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**AN INTERNATIONAL PEER-REVIEWED  
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## Inside this issue:

- ◆ Superintendents and School Boards Collaborate to Narrow Achievement Gaps: A Suburban New York Multisite Case Study
- ◆ How Does Opportunity to Learn Influence Student Achievement?
- ◆ Developing Grit in our Students: Why Grit is Such a Desirable Trait, and Practical Strategies for Teachers and Schools
- ◆ Challenges to Inclusivity: An Investigation of Transgender Policy Implementation at a Suburban High School
- ◆ Cultural Intelligence in the Diverse Classroom
- ◆ Gamification in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review with Particular Reference to Octalysis as the Futuristic Framework for Further Research
- ◆ From the Field: Striving for an Inclusive Workplace
- ◆ Book Review: Gorbachev: His Life and Times  
- by William Taubman, Biographer
- ◆ Book Review: Confessions of a School Reformer  
- by Larry Cuban

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# Contents

## Page

♦	Editor's Perspective: - by Editor-In-Chief, Dr. Richard Bernato	7
♦	Superintendents and School Boards Collaborate to Narrow Achievement Gaps: A Suburban New York Multisite Case Study - by Lara Gonzalez, Ed.D.	9
♦	How Does Opportunity to Learn Influence Student Achievement? - by Laura Ficarra, Ed.D.	15
♦	Developing Grit in our Students: Why Grit is Such a Desirable Trait, and Practical Strategies for Teachers and Schools - by Jennifer Bashant, Ph.D.	24
♦	Challenges to Inclusivity: An Investigation of Transgender Policy Implementation at a Suburban High School - by Eustace Thompson, Ph.D. and Jeffrey Harris, Ed.D.	28
♦	Cultural Intelligence in the Diverse Classroom - by Ann M. Macaluso, Ed.D.	33
♦	Gamification in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review with Particular Reference to Octalysis as the Futuristic Framework for Further Research - by Harika Rao, Ed.D.	38
♦	From the Field: Striving for an Inclusive Workplace - by John W. Coverdale, Ed.D.	47
♦	Book Review: Gorbachev: His Life and Times - by William Taubman, Biographer Reviewed by Robert J. Manley, Ph.D.	51
♦	Book Review: Confessions of a School Reformer - by Larry Cuban Reviewed by Anthony J. Annunziato, Ed.D.	52



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**The Editorial Board of the Journal for Leadership and Instruction has identified the following thematic interests for the 2023 issues:**

1. Early Childhood Development
2. Social and Emotional Development and Mental Health
3. School Finance
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## Editor's Perspective



When you stop trying to get better you stop being good. I often tell my students who seek certification or doctoral degrees as education leaders that if they seek such goals, i.e., improving our practices and applying new strategies to both old and new challenges, had better be at the top of their list. In like manner, the Journal for Leadership and Instruction

continues to strive to build a community of practitioner-researchers to meet those challenges.

There is not much difference between appreciation and gratitude. Distinctions however, do exist. For one, appreciation can speak to a sense of awe and respect for others' contributions to efforts of common commitment. In contrast, but not in opposition, gratefulness speaks to me as a sense of indebtedness for others' good will and intentions to concretely sustain the success of that commitment.

All the more reason to be both grateful for and appreciative of individuals like George Duffy, Robert Manley, Judy Coffey, Christine Cosme, Amy Eckelmann, Jack Labriola, and the entire JLI editorial board and reviewers, for their contributions to the SCOPE Journal for Leadership and Instruction's educational community. This is especially so, as I offer deep thanks for their support of my efforts to continue the journal's quality as the new Editor-in-Chief.

The centerpiece of our commitment to improve education will always remain the Journal itself, which enters its fifteenth year of publishing quality peer reviewed research articles, book reviews, and From the Field articles, that are devoted to that goal. In addition, updates that follow will enable you to recognize how we strive to continue that excellence.

- We are now listed not only in ERIC, but also in EBSCO. This development will widen our exposure to researchers.
- We are initiating an occasional feature where we will reprint articles from previous issues that have attracted a high number of downloads for their topics since these issues remain of high interest.
- Our new podcast series has begun. These podcasts are posted twice a month. Their purpose will be to interview JLI published authors to consider, even more deeply, the themes they have investigated. These conversations will also influence improved leadership practice and motivate others to offer us comments for further exploration.

To date, six podcasts have been posted. Please click on the link <https://www.scopeonline.us/jli-podcast-episodes/> to enjoy these discourses, and to contribute to them as well. In addition, they are certainly very worthy to share with your leadership colleagues!

### Journal submissions

This Fall issue includes an impressive array of submissions that includes two book reviews, an article from the field, and three new research articles...AND in addition, we have included an article from a previous issue that will introduce a Revisited Article series. You will find that individually and in sum, the authors' research and thinking reflects a cross section of themes and developments all educational leaders must factor into their planning.

- o Dr. Lara Gonzalez' article, "Superintendents and School Boards Collaborate to Narrow Achievement Gaps: A Suburban New York Multisite Case Study," explores the needs to narrow achievement gaps among students. It examines how superintendents and boards of education can collaborate to meet this pressing issue, made even more dramatic by recent reports about drops in student achievement during the pandemic crisis.
- o Do technology developments like gamification, have the potential to help educational leaders embed the kinds of highly motivating qualities it offers to our instructional practices? In this article, Dr. Harika Rao provides a literature review of encouraging gamification models of practice in higher education for our consideration.
- o Related to our desire to analyze all factors that may affect serving all students' needs is Dr. Ann Macaluso's article, "Cultural Intelligence in the Diverse Classroom." This article's perspective examines what we mean by cultural intelligence and offers interesting data about how immigrant students' experiences enable them to effectively participate in an interconnected world.
- o Dr. John Coverdale's From the Field article, "Striving for an Inclusive Workplace," is a product of Dr. Coverdale's notable experience in matters of equity, diversity and social justice. He offers understandings about the intersectionality of these perspectives and guidelines for educational leaders to embed in their policy making and hiring practices.
- o How does the concept of Opportunity to Learn (OTL), defined by Dr. Laura Ficara as the "amount of time a teacher commits to the content of the

## Editor's Perspective

curriculum..." play a role in affecting student achievement? Her article, "How Does Opportunity to Learn Influence Student Achievement?", uncovers interesting findings when this variable is measured for its presence in High and Low Achieving schools.

- o The matter of how or to what extent transgender policies are implemented in schools has clearly become a topic of importance in our current times. Drs. Eustace Thompson and Jeffrey Harris' research demonstrates the fragility of connection between District policy implementation and building based collaboration.
- o Dr. Jennifer Bashant's article, "Developing Grit in Our Students: Why Grit is Such a Desirable Trait, and Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students" is the first of our Reprint Series. Its topic, about both prevailing through and successfully navigating the challenges of schools, was downloaded many times across its initial printing.
- o Dr. Robert Manley's review of William Taubman's biography, "Gorbachev: His Life and Times", is a

timely revised reprint, given that Gorbachev's recent death recalls a different era in global politics stark in contrast to our present. It is a book valuable for Advanced Placement teachers.

- o Larry Cuban is perhaps my own personal favorite school reform and improvement author whose books across his professional career have influenced many who are interested in innovative instruction and in school improvement processes. Dr. Anthony Annunziato's review of Cuban's latest publication, "Confessions of a School Reformer," explores Cuban's concerns about school change efforts and his own reflections about how well school reform has had successful sustained impact on school quality.

In closing, we at **JLI** invite you to read the articles offered and listen to the posted podcasts related to them, so that we can continue to create a growing leadership critical mass of sustainably effective schools in these challenging times.

*Richard Bernato,*  
Editor-in-Chief



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# Superintendents and School Boards Collaborate to Narrow Achievement Gaps: A Suburban New York Multisite Case Study

By Lara Gonzalez, Ed.D.

## Abstract

This study explored the role of school superintendents and board of education trustees in closing the achievement gap, which can be defined as "the disparity in academic performance between groups of students" (Muhammad, 2015, p. 14). District leaders (superintendents and school boards) set the priorities and policies in their school systems and have the power to promote or thwart educational equity (Skrla et al., 2009). The purpose of this qualitative study was to highlight effective practices of superintendents and school boards that have prioritized closing achievement gaps and have succeeded in narrowing them. This study involved four case studies and made use of interviews, observations, and document review. The data revealed that the most formidable challenges to closing achievement gaps were increasingly diverse student needs, stakeholders' deficit-thinking about students, lack of family engagement, and financial obstacles. To overcome those challenges, the researcher found that superintendents used various strategies, including setting a vision for equity at the district level, using data to drive decision-making, hiring quality teachers and leaders, using district funds resourcefully, providing rigorous curricula for students, and creating innovative academic and non-academic programs for students. Although there is academic literature on the challenges that school superintendents face in closing achievement gaps and the strategies that they have used to overcome them, there is a lack of research on how superintendents and their school boards collaborate to narrow achievement gaps. The aim of the study was to address that gap in the literature. Data revealed that district leaders collaborated to narrow gaps by setting district visions, goals, and policies, sharing information, and partnering on the budgeting and hiring processes.

## Introduction

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), signed into legislation in 2002, required school district leaders for the first time to report student achievement along racial and ethnic lines as well as according to special education status and socio-economic level (Maranto et al., 2017). Considered the "most sweeping reform of U.S. Federal education policy since the 1960s," NCLB compelled leaders in K-12 public school systems nationwide to address achieve-

ment gaps among White, economically advantaged students and their African-American,<sup>1</sup> Latino,<sup>2</sup> and economically disadvantaged counterparts (Skrla et al., 2009, p. 4). In 2015, Congress replaced NCLB with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA obligates school districts to continue to provide educational opportunity for our nation's schoolchildren consistent with Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), originally enacted in 1965. ESSA allows states greater flexibility than NCLB in allowing school districts to demonstrate improved outcomes for under-represented minority and economically disadvantaged students (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Still, despite decades of federal and state legislation and efforts in school districts nationwide, such as mandated reporting by student subgroup and improved accountability measures, achievement gaps remain.

Although there are myriad ways to define the achievement gap in schools, this study used the definition from the Achievement Gap Initiative (AGI), which is a collaboration between Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and its Graduate School of Education. AGI, established to bring education scholars and practitioners together to better understand achievement gaps and to work towards remedying them, defined the achievement gap as follows:

the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other success measures. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African-American and Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic white peers, and the similar academic disparity between students from low-income families and those who are better off. (Muhammad, 2015, p. 14)

Turner (2015) asserted that our schools today are "more diverse and unequal than ever" and that "over half of

<sup>1</sup> African American and Black used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Hispanic and Latino used interchangeably.

U.S. cities are now majority non-White" (p. 4). Public school districts in recent years have experienced three major demographic shifts-increasing numbers of students of color, students living in poverty, and immigrant students (Welton et al., 2015). These demographic trends make addressing the achievement gap even more timely and pressing.

While some school districts have adapted to the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, others have been unable or possibly unwilling to adapt. According to Skrla et al. (2009), superintendents and their respective school boards have the power to promote or thwart the district's focus on equity. Although superintendents and school board members have various responsibilities, it is at least arguable that student academic performance should be their top priority. For a variety of reasons examined in this study, district leaders (superintendents and school board members) may experience difficulty in their attempts to narrow achievement gaps among students.

Through one-on-one interviews, observations, and a review of documents, this study examined the barriers to collaboration between school superintendents and their boards of education and the ways in which they overcame them to narrow achievement gaps for students. The following questions guided this study: 1) What challenges have superintendents who have prioritized closing achievement gaps faced in their efforts to close achievement gaps, and how have they attempted to overcome those challenges? 2) What strategies have superintendents who have prioritized closing achievement gaps used in their efforts to close achievement gaps? and 3) How, if at all, have superintendents who have prioritized closing achievement gaps collaborated with their school boards with the goal of achieving educational equity for students in their school districts?

## Review of Literature

### *Challenges to Closing the Achievement Gap*

The literature has shown that one major challenge to creating equitable outcomes for students is stakeholders' deficit thinking about students and their families. Turner (2015) defined the cultural deficit discourse as "an explanation of educational and social inequality that attributes school success or failure to individual children, families, or group cultural characteristics" (p. 29). Sherman and Grogan (2003) discovered that even though superintendents in Virginia knew that teachers held lower expectations for Black students, few leaders could point to specific district level efforts to address those low expectations. Sherman's (2008) research revealed that Virginia superintendents studied implemented programs to improve the performance of underachieving students in general; yet they were reluctant to create programs that targeted specific minority groups possibly because of the political milieu in the community (Sherman, 2008).

In Welton et al.'s (2015) case study, researchers examined how suburban district leaders reacted to significant demographic shifts in student population in Texas.

The study placed the "onus of failure in achievement on the individual student, not the district" (p. 708). Welton et al. (2015) concluded that there was little discussion among district leaders in Texas about the need to develop more culturally responsive schools to meet the diverse needs of the student and parent populations that they served. Whitt et al. (2015) found that the superintendents attributed the academic failure of their students to perceived shortcomings based on individual, family and cultural deficits (Whitt et al., 2015).

Sherman and Grogan (2003) reported that some superintendents were not willing to communicate disaggregated assessment data because their school boards did not want that information shared publicly. Given the significant discrepancies between Black and White students' scores, superintendents reported that possible negative reactions to test score gaps discouraged them from raising the issue in the communities that they served. Sherman and Grogan (2003) explained the range of reasons that superintendents withheld information from the community as follows: 'from the desire to 'soft-pedal racial differences' to the desire to avoid 'another suit filed against us' to a general feeling that 'scores can't go up in the general population due to large numbers of minority students'" (p. 230).

Turner's (2015) findings concluded that the school district leaders' decision-making did not directly address the systematic inequalities in students' lives, namely those related to race, immigration, and poverty. Turner explained, "Community members and parents often limit changes-particularly equity-oriented policies-that stray from their values or group interests" (p. 8) because their perception is that if one group benefits, it will likely be at the expense of another group. Williams and Tabernik (2011) examined school board politics in Ohio and its impact on superintendents' ability to lead. Instead of student achievement, those boards were motivated by social or personal agendas (e.g., lobbying on behalf of their own children or for specific programs).

### *Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gap*

Sherman (2008) found that the Virginia districts that she studied implemented activities and programs designed to raise performance levels for underachieving students. Superintendents pointed to greater collaboration among stakeholders, increased professional development for teachers, attention to student sub-groups, and use of data to drive instruction as strategies that yielded improved student achievement (Sherman, 2008). In Wright and Harris' (2010) qualitative, narrative study, the researchers examined the role of superintendents in Texas in narrowing the achievement gap by implementing culturally proficient practices. The definition of cultural proficiency used in the study was: "the honoring of differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully with a variety of cultural groups" (p. 221). The major findings were as follows: superintendents must articulate a clear vision regarding narrowing the achievement gap, be role models for cultural proficiency, and work collaboratively with their school boards to ensure

**Table 1. Participant Information**

District	Superintendent	Board of Education officer/trustee
A	White female	Black female
B	White female	White female
C	White male	White male
D	White male	White female

that cultural proficiency can become part of the fabric of the district (Wright & Harris, 2010).

Sherman (2008) found that building relationships between the district and the community was key to improving student achievement. Programs referenced in Sherman's study included community meetings, Saturday school, parent centers, before and after school tutorial programs, and district-university partnerships. According to Sherman, "Superintendent leadership and community activism is crucial to the success of such a transformation and increased visibility to all minority groups" (p. 699). The leaders in Hentschke et al.'s (2009) partnered with local universities for early college opportunities for students and curriculum development for teachers and collaborated with local and national foundations for financial support.

In summary, the existing literature found that various barriers exist for school district leaders who prioritize narrowing achievement gaps but that those challenges can be overcome with strategies such as a district-wide commitment to cultural proficiency, a focus on teacher professional development, and partnerships between the district and outside educational agencies.

