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The Journal for Leadership and Instruction is an international peer reviewed publication that is published twice each year. Authors should follow the APA Manual 7 guidelines. The review of related literature should be written in the past tense. No article will be accepted if it is more than 10 pages (double spaced) long. Suggested changes are the responsibility of the author. For the Spring issue, we ask that all submissions arrive by February 1, 2026. Please note that simultaneous and concurrent submissions will not be considered for publication.

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SCOPE Education Services is a not-for-profit, private, voluntary organization permanently chartered by the New York State Board of Regents to provide services to school districts. Founded in 1964 by school superintendents, it is a cooperative venture for sharing resources to deal with common concerns. It is governed by a Board of Directors of school superintendents and college representatives and serves as a regional School Study Council and School Board Institute.

JLI Podcasts Spring 2025

Beyond Instruction: A Framework for Balanced Leadership	"Beyond Instruction: A Framework for Balanced Leadership," by Dr. Andy Sezto of Brooklyn and of Russell Sage Colleges, contributes research about the effective implementation of balanced literacy that has leadership lessons for how any organizational change warrants careful consideration.	
The Opt-Out Movement Revisited	Drs. Kenneth Forman and Craig Markson, whose extensive use of data analysis in their article, "The Opt-Out Movement Revisited," substantiates learning and expenditure gaps among school districts. Their analyses pose decision points for leaders and policymakers across the board.	
Exploring Aspirations: A Review of the Career Decision Influences for Chinese American College Students	Molloy University's Rebecca Y. Martinez's article, "Exploring Aspirations: A Review of the Career Decision Influences for Chinese American College Students" highlights a need to recognize how these variables must be factored into sensitive counseling and advice.	
The Power of Teacher Beliefs in Effective Learning of Students with Disabilities in Inclusion Classrooms	Dr. Nisha Acharya Julien of Fordham University accents her research about "The Power of Teacher Beliefs in Effective Learning of Students with Disabilities in Inclusion Classrooms." She has valuable insights about this important topic. What is the optimum way to combine the many elements of instruction in Inclusion classrooms?	
Educational Leadership in Modern Times: Harnessing the Power of Self-Awareness, Emotional Intelligence, and Intentional Communication	Listen to Dr. Vincent Butera's comments about his article, "Educational Leadership in Modern Times: Harnessing the Power of Self-Awareness, Emotional Intelligence, and Intentional Communication," where he takes an entirely different tack in demonstrating how we can meaningfully impact troubling choices by approaching them from a range of reflective practices.	

You can find all of JLI's podcasts on Spotify

Editor's Note

Matching the Many Faces of Change and Leadership

The JLI Editorial Board has carefully chosen to publish submissions that certainly stand on their own for research and reflection excellence. That would only however, be half the message behind the music of their selections. Additionally, they twine together to emphasize current and future themes whose total exceed the sum of their parts. Draw a line between likely authors and appropriate leadership themes or issues. And yes, they *may* duplicate.

Column A - Authors' Names/Affiliations	**Column B - Leadership Themes and Issues**
Dr. Victoria Borsella & Ms. Juanita Diaz	
Dr. Karen Gross	Reflection
Molloy University (Dr. Audra Ceruto et al.)	Creative Organization Design
Dr. Christina Carnovale	Capacity Building
Dr. Vincent Butera	Change Toolkit
Drs. Alan Sebel, Thomas J. Troisi, & James Parla	Successful Program Design
Dr. Robert Manley	
Ms. Dorothy Drexel	

Dr. Victoria Borsella & Juanita Diaz (Port Washington School District)'s article, Instructional Leadership is the Key to a Successful Literacy Initiative, explores and solidifies compelling conclusions about how a literacy initiative implementation is vitally dependent on leadership deftly nurtured by change toolkit competencies and dispositions necessary for sustainable and effective instruction.

Both Dr. Karen Gross's extraordinary experience and insights about the impact of a successful program systemically and strategically designed for postsecondary graduates, demonstrates critical insights in how these students can only succeed with thoughtful continued intervention and support. Her article, Transition Practices: Predictors of Postsecondary Outcomes for Students with Disabilities; Karen Gross (St. John's University), emphasizes how we can help these students succeed.

Molloy University's Audra Cerruto, Ph.D., Kirsten Watts, M.S., Rickey Moroney, M.S., Jeanne Kimpel, Ph.D., Rebeca Herro Saenz, Ph.D., Sherone Smith-Sanchez, Ed.D., Devi Singh, Sonia Singh, Samantha DiStefano, & Stephanie Sage, article Mixed-method Analysis of the Effects of Mentoring on the Self-efficacy of Pre-service Teachers Engaged in a Microteaching Lesson Study; speaks to their conclusions and considers implications about the importance of empowering preservice teaching candidates with competencies that increases their capacity to use both mind and skillsets in their instructional planning to more nearly assure effectiveness.

Similar in theme to the Molloy authors' research, too often, practicing teachers become concerned that their students may have deep learning or ELL difficulties that may exceed their own skills or experiences. Understandably they will turn to special education or ELL specialists to intervene on the students' behalf. Dr. Christina Carnovale's article, of Glen Cove Schools, article, Preservice Content Area Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy ELL Education; considers another dimension that may often need bolstering, that of instructional training for students with ELL and / or special education disabilities in their preservice training to more nearly assure that general education and ELL specialists can support their students' needs.

"Doctor it hurts when I do this …" implies the premise that leaders, challenged by daunting times like ours will often fall back to tried-and-true solutions to decision choices, even when these no longer seem to be effective. Dr. Vincent Butera's Educational Leadership in Modern Times: Harnessing the Power of Self- Awareness, Emotional Intelligence, and Intentional Communication; takes an entirely different tack where he demonstrates how we can meaningfully impact troubling choices by approaching them from a range of reflective practices.

Reminiscent of Dr. Butera's article, Drs. Alan Sebel, Thomas J. Troisi, and James Parla of Touro University offers research-based evidence of the factors that obstruct or encourage teachers to become school leaders in their article Factors That Motivate and Deter Teachers from Seeking School Leadership Positions;

Article Review: Speaking of challenging times, the confusion about the merits of embedding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into school organization planning, Dr. Robert Manley's thoughtful exploration of the Harvard Business Review's article, Achieve DEI goals without DEI Programs; supplies creative reflections and a new set of perspectives to see how these goals are achieved differently.

The journal's Editorial Board has begun a new genre to include in our articles and reviews offerings. Their decision acknowledges there are other dimensions that capture how educational researchers and writers can influence thinking and applications to leadership and instruction. These will entertain reflective practices and conclusions that may exceed the ordinary empirical data we have always endorsed. Sunflowers may be sunflowers, but the message behind the entry's music says much more.

Dorothy Drexel's reflection piece, Planting the Seeds of Legacy: A Poetic Reflection on Leadership and Resilience in School Building Administration; sparks reflective consideration for all educators. It gives pause to us leaders who are caught sometimes, actually quite often, in a rapid - fire decisions - and - actions - quicksand occasions where they cannot either be effective or satisfied by merely doing what "worked yesterday." Ms. Drexel's sunflower metaphor is apt for all those who need to stop to smell the flowers (even though I don't think

sunflowers have a scent). More importantly, it emphasizes that leaders' choices that are reflectively nurtured do the best for all.

You can expect podcast conversations with each article's authors where we perform deeper analysis of the meaningful implications their submissions suggest for us.

As we mark our twenty-fifth year of publication, please take note of the podcast, publication, and program spectrum efforts we will provide our readers for the next several months.

This begins this November, when Mr. George Duffy, SCOPE's Executive Director, our major cheerleader and supporter and I will kick off an opening podcast to offer an overview of these multifaceted efforts.

Also in late November, Drs. Robert Manley, our journal's founding editor, and Kevin McGuire, a succeeding editor and fellow long-term member of SCOPE's Executive Board, will participate in a Marking Mission and Milestones podcast that will trace the journal's beginnings and continuing efforts to influence important research and practices in all corners of educational genres.

Other podcasts will center on Change, Artificial Intelligence, DEI and other trends that our journal will explore in coming years.

In addition to podcasts, you can expect a double Silver Anniversary Issue in mid Spring,where we will offer the journal's five most cited articles across our tenure. Finally, specialized forums in late spring will synthesize our celebration and forge new trails for the next twenty-five!

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In closing we note with great sadness, the passing of Dr. Eustace Thompson. Dr. Thompson served education as a vital figure in shaping educational leadership research and practices, not only at Hofstra University, but also across New York State in leadership policy and certification matters. Most notably for his colleagues here at SCOPE, he has been a valued long-term member of the SCOPE Journal for Leadership and Instruction where he advised and contributed to our research and practices efforts on many cutting-edge fronts. Our sincerest condolences to his family, to the Hofstra educational community, and to all who respect exemplary service to learners.

Best wishes to all as we celebrate the holiday season!

Dr. Richard Bernato,
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Correction: There was a misprint of the title of the article *Beyond Instruction - A Framework for Balanced Leadership* by Dr. Andy Sezto. We apologize for the error.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IS THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL LITERACY INITIATIVE

Dr. Victoria Borsella and Juanita Diaz
(Port Washington School District, New York)

Abstract

This article examines the crucial role of instructional leadership in the successful implementation of a literacy initiative in New York State, particularly in light of historically stagnant reading proficiency rates among diverse student populations. Drawing on extensive research, including findings from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the authors advocate for evidence-based practices in reading instruction, specifically emphasizing the Science of Reading framework. By analyzing the historical context of literacy reform and the impact of educational policies, the article highlights the necessity of shifting mindsets among educators and instructional leaders towards structured literacy approaches that prioritize phonemic awareness and explicit instruction. It further underscores the importance of professional development, accountability, and budget alignment to support the impmentation of Education Law §818, which mandates evidence-based literacy instruction from prekindergarten through third grade. The authors argue that through strategic leadership and collaborative efforts, school districts can significantly enhance literacy outcomes, thereby addressing the broader implications of literacy on economic stability, health, and overall well-being.

Keywords: leadership, Science of Reading, literacy

Literacy Reform-A Long Time in the Making

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000) identified," The need for clear, objective, and scientifically based information on the effectiveness of different types of reading instruction and the need to have such research inform policy and practice" (p. 1-2). For decades after its publication, this report did not influence federal or state policy in ways that directly shaped how school districts implemented reading instruction. The effects of this lack of policy could be seen vis-a-vis New York State's English Language Arts (ELA) exam scores and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores. Fourth-grade ELA test scores in NYS have consistently ranged between 30% and 49% proficiency, except for the 2021 administration. New York State Education Department (2021, October 28) stated that in response to post-COVID concerns, a shorter exam was administered to students in-person only, identifying potentially lower participation, and conceded that local results may not reflect the population of students in a given district. NAEP data also reflects that reading proficiency for NYS has hovered between 29-37 percent since 1998. New York State has seen the majority of their students, for over twenty years, not demonstrate proficiency in reading. To emphasize the urgency of this literacy initiative, it is essential to examine data related to specific subgroups. Over the past three administrations of the NYS ELA exam fourth grade English Language Learners (ELLs) have consistently shown proficiency rates below 20% in contrast to their non-ELL counterparts whose proficiency rates ranged from 45% to 53%. Similarly, fourth-grade students who are economically disadvantaged have maintained a proficiency rate of 37% or less, while their more economically advantaged peers achieved rates between 57% to 64%. Additionally, Black and Hispanic fourth-grade students have continued to demonstrate proficiency rates at or below 40% in this same period while White students achieved proficiency rates between 48-54%. It is also critical to recognize the far-reaching consequences of inadequate reading skills, often rooted in weak phonemic awareness. The impact extends well beyond academic performance, influencing multiple aspects of an individual's life. As Fogg, Harrington, and Khatiwada (2018) highlights, workers with the highest levels of literacy and numeracy proficiency (levels 4/5) earn approximately 75% more than those at level 2. Studies indicate that people with lower literacy skills often underutilize preventative health services, engage more frequently in risky health behaviors, and struggle to comprehend and manage medical treatments—factors that contribute to poorer overall health outcomes (Mulcahy et al., 2016). Thus,

limited literacy proficiency has broad implications, shaping employment opportunities, economic stability, and health and well-being. Despite the National Reading Panel's Report (2000) and extensive research identifying best practices for reading instruction, no measures or actions were taken to ensure their implementation—until now.

One may wonder why there has been stagnation in our reading rates for so many years. While the importance of reading has long been undisputed, the most effective method for teaching children to read remains a subject of intense debate—often referred to as the "Reading Wars," pitting phonics-based instruction against whole-language or balanced methods (Barends & Reddy, 2024; Thomas, 2022; Wyse & Bradbury, 2023). Scholarly discourse on reading instruction has long centered on competing pedagogical approaches—whether children benefit most from systematic, explicit instruction in phonics and decoding skills, or whether literacy develops more naturally through immersion in rich texts and authentic reading experiences (Pearson, 2004). According to Pearson (2004) what originated as a debate between explicit instruction and whole-word methods later evolved into the broader and more enduring controversy between explicit, phonics-based approaches and whole-language instruction, often described as the Reading Wars.

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000) identified that in 1997, Congress enlisted the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Secretary of Education, to create a national panel to assess the teaching based on research-based methods and effectiveness when it comes to reading. The National Reading Panel looked at topics of importance to reading, with phonemic awareness being one of the research's major components. Findings indicate that explicit phonemic awareness instruction positively impacted students' ability to read words and non-words demonstrating implications for decoding assistance and recalling known words (NICHD, 2000). Furthermore, instruction in phonemic awareness was recognized as a key pillar of early reading development, and explicit phonics instruction emerged as a pivotal factor in achieving reading proficiency. However, there were no mandates to implement explicit phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, despite the report.

Emily Hanford created a podcast that helped ignite the discussion about the best way to teach reading, again. According to Hanford (2022) the whole-language philosophy originated from New Zealand's shift toward book-based experiences in the 1960s. Hanford further states that Marie Clay investigated why certain students failed to notice print under the whole-language approach. The whole-language approach relied on exposure to books and language for students to learn to read. Marie Clay's research gave birth to Reading Recovery for emergent readers to use a system to decode unfamiliar words. Kim (2008) discussed the work of Jeanne Chall who found that emphasis on understanding the code of reading would produce better word recognition results. Hanford (2019) explains that Ken Goodman's focuses on how readers rely on cues to guess difficult words—rather than on precision and decoding. These cues came to be known as the three-cueing system, and it was used as a strategy in programs designed by Marie Clay and others.

Kim (2008) points out that The National Reading Panel's 2000 report influenced the governmental Reading First portion of the No Child Left Behind Act that required scientifically based research practices in the pillars of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Hanford (2019) identified that despite the National Reading Panel's report, a new version of the whole language approach, termed balanced literacy, evolved. Still, the three-cueing method persisted, despite its limited emphasis on phonemic awareness and phonics as key tools for word decoding. Barshay (2020) described balanced literacy as a compromise between phonics and the whole-language approach. She further noted that whole language relied on students' exposure to text and eventually incorporated three-cueing, a strategy for decoding that lacks strong research support. The nation has spent decades utilizing strategies that lack a strong research base. The research speaks to the need for direct instruction as a route to reading success.

The methods one uses to teach reading do matter. Decades of research have pointed us towards the use of explicit, systematic, and direct instruction in the reading pillars, or structured literacy. The Science of Reading has emerged as the research and evidence-based framework for reading instruction. The New York State Education Department (2024) defined the Science of Reading as a body of interdisciplinary research that describes how children develop reading and writing skills. Brief 1 goes on to point out that many current instructional practices in reading are not grounded in effective approaches and structured literacy. Structured literacy draws on the Science of Reading research.

According to Archer and Hughes (2011), structured literacy is marked by explicit, systematic, and sequential instruction in areas such as phonemes, letter–sound correspondences, syllable patterns, morphemes, vocabulary, fluency, and text structure. The body of work is clear that these skills are imperative in developing the necessary reading skills to read and comprehend with effectiveness in school despite a lack of consistent use of research-based practices.

Sequeira (2025, April 30) pointed out that many states are beginning to address literacy through state initiatives instead of leaving those decisions to local control. New Jersey has mandated early literacy screenings, Oregon, Washington, and Montana are weighing coaches, interventions, and training in literacy, and Georgia is moving towards banning three cues. The Education Trust–New York (2023) highlighted that since 2019, dozens of states mandated or incentivized schools and teacher-prep programs to use Science of Reading and evidence-based reading instruction in their classrooms. According to The Education Trust–New York, a mixed-methods study revealed that the most frequently used curriculum among 250 responding New York school districts was Lucy Calkins' Teachers College Units of Study, even though its methods have been shown to be ineffective.

According to Wyse and Bradbury (2022), there are many factors that influence whether research-based information is part of curriculum policy, and even more telling, part of a teacher's pedagogy. The Education Trust–New York (2023) points to the local control approach that New York has to education as the reason for inconsistent and ineffective instructional methods, leading to lagging reading scores for New York students. New York State faced mounting pressure by advocacy groups like The Education Trust–New York and ESSA regulations that necessitate improvement through evidence-based interventions. The Reading League which is based in New York, in their call to action said that educational programs need to align coursework to the Science of Reading, school administrators and school boards needed to provide professional development in it, and policymakers needed to prioritize the application of the Science of Reading in Schools (The Reading League, 2020). The importance of evidence and research-based practices in literacy by way of structured literacy will continue to be in the spotlight as states continue shifting their practices through policy and training.

The New York State Education Department (2025) is now requiring all districts for fall of 2025 to adhere to Education Law §818. Education Law §818 requires that instruction in prekindergarten through third grade be linked to research-based best practices (New York State Senate, 2024). Requiring every district to verify that their curriculum in prekindergarten through third grade is aligned with the New York State provided research-based best practices is a pivotal moment in education related to reading instruction. New York State's Education Department put out a set of Literacy Briefs aimed at introducing the Science of Reading, the pillars of reading, and high-impact instructional practices in reading to build knowledge in evidence-based practices in reading and writing. Previously, there was no mandate around teaching all reading pillars or using evidence-based or scientifically based materials in New York. Now, due to these accountability measures, this critical issue will continue to be at the forefront of education. New York's reading initiative and adoption of Education Law 818 is a long time in the making. Education Law 818 calls for evidence-based and scientifically-based reading instruction to be implemented in every New York State school district.

Shifting Mindset to Shift Instructional Practices

Shifting mindsets is a critical first step in transforming instructional practices to improve student outcomes. Educators as well as instructional leaders must have a growth mindset. A growth mindset is " based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts" (Dweck, 2008, p.7). Furthermore Dweck states that growth and change are possible for anyone through dedication and learning from experience. Educators must recognize that effective teaching evolves through continuous learning, reflection, and the willingness to refine practice. Shifting an educator's mindset involves moving away from traditional teaching methods that may no longer meet the diverse needs of today's students and moving towards evidence-based practices. This shift begins with challenging long-standing beliefs about instruction and being open to new strategies that meet the needs of all learners. The research speaks to the need for direct instruction as a route to reading success. Shanahan (2020) stated, "According to those views, such data provide convincing evidence that explicit decoding instruction (e.g., phonological awareness, phonics) should be beneficial to reading success" (p. S235).

Utilizing data to highlight the need for change is a crucial first step, as it provides a clear rationale for adjusting instructional practices (Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007). Ikemoto and Marsh argue that grounding the call for change in data is essential, as it provides an evidence-based rationale for refining and adapting instructional practices. Additionally, Lee, Camburn, and Sebastian (2024) found that school leaders who used benchmark data to make informed decisions observed significant improvements in student reading and math scores.

Equally critical is cultivating collaboration among key stakeholders to design and implement a collective action plan that ensures shared responsibility for improvement efforts (Fullan, 2016). Instructional leaders play an important role in this process by modeling a growth-mindset approach, providing support through professional development, and fostering a culture where innovation and reflection are valued (Robinson et al., 2008). Ultimately, when mindsets shift, instructional practices follow, leading to more effective teaching and improved student outcomes.

Professional Development to Support the Initiative

Effective instructional leadership is crucial for navigating the changes required by the NYS Literacy Initiative. Professional development is a critical component in supporting the implementation of Education Law 818, which

emphasizes evidence-based and scientifically based reading instruction for students in prekindergarten through grade three. This law requires that instructional practices focus on key literacy components such as phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, comprehension, oral language, and writing, all aligned with the Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework (CR-SE framework). According to the New York State Education Department (2019), the CR-SE framework components include: a welcoming and affirming environment, high expectations and rigorous instruction, inclusive curriculum and assessment, and ongoing professional learning and support. For instructional leaders, their professional development is essential to build the capacity needed to evaluate, guide, and support educators in adopting best practices, ensuring curriculum alignment, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Leaders must be equipped to conduct curriculum reviews, provide effective feedback, and create strategic plans that enhance early literacy outcomes. Instructional leaders must have a strong understanding of the initiative, the research behind the initiative, and the instructional best practices New York State is requiring teachers to utilize in their classrooms. This knowledge is important to be able to support teachers as they implement these practices. Leaders have to know what those best practices translate to in the classroom setting.

For teachers, ongoing professional development ensures they have the knowledge and skills to implement high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction effectively. Training in specific literacy strategies, differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive practices empowers teachers to meet diverse student needs and improve reading proficiency. The New York State Education Department (2024) in Literacy Brief 1 named six skills associated with reading. The skills are oral language, phonological awareness with phonemic awareness as an embedded skill, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. These six skills should be the focus of professional development. Ultimately, comprehensive professional development for both instructional leaders and educators is vital to meeting the requirements of Education Law 818 and driving improved literacy outcomes for all students.

The Role of Accountability

Accountability plays a role in the successful implementation of Education Law 818, ensuring that both instructional leaders and educators are committed to improving early literacy outcomes. Leaders must articulate a shared understanding of literacy goals aligned with state mandates, fostering a collaborative culture that encourages teamwork among teachers, administrators, and support staff. For instructional leaders, accountability involves overseeing curriculum alignment with the state's evidence-based best practices, monitoring the effectiveness of reading instruction, and providing targeted support where needed. This includes conducting regular reviews of instructional practices by conducting observations, analyzing student data to identify areas for growth, and holding educators to high standards of instructional excellence. Leaders are responsible for creating a culture of continuous improvement, where data-driven decision-making and reflective practices guide professional development and instructional strategies.

For educators, accountability ensures that evidence-based reading instruction is delivered with fidelity, meeting the diverse needs of all students. Teachers are expected to implement the instructional best practices outlined by the commissioner, regularly assess student progress, and adjust their teaching methods based on data and feedback. Professional development serves as a critical support system, equipping educators with the tools and strategies necessary to meet these expectations.

Additionally, accountability fosters a sense of professional responsibility, encouraging educators to reflect on their practices, collaborate with colleagues, and actively engage in continuous learning to enhance student achievement in early literacy. As Carol Dweck (2008) states, "Becoming is better than being"(p.25). For educators, this mindset is crucial. It encourages us to remain open to new strategies, feedback, and innovations in teaching practices, reinforcing professional development is a lifelong journey. Educators are truly becoming lifelong learners.

Aligning the Budget to Support the Initiative

It is often said that how individuals or organizations allocate their financial resources reveals their true priorities and values. To implement this literacy initiative effectively, it is essential to invest time, human capital, and financial support into the various components that will be necessary for it to be successful. Whether adopting a new program or enhancing the current curriculum, allocating appropriate resources will be critical.

Professional development for educators will be a necessary part of this process, demanding both time and funding. This may involve budgetary implications associated with hiring substitutes to cover classrooms during training sessions, bringing in external experts to engage staff in professional learning, or leveraging in-house experts who are deeply familiar with the school's population to provide more contextually informed professional learning opportunities. Additionally, classrooms will require materials that align with evidence-based best practices to support instructional shifts. While the scale of these shifts may vary in classrooms across NYS, all will require some level of budgetary commitment. Districts must prioritize access to high-quality instructional materials and professional development opportunities, while regularly reviewing instructional practices and student outcomes to guide continuous improvement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; DuFour, 2004)

The NYS Literacy Initiative marks a significant step towards evidence-based literacy instruction. Through strong instructional leadership and strategic change management, districts can address challenges and ensure that all students develop the critical reading and comprehension skills needed for academic success.

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TRANSITION PRACTICES: PREDICTORS OF POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

For school districts to adequately prepare students with disabilities for a successful post-graduation life, it is essential to understand which variables predict postsecondary outcomes. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between race/ethnicity, disability classification, and graduation year on students with disabilities' self-reported post-graduation education plan. The study aims to determine whether these independent variables predict postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities and to identify disparities that exist in subgroups of race/ethnicity and disability classification. The findings of this study hold promise, as they can assist educational leaders and stakeholders in improving existing transition practices or initiating new transition programs to better support students with disabilities in achieving optimal outcomes. The sample consisted of 267 students from a large suburban secondary school in the Northeastern part of the United States, with a majority of Latino or Hispanic and Black or African American student populations. The quantitative ex post facto study used archived data and binary logistic regression analysis to uncover predictive relationships. Findings indicated significant relationships between race/ethnicity and graduation year with postsecondary outcomes. These findings highlight the potential for designing effective educational programs for students with disabilities to ensure greater success in postsecondary outcomes.

Keywords: Students with disabilities, postsecondary outcomes, transition services, individualized education plan, race/ethnicity, evidence-base

Introduction

Schools across America are built on the premise that all students have equal access to education. Research has shown, however, that students with disabilities are less successful than their non-disabled peers in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living (Newman et al., 2011) and gender and race/ethnicity reveal lower success rates in some postsecondary outcomes for individuals than in other subgroups (Gardenhire et al., 2016). This lack of success has several adverse consequences, prompting the implementation of transition services and the creation of the National Technical Assistance Center of Transition (NTACT).

In the 2021-22 school year, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 15% of public-school students aged 3-21 received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (NCES, 2022c). Students with a learning disability (33%) made up the largest group, followed by speech and language (19%), and other health impairments (15%). Race/ethnicity varied among students with disabilities, with American Indian/Alaska Native students (19%) and Black students (17%) representing the highest percentages (NCES, 2022a).

Individuals with disabilities experience poorer postsecondary outcomes than their non-disabled peers. In 2022, only 34.8% of individuals with disabilities over age 16 participated in the labor force, compared to 74.4% of their non-disabled peers (USDOL, 2023). The unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities was 7.6%, while for non-disabled peers it was 3.5% (USDOL, 2023). Unemployment rates, low wages, and poverty are especially high for those with intellectual disabilities compared with non-disabled peers (Butterworth et al., 2015). Additionally, research has shown that race/ethnicity and gender have similar outcomes with college and career aspirations, with male students of color encountering additional barriers to reaching their goals (Gardenhire et al., 2016).

There are negative impacts on individuals and society when students with disabilities have poor postsecondary outcomes. Test et al. (2006) found that employment is essential for financial security and independent living. However, students with disabilities are less likely than their non-disabled peers to experience these successes (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Socioeconomic status also impacts students with disabilities and postsecondary outcomes. Wagner et al. (2005) found that students with disabilities had higher rates of poverty compared to families of students in general education, with Lopez et al., (2000) finding Latinos have the lowest income across ethnic groups, often due to low educational attainment.

The need for transition services was addressed through amendments to IDEA, beginning in 1990. Transition services must be included in students' Individualized Education Plans (IEP) (Test et al., 2014). The amendment required a student's development of needs, interest, and preferences with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) beginning the year a student's turns 16 with a statement of transition services and agency linkages (Kohler & Field, 2003). Another IDEA amendment in 2004 added a mandate requiring a transition plan on the IEP to generate sustainable postsecondary outcomes (Newman et al., 2011).

Under section 300.8 in the IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2023), disability classifications are identified, with thirteen disability classifications under the New York State Commissioner's Regulations Part 200.1. The classifications are autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, emotional disturbances, hearing impairment, learning disability, intellectual disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairments, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, including blindness, and multiple disabilities. While there are several disability categories, most of the research has focused on learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, and intellectual disabilities (Murray et al., 2021). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019), out of the 10% of all students receiving special education services in a public-school setting, over 50% fall into one of the three categories of learning disability, emotional disturbances, or intellectual disabilities. Many of the studies conducted focus on limited categories and not all 13. The lack of disaggregated data by disability category is a notable limitation in predicting postsecondary outcomes (Test et al., 2009).

The increasing number of students with disabilities entering public schools will impact special education spending, which is significantly higher than for general education (Kingsbury, 2020). In 2018-2019, New York spent $32,359 per pupil (data.nysed.gov, 2019) on special education, compared to $13,701 per general education student nationally (NCES, 2022b). In 2018, New York State showed that while general education student enrollment remained primarily consistent, the special education enrollment showed an increase of 15%, with spending growing over 25% (Kingsbury, 2020). As the number of students with disabilities continues to rise, the stress on budgets will increase.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks guiding this study are Paula Kohler's taxonomy of transition programming 2.0 (Kohler et al., 2016) and Peter Senge's learning organization (Senge et al., 2012). Kohler's taxonomy for transition programming 2.0 is arguably one of the cornerstones of transition practices utilized and outlines a set of transition practices guiding how schools and teachers deliver education and services. These strategies provide an individual-centered paradigm using self-determination and a family and student involvement approach center (Kohler & Field, 2003). The five categories of taxonomy are student-focused planning, student development, interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration, family engagement, and program structure (Kohler et al., 2016). Senge's learning organization focuses on the interconnectedness of five disciplines working together to create an optimal organization. It examines how people work together to achieve outcomes, promoting continuous learning and innovation (Senge et al., 2012). The five disciplines include personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, team learning, and systems thinking. The theoretical framework was used as a lens that guided this research study by examining students with disabilities, exploring their long-term goal while looking at the entire system.

Methods

The researcher used a quantitative non-experimental ex post facto design to determine whether race/ethnicity, disability classification, and graduation year predict postsecondary outcomes. The research questions were: To what extent does race/ethnicity predict postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities? To what extent does disability classification predict postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities? To what extent does graduation year predict postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities?

This study used purposive sampling to select participants, focusing on students with special education classifications or 504 plans. The final sample consisted of 267 students (n = 267), adjusted from an initial population of 299 after accounting for duplicates and miscoded data. The participants were from the 2017-2018 cohort (n = 118) with IEPs or 504 plans and the 2021-2022

cohort (n = 149). The study was conducted in a large suburban high school in the northeastern United States. In 2017-2018, the demographics were 9% Black or African American, 84% Latino or Hispanic, 2% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 3% White, and 0% Multiracial (NYSED, 2018). In 2021-2022, the demographics were 8% Black or African American, 87% Latino or Hispanic, 2% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 2% White, and 0% Multiracial (NYSED, 2022). Students with disabilities represented 13% of the student population in 2017-2018 and 15% in 2021-2022 (NYSED, 2018, 2022).

Data were archived and collected from various sources, including the eSchool Management System for demographic data and the ClearTrack Information Network for IEP and 504 plan tracking. Additional data from the New York State Report Card included gender, race/ethnicity, students with disabilities, graduation rates, and diploma types for 2018 and 2022 (NYSED, 2018, 2022). Post-graduation plans (PGP) were self-reported to school counselors, who entered the data into eSchool. The researcher ensured all identifying information was removed to maintain confidentiality. Data were securely stored on a password-protected laptop in a locked office drawer.

Results

This study analyzed data from 267 participants in the graduating years of 2018 (n = 118) and 2022 (n = 149). The sample was predominantly male (69.3%) with 30.7% female participants. The racial/ethnic distribution included 66.7% Latino or Hispanic, 23.2% Black or African American, 6.4% White, and 3.7% Other (Asian, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Multiracial, American Indian/Alaskan Native).

The study aimed to predict postsecondary outcomes based on race/ethnicity, disability classification, and graduation year. A binary logistic regression was conducted to examine the likelihood of attending postsecondary education or “other” outcomes like employment or military service. Race/ethnicity was coded as 1 for Latino (reference group), 2 for Black/African American, 3 for White, and 4 for Other. Disability classification was coded 1 for Learning Disability (reference group) to 13 for Multiple Disabilities. Graduation year was coded as 1 for 2018 (reference group) and 2 for 2022.

An alpha level of .05 was set for significance, and assumption tests for logistic regression were conducted. The dependent variable was nominal, and the independent variables were categorical. The binary logistic regression revealed a significant relationship between race/ethnicity and postsecondary outcomes ($x^2(15, N = 267) = 51.37$, $p < .001$). White students with disabilities were 75% less likely to report postsecondary education outcomes compared to Latino students (OR = 0.25). Black or African American and Other racial categories did not significantly contribute to the model (p = .454, p = .207). Disability classification did not significantly predict postsecondary outcomes. Graduation year (2022) was associated with postsecondary outcomes; students graduating in 2022 were 75% less likely to report postsecondary education outcomes (OR = 0.25, p < .001).

Table 1

Binary Logistic Regression Predicting the Likelihood of Race/Ethnicity and Postsecondary Outcome of Education

							95% CI OR	
Race/Ethnicity	***B***	***SE-B***	***Wald***	***df***	***P***	***OR***	***LL***	***UL***
Black/AA	.27	.36	.56	1	.454	1.30	.65	2.61
White	-1.40	.68	4.27	1	.039	.25	.07	.93
Other	1.44	1.14	1.59	1	.207	4.21	.45	39.21
Constant	-4.25	2.24	3.59	1	.058	.01		

Note. *Latino/Hispanic is the reference category for Race/Ethnicity*

Table 2

Binary Logistic Regression Predicting the Likelihood of Disability Classification and Postsecondary Outcome of Education

							95% CI OR	
Dis Class	***B***	***SE-B***	***Wald***	***df***	***P***	***OR***	***LL***	***UL***
OHI	.02	.43	.00	1	.960	1.02	.44	2.36
Intel Dis	.25	.73	.12	1	.728	1.29	.31	5.41
Spch/Lang	20.02	22740.97	.00	1	.999	496133052.86	.00	.
Autism	-.50	1.05	.22	1	.638	.61	.08	4.80
Emot Dis	-1.05	1.58	.44	1	.508	.35	.02	7.80
Hearing	20.25	40192.97	.00	1	1.000	624182766.63	.00	.
Mult Dis	-21.65	15448.71	.00	1	.999	.00	.00	.
Constant	-4.25	2.24	3.59	1	.058	.01		

Note. Learning Disability is the reference group for Disability Classification.

Table 3

Binary Logistic Regression Predicting the Likelihood of graduating Year and Postsecondary Outcome of Education

							95% CI OR	
Grad Year	*B*	*SE-B*	*Wald*	*df*	*P*	*OR*	*LL*	*UL*
2022	-1.40	.34	16.53	1	<.001	.25	.13	.49
Constant	-4.25	2.24	3.59	1	.058	.01		

Note. 2018 is the reference group for Graduation Year

Discussion

Implications of Findings

This quantitative non-experimental ex post factor study examined how race/ethnicity, disability classification, and graduation year predicted postsecondary outcomes, specifically education, for students with disabilities. The theoretical frameworks guiding this study were Senge's learning organizations (Senge et al., 2012) and Kohler’s taxonomy for transition programming 2.0 (Kohler et al., 2016). The study also used research from the National Technical Assistance Center of Transition (NTACT, 2021) to identify predictor variables in high school and postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. Major findings revealed that race/ethnicity and graduation year predicted postsecondary education outcomes, but disability classification did not.

The first research question explored the relationship between race/ethnicity and self-reported postsecondary plans. Previous research has shown that Latino and Black males have poorer high school completion outcomes compared to White students (Aud et al., 2011). This study found a statistically significant result (p = .039), with White students with disabilities being 75% less likely to report postsecondary education plans compared to Latino or Hispanic students (OR = 0.25). No significant results were found for Black or African American (p = .454) or other racial groups (p = .207). While some studies have shown that students of color with disabilities have lower postsecondary representation, this study found that White students were less likely to report postsecondary education plans than Latino or Hispanic students.

The second research question examined the relationship between disability classification and self-reported postsecondary plans of education. Previous studies have found that only 38% of individuals with disabilities complete postsecondary education programs (Sanford et al., 2011), with only 34.7% of students with autism attending college (Shattuck et al., 2012). This study found no significant relationship between disability classification and postsecondary education plans (p > .05 for all classifications). These findings align with previous research questioning the significance of disability classification in predicting postsecondary outcomes.

The final research question examined the impact of graduation year (2018 vs. 2022) on postsecondary outcomes. A binary logistic regression found that students with disabilities who graduated in 2022 were 75% less likely to report postsecondary education plans (OR = 0.25, p < .001). This finding may reflect the ongoing impact of the pandemic on postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

The theoretical frameworks underpinning this study highlight the challenges in postsecondary participation in secondary and transition among students of different disabilities, genders, and ethnicities, resulting from tracking based on student characteristics rather than their postsecondary goals (Baer et al., 2011). Learning organizations and Kohler’s taxonomy for transition programming 2.0 offer a complementary systematic approach, focusing on individualized goals, family and stakeholder involvement, and best practices for transition services. Learning organizations focus on continuous improvement and group collaboration for optimal outcomes, while Kohler’s taxonomy emphasizes transition services that lead to the best postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

Limitations of the Study

This quantitative analysis has limitations to consider when interpreting the findings. One limitation is the sample size of 267 participants. Although it was sufficient for statistical analysis and adequate to detect effects, it falls below the ideal sample size recommended by Cohen (1988), potentially impacting the generalizability of the results.

Another limitation was the nature of the data collection method. While the researcher used archived data for the study, data collection methods and biases could have skewed the results. The data collection process could have led to missing or incomplete data, human error, or misidentified postsecondary plans. Non-response bias could be present, with overrepresentation of students who failed, did not graduate, or worked full-time during reporting periods.

The study also examined a limited set of

variables. Extraneous factors, such as family involvement, absenteeism, family income levels, and class placement, were not considered but may have influenced the results. Greater parental involvement or family support might have yielded different results in postsecondary outcomes.

Finally, the research timeframe could have influenced the results. External factors, like the COVID-19 pandemic, led to the closure of in-person learning during this time. Changes to graduation requirements during the pandemic may have also impacted students' postsecondary outcomes, possibly leading to students receiving more advanced diploma types than before the pandemic.

Conclusion

This quantitative ex post facto study used archived data to examine the relationship between race/ethnicity, disability classification, and graduation year for students with disabilities' self-reported postsecondary education outcomes. The study focused on a large suburban high school in the Northeastern U.S. with a diverse district population: 87% Latino or Hispanic, 8% Black or African American, 2% White, and 3% other.

The study found significant variables related to postsecondary education outcomes. Students with disabilities who identified as White and graduated in 2022 were less likely to report postsecondary education outcomes compared with the reference groups. Disability classification had no significance.

While some prior research supported these findings, others did not. The study was conducted in one district, and the results should be interpreted with that in mind. This finding emphasizes the need for continued support and transition services for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities, particularly White students who graduated during the pandemic, were less likely to report postsecondary education plans compared to the reference group.

The study did not explore other postsecondary outcomes, such as employment, military service, or adult services, which may provide additional insights. While valuable, the study does not explain the individual experiences or reasons behind students' self-reported postsecondary outcomes. A broader focus could yield different results and identify further opportunities to improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

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MIXED-METHOD ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF MENTORING ON THE SELF-EFFICACY OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS ENGAGED IN A MICROTEACHING LESSON STUDY

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Abstract

This mixed-method study focused on the impact of mentoring on the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers engaged in a microteaching lesson study (MLS). A sample of 33 pre-service teachers in a graduate education course at a suburban university participated in a community-based educational outreach program as a course requirement. Mentorship in the context of a microteaching lesson study, which is the process of creating, revising, executing, and reflecting on a lesson as a team, was a key element of the program. Experienced mentors supported the pre-service teachers in preparing the program sessions, participating in the outreach program, and leading reflection sessions with the pre-service teachers. Self-efficacy was measured with a pre-post survey adapted from the London Schools Excellence Fund Self-Efficacy Scale (2015). Quantitative data results demonstrated a significant increase in self-efficacy in the areas of student engagement and instructional strategies after participating in the program. Pre-service teachers' journal entries were analyzed through a qualitative approach of initial and focused coding to assess the impact of mentors during the microteaching lesson study process. Several categories emerged indicating mentors' contributions to the pre-service teachers' professional development and growth, including nurturing self-confidence, fostering team collaboration, providing constructive and supportive feedback, focusing on student success, and reducing their fears and anxiety. The impact of this mentoring positively impacted the development of the pre-service teachers' sense of self-efficacy, preparing them to enter the field of education with an openness to collaboration and ongoing growth.

Keywords: teacher self-efficacy, microteaching lesson study, mentorship, pre-service teachers

Introduction

The K-12 teaching profession has faced significant challenges post-pandemic, exacerbating existing educator shortages, particularly in hard-to-staff areas such as math, science, bilingual, and special education. Between January 2021 and February 2022, there were at least 36,000 unfilled teacher positions and 163,000 filled by underqualified educators across the United States (Nguyen et al., 2022). By fall 2022, teacher turnover increased by 4% compared with pre-pandemic levels (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023), with 55% of teachers considering a career change (Walker, 2022).

Key reasons for teacher attrition include low compensation, unreasonable expectations, and poor well-being, as highlighted by a McKinsey survey of educators between February and May 2022 (Bryant, 2023). Physical and emotional exhaustion, declining morale, and doubts about the impact of their efforts further reduce enthusiasm for teaching (Lavery & Dahill-Brown, 2024). Collaborative and shared decision-making is critical for retaining educators and maintaining workforce stability.

In New York State, 22% of teachers with less than five years of experience left the profession in the 2023-2024 school year, compared with 14% of teachers of all experience levels in the State. High turnover, especially in high-poverty and high-minority schools, increases recruitment costs and exacerbates educational inequities (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Teacher attrition negatively affects student achievement and demands policies that improve retention, teacher preparation, and working conditions (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2022).

Solutions include better compensation, improved working environments, and mentorship programs to support teacher development. Additionally, teacher

preparation programs must offer authentic experiences that build practical skills and resilience. Without addressing these issues, the risk of widespread teacher shortages remains critical (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Mentorship in Education

Mentorship fosters continuous growth for educators, particularly new teachers, by developing a growth mindset — believing that abilities can improve through effort (Dweck, 2016). Working with experienced professionals supports collaboration, improves instructional techniques, and reduces teacher attrition. Mentored teachers are more likely to stay in the profession and achieve positive classroom outcomes. The New York State Mentoring Standards (2022) highlight the value of supportive mentor-mentee relationships in creating inclusive teaching environments, enhancing competencies, and preparing educators for challenges, ultimately improving educational outcomes.

Traditional mentorship models, especially during pre-service teaching, help teachers bridge theoretical knowledge with practical classroom application (Mena et al., 2017). Research by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2009) shows that well-prepared teachers with solid content knowledge and teaching skills are less likely to leave their positions. However, studies on mentorships' effectiveness in teacher retention and development remain limited. For instance, Almedar et al. (2022) used social network analysis to explore mentorship effects, while Smith & Ingersoll (2004) linked structured mentoring to higher retention rates. In contrast, Glazerman et al. (2008) found that some teacher induction programs had a limited impact on retention.

To address these inconsistencies, teacher preparation programs and school systems must prioritize high-quality, well-structured mentorship programs. These initiatives can create a supportive network of peers, promote trust through shared experiences, improve teacher retention, and strengthen school culture (deLange & Wittek, 2020; Kamalı-Arslantas. & Yalçın, 2023).

Self-Efficacy

Rooted in ideas of volition and choice from philosophers such as John Locke and William James, self-efficacy emphasizes personal control — the ability to make decisions for oneself. Modern theories such as Bandura's social learning theory (1977; 1997), Maier & Seligman's learned helplessness (1976), Dweck's growth mindset (2016), and Duckworth's grit (2016) explore the impact of personal choice and determination on performance and functioning. Bandura coined the term self-efficacy to describe one's perceived competence and control, establishing it as a key component of social cognitive theory.

Self-efficacy involves engaging with surroundings, reflecting on experiences, and channeling emotions to shape thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs. It is the belief in one's ability to control personal, interpersonal, and professional domains. For teachers, self-efficacy reflects their confidence in influencing students' academic, behavioral, and motivational outcomes in a positive way.

Bandura linked teacher self-efficacy to mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social encouragement, and emotional states such as confidence or anxiety (Margolis & Mccabe, 2006). Mok, Rupp, and Holzberger (2023) highlight the importance of authentic teaching experiences and self-reflection in building self-efficacy. Research spanning 40 years shows that higher teacher self-efficacy is associated with better classroom quality, student achievement, teacher satisfaction, commitment, and reduced burnout (Zee & Koomen, 2016). It also positively impacts on student motivation and self-efficacy while improving teachers' well-being and resilience.

Teachers are change agents whose confidence in their ability to shape students' skills, knowledge, and behaviors enhances their professional satisfaction and ability to overcome challenges. Cultivating self-efficacy during teacher preparation can strengthen their capacity to act as such agents, benefiting educators and students.

Self-Efficacy and Mentoring

Research by Feng, Hodges, Waxman, and Joshi (2019) demonstrated that new teachers often experience a significant decline in self-efficacy during their first year of teaching, prompting teacher preparation programs to explore preventive strategies through structured mentorship. As Mallette et al. (2020) noted, "The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the more active the efforts, the higher the satisfaction, and the better the likelihood of continuing in the teaching profession (p.30)." While research consistently shows that increased time with mentors and participation in formal teacher induction programs significantly enhance self-efficacy (Hamre et al., 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2012), novice teachers often face barriers to accessing such support because of limited institutional resources and time constraints (Mallette et al., 2020).

Examining specific mentorship frameworks becomes crucial for teacher preparation programs because of the critical relationship between mentorship and self-efficacy development. One promising approach that addresses the need for structured support and practical skill development combines microteaching with lesson study methodology.

Microteaching and Lesson Study (MLS)

Microteaching effectively develops specific teaching skills in pre-service teachers, where they plan, teach, receive feedback, and revise lessons in a simulated classroom setting. The existing research on microteaching shows its positive impact on pre-service teachers in fields such as mathematics (Cheng, 2017), technology (Saban & Coklar, 2013), music education (Napoles, 2008), and language education (Retelj & Puljić, 2016; Gocer, 2016; Turgay & Takkaç-Tulgar, 2019).

Lesson study is a collaborative inquiry method of professional development where teachers collectively plan, teach, observe, and reflect on lessons to improve teaching practices. This method aims to enhance lesson effectiveness and delivery. It provides the opportunity for teachers to be learners and to grapple with the development of their skills (Lewis & Perry, 2006).

The integration of microteaching and lesson study, known as microteaching lesson study (MLS), combines microteaching and lesson study tenets to create a structured, collaborative environment for refining teaching skills. It is the cyclical process of creating, revising, executing, and reflecting on a lesson within the supportive environment of peers and instructors (Fernandez & Robinson, 2006). Research has shown the benefits of MLS for in-service and pre-service teachers in subjects such as mathematics (Fernandez & Robinson, 2006; Fernandez, 2010; Elbehary, 2019; Kurt & ÇakıroğluCakiroglu, 2023); history (Utami et al., 2016); science (Bahcivan, 2017), and physics (Danday, 2021).

MLS research also highlights the positive impact on teachers' self-efficacy and identity (Arsal, 2014; d'Alessio, 2018; Mergler & Tangen, 2010). Pre-service teachers valued the feedback they received, which helped shape their teacher identity and confidence. Given the current educational challenges, strategies such as MLS can provide emotional support and boost confidence in new teachers (Cerruto et al., 2023). However, while microteaching, lesson study, and MLS have shown promising results, the role of the person providing the feedback and support remains underexplored. This study aims to examine the role of mentorship in MLS, contributing to the existing self-efficacy research.

Research questions

This research study aimed to explore the MLS approach with pre-service teachers. Our hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 1: Participation in the MLS approach will lead to a significant increase in pre-service teachers' self-efficacy in student engagement and instructional strategies, as measured by a pre-post assessment using the London Schools Excellence Fund Self-Efficacy Scale (2015).

Hypothesis 2: Mentorship during the MLS experience will have a positive impact on pre-service teachers' self-efficacy, as reflected in their journal entries, demonstrating increased confