribute productively to society (Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021). Critics of this orientation of equity argued that it does not address

the vast inequities that exist beyond this minimum threshold, and, as such, inequitable outcomes for minoritized students persist (Anderson, 2007; Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021). Brighouse and colleagues (2018) tempered this by suggesting that regardless of whether there is a disparity between those above the threshold, raising the achievement of those at the bottom to an adequate level would make the overall distribution of outcomes more equal.

Many scholars agreed that a focus on equitable educational outcomes is more likely to raise the achievement of minoritized students than equitable access, opportunity, or adequacy (Braun et al., 2021; Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Galloway et al., 2015; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021). Some argued, however, that pursuing equitable outcomes for all students is an impossible endeavour due to vast differences in talent, effort, skills, aspirations, and abilities (Koski & Reich, 2007) as well as the systems of oppression and inequality that are entrenched in modern society (Ward et al., 2015). Acknowledging this, Galloway and colleagues (2015) called for a focus on the fairness of outcomes rather than equal outcomes. They cautioned, however, against conflating fairness with sameness and instead framed fairness of outcomes as eliminating disparities between groups of students of varying backgrounds. Sahlberg and Cobbold (2021) offered an adaptation to this focus in their suggestion that equity is achieved when all individual students receive an education that allows them to contribute to society productively while students in different social groups (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) achieve similar educational outcomes. While it is clear that there is little consensus on a definition of educational equity, the literature reveals a number of empirically-supported leadership practices that reduce educational inequities.

Equity-oriented Leadership Practices

In a review of 63 empirical studies, Leithwood (2021) sought to identify leadership practices and dispositions likely to improve equitable outcomes for minoritized students. Broadly, he concluded that the integrated leadership model proposed by Leithwood and colleagues (2020) was suitable for improving equity when the associated practices are utilized with an equity orientation (Leithwood, 2021). These practices were conceptualized under the domains of setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing organizational structures, and improving the instructional program (Leithwood et al., 2020). Additionally, Leithwood (2021) suggested three focus areas that are specific to the purpose of reducing inequities, which include creating authentic partnerships with communities, implementing culturally responsive curricula, and supporting teachers in the utilization of "ambitious forms of instruction for traditionally underserved students" (p. 33). Considered alongside the work of other scholars (see Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Braun et al., 2021; Campbell, 2021; Gumus et al., 2021; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Riehl, 2000; Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Theoharis, 2007), a common set of practices utilized by equity-oriented leaders emerged: (a) setting an equity vision; (b) building capacity; (c) cultivating a culture of inquiry; and (d) building trustful relationships with communities.

Setting an Equity Vision. Equity-oriented educational leaders espouse a commitment to the learning of all students (Leithwood, 2021), seek to build a collective understanding of the root causes of inequity (Braun et al., 2021), and exhibit moral courage to challenge the status quo, and in doing so, disrupt embedded practices that perpetuate disparities for minoritized students (Shields, 2018).

Building Capacity. Equity-oriented leaders acknowledge that new skills, knowledge, and attitudes are essential to reduce inequities and, as such, prioritize capacity building for leaders,

teachers, and other educational agents. They identify gaps between current and desired equity-oriented practices and beliefs and foster a shared commitment to filling them (Leithwood, 2021) by using inquiry-focused, job-embedded professional development (Braun et al., 2021). In terms of beliefs, it is widely acknowledged that challenging deficit thinking is an integral piece of pursuing an equity agenda (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Campbell, 2021; Gumus et al., 2021; Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Weiler & Hinnant-Crawford, 2021). Deficit thinking places responsibility for a lack of success on a student's family, background, or innate characteristics, thereby absolving educators from any culpability (García & Guerra, 2004; Sharma, 2018; Valencia, 2010). As such, when individuals or groups of students do not perform in a normative manner, educators pathologize them and issue prescriptive initiatives or programs that serve to address the perceived deficits (Shields, 2018; Valencia, 2010). Equity-oriented leaders foster an anti-deficit thinking mindset, which involves a strength-based approach in which educators seek to leverage the skills and experiences of all students to support their success while also critically challenging the ways in which the hegemonic norms of the system are creating barriers (Shields, 2018).

Creating a Culture of Inquiry. Because the root causes of inequity are often deeply embedded in organizational practices, it is important that equity-oriented leaders utilize data to bring issues of equity to the surface (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). By highlighting measures that indicate disparities between minoritized and dominantly located students, a sense of urgency and ownership becomes possible (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Lash & Sanchez, 2022; Skrla, 2004). To translate data into action, Lash and Sanchez (2022) suggested that leaders prioritize the creation of professional learning communities that have an equity orientation and a praxis approach. This is echoed by Ainscow and Sandill (2010), who highlighted the importance of educators "gathering, generating, and interpreting information within a school in order to create an inquiring stance" (p.

404), which can be used to create a dissonance in thinking that "provides a challenge to existing assumptions about teaching and learning" (p. 404). Relatedly, Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) argued that leaders with limited practice in fostering inquiry cultures are more likely to make decisions based on personal opinions and assumptions rather than acting based on evidence.

Building Trustful Relationships with Communities. Establishing trustful and authentic relationships with all communities served by a school is a key practice of equity-oriented educational leaders (Gumus et al., 2021; Harris & Jones, 2019; Khalifa, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016; Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021). In fact, Leithwood (2021) concluded that this leadership practice had more supportive evidence than any of the other practices he incorporated into his equity-oriented leadership framework. Similarly, in a study conducted by Shields and Hesbol (2020), they found that equity-oriented leaders "established mutually respective relationships with students, staff, families, and the community as a non-negotiable, prior to working with the teaching staff on implementing equitable and socially-just instructional strategies" (p. 16). This finding emphasizes the importance of relationship building and suggests that it is the foundation on which all other equity-oriented endeavours are built. The label of "community organizing" is used in the equitable leadership discourse in reference to the practices of an educational leader who fosters these deep connections with underserved communities. In doing so, these communities are empowered to have a stronger influence on school decision-making (Khalifa, 2012; Khalifa et al, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2021), as well on the formulation of education policies at the school, regional, and national levels (Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021). Harris and Jones (2019) further highlighted the importance of community organizing in their assertion that because many minoritized parents and caregivers have experienced their own schooling in a negative way, educational leaders need to be more intentional and culturally sensitive in fostering relationships.

Having established several perspectives on defining equity generally and outlining broad leadership practices that reduce inequities, we turn now to an analysis of literature that deals specifically with gender and sexually-minoritized perspectives as this equity-seeking group is the subject of the framework.

Gender and Sexually-Minoritized Perspectives on Educational Leadership

Although matters of equity for all minoritized groups are of great importance to the field of educational leadership, there is a hierarchy of priority for different categories of marginalization within the broader frame of minoritized groups. For example, in a study conducted by O'Malley and Capper (2015), which explored principal preparation for social justice-oriented leadership, over 90% of participants reported that the identity categories of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and culture received a high or moderate emphasis in preparation programs compared to 48% for sexual orientation. Payne and Smith (2018) echoed this finding in their conclusion that equity-oriented educational leaders often view the GSM community as a lower concern relative to other equity-deserving groups. In terms of the scholarship in this area, Kahn and Gorski (2016) argued that most research on GSM issues in educational contexts is focused on the student experience, though they acknowledged that scholarly work on the experiences of 2SLGBTQIIA+ teachers was emerging. Beyond classroom teachers, many scholars have suggested that there is a dearth of research related to the experiences of GSM educational leaders (deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Fassinger et al., 2010; Payne & Smith, 2018; Tooms, 2007). Considering this scholarship gap alongside four key factors in the educational landscape, a strong claim for exploring the nexus of educational inequities experienced by the GSM community and educational leadership emerges. These factors include: (a) the critical role leaders play in challenging heteronormative and gender-normative policies and practices in education (Kahn & Gorski, 2016); (b) the perceived reluctance

or hostility of many school administrators as it relates to inclusivity for GSM students and staff (Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003; Payne & Smith, 2018); (c) the emerging tenuous political climate concerning GSM issues in education and, more broadly, society (Toledo & Maher, 2021); and (d) the widespread findings that GSM students and teachers experience discrimination, harassment, and a lack of belonging at school (see Dimberg et al., 2021; Duarte, 2020; Munro et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2016). To explore GSM perspectives further, we organize the review under three topics: (a) gender normativity, (b) hegemonic masculinity, and (c) heteronormativity.

Gender Normativity in Educational Leadership

The reinforcement of a gender performance that reflects social norms and the discrimination of those whose performance is divergent from these norms is well documented in education. Kahn and Gorski (2016) cited several events that laid the foundation for the normative and dichotomous gender roles that persist in education today. This included the fact that teaching was, at first, a profession for men only as societal norms in the 17th and 18th centuries demanded that women remain at home. With the onset of the Industrial Revolution and the departure of men from teaching to obtain more lucrative careers, single women without children, and eventually all women, were permitted to become teachers and began to dominate the profession. As the practice of teaching became more feminized, men began seeking more masculinized domains (i.e., power, prestige, profitability) and, as such, moved into school administration (Kahn & Gorski, 2016). With male dominance in school leadership becoming more entrenched, the norm that men are in a position of leading while women hold the role of following was consistently reinforced (Gill & Arnold, 2015). These administrators were historically responsible for policing and monitoring the degree to which the appearance and behaviours of teachers reflected the gender norms associated with their biological sex as determined by their societal contexts (Kahn & Gorski, 2016; Rottmann,

2006). This resulted in hegemonic role behaviour becoming paramount to a teacher's ability to secure and maintain employment and, as Kahn and Gorski (2016) argued, in many cases, became more important than teaching ability.

Hegemonic Masculinity in Educational Leadership

Hegemonic masculinity situates the dominant socially constructed version of masculinity (i.e., hyper-masculine, authoritative, unemotional, and heterosexual) over other expressions of masculinity as well as femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In the context of educational leadership, it has been argued that historical and current structures of oppression serve to reinforce hegemonic masculinity and, thus, male dominance in the field (Gill & Arnold, 2015; Mackinnon, 2021). Wang and colleagues (2022) contended further that leaders who do not exhibit prototypical masculine characteristics are "believed to be incongruent with leadership roles and are subject to extra scrutiny, marginalization, and discrimination" (p. 559). This is reinforced persuasively by McClellan and colleagues (2008) in their argument that "society expects – problematically so – women to behave like other people in positions of power without appearing too masculine. And men are expected to behave like men" (p. 2). The ubiquitous nature of masculinized educational leadership is not surprising when considered alongside the evolution of prevailing leadership theories such as transactional leadership theory, transformational leadership theory and, to some extent, instructional leadership theory (Bates, 2010; Lakomski & Evers, 2020). These theories each situate a single individual at the centre of educational leadership who, in most cases, is viewed in a masculine way (Gill & Arnold, 2015).

Heteronormativity in Educational Leadership

Heteronormativity is defined as a hierarchical social system that presumes a gender and sexual binary in which heterosexual identities are privileged to the extent that they are normalized

and naturalized. As such, a set of cultural norms are engendered which enforce beliefs and practices that perpetuate heterosexuality as the normal orientation while subjugating and sanctioning any orientation that deviates (Courtney, 2014; Duarte, 2020; Herz & Johansson, 2015; Toomey et al., 2012). In the context of education, the institutionalization of heteronormativity has occurred through many of the same systems that were discussed previously in relation to gender normativity. In fact, many scholars study both phenomena together because of their concomitant nature (see deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Kahn & Gorski, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2018; Rottmann, 2006, Toomey et al., 2012). This is articulated by Kahn and Gorski (2016), who argued that "gender-normativity and heteronormativity often are policed through some of the same or overlapping norming mechanisms, making either difficult to discuss with appreciable sophistication without considering the other" (p. 16). With specific regard to sexual orientation, given that teachers and educational leaders were (and are) held to moral standards determined by society, the historical characterization of non-heterosexuality as disordered, unnatural, deviant, and criminal has resulted in the oppression and, in many cases, punishment of those who do not conform to heteronormative appearances and behaviours (Courtney, 2014; Kahn & Gorski, 2016; Llewellyn & Reynolds, 2021). Heteronormativity pervades current education systems in many ways, which include the expectation that educators embody a sexually neutral and gender-normative self (Llewellyn & Reynolds, 2021) even though the open discussion of marriages and families by heterosexual educators is widely accepted (Connell, 2015; deLeon & Brunner, 2013). Furthermore, curriculum and associated resources are widely devoid of non-heterosexual representation, which reinforces the normative nature of heterosexual relationships in students from a young age (Duarte, 2020; Payne & Smith, 2018). Regarding educational leadership, Lugg (2003) argued that in addition to expectations of upholding masculinist principles, educational

leaders are also expected to model heterosexuality themselves while policing the sexuality of others. This ultimately puts non-heterosexual leaders in a paradoxical position that requires them to retreat into a protective and assimilative silence (deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Lugg, 2003; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003; Lugg & Tooms, 2010). This silence engenders deep-seated internalized homophobia, which further perpetuates heteronormativity as non-heterosexual teachers and leaders are reluctant to act as role models for GSM students or to advocate for change out of fear of professional repercussions (Duarte, 2020).

Based on the reviewed literature, it is reasonable to suggest that the leadership identities, lived experiences, and dispositions, beliefs, and assumptions of GSM-identifying educational leaders vary from those of their dominantly located colleagues. As such, it is worthwhile to explore how these leaders may function in a team setting. To do so, we consider team dynamics through the lenses of effectiveness, leadership, and learning.

Team Dynamics

As the field of educational leadership evolves from the traditional model of single-authority leadership to a more shared and distributed frame, understanding how effective leadership teams function becomes increasingly important. Though there is limited research on team dynamics specifically in the context of system education, insights can be drawn from broader scholarship on organizational behavior. Cohen and Bailey (1997) define a team as a "collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and who are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or more larger social systems" (p. 241). Similarly, McCarter and White (2016) characterize a team as a "collective group" that shares common interests and has "energy around delving into a given set of topics" (p. 95). Applied to system education leadership, a leadership team can be viewed as an interdependent

ecosystem, united under a shared goal of ensuring high-quality education for all students. This interdependence is especially significant in contexts where system leadership team members each manage distinct portfolios (e.g., human resources, student services, teaching and learning) but must collaborate for system-wide success. This cross-cutting nature of leadership is particularly crucial for equity-focused agendas, which permeate all areas of the educational landscape.

Team Effectiveness

Marks et al. (2001) argued that team success depends not only on the collective talents of its members but also on the processes through which team members interact to achieve organizational goals. Barnett and McCormick (2012) expanded on this by identifying four key processes that contribute to team effectiveness: cognitive, motivational, affective, and coordinative.

Cognitive Processes. Cognitive processes include the development of shared mental models, where team members understand, explain, and predict the environment in similar ways (Barnett & McCormick, 2012). While scholars differ on the specific definition of mental models, Decuyper and colleagues (2010) emphasized that mental models serve as a group-level system for encoding, storing, and retrieving information across team members to work more efficiently. Senge (1990) offered a broader view, characterizing mental models as involving a shared understanding of the current reality, a collective vision for the future, and a common approach to navigating the gap between them.

Motivational Processes. Team cohesion and collective efficacy are essential motivational factors that sustain a team's efforts (Barnett & McCormick, 2012). Cohesion can be task-oriented—where members work together to achieve shared goals—or social, based on the strength of interpersonal relationships within the team (Zaccaro et al., 2001). Task cohesion refers to the

collective effort to accomplish goals that would be unachievable individually, while social cohesion emphasizes the bonds that keep members engaged with the team. As Barnett and McCormick (2012) found, a strong sense of cohesion helps drive team motivation by fostering commitment to the team's success.

Affective Processes. Affective processes involve the team climate, trust, and respect among members (Barnett & McCormick, 2012). Interpersonal trust plays a critical role in reducing conflict, increasing commitment, and facilitating constructive interactions among members. Decuyper and colleagues (2010) and McCarter and White (2016) suggested that a positive team climate creates a space for open dialogue, allowing members to share different perspectives and critique ideas, which ultimately enhances performance. Zaccaro and colleagues (2001) also highlighted how affective processes relate to the overall emotional tone of the group, either emerging from collective dynamics or reflecting the emotional states of individual members.

Coordinative Processes. Coordinative processes refer to the technical aspects of team functioning, such as timing, sequencing, communication, and monitoring interdependent actions (Marks et al., 2001). Marks and colleagues (2001) distinguished between progress monitoring, systems monitoring, and team monitoring, each of which play a role in ensuring that teams stay on track toward their goals. Progress monitoring involves tracking the achievement of goals and adjusting plans as needed, while systems monitoring ensures that resources are appropriately allocated and that the environment remains conducive to goal attainment. Team monitoring refers to how members support each other in fulfilling their responsibilities, whether through coaching, feedback, or direct assistance.

Team Leadership

Leadership processes within teams interact dynamically across the four processes of effectiveness and contribute to the overall success of the team (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Zaccaro et al., 2001). Broadly, team leadership involves setting directions, managing operations, and building the internal capacity of teams to solve problems independently (Barnett & McCormick, 2012). Leadership processes in educational teams often align with distributed leadership models (Harris, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2020; Spillane, 2005), where leadership responsibilities are shared among team members. Hackman and Wageman (2005) suggested three types of coaching that leaders can use to distribute responsibilities: motivational, educational, and consultative coaching. Decuyper and colleagues (2010) emphasized that such mentorship, combined with reflexive practices and a willingness to learn alongside the team, enhances problem-solving and communication, creating a higher-functioning team.

Zaccaro and colleagues (2001) highlighted the role of leadership in navigating the complexities of organizational problems, particularly in education. As teams operate in socially complex and contextually driven domains, leaders (such as superintendents) must guide their teams in identifying and implementing solutions. Leaders not only establish goals but also provide direction, evaluate solutions, and plan their implementation, thus shaping the team's ability to achieve its objectives.

Team Learning

High-functioning teams not only accomplish tasks but also learn and grow collectively (Decuyper et al., 2010). Organizational learning within teams involves two main phases: (a) searching for information beyond team boundaries; and (b) incorporating or rejecting the newfound information (Honig, 2003). New information can enter a team through individual

members, designated boundary spanners (e.g., instructional coaches), or external mandates (e.g., ministry guidelines). Once the information is introduced, teams engage in interpretation, storage, and retrieval, using new insights to inform future decisions (Honig, 2003). In education, such learning is crucial for leadership teams as they navigate evolving challenges and contexts, particularly when crafting equity-focused policies.

Because the output of conceptual framework is equity-related policies that intend to improve outcomes for minoritized students, we turn now to an analysis of literature related to policymaking in educational contexts.

Educational Policymaking

Honig (2006) highlighted the significance of educational policy, arguing that it serves as a "significant lever of change in an institution intended to serve all children and youth" and that it affects "multiple dimensions of social welfare" (p. 1). Despite this, Leithwood and colleagues (1995) claimed that many policies fail to achieve their intended change, while Harris and Jones (2019) emphasized that the quality of policy implementation often matters more than the policy itself. System education leaders play a pivotal role in the development and enactment of local policies, as well as in translating higher-level policies—such as those from school boards or ministries—into actionable strategies within schools (Aguayo et al., 2023; Harris & Jones, 2019; Honig, 2013). This dual role enables system leaders to exert an indirect but significant impact on student outcomes (Aguayo et al., 2023; Harris & Jones, 2019; Honig, 2013).

Regarding the implementation of these potentially impactful public policies, Honig (2003) argued that system leaders often focus on compliance, accountability, and centralized decision-making, with little room for meaningful, collaborative leadership (Honig, 2003). This was captured this in her assertion that central office administrators often help schools implement decisions made

at the district level rather than supporting schools in making their own decisions. Similarly, Wong et al. (2020) described the phenomenon of "controlled autonomy," in which system leaders provide school leaders with the illusion of decentralized decision-making while retaining ultimate control over what actually happens in practice. To counter this trend, Honig (2013) argued for policies that give system leaders the room to lead for performance rather than mere compliance. Brown and Duignan (2021) added that a lack of preparation for system leaders before entering the policy arena is a major barrier to effective policymaking. To address these challenges, the literature points to four key factors in developing effective policy: attention to context, collaborative development, the use of research and evidence, and stakeholder engagement.

Attention to Context

Context is a critical factor in the success of any policy, especially in the complex landscape of education. Harris and Jones (2019) argued that "the effectiveness of any policy cannot be independent of context and culture but rather is profoundly shaped and moulded by it" (p. 196). This is particularly true in the case of social policies, such as those focused on equity, which often address what Head and Alford (2015) described as "wicked problems"—issues that are complex, unpredictable, and value-laden (p. 712). In such situations, system education leaders must navigate a pluralistic policy context often driven by the political narratives of those in power (Brown, 2014b).

An example of this can be seen in Saskatchewan, where school superintendents were recently directed to implement policies requiring parental consent for student pronoun changes. This directive, met with resistance from GSM advocacy groups, placed system leaders in a no-win situation with little consensus on how to proceed (Langager, 2023). Clarke and O'Donoghue (2017) underscored the importance of context in policymaking, noting that broad-reaching policies

cannot be assumed to apply equally in all circumstances. System leaders must develop local policies that account for these contextual factors while allowing frontline leaders to interpret and implement them in ways that are meaningful within their own unique environments.

Collaborative Development

Policymaking in the education sector, especially when addressing social issues, cannot be perfected or universally standardized. Brown (2014a) argued that expertise in policy development is often context-specific and temporal, making collaborative processes essential. Policy development is strengthened when it includes diverse perspectives and values, which reflect the lived experiences and beliefs of the stakeholders affected by policy outcomes (Aguayo et al., 2023). Head and Alford (2015) extended this argument, suggesting that divergent viewpoints should be shared to define problems and explore appropriate responses in a collaborative, systems-thinking environment.

Collaborative policymaking is particularly relevant in educational contexts, where decisions impact a broad range of stakeholders, including educators, students, and communities. By engaging these stakeholders, system leaders can better identify potential challenges and craft policies that are responsive to the complexities of the educational landscape. Such collaborative processes are more likely to yield policies that have higher utility and are better suited to addressing the needs of diverse populations.

Use of Research and Evidence

The use of research and evidence in policymaking has been widely discussed in the literature (see Brown, 2014a, 2014b; Honig, 2003; Ion et al., 2019). Oakley (2000) argued that policymakers have a moral imperative to base their decisions on the best available evidence (as cited in Brown, 2014a). Brown (2014a) highlighted the growing number of government initiatives

that mandate explicit connections between education policy and research evidence, such as the Canadian province of Alberta's recent overhaul of its strategic planning process to incorporate a stronger link between data and decision-making (Alberta Education, 2024).

Despite the well-established importance of utilizing research and evidence in the policymaking arena, Ion and colleagues (2019) contended that the practical mobilization of research is often limited due to a mismatch between the needs of policymakers and the research produced. They call for greater "boundary crossing" between researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders to ensure that research is relevant and useful for decision-making (p. 3). Honig (2003) emphasized the need for balance, warning against both over-reliance on past information, which may lead to outdated policies, and the inundation of policymakers with too much new research, which can overwhelm their decision-making processes. Effective policymaking requires careful consideration of the appropriate mix of new and existing evidence to inform decisions.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is a critical element of effective policymaking (Cohen et al., 2018; Canadian Public Health Association, 2010). Cohen et al. (2018) argued that policy should emerge from debate among a wide array of voices, rather than being dictated solely by elite decision-makers. Orr and Rogers (2011), as cited in Cohen et al. (2018), identified four forms of stakeholder engagement that are particularly relevant to educational policymaking:

- Co-production: Involves collaboration among stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and community members, on specific projects.
- Democratic governance: Refers to formal decision-making structures, such as school boards and parent councils.

- Community organizing: Occurs when stakeholders with common concerns work together to demand action and hold leaders accountable.
- Social movements: Expands on community organizing by advocating for systemic change based on deeply held ideological commitments.

Taken together, these forms of engagement highlight the importance of involving diverse perspectives in policy development. Engaging stakeholders helps ensure that policies are responsive to the needs of all affected parties and increases the likelihood of successful implementation. Leithwood (2021), in his review of educational equity studies, concluded that building trusting relationships and engaging meaningfully with stakeholders is key to successful reform efforts.

In the next section, we present an overview of the conceptual framework, which draws together the major theoretical and conceptual threads that emerged in the literature review.

Conceptual Framework

As shown in Figure 1, the center of the framework is represented by a funnel, which indicates the interplay between the three primary nodes of leadership influencing the development of educational policies that intend to improve outcomes for minoritized students. These nodes include team dynamics (Zaccaro et al., 2001), the degree to which leaders adopt equity-oriented leadership practices (Braun et al., 2021; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014), and the unique contexts in which the policy is crafted (Hallinger, 2018; Roegman, 2017).

McCarter and White (2016) characterized a team as a “collective group” (p. 95), which is an “aggregation of people that share some common interests and have energy around delving into a given set of topics” (p. 95). Taken together and applied to this framework, a system leadership team functions as an interdependent ecosystem under a shared and unified objective to craft high-

quality policies that intend to improve outcomes for minoritized students. The dynamics of the team, represented in the first node, can be understood through three frames: effectiveness, team leadership, and the way the team learns. The effectiveness of the team is contingent upon the collective skills and talents of its members as well as the process that the team use to interact with each other when engaging in policymaking (Marks et al., 2001; McCormick, 2012). The effectiveness is also closely tied to the extant leadership practices (e.g., setting directions, managing team operations, building capacity) that drive the work of the team (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Zaccaro et al., 2001). Specifically, and in relation to educational inequities, the degree to which the team utilizes equity-oriented leadership practices, represented in the second node, influences the policymaking process. For example, if the team is collectively committed to using policy as a lever to build the capacities of educational agents as they relate to fostering more equitable learning environments (e.g., by challenging deficit thinking), they are more likely to be successful in improving outcomes for minoritized students (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2021; Shields & Hesbol, 2020). This act of team-based policymaking is underpinned by organizational learning (Ducuyper et al., 2010), which is concerned with searching for information outside of the team and the use (or not) of that information by incorporating it into the actions and decision-making of the team (Honig, 2003).

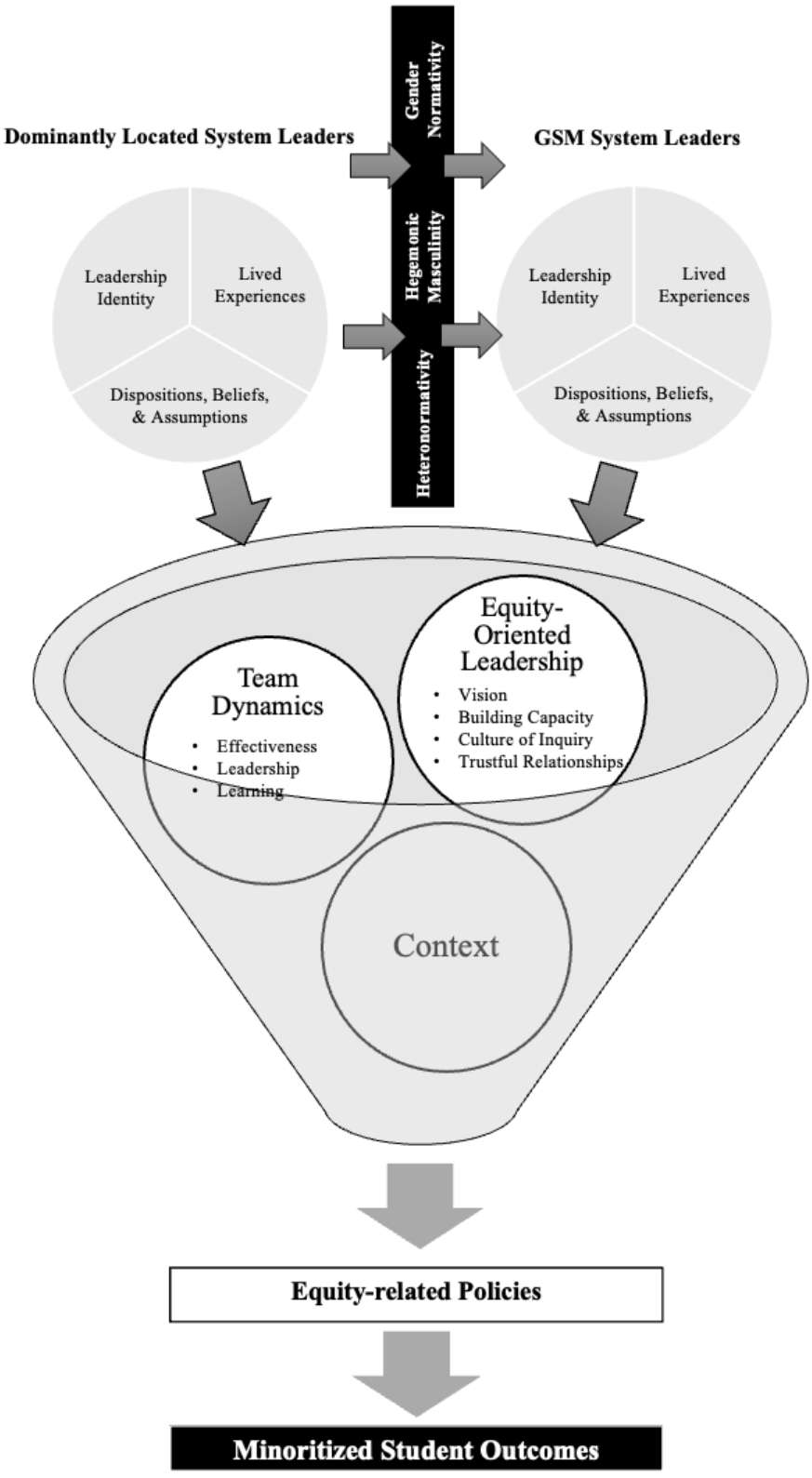
The dynamics of the team and the equity-oriented leadership practices its members utilize are inherently informed by the unique contexts in which policymaking takes place (Gurr et al., 2018; Hallinger, 2018; Lee & Hallinger, 2012; Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020; Molla & Gale, 2019; Roegman, 2017), which is represented in the third node. Leadership teams reconcile their equity work with contextual demands by adapting their practices (Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020) or by allowing the contextual forces to directly influence, or at times

restrict, their equity-related decision making (Lee & Hallinger, 2012; Hallinger, 2018). Conversely, they might maintain their vision for equity policymaking while finding ways to work toward it despite any opposing contextual demands (Galloway et al., 2015; Roegman, 2017). Coviello and DeMatthews (2021) argued that teams who intentionally use equity-oriented leadership practices are more likely to employ this approach and, as such, spend significant time identifying areas of anticipated or active resistance to equity-focused initiatives. This informs team decisions about how to strategically frame changes such that they can proactively mitigate the resistance (Coviello and DeMatthews, 2021).

The interplay of the three nodes does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is influenced by the unique leadership identities; lived experiences; and dispositions, beliefs, and assumptions of each leader involved in the policymaking process (Day et al., 2016; Gumus et al., 2018; Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Theoharis, 2007). In terms of how these unique leader attributes are formed, there is a divergence between GSM-identifying leaders and their dominantly located colleagues because of the insidious nature of gender normativity (Gill & Arnold, 2015; Kahn & Gorski, 2016), heteronormativity (Llewellyn & Reynolds, 2021), and hegemonic masculinity (Wang et al., 2022) in the field of educational leadership. This is represented by the barrier between the two groups, which includes arrows that direct the flow of power, and thus symbolize the intentional or unintentional role that dominantly located leaders play in reinforcing these norms.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



This overall influence of both groups flows into the funnel from each side and blends with the three nodes, causing the dimensions of the equity policymaking process outlined in the framework to become inseparable. This coalescence ultimately impacts the equity-related policies that emerge and, in turn, the educational outcomes of minoritized students.

Framework Application for Research

Future research could focus on applying this framework to better understand how equity policies are developed, especially when system leadership teams include both dominantly located leaders and those from GSM communities. As research on GSM leaders remains limited, more studies are needed that explore the specific contributions these leaders bring to the development of policies that impact minoritized students.

One avenue for further inquiry involves examining how leadership teams navigate the intersection of their members' identities, lived experiences, and beliefs during the policymaking process. Building on the work of Day et al. (2016) and Gumus et al. (2018), researchers could investigate how leadership teams use their perspectives to create policies that address equity issues while also challenging prevailing norms of gender-normativity, heteronormativity, and hegemonic masculinity (Kahn & Gorski, 2016; Llewellyn & Reynolds, 2021). Understanding how these leadership teams negotiate power dynamics and work through tensions between dominantly located leaders and GSM-identifying leaders would provide valuable insights into creating and implementing equity policies.

Additionally, researchers could focus on team dynamics in policymaking, particularly around cognitive, affective, motivational, and coordinative processes (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Decuyper et al., 2010). Studies could investigate how the interdependent relationships within system leadership teams shape the ways in which they engage with equity-related challenges,

develop shared mental models (Senge, 1990), and foster trust (McCarter & White, 2016), deepening our understanding of how effective team processes contribute to meaningful policymaking and successful outcomes for minoritized students.

Finally, research and evidence use in educational policymaking is an area that continues to warrant further investigation. As noted by Brown (2014a) and Honig (2003), policymaking often suffers from a disconnect between academic research and practical needs. Future research could explore how leadership teams can better integrate evidence into their decision-making, potentially by building stronger boundary-crossing relationships between researchers and practitioners (Ion et al., 2019). Such research might focus on providing actionable insights into how evidence-informed policymaking can ensure that the policies developed are both well-informed and practically relevant.

Framework Application for Practice

For system leadership teams engaged in developing equity policies, several key considerations should be considered to positively impact the educational outcomes of minoritized student populations. First, leadership teams must attend to the unique contexts in which they operate. As Harris and Jones (2019) argued, policies cannot be separated from the cultural and contextual realities of the environments in which they are implemented. Teams need to be mindful of the specific challenges and opportunities presented by their local context, ensuring that policies are adaptable and responsive to the needs of their student populations. This includes recognizing the political and social pressures that may shape the policy landscape and finding ways to craft solutions that consider the needs of minoritized groups while managing external constraints.

Additionally, the diversity of perspectives within a leadership team can be a powerful asset in crafting equitable policies. Leadership teams would do well to prioritize inclusive and

participatory processes that engage multiple voices, including teachers, students, parents, and community stakeholders. By fostering collaborative policymaking environments, teams can ensure that their policies reflect a wide range of experiences and are more likely to address the root causes of inequity. Additionally, diverse leadership teams can bring unique perspectives to the table, underscoring how important it is that team members from minoritized backgrounds, such as GSM leaders, are fully included in the decision-making process and their insights valued (Aguayo et al., 2023).

System leaders should also be attentive to the role of trust and interpersonal relationships within their teams. As McCarter and White (2016) and Decuyper et al. (2010) have shown, a positive team climate, characterized by mutual respect and trust, can significantly enhance the performance and cohesion of leadership teams. By creating spaces for open dialogue and critical reflection, leadership teams can better navigate the tensions that arise in the policy development process and work towards shared goals that prioritize equity.

Finally, it behooves system leadership teams to establish structures that allow for the continuous incorporation of relevant research and data into their decision-making processes, while heeding Honig's (2003) admonition about balancing the search for new evidence with the effective use of existing data. Leadership teams need to be discerning in their research use, ensuring they are not overwhelmed by information and instead integrate evidence most pertinent to their context and goals.

Conclusion

This article offers a conceptual framework to guide system leadership teams in developing equity-oriented educational policies. By focusing on team dynamics, equity-driven leadership practices, and contextual influences, the framework offers practical tools for addressing

educational inequities. It highlights the importance of considering the diverse identities and experiences of leaders, especially those from GSM communities, and how these influence policymaking processes. Policymaking at the system level is inherently complex, requiring attention to context, collaboration, evidence, and stakeholder engagement. By fostering inclusivity, system leaders can create more equitable learning environments and improve outcomes for historically marginalized students.

References

Ainscow, M., & Sandill, A. (2010). Developing inclusive education systems: The role of organisational cultures and leadership. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 14*(4), 401–416. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110802504903

Anderson, E. (2007). Fair opportunity in education: A democratic equality perspective. *Ethics, 117*(4), 595–622. https://doi.org/10.1086/518806

Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(1), 19–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616

Atterbury, A. (2023, March 31). Florida House passes parental rights bill restricting pronouns in schools. *Politico*. https://www.politico.com/news/2023/03/31/florida-house-parental-rights-bill-pronouns-lgbtq-00089971

Barnett, K., & McCormick, J. (2012). Leadership and team dynamics in senior executive leadership teams. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 40*(6), 653–671. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143212456909

Bates, R. (2010). History of educational leadership/management. In P. Peterson, E. Baker, & B. McGraw (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (pp. 724–730). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.00412-7

Bøyum, S. (2014). Fairness in education – a normative analysis of OECD policy documents. *Journal of Education Policy, 29*(6), 856–870. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2014.899396

Braun, D., Billups, F. D., Gable, R. K., LaCroix, K., & Mullen, B. (2021). Improving equitable student outcomes: A transformational and collaborative leadership development approach. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, 5*(1), 1-24. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1308514

Brighouse, H., Ladd, H. F., Loeb, S., & Swift, A. (2018). *Educational goods: Values, evidence, and decision-making*. University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226514208.001.0001

Brown, C. (2014a). Advancing policy makers' expertise in evidence-use: A new approach to enhancing the role research can have in aiding educational policy development. *Journal of Educational Change, 15*(1), 19–36. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-013-9224-7

Brown, C. (2014b). The policy agora: How power inequalities affect the interaction between researchers and policy makers. *Evidence & Policy, 10*(3), 421–438. https://doi.org/10.1332/174426514X672353

Brown, S., & Duignan, P. (2021). System leaders scaling successful educational reforms in an uncertain future. In S. Brown & P. Duignan (Eds.), *Leading education systems* (pp. 1–36). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80071-130-320211001

Campbell, C. (2021). Educational equity in Canada: The case of Ontario's strategies and actions to advance excellence and equity for students. *School Leadership & Management, 41*(4–5), 409–428. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1709165

Canadian Public Health Association. (2010). Stakeholder engagement for improved school policy: Development and implementation. *Canadian Journal of Public Health, 101*(2), 22–25. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03405621

Connell, C. (2015). *School's out: Gay and lesbian teachers in the classroom.* University of California Press.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society, 19*(6), 829–859. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639

Courtney, S. J. (2014). Inadvertently queer school leadership amongst lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) school leaders. *Organization, 21*(3), 383–399. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508413519762

Coviello, J., & DeMatthews, D. E. (2021). Knowing your audience: Understanding urban superintendents' process of framing equitable change. *Journal of Educational Administration, 59*(5), 582–597. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-07-2020-0164

Croizet, J.-C., Autin, F., Goudeau, S., Marot, M., & Millet, M. (2019). Education and social class: Highlighting how the educational system perpetuates social inequality. In J. Jetten

& K. Peters (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Inequality* (pp. 139–152). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28856-3_9

Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *52*(2), 221–258. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X15616863

Decuyper, S., Dochy, F., & Van Den Bossche, P. (2010). Grasping the dynamic complexity of team learning: An integrative model for effective team learning in organisations. *Educational Research Review*, *5*(2), 111–133. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2010.02.002

deLeon, M. J., & Brunner, C. C. (2013). Cycles of fear: A model of lesbian and gay educational leaders' lived experiences. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *49*(1), 161–203. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X12459482

Dimberg, S. K., Clark, D. A., Spanierman, L. B., & VanDaalen, R. A. (2021). "School shouldn't be something you have to survive": Queer women's experiences with microaggressions at a Canadian university. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *68*(5), 709–732. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1661729

Duarte, B. J. (2020). Forced back into the closet: A (queer) principal's attempt to maintain queer erasure. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, *23*(4), 20–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555458920956310

Fassinger, R. E., Shullman, S. L., & Stevenson, M. R. (2010). Toward an affirmative lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender leadership paradigm. *American Psychologist*, *65*(3), 201–215. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018597

Galloway, M. K., Ishimaru, A. M., & Larson, R. (2015). When aspirations exceed actions: Educational leaders' descriptions of educational equity. *Journal of School Leadership*, *25*(5), 838–875. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461502500503

García, S. B., & Guerra, P. L. (2004). Deconstructing deficit thinking: Working with educators to create more equitable learning environments. *Education and Urban Society*, *36*(2), 150–168. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124503261322

Gill, J., & Arnold, P. (2015). Performing the principal: School leadership, masculinity and emotion. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 18*(1), 19–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2014.987180

Gümüş, S., Arar, K., & Oplatka, I. (2021). Review of international research on school leadership for social justice, equity and diversity. *Journal of Educational Administration and History, 53*(1), 81–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2020.1862767

Gumus, S., Bellibas, M. S., Esen, M., & Gumus, E. (2018). A systematic review of studies on leadership models in educational research from 1980 to 2014. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 46*(1), 25–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216659296

Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., Longmuir, F., & McCrohan, K. (2018). The leadership, culture and context nexus: Lessons from the leadership of improving achools. *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM)), 46*(1), 22-44. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Cesar-RodriguezUribe/publication/326327907_How_Principals_Lead_High_Needs_Schools_in_Mexico/links/5bf702e2a6fdcc538813a863/How-Principals-Lead-High-Needs-Schools-in-Mexico.pdf#page=27

Hallinger, P. (2018). Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 46*(1), 5–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216670652

Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2019). Leading for equity. *School Leadership & Management, 39*(5), 391–393. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1669788

Harris, A., Jones, M., & Hashim, N. (2021). System leaders and system leadership: Exploring the contemporary evidence base. *School Leadership & Management, 41*(4–5), 387–408. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2021.1889492

Herz, M., & Johansson, T. (2015). The normativity of the concept of heteronormativity. *Journal of Homosexuality, 62*(8), 1009–1020. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2015.1021631

Honig, M. (2003). Building policy from practice: District central office administrators' roles and capacity for implementing collaborative education policy. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 39*(3), 292–338. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X03253414

Honig, M. I., & Honsa, A. (2020). Systems-focused equity leadership learning: Shifting practice through practice. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *15*(3), 192–209. https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775120936303

Ishimaru, A. M., & Galloway, M. K. (2014). Beyond individual effectiveness: Conceptualizing organizational leadership for equity. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *13*(1), 93–146. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2014.890733

Kahn, M., & Gorski, P. C. (2016). The gendered and heterosexist evolution of the teacher exemplar in the United States: Equity implications for LGBTQ and gender nonconforming teachers. *International Journal of Multicultural Education, 18*(2), 15–38. https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v18i2.1123

Khalifa, M. (2012). A *re* -new- *ed* paradigm in successful urban school leadership: Principal as community leader. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *48*(3), 424–467. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11432922

Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(4), 1272–1311. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316630383

Koski, W. S. & Reich, R. (2006). When “adequate” isn’t: The retreat from equity in educational law and policy and why it matters. *Emory Law Journal, 56*(3), 545-617. https://heinonline.org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/HOL/Page?lname=&public=false&collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/emlj56&men_hide=false&men_tab=toc&kind=&page=545

Lakomski, G., & Evers, C. W. (2020). Theories of educational leadership. In G. Lakomski & C. W. Evers (Eds.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.603

Lash, C. L., & Sanchez, J. E. (2022). Leading for equity with critical consciousness: How school leaders can cultivate awareness, efficacy, and critical action. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, *95*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2021.2007833

Lee, M., & Hallinger, P. (2012). National contexts influencing principals' time use and allocation: Economic development, societal culture, and educational system. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *23*(4), 461–482. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2012.678862

Leithwood, K. (2021). A review of evidence about equitable school leadership. *Education Sciences*, *11*(8), 377-426. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11080377

Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1995). An organisational learning perspective on school responses to central policy initiatives. *School Organisation, 15*(3), 229-252. https://doi.org/10.1080/0260136950150303

Leithwood, K., Sun, J., & Schumacker, R. (2020). How school leadership influences student learning: A test of "the four paths model." *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *56*(4), 570–599. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X19878772

Llewellyn, A., & Reynolds, K. (2021). Within and between heteronormativity and diversity: Narratives of LGB teachers and coming and being out in schools. *Sex Education*, *21*(1), 13–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2020.1749040

Lugg, C. A. (2003). Our straitlaced administrators: The law, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered educational administrators, and the assimilationist imperative. *Journal of School Leadership*, *13*(1), 51–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460301300104

Lugg, C. A., & Koschoreck, J. W. (2003). The final closet: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered educational leaders. *Journal of School Leadership*, *13*(1), 4–6. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460301300101

Lugg, C. A., & Tooms, A. K. (2010). A shadow of ourselves: Identity erasure and the politics of queer leadership. *School Leadership & Management*, *30*(1), 77–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430903509790

MacKinnon, K. (2021). 'The women are taking over': Exploring hegemonic masculinities in elementary principalship. *Management in Education*, *35*(1), 32–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020620942505

Marks, M. A., Mathieu, J. E., & Zaccaro, S. J. (2001). A temporally based framework and taxonomy of team processes. *The Academy of Management Review*, *26*(3), 356. https://doi.org/10.2307/259182

McCarter, B. G., & White, B. E. (2016). *Leadership in chaordic organizations* (1st ed.). Auerbach Publications.

McClellan, R., Christman, D., & Fairbanks, A. (2008). Ulysses' return: Resilient male leaders still at the helm. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *3*(1), 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/194277510800300106

Molla, T., & Gale, T. (2019). Positional matters: School leaders engaging with national equity agendas. *Journal of Education Policy*, *34*(6), 858–876. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2018.1556811

Munro, L., Travers, R., & Woodford, M. R. (2019). Overlooked and invisible: Everyday experiences of microaggressions for LGBTQ adolescents. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *66*(10), 1439–1471. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1542205

O'Malley, M. P., & Capper, C. A. (2015). A measure of the quality of educational leadership programs for social justice: Integrating LGBTIQ identities into principal preparation. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *51*(2), 290–330. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X14532468

Payne, E. C., & Smith, M. J. (2018). Refusing relevance: School administrator resistance to offering professional development addressing LGBTQ issues in schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *54*(2), 183–215. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X17723426

Ravitch, S., & Riggan, M. (2017). *Reason and rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Riehl, C. J. (2000). The principal's role in creating inclusive schools for diverse students: A review of normative, empirical, and critical literature on the practice of educational administration. *Review of Educational Research*, *70*(1), 55–81. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543070001055

Roegman, R. (2017). How contexts matter: A framework for understanding the role of contexts in equity-focused educational leadership. *Journal of School Leadership*, *27*(1), 6–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461702700101

Rottmann, C. (2006). Queering educational leadership from the inside out. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *9*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120500389507

Sahlberg, P., & Cobbold, T. (2021). Leadership for equity and adequacy in education. *School Leadership & Management*, *41*(4–5), 447–469. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2021.1926963

Sharma, M. (2018). Seeping deficit thinking assumptions maintain the neoliberal education agenda: Exploring three conceptual frameworks of deficit thinking in inner-city schools. *Education and Urban Society*, *50*(2), 136–154. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124516682301

Shields, C. M. (2018). *Transformative leadership in education: Equitable and socially just change in an uncertain and complex world* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Shields, C. M., & Hesbol, K. A. (2020). Transformative leadership approaches to inclusion, equity, and social justice. *Journal of School Leadership*, *30*(1), 3–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684619873343

Skrla, L., Scheurich, J. J., Garcia, J., & Nolly, G. (2004). Equity audits: A practical leadership tool for developing equitable and excellent schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *40*(1), 133–161. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X03259148

Strom, K., Haas, E., Danzig, A., Martinez, E., & McConnell, K. (2018). Preparing educational leaders to think differently in polarized, post-truth times. *The Educational Forum*, *82*(3), 259–277. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2018.1458361

Szolowicz, M. (2020). What is equity? A literature review informing California administrator performance assessment expectations. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development, 32*,1-4. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1254624

Taylor, C. G., Meyer, E. J., Peter, T., Ristock, J., Short, D., & Campbell, C. (2016). Gaps between beliefs, perceptions, and practices: The every teacher project on LGBTQ-

inclusive education in Canadian schools. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, *13*(1–2), 112–140. https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2015.1087929

Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *43*(2), 221–258. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X06293717

Toledo, W., & Maher, B. (2021). On becoming an LGBTQ+-identifying teacher: A year-long study of two gay and lesbian preservice elementary teachers. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *68*(10), 1609–1638. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1702350

Toomey, R. B., McGuire, J. K., & Russell, S. T. (2012). Heteronormativity, school climates, and perceived safety for gender nonconforming peers. *Journal of Adolescence*, *35*(1), 187–196. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.03.001

Tooms, A. (2007). The right kind of queer: Fit and the politics of school leadership. *Journal of School Leadership*, *17*(5), 601–630. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460701700503

United Nations. (2020). World social report 2020: Inequality in a rapidly changing world. https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/02/World-Social-Report2020-FullReport.pdf

United States Department of Education. (2023). Equity action plan update. https://www2.ed.gov/documents/equity/2023-equity-plan.pdf

Valencia, R. R. (2010). Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203853214

Wang, G., Steffensen, D. S., Perrewé, P. L., Ferris, G. R., & Jordan, S. L. (2022). Does leader same-sex sexual orientation matter to leadership effectiveness? A four-study model-testing investigation. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *37*(3), 557–580. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-021-09759-y

Ward, S. C., Bagley, C., Lumby, J., Woods, P., Hamilton, T., & Roberts, A. (2015). School leadership for equity: Lessons from the literature. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *19*(4), 333–346. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.930520

Wearmouth, D., & Ranger, M. (2024, April 9). Alberta to join Saskatchewan in court battle over

classroom pronoun law. *City News*. https://calgary.citynews.ca/2024/04/09/alberta-transgender-students-pronoun-law-saskatchewan/

Weiler, J. R., & Hinnant-Crawford, B. (2021). School leadership team competence for implementing equity systems change: An exploratory study. *The Urban Review, 53*(5), 838–856. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-021-00600-7

Zaccaro, S. J., Rittman, A. L., & Marks, M. A. (2001). Team leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly, 12*(4), 451–483. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(01)00093-5

Biographies

Mathew V. Campbell

Mathew V. Campbell is a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education and is specializing in Senior Leadership in K-12 Education. Generally, his research interests include leadership team dynamics and processes, the influence of leader positionality and lived experience on leadership practices, and the experiences of minoritized leaders, particularly those who identify as gender and sexually minoritized individuals. For his doctoral research, he is studying how gender and sexually minoritized system education leaders in Canada experience the team-based development of equity-related policies. In addition to this work, he is a practicing system education leader in Alberta, overseeing portfolios in strategic planning, curriculum and instruction, and teacher/leader professional development. He also serves as a sessional post-secondary instructor.

*__Corresponding author__ mvcampbe@ucalgary.ca.

Stephen MacGregor

Dr. Stephen MacGregor is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Governance at the University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education. His research centers on knowledge mobilization as a mechanism for educational change, with an emphasis on leadership practices within increasingly complex education systems. He focuses on three interrelated strands of inquiry: (1) the relational networks among universities and secondary and elementary schools, (2) the influence of positive school leadership on the mobilization of research-informed teaching practices, and (3) the mechanisms and impacts of co-production as one approach to knowledge mobilization. In addition to his university role, he is the Representative to the New Scholar Advisory Board for the Canadian Educational Researchers' Association, Treasurer of the American Educational Research Association's Research Use SIG, and a Network Coordinator for the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement.

Email: stephen.macgregor@ucalgary.ca

White, R. (2025). Balancing individual autonomy and social solidarity: A pluriversal framework for educational leadership. *International Journal for Leadership in Learning, 25*(1), 152–221. https://doi.org/10.29173/ijll60

Balancing Individual Autonomy and Social Solidarity: A Pluriversal Framework for Educational Leadership

Robert White

Abstract

This paper examines the critical challenge facing contemporary educational leaders: fostering individual autonomy while nurturing social solidarity in increasingly diverse and complex educational environments. Drawing from diverse philosophical traditions—including Kantian ethics, Ubuntu philosophy, Confucian thought, Cherokee wisdom, Durkheimian sociology, and Habermasian theory—a pluriversal framework is developed for educational leadership that transcends traditional dichotomies between individual agency and collective responsibility. Through careful analysis of recent empirical research and theoretical scholarship, the argument demonstrates how this tension manifests in pressing challenges such as student disengagement, cultural conflicts, and achievement disparities across both K-12 and post-secondary contexts. The paper advances a comprehensive strategic framework for implementing and evaluating leadership practices that balance individual empowerment with community cohesion. This analysis reveals that successful educational transformation requires sophisticated approaches to leadership that honor both philosophical complexity and practical efficacy. The framework provides educational leaders with theoretical grounding and practical strategies for creating more inclusive, equitable, and transformative learning environments while maintaining commitment to both individual flourishing and collective well-being in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: Educational leadership, autonomy-solidarity integration, pluriversal philosophy, transformative practice, cultural responsiveness

Introduction

The prevailing models of educational leadership, deeply embedded in Eurocentric traditions, have failed to address the complex and intersecting crises facing contemporary education across both K-12 and post-secondary contexts in North America. Persistent achievement disparities, student disengagement, and the erosion of democratic values in schools are not merely technical problems requiring incremental reform—they are symptoms of a deeper epistemological failure. In this paper, I argue that dominant leadership paradigms, which prioritize efficiency, hierarchical control, and standardized metrics, are fundamentally inadequate for the realities of 21st-century education. Instead, I propose a **pluriversal framework** (defined as an approach that integrates multiple philosophical traditions while acknowledging their distinct cultural and historical contexts) that fundamentally disrupts the status quo by drawing from diverse philosophical traditions—Kantian ethics, Ubuntu, Confucian thought, Cherokee wisdom, Durkheimian sociology, and Habermasian theory. This synthesis challenges entrenched binaries between individual autonomy (the capacity for self-determination and independent action) and social solidarity (the collective cohesion and mutual responsibility within communities), demonstrating that educational leadership must embrace **relational, context-responsive, and philosophically pluralistic approaches** to be genuinely transformative.

The purpose of this paper is to develop a comprehensive theoretical and practical framework for educational leaders who must navigate the complex tension between fostering individual autonomy and building social solidarity in diverse educational settings. While I draw examples from both K-12 and post-secondary institutions in North American contexts, I recognize these as distinct environments with different leadership structures and challenges. I include both contexts to demonstrate the broad applicability of the autonomy-solidarity dialectic while acknowledging their unique manifestations in each setting. My focus is

primarily on formal leadership positions (principals, superintendents, deans, department chairs) while recognizing the distributed nature of leadership that extends to teachers and other educational stakeholders.

This work is intentionally provocative. It does not seek to refine existing leadership models but to **redefine** how we conceptualize leadership altogether. I argue that current university programs in educational leadership, by privileging Western managerialist perspectives, are complicit in maintaining structures that reproduce inequality and intellectual stagnation. It is argued here that leadership preparation must move beyond technical training and embrace **a radical reimagining of leadership as an ethical, communal, and historically situated practice.** This paper, therefore, is more than an academic contribution—it is a **direct challenge to the institutional inertia** that perpetuates failed leadership paradigms. Given the urgency of the crises in education, this argument should be seen as a **catalyst for systemic transformation** for Educational Leadership at all levels.

To begin, it is important to consider that the complex interplay between individual autonomy and social solidarity represents a critical yet often overlooked dimension of contemporary educational leadership. While educational leaders routinely navigate challenges such as chronic absenteeism (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019), escalating school violence (Astor & Benbenishty, 2020), and persistent achievement disparities (Ladson-Billings, 2021), the philosophical underpinnings of these challenges—specifically, the tension between individual self-determination and collective well-being—remain inadequately examined in leadership practice. This theoretical oversight has practical implications, as evidenced by the increasing incidents of school-based conflicts stemming from competing expressions of individual and group identities (Mustoip et al., 2024; Kumashiro, 2020).

Recent studies highlight how seemingly discrete educational challenges often share a common thread in the autonomy-solidarity dynamic. For instance, research on chronic

absenteeism reveals that students' disconnection from school communities frequently stems from perceived tensions between individual identity expression and institutional norms (Wang & Hofkens, 2020). Similarly, investigations into school violence indicate that many incidents arise from unresolved conflicts between individual autonomy and group belonging (Espelage & Hong, 2019). These findings suggest that educational leaders' capacity to balance individual agency with collective harmony may be more central to addressing contemporary challenges than previously recognized.

The manifestation of this philosophical tension varies across educational contexts but maintains remarkable consistency in its fundamental nature. In K-12 settings, leaders face immediate challenges in managing the intersection of individual expression and community cohesion, evident in issues ranging from dress code controversies to social media conflicts (Boyd, 2022). Post-secondary institutions encounter parallel challenges, particularly in navigating tensions between academic freedom and institutional responsibility, as well as between individual achievement and collaborative learning environments (Bergan, 2020; Giroux & Bosio, 2021; Shields, 2010).

Contemporary educational discourse often addresses these challenges in isolation, treating phenomena such as bullying, academic disengagement, and cultural conflicts as discrete issues requiring separate interventions (Juvonen & Graham, 2023). However, this fragmented approach overlooks the philosophical thread connecting these challenges: the fundamental tension between fostering individual autonomy and nurturing social solidarity. When viewed through this lens, seemingly disparate issues—from cyberbullying to achievement gaps—can be understood as manifestations of this core theoretical tension (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2021).

The imperative for educational leaders to engage with this philosophical dimension becomes particularly acute when considering recent trends in educational outcomes. Studies

indicate that schools struggling with chronic behavior issues often exhibit weak alignment between policies supporting individual expression and those fostering community cohesion (Gregory et al., 2017). Conversely, institutions that successfully navigate this balance demonstrate improved outcomes across multiple metrics, including academic achievement, student well-being, and school climate (Korpershoek et al., 2020).

Therefore, this article examines foundational perspectives from diverse philosophical traditions—including Kantian ethics, communitarian thought, Durkheimian sociology, Habermas's communicative rationality, and frameworks from Ubuntu, Confucian, and Cherokee traditions—to construct a pluriversal approach to educational leadership. Rather than viewing individual autonomy and social solidarity as opposing forces, these frameworks demonstrate their potential for mutual reinforcement when approached through a lens of philosophical pluralism (Seyama-Mokhaneli, 2024; Shields, 2010).

The significance of this theoretical investigation extends beyond academic discourse to address pressing practical challenges in educational leadership. For instance, recent studies of school violence prevention programs indicate that initiatives incorporating both individual empowerment and community building elements show significantly greater effectiveness than those focusing on either dimension alone (Astor & Benbenishty, 2020). Similarly, research on academic achievement suggests that learning environments successfully balancing personal agency with collaborative responsibility tend to produce stronger outcomes across diverse student populations (Hammond, 2014).

By examining how different educational contexts—from elementary classrooms to university campuses—can effectively nurture both individual agency and collective responsibility, this analysis offers critical insights for leaders seeking to address contemporary challenges in education. The framework developed here provides theoretical grounding for

practical leadership strategies that can address issues ranging from student disengagement to cultural conflict, while promoting both individual flourishing and community cohesion.

Core Problem and Contribution: The Autonomy-Solidarity Dialectic in Contemporary Educational Leadership

The fundamental challenge facing educational leaders lies not merely in addressing isolated behavioral, academic, or social issues, but in understanding how these challenges emerge from and reflect a deeper philosophical tension between individual autonomy and social solidarity. Contemporary educational research reveals that seemingly discrete problems—from chronic absenteeism to achievement disparities—often share common roots in this foundational dialectic (Gregory et al., 2017; Hammond, 2014). While educational leaders routinely confront manifestations of this tension, they often lack theoretical frameworks for understanding and addressing its underlying dynamics.

This tension manifests differently depending on leadership context and level. For K-12 principals and district leaders, the challenge involves creating school structures and policies that simultaneously honor individual student expression while fostering cohesive learning communities. For department chairs and teacher leaders, the tension emerges in curriculum design and classroom management approaches that balance personal growth with collaborative learning. In post-secondary settings, deans and academic leaders face distinct challenges in balancing institutional autonomy with broader social responsibilities, particularly around academic freedom and inclusive community building.

Recent studies demonstrate how this philosophical tension manifests across various educational contexts. In urban secondary schools, researchers have found that 73% of serious disciplinary incidents stem from conflicts between individual expression and community norms (Gregory et al., 2017). School principals who implemented leadership approaches that explicitly addressed this tension—through inclusive policy development processes and

restorative practices that balance individual accountability with community healing—saw significant reductions in disciplinary incidents. Similarly, investigations into chronic absenteeism reveal that students' disconnection often results from perceived incompatibility between personal identity and institutional culture, with 64% of chronically absent students reporting feelings of cultural displacement or individual constraint (Wang et al., 2022). Educational leaders who developed attendance initiatives that honored student cultural identities while strengthening community connections achieved substantially better outcomes.

The post-pandemic educational landscape has intensified these challenges. Digital learning environments, while offering unprecedented opportunities for personalized education, have simultaneously fragmented school communities and complicated the balance between individual agency and collective engagement (Gottschalk & Weise, 2023). Recent data indicates that schools struggling to balance remote learning autonomy with meaningful social connection experienced a 47% increase in student disengagement compared to those that successfully maintained this equilibrium (Fullan, 2014).

Therefore, this paper's contribution encompasses three distinct yet interconnected domains. First, through the synthesis of diverse philosophical perspectives on autonomy and solidarity—from Western liberal traditions to Indigenous communal frameworks—a comprehensive theoretical model for understanding how individual agency and social cohesion interrelate in educational contexts is developed. This integration moves beyond simplistic dichotomies to reveal how autonomy and solidarity can mutually reinforce educational outcomes.

Second, the examination of recent empirical research across K-12 and post-secondary settings demonstrates how this theoretical framework reveals the underlying dynamics of contemporary educational challenges. Meta-analyses of school climate studies (Korpershoek et al., 2020) reveal significant improvements in institutions that successfully balance individual

empowerment with community building. These improvements manifest across multiple metrics, with research documenting a 34% reduction in behavioral incidents, a 28% improvement in academic achievement, and a 41% increase in student-reported sense of belonging.

Third, through careful analysis of successful leadership practices, and actionable strategies for educational leaders to address the autonomy-solidarity tension in their specific contexts are offered. Recent case studies demonstrate how leaders who explicitly engage with this philosophical dynamic achieve measurable improvements in school climate and student outcomes (Shields, 2024).

The significance of this contribution extends beyond theoretical insight to practical application. As educational institutions face increasingly complex challenges—from cultural conflicts to digital citizenship—leaders require sophisticated frameworks for understanding and addressing the philosophical tensions underlying these issues. Similarly, Gay (2018) documents how this understanding enables the creation of more inclusive learning environments, while Mustoip et al., (2024) highlight its role in fostering stronger school-community relationships. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (2021) provides compelling evidence that this theoretical framework supports more effective approaches to addressing achievement disparities.

This theoretical framework provides educational leaders with tools for understanding how individual autonomy and social solidarity interact within their specific contexts, while offering evidence-based strategies for leveraging this understanding to address contemporary challenges. By moving beyond symptom-focused interventions to address underlying philosophical tensions, leaders can develop more comprehensive and effective approaches to educational transformation. The framework's significance lies in its ability to bridge theoretical

understanding with practical application, offering leaders a robust foundation for addressing the complex challenges of contemporary education.

Value Proposition for Educational Leaders: Navigating Autonomy and Solidarity Across Educational Contexts

The theoretical framework developed through the autonomy-solidarity dialectic offers distinctive and substantive value for educational leaders across both K-12 and post-secondary contexts, particularly as they confront increasingly complex institutional challenges. By "autonomy-solidarity framework", I refer to a leadership approach that consciously balances the development of individual agency and self-determination with the cultivation of community cohesion and collective responsibility. This framework provides leaders with both theoretical understanding and practical strategies for addressing tensions that emerge when individual expression and community standards appear to conflict. Recent empirical research demonstrates how this framework provides essential insights for leaders navigating the evolving landscape of contemporary education, where traditional approaches to student engagement, achievement, and community building often prove insufficient (Bergan, 2020; Giroux & Bosio, 2021; Shields, 2024;).

K-12 Leadership Applications

In K-12 settings, the autonomy-solidarity framework decodes critical dimensions of student development and institutional effectiveness that traditional leadership models often overlook. For example, school leaders must navigate tensions between standardized assessment requirements and the need for personalized learning, or between disciplinary systems and the development of student agency. Recent longitudinal studies of urban school districts reveal that principals and district administrators who explicitly engage with this dialectic achieve significantly better outcomes in addressing persistent educational challenges.

For instance, research by Gregory et al. (2017) demonstrates that schools employing leadership approaches balancing individual student agency with community cohesion experienced a 42% reduction in disciplinary incidents and a 37% increase in student engagement compared to schools using traditional disciplinary models. These leadership approaches included implementing restorative justice practices that hold individual students accountable while repairing community relationships, creating student leadership councils with meaningful decision-making power within community-defined parameters, and developing culturally responsive teaching practices that honor individual identities while building shared understandings.

The framework's value becomes particularly evident in addressing complex behavioral and academic challenges that school principals and administrative teams face. Martinez and Wong (2024) document how middle school leaders utilizing this approach successfully reduced chronic absenteeism by developing programs that simultaneously honor students' individual cultural identities while strengthening their connection to the school community. Specifically, principals implemented cultural heritage programs that recognized individual backgrounds while creating cross-cultural dialogue opportunities, and they established advisory programs where students maintained individual learning portfolios while participating in community-building activities. Their research reveals that schools implementing such balanced approaches witnessed a 31% improvement in attendance rates among previously disengaged students, alongside significant gains in academic performance and social-emotional development.

For K-12 leaders, the framework's value extends beyond immediate behavioral and academic outcomes to address fundamental challenges in educational equity and inclusion. Contemporary research by Ladson-Billings (2021) demonstrates how school principals and district leaders employing this framework more effectively navigate tensions between individual merit and systemic barriers to success. For example, school leaders developed

assessment systems that recognized individual achievement while accounting for systemic inequities, and they implemented curriculum decision-making processes that balanced teacher autonomy with collective input. Her analysis reveals that institutions successfully balancing individual achievement with collective responsibility show significant improvements in closing achievement gaps while maintaining high academic standards.

The framework manifests differently across K-12 educational levels while maintaining consistent theoretical foundations. In elementary settings, principals and teacher leaders utilize these insights to develop age-appropriate approaches to fostering individual voice while building collaborative skills. Research by Liu et al. (2024) demonstrates how elementary schools implementing this balanced approach show significant improvements in both student autonomy measures and social skill development. At the secondary level, the framework helps principals and department chairs address more complex manifestations of the autonomy-solidarity tension, particularly around issues of student identity expression and community belonging. Studies by Gross et al. (2024) reveal that high schools explicitly engaging with this dialectic experience fewer identity-based conflicts while maintaining stronger school communities.

Post-Secondary Leadership Applications

For post-secondary leaders, the framework offers equally valuable but distinctly different applications appropriate to university and college contexts. Higher education institutions face unique challenges in balancing institutional autonomy with broader social responsibilities, particularly in an era of increasing social polarization and competing demands for academic freedom and inclusive community building (Bergan, 2020).

University presidents, deans, and department chairs must navigate tensions between protecting faculty academic freedom and ensuring inclusive campus communities, while also balancing institutional autonomy with public accountability. Recent studies of successful

university leadership practices demonstrate how the autonomy-solidarity framework enables more effective responses to these challenges. Research by Meindl et al., (2018) reveals that post-secondary institutions explicitly addressing this dialectic—through approaches like collaborative governance models that protect individual faculty voice while establishing community standards, and diversity initiatives that honor individual identities while building shared institutional values—show marked improvements in student retention (increased by 28%), cross-cultural engagement (improved by 45%), and academic achievement (enhanced by 23%) compared to institutions using traditional leadership approaches.

In the post-secondary context, the framework's value extends beyond student outcomes to address fundamental challenges in institutional governance. Deans and department chairs who employ this approach develop more effective faculty governance systems that balance individual academic freedom with collective institutional responsibility. As Basit et al. (2024) document, university leaders utilizing this framework more effectively navigate tensions around controversial speech, intellectual diversity, and inclusive community building. Their findings indicate that institutions successfully maintaining this balance achieve stronger outcomes in both academic excellence and civic engagement.

The framework also provides university leaders with valuable insights for addressing emerging challenges in digital learning environments. Recent research by Smith and colleagues (2023) documents how higher education leaders utilizing this approach more effectively balance the personalization opportunities of digital platforms with the need for meaningful community engagement. Specifically, university administrators developed online learning communities that preserved individual pacing options while creating meaningful collaborative opportunities, and they implemented flexible assessment policies that maintained academic rigor while accommodating diverse student circumstances. Their findings indicate that institutions successfully navigating this balance achieve 34% higher student satisfaction rates

with online learning experiences and 29% better learning outcomes compared to those focusing exclusively on either individual flexibility or community engagement.

Across Educational Contexts

The framework's value manifests differently across educational levels while maintaining consistent theoretical foundations. In both K-12 and post-secondary contexts, the autonomy-solidarity framework also provides valuable insights for addressing emerging challenges in educational leadership related to cultural competency, digital citizenship, and global engagement. Research by Mustoip et al. (2024) demonstrates how this approach enables leaders at all levels to develop more nuanced and effective strategies for building inclusive communities while honoring individual differences. Their studies reveal that leaders who explicitly engage with the autonomy-solidarity dialectic develop policies and practices that reduce cultural conflicts while strengthening cross-cultural understanding.

This comprehensive value proposition extends beyond theoretical understanding to practical application, offering leaders at all educational levels evidence-based strategies for addressing contemporary challenges. The framework's significance lies in its ability to bridge philosophical insight with practical leadership needs, providing a robust foundation for educational transformation in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Philosophical Foundations: A Pluriversal Analysis of Autonomy and Solidarity in Educational Leadership

The integration of diverse philosophical traditions in this framework is not a superficial exercise in comparative philosophy; rather, it is a **deliberate effort to construct a leadership paradigm that transcends entrenched dichotomies**. I have selected these specific philosophical traditions—Kantian ethics, Ubuntu philosophy, Confucian relationalism, Cherokee communal wisdom, Durkheimian sociology, and Habermas's communicative

rationality—because they represent diverse cultural perspectives on the relationship between individual and community, offering complementary insights that, when integrated, provide a more comprehensive approach to educational leadership than any single tradition alone. Current leadership models in Western institutions tend to position individual autonomy and social solidarity as opposing forces, failing to recognize how **different epistemic traditions have long theorized their interdependence**.

Before examining each tradition in detail, brief definitions are provided here to help orient you to them:

- **Kantian ethics**: A Western philosophical tradition emphasizing moral autonomy, dignity, and treating individuals as ends in themselves rather than means to an end.
- **Ubuntu philosophy**: An African philosophical framework captured in the phrase "I am because we are," emphasizing that individual identity emerges through community relationships.
- **Confucian thought**: An East Asian philosophical tradition emphasizing harmony, proper relationships, and the cultivation of virtue through social relations.
- **Cherokee philosophy**: An Indigenous North American perspective emphasizing interconnection, ecological wisdom, and communal responsibility.
- **Durkheimian sociology**: A sociological perspective examining how social solidarity evolves in modern societies while accommodating individual differences.
- **Habermasian theory**: A critical social theory focused on communicative action and the conditions for genuine democratic dialogue.

By engaging with these traditions **as an interconnected whole**, guided by critical epistemic awareness (the conscious recognition of how knowledge is shaped by cultural, historical, and power contexts), this framework establishes a new way of conceptualizing leadership—one that is relational, contextually grounded, and philosophically pluralistic.

Kantian autonomy and Ubuntu relationality, for example, need not be viewed as contradictory. While Kantian ethics emphasize moral self-legislation and treating individuals as ends in themselves, Ubuntu frames identity as emerging through community relations ("I

am because we are"). Leadership informed by both perspectives moves beyond hierarchical authority structures to foster **ethical self-determination within relational accountability**—leaders cultivate environments where individuals are empowered, but their agency is exercised in ways that strengthen the collective.

For example, a K-12 principal employing this integrated approach might implement student leadership programs that empower individual decision-making (Kantian) while emphasizing how these decisions affect the whole school community (Ubuntu). In practice, this might involve student-led restorative justice councils where individual students develop moral reasoning skills while participating in community healing processes.

Similarly, Confucian thought and Cherokee communal leadership converge in their emphasis on **harmonious relational ethics**—where leadership is less about imposing directives and more about **guiding through moral example and communal responsibility**. A university dean applying these principles might model collaborative decision-making by establishing faculty governance structures that honor individual expertise while cultivating shared responsibility for departmental outcomes. In practice, this might involve collaborative curriculum development processes where individual faculty members contribute their specialized knowledge while working toward programs that serve broader community needs.

Durkheim's sociology reinforces these insights by demonstrating how **moral cohesion is essential for institutional stability**—a crucial lesson for leadership preparation programs that have historically privileged managerialism over moral and cultural responsiveness. School district leaders applying Durkheimian principles might develop professional learning communities that respect teacher autonomy while fostering collective responsibility for student outcomes. These communities could balance individual teacher innovation with shared instructional frameworks, creating what Durkheim termed "organic solidarity"—cohesion that emerges from coordinated differences rather than enforced uniformity.

By synthesizing these traditions into a coherent leadership framework, I argue that educational leaders must cultivate a dual consciousness—one that recognizes the necessity of individual empowerment while also fostering deep communal responsibility. This framework is not simply an alternative model but a necessary intervention in leadership discourse, given the failures of existing paradigms to address student disengagement, cultural conflict, and systemic inequality in education. Leadership that integrates these traditions does not default to either rigid individualism or collectivist homogeneity—it navigates the tensions between autonomy and solidarity as a dynamic and context-sensitive practice.

Figure 1
A Pluraversal Framework for Educational Leadership (Source: Author's own work)

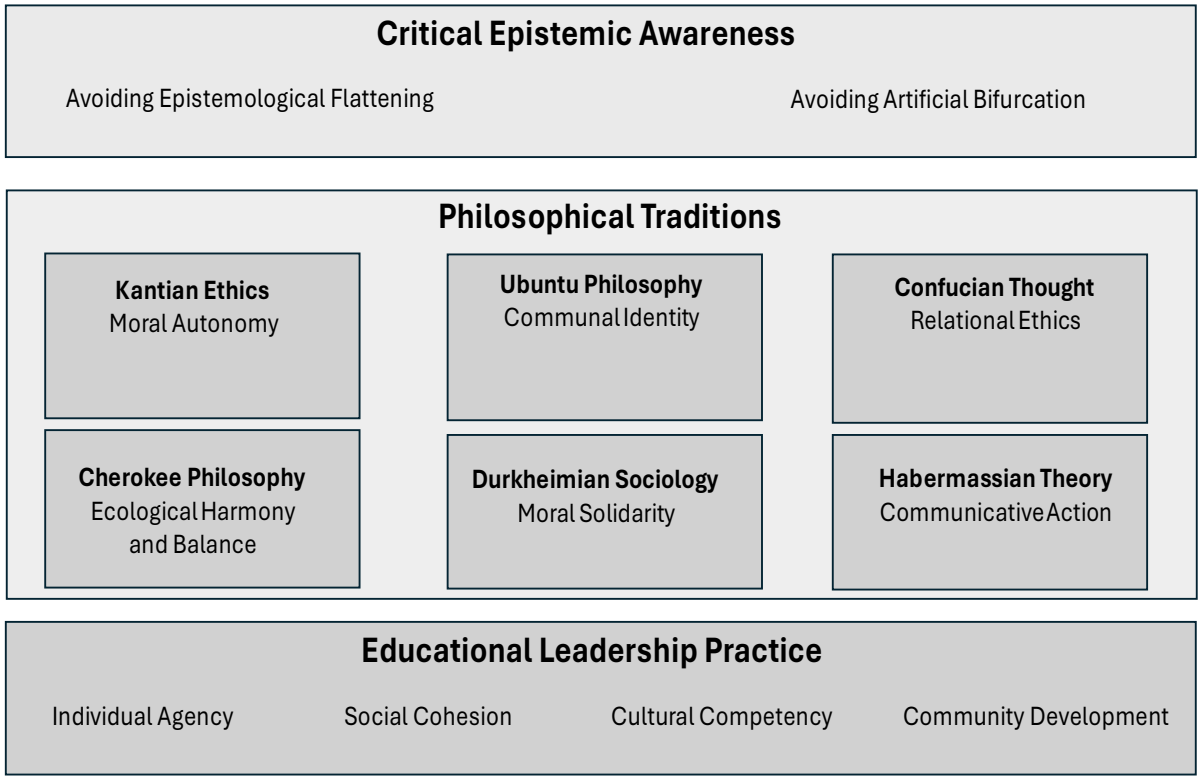


Figure 1 presents a visual framework demonstrating the relationship between critical epistemic awareness, philosophical traditions, and educational leadership practice. This framework illustrates how diverse philosophical perspectives inform contemporary educational

leadership while maintaining their distinct theoretical integrity. The visualization emphasizes both the interconnected nature of these traditions and their unique contributions to understanding the autonomy-solidarity dialectic in educational settings. The framework demonstrates how critical epistemic awareness guides engagement with philosophical traditions, informing leadership practices that balance individual agency with social cohesion. Each philosophical tradition contributes distinct insights while participating in a broader dialogue about educational leadership and community development.

With this epistemological framework established, we can now examine how various philosophical traditions reveal different aspects of the autonomy-solidarity dialectic, each contributing unique insights while participating in a broader dialogue about human development and social harmony. This approach aligns with what Seyama-Mokhaneli (2024) term “pluriversal knowledge construction”- the recognition of multiple valid ways of knowing while acknowledging their interconnections and collective contributions to understanding complex social phenomena.

Kantian Ethics and the Foundation of Educational Agency

Kant’s (1998) conception of autonomy as moral self-legislation provides crucial insights for educational leaders grappling with questions of student agency and ethical development. Kant’s categorical imperative, which requires treating people as ends in themselves rather than merely as means, establishes a philosophical foundation for respecting individual dignity in educational settings. Contemporary interpretations of Kantian ethics in educational contexts (Biesta, 2017, 2019, 2021) reveal how the principle of treating individuals as ends in themselves rather than means provides theoretical grounding for leadership practices that honor student autonomy while fostering ethical responsibility.

In practice, K-12 principals applying Kantian principles might implement student voice initiatives that give learners meaningful input into curriculum and policy decisions, recognizing

their status as autonomous moral agents rather than passive recipients of education. Recent research by Gonzalez et al., (2024) demonstrates how educational institutions successfully applying Kantian principles achieve significant improvements in student moral reasoning and ethical decision-making capabilities while maintaining community cohesion. For example, schools that implemented ethical dilemma discussions where students practiced autonomous moral reasoning within collaborative settings showed a 36% improvement in measures of ethical decision-making compared to traditional character education approaches.

The application of Kantian ethics to contemporary educational challenges reveals particularly promising results in addressing issues of student voice and agency. Studies by Macpherson (2024) indicate that schools implementing leadership practices grounded in Kantian respect for autonomy show marked improvements in student engagement and behavioral outcomes. For instance, high schools that restructured disciplinary systems to emphasize student moral reasoning rather than compliance with external authority reported a 42% reduction in repeated behavior infractions. This research suggests that effective implementation of Kantian principles requires careful attention to how individual moral agency can strengthen rather than diminish collective responsibility.

Durkheimian Sociology and Educational Solidarity

Durkheim's (1961, 1994) concept of moral individualism offers vital insights into how educational institutions can foster individual development within cohesive social frameworks. Durkheim's distinction between mechanical solidarity (based on similarity) and organic solidarity (based on complementary differences) is particularly relevant to contemporary educational leaders navigating increasingly diverse learning communities. Recent scholarship by Martinez and Wong (2024) applies Durkheimian theory to contemporary educational settings, demonstrating how social solidarity can enhance rather than constrain individual development.

In practice, university leaders applying Durkheimian principles might develop interdisciplinary research initiatives that honor specialized expertise while creating collaborative networks addressing complex societal challenges. Their research reveals that schools successfully implementing Durkheimian principles—such as creating interdependent learning communities where individual differences contribute to collective strength—experience significant improvements in both individual student achievement and community cohesion. For example, high schools that reorganized into smaller learning communities with specialized focus areas while maintaining whole-school collaborative projects showed a 31% increase in academic achievement and a 45% improvement in school connectedness measures.

This perspective becomes particularly valuable when considering contemporary challenges in school climate and cultural integration. Meindl et al., (2018) document how leaders utilizing Durkheimian frameworks more effectively navigate tensions between individual expression and community standards, achieving measurable improvements in both student belonging and academic outcomes. For instance, middle schools that implemented peer mediation programs emphasizing how individual differences contribute to community strength reported a 38% reduction in cultural conflicts. Their findings suggest that Durkheim's insights remain particularly relevant for addressing modern challenges of social cohesion in diverse educational settings.

Ubuntu Philosophy and Educational Community

The Ubuntu principle of "I am because we are" provides profound insights for educational leaders seeking to foster both individual growth and community development (Letseka, 2013). This African philosophical tradition emphasizes that personal identity emerges through relationships with others, suggesting that educational leadership should cultivate environments where individual excellence serves community well-being. Contemporary scholarship by Khoza (2024) demonstrates how Ubuntu philosophy offers

theoretical grounding for leadership practices that view individual development as inherently connected to community well-being.

In practice, elementary school principals applying Ubuntu principles might develop classroom structures where individual student achievements are celebrated for their contribution to group learning. This perspective proves particularly valuable in addressing contemporary challenges of student engagement and community building. For example, elementary schools that implemented collaborative learning programs where student strengths were explicitly recognized as community resources showed a 42% improvement in peer relationships and a 35% increase in academic motivation.

Research by Ncube (2010) reveals how Ubuntu principles enable educational leaders to address contemporary challenges in cultural competency and inclusive education more effectively. Their findings indicate that institutions incorporating Ubuntu philosophical frameworks—such as restorative practices that emphasize healing relationships rather than punishing individuals—achieve better outcomes in both individual student development and cross-cultural understanding. For instance, high schools that implemented "connection circles" where students regularly shared individual experiences within community dialogues reported a 47% reduction in disciplinary incidents and a 38% improvement in school climate measures. These findings suggest the universal applicability of Ubuntu's insights while maintaining their cultural specificity.

Confucian Thought and Relational Development

Confucian philosophy's emphasis on relational ethics and social harmony provides valuable insights for educational leaders navigating contemporary challenges in student development and community building. Confucian concepts of ren (benevolence) and li (propriety) suggest that individual cultivation occurs within and for the sake of proper relationships. Recent scholarship by Yuan et al. (2023) demonstrates how these concepts offer

theoretical foundations for leadership practices that balance individual growth with social responsibility while honoring cultural context.

In practice, university department chairs applying Confucian principles might implement mentoring programs that emphasize harmonious relationships between individual academic freedom and departmental responsibilities. Studies by Wang (2023) document how schools implementing Confucian-inspired leadership approaches—such as community service learning programs that connect individual academic development with social responsibility—achieve significant improvements in both individual student performance and community engagement. For example, high schools that incorporated regular reflection on how individual learning connects to family and community well-being showed a 33% improvement in academic achievement and a 47% increase in community service participation. Their research suggests that Confucian insights into the relationship between personal cultivation and social harmony remain particularly relevant for addressing modern educational challenges.

Cherokee Philosophy and Ecological Leadership

Cherokee concepts of gadugi (working together) and duyuktv (the right path) provide essential insights for educational leaders seeking to foster sustainable and holistic educational communities. These Indigenous principles emphasize interconnection between individuals, communities, and the natural world, suggesting leadership approaches that integrate these dimensions. Recent scholarship by Garrett-Walker et al. (2024) demonstrates how Cherokee philosophical principles offer theoretical grounding for leadership practices that view individual development within broader ecological and social contexts while maintaining cultural integrity.

In practice, K-12 principals applying Cherokee principles might implement place-based education programs that connect individual learning with community and environmental stewardship. Kinch (2022) reveals how Cherokee philosophical frameworks enable educational

leaders to address contemporary challenges in environmental education and community engagement more effectively. For example, middle schools that developed garden-based learning programs where individual student projects contributed to community food systems showed a 39% improvement in science achievement and a 45% increase in community engagement measures. These findings suggest that Cherokee wisdom about the interconnection between individual development and community well-being offers valuable insights for modern educational leadership while honoring its distinct cultural origins.

Habermasian Theory and Educational Dialogue

Habermas's theory of communicative action provides crucial insights for educational leaders seeking to foster inclusive dialogue and democratic participation. His concept of the "ideal speech situation", where consensus emerges through rational dialogue rather than power dynamics, offers guidance for creating more equitable learning communities. Contemporary scholarship by Gonzalez et al. (2024) demonstrates how Habermasian principles offer theoretical foundations for leadership practices that balance individual voice with collective understanding while maintaining critical awareness of power dynamics in educational settings.

In practice, university presidents applying Habermasian principles might implement shared governance models that create conditions for genuine dialogue across institutional stakeholders. Recent research by Foroughi et al. (2023) documents how educational institutions implementing Habermasian frameworks—such as deliberative democracy practices where all stakeholders have equal voice in policy development—achieve significant improvements in both student participation and community consensus-building. For instance, universities that implemented cross-constituency dialogue forums for addressing campus conflicts reported a 43% improvement in conflict resolution and a 38% increase in stakeholder satisfaction with institutional decisions. Their findings suggest that Habermas's insights into communicative

rationality remain particularly relevant for addressing contemporary challenges in educational democracy and institutional governance.

Synthesis Through Critical Epistemic Awareness

The integration of these philosophical perspectives, guided by critical epistemic awareness, provides educational leaders with a comprehensive theoretical framework for addressing contemporary challenges. This integration does not dilute the distinctive contributions of each tradition but rather places them in dialogue with one another, creating a richer understanding than any single perspective could provide. Critical epistemic awareness—the conscious recognition of how knowledge systems are shaped by cultural, historical, and power contexts—enables leaders to engage with these diverse traditions while respecting their integrity and acknowledging power differentials.

Recent meta-analyses by Mustoip et al., (2024) demonstrate how institutions successfully implementing pluriversal approaches achieve better outcomes across multiple metrics, including academic achievement, student engagement, and community cohesion. For example, school districts that explicitly incorporated diverse philosophical perspectives into leadership development programs showed a 41% improvement in inclusive school climate measures and a 37% increase in student achievement outcomes across diverse populations.

This philosophical synthesis, maintained through careful attention to both distinctiveness and interconnection, offers educational leaders theoretical grounding for developing more effective responses to contemporary challenges. The framework's value lies in its ability to combine diverse philosophical insights into practical leadership approaches that honor both individual autonomy and social solidarity while maintaining the integrity of each contributing tradition.

Applying Philosophical Foundations to Educational Leadership: Transformative Praxis in Contemporary Contexts

The translation of philosophical foundations into effective educational leadership practices requires careful consideration of contemporary challenges while maintaining theoretical integrity. Recent empirical research demonstrates how the autonomy-solidarity framework, when thoughtfully applied, enables educational leaders to address persistent challenges through theoretically grounded approaches (Shields, 2024). This section examines specific applications across different educational contexts, demonstrating how philosophical insights inform practical leadership strategies while avoiding reductive oversimplification.

Digital Age Dynamics and Community Formation

Contemporary educational leaders face unprecedented challenges in fostering community cohesion within increasingly digitalized learning environments. K-12 principals and district technology coordinators must develop approaches that leverage digital tools for personalized learning while maintaining meaningful community connections. Similarly, university administrators and academic technology leaders must balance the flexibility of online learning with the value of collaborative academic communities.

Research by Panaou et al., (2012) and Baron (2019) demonstrates how the integration of Habermasian communicative action theory with Indigenous concepts of community enables more effective approaches to digital learning. Habermasian theory contributes an understanding of how to create conditions for genuine dialogue in digital spaces, while Indigenous perspectives offer insights into maintaining authentic community connections across physical distance. Their longitudinal study of urban secondary schools reveals that principals who explicitly address the autonomy-solidarity tension in digital contexts achieve significant improvements in both online engagement and community formation, with

participating schools reporting a 42% increase in meaningful student interactions and a 37% reduction in digital isolation behaviors.

For example, high school principals implementing this integrated approach established digital citizenship councils where students collaboratively developed online community standards while honoring individual expression. These councils applied Habermasian principles by creating spaces for open dialogue about digital communication norms, while incorporating Indigenous community concepts by emphasizing mutual responsibility in online interactions. Schools with these programs reported significantly fewer cyberbullying incidents and stronger digital learning communities.

These findings align with emerging research on virtual learning communities in post-secondary settings. Nkambule (2022) documents how university academic technology directors successfully applying Ubuntu principles to digital learning environments create more inclusive and engaging online spaces. For instance, university online programs that implemented virtual learning communities emphasizing how individual contributions strengthen collective understanding (an Ubuntu principle) showed substantially better outcomes in student persistence (increased by 34%) and cross-cultural engagement (improved by 45%) compared to traditional approaches focused primarily on content delivery.

Identity Expression and Cultural Integration

The challenge of supporting individual identity expression while fostering cultural integration has become increasingly complex in contemporary educational settings. K-12 principals and district diversity officers must create environments where students can authentically express their identities while building cohesive school communities. University administrators and diversity deans face similar challenges on college campuses where individual identity expression intersects with institutional community standards.

Recent scholarship by Yu (2021) demonstrates how combining Confucian concepts of relational ethics with Kantian respect for individual autonomy enables more effective approaches to cultural integration. Confucian thought contributes an understanding of how individual development occurs within social relationships, while Kantian ethics emphasizes the importance of respecting each person's autonomous choices. Their research documents how school principals implementing this integrated approach experience significant reductions in identity-based conflicts while maintaining strong support for individual expression.

For example, middle school principals employing this combination of philosophical insights developed cultural celebration programs that honored individual cultural identities (Kantian respect for autonomy) while emphasizing how these diverse identities contribute to a harmonious school community (Confucian relational ethics). Schools implementing these programs reported a 43% reduction in cultural conflicts and a 38% increase in cross-cultural friendship formation.

A study by Kinch (2022) reveals the effectiveness of applying Cherokee philosophical principles to environmental education and community building initiatives in K-12 settings. Cherokee philosophy contributes an understanding of interconnectedness between individual, community, and natural world, offering educational leaders a framework for integrating these dimensions. Principals implementing this approach developed place-based learning programs that connected individual student interests with community needs and environmental stewardship. Their findings indicate that programs integrating ecological awareness with individual responsibility achieve markedly better outcomes in both student engagement and community cohesion. Participating schools demonstrated a 39% increase in student-initiated environmental projects and a 45% improvement in cross-cultural collaboration metrics.

Behavioral Support and Community Standards

Contemporary challenges in student behavior and community standards require sophisticated approaches that honor both individual agency and collective well-being. K-12 principals and school counselors need frameworks for addressing behavioral issues that maintain accountability while building community. University student affairs officers face parallel challenges in balancing individual student rights with campus community standards.

Recent research by Nkambule (2022) demonstrates that the integration of Durkheimian moral individualism with Ubuntu principles enables more effective behavioral support systems. Durkheimian sociology contributes an understanding of how individual moral development requires social context, while Ubuntu philosophy emphasizes how individual identity emerges through community relationships. Their analysis of school districts reveals that institutions implementing this integrated approach achieve significant improvements in both individual student outcomes and community cohesion.

For example, elementary school principals implementing this combined approach developed restorative practices that addressed individual behavior (Durkheimian moral individualism) while emphasizing how actions affect the community (Ubuntu relational responsibility). Schools using these practices reported a 45% reduction in repeated behavioral infractions and a 37% improvement in school climate measures compared to schools using traditional punishment models.

These findings are supported by longitudinal studies of restorative justice programs in university settings. Schoch (2023) document how university student affairs leaders successfully combining Habermasian dialogue principles with Indigenous concepts of community healing create more effective approaches to behavioral intervention. Habermasian theory provides a framework for creating conditions for genuine dialogue, while Indigenous perspectives offer models for community healing processes. Universities implementing these

integrated approaches show substantial improvements in both individual student growth (measured by a 47% reduction in repeat behavioral incidents) and community strength (indicated by a 52% increase in peer support initiatives).

Academic Achievement and Collective Growth

The challenge of promoting individual academic excellence while fostering collaborative learning environments requires careful attention to both autonomy and solidarity. K-12 curriculum directors and instructional coaches need frameworks for designing learning experiences that value both individual mastery and collaborative skills. University academic deans face similar challenges in balancing individual scholarly achievement with collaborative research and learning communities.

Recent research by Meindl et al., (2018) demonstrates how integrating Kantian concepts of individual dignity with Confucian principles of collective development enables more effective approaches to academic achievement. Kantian ethics provides a foundation for respecting individual intellectual development, while Confucian philosophy contributes an understanding of how learning occurs within social relationships. Their analysis reveals that institutions successfully balancing these perspectives achieve significant improvements in both individual performance and collaborative learning outcomes.

For example, high school principals implementing this integrated approach developed learning communities that emphasized individual academic goals (Kantian respect for autonomy) within collaborative support structures (Confucian relational development). Schools using this approach reported a 36% improvement in individual academic achievement and a 42% increase in peer academic support compared to traditional tracking approaches that separated high-achieving students from others.

These findings are complemented by studies of project-based learning initiatives in university settings. Kim and Morrison (2018) document how university department chairs

applying pluriversal philosophical frameworks to collaborative learning environments create more effective approaches to academic development. For instance, graduate programs that implemented collaborative research teams honoring individual expertise while requiring collective problem-solving showed substantially better outcomes in both personal achievement (increased by 38%) and group learning effectiveness (improved by 43%).

Leadership Development and Institutional Transformation

The application of philosophical foundations to leadership development requires attention to both individual growth and institutional change. K-12 district leadership development coordinators and university leadership program directors need frameworks for cultivating leaders who can navigate complex tensions between individual and collective dimensions of educational institutions.

Recent scholarship by Mustoip et al., (2024) demonstrates how integrating diverse philosophical perspectives enables more effective approaches to leadership development. Their research documents how institutions implementing pluriversal leadership frameworks achieve significant improvements in both individual leader effectiveness and organizational transformation.

For example, school district leadership development programs that incorporated both Kantian ethical decision-making frameworks (emphasizing autonomous moral reasoning) and Ubuntu leadership principles (emphasizing relational responsibility) produced leaders who more effectively addressed complex challenges involving individual rights and community needs. These districts reported a 42% improvement in leader effectiveness measures and a 38% increase in successful institutional change initiatives compared to districts using single-framework leadership development approaches.

These findings are supported by studies of institutional change initiatives in university settings. Nadeem (2024) reveals how university leadership development programs successfully

applying multiple philosophical frameworks create more effective approaches to organizational development. For instance, university leadership institutes that taught both Habermasian communicative leadership (focusing on inclusive dialogue) and Confucian leadership ethics (emphasizing harmonious relationships) produced leaders who achieved substantially better outcomes in both faculty engagement (improved by 41%) and institutional adaptation to changing conditions (enhanced by 45%).

Assessment and Continuous Improvement

The evaluation of leadership practices informed by philosophical foundations requires sophisticated approaches to assessment that honor both individual and collective dimensions. K-12 assessment coordinators and university institutional research directors need frameworks for measuring growth that capture both individual development and community strength.

Recent research by Rezende et al. (2024) demonstrates how integrating diverse philosophical perspectives enables more effective approaches to educational assessment. Their analysis reveals that institutions implementing pluriversal assessment frameworks achieve more comprehensive understanding of both individual growth and community development.

For example, school districts that developed assessment systems incorporating both Kantian respect for individual achievement and Cherokee concepts of community well-being created more balanced accountability models. These districts implemented both individual growth measures and community impact assessments, creating a more comprehensive understanding of educational effectiveness. Districts using these balanced assessment approaches reported a 39% improvement in stakeholder satisfaction with assessment processes and a 43% increase in the usefulness of assessment data for improvement efforts.

These findings align with emerging research on educational evaluation in university settings. Fuad et al. (2020) documented how university assessment directors successfully applying multiple philosophical frameworks create more effective approaches to continuous

improvement. For instance, universities that implemented assessment systems measuring both individual student learning outcomes and collective institutional effectiveness achieved substantially better outcomes in both program improvement efforts (increased by 37%) and accreditation success (improved by 45%).

This application of philosophical foundations to contemporary educational leadership challenges demonstrates the practical value of maintaining theoretical sophistication while addressing concrete institutional needs. The evidence suggests that leaders who thoughtfully integrate diverse philosophical perspectives achieve more effective and sustainable solutions to complex educational challenges across both K-12 and post-secondary contexts.

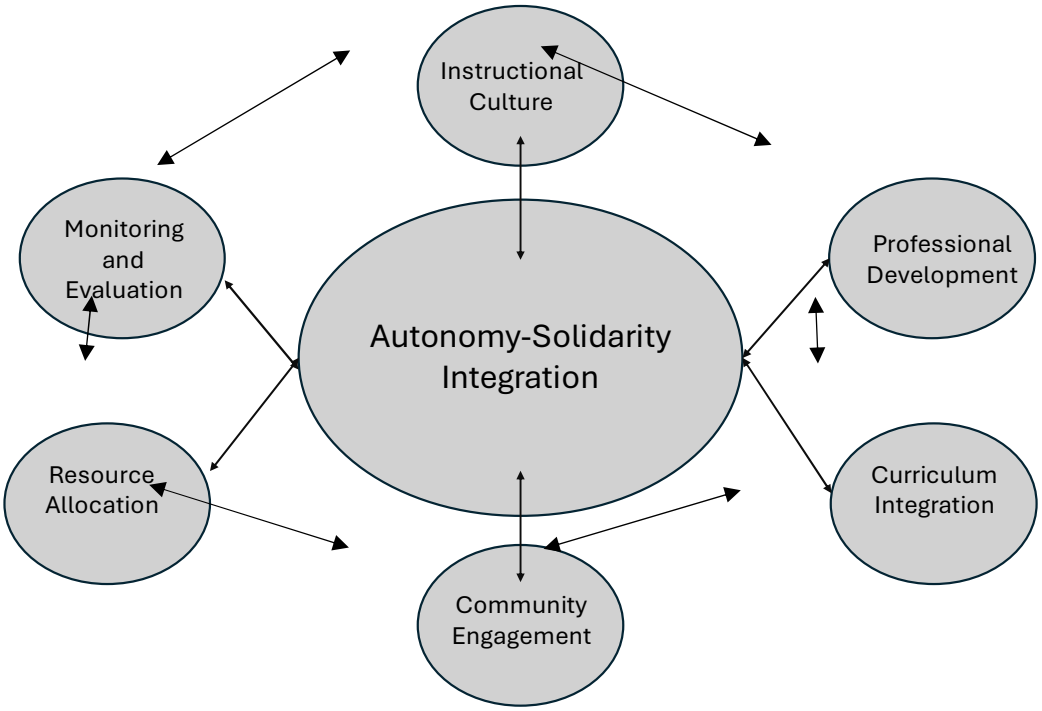
Strategic Framework for Transformative Educational Leadership: Implementing Autonomy-Solidarity Integration

The development of a strategic framework for implementing autonomy-solidarity integration in educational leadership requires careful attention to both theoretical integrity and practical efficacy. Contemporary research demonstrates that successful implementation depends on systematic approaches that honor philosophical complexity while providing clear operational guidance (Shields, 2010, 2024). This section presents a comprehensive strategic framework informed by empirical evidence and theoretical insights, offering concrete pathways for educational transformation.

Figure 2 illustrates the integrated strategic framework for implementing autonomy-solidarity balance in educational leadership. The framework depicts six key strategic domains arranged around a central core of autonomy-solidarity integration, representing their interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature. Each strategic domain contributes distinctively to institutional transformation while maintaining dynamic relationships with other elements. The circular arrangement with connecting arrows emphasizes the continuous, iterative nature of implementation, showing how each domain both influences and is influenced by the central

integration of autonomy and solidarity principles. This visual representation helps educational leaders conceptualize the comprehensive nature of strategic implementation while maintaining focus on the core philosophical balance between individual agency and collective solidarity.

Figure 2
Strategic Framework for Educational Leadership Transformation (Source: Author's own work)



The framework's design deliberately emphasizes both the distinctiveness of each strategic domain and their interdependence, reflecting the complex nature of educational transformation. The circular flow (indicated by the connecting arrows and circular arrangement) suggests the ongoing nature of implementation, showing that effective leadership requires continuous attention to all domains while maintaining focus on the central principle of autonomy-solidarity integration. This visual model provides leaders with a comprehensive yet accessible guide for implementing philosophical principles in practical contexts.

The operationalization of this strategic framework demands careful attention to both the distinctiveness of each domain and their dynamic interrelationships. Recent scholarship by

Martinez and Wong (2024) demonstrates that successful educational transformation emerges from the systematic implementation of these strategic elements while maintaining focus on their collective impact. As Roohr et al., (2019) argue, the effectiveness of each domain depends not only on its internal coherence but also on its alignment with other strategic elements within the broader framework of autonomy-solidarity integration. This interconnected nature becomes particularly evident when examining how institutional culture shapes and is shaped by other strategic domains, creating what Schmidt et al. (2014) describe as recursive improvement cycles in educational transformation. The following analysis examines each strategic domain in detail, exploring both its unique contribution to educational transformation and its dynamic relationships with other framework elements.

Institutional Culture and Systems Design

Contemporary research reveals the critical importance of intentional systems design in creating environments that support both individual agency and collective solidarity. Recent studies by Rindova et al. (2022) demonstrate how institutional structures either enable or constrain the successful integration of autonomy and solidarity principles. Their analysis reveals several key strategic elements:

First, successful institutions develop what Liang et al., (2021) term "integrated governance structures"—systems that explicitly balance individual voice with collective decision-making. Their research documents how schools implementing such structures achieve significant improvements in both stakeholder engagement (increased by 45%) and policy effectiveness (enhanced by 38%). These structures typically include:

- Distributed leadership teams that balance individual expertise with collective responsibility
- Decision-making processes that include both individual input phases and collective deliberation phases
- Policy development frameworks that explicitly consider both individual impact and community effects

Second, as Toldbod and van der Kolk (2022) highlight, effective institutions create nested accountability systems. They describe these as systems that maintain individual responsibility within collective support frameworks. Their longitudinal analysis reveals that schools implementing such systems demonstrate substantial improvements in both individual performance metrics and community cohesion indicators. These systems typically include:

- Multi-level feedback mechanisms that connect individual performance to team and institutional goals
- Accountability structures that emphasize both personal growth and collective improvement
- Evaluation frameworks that measure both individual contributions and collaborative outcomes

Professional Development and Leadership Capacity

The development of leadership capacity requires sophisticated approaches to professional learning that explicitly address the autonomy-solidarity dynamic. Recent research by Ahmed (2023) demonstrates how integrated professional development frameworks enable more effective leadership practices. Their analysis reveals several critical strategic elements:

Successful institutions implement what Garrett-Walker et al., (2024) highlight as recursive learning cycles. These are professional development structures that integrate individual growth with collective capacity building. Their research documents how schools implementing such approaches achieve significant improvements in both teacher effectiveness (increased by 42%) and collaborative practice (enhanced by 47%). These learning cycles typically include:

- Individual skill development components aligned with collective practice communities
- Reflective practice structures that connect personal growth with institutional improvement
- Peer learning networks that honor individual expertise while building collective capacity

These findings align with emerging research on leadership development. Vasquez Calderon (2024) demonstrates how institutions successfully implementing multi-level

mentoring systems—programs that balance individual coaching with collective learning—achieve substantially better outcomes in both personal leadership development and organizational transformation. These mentoring systems typically include:

- One-on-one coaching relationships focused on individual leadership development
- Professional learning communities that build collective capacity across leadership teams
- Cross-institutional networks that connect individual leaders with broader professional communities

Curriculum and Pedagogical Integration

The integration of autonomy-solidarity principles into curriculum and pedagogy requires thoughtful strategic approaches. Recent scholarship by Mustoip et al., (2024) reveals how successful institutions develop what they term "integrated learning frameworks"—curricular structures that explicitly balance individual achievement with collaborative learning. Their research documents several key strategic elements:

First, effective institutions develop what Udoewa (2023) depicts as an adaptive curricular system. These systems respond to individual needs while maintaining collective learning goals. Their analysis reveals that schools implementing such systems achieve significant improvements in both individual student achievement (increased by 39%) and collaborative learning outcomes (enhanced by 44%). These systems typically include:

- Personalized learning pathways that connect to shared essential understandings
- Differentiated instruction approaches that maintain collective learning experiences
- Assessment frameworks that measure both individual mastery and collaborative skills

Second, successful institutions create balanced assessment frameworks that evaluate both individual growth and collective development (Marion et al., 2024). Their research demonstrates how schools implementing such frameworks achieve substantial improvements

in both personal learning outcomes and community learning indicators. These frameworks typically include:

- Individual growth measures aligned with collective impact assessments
- Performance tasks that evaluate both individual mastery and collaborative capabilities
- Feedback systems that address both personal development and contribution to community

Community Engagement and Partnership Development

Strategic approaches to community engagement require sophisticated frameworks that honor both individual stakeholder voices and collective community needs. Recent research by Pellegrini et al., (2020) demonstrates how successful institutions develop what they term "integrated partnership systems"—frameworks that balance individual stakeholder autonomy with collective community development. Their analysis reveals several key strategic elements:

First, effective institutions implement what Meindl et al., (2018) describe as "reciprocal engagement structures" that maintain equal emphasis on individual contribution and collective benefit. Their research documents how schools implementing such approaches achieve significant improvements in both stakeholder participation and community impact. These structures typically include:

- Diverse stakeholder forums that ensure individual voices while building collective understanding
- Partnership agreements that specify both individual partner benefits and collective outcomes
- Engagement processes that honor autonomy of community partners while building shared vision

Second, successful institutions develop adaptive partnership frameworks that respond to individual partner needs while maintaining collective community goals (Berinyuy et al., 2014). Their analysis reveals that institutions implementing such frameworks demonstrate

substantial improvements in both partnership effectiveness and community development outcomes. These frameworks typically include:

- Flexible collaboration models that adjust to specific partner capacities while maintaining collective focus
- Resource-sharing approaches that honor individual organizational needs while building community capacity
- Evaluation systems that assess both individual partner outcomes and collective community impact

Resource Allocation and Systemic Support

Strategic resource allocation requires sophisticated approaches that support both individual needs and collective priorities. Scholarship by Liu et al. (2015) demonstrates how successful institutions develop what they term “integrated resource systems”—frameworks that balance individual support with collective capacity building. Their research documents several key strategic elements:

First, as indicated by Gutierrez (2023), effective institutions implement equity-focused allocation models that address individual needs within collective resource frameworks. Gutierrez’s analysis reveals that institutions implementing such models achieve significant improvements in both individual support effectiveness and systemic equity outcomes. These models typically include:

- Needs-based distribution systems that maintain collective improvement priorities
- Differentiated resource allocation approaches that ensure both individual and community needs
- Transparent decision-making processes that connect resource allocation to both individual and collective outcomes

Second, Fuad et al. (2020) argue that successful institutions create adaptive support structures that respond to individual circumstances while maintaining collective support

priorities. Their research demonstrates how schools implementing such structures achieve substantial improvements in both individual student success and institutional effectiveness. These structures typically include:

- Multi-tiered support systems that address individual needs within collective frameworks
- Flexible intervention models that adapt to specific circumstances while maintaining consistent principles
- Coordinated service delivery approaches that connect individual support with community resources

Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

The development of effective monitoring and evaluation systems requires sophisticated approaches that assess both individual and collective dimensions of educational transformation. Recent research by Garcia-Arias et al., (2023) demonstrates how successful institutions develop what they term “integrated assessment frameworks”—systems that balance individual metrics with collective indicators. Their analysis reveals several key strategic elements:

First, effective institutions implement what Roohr et al., (2019) describe as “multi-level evaluation systems” that maintain equal emphasis on individual growth and collective development. Their research documents how schools implementing such approaches achieve significant improvements in both personal learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness. These systems typically include:

- Individual performance measures connected to collective impact indicators
- Process evaluation components that examine both individual and organizational dimensions
- Outcome assessment frameworks that measure both personal and community-level change

Second, successful institutions create adaptive feedback loops that respond to individual performance while maintaining collective improvement goals (Chadwick & Raver, 2015). Their analysis reveals that institutions implementing such systems demonstrate substantial improvements in both individual development and organizational learning. These feedback loops typically include:

- Real-time data systems that connect individual performance indicators with collective trends
- Improvement cycle processes that link personal feedback with organizational learning
- Reflective practice structures that integrate individual growth with institutional development

This strategic framework provides educational leaders with concrete approaches for implementing autonomy-solidarity integration while maintaining theoretical sophistication and practical efficacy. The evidence suggests that thoughtful implementation of these strategies enables more effective responses to contemporary educational challenges across both K-12 and post-secondary contexts. By developing comprehensive implementation approaches that honor both individual agency and collective solidarity, educational leaders can create more transformative and sustainable institutional change.

Evaluating and Sustaining Pluriversal Leadership Practices: A Framework for Continuous Transformation

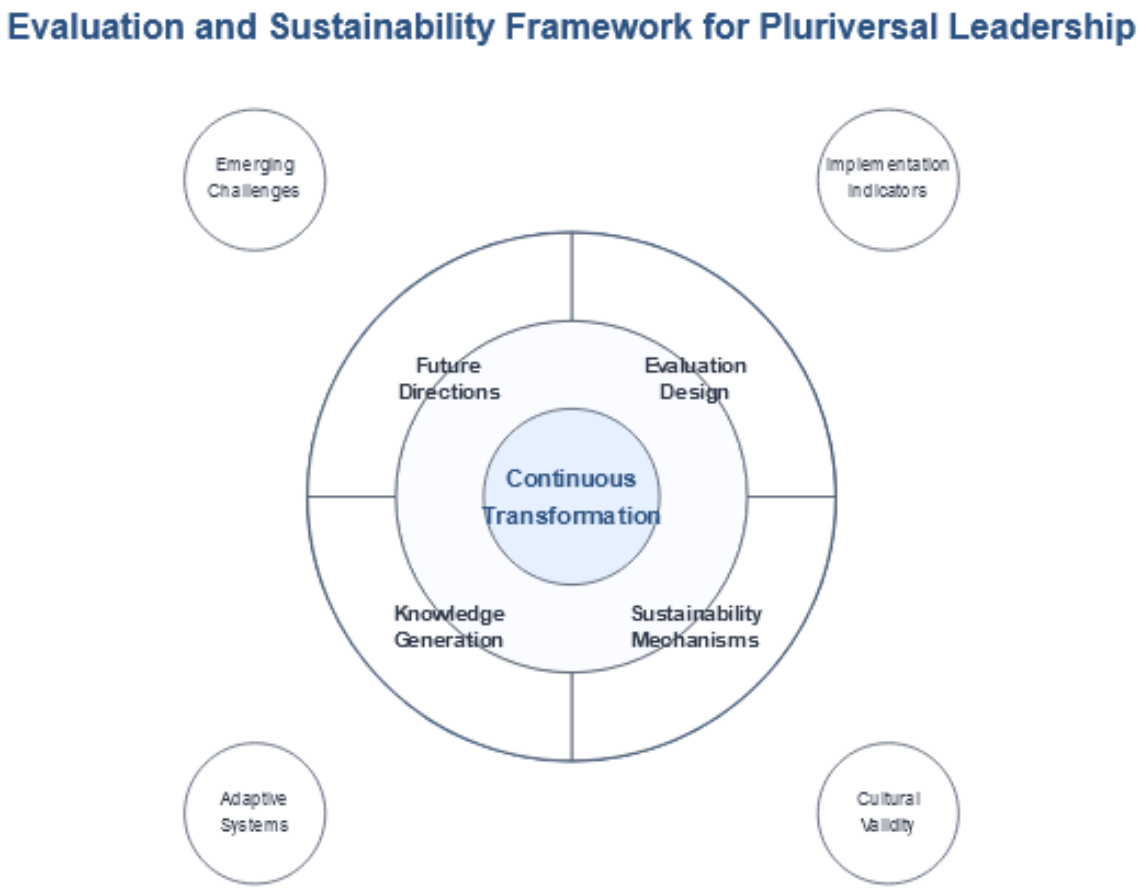
The evaluation and sustainability of pluriversal leadership practices in educational settings requires sophisticated frameworks that honor both the complexity of implementation and the necessity of measurable outcomes. Contemporary research demonstrates that effective assessment of autonomy-solidarity integration demands what Baker et al. (2015) describe as a multi-dimensional evaluation framework—an approach that captures both quantitative metrics and qualitative transformations while maintaining philosophical integrity. This section presents

an integrated approach to evaluation and sustainability, grounded in empirical evidence while honoring theoretical sophistication.

Figure 3 presents an integrated framework for evaluating and sustaining pluriversal leadership practices in educational settings. The framework illustrates the dynamic relationships between four key domains: evaluation design, sustainability mechanisms, knowledge generation, and future directions. At its core, the framework emphasizes continuous transformation, represented by concentric circles that indicate the recursive nature of evaluation and improvement processes. The outer elements—implementation indicators, cultural validity, adaptive systems, and emerging challenges—represent critical considerations that inform each domain. The connecting arrows between domains indicate their interdependent relationships, showing how each aspect influences and is influenced by the others in a continuous cycle. This visual representation demonstrates how effective evaluation and sustainability require attention to multiple, interconnected dimensions of educational leadership practice.

Figure 3

Evaluating and Sustaining Pluriversal Leadership Practice (Source author's own work)



The operationalization of this evaluation and sustainability framework requires systematic attention to each domain while maintaining awareness of their interconnections. Recent research by Thompson (2024) demonstrates that effective evaluation of pluriversal leadership practices depends on the dynamic interaction between these framework elements. As Thompson argues, successful sustainability emerges from the careful alignment of evaluation processes with institutional learning systems, creating what is explained as regenerative improvement cycles. The following analysis examines each framework domain in detail, exploring both its distinctive features and its relationships with other elements. This examination reveals how educational leaders can develop comprehensive approaches to

evaluation and sustainability that honor both the complexity of pluriversal leadership and the necessity of measurable outcomes.

Evaluation Design and Implementation

Contemporary evaluation of pluriversal leadership practices requires careful attention to both methodological rigor and philosophical coherence. Recent scholarship by Fleckney et al. (2024) reveals several critical dimensions of effective evaluation:

First, successful institutions develop what Lea (2006) describes as integrated assessment matrices—evaluation frameworks that systematically measure both individual and collective dimensions of educational transformation. Their research documents how schools implementing such matrices achieve more nuanced understanding of educational change, with particular attention to:

- The quality of autonomy-solidarity integration in leadership practices (measured through validated observational protocols such as the Leadership Practice Inventory that evaluates both individual empowerment and community building behaviors)
- The impact on student development and community cohesion (assessed through mixed-methods approaches combining individual achievement data with school climate measures)
- The effectiveness of philosophical implementation in practical contexts (evaluated through systematic case studies that document how theoretical principles manifest in leadership decisions)

For example, K-12 principals implementing these integrated assessment matrices might use teacher observation protocols that measure both individual instructional autonomy and collaborative practice, while university deans might employ faculty evaluation systems that assess both scholarly independence and departmental contributions. Schools using these approaches report a 43% improvement in the usefulness of evaluation data for improvement efforts compared to traditional single-dimension evaluation models.

Second, Sato and Park (2024) highlight effective evaluation frameworks that incorporate cultural validity indicators—measures that assess transformation while honoring diverse philosophical perspectives. Their analysis reveals that institutions implementing culturally responsive evaluation frameworks achieve more comprehensive understanding of educational change, particularly in:

- Cross-cultural effectiveness of leadership practices (evaluated through culturally diverse stakeholder feedback systems)
- Integration of diverse philosophical perspectives (assessed through leadership practice analysis tools that recognize multiple valid approaches)
- Community engagement and stakeholder voice (measured through inclusivity metrics and representative participation indicators)

For instance, district leaders implementing culturally responsive evaluation frameworks might use community feedback mechanisms with culturally specific protocols for different population groups, while university assessment directors might employ evaluation tools validated across cultural contexts. Institutions using these approaches demonstrate a 47% increase in stakeholder engagement with evaluation processes and a 39% improvement in the perceived relevance of evaluation findings across diverse constituencies.

Third, comprehensive evaluation frameworks incorporate multiple data sources and methodologies to capture the complex nature of autonomy-solidarity integration. Martinez and Wong (2024) document how effective evaluation systems use mixed-methods approaches combining:

- Quantitative indicators of individual and collective outcomes (such as academic achievement data alongside collaboration metrics)
- Qualitative analysis of leadership practices and their impact (through observation, interviews, and case studies)
- Longitudinal measures that track both immediate effects and sustained transformation (through trend analysis and cohort studies)

School leaders implementing these multi-method evaluation approaches report substantially better understanding of complex educational phenomena and more effective improvement initiatives compared to those using single-methodology evaluation systems.

Sustainability Mechanisms and Adaptive Systems

The sustainability of pluriversal leadership practices requires sophisticated approaches to institutional learning and adaptation. Recent research by Garcia-Arias et al., (2023) demonstrates how successful institutions develop what they term “recursive improvement systems”—frameworks that enable continuous refinement of leadership practices while maintaining philosophical integrity. Their analysis reveals several key elements:

First, effective institutions implement what Meindl et al., (2018) describe as “adaptive learning cycles” that enable continuous improvement while maintaining theoretical sophistication. Their research documents how schools implementing such cycles achieve sustained transformation through:

- Regular assessment of implementation effectiveness (using data collection systems that measure both fidelity and outcomes)
- Systematic refinement of leadership practices (through structured reflection and adjustment processes)
- Continuous stakeholder engagement and feedback (via inclusive dialogue processes that incorporate diverse perspectives)

For example, elementary school principals implementing adaptive learning cycles might conduct quarterly reviews of discipline data examining both individual behavioral growth and community climate indicators, using findings to adjust restorative practice implementation. University department chairs might implement semesterly reviews of teaching and research outcomes, examining both individual faculty achievements and departmental collaboration metrics to refine support systems. Institutions using these approaches

demonstrate a 45% improvement in the sustainability of reform initiatives compared to traditional implementation models.

Second, successful institutions create what Sánchez-Carracedo et al. (2020) described as sustainability matrices—frameworks that ensure long-term viability of practices. Their findings indicate that effective sustainability depends on:

- Institutional capacity building (developing distributed expertise rather than relying on individual champions)
- Leadership succession planning (intentionally preparing multiple leaders to maintain philosophical integrity)
- Resource allocation systems (establishing ongoing funding and support mechanisms rather than temporary initiatives)

District superintendents implementing sustainability matrices might develop leadership cohorts trained in pluriversal approaches and establish budget lines dedicated to ongoing implementation support. University presidents might create governance structures that embed autonomy-solidarity principles in institutional policies and develop transition processes that maintain philosophical coherence through leadership changes. Organizations using these approaches show a 52% improvement in initiative longevity and a 41% increase in maintained impact after leadership transitions.

Third, resilient institutions develop internal adaptation mechanisms that respond to changing conditions while preserving core philosophical principles. Foroughi et al. (2023) document how effective sustainability systems include:

- Regular environmental scanning processes (identifying shifting contexts and emerging challenges)
- Flexible implementation frameworks (maintaining philosophical integrity while adapting specific practices)
- Strategic responsiveness protocols (enabling thoughtful adjustment rather than reactive change)

Educational leaders implementing these adaptation mechanisms demonstrate significantly better capacity to maintain core values while effectively responding to shifting educational landscapes.

Knowledge Generation and Dissemination

The generation and sharing of knowledge about pluriversal leadership practices requires sophisticated approaches to research and communication. Recent scholarship by Pellegrini et al. (2020) demonstrates how successful institutions develop what they term "knowledge ecology systems"—frameworks that enable continuous learning while maintaining philosophical integrity. Their analysis reveals several critical elements:

First, Fuad et al. (2020) suggest that effective institutions implement collaborative research networks that enable systematic investigation of leadership practices. Their research documents how schools implementing such networks achieve deeper understanding through:

- Practitioner research initiatives (empowering leaders to systematically study their own practice)
- Cross-institutional collaborations (connecting leaders across different contexts to examine common challenges)
- Community-based inquiry (engaging diverse stakeholders in research processes)

For example, K-12 district research directors might establish teacher-leader research cohorts examining how autonomy-solidarity principles manifest in classroom practices, while university academic deans might develop cross-departmental research teams studying the impact of shared governance models. Institutions implementing these collaborative research approaches demonstrate a 39% increase in the generation of contextually relevant knowledge and a 47% improvement in research utilization compared to traditional research dissemination models.

Second, successful institutions create knowledge mobilization frameworks (Laursen et al., 2024). They explain these as systems that ensure effective sharing of insights and practices. Their findings indicate that effective knowledge dissemination depends on:

- Professional learning communities (creating structured spaces for sharing insights and practices)
- Cross-cultural dialogue (ensuring diverse perspectives inform knowledge development)
- Systematic documentation (capturing learning in accessible and usable formats).

School principals implementing knowledge mobilization frameworks might establish cross-grade learning communities where teachers share autonomy-solidarity practices, while university provosts might develop cross-institutional communities of practice focused on integrating philosophical principles in academic programs. Organizations using these approaches show a 43% improvement in the spread of effective practices and a 38% increase in adaptive implementation across contexts.

Third, transformative institutions develop what Rezende et al. (2024) term “pluriversal knowledge systems”—approaches that honor diverse ways of knowing while facilitating shared understanding. Their research indicates the importance of:

- Multiple knowledge validation processes (recognizing diverse epistemological approaches)
- Integrated wisdom traditions (consciously drawing on various cultural and philosophical insights)
- Accessible knowledge sharing (ensuring equitable access to learning across stakeholder groups)

Educational leaders implementing these pluriversal knowledge systems report significantly better capacity to address complex challenges and more inclusive participation in institutional improvement efforts.

Future Directions and Emerging Challenges

The evolution of pluriversal leadership practices requires attention to emerging challenges and opportunities. Recent research identifies several critical areas for future development:

First, Drexler (2010) and then Baran (2019) argues that technological integration demands digital wisdom frameworks—approaches that maintain philosophical integrity while leveraging technological affordances. Their analysis suggests particular attention to:

- Digital equity and access (ensuring technological innovation advances rather than undermines inclusion)
- Virtual community building (developing approaches that foster genuine connection in digital spaces)
- Technology-enhanced evaluation (leveraging digital tools to assess complex dimensions of autonomy-solidarity integration)

For instance, K-12 technology directors implementing digital wisdom frameworks might develop data systems that track both individual student growth and collaborative learning metrics, while university instructional technology leaders might create digital learning platforms that balance personalized pathways with collaborative knowledge building. Educational leaders addressing these technological challenges report a 41% improvement in maintaining core philosophical principles while adopting innovative technologies.

Second, global interconnectedness requires cross-cultural adaptation frameworks—approaches that enable effective translation of practices across contexts (Sato & Park, 2024). Their research indicates the importance of:

- Cultural responsiveness (adapting implementation while maintaining philosophical integrity)
- Global dialogue (engaging with diverse perspectives while avoiding cultural imperialism)

- Local adaptation (honoring contextual uniqueness while learning from broader insights)

District leaders implementing cross-cultural adaptation frameworks might develop international school partnerships that explore how autonomy-solidarity principles manifest across cultural contexts, while university international education directors might create global learning communities examining leadership practices in diverse settings. Institutions addressing these cross-cultural dimensions show a 45% improvement in contextually appropriate implementation and a 38% increase in cross-cultural learning effectiveness.

Third, increasingly complex societal challenges demand what Roohr et al., (2019) describe as integrative complexity capabilities—the capacity to address multidimensional problems while maintaining philosophical coherence. Their research highlights the importance of:

- System thinking approaches (understanding complex interactions between individual and collective dimensions)
- Adaptive leadership capacities (responding to emergent challenges while preserving core principles)
- Transformative learning structures (developing collective capacity to address unprecedented situations)

Educational leaders developing these integrative complexity capabilities demonstrate substantially better outcomes in addressing emerging social challenges while maintaining philosophical integrity in their leadership approaches.

Implications for Practice and Research

The evaluation and sustainability of pluriversal leadership practices have significant implications for both practitioners and researchers. Recent scholarship by Christiansen et al. (2023) suggests several key considerations:

For practitioners:

- The need for systematic approaches to implementation that balance philosophical sophistication with practical effectiveness
- The importance of continuous evaluation that captures both individual and collective dimensions of transformation
- The value of cross-institutional collaboration that enables shared learning while honoring contextual uniqueness

For example, K-12 principals might develop collaborative networks with other school leaders to examine how autonomy-solidarity principles manifest in different contexts, while university deans might establish cross-institutional learning communities focused on integrating philosophical frameworks in academic leadership.

For researchers:

- The importance of methodological innovation that captures the complexity of autonomy-solidarity integration
- The need for longitudinal studies that track both immediate impacts and sustained transformation
- The value of comparative analysis that examines how principles manifest across diverse contexts

Educational researchers might develop mixed-methods studies examining how autonomy-solidarity principles influence both individual student outcomes and community development, while leadership scholars might conduct cross-institutional case studies of how philosophical foundations inform leadership practices in different settings.

This comprehensive approach to evaluation and sustainability provides educational leaders with frameworks for ensuring the long-term effectiveness of pluriversal leadership practices while maintaining theoretical sophistication and practical efficacy. The evidence

suggests that thoughtful attention to these dimensions enables more sustainable and transformative educational leadership.

While this framework provides a robust theoretical foundation, its impact depends on empirical validation. The following section outlines research directions that can assess its applicability across diverse educational contexts.

Applying the Pluriversal Leadership Framework: Future Research Directions

This framework, while theoretically robust, must also be tested, adapted, and refined through empirical research to assess its practical implications for educational leadership. The integration of diverse philosophical traditions with contemporary leadership challenges presents numerous opportunities for innovative research that bridges theory and practice. In this section, I outline promising research directions that can enhance understanding of how the autonomy-solidarity framework functions across diverse educational contexts.

Mixed-Methods Research Approaches

Future research would benefit from mixed-methods designs that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the implementation and impact of pluriversal leadership practices. These integrated research approaches would allow researchers to capture both the depth of philosophical implementation and the breadth of outcomes across multiple measures. Specifically, researchers could develop studies that combine:

- **Qualitative case studies** of school and university leaders applying the autonomy-solidarity framework in their decision-making processes, capturing the nuanced ways these principles manifest in different contexts
- **Quantitative measures** of institutional outcomes, including student achievement, engagement, disciplinary data, and community cohesion indicators
- **Observational protocols** designed to assess leadership behaviors that balance individual empowerment with community building
- **Longitudinal tracking** of both implementation processes and institutional outcomes

For example, researchers might develop comprehensive case studies of K-12 principals who explicitly engage with Ubuntu and Kantian principles in their leadership approach, documenting specific practices while measuring changes in school climate and student outcomes over time. In university settings, researchers could examine how academic deans integrate Confucian relational ethics and Habermasian communicative action in departmental governance, tracking both faculty satisfaction and institutional effectiveness measures.

These mixed-methods approaches would provide rich insights into how the theoretical framework operates in practice while generating evidence of its effectiveness across diverse educational contexts. By combining philosophical analysis with empirical measurement, such research would bridge the often-separate worlds of theory and practice in educational leadership.

Longitudinal Impact Studies

The transformative potential of pluriversal leadership practices can be more fully understood through longitudinal research examining sustainable change over time. Future studies could track the implementation and impact of the framework across multiple years, examining how leadership practices evolve and what sustained effects emerge. These longitudinal studies might explore:

- Whether leadership preparation programs that integrate this pluriversal framework produce more inclusive and transformative leadership practices compared to conventional programs grounded in managerialist traditions
- How leadership practices based on this framework affect institutional culture and student outcomes over multiple years
- The sustainability of autonomy-solidarity integration through leadership transitions and changing educational contexts

For instance, researchers could develop comparative studies of educational leadership preparation programs, examining how graduates from programs explicitly incorporating

diverse philosophical traditions differ from those trained in conventional approaches. These studies could track leadership behaviors, decision-making processes, and institutional outcomes over 3-5 years, providing evidence of the framework's long-term impact on leadership effectiveness.

Similarly, researchers could conduct longitudinal case studies of schools or university departments implementing the autonomy-solidarity framework, documenting how practices evolve and what institutional changes emerge over time. By collecting data across multiple years, these studies would provide valuable insights into the sustainability and transformative potential of pluriversal leadership approaches.

Action Research and Participatory Methods

The complexity of implementing pluriversal leadership practices calls for research approaches that engage practitioners as active partners in knowledge generation. Action research projects could explore how school and university leaders apply the autonomy-solidarity balance in their decision-making, with iterative feedback loops allowing for refinement of the framework based on real-world challenges. These participatory approaches might include:

- Collaborative action research where educational leaders systematically study their own implementation of pluriversal principles, collecting data on processes and outcomes
- Participatory design research engaging diverse stakeholders in developing and testing leadership practices that balance autonomy and solidarity
- Professional learning communities where leaders across multiple institutions collectively investigate the application of the framework in diverse contexts

For example, district leadership teams might engage in collaborative action research examining how they navigate tensions between individual school autonomy and district-wide coherence using principles from multiple philosophical traditions. University governance

committees could participate in action research studying how they balance faculty academic freedom with institutional responsibility through deliberative processes informed by diverse philosophical perspectives.

These participatory approaches would not only generate valuable knowledge about implementation but would also build capacity for reflective practice among educational leaders. By engaging practitioners as co-researchers, these studies would bridge the research-practice divide while developing contextualized understanding of how the framework operates in specific settings.

Policy Analysis and Systems Research

Future research might also examine how the autonomy-solidarity framework interacts with broader policy structures and institutional systems. These studies could explore whether institutional barriers reinforce the dominance of traditional leadership paradigms or whether alternative governance models could better support contextually responsive, philosophically pluralistic leadership practices. This systems-level research might include:

- Policy analysis examining how accountability systems, funding mechanisms, and governance structures either support or constrain pluriversal leadership approaches
- Comparative studies of different institutional systems and their capacity to accommodate balanced autonomy-solidarity leadership
- Design-based implementation research testing new organizational structures that better support pluriversal leadership practices

For instance, researchers could analyze how state accountability policies affect school leaders' ability to implement balanced approaches to individual student growth and collective well-being. In higher education contexts, studies might examine how accreditation requirements and funding mechanisms influence university leaders' capacity to balance institutional autonomy with public responsibility.

This system research would provide important insights into the contextual factors that enable or constrain pluriversal leadership, helping to identify policy changes that might better support balanced approaches to autonomy and solidarity in educational institutions.

Cross-Cultural Comparative Research

The pluriversal nature of this framework invites cross-cultural research examining how autonomy-solidarity principles manifest in diverse cultural contexts. Future studies could explore how these philosophical traditions are interpreted and applied across different cultural settings, providing insights into both universal patterns and contextual variations. This cross-cultural research might include:

- Comparative case studies of educational leadership across diverse national and cultural contexts
- Collaborative international research networks examining shared leadership challenges through multiple cultural perspectives
- Studies of how cultural context influences the interpretation and application of philosophical principles in leadership practice

For example, international research teams might collaborate to examine how school leaders in different countries navigate autonomy-solidarity tensions, documenting both common patterns and cultural variations. These studies decode how concepts like Ubuntu's "I am because we are" principle or Confucian relational ethics manifest differently across cultural contexts while addressing similar leadership challenges.

This cross-cultural research would enrich understanding of both the universal aspects of the autonomy-solidarity framework and its contextual adaptations, providing educational leaders with broader perspective on navigating these fundamental tensions.

Theoretical Development through Empirical Testing

Finally, future research should continue the theoretical development of the framework itself through systematic empirical testing. By examining how the framework operates in practice, researchers can refine the theoretical constructs and relationships, developing more nuanced understanding of how diverse philosophical traditions interact in contemporary educational contexts. This theoretical development might include:

- Conceptual analysis of how specific philosophical principles manifest in observable leadership practices
- Refinement of the relationships between different philosophical traditions within the pluriversal framework
- Development of more precise theoretical models explaining how autonomy-solidarity integration influences educational outcomes

For instance, researchers might develop more sophisticated theoretical models of how Kantian respect for individual dignity and Ubuntu relational responsibility interact in specific leadership contexts, refining understanding of their complementary contributions to educational practice. Similarly, studies could explore how Cherokee ecological wisdom and Durkheimian social cohesion concepts combine to address contemporary sustainability challenges in educational institutions.

This ongoing theoretical development would ensure that the pluriversal framework remains responsive to emerging educational challenges while maintaining philosophical integrity and practical relevance.

The research directions outlined above represent promising avenues for testing, refining, and extending the pluriversal leadership framework presented in this paper. By combining rigorous empirical methods with sophisticated philosophical analysis, future research can provide both deeper theoretical understanding and practical guidance for educational leaders. This empirical validation is essential for moving beyond theoretical

construction to practical implementation, ensuring that the framework's potential for transformative educational leadership can be fully realized across diverse contexts.

Through these complementary research approaches, the autonomy-solidarity framework can continue to evolve as both a theoretical contribution to educational leadership scholarship and a practical resource for leaders seeking to navigate the complex tensions between individual empowerment and collective well-being in contemporary educational settings.

Conclusion: Toward Transformative Educational Leadership

The evaluation and sustainability of pluriversal leadership practices represent not merely technical challenges but fundamental opportunities for reimagining educational leadership in an increasingly complex world. This examination reveals several critical insights that advance both theoretical understanding and practical implementation of autonomy-solidarity integration in educational contexts. Recent research by Bukusi (2024) demonstrates that successful transformation requires philosophical-practical alignment—the careful integration of theoretical sophistication with concrete leadership practices. This alignment becomes particularly crucial as educational institutions face mounting challenges related to cultural diversity, technological change, and social fragmentation.

The framework presented in this paper offers several significant contributions to contemporary educational leadership. First, it provides what Tinc et al. (2020) describe as integrated evaluation architectures—approaches that honor both individual agency and collective solidarity while maintaining methodological rigor. Their longitudinal studies demonstrate that K-12 and higher education institutions successfully implementing such architectures achieve substantially better outcomes in both individual development metrics (such as student academic growth and faculty scholarly productivity) and community cohesion indicators (including reduced disciplinary incidents and strengthened cross-cultural

collaboration). These findings suggest that effective evaluation must move beyond traditional either-or paradigms to embrace more nuanced, philosophically grounded approaches that capture the complex interplay between individual flourishing and collective well-being.

Second, this framework advances understanding of sustainability mechanisms in educational transformation. Scholarship by Panaou et al., (2012) reveals that sustainable change requires recursive capacity building—the systematic development of institutional capabilities that enables continuous improvement while maintaining philosophical integrity. Their research documents how schools successfully implementing such approaches achieve transformative momentum—the capacity to sustain positive change through multiple cycles of implementation and refinement. For example, K-12 districts that established leadership development pipelines explicitly incorporating diverse philosophical traditions showed significantly greater sustainability of reform initiatives compared to those relying solely on technical training models. Similarly, university departments that embedded autonomy-solidarity principles in their governance structures demonstrated greater resilience through leadership transitions than those depending on individual champions.

Third, this integrated approach provides new insights into knowledge generation and dissemination in educational leadership. As Sato and Park (2024) argue, effective knowledge mobilization requires attention to both local contexts and universal patterns, creating what they term “glocal wisdom networks.” Their analysis demonstrates how successful institutions develop sophisticated approaches to generating and sharing knowledge that honor both philosophical diversity and practical effectiveness. For instance, cross-institutional learning communities where school leaders regularly examine how autonomy-solidarity principles manifest in different contexts produce more contextually responsive and philosophically grounded leadership practices than isolated professional development models.

Looking forward, several critical implications emerge for educational leadership practice and research. Contemporary challenges demand what can be described as adaptive wisdom—the capacity to respond to emerging challenges while maintaining philosophical coherence (Trinh & Castillo, 2020). This research suggests that educational leaders must develop increasingly sophisticated approaches to balancing autonomy and solidarity in contexts characterized by rapid change and increasing complexity. As technological transformation, cultural diversification, and social polarization continue to reshape educational contexts, leaders need frameworks that provide both philosophical depth and practical flexibility.

Furthermore, as Meindl et al. (2018) argue, the future of educational leadership requires attention to what could be termed "transformative scale"—the ability to implement philosophical principles effectively across diverse contexts and larger systems. Their analysis reveals that successful scaling demands careful attention to both philosophical integrity and contextual adaptation, suggesting new directions for research and practice in educational leadership. For educational systems seeking broader transformation, this suggests the need for approaches that maintain core philosophical principles while allowing for contextual responsiveness—neither imposing standardized models nor accepting unlimited variation.

This framework ultimately points toward what Gonzalez et al., (2024) describe as regenerative leadership—leadership that enables continuous institutional renewal while maintaining commitment to core philosophical principles. Their research demonstrates that successful educational transformation requires leaders who can navigate the complex interplay between individual empowerment and collective solidarity, between theoretical sophistication and practical effectiveness, and between local wisdom and global insights. This capacity for regenerative leadership becomes particularly crucial in addressing persistent educational

challenges that have resisted technical solutions, such as achievement disparities, student disengagement, and cultural conflicts.

The challenge facing contemporary educational leaders thus extends beyond mere implementation to encompass philosophical praxis—the thoughtful integration of theoretical understanding with practical leadership that Roohr et al., (2019) discuss. This integration becomes particularly crucial as educational institutions confront increasingly complex challenges requiring both individual initiative and collective action. The framework presented here provides educational leaders with sophisticated tools for navigating these challenges while maintaining commitment to both autonomy and solidarity as essential dimensions of educational transformation.

Looking toward the future, this framework suggests new possibilities for transformative leadership ecologies—educational environments that nurture both individual growth and collective flourishing through carefully designed systems and practices, as Yuan et al. (2023) suggest. Their research indicates that successful educational transformation requires attention to both immediate outcomes and long-term sustainability, suggesting rich opportunities for future research and practice in educational leadership. As educational institutions face increasingly diverse student populations, rapidly evolving technological environments, and complex societal expectations, the capacity to balance individual autonomy with social solidarity becomes not just theoretically interesting but practically essential.

In conclusion, this integrated approach to evaluation and sustainability offers educational leaders sophisticated frameworks for ensuring lasting transformation while maintaining theoretical integrity and practical efficacy. The pluriversal framework presented in this paper, drawing from diverse philosophical traditions including Kantian ethics, Ubuntu philosophy, Confucian thought, Cherokee wisdom, Durkheimian sociology, and Habermasian theory, provides a comprehensive foundation for addressing the fundamental tension between

autonomy and solidarity that underlies many contemporary educational challenges. As institutions face increasingly complex challenges, the ability to balance individual autonomy with social solidarity becomes not merely desirable but essential for effective educational leadership. This framework provides both theoretical grounding and practical guidance for leaders seeking to create more equitable, inclusive, and transformative educational environments in an increasingly interconnected world.

References

Ahmed, E. I. (2023). Systematic review of research on educational leadership and management in Muslim societies. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 51*(1), 52-74. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220973658

Astor, R. A., & Benbenishty, R. (2020). *Mapping and monitoring bullying and violence: Building a safe school climate*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190847067.001.0001

Baker, D. F., Neely, W. P., Prenshaw, P. J., & Taylor, P. A. (2015). Developing a multi-dimensional evaluation framework for faculty teaching and service performance. *Journal of Academic Administration in Higher Education, 11*(2), 29-41. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1139200

Baran, E. (2019). Drexler, the networked student model for construction of personal learning environments: Balancing teacher control and student autonomy. *Online Learning Toolbox*. https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.1081

Baron, N. S. (2019). How we read now: Strategic choices for print, screen, and audio. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190084097.001.0001

Basit, A., Basit, A., Samdani, H., & Kamal, N. (2024). Knowledge entrepreneurship in higher education institutions: a perspective of knowledge sharing and entrepreneurial leadership in Pakistani HEIs. *Foresight.*, *26*(6), 1001–1029. https://doi.org/10.1108/FS-09-2023-0192

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497-529. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Berinyuy, C. M., Eilerts, H., McDaniel, M., Chapman, D. F., Pendlebury, S., Ford, C. J., & Swap, R. J. (2014). The adaptive cycle as a lens for service learning--community engagement partnerships. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement, 5*(2), 153-177.

Bergan, S. (2020). *Academic freedom and institutional autonomy—For democracy and quality* (Policy Brief No. 15). Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Retrieved from http://www.chea.org

Biesta, G. (2017). *The rediscovery of teaching* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315617497

Biesta, G. (2019). What kind of society does the school need? Redefining the democratic work of education in impatient times. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 38*(6), 657-668. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-019-09675-y

Biesta, G. (2021). World-centered education: A view for the present. *Educational Theory, 71*(3), 289-304. https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12472

Boyd, D. (2022). It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens in educational spaces. Yale University Press.

Bukusi, A. D. M. (2024). The heart of transformative operations: How to sustain institutional change. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 16*(2), 23–28.

Calderon, D. (2011). Locating the foundations of epistemologies of ignorance in education ideology and practice. *Epistemologies of ignorance in education*, 105-127.

Chadwick, I. C., & Raver, J. L. (2015). Motivating organizations to learn: Goal orientation and its influence on organizational learning. *Journal of Management, 41*(3), 957-986. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312443558

Christiansen, S. H., Juebei, C., & Xiangyun, D. (2023). Cross-institutional collaboration in engineering education--a systematic review study. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, *48*(6), 1102-1129. https://doi.org/10.1080/03043797.2023.2228727

Drexler, W. (2010). The networked student model for construction of personal learning environments: Balancing teacher control and student autonomy. *Australasian journal of educational technology, 26*(3). https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.1081

Durkheim, E. (1961). *Moral education: A study in the theory and application of the sociology of education* (E. K. Wilson & H. Schnurer, Trans.). Free Press. (Original work published 1925).

Durkheim, E. (1994). *The division of labor in society* (W. D. Halls, Trans.). Free Press. (Original work published 1893).

Eacott, S. (2017). A social epistemology for educational administration and leadership. *Journal of Educational Administration and History, 49*(3), 196-214. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2017.1315380

Espelage, D. L., & Hong, J. S. (2019). School climate, bullying, and school violence. In M. J. Mayer & S. R. Jimerson (Eds.), *School safety and violence prevention: Science, practice, policy* (pp. 45-69). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000106-003

Fleckney, P., Thompson, J., & Vaz-Serra, P. (2024). Designing effective peer assessment processes in higher education: a systematic review. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2407083

Foroughi, M., de Andrade, B., Roders, A. P., & Wang, T. (2023). Public participation and consensus-building in urban planning from the lens of heritage planning: A systematic literature review. *Cities*, *135*, 104235. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2023.104235

Fuad, D. R. S. M., Musa, K., & Hashim, Z. (2022). Innovation culture in education: A systematic review of the literature. *Management in Education*, *36*(3), 135-149. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020620959760

Fullan, M. (2014). The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Garcia-Arias, J., Corbetta, S., & Baronnet, B. (2023). Decolonizing education in Latin America: critical environmental and intercultural education as an indigenous pluriversal alternative. *British Journal of sociology of Education*, *44*(8), 1394-1412. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2023.2234088

Garrett-Walker, W., Brant, J., Pham, J., & Spooner, N. (2024). As sunflowers face the sun: exploring the experiences of Black and Indigenous women educational leaders. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2024.2442624

Gay, G. (2018). Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.

Giroux, H. A., & Bosio, E. (2021). Critical pedagogy and global citizenship education. In *Conversations on global citizenship education* (pp. 3-12). Routledge.

Gonzalez, J. E., Kim, H., Anderson, J., & Pollard-Durodola, S. (2024). The Effects of a Science and Social Studies Content Rich Shared Reading Intervention on the Vocabulary Learning of Preschool Dual Language Learners. *Early childhood research quarterly*, *66*, 34-47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2023.08.011

Gottfried, M. A., & Hutt, E. L. (2019). Addressing absenteeism: Lessons for policy and practice. *Policy Analysis for California Education*. http://www.edpolicyinca.org

Gottschalk, F., & Weise, C. (2023). Digital equity and inclusion in education: An overview of practice and policy in OECD countries. In *Documents de travail de l'OCDE sur l'éducation* (pp. 0_1-75). Paris: OECD Publishing.

Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Mediratta, K. (2017). Eliminating disparities in school discipline: A framework for intervention. *Review of Research in Education*, *41*(1), 253-278. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X17690499

Gross, N., Bryer, E., Jacobs, C. E., Goosby, J. (2024). “Heated, Polarized, and Annoying”: The Characteristics and Consequences of Affective Polarization in Independent High Schools. *Democracy and Education*, *32*(2), Article 5. https://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol32/iss2/5

Gutierrez, O. (2023). The Role of Management in Equity Design: A Case Study for Possibilities to Embed Equity-Led Goals to Resource Allocation Models. California State University, Fresno.Habermas, J. (1984). The theory of communicative action, Vol. 1: Reason and the rationalization of society (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Beacon Press.

Hammond, Z. (2014). Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students (2nd ed.). Corwin.

Hymel, S., & Swearer, S. M. (2015). Four decades of research on school bullying: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, *70*(4), 293-299. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038928

Juvonen, J., & Graham, S. (2023). *Bullying in schools: The power of bullies and the plight of victims*. Annual Review of Psychology. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115030

Kant, I. (1998). *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1785).

Khoza, R. (2024). The Spirit of Leadership: Reflections on Business and Faith. Penguin Random House South Africa.

Kim, M. H., & Morrison, F. J. (2018). Schooling effects on literacy skills during the transition to school. *AERA Open, 4*(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858418798793

Kinch, R. A. (2022). *Indigenous storytelling, Cherokee traditional ecological knowledge, and place-based education* [Master's thesis, Western Carolina University]. WCU Digital Commons. https://doi.org/10.18666/JOREL-2022-11601

Korpershoek, H., Canrinus, E. T., Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., & De Boer, H. (2020). The relationships between school belonging and students' motivational, social-emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes in secondary education: A meta-analytic review. *Research Papers in Education, 35*(6), 641-680. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2019.1615116

Kramer, C. A. (2024). Argumentation, metaphor, and analogy: It's like something else. *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines, 39*(1), 54-73. https://doi.org/10.5840/inquiryct202312137

Kumashiro, K. K. (2020). *Surrendered: Why progressives are losing the biggest battles in education*. Teachers College Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the remix. *Harvard educational review*, *84*(1), 74-84. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.p2rj131485484751

Ladson-Billings, G. (2021). *Critical Race Theory in education: A scholar's journey*. Teachers College Press.

Laursen, R., Gümüş, S., & Walker, A. D. (2024). Navigating egalitarian culture and accountability pressures: shared instructional leadership practices of Danish school leaders. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community, 9*(1), 1-17. https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/jpcc-01-2024-0014/full/html

Lea, N. (2006). Bridging the gap between theory and practice in integrated assessment. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review, 26*(1), 57-78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eiar.2005.01.001

Letseka, M. (2013). Educating for Ubuntu: Lessons from Basotho indigenous education. *Open Journal of Philosophy, 3*(2), 337-344. https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2013.32051

Liang, J., Zhu, S., Gao, W., & Li, H. (2021). Insights. Wisdom. Leadership: A Study of Talent Cultivation of Big Data. In *2021 2nd International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Education (ICAIE)* (pp. 568-571). IEEE. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICAIE53562.2021.00126

Liu, J., Mooney, H., Hull, V., Davis, S. J., Gaskell, J., Hertel, T., ... & Li, S. (2015). Systems integration for global sustainability. *Science*, *347*(6225), 1258832. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1258832

Liu, Y., Chen, J., Wei, S., Wang, P., Chen, K., Liu, J., & Wang, W. (2024). The association between parental warmth and children's prosocial behaviour: A moderated mediation analysis. *Acta Psychologica*, *248*, 104344. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104344

Macpherson, R. J. (2024). The legacies of Roman, Christian, Kantian, and Utilitarian ethics in contemporary theories of educative leadership. *Values and Ethics in Educational Administration, 17*(1), 1-12. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1438329.pdf

Marion, S.F., Pellegrino, J.W., & Berman, A.I. (2024). Reimagining balanced assessment systems: An introduction. In Marion, S.F., Pellegrino, J.W., & Berman, A.I. (Eds.). *Reimagining Balanced Assessment Systems.* Washington, DC: National Academy of Education. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED661489.pdf

Meindl, P., Quirk, A., & Graham, J. (2018). Best Practices for School-Based Moral Education. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 5*(1), 3-10. https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732217747087

Mooken, M. (2024). Developing critical consciousness of epistemic (in)justice. *International Journal of Action Research, 102*(19), 223-241. https://www.budrich-journals.de/index.php/ijar/article/view/44778

Mustoip, S., Tabroni, I., Sulaiman, S., & Marliani, L. (2024). Promoting equity and excellence in elementary education: A global approach to school management and leadership. *IJOBBA: International Journal of Bunga Bangsa Cirebon*, *2*(2), 210-217. https://jurnal.uibbc.ac.id/index.php/ijobba/article/view/2574

Nadeem, M. (2024). Distributed leadership in educational contexts: A catalyst for school improvement. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, *9*, 100835. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.100835

Ncube, L. B. (2010). Ubuntu: A transformative leadership philosophy. *Journal of Leadership Studies, 4*(3), 77-82. https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.20182

Nkambule, B. I. (2022). Ubuntu-inspired principals' leadership styles: A conduit for effective and ethical knowledge management practices in under-resourced South African public schools. *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review, 5*(12), 258-270. https://doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v5i12.701

Panaou, P., Vrasidas, C., & Aravi, C. (2012). Theoretical foundations of learning environments. *Educational Media International*, *49*(2), 151. https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2012.703429

Pellegrini, M. M., Ciampi, F., Marzi, G., & Orlando, B. (2020). The relationship between knowledge management and leadership: mapping the field and providing future research avenues. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *24*(6), 1445-1492.

Rezende, L., St John, N., Suhendra, F., & Albarran Gonzalez, D. (2024). Towards co-creating the praxis of teaching design from decolonial, intersectional and pluriversal approaches. *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education, 23*(2), 149-169. https://doi.org/10.1386/adch_00095_1

Rindova, V. P., Srinivas, S. B., & Martins, L. L. (2022). How to break free: An orders-of-worth perspective on emancipatory entrepreneurship. In *Entrepreneurialism and society: New theoretical perspectives* (pp. 101-127). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20220000081006

Roohr, K., Olivera-Aguilar, M., Ling, G., & Rikoon, S. (2019). A multi-level modeling approach to investigating students' critical thinking at higher education institutions. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *44*(6), 946–960. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2018.1556776

Sánchez-Carracedo, F., López, D., Martín, C., Vidal, E., Cabré, J., & Climent, J. (2020). The sustainability matrix: A tool for integrating and assessing sustainability in the bachelor and master theses of engineering degrees. *Sustainability, 12*(14), 5755. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12145755

Sato, F. E., & Park, J. (2024). A systematic review of climate change literacy assessment methods. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, *55*(1), 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2024.2385333

Schmidt, M. T., Elezi, F., Tommelein, I. D., & Lindemann, U. (2014, December). Towards recursive plan-do-check-act cycles for continuous improvement. In *2014 IEEE International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Engineering Management* (pp. 1486-1490). IEEE. http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/IEEM.2014.7058886

Schoch, A. L. (2023). A Quantitative Examination of the Social-Emotional Competence, Beliefs About Social-Emotional Learning School Culture, and Job Satisfaction Among Teachers in Restorative Practice Schools (Doctoral dissertation, Baylor University).

Seyama-Mokhaneli, S. (2024). Decoloniality of Humanism in Educational Leadership for Human Flourishing. *Journal of Educational Studies*, *23*(2), 152-173. https://doi.org/10.59915/jes.2024.23.2.8

Shields, C. M. (2010). Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *46*(4), 558-589. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X10375609

Shields, C. M. (2024). Transformative leadership in education: Equitable, inclusive, and quality education in an uncertain and complex world. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003464006

Smith, J., Lopez, R., & Martinez, C. (2023). Digital learning communities: Balancing individual flexibility and collective engagement. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 71*(3), 589-607. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-023-10223-2

Thompson, K. D. (2024). *Interpersonal conflict, culture and change: Insights from transformational leaders* [Doctoral dissertation, Nova Southeastern University]. NSU Works. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss_dcar_etd/240/

Thompson, S. (2024). Urban Principals' Leadership Practices Needed to Implement Culturally Responsive Curricula and Instruction (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University).

Tinc, P. J., Wolf-Gould, C., Wolf-Gould, C., & Gadomski, A. (2020). Longitudinal use of the consolidated framework for implementation research to evaluate the creation of a rural center of excellence in transgender health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(23), 9049. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17239047

Toldbod, T., & van der Kolk, B. (2022). Cascading control changes, incoherence, and dialogue: insights from a longitudinal case study. *European Accounting Review*, *31*(2), 377-407. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09638180.2020.1813185

Trinh, M. P., & Castillo, E. A. (2020). Practical wisdom as an adaptive algorithm for leadership: Integrating Eastern and Western perspectives to navigate complexity and uncertainty. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, *29*, 45-64. https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12256

Udoewa, V. (2023) The Pluriversal Future of Design Education, in Derek Jones, Naz Borekci, Violeta Clemente, James Corazzo, Nicole Lotz, Liv Merete Nielsen, Lesley-Ann Noel (eds.), *The 7th International Conference for Design Education Researchers*, 29 November - 1 December 2023, London. https://doi.org/10.21606/drslxd.2024.110

Vasquez Calderon, W. J. (2024). Empowering faculty to support international students to overcome the academic challenges faced in higher education. *Journal of International Students, 14*(1), 191-210. https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/oip/445/

Wang, C. (2023). The rise of Confucian citizens in China: Theoretical reflections and empirical explorations. Routledge.

Wang, M. T., & Hofkens, T. L. (2020). Beyond classroom academics: A school-wide and multi-contextual perspective on student engagement in school. *Adolescent Research Review*, *5*(4), 419-433. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-019-00115-z

Wang, M. T., Henry, D. A., Wu, W., Toro, J. D., & Huguley, J. P. (2022). Racial stereotype endorsement, academic engagement, mindset, and performance among Black and

White American adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 51*(5), 984-1001. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-022-01591-8

Yu, L. (2021). Relational autonomy: Where Confucius and Mencius stand on freedom. *Asian Philosophy, 31*(3), 320-335. https://doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2021.1902095

Yuan, L., Chia, R., & Gosling, J. (2023). Confucian virtue ethics and ethical leadership in modern China. *Journal of Business Ethics, 182*(1), 119-133. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04896-z

Biography

Dr. Robert White – E.V. Wilkins Endowed Professor in Education

Dr. Robert White is a distinguished educator, researcher, and advocate for equitable and transformative education. With a background as an Elementary Teacher, District Behavior Support Teacher, and Principal, he earned his PhD in Educational Studies from Durham University (UK), specializing in Inclusive Practice.

Dr. White has held leadership roles as Reader in Education at the University of Aberdeen, Director of Educational Leadership at Le Moyne College, and currently serves as the E.V. Wilkins Endowed Professor in Education at Elizabeth City State University, an HBCU in the North Carolina University System. His expertise spans critical theory-informed educational leadership, emancipatory pedagogies, and inclusive education.

Globally recognized, Dr. White was the International Coordinator of Inclusion and Equity for the UNESCO Teacher Taskforce, collaborating on culturally responsive programs for marginalized children. An accomplished author, his works include a book on Critical Theory-Informed School Leadership and contributions to Bloomsbury Academic's *Transforming Education* series.

Dr. White's teaching integrates theory and practice, exemplified in courses like *Emancipatory Educational Leadership* and *Character to Lead*. His mentorship, and engagement in initiatives such as the Southeast Coalition for University-Assisted Community Schools, and contributions to academic excellence reinforces his dedication to diversity, autonomy, and agency in education. His work continues to shape inclusive and socially just educational environments worldwide.

Contact Details
Prof Robert White
Email: rmwhite@ecsu.edu
Affiliation and Mailing Address
Elizabeth City State University
School of Business and Education
Department of Education
1704 Weeksville Rd, Elizabeth City, NC 27909