**Table 2. Participant District High School Graduation Rates v. NYS Average**

	High School Graduation Average August 2017-August 2019	% District Exceeded NYS Graduation Average (August 2017-August 2019)
District A		
White	96.0%	5.9%
Black/Hispanic	93.2%	21.0%
District B		
White	95.7%	5.6%
Black/Hispanic	89.7%	17.5%
District C		
White	99.3%	9.2%
Black/Hispanic	97.3%	25.1%
District D		
White	99.3%	9.2%
Black/Hispanic	92.2%	20.0%

## Method

The data for this article came from a qualitative, multisite case study conducted by the author during the 2018-19 school year (Gonzalez, 2019). Methods of data collection included one-on-one interviews, observations, and document

analysis. The study involved four public, suburban school districts in New York; two of the four districts were "majority minority" districts and two districts had majority White student bodies with approximately one quarter of students identified as non-White. Districts were selected based on their public commitment to closing achievement gaps.

The selection of participants was purposive; four district superintendents and four school board trustees, one from each district, were interviewed for this study (Table 1). Data were collected via semi-standardized interviews, as defined by Lune and Berg (2017). Data collection was triangulated through observations of school board meetings and analysis of documents (e.g., policies related to closing gaps, etc.). Data analysis was conducted throughout the data collection process (transcription, coding, connecting data to research questions) as suggested by Gibbs (2007). Data were compared from one case to another as Gleason and Gerzon (2013) recommended for cross-case analysis.

Based on available data through the New York State Report Card (data.nysed.gov), the four participant districts exceeded the New York State (NYS) average 4-year high school graduation rate of 90.1% for White students for August in 2017, 2018, and 2019 and 72.2 % for Black and Hispanic students combined during that same period. The average 4-year high school graduation rate for White, Black, and Hispanic students for August 2017-August 2019 in the participant districts is illustrated in Table 2. Also included in Table 2 is the percentage the participant districts outperformed the NYS average high school graduation rates. During August 2017-August 2019, District C narrowed the 4-year high school graduation gap between White and under-represented minority students to 2% and that even with an approximately 7% difference, District D was still well below the NYS high school graduation rate gaps between the same groups of students.

## Findings

### Challenges to Narrowing Achievement Gaps

The data revealed that a major challenge to narrowing achievement gaps is stakeholders' beliefs about students' potential. In all four

districts studied, participants indicated that some teachers, community members, and parents held limiting views of students' potential. One of the superintendents in the study described the concept as "the kids can't because..." That type of negative thinking about students' capabilities because of their race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status is referred to in the academic literature as "deficit-thinking" (Maxwell et al., 2013; Turner, 2015; Welton et al., 2015; Valencia, 1997; Valencia, 2015).

The data also showed that financial obstacles to closing achievement gaps exist. In three of the four districts, interviewees referenced the financial constraints that their districts must operate in as challenges; they identified insufficient state aid and the budget limitations placed upon them by a tax levy limit as challenges to narrowing gaps. Participants spoke about "shifting" funding and "juggling" resources to meet the needs of students.

### **Strategies for Closing Achievement Gaps**

To overcome barriers to closing achievement gaps, district leaders in the four school systems studied seemed to possess an equity-oriented attitude and vision for their districts. When asked which stakeholder was most responsible for narrowing achievement gaps among students, one superintendent replied, "Me." He went on to explain how it is the responsibility of leaders to inspire and of teachers to adapt to students. Another superintendent explained the importance of setting the tone for the district and then having everyone "row in the same direction." Additionally, in interviews, successful gap-closing superintendents shared their commitment to transparent leadership when encountering resistance to their efforts to provide equity for all students.

The data suggested that an academically demanding curriculum was a strategy for narrowing achievement gaps among groups of students in three of the four districts studied. To convince a skeptical public, one superintendent shared his team's reliance on data. He explained that data are the "handmaid of the conversation [on closing achievement gaps]." In all four school systems, district leaders relied heavily on data-driven decision-making. Additionally, the data revealed that hiring teachers with an "assets-based" attitude toward students and developing those teachers are common strategies in successful gap-closing school districts. One superintendent explained that the district sought teachers "with heart, dreaming about kids, [teachers] who have no limits for kids."

### **Collaboration with School Boards**

Participants in all four districts highlighted their commitment to professional learning at local, state, and national conferences. During an observation of one district's board of education meeting, each board member spoke publicly about workshops he/she had attended at a recent school boards' conference. One interviewee in a different district shared that she felt that her role on the school board was to share information with the superintendent

and maintain the "pulse" of the community. In that school district, the board of education participant shared that the issue of hiring a more diverse faculty was a "hot topic" in the community and that it was the responsibility of trustees to convey that information to the superintendent.

Regarding collaboration, when asked what role board of education support has played in reducing achievement disparities, one superintendent indicated that the school board had allowed him to "do his job without interfering." In that same district, when asked how involved the school board had been in equity-related matters, the board of education officer replied that school board was "very involved ... informed" and that "we actually approve everything they present to us."

Another theme that emerged was the way in which the school board sometimes acts as a buffer between district administrators and the community. In at least two of the four districts in this study, participants alluded to the board's role in standing firm in the face of community resistance to district initiatives such as the elimination of lower academic tracks and the implementation of a rigorous course of study for all students.

### **Discussion**

Strategies that successful gap-closing districts use to advance their equity agendas included focusing on high quality instruction through hiring and professional development for teachers, emphasizing culturally responsive practices, removing barriers to high level curriculum for students in lower-level academic tracks, creating academic and non-academic supports for students, and partnering with community educational and non-profit organizations.

The findings revealed that superintendents and their boards of education collaborate in a multitude of ways to foster educational equity. The superintendents and school board members reported that they had positive working relationships; they had clearly defined their respective roles, engaged in professional learning, and shared information together. They also collaborated on setting a district vision, priorities, and policies. It was also evident that in the budgeting and hiring processes that the superintendents and their boards worked together to achieve best outcomes for all students in their school systems. School leaders (superintendents and board members) throughout the state might benefit from specific training about how to work together to narrow gaps in their districts.

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# How Does Opportunity to Learn Influence Student Achievement?

By Laura Ficarra, Ed.D.

## Abstract

The purpose of this article was to explore the differences in opportunity to learn between higher and lower achieving schools. Additionally, the teachers' perception of Opportunity to Learn (OTL) as it relates to students' achievement were investigated. Teachers were surveyed to investigate any difference in their perceptions of opportunity to learn, parental involvement, instructional practices, and quality of leadership between higher and lower achievement schools.

This exploratory study scrutinized the variables and demographics that might predict student achievement. The independent variables were opportunity to learn, parental involvement, instructional qualities, and quality of leadership. The dependent variable was student achievement using New York State (NYS) Math 8<sup>th</sup> Grade scores and English Language Arts (ELA).

A significant finding in this study was that student achievement was not related to student demographics. English language learners were equally matched between each pair of higher and lower performing schools. Race and Students with Disabilities were approximately equal in each set of schools. Furthermore, this study found that OTL was employed more in higher performing than in lower performing schools.

## Introduction

Opportunity to Learn (OTL) is the amount of time a teacher commits to the content of the curriculum, including instructional time, grouping, higher-order thinking questions, and evidence-based teaching practices (Elliot, 2015). The definition of OTL comprises instructional time, curriculum content, and teaching practices (Flores & Robert, 2008; Kurz, Elliot, Lemons, Zigmond, Kloo, & Kettier, 2014; Elliot, 2015). OTL has been found to have a positive relationship to student achievement (Schmidt, Burroughs, Zoldo, & Houang, 2015).

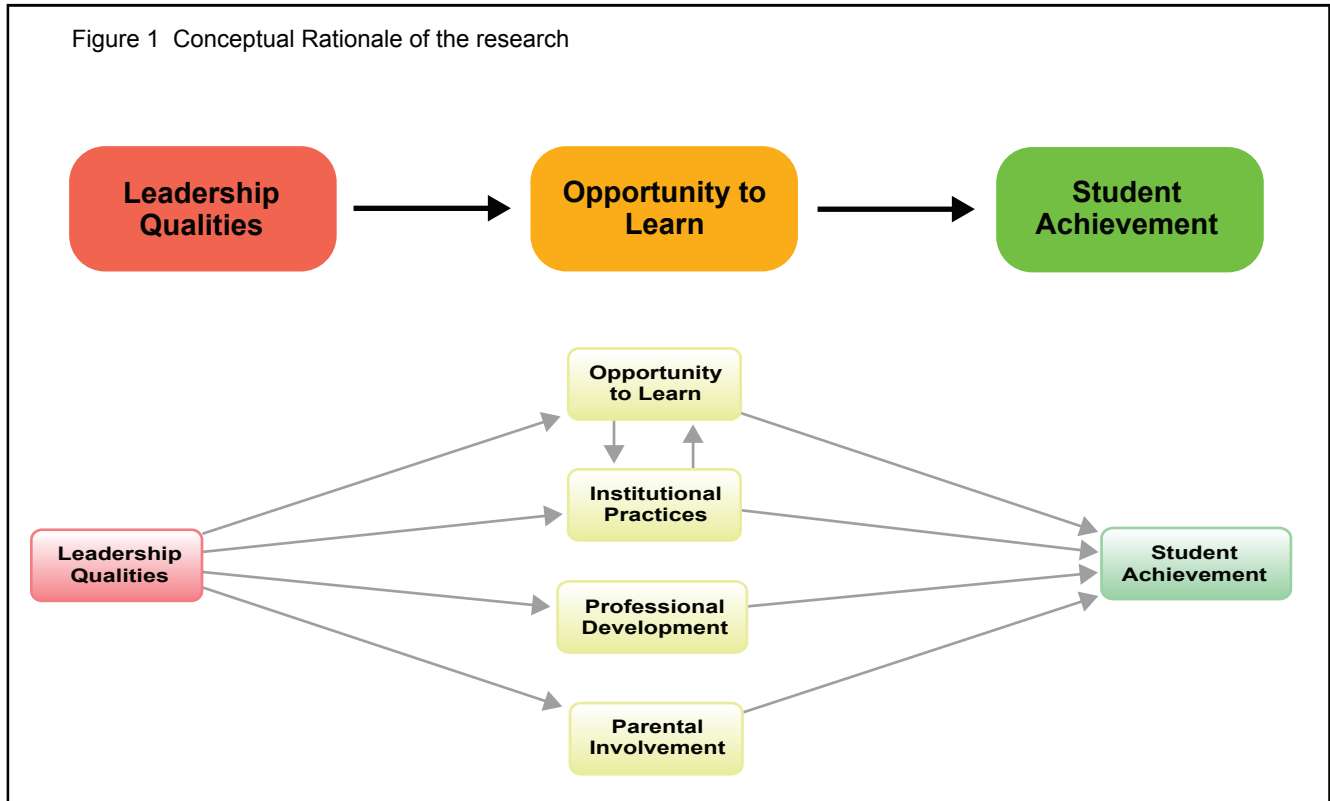
Reeves conducted a study (2012) of high school sophomore students from Database of 2004 - 2006 available from the National Center for Education Statistics using the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS). Data from 11,170 sophomores in 2004 who would be graduating in 2006 were

examined. The achievement gap for rural students during the last two years of high school, the deficiency in OTL for the rural math achievement gap, and the reason for this deficiency were examined in this study. This study broke OTL into two parts. The first concerns the school's resources to learn advanced mathematics topics such as simply offering trigonometry or calculus in the high school. The second centers on the school's inclusiveness when enrolling students in advanced math courses, as well as the quality of instruction in advanced math courses. The level of inclusiveness that counselors employed when advising students from families that are nonprofessional to take advanced math classes was examined.

The quality of instruction, if low, would indicate a lack of Opportunity to Learn for those students. Another facet explored by Reeves was the influence of friendships within academic courses and student achievement. This was measured by examining two questions on the Likert Scale, friends who have dropped out of high school and friends who plan on attending a four-year college. The findings of this study showed that students in a rural community were not given less of an Opportunity to Learn advanced mathematics. There was also no difference found between student achievement and math courses in rural and urban students. However, there was a difference between rural and suburban students' enrollment in advanced math courses. Furthermore, friends and SES did have a noticeable influence. Students who had friends that dropped out of school were less likely to take advanced math courses. Conversely, students who had friends that planned to attend a four-year college, took more advanced math courses. Therefore, the influence of family and friends could account for the achievement gap for rural students.

Schmidt, Burroughs, Zoldo, and Houang, define OTL as curriculum and the exposure of educational content (2012). Their study examined the relationship between OTL and SES (Socio-Economical Status), and how these inequalities affect student achievement, and the degree to which content coverage (OTL) and SES affect achievement. They used the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to explore the relationship between OTL and SES on student achievement in mathematical literacy. This qualitative study employed a stratified cluster sample

Figure 1 Conceptual Rationale of the research



comparing survey results for 15-year old students in various countries and grade levels. They found that OTL has a positive relationship to student achievement, a positive relationship was also found between SES and OTL, and about one third of the SES relationship to literacy was linked to OTL. Moreover, out of the 32 countries examined, the United States had the highest SES inequalities adding to the association of SES and OTL. The United States would need to address unequal content coverage within schools related to SES.

Furthermore, in a study that explored OTL within socio-economic conditions the researchers found that if OTL is high, it levels the playing field for students in lower socio-economic areas and when OTL increases, student achievement increases (Santibanez & Fagioli, 2016).

Other researchers established relationships between OTL and student achievement. The framework that links teacher practice with student achievement is Opportunity to Learn (OTL) (Perry, Sealy, Ramirez-Perez, DeNicola, & Cohen, 2015). The definition of Opportunity to Learn is teacher quality, curriculum, and instructional time (Kurz et al., 2014). OTL has a positive relationship to student achievement (Schmidt et al., 2015).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the differences between Opportunity to Learn within higher and lower achieving schools. Furthermore, this study investigated the variables and demographics that predict student achievement.

### Conceptual Framework

The direct and indirect relationship between principal quality and student achievement is shown in the Ripple Effect (Leithwood et al., 2004). The essence of the **Ripple Effect** is that teacher and instructional practices influence student achievement which is directly impacted by principals' practices (Leithwood et al., 2004; Clifford et al., 2012). This conceptual framework examines if OTL is the crucial equalizer for students in lower achieving schools.

The following research question guided this study:

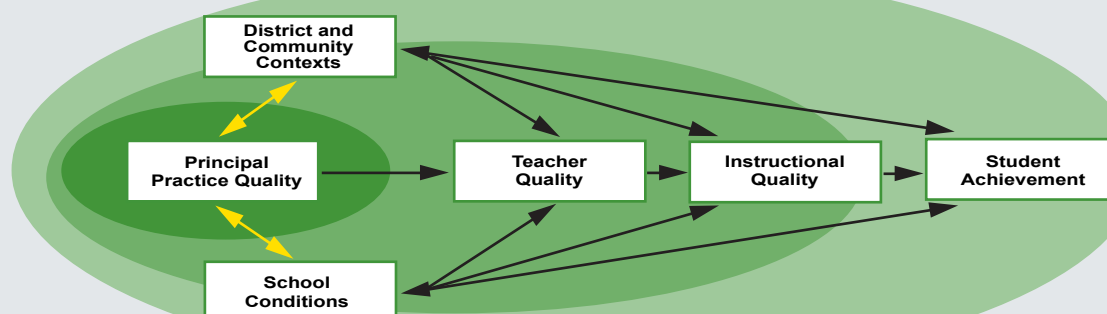
How do teachers in higher and lower achieving schools differ on students' opportunity to learn, instructional practices, parental involvement, their principal's leadership qualities, and teacher's professional development?

### Review of Related Literature

#### Opportunity to Learn

Opportunity to Learn (OTL) is defined as teacher quality, curriculum content, and time on task (Flores & Robert, 2008; Kurz et al, 2014; Elliot, 2015). OTL is the time a teacher dedicates content coverage to the expected curriculum and time on instructional, accentuation higher-order thinking, grouping, and evidence-based instruction (Elliot, 2015). OTL incorporates teachers cooperating collaboration (Schmidt et al., 2015).

**Figure 2. The Ripple Effect: Framework for Principal Impact**



Source: Halliger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003

### **Student Achievement**

Student achievement is measured using New York State English Language Arts and Math 8th Grade scores for the purpose of this study. Schools whose students score above average on New York State 8th grade Common Core English Arts and Math Assessments are operationally defined as higher achieving schools. Schools whose students score below New York State average on 8th grade Common Core English Language Arts and Math Assessments are operationally defined as lower achieving schools.

### **Instructional Practices**

For the purpose of this study, Opportunity to Learn did not include instructional practices as theorized by Elliot (2015). The operational definition of instructional practices is teaching using evidence based and differentiated lessons that incorporate higher order thinking during content coverage of curriculum, time on task, and reflective teaching. Researchers have confirmed that instructional practices include quality of instruction, content coverage, and time on instruction (Kurz et al., 2014; Elliot, 2015).

### **Professional Development**

Professional development is professional growth and the continuous learning of pedagogy that provides immense progress in teachers' instructional practices (Wilson, Sztajin, Edgington, & Myers, 2015). Professional development is the unceasing training of teachers that aligns with the curriculum and focuses on the district mission and vision (Manley & Hawkins, 2010).

Kurz et al., (2014) conducted a quantitative study across three states to examined OTL for Students with Disabilities (SWD). They employed MyiLOGS, an online program that uses a Likert Scale to monitor OTL in the classroom.

The OTL definition they used in their study included three key dimensions which were content, time, and quality of instruction. The study was conducted during a 151-day period. The participants of the study were 38 general and special education teachers which included 89 SWD and 49 reading and math classes.

The researchers found that SWD in general education classes experienced more non-instructional time, less time on standards, and less content coverage than their overall class (Kurz et al., 2014). They found some limitations to the study. One limitation that the researchers found was that, although it was across three states, it was a small sample as well as a limited class type. Therefore, it lacked generalizability. However, other research was consistent with their previous studies. Their recommendations consist of improvement of SWD instructional practices and further research on OTL assessments. They also recommended to find an alternative method of assessment other than standardize testing. These recommendations emphasized the need to expand methods of assessing schools to elucidate how to make improvement and the complexity of assessing OTL.

Reeves (2012) used the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) Database from 2004 - 2006 available from the National Center for Education Statistics to examine 11,170 sophomores in 2004 that would be graduating in 2006. In this study, OTL is defined as supply and demand function. The supply is the resources within the school that fostered advanced mathematical course such as calculus and trigonometry (Reeves, 2012). The demand function represents the quality of instruction and the school's inclusive and practices to enroll students in more advanced math classes (Reeves, 2012). The latter refers to the probability of recommendations by counselors to students from nonprofessional families to enroll in advanced math classes. This component is crucial when trying to understand performance and

achievement among students. These beliefs from teachers and counselors about their students negatively affects students.

If school personnel such as teachers and counselors believe that students from certain demographic backgrounds cannot manage metacognitive undertakings and do not provide them with them the resources they need to become successful, OTL is being denied. This dimension of organizational climate is what Tagueri described as organization culture which referred to the behavior of the individuals within the organization (Owens, 2004). Smith (2001) discussed how these biases were what Senge called mental models. Milieu is what Tagueri coined as another dimension of organizational climate (Owens, 2004). Tagueri's milieu includes the organizational social dimension which comprise social interactions and demographical facets of an organization (Owens, 2004).

Schmidt, Burroughs, Zoldo, and Houang, conducted a study that analyzed the correlation between Socio-Economical Status (SES) and OTL (2012) and if and how these disparities influence the extent of content coverage (OTL), student achievement, and how SES affects achievement. The researchers defined OTL as contact to educational content and curriculum (Schmidt et al., 2012). This qualitative study used the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to explore the connection between OTL and SES on student achievement in mathematical literacy. A stratified cluster sample compared 15-year old's surveys in various grade levels from 32 countries (Schmidt et al., 2012). Schmidt et al. (2012) found that OTL had a positive relationship with SES, and about one third of the SES relationship to literacy was linked to OTL.

Santibanez and Fagioli, (2016) conducted a study that found if students in lower SES areas have a high OTL, student achievement rises. The plethora of research supporting the importance of OTL and how student achievement correlates with OTL underscores why OTL should be further researched.

### Parental Involvement

Parents' roles in their child's life is not only crucial at home but equivalently important at school. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) echoed this sentiment when creating this legislation. NCLB (2004) emphasized the collective responsibility amid schools and parents to improve learning and teaching. The definition of parental involvement according to NCLB (2004) orders parental involvement and allotted finances to support Title I which incorporates a legally binding contract between schools and parents (Department of Education, 2004). Parental involvement includes parents' significant role in child's learning, parents were persuaded to be an integral parent of their child's education (Department of Education, 2004). Furthermore, parents were included in their child's education such as advisory committees and decision-making (Department

of Education, 2004). Other legislation from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) also stressed that schools should collaborate with families while administrators are regarded as the primary educational leaders (Florida Gulf Coast University, 1997). The National Education Association (NEA) also reiterated that parental involvement is just as important as curriculum, test scores and national standards (National Education Act, 2008).

Parental involvement has been proven to be a catalyst for academic achievement (Rapp & Duncan, 2011). Parental involvement increases student aptitude, sense of belonging, and provides a sense of wellbeing (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Parental involvement was found to increase student achievement and was just as significant as school leadership and teacher quality (Gaynor, 2012).

Epstein (2011) stressed that parental involvement should be a joint responsibility between them and the school regarding a student's development and learning, not just sharing information, accomplishment celebrations, and problem solving. Parents should also nurture interest in school activities, help their child with homework, promote reading, and limit television watching (Hornby & Witte, 2010).

Moreover, Jeynes (2005) also found a statistically significant relationship between academic achievement and parental involvement regardless of race and gender in urban area students.

Rapp stated that parents should consistently be implored to be involved with their child's education (Rapp, 2005). Moreover, parental involvement was shown to increase the likelihood their child will graduate high school (Lopez et al., 2001). Parental involvement and parental engagement are used interchangeable. However, they are not the same. Parental involvement is affiliated with participation, while engagement is affiliated with commitment which includes strategic planning and shared decision making (Bernato, 2017). Regardless, both variables were related significantly to student achievement.

### Instructional Practices

Instructional practices were found to be more important than amount of time spent in class as a forecaster of higher student achievement (Yair, 2000). Student achievement in mathematics was also linked to instructional practices (Firmender et al., 2014). Palardy and Rumberger (2008) found that instructional practices were much more related to raising student achievement than background characteristics.

### Professional Development

Professional development should be an unceasing training of teachers to help them reach their highest potential and address the district's and school's mission and vision (Manley & Hawkins, 2010). The effectiveness of professional development should be assessed to make better

informed choices as to what professional development should address (Koellner & Jacobs, 2015). Higgin & Bonne (2011) found professional development not only increased student achievement and it promoted a climate of trust.

### The Sample and Population

The location of this study was in the Northeast region of the United States in a suburban area known as Long Island. Long Island is a bedroom community of New York City and contains a wide range of demographic areas. Ninety-five (95) teachers from four schools responded to the survey. There was a minimum of 20 surveys completed from each school. Two of the schools were high performing and two were low performing in Long Island, New York.

### Instruments

#### Survey

Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013 Teacher Questionnaire was also used as a guide to develop the survey used in this study. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international educational consortium that develop TALIS to survey principal and teachers in over 30 countries including the United States of America. Each of the TALIS questions were examined and only the ones that pertained to the variables in this study were used to create the questions in the survey instrument. A five-point Likert scale was used in the survey. **Table 1** outlines how each question relates to the variables in the study.

### Procedures for Collecting Data

Subsequent to Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, a semi-structured interview protocol and survey were utilized that were adapted from Teaching and Learning International Survey (2013). A purposeful sample of middle school principals were mailed consent letters. Thereafter, principals were followed up with phone calls to build interest to participate and schedule interviews. Eight principals were interviewed from higher and lower achieving schools. Those principals that were interviewed, then shared the survey to their middle school teachers. The five-point Likert Scaled survey was color coded to differentiate between higher and lower achieving schools. The purpose of the study was explained in an invitation letter that also stated that anonymity and confidentiality would be upheld. Participants could withdraw from the study at any point and was conducted voluntarily.

### Reliability

Reliability tests were used for each variable in this study. Cronbach alpha coefficients' calculations are shown in **Table 2**. When analyzing the reliability of the variables, the researcher eliminated some items.

### Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, three research questions were formulated to guide this study.

<b>Table 1</b>				
Survey Questions by Dimension				
Variable	Item	Number of Items	Range	Source
Opportunity to Learn	22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27	6	6 to 30	Kurz, et al. (2014); Elliot (2015); TALIS (2013)
Parental Involvement	29,30,31,33,34r	5	5 to 25	Robbins & Searby (2015); TALIS (2013)
Instructional Practices	6, 7, 8, 9, 10	5	5 to 25	Firmender, et al. (2014); TALIS (2013)
Professional Development	12,14,15,16,17,18,19r	7	7 to 35	Wilson et al. (2015); TALIS (2013)

<b>Table 2</b>				
Refined Variables Table				
Dimension	Item	Items	Raw Score	Alpha Coefficient
Opportunity to Learn	22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27	6	6 to 30	0.763
Parental Involvement	29,30,31,33,34r	5	5 to 25	0.741
Instructional Practices	6, 7, 8, 9, 10	5	5 to 25	0.728

**Table 3**

Independent Samples t-Test Comparing the Difference of Teachers' Perceptions of OTL, PI, IP, And LQ Based on Their School Achievement

	<i>School Achievement</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
OTL	Low	45	23.22	3.16	-2.89	.005
	High	49	25.12	3.20		
PI	Low	45	13.18	4.89	-2.22	.030
	High	49	15.08	3.18		
IP	Low	45	21.18	2.38	-2.17	.033
	High	49	22.29	2.56		
LQ	Low	42	25.69	4.03	-2.87	.005
	High	42	28.12	3.71		

OTL – Opportunity to Learn, PI – Parental Involvement, IP – Instructional Practices, LQ- Leadership Qualities

### Research Question One

How do teachers in higher and lower achieving schools differ on students' opportunity to learn, instructional practices, parental involvement, effective leadership qualities, and teacher's professional development?

Research question One was answered by using a series of independent sample t-tests and mean scores for each dimension in higher and lower achieving schools. Opportunity to learn (OTL) variable contained six items with a six to 30 score range. The standard deviation was 3.30 with a mean score of 24.21. The mean score was 4.03 when divided by the number of items signifying that teachers not only agreed that OTL should be used but also employed OTL in their classroom and they consider OTL as an important practice to be implemented and to address student achievement. Parental involvement (PI) was comprised of an actual range of five through 25 of five items and the mean score was 14.17 with a standard deviation of 4.18. The mean score was 2.83 when divided by the number of items signifying teachers slightly agreed that they implement PI and slightly agreed it is an indispensable resource toward student achievement.

### Research Question Two

What were the relationships among students' opportunity to learn, instructional practices, parental involvement, their principal's leadership qualities, teacher's professional development, and teacher's gender, years of experience, level of education and higher and lower achievement?

Research question two was answered using correlation analysis.

The correlational analysis results presented in **Table 4** indicating that OTL is strongly correlated with parental involvement with  $r = .301$  where 9% of the variance shared by OTL and PI. Subsequently, schools that utilize OTL anticipate high level of parental involvement. Furthermore, OTL is strongly correlated with Instructional practices (IP) 23 percent of the variance is shared by OTL and IP ( $r = .482$ ). Hence, when high use of OTL occurs in school classrooms, high IP is expected, as well as higher math and ELA test scores.

### Research Question Three

Research question three asked which variable predicted student achievement. A multiple regression table was used to answer this question.

The Exp(B) value of item principal leadership qualities (1.179) indicated that for each one-point increase of Principal leadership item, the probability of that school of being placed in a high-achieving school increased by 1.179 times.

The logistical regression analysis found that the variables teacher level of education, teacher gender, teacher years of teaching, teacher age, opportunity to learn, parental involvement, and instructional practices were not added to the prediction model as they were not found to be significant predictors of student achievement. The correlation analysis demonstrates a high relationship between School Leadership Quality and Opportunity to Learn, indicating that teachers perceived the quality of the principal's leadership was related to opportunities to learn and instructional practices.



**Table 4**

Correlation among OTL, PI, IP, LQ, Gender, Years of Experience, Level Of Education, and Higher &amp; Lower Achievement

		OTL	PI	IP	LQ	Gender	Years Teaching	Level of Education
PI	r	.301**						
	r <sup>2</sup>	0.09						
	N	94						
IP	r	.482**	.490**					
	r <sup>2</sup>	0.23	0.24					
	N	94	94					
LQ	r	.506**	.606**	.540**				
	r <sup>2</sup>	0.25	0.37	0.29				
	N	84	84	84				
Gender	r	0.080	0.18	.257*	0.213			
	r <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.03	0.07	0.04			
	N	94	94	94	84			
Years	r	0.089	-0.101	-0.031	-0.011	-0.061		
Teaching	r <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	N	94	94	94	84	94		
Level of	r	-0.085	-0.029	-0.085	-0.078	-0.075	.374**	
Education	r <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.14	
	N	94	94	94	84	94	94	
hl2	r	.288**	.229*	.221*	.303**	-0.052	.262*	0.192
	r <sup>2</sup>	0.08	0.05	0.05	0.09	0.00	0.07	0.04
	N	94	94	94	84	94	94	94

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

OTL - Opportunity to Learn, PI - Parental Involvement, IP - Instructional Practices, LQ - Leadership Qualities.

High 49 22.29 2.56

OTL – Opportunity to Learn, PI – Parental Involvement, IP – Instructional Practices

**Table 5**

Variables in The Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	P	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Principal Leadership Qualities	.165	.062	7.042	1	.008	1.179
	Constant	-4.440	1.694	6.868	1	.009	.012

a. Variable(s) entered on Step1: Leadership Qualities.

## Conclusions

The findings in this study reveal that higher achieving schools have significant higher levels of opportunity to learn, parental involvement, effective instructional practices and quality of leadership.

For teachers to improve opportunity to learn they may utilize small group instruction, employ data driven instruction, give more frequent student feedback, and differentiate instruction according to student needs. Another recommendation is to incorporate MyiLogs (educational system) into their daily practice since it lets teachers document instructional practices, utilize data, and provides the teachers with related feedback to improve instructional practices, differentiation of instruction and assessment of learning (Elliot, Roach, & Kurz, 2014).

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## Developing Grit in our Students: Why Grit is Such a Desirable Trait, and Practical Strategies for Teachers and Schools

By Jennifer Bashant, Ph.D.

### Introduction

Why do most individuals make use of only a small percentage of their resources, whereas a few exceptional individuals push themselves to their limits? Why do some individuals accomplish more than others of equal intelligence? One personal quality that is shared by most high achieving and successful people is grit. Grit may be the quality that sets these highly successful individuals apart from everyone else (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007).

There has been a lot of talk recently about grit and how to develop it within our students. Grit is the quality that enables individuals to work hard and stick to their long-term passions and goals. It makes sense that this would be important for students, both in school and in life. Can one learn to have grit? How do you teach it? These are some of the essential questions that will be addressed in this research brief with the hope that you will gain a deeper understanding of what is meant by "grit," and that you will discover a couple new ways to encourage students to be more "gritty."

According to leading researcher, Angela Duckworth, grit can probably be taught. "Kids may have the wrong beliefs and have misunderstandings about skill development...beliefs that stand in the way of tapping into performance traits." When students struggle with a task, they may believe that they lack the ability to solve the problem and, therefore, give up. It is important for students to understand that it is ok to feel confused when learning something new, and actually, it is expected. We can teach students that making mistakes or taking a long time to complete an assignment is a normal part of learning, not a sign of failure.

### Definition of Grit

According to researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, grit is defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals." Grit involves working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. While disappointment or boredom may lead most people to change trajectory, the

gritty individual stays the course" (Duckworth et al, 2007). We all can identify people in our lives who have big ideas and a lot of enthusiasm for many projects, only to drop them within a few weeks. Individuals with a lot of grit tend to set very long-term objectives and do not lose sight of them, even when they are not getting any positive feedback.

Resilience, as defined by Martin Seligman, a researcher from the University of Pennsylvania and creator of the evidence-based Penn Resiliency Program, is "the ability to appraise situations without distorting them, and thinking about changes that are possible in your life" (Perkins-Gough, 2013). Resilience is related to grit because part of what it means to be gritty is to be resilient when challenges present themselves. There are many other traits one must possess in order to be gritty, which include conscientiousness, self-discipline and perseverance. Having grit means that you choose to invest time and energy in a particular endeavor and give up many other things in order to pursue this passion. Gritty people have deep commitments to which they remain loyal for many years.

### Research Supporting the Importance of Grit

So why should we pay so much attention to grit? Duckworth and Seligman (2005, 2007) have demonstrated that grit, perseverance and self-discipline are better predictors of success in college than the SAT or IQ tests. These standardized tests serve an important function, but are limited in their ability to measure important traits such as grit and self-control.

Angela Duckworth and Deborah Perkins-Gough conducted a study at West Point Military Academy in order to look at how well grit would predict who would stay for the entire program. Although West Point has a rigorous admissions process, about 1 in 20 cadets drop out before the first academic year begins (Perkins-Gough, 2013). As part of the study, the cadets each took a short grit questionnaire when they first arrived. This score was actually a better predictor of who would stay than any other measure West Point looked at. There have been similar findings with many other groups,

including the National Spelling Bee contestants and first year teachers in really tough schools. When one considers individuals of equal talent, the grittier people do better.

There have been many studies that show the importance of self-discipline in achieving positive outcomes such as academic success, happiness and overall competence (Mischel, Shoda & Rodriguez, 1989; Ayduk et al, 2000; Funder, Block & Block, 1983; Duckworth, 2009). Self-discipline is defined as "the capacity to do what you want to do. It's knowing how to manage your emotions and thoughts and knowing how to plan your behavior in order to reach your goals" (Duckworth, 2009). In 1995, Wolf and Johnson conducted a study which found that self-discipline was the only one among 32 measured personality traits that predicted college GPA better than the SAT did (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

In a study by Duckworth and Seligman (2005), highly disciplined adolescents outperformed their peers that were more impulsive on all academic variables, including grades, standardized test scores, admission to a competitive high school and attendance. Self-discipline also predicted which students would improve their grades throughout the year, while IQ scores did not.

The Big Five model has provided a framework for many of the studies on traits that predict success. Personality psychologists, for the most part, agree that the five-factor model encompasses all of the major personality traits and organizes them into a framework. These five factors are conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, emotional stability and openness to new experiences. Relative to the other big five traits, conscientiousness is the most reliable predictor of academic course grades, physical health, longevity, job performance and marital stability (Duckworth, Weir, Tsukayama & Kwok, 2012). Conscientious individuals are more likely to avoid unnecessary interpersonal conflict and to settle conflicts when they occur. These behaviors may explain why conscientiousness predicts how many friends children will have better than intelligence or any other big five trait. In addition, conscientious individuals perform better in school which often leads to better paying jobs, and for some, greater subjective well-being (Duckworth et al, 2012).

### **Grit Versus Talent**

At one time or another, we all have been impressed by an athlete, a student or a musician whom we would label as "talented." Talent, however, is only part of the picture. In his book, *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell talks about the 10,000 hours of practice required to excel at a particular skill. "I believe ability can get you to the top," says coach John Woodin, "but it takes character to keep you there. It's so easy to begin thinking you can just turn it on automatically, without proper preparation. It takes real character to keep working as hard, or even harder once you are there. When you read about an athlete or a team that wins over and over and over, remind yourself that more than ability, they have character" (Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*).

In terms of academics, if students are just trying to reach the threshold of getting an A, and they also happen to be very talented, they may do their homework or study for a test in just a few minutes. Once they reach a certain level of proficiency, then they stop. They actually work less hard than their peers for whom the work is challenging. If, on the other hand, they are not just trying to reach a certain cut point, but are trying to learn as much as possible by doing as well as they can, then there is no limit to what can be accomplished.

There are a lot of fragile gifted and talented kids who don't know how to fail. They don't know how to struggle, and they don't have a lot of practice with it. "Being gifted is no guarantee of being hardworking or passionate about something. The people who are ambitious and have no limit to how much they want to understand, learn or succeed are both talented and gritty" (Perkins-Gough, 2013). According to Galton (1892) who collected biographical information about highly successful people (judges, statesmen, scientists, etc.), "ability alone did not bring about success in any field. Rather, successful high achievers also possessed zeal and the capacity for hard labor" (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007).

### **Encouraging Grit and Character**

According to Carol Dweck in *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, "After seven experiments with hundreds of children, we had some of the clearest findings I've ever seen. Praising children's intelligence harms their motivation and it harms their performance. Children love praise, and especially for their intelligence and talent. It really does give them a boost, a special glow - but only for that moment. The minute they hit a snag, their confidence goes out the window and their motivation hits rock bottom. If success means they are smart, then failure means they are dumb. That's the fixed mindset."

Children who have more of a growth mindset tend to be grittier. The attitude that "I can get better if I try harder," most likely results in the development of a tenacious, hardworking person. "In theory, the work that Carol Dweck has done to show that you can change your mindset would also be relevant to changing your grit." Duckworth and her colleagues at University of Pennsylvania are developing an intervention, based on Dweck's work, to look at making students aware of the value of deliberate practice. The intervention requires teachers to tell kids that practice is not easy...that they are going to be confused...frustrated. Teachers explain that when you are learning, you have to make mistakes and do things over and over again which can be boring (Perkins-Gough, 2013).

Tim Elmore recently wrote a blog about building perseverance in students based on the findings that students in Singapore are far more persistent in problem solving than American students. He explains that although we live in a world of speed and convenience (ATMs, high-speed internet access, fast, Instagram), this speed has diminished perseverance and work ethic in our kids. He recommends

the following strategies to encourage perseverance in students:

- Talk about the power of attitude and persistence. Singapore teachers repeatedly talk to their students from a young age about attitude and persistence. They underscore how valuable this trait is for success in life.
- Turn the problem into a picture or puzzle. Singapore teaching methods include "model drawing." Students turn math problems into a picture and the graphic helps them solve the problem by engaging both sides of the brain.
- Start with smaller problems they can more easily solve and help them get some quick wins.
- Share the "why" before the "what." We often fail to inspire kids because we don't share the relevance of the problem.
- When possible, place students in communities to work together. Students learn best in communities where they can solve problems in cooperation with peers. They often give up when they feel alone and inferior.
- Make it a game or competition.
- Reward hard work and delayed gratification. What gets rewarded gets repeated. Affirm hard work and actually reward completion in the end.

Research shows that how students conceive their abilities in relation to a task can shape the outcome. Discussing students' strengths in a setting where they feel unsure of themselves sets a positive tone and removes a barrier to success (Pappano, 2013). However, attempting to boost students' self-esteem with words is less effective than asking them to persevere on a challenging task.

### Action Steps for Teachers and Schools

In order to build character and grit in students, it is essential to also develop a school culture that emphasizes character and grit (Dean, 2014). Many times, a character education program is implemented on top of an existing school culture, but copying and pasting a program is not likely to be successful.

In one school that is successfully teaching grit and character, they use advisory to explicitly teach the important skills and mindset. This teaching is supported by much of what happens outside of the advisory, including "modeling by teachers, the use of a common language about character, and the recognition that all students play a role in character development. In addition, students are given room to challenge authority in the school, set the agenda for school meetings, and engage with social issues beyond the school walls" (Dean, 2014).

One assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction explained that the administrators in his district firmly believe that character education and positive school

climate are the keys to reducing discipline problems and raising student achievement. He researched this topic for two years by reading about Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and by reading Ross Green's *Lost at School* and Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed*. He decided to build a period of time into the schedule in the middle schools to address school culture and climate concerns as well as to implement character education and citizenship classes. Topics such as "how to have good conversations, be an active listener, build meaningful relationships, set goals and pursue them, and recognize the consequences of behavior were taught" (Perkins-Gough, 2013). This school was part of a study conducted by Angela Duckworth who found that their character-building program has yielded results at the elementary level, middle school level and even in the ninth grade. In ninth grade, when many students have trouble adjusting to higher demands, retention rates have decreased, discipline problems have fallen and student achievement has risen (Perkins-Gough, 2013).

Another school that has been studied by Duckworth's team has been successful in teaching intellectual virtues through repeated action and practice. One third grade teacher in this school has posters about "Intellectual Aggressiveness" along with examples of their use such as "Use Evidence to Support your Ideas." This teacher says things like, "Talk to your neighbor and let's be intellectually aggressive about this." He says it is important to have language around these skills which allows him to attach it to their struggles or behaviors that may take them away from being successful. When students in his class misbehave, he interprets this as masking a lack of knowledge. He looks through such behaviors to give students the message that "you can fight through this and you can be successful" (Pappano, 2013).

One high school math teacher described how instead of showing approaches to a geometry problem, he lets students struggle until they uncover the principle themselves. He gets students interested by saying things like, "Let's be curious about this." His students are motivated, not because of the grade, but because they are curious and they truly want to learn. If the question is framed correctly, it spurs something intrinsic inside of them (Pappano, 2013).

In a study of three successful Boston charter schools, researchers concluded that success is derived from a two-part model: (1) establishing a common vocabulary around character strengths and then (2) utilizing the vocabulary in very specific instructional moments. If a student is struggling with an essay, the teacher might say, "Let me show you how to be really gritty." If a student gives up too quickly or lacks the self-confidence to persist in math, the student and teacher can reflect and discuss, "How does that feel? What does it look like? How does it affect me? Together they can make a plan to challenge the idea that the student can't figure out problems or is inclined to give up quickly. If he usually gives up after one try, he can decide that next week he will try three times before giving up, or will commit to getting help after school."



## Conclusion

Although there are many interventions and strategies that can be implemented in order to develop grit, it is the quality of interactions and interventions - not the strategies themselves - that matter most. "Human change occurs more readily in the context of caring and trusting relationships" (Pappano, 2013). We must remember the importance of providing social emotional support to our students. "If public schools start to devalue social workers, counselors and school psychologists - if they don't understand that these people are a key part of the learning situation for kids - then we are in big trouble." Schools, especially those facing major challenges, should not be afraid to look into partnerships with research universities. The more relationships schools can build with outside resources, the better off they are going to be (Perkins-Gough, 2013).

Schools should devote more - not less - intentional effort to developing grit in students. Teaching grit means helping students understand how to set and achieve their goals. When we teach students how to regulate their attention, emotions and behavior, we empower them to pursue goals that are most important to them (Duckworth, 2009), which sets the stage for helping each student reach his or her full potential.

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# Challenges to Inclusivity: An Investigation of Transgender Policy Implementation at a Suburban High School

By Eustace Thompson, Ph.D. and Jeffrey Harris, Ed.D.

## Abstract

The national policy context regarding transgender students' rights has been volatile in recent years. New York State's Department of Education has a transgender policy in place, yet local school districts around New York State do not. This qualitative case study examined how district and school staff perceived the knowledge and effectiveness of transgender policies. Findings suggest a policy breakdown created by key stakeholders at both the district and school levels that leave transgender students vulnerable.

Transgender students appear to be a small but growing community. The findings from research on transgender, non-binary, and nonconforming (collectively referred here as "trans") students, indicate that this group is marginalized in most school environments (Meyer, 2022). Herman et al. (2022) reported that from 2017- 2020 the number of students identifying as transgender had nearly doubled. Their analysis, based on government health survey data, estimated that 1.4 percent of 13- to 17-year-olds and 1.3 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds were transgender, compared with about 0.5 percent of all adults.

School administrators are tasked with addressing the needs of trans students. In 2022 NYS adopted the Professional Standards for School Leaders (PSEL) standards to address issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. Their application to trans students is contained in the statement, school leaders are to act as inclusive leaders and "equity-oriented change agents" (Maxwell, Locke, & Scheurich, 2013, p. 1).

Gender inclusivity leadership is a growing area of concern especially related to trans students. A transgender person is an individual whose gender identity does not match stereotypes or the sex assigned to him or her at birth (Beese, & Martin, 2018). There has been increased research focusing on meeting the needs of these students and their subsequent impact on school districts (Beese et al., 2018; Cicero, & Wesp, 2017; Craig et al., 2018; Macgillivray & Meyer et al., 2022).

## Statement of Problem

Although some districts and states have developed laws and policies to improve the experiences of trans students, many are either ill-conceived, ineffectively implemented, or reinforce restrictive and inflexible structures regulating gender (Omercajic & Martino, 2020). In addition, the complexity of the experience of trans in school environments is further heightened by their special status within the larger LGBTQ group. Some researchers argue that the trans population should be viewed separately from the LGBTQ community. They identify trans as having greater gender minority stress than other LGBTQ groups due to the marginalizing ideologies and social norms of the privilege accorded to cisgender people (Riggs and Treharne, 2017).

## Gaps in Research

There is an extensive body of literature that exists for district administrators related to policies pertaining to the bullying and harassment of transgender students (Agge-Aguayo et al., 2017; Atteberry-Ash et al., 2019; Craig et al., 2018; Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2017). However, researchers have not analyzed the perception toward and effectiveness of district policies, or lack thereof, at the secondary school level. Additionally, scant literature was found that analyzed communication issues about trans students within schools. This includes intra-staff communication. Lastly, there is a dearth of literature focused on the exploration of school district personnel's perspectives on the effectiveness of how school districts address the challenges and threats to transgender students (Agge-Aguayo et al., 2017; Atteberry-Ash, Kattari, Speer, Guz, and Kattari, 2019; Craig et al., 2018; Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2017).

## Research Question

What are the perceptions of district and school personnel regarding the effectiveness of district and school policies and procedures for addressing potential challenges and threats to transgender youths?

## Theoretical Framework

This study used a five-stream Policy Implementation framework developed by Kingdon (1996) and refined by Howlett (2019). This framework was aligned to the issue of transgender policy and practice implementation in schools because it focuses on the actors and events active in the implementation phase of public policy-making. Although the stages (agenda setting, policy formation, decision-making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation) are interconnected with traversing factors, our focus was on the Decision-making and Implementation stages.

## Field Setting

This case study took place in a suburban school district in the New York City metropolitan area consisting of one high school, one middle school, one 4-5 school, and two K-3. Approximately 1,300 students are currently enrolled in the high school.

## Participants

The selected participants were three district-level employees Jack (superintendent), Tom (Assistant Superintendent), and Matt (Assistant Superintendent), two Board of Education members (Frank and Angela), administrators included Principal (Rob), and two Assistant Principals (Liz and Carmine), and seven support staff members. The support staff included a school social worker (Patty), two school psychologists (May and Ken), and five guidance counselors (Mia, Olivia, Kim, Emily and Ava).

## Data Collection

This qualitative, intrinsic case study utilized a purposeful sampling strategy. This method was appropriate as it provided an extensive investigation of a specific student group (Myers, D., (2013). This study included data collection from interviews with district-level, building-level administration, Board of Education members, and support staff. This study also included an analysis of documents and focus groups of Board of Education members and guidance counselors. Interviews took approximately 30-40 minutes each. Documents analyzed included minutes from Board of Education meetings, the Dignity for All Students Act form, school board policies, student agenda books/calendar, curriculum documents from the school's health classes, U.S. Department of Education's "Dear Colleague Letters" from 2016 and 2017, Title IX, and other Office of Civil Rights papers.

## Data Analysis

Two coding cycles were used to analyze data. The first cycle which was line by line open coding combined an inductive and deductive approach to the data and enabled the researchers to provide a narrative analysis. Atlas-ti was the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (caqdas) used in this study. Second cycle coding enabled a

cross-analysis of the data leading to the development of themes aligned to the research questions. The last analysis cycle was axial coding that enabled analyzing categories into emerging patterns.

## Policies

Although the Title IX federal law covers all public schools receiving federal funding, there have been several interpretations of the law in reference to transgender youth. Based on the "Dear Colleague Letter" issued in 2011 by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, transgender youth could theoretically legally sue for protection under Title IX for sexual harassment and sexual violence. Because of legal challenges to this interpretation, President Biden in Executive Order 14021 of 2021 clarified the status of trans by specifically identifying 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity' protection against discrimination and sexual violence (Kingkade, 2022). The Dignity Act was signed into law on September 13, 2010, and took effect on July 1, 2012. It focused on the concepts of tolerance, respect for others and dignity for all groups including areas of sexual orientation and gender identity. The Dignity Act further amended Section 2801 of the Education Law by requiring Boards of Education to include language addressing The Dignity Act in their codes of conduct.

## Literature Review

This review of the literature found federal and state policies impacted transgender students on a multitude of levels (Colvin, 2019; Crissman et al., 2020; Jarpe-Ratner et al., 2021; Kull et al., 2016; Schuster et al., 2016; Watkins et al., 2017; Wernick et al., 2014; White et al., 2018). These factors affected school culture and climate, school strategies and procedures, and gender inclusivity. School culture, climate, and experiences were found to be critical for transgender students as they continue to function within a system of shared values, norms, safety concerns, and student outcomes (Crissman et al., 2020). School-based Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs were found to be a voice for transgender students that could create a system of accountability, and most importantly, safe spaces (Bishop et al., 2011; Colvin, 2019; Craig et al., 2018; Kull et al., 2016; Silveira et al., 2016; White et al., 2018). Perceptions about school safety, including bullying and harassment, and trans-phobia were found to be critical as they intertwined with many elements, including climate and gender inclusivity (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2019; Craig et al., 2018; Hattford-Letchfield, 2017; Meyer et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2016; Wernick et al., 2014). The importance of support staff and professional development were found to play an important role in the lives of transgender youth (Colvin, 2019; Craig et al., 2018; Jarpe-Ratner et al., 2021; Russell et al., 2016). Finally, a lack of gender inclusivity and a hidden curriculum has been found in the literature to affect transgender students. The review of literature has shown that federal and state government policies were found to help and hinder transgender youth.

**Figure 2**

Policy Implementation School & District Levels	Perceived Levels of Policy Effectiveness for Transgender Inclusivity	Perceived Levels of Policy Protection offers for Transgender Students
Boards of Education /Superintendent	High	High
Principal and Assistant Principals	Moderate	Moderate
High School Staff (Social worker, guidance counselors, psychologist)	Low	Low

## Findings

Above, we explore the three major findings that emerged from the data analysis. **Figure 2** references the research question by identifying the variations of trans policy perceptions by participant groups.

### ***Lack of Alignment of Perceived Levels of Policy Effectiveness & Protection***

The DASA Code of Conduct guided decision-making for the actions of district/school personnel at all levels, however, the three levels of the district organization differed on the effectiveness of policy in the support of trans students. The Board deemed the DASA policy to be effective in addressing trans issues. Board members in interviews and focus groups concurred, with trustee Angela, "The transgender element has been included in the DASA and the Code of Conduct, there's nothing on the front burner as far as policies that are being looked at or are being moved forward with." Board member Frank added, "The only thing that we had was the issue with the bathrooms (single-stall bathroom) and that was addressed and taken care of. Nothing really has come up since then. We don't need any additional policies." Angela during the focus group added, "Through the enforcement of the Code of Conduct, all students' needs are being met".

These views were supported by district personnel. The superintendent agreed, "The state requires us to have a DASA policy. Although the transgender (student policy) piece is not a requirement we update each policy with the lens of making sure all students are included in that policy design." Tom an assistant superintendent supported the inclusivity of the DASA policy, "the building team uses DASA to support all students, and certainly transgender students fall in that category." Matt another assistant superintendent, maintained the comprehensiveness of DASA to ensure "that all issues that maybe a student might have, no matter the student, whether it's a transgender or not, has equal rights as everyone else and could be treated fairly across the entire school day."

The school level administrators had varying and different views of policy decision-making and effectiveness. They recognized that DASA was the key district support policy for trans students, however they stressed the limitations of DASA. Both principal Rob and Assistant Principal Carmine agreed, "The only policy we are aware of is the DASA and the

Code of Conduct." Rob added, "In spite of not having formal transgender Board-approved policy... over time we end up kind of back-filling with (school) practices that align with what you're doing day to day operationally." Carmine, Assistant Principal indicated, "I have not been made privy to any policies, procedures, guidance documents, etcetera, that specifically address transgender students or the greater LGBTQ+ community and there is nothing in place in district or on the building-level."

The data from school-based staff differed markedly on the issue of policies to guide decision-making relative to trans. They pointed to several procedural issues: "Emily noted, 'I believe our school psychologist may think that she's the point person on transgender issues and I don't know if she doesn't want to involve more people that need to be.'" Guidance counselor Olivia spoke to how tough the process can be without clear procedures for applying to college as a transgender student, "I just had a recent occurrence where a transgender person applied for an onsite visit at a college, and I did not know the transgender student, and gave a different name on the applications and during the onsite visit."

### ***Fragmentation of Intra-staff School-Based Communication***

A key strand found within the data was the lack of communication within the support staff. The guidance focus group described their frustration as a communication issue among staff members, especially on how the counselors learn of their transgender students in their caseload. Guidance counselor, Emily noted, "I believe our school psychologist may think that she's the point person on transgender issues and I don't know if she doesn't want to involve more people that need to be." This example highlighted how important transgender student information would get disseminated to the staff. School counselor Mia concurred, "Usually, we are informed because there is some kind of conflict, and we have to actually work to resolve a conflict. Usually, we're not aware prior to that." The communication of documents related to transgender students was unavailable. One particular challenge took place at the beginning of the school year when a guidance counselor discovered she had a transgender student due to an incident. School counselor Ava added, "Yeah, I wasn't aware of that [gender support plan] either until a student was really opening up to me or wanted me to kind of help her with stuff. And

then when I brought it up to our psychologist, she said that she handles all of that and she has a form and that was it."

### **Lack of Community and Stakeholder Support for Policy Protection**

A common thread among the participant groups was the lack of affirmation and recognition of the trans student population. All participant groups identified the challenges to trans policy created by the personal views of staff and community individuals. The Board member Angela stated, "we have not received any pressure to develop any new transgender policies. On the contrary, we have received feedback from the community urging us not to pursue any additional policies in this area." Superintendent Jack explained, "We believe that a transgender student policy could happen in the future, but based on the current political climate, it is unlikely at this time." Principal Jack acknowledged that, "there have been few parental conversations that would encourage the development of extended transgender policy and considering the current political climate we would be reluctant to bring the issue to the district or Board." The comment by psychologist May was representative of the high school staff, "we suffer from minimal potential buy-in from both staff and community."

### **Discussion**

This study found the perceptions of policy implementation were not aligned across key stakeholder groups. The findings support the current literature that suggest the lack of district and school policy exposes the systematic erasure and invisibilization of trans youth in schools and eschews the necessity of addressing the institutionalization of cisgenderism and cisnormativity in the education system (Marino et al., 2022).

The policy implementation framework indicates that trans policy was developed top down from the federal and state levels. Once this trans policy decision was made it was assumed districts and schools would have the resources and knowledge needed to carry it out (Hupe and Hill, 2016). The finding of the fragmentation of policy perception by administrators in this study identified that the breach in the flow of policy implementation occurred at both the district and school levels. The district Board and superintendent indicated dependence on the expertise of the principal and staff to implement the trans policy. However, at the school level the 'cost' of high implementation and compliance was identified as too disruptive to the school climate and intra-staff relationships.

The finding referencing the lack of community and staff support for trans policy highlighted the viewpoints of educators in response to the increasing visibility of trans youth in schools. The responses of participants at all levels highlighted resistance to trans policy as a critical institutional and systemic barrier for transgender students in the education system. This case study served as an illustrative exemplification of the problem of trans inclusion face in due to a culture driven by cisnormativity. Lennon and Mistler

(2014) define cisgenderism as "the cultural and systemic ideology that denies, denigrates or pathologizes self-identified gender identities that do not align with assigned gender at birth, as well as resulting behavior, expression and community" (p. 63). In this study the Board and superintendent level participants denial of potential issues at the building level was apparent and confirmed the findings of researchers who claim the absence of trans-affirmative policies and practices (Neary & Cross, 2018; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2019).

The fragmentation of intra-staff school-based communication relative to transgender youth is a new finding and not identified in the trans literature. One might hypothesize that there would be greater alignment on issues related to trans among key staff including the psychologist, social worker, and guidance counselor. The data revealed the siloing of information related to trans.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is clear trans-affirmative policy must be conceptualized within the broader school and community cultural context. The conditions for trans students cannot be exclusively bracketed within the LGBTQ. Trans students require more explicit protections and recognition through district and school policy and practices.

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# Cultural Intelligence in the Diverse Classroom

By Ann M. Macaluso, Ed.D.

## Abstract

It cannot be denied that our world has become increasingly interconnected. Improvements in transportation together with advances in technology have provided opportunities for individuals to explore the world beyond geographic and economic boundaries. Add in a global pandemic that forced individuals to interact via the Internet and you see the further erosion of boundaries and a recognition that life today can be essentially flat. A flattened world has fewer borders and allows for a fluid flow of people, goods, and services across national boundaries. To be successful in this flattened world, individuals must be culturally competent. Cultural competence is the ability to fluidly interact with individuals from other cultures and diverse backgrounds (Villagran & Hawamdeh, 2020). The purpose of this study was to identify if immigrant students lived multicultural experiences provided them with the competencies necessary for successful participation in an interconnected world. Participants were high school students in a large, diverse suburban public high school in the Northeast United States. Surveys were administered in-class via pencil and paper to students in general education and bilingual Social Studies classes. This non-experimental study utilized Earley and Ang's (2003) Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) to assess student's global competencies. The results of the study revealed that a student's immigrant generational status is related to their level of cultural intelligence. These results suggest that immigrant students, compared to their non-immigrant peers, may already have the globally desired skills, values, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to be highly successful leaders of tomorrow.

## Introduction

Leaders across the globe recognize the need for individuals to be able to interact with people from other cultures. Whether during travel required for employment or throughout an individual's daily personal life, cross-cultural interactions with individuals born elsewhere are becoming the norm. In *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman (2005) recognizes the phenomenon of global melding. A flattened world has fewer barriers allowing individuals, goods, and services to flow freely across borders. Friedman identifies the necessity for individuals to be able to transcend cultural and language barriers to be competitive on a global scale. Being void of these cross-cultural competencies puts an individual at risk of losing

opportunities to others that already have these competencies. To prepare students for success in an interconnected world, schools must take the responsibility to ensure students are globally competent. Although immigration in the United States was on track to reach record highs, the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with unstable immigration policies has dramatically slowed immigration in recent years (Schachter et al., 2021). Despite these factors, the number of individuals born abroad is at one of its highest levels (Budiman, 2020) and this is reflected in classrooms across the country (Camarota et al., 2017). In order to meet the changing needs of society and to be proactive in preparing our children for the global environment in which they will thrive, educational leaders must develop not only curriculum but strategies to foster global competencies. They should recognize, harness, and cultivate the wealth of cultural intelligence already within the classroom to ensure that all students have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to interact with people from other cultures (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011; Asia Society & OECD, 2018; UNESCO, 2014). The purpose of this study was to determine if students with international experiences by virtue of immigration possess some of the competencies necessary for successful participation in an increasingly competitive globalized environment. This study is centered around the following research question: Is there a difference in the cultural intelligence of a student based upon their immigrant generational status.

## Review of Literature

This study was guided by several theoretical frameworks: Experiential and Constructivist Learning theories as well as the Cross-Cultural Learning Theory. Experiential and Constructivist Learning establishes that individuals that have a new experience will adapt by constructing new knowledge from that experience (Zijdemans-Boudreau et al., 2013). When faced with the same or similar experiences, individuals can draw from their memory of that prior experience and know how to behave or react (Piaget, 1965). If you walk on a wet marble floor and slip, you have learned that the wet marble may cause you to fall. The next time you walk into a building lobby with a marble floor after a heavy rain you decide, based on your experiences, to avoid the wet patches and walk ever so cautiously. The prior experience has informed your current action. When a student

immigrates to a new country, they often experience a new culture and language. Each new cultural interaction and experience will form knowledge from which to draw from for future decision making. Kolb (1984) explains the process by which individuals learn from prior experiences as the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) which is the primary theory that guides this study. This construction of new knowledge falls within the constructivist learning theory and is specifically related to the theories of Piaget (cognitive constructivism) and Vygotsky (social constructivism) which imply the learning of new social norms and behaviors through interactions with others. When interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds, one learns from the experience and then draws upon that new knowledge when faced with a similar cultural experience (Kolb, 2015). Vygotsky (1979) recognized that these personal experiences provide not only the ability to understand different cultures and behaviors, but also provides an individual with the ability to behave in a culturally appropriate manner by drawing from these experiences. The researcher has synthesized these points and represents them in **Figure 1** below.

### Cultural Adaptation vs. Cultural Assimilation

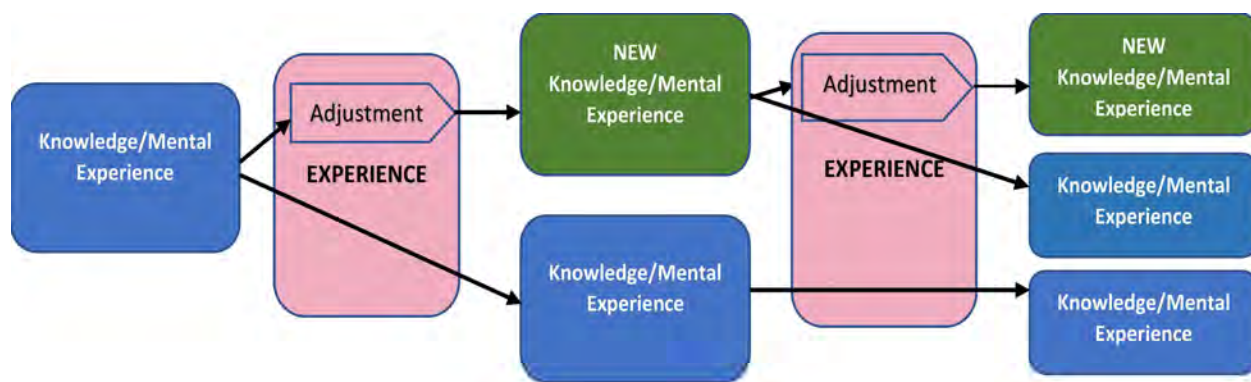
Kim (2001) further refines Vygotsky's premise of social constructivism and applies it to cultural experiences resulting in cross-cultural adaptation. Cross-cultural adaption should not be confused with cultural assimilation. The exposure to new experiences allows individuals the ability to adapt to these new situations, yet it does not eliminate prior cultural identification. In the late 20th century, Portes and Zhou (1993) describe how immigrants assimilated into American culture by rejecting their native language and conforming to the behaviors and ideals of their new communities. Cross-cultural adaptation differs in that it does not require assimilation into and becoming a member of the existing dominant culture, but rather indicates the acquisition of knowledge that allows for appropriate participation in the new culture, without losing one's cultural identity.

Many cross-cultural interactions are short-term. One may travel for several weeks for international busi-

ness purposes or to participate in a semester abroad while in college. Kehl and Morris (2008) studied the impact of short-term study-abroad programs on student global competencies at three private universities. A sample of students enrolled in a short-term study-abroad experience ( $n = 144$ ) was utilized. An analysis of variance indicated that the difference in global competency scores for students that participated in a short-term study-abroad program and those that remained on campus ( $n = 183$ ) was non-significant. LeCrom, Greenhalgh, and Dwyer (2015) sought to identify if students that participated in a short-term two-week study-abroad program had an increase in global competency scores. Their study included alumni of a master's program that included the option to study-abroad as part of a sports related curriculum. The participants ( $n = 198$ ) had been out of the program for up to twelve years (2000-2012). Results of the t-test indicated that the levels of global competence for students that participated in the two-week study-abroad program were not statistically different from those that did not study-abroad, and an analysis of variance test indicated that the time since participation was not significant. Immigrants have a new country as their permanent home. These individuals tend to become more immersed in their new environment and as a result, are better able to adapt compared to those who are in a new cultural environment for a short period of time. According to Kim (2017), individuals that experience cross-cultural adaptation develop an openness to new information without concerns for making mistakes when encountering an unfamiliar cultural situation. As an individual experiences the cross-cultural adaptation process, he/she begins to add to their cultural identity, developing an intercultural global identity.

Educators have addressed the ideal of global competence by modifying curriculum to teach about other cultures through their history, government, practices, religions, and values. However, these efforts are stagnant and do not include the authentic lived experiences necessary for cultural adaptation to take place. The International Baccalaureate Organization (IB) offers a program of study that focus on global competencies. The goal of the IB is to develop

**Figure 1:** A framework for the construction of appropriate cross-cultural experiences based upon lived experiences



internationally minded students who develop a sensitivity and understanding of global issues and a recognition of oneself in a global context (International Baccalaureate Organization [IBO], 2017). Lope (2014) sampled students ( $n = 620$ ) at a suburban high school and did not find a significant difference ( $p = .17$ ) between the international mindedness scores of 9th grade students who came from a middle school that had the IB Middle Years Programme and those who came from a middle school that did not offer the IB programme.

## Methodology

For this study, the U.S. Census bureau definitions for an individual's generational status were used which identify a first-generation individual as one that was born in another country; a second-generation individual has at least one immigrant parent; and a third-and higher generation individual as having both parents being born in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

An ex post facto research design was selected to identify if there is a relationship between student immigrant generational status and their level of global competency as measured by Earley and Ang's (2003) Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS). Creswell (2015) identifies a causal-comparative research design as a method that compares outcomes from groups on an area of interest (in this study, generational status) on one or more dependent variables (CQS) without experimental manipulation. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics for results on the independent variable (immigrant generational status) and CQS subscale. This study controlled for gender, years in the U.S., and Country of Origin. The CQS has four subscales: metacognition, cognition, motivational and behavioral. Separate analysis of variances were conducted for the dependent variable followed by appropriate post hoc tests (Tukey) to identify which groups differed from each other. This research sought a significance level of  $p < .05$ . Multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to identify if there was a relationship between the independent variable and the four subscales of the CQS. The significance level for these tests was set at  $p < .01$ .

## Participants

A convenience sample of participants was obtained from a large suburban high school in the Northeast United States containing 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Approximately 82% of the students that attend this school are on free and reduced lunch and 29% are English Language Learners. Teachers in the Social Studies department ( $n = 49$ ) were asked if they were interested in having their students participate in the study. Seventeen regular Social Studies teachers, three bilingual teachers and zero special education teachers agreed to offer an invitation to participate in the study to their students. A usable sample size of 809 surveys ( $n = 809$ ) was obtained. This sample was comprised of 257 students that identified as 1<sup>st</sup> generation (32%), 451 that identified as 2<sup>nd</sup> generation (56%) and 102 students identified they were 3<sup>rd</sup> and higher generation

(13%). Demographic questions indicated that most of the 1<sup>st</sup> generation students ( $n = 257$ ) were from South and Central American countries ( $n = 202$ ). Many students that were 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> and higher generation identified as Hispanic ( $n = 72$ ). Individuals that identify as Hispanic are those whose heritage includes "Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

## Survey Instrument

Intelligence scales have been in existence for many years. Binet and Simon (1916) developed a scale to numerically measure the magnitude or quotient of an individual's intelligence. This Binet-Simon Scale or Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test was the precursor to the Stanford-Binet IQ test and has inspired many similar measurement instruments. The ability to effectively adapt and understand local culture is measured by cultural intelligence, or CQ (Earley & Ang, 2003). The CQS was originally developed for use within the field of business to identify individuals within an expanding workforce that could successfully interact within global markets as well as with an increasingly diverse domestic employee base (Earley & Ang, 2003). CQ is characterized by an individual's motivation to interact in a culturally responsive manner and has four components or subscales. Metacognition is the process of thinking about thinking. It incorporates higher order cognitive processes that allows an individual to reflect upon the knowledge they have, plan, and revise that knowledge in order to connect new information to prior learning experiences. Individuals with high metacognitive CQ are "consciously aware of the cultural preferences and norms of different societies prior to and during interactions" (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015, p. 5). Cognitive CQ is the knowledge an individual may have regarding the practices, religious rituals, as well as the economic, legal and social systems of different cultures. Individuals with high cognitive CQ, due to their knowledge base, are better able to interact in culturally diverse settings (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). Motivational CQ is the intrinsic desire to engage in cross cultural situations (Early & Ang, 2003). Individuals with high motivational CQ willingly and actively seek opportunities to participate in situations which involve different cultures. Behavioral CQ reflects the ability of an individual to exhibit appropriate behavior, both verbal and nonverbal when in cross-cultural situations. For example, when having a meal, finishing what is on your plate is viewed very differently in different cultures. Some hosts may view a clean plate as an indication that they did not serve you enough as they did not satisfy your hunger, and others view a clean plate as a sign that you are not wasteful and enjoyed what was served. Individuals with high behavioral CQ would not only have the cognitive CQ (knowing), the motivational CQ (desire), but would follow through with action (Early & Ang, 2003).

## Results

A one-way ANOVA shows that CQS scores differ significantly based on generational status ( $F(2, 806) = 23.08, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$ ). A post hoc Tukey indicates CQS

scores for 1<sup>st</sup> generation students were significantly higher than scores for both 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students ( $p < .001$ ) as well as 3<sup>rd</sup> and higher generation students ( $p < .001$ ). The difference between 2<sup>nd</sup> generation and 3<sup>rd</sup> and higher generation students was nonsignificant ( $p = .422$ ). A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), used to identify any relationship between student generational status and the separate components of the CQS, also reached significance (Wilks' Lambda = .945,  $F = (8, 1606.000) = 5.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ ). Subsequent one-way ANOVAs were estimates for each subcomponent, each with a significance level set at  $p = .01$ . Mean scores for the subcomponents of the CQS are provided in **Table 1**. Each of the four subcomponents of the CQS reached significance, suggesting scores differed by generational status for Metacognitive, Cognitive, Motivational, and Behavioral CQ. These results indicate that the level of CQ diminishes with each generation. Immigrant students are more culturally intelligent than 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students and both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students are more culturally intelligent than 3<sup>rd</sup> and higher generation students. Immigrant students are more aware of cultural differences, are aware of the knowledge they have relative to social norms, have the desire to seek opportunities to engage with individuals from other countries and cultures, and utilize their knowledge to behave in a culturally appropriate manner in cross-cultural situations.

## Discussion

As our world becomes increasingly interconnected and borders between economies continue to become more fluid, the need for students to be globally competent becomes critical for personal and professional success. World leaders and academic researchers have established that authentic international experiences increase an individual's ability to be globally competent. Study-abroad experiences are restricted to a specific period of time. Additionally, these study-abroad experiences are typically available to students enrolled in a university program and are experienced by a limited number of students that may have the time and/or financial resources to participate in them. Those that can participate in study-abroad experiences typically are not from underrepresented groups nor are they from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby

excluding a critical demographic of American society (Norton, 2008).

Much of the literature on global competencies identifies research focused on the collegiate level or within the business domain. Measuring and developing global competencies while a student is already in college or after he or she is gainfully employed is after the fact and does not address college and career ready goals designed to ensure that k-12 students have the necessary skills to be successful in their personal and professional lives. So how do educators "teach" global competencies. Educators must take inventory when students first enter the classroom allowing the educator to create custom "instructional environments that propel learning by connecting new learning to each student's background and prior experience" (D'Agati, 2017). Vygotsky and Piaget have long theorized that knowledge is not passed from teacher to student, but constructed from what students know and experience, with help from the instructor. Immigrant students already have these authentic cross-cultural experiences yet have been neglected in the literature. This study suggests immigrant students in the k12 classroom are more globally competent as evidenced by significantly higher scores on the CQS.

## Conclusion

The study revealed that immigrant students have statistically higher scores on the CQS than students that are not immigrants. The immigrant students in this study have international experiences by virtue of their immigration to the United States and have constructed new knowledge evidenced by their higher scores. These students have the competencies necessary for success in a globalized world, and educators must find a way to harness and share these lived experiences so that all students graduate as globally competent individuals.

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**Table 1**

**Mean Scores for Each Subcomponent of the CQS Based on Student Generational Status**

Generation	n	CQS Subscales			
		Metacognitive	Cognitive	Motivational	Behavioral
1st	246	5.24 (.93)	4.20 (1.16)	5.45 (.95)	4.72 (1.16)
2nd	451	4.91 (1.02)	3.85 (1.13)	5.09 (1.05)	4.34 (1.09)
3rd and higher	102	4.93 (1.06)	3.66 (1.20)	5.00 (1.05)	4.24 (1.09)
Note $p < .01$ , Standard deviations in parenthesis.					

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# Gamification in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review with Particular Reference to Octalysis as the Futuristic Framework for Further Research

By Harika Rao, Ed.D.

## Purpose of the Study

The literature review explores the dynamic improvements in gamification in higher education and the feasibility of enhancing the student's motivation and engagement with the learning process by dwelling more on the behavioral aspects of motivation.

## Background of the Study

An educator's goal has always been to achieve higher student success in learning outcomes. Making students interested in learning is one of the critical factors in achieving that goal. Teachers can use technology to enhance student learning by incorporating quizzes, tests, and the like with prompt feedback (Faiella & Ricciardi, 2015). During the past decade, 'gamification' has become a buzzword in business, medical and educational fields that has attracted many researchers. Though there are many definitions of "gamification" in use, for this study, the definition of Educause will be adopted: "Gamification is the application of game elements in non-gaming situations, often to motivate or influence behavior" (Educause, 2011).

With the availability of educational games such as ClassDojo, Socrates, Kahoot, and Quizlet, teachers could apply those software applications to gamify learning in the classroom (Hanus & Fox, 2015).

## Introduction

### About Gamification

The concept remained dormant despite the term "gamification," coined by Nick Pelling two decades ago in 2002. It did not gather steam till 2011, and gamification has attracted educational research scholars' attention (Dichev & Dicheva, 2017).

In their book "For the Win," Werbach & Hunter (2020) describe that "the great fun that comes from an extended interaction with well-designed games" is a 'special tool to address serious pursuits,' including education. They do not hesitate to equate education and work with 'just games' and wonder, 'why not make better games?'

(Werbach & Hunter, 2020). Previous studies showed that features of well-designed games resulted in higher motivation levels in people, ostensibly because participation in the games is better than monetary incentives (Werbach & Hunter, 2020).

## Game Elements

The building blocks of gamification, called game elements, are (a) Points, (b) Badges, and (c) Leaderboards (PBL, in short) (Dicheva et al., 2015; Hamari et al., 2014). Points encourage people to collect more by channeling their efforts towards the desired behaviors. Badges are simply a manifestation of points in visual form. Finally, the leaderboards show the relative position of a participant against others. Thus, leaderboards can be a double-edged sword as they can motivate and demotivate others due to individual perceptions.

## A "bird's eye view" of three gamification theories

### Self-determination theory of motivation (SDT)

Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) consists of a fusion of three interrelated human needs, namely, autonomy, relatedness, and competence, which propel an individual to engage in an activity or not. In gamification, autonomy refers to a participant's choices among several levels of activities to compete in the activity. Relatedness fosters relationships among participants to enjoy and compete in the activity. The need for competence is met by the elements in gamification, such as points and badges. Incidentally, SDT has been the most popular and frequently used theoretical model in gamification research (Seaborn & Fels, 2015).

### Flow Theory

Flow Theory was introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the 1970s (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993). The theory is based on the research of examining people who did activities for pleasure, even when they were not rewarded with money or fame. Csikszentmihalyi's words, flow is "a state in which people are

so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it". Csikszentmihalyi (1993) considered artists, writers, athletes, chess masters, and surgeons - as individuals who engaged in desired activities. He discovered that enjoyment did not result from relaxing or living without stress, but their attention was entirely absorbed during these intense activities. He called this state 'flow' because, during his research, people illustrated their intense experiences using the metaphor of being carried by a current like a river flow. The participants were motivated by the quality of the experience during their engagement in their chosen activity. The flow experience came when the activity was problematic and involved risk. It usually stretched the person's capacity and provided a challenge to his/her skills. Flow theory is optimal for the best user experience (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993).

According to Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002), flow is an experiential state that is characterized by the following aspects: (a) The individual is in a state of intense and focused concentration on what he or she is doing; (b) a merging of action and awareness takes place; (c) the individual experiences a loss of reflective self-consciousness; (d) the individual feels a deep sense of control; (e) the individual's temporal experience is distorted (hours seem to pass like seconds); (f) worries and ruminative thoughts disappear; and (g) the individual enters a state of autotelic motivation indicated by the fact that engagement in the activity is perceived as rewarding in and of itself.

## Octalysis

Chou (2019), author of 'Actionable Gamification' and self-made consultant, defined the first framework called Octalysis in his book Actionable Gamification. Actionable Gamification is more than a business book. It touches on the art of game design, the psychology that drives confident choices, the science of interaction, and how they all interplay to create something more than the sum of its parts -- a game. While the book uses a few social media games, such as Farmville, to explain game elements, it also deliberates on the practical usage in the United States Armed Forces and Nike. The book explores numerous ways games can use human tendencies for better engagement and offers a comforting thought on the techniques to improve results.

Octalysis framework is human-centered and wired to drive human behavior. This human-focused framework took ten years in the making. It helped boost motivation and engagement with eight core drivers representing meaning, empowerment, social influence, unpredictability, avoidance, scarcity, ownership, and accomplishment (Chou, 2019, p.9).

Each of the drives analyzes the motivational factors for users. The Octalysis can reverse-engineer users' behavior to fulfill your business objectives. Octalysis framework continues to retain its novelty, as research or literature on date remains to be a handful.

**Figure 1** Actionable Gamification by Chou, K. 2019



Note: Figure 1 is a synopsis of Chou's Actionable Gamification. The figure denotes the eight drives with examples.



## Literature Review

### Approach to literature review

After an initial search of articles on gamification from Google Scholar and the research databases, relevant articles relating to gamification in higher education published from 2015 to 2020 were selected. This period showed considerable growth in research studies on the subject. Majority of the sixteen (16) articles selected for literature review related to the year 2020 (6), followed by 2019 (3), 2018 (4), 2016 (2), and 2015 (1).

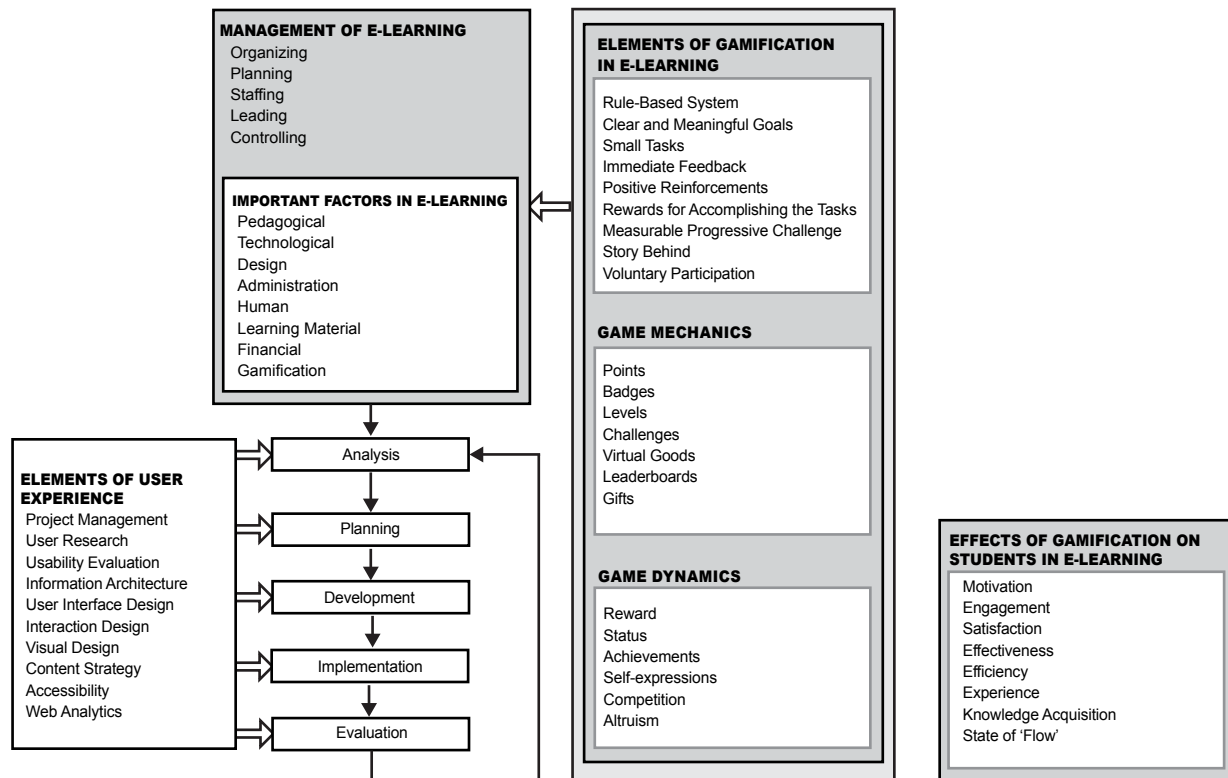
### Significant findings of the work done

Zainuddin et al. (2020) determined that "most studies were found to use a quantitative approach, followed by the mixed-methods approach," indicating the lack of in-depth investigations into the qualitative aspects of gamification in education. They further observed that their systematic review of empirical evidence covered the period from 2016-2019 from the Web of Science database was in line with two other similar reviews; (a) by Bozkurt et al. (2015) covering

the period from 2009 to 2013 and (b) by Özyurt and Özyurt (2015: p. 69) covering the period from 2005-2014. While recommending the adoption of contemporary technologies by teachers, they concluded that "a good teaching strategy was that would make the students comfortable and ensure that they experience fun and enthusiasm while learning." Another systematic mapping study of fifty research papers covering the 2011-2016 period by Rodrigues et al. (2019) in the areas of education and business identified 'eight themes (gamification; game; use; users; business; points; engagement; learning) and twenty-eight related concepts' serving as guidelines for future research on gamification. In particular, the authors highly recommended using Leximancer software for content analysis in qualitative research.

Huang & Hew (2018) presented two quasi-experimental studies in flipped learning context based on a synthesized theoretical model called GAFCC (goal-access-feedback-challenge-collaboration), a fusion of five theoretical models, namely, flow, goal setting, social comparison, self-determination, and behavioral reinforcement. The studies involved forty postgraduate students from information technology and library science programs without prior

**Figure 2** The model for the introduction of gamification into the field of e-learning.



Note: Figure 2 is a flowchart conceptualized by Urh et al. (2015).

experience in flipped learning or gamification. The GAFCCC class produced positive results regarding a higher completion rate of pre- and post-class activities in quantity and quality.

Aguiar-Castillo et al. (2020) analyzed the factors influencing the students' intention to use the 'HE Game App' gamified app. The results showed that hedonic and social benefits and students' attitudes towards learning influenced their intention to use the gamified app in face-to-face education. The study investigated the effect of gamified education on student achievement and their attitudes toward lessons. The pre and post-experimental design consisted of ninety-seven sophomores of elementary mathematics from a university. The results positively impacted both student achievement and their attitudes toward lessons. Further, though gamified teaching did not contribute to the student's cognitive levels, it provided more significant positive attitudes toward lessons.

Urh et al. (2015) recommended a conceptual model for eLearning by incorporating appropriate gamification elements, as presented in **Figure 2**. Apart from discussing the project management side of e-learning, they underscored the importance of personalizing the e-learning content to suit the learners' wants. This model consists of the main elements of management of e-learning, essential factors in e-learning, elements of user experience, phases of development (analysis, planning, development, implementation, and evaluation), game mechanics, game dynamics, gamification elements in e-learning, and their effects on students (Urh et al., 2015).

Bai et al. (2020) attempted a deep dive through meta-analysis on the impact of gamification on student learning. The analysis consisted of twenty-four quantitative and thirty-two qualitative studies with no publication bias found by the authors. While the meta-analysis of quantitative studies showed a moderately positive impact of gamification on learning outcomes, the qualitative studies explained the 'why' part of the impact (both positive and negative) of gamification. The reasons favoring gamification included enhanced enthusiasm, feedback on performance, recognition, and goal setting. The study, however, posed two unresolved questions: (a) the effectiveness of tangible rewards to users, and (b) the appropriate way to use leaderboards in educational contexts. While studying the meta-analysis impact of gamification, the authors took a neutral stance in the context of some severe criticism against gamification by Bogost (2011) and Toda et al. (2017). Bogost (2011) described Gamification to be a marketing "bullshit" invented by consultants to capture the wild, coveted beast that is videogames and to domesticate it for use in the grey, hopeless wasteland of big business, where "bullshit" already reigns anyway. Toda et al. (2017) cautioned against the superficial and shallow nature of implementing gamification resulting in possible adverse effects.

Van Roy & Zaman (2018 and 2019) conducted a quantitative study in 2018 and a qualitative study in 2019. Their quantitative study in 2018 consisted of forty university students over a 15 week-semester to assess the changes in motivation resulting from the interaction with the need supporting platform.

It produced mixed results. An important finding was that personal characteristics could mediate between gamification and motivation. Their qualitative study in 2019 involved 120 individual surveys and two focus groups of university students at master's level courses over 15 weeks. Based on the psychological need satisfaction component of self-determination theory, the results showed mixed results of the impact of game elements on a gamified platform.

Kusuma et al. (2018) conducted a survey of thirty-three papers on gamification models across four disciplines, namely, generic, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), history, and language, using the MDA (Mechanics, Dynamics, and Aesthetics) framework revealed that only some gamification models resulted in higher motivation, achievement, and engagement.

Putz et al. (2020) conducted a two-year longitudinal study of 617 secondary and tertiary students with various workshop designs revealing that improved workshop designs contributed to increased student knowledge retention. The study further reinforced the usefulness of gamification in learning environments.

Treiblmaier & Putz (2020) led gamified experimental workshops with 384 students in a field experiment that showed increased intrinsic motivation measured by enjoyment and curiosity. Thus, the authors concluded that gamification positively affected intrinsic motivation by amplifying it and moderating the external motivational factors.

Ntokos (2019) engaged the weak students by introducing appropriate game elements and found that the study produced positive results. The qualitative study concluded meaningful feedback from happy students that used the game elements in one unit. The author recommended more cycles to refine the framework and modify the components that did not work for students.

Hakak et al. (2019) predicted that gamification would likely replace traditional education, and the solution hinged on merging gamification with cloud computing. Despite its futuristic nature, the authors gave the readers a basic understanding of the required cloud architecture. A model incorporating the learning components of all subjects in a single application for ease of implementing the technology was provided.

Alexiou & Schippers (2018) revealed the complexity of integrating digital technologies into pedagogy by underscoring the roles of proximal goals, the inclusion of uncertainty, regular feedback, and adaptable challenge levels to sustain higher levels of the game player's engagement.

Taspinar et al. (2016) developed a board game as an instrument for the teachers with interactive and self-learning modes to use in blended learning. The teachers and the students reported a positive effect of motivation and fun on learning.

Legaki et al. (2020), through their study, conducted a gamified application called 'Horses for Courses' in Statistics subject in which 365 students from Engineering and Business disciplines participated. The results showed a positive impact on student learning compared to traditional methods. Further, the impact was more on female students from the Engineering discipline. The authors noted that the positive impact of gamification would be more when combined with traditional teaching methods. The results were in line with the other studies indicating the positive impact of gamification on learning outcomes.

Bennani et al. (2020) argued that gamification needs to be adaptive to the learners' personal and changing needs based on the premise that one size does not fit all. After analyzing educational and gamification ontologies, the authors proposed a representation of adaptive gamification domain knowledge into an ontology.

Gatti et al. (2019) conducted a pre and post-business game survey to evaluate student learning experience at two universities which showed that the action learning approach, particularly simulation and gaming, generated cognitive and effective learning outcomes.

Andrade et al. (2016) contended that, in contrast to the marketing perspective, the goal of gamification was to make the participants loyal to the system, not necessarily to enhance learning. Gamification was only good only if it was controlled. It could cause distraction in the form of relatedness-centric forums and charts that did not contribute to learning. Customization was yet another feature that promoted immersion but resulted in a waste of time without learning. Students could get addicted to the

external incentive and concentrate less on learning. Gamification's overuse should be controlled by constantly monitoring users, systems, and gamification features.

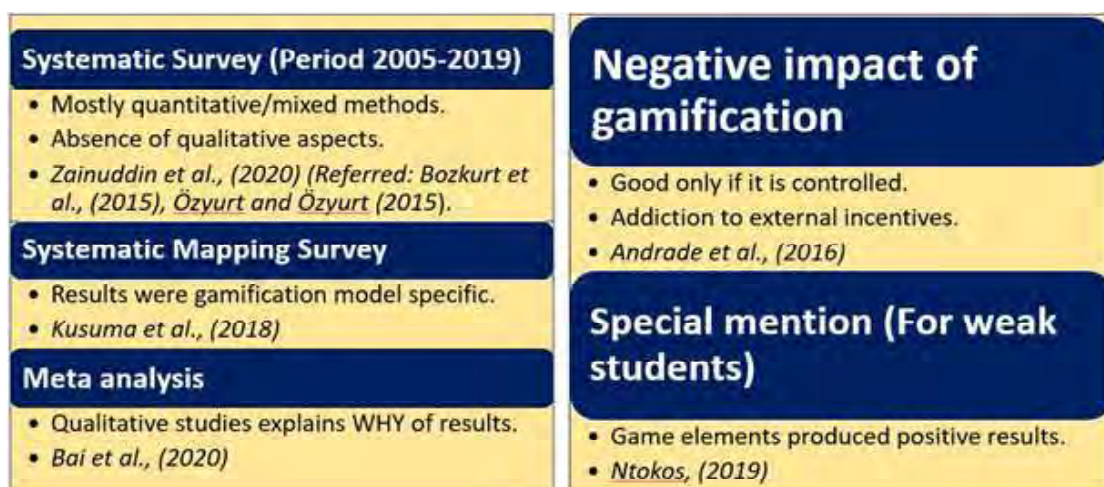
### Synopsis of literature review

The studies mentioned above were based on mixed and quantitative methodologies. The standard theoretical framework among the studies was Self Determination Theory, followed by Flow theory by designing various combinations of game elements in different contexts with rewards (points, grades, or leaderboard). A majority of the studies concluded with mixed results with no substantial evidence on the intrinsic factors for the positive results on the impact of a user's motivation. Quantitative studies did not deliberate the 'state' of a user in depth. Qualitative research could have added more value to understanding the 'state' of a user. A key area least addressed was understanding the association between personal characteristics and motivation through game elements. Qualitative research findings would help establish a substantial inclusion and connection of the intrinsic motivators and game elements.

### Gaps in literature and Future research focus are recommended in the literature.

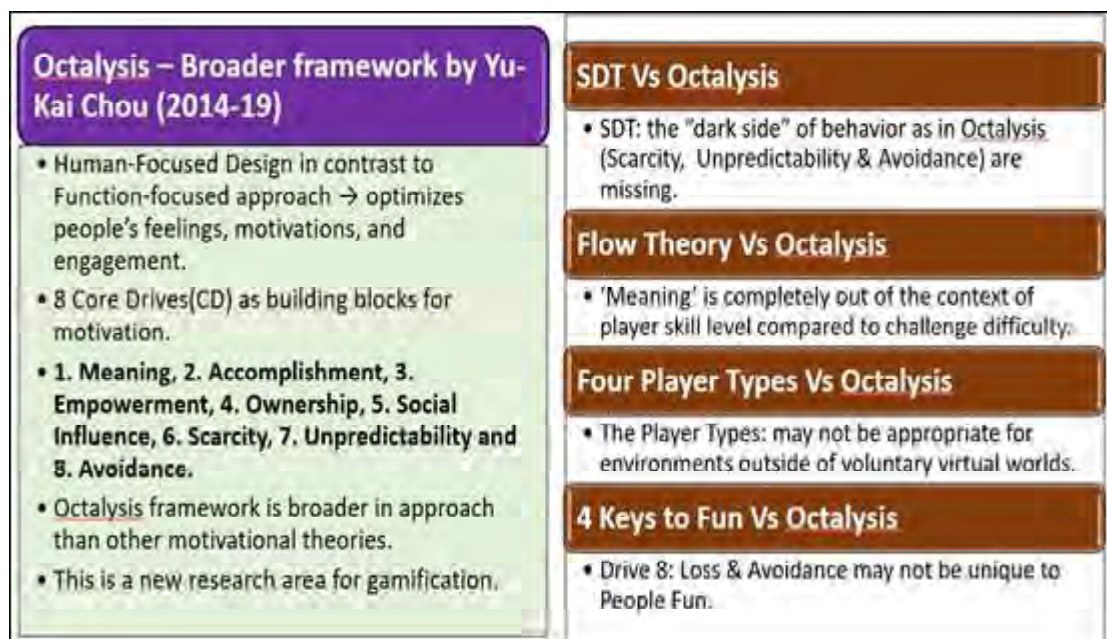
Zainuddin et al. (2020) found that ineffective gamified learning was due to game-based elements, instructional design, and technical factors. Further, over-incentivization resulted in a lack of intrinsic motivation for students to participate voluntarily in the learning process. Longitudinal studies across disciplines, time, and space, were recommended for future research Zainuddin et al.,

**Figure 3** Overview of gaps in the literature



Note: **Figure 3** summarizes the gaps in the literature based on the systematic analysis of the research studies.

**Figure 4** Components of Octalysis and its comparison with other theories.



Note: **Figure 4** shows the components of Octalysis and its comparison with other theories.

(2020). Systematic mapping studies could replicate with larger samples to determine predictive capabilities. (Rodrigues et al., 2019). Cultural differences in various countries should consider in future studies. Future studies should include skills other than memorization, such as mathematical, language, or social skills (Putz et al., 2020).

## Conclusion

The overview of the gaps in the literature on gamification in higher education is shown in **Figure 3**.

The broader framework of Octalysis is a more human-focused design in contrast to the function-focused approach of other theories, optimizing people's feelings, motivations, and engagement.

From the above, in **Figure 4**, it is evident that the Octalysis framework seems to be better suited to the application of gamification in higher education. The uniqueness of the Octalysis framework is the eight core elements, and Chou (2019) believes that different game techniques push users forward differently. Based on Chou's work on the eight drivers, the framework can be synonyms with the business model of Agile Methodology. The Octalysis framework can be customized to fit the users' perspective and feedback - the more customization, the better the motivational impact of the end users. As a new concept, research in this area is nascent and holds much promise in the future.

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## From the Field: Practical Applications of Research

# Striving for an Inclusive Workplace

By John W. Coverdale, Ed.D.

### Abstract

This article aims to provide school leaders with preliminary information and initial insight into the challenges they face when they seek to hire, retain, and sustain a diverse workforce. This article brings together some essential facts about the lack of diversity in the school district workforce in New York and outlines an array of steps school leaders can take to sustain a more diverse workforce that better reflects the diversity within society and in their schools.

### Introduction

My work in school districts and other social agencies has enabled me to serve as a consultant to many leaders who struggle to create an inclusive culture for their staff and students. Daniel Goleman, psychologist and author of a best-selling book on Emotional Intelligence, as well as countless articles on the subject, said: "the rules of work are changing, and we are being judged by a new yardstick—not just how smart we are and what technical skills we have, which employers see as givens, but increasingly by how well we handle ourselves and one another" (Goleman, 2007). With great interest, I have witnessed leaders from an array of employment sectors respond in various ways to the social and political protests that have engulfed our country since 2019. As a consultant to school districts, municipalities, and small businesses, I've had many opportunities to participate in leader-level conversations centered on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in general, and more specifically, the impact these conversations can have on the recruitment, selection, and staffing processes. While some organizations have achieved various levels of success on their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion journeys, others have struggled, and in some instances, their leaders have become frustrated after encountering barriers to an inclusive workforce. This is particularly true for school leaders on Long Island, many of whom, in addition to facing rapid shifts in racial demographics among the student populations they serve, have struggled at times to recruit and retain educators with diverse backgrounds, particularly where the intersectionality of race and ethnicity occurs.

Demographic trends indicate that the United States is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, yet staffing levels of diverse educators have remained stagnant, at least

statistically, for decades. For example, according to the US Census Bureau, in 2014, there were more than 20 million children under the age of 5, and 50.2 percent of them were minorities, making up a majority-minority.

In 2017, Education Trust New York reported that "there is not a single Latino or Black teacher in one-third of all New York Schools, and nearly 200,000 Latino and Black students attend schools with no or just one same race or same ethnicity teacher" (P.12). Similarly, as reported in *Newsday* (2019) a Hofstra University report indicated that "nonwhite students accounted for nearly 45 percent of the region's public-school enrollment in 2017, with particular growth among Asians and Latinos. Even so, nonwhite teachers made up only 8 percent of the region's classroom workforce" (Hildebrand, 2019).

According to the New York State Education Department, in the 2020-21 school year, Hispanic students accounted for nearly one-third of Long Island's student body, Asians were nearly ten percent, and African Americans accounted for about nine percent of 421,254 students. According to a March 2022 article in *Newsday*, Long Island has 36,000 public school teachers who instruct 418,257 students. Ninety-two percent of Long Island teachers are white, while approximately 9.5 percent or slightly under 3,600 full-time teachers are minorities, and the minority student population is 52.8 percent (Polsky, 2022).

Current data indicate that in a vast majority of Long Island schools, minority students never encounter a minority faculty member during their K-12 journey. In contrast, the vast majority of white students only see teachers who look like them during their K-12 journey. As a Human Resources consultant immersed in nearly all aspects of workplace issues, I often wonder, based on their lack of exposure to critical elements of diversity in their schools, how prepared some of our graduates are for the increasingly diverse world they will encounter after high school.

As the son of two fiercely proud African American educators who in 1960 came to Long Island from vastly different socio-demographic environments to live and work, I am struck by the fact that today's school leaders have, in addition to so many other things, been tasked with addressing the

long-anchored practices that created exclusive or "in group" hiring patterns and preferences that continue to delimit the inclusion of nonwhite educators. On the other hand, as my parents often said when helping me prepare to face a significant challenge, "someone has to do it; why not you?" My purpose here is to share with educators the insights and understandings I have gained working with school leaders and help today's leaders sustain a diverse workforce in their schools.

To improve organizational culture, as a means of achieving more equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplaces, many school leaders and professional development programs include the topic of workplace inclusivity at the forefront of leadership development programs. Two questions are central to this emergent and possibly transformational leadership conversation, and I believe they are fundamental to any school organization's strategic plans. The first question is, how do we engage leaders to embrace the need for change, enhance collective social and emotional intelligence, and focus on creating environments that reflect a core value of inclusion? The second question is, striving for diversity, equity, and inclusion, how do we determine future human capital needs, recruit qualified candidates, select the best candidates as new employees, retain them, and help prepare them for sustainable success?

As a Human Resources consultant, whenever I am asked to assist clients with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (DEI) initiatives, I am often reminded of the phrase "employers cannot fix what they do not understand." Regardless of where they might be on their DEI journey, I implore them to spend some time reflecting, without attribution, on how "we" got here, and I explicitly say "we," because, as Stephen Covey once said, "we see the world, not as it is, but how we are conditioned to see it" (2004, P. 28). While this may be an uncomfortable truth for many leaders, any organization's successful DEI journey must begin with individual and organizational reflection, or what I call an Inclusion audit.

It is helpful to look at any DEI effort systemically to understand better the substantial degree of connectedness among its core elements of recruitment, selection, inclusion, and retention. Setting up a systematic data review of the historical and current outcomes by schools and departments for the inclusive hiring system will reveal strengths and weaknesses within the process.

As more employers have discovered, employees across multiple demographics are demanding change on issues pertaining to DEI and achieving more inclusive workplaces. In February of this year, the Gallup Organization reported that 42 percent of 13,085 employees surveyed indicated that having an "organization that is diverse and inclusive of all types of people," ranked among the top six things they wanted in their next job. (Wigert, 2022) Research conducted by the American Psychological Association suggests "there is a relationship between equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI), and organizational health. Fostering a welcoming and inclusive workplace helps employees feel a

sense of belonging and contributes to a healthy work culture, and taking a multifaceted approach that engages employees throughout the organization reaffirms your organization's commitment to EDI while supporting employee well-being." (American Psychological Association, 2022).

In what might be considered indicative of the extent to which the workplace has become a microcosm of society, some organizations have become more assertive in responding to emerging employee expectations. For example, Deloitte, one of the top accounting firms in the world, recently shared the following message with both prospective and current employees:

"For those of you considering joining our Deloitte team now or in the future, we welcome your exploration of our culture and our commitment to DEI. Ask yourself-and us-if Deloitte is a place where you can connect, belong, and grow. And for our people, we urge you to hold us to increased transparency and meaningful change. Know that these goals are not exhaustive of the work ahead. Continue to engage and challenge us on how we lead this movement and deliver on the talent experience you deserve. Most importantly, continue to bring your full and authentic selves to work-and encourage your colleagues to do the same" (www.deloitte.com, June 22, 2022).

In posting statements such as these, Deloitte is sending two powerful messages. The first message tells prospective employees that this is a progressive workplace that not only welcomes employees of all backgrounds, it is also a place that values inclusion. The second message is more directed toward current employees and serves as an important reminder that DEI is infused throughout the organization, and while subtle, this message serves as a reminder to current employees to avoid conduct that conflicts with the organization's stated values.

One aspect of inclusion that many leaders struggle with is not understanding what an inclusive work environment looks like. Admittedly, this question is not easy to answer without some depth of analysis. However, it bears noting that inclusive work environments are continually self-reflective, have ongoing movement, and embrace change. Another key determinant is the extent to which the organization is willing to assess the impact of organizational and individual practices, including how effectively the leaders communicate across real or imagined barriers.

I often share a story with my clients about a time when I was asked to teach a cohort of Korean leaders pursuing their Master's degrees through Stony Brook University's College of Business, which had a campus in Korea. In my case, the students came to the United States to study during an intensified four-week semester. They spoke little to almost no English, and because I did not know even one word of Korean, I initially rejected this prestigious teaching assignment because I was concerned about the significant language barrier. However, a few days later, I decided to take the assignment, and it turned out to be a magnificent personal

and professional experience, partly because of the effort it took to mitigate the discomfort I initially felt. As a result of the experience, I now frequently ask leaders I am working with to assess their comfort level when communicating across diverse cultures and groups. This type of self-awareness is critical because hiring decisions and in-group out-group associations, can be impacted by barriers, whether real or imagined, due to language, gender, age, race, or any constitutional protections, and those barriers act as unconscious "gatekeepers" that can negatively influence employee-related decision making.

I have listed below some of the practices that inclusive organizations with whom I work employ to sustain their diverse workforce:

- Conduct recruitment outreach, or participate in regional efforts to expand the recruitment net in order to achieve a more diverse pool of applicants. Monitor the interview process and candidate experience to ensure it aligns with your DEI commitment. Inclusive organizations also monitor new employee onboarding practices. Data confirms that this positively affects employee retention rates and engagement levels for employees in general, particularly for diverse employees.
- Maintain a visible commitment to prioritizing inclusion at the highest leadership level and ensure this commitment cascades throughout the organization. Have a strong desire to improve, do not fear or avoid the hard truths and challenging discussions, and have equitable employment practices that are rooted in trust.
- Pay close attention to demographic changes in the general population and the workforce.
- Are adept at dealing with conflict, particularly conflict that can stem from social and organizational change.
- Know that unconscious bias (biases we do not realize we have) can be just as impactful and dangerous as racism because even the hidden or unknown biases of good people who lead organizations can influence recruitment, interviewing, candidate selection, performance evaluation, career development/promotions, in-group versus out-group relationships, employee sense of belonging and engagement, organizational climate, and are often manifested in bigotry, intolerance and unfairness because they cloud internal decisions, influence human interactions, shade perceptions of others, and are far more difficult to pinpoint.

## Conclusion

I recommend to leaders that they conduct an inclusion review of their organization. While it may sound cumbersome, it does not need to be. An inclusion review can range from a leadership discussion focused on whether

there is a disconnect or a gap between what we say we do and believe and how people experience inclusion in the workplace. A review of staff demographics (age, gender, race, ethnicity, and disability) can authentically determine who is underrepresented. A review that involves tracking the racial and gender breakdown on teams, promotion rates, who is assigned key projects, and reviewing employee retention rates can help identify any biases the organization may have. In addition, consider the following three questions as part of the audit:

- Do you know how employees from different demographic groups feel about your organization?
- Do your employees feel they can be their authentic selves at work?
- Do your employees feel like they belong as full members of your organization?

It is important to remember that in order to have a more inclusive workplace, leaders must focus on instilling a sense of belonging for employees of all backgrounds and remain fully cognizant of the fact that newly appointed employees from diverse backgrounds might not assimilate as seamlessly as others into the workplace unless employers provide a continuous onboarding process that focuses on building trust, and strives to achieve both a common mission and positive workplace culture. Finally, as organizations mature in their inclusivity processes, here are some additional suggestions for questions that can be part of any organization's inclusion review:

- Is the organization genuinely welcoming to people of all backgrounds? What systemic inequalities may exist? How does the organization come across to prospective job applicants? Are we processing this assessment through our prisms or theirs? What, if any, gaps exist?
- How easily does our organization accept and welcome diverse employees? To what extent do we meaningfully interact with them?
- What are the gender and racial/ethnicity breakdowns in our overall workforce? This assessment should then be applied to representation in overall management, senior management, and among new hires. Similarly, a review can be done of all promoted employees and the 10% highest paid populations.
- What information might be available in a review of retention data focused on the reasons for the departure of former employees?
- What information might be available from meeting with select groups of current employees to identify is-

sues/concerns specific to the work environment and get their thoughts on the organization's culture?

- What image does your website and digital/social media presence present to prospective employees?
- Do your job descriptions and advertisements include gender-sensitive words and nurturing and supportive language?
- Have your employees experienced any patterns of discrimination, bullying, or harassment?
- What about supplier diversity? How much money do we spend with companies owned by people from underrepresented groups?

A Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion journey is a powerful impetus to enhance employee engagement, wellness, and productivity. Leaders and Boards of Trustees must not only hold themselves accountable they also have to recognize that building an inclusive organization is a non-linear journey that requires continuous commitment, but is arguably one of the most crucial steps a progressive leader can take to help build a workplace that aligns with the future, while simultaneously helping to better prepare students to sustain it.

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## **Book Review:**

### **Gorbachev: His Life and Times**

**By William Taubman, Biographer**

**Reviewed by Robert J. Manley, Ph.D.**

On August 30, 2022, Mikhail Gorbachev took his last breath on this Earth. He was one of the most influential political leaders of the second half of the 20th Century. His policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) led to a hopeful beginning of greater peaceful relations across the world and a nuclear disarmament agreement that he signed with Ronald Reagan. Because of Gorbachev, and the Russian Language Program that West Babylon offered in third-twelfth grades for students who had perfect scores on their English language comprehensive test of basic skills, West Babylon was invited to host the first exchange of Russian high school students in the 20th Century.

On November 9, 1989, my colleagues and 21 students from West Babylon High School were awaiting the arrival of 21 students and their teachers and administrators from Moscow at John F. Kennedy Airport. The students were engaged in the first high school student exchange sponsored by medical doctors in Moscow under the theme "Children are the Creators of the 21st Century." From 1989 until 1999, the students of both communities enjoyed the cultural and historical exchange of ideas, aspirations, and friendships.

Thirty-three years later, one wonders how to help USA students of World History appreciate how history unfolds and their place in its unfurling. Having lived with Russian host families in Moscow for several weeks in 1993, 1995 and 1997, I found Amherst College Professor Emeritus William Taubman's life of Mikhail Gorbachev a fascinating description of the changing landscape of the Soviet system and of the European and American exchanges. Professor Taubman's book and writing style incorporates extensive research and interviews with participants in perestroika and glasnost and enables the reader to experience events as if one is a witness.

Every aspect of Mikhail Gorbachev's life is examined with careful detail and personal descriptions. His early years as a child and schooling are presented with a sense of being a student with him. His university experience and marriage to Raisa and their partnership and parenting reveal themes of deep human emotions known among young parents across the globe. His ascent in political life and his doubts and aspirations are explored as well as his dramatic effect on the world stage with other national leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

Teachers may struggle with methods to bring history alive in their classrooms. One way to help students experience history is to bring quality biographies into the classroom. A collaborative and cooperative learning endeavor can help students use their critical thinking skills in new ways and enable them to digest a 700-page biography of Gorbachev while they learn a portion of the history of Russia in the last half of the 20th Century. Gorbachev's life and work helps every reader understand how Russia came to be what it is now and how its people may evolve.



I spoke with a few high school students about a method to address a large and scholarly biography in school. I offered that students might be divided into groups of four and assigned a segment of the book dealing with themes or periods of the person's life. Each group of students would be expected to read 75 to 100 pages very carefully and contrast the story line of Gorbachev's Russia with happenings in the USA available in magazine, newspaper, and film archives.

Students would be expected to present the major themes and important insights available in the biography and to contrast them with events in their own country. In a PowerPoint presentation, students could summarize what they learned, insights they acquired and new knowledge they gained and even illustrate their points with film clips.

If teachers managed these presentations on Fridays twice a month, students could participate in developing questions that they wished the next group to address as they proceeded to read the chapters of Gorbachev's life. My student advisors thought that this would be a "fun way to learn."

So, for educators who wish to examine history with their students, Professor Taubman's biography of Mikhail Gorbachev offers a lively examination of the second half of the 20th Century and insight into the first half of 21st Century Russia and world politics. As the people of the Ukraine in August 2022 struggle to preserve their fragile democracy in the face of Vladimir Putin's invading army, the world hopes for peace once again. The painting presented here depicts the hope and fear of a Russian National Approved Artist who painted this vision in 1990.

**Reviewed by Robert J. Manley, Ph.D.**, retired superintendent of West Babylon Public Schools and Retired Professor of Education Administration.

## Book Review:

### Confessions of a School Reformer

By Larry Cuban

Reviewed by Anthony J. Annunziato, Ed.D.

"All social movements involve conflicts which are reflected intellectually in controversies. It would not be a sign of health if such an important social interest as education were not also an arena of struggles, practical and theoretical." (Dewey, 1938, p. 5)

Larry Cuban, Professor Emeritus of education at Stanford University, has been an educator and academician for the better part of eight decades as a student, teacher, administrator, and researcher. One can see Larry Cuban has been around and seen it all in educational reform. He is a prolific writer and researcher who has focused on the history of curriculum and instruction, educational leadership, school reform and technology in the classroom. He is the epitome of the scholar - practitioner who has seen both sides of the educational profession.

In his latest book he attempts to understand a century of school reform movements which is as much memoir as it is analysis of the reform movements of the 20th century as well the 21st century of American education. From the Progressive Movement to the impact of the Covid pandemic, Professor Cuban covers much of the various periods of the history of education and reform from both an historical lens and his personal viewpoint at the time and in retrospect. Threaded through an analysis of the impact of school reform efforts is Professor Cuban's reflection on his beliefs then and now. As he writes, "When I describe my direct experiences as a teacher, administrator, and researcher during surges of reform, I will elaborate on primary beliefs at the time and detail any mistaken ideas and slipups in practice that I pursued and committed." (Cuban, 2021, p. xix)

During the first two chapters, Cuban makes sense of the progressive movement impact on education while growing up and being educated in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. He provides insight into how schooling impacted his life and thinking at the time. Using the device of "fast forward," and "rewind" to comment on how his experiences impacted his life after the fact. He concludes that this period in his life and in a general, schooling's impact on his and other children's development tend to pale in comparison to external events, i.e., World War II, or the influence of family and friends. "I believe, formal schooling in those 1,200 hours a year, important as they are socially in accu-

lating the young, politically in cultivating civic participation, and economically in accumulating diploma for degrees for jobs and careers, all of that is given far more weight than it deserves in assessing how children and teenagers become adults." (Cuban, 2021, p. 46)

In addition to the story of his career as an educator, among the most interesting chapters is the Standards-Based Reform Movement. "What I have noticed is that the rationale for business involvement in the 1890's and 1980's remains nearly the same as in the 2020's." (Cuban, 2021, p. 114) One of the most significant points Professor Cuban makes in the chapter is that despite what one may believe about standards-based education, it has become the "de facto national policy" (Cuban, 2021, p. 114) of America. Moreover, it is one of the most poignant examples of how education is impacted by civic leaders as in the Civil Rights movement and desegregation and here, the impact of business leaders with the standards-based movement. As Professor Cuban writes, "The actions of business and civic leaders at two different times in the history of the US both show the permeability of tax-supported public schools to external stakeholders, and of even greater importance, illustrate how politically vulnerable public schools are to major economic, social and cultural currents in the nation." (Cuban, 2021, p. 115)

His assessment is no less true of the controversies plaguing education today with Critical Race Theory and LGBTQIA in curriculum in many parts of the country. While these conclusions are not earthshattering, they provide context for the reader, hopefully new and prospective educators, who should do more than learn how to teach but to understand the history and dynamics of the educational reform movement.

". . . the educational history of the past few decades indicates that Americans may need to reconsider where to place the burden of their effort in education and how." (Cremin, 1977, p. 125)

**Reviewed by Anthony J. Annunziato, Ed.D.**, Clinical Associate Professor and Assistant Chair, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University.





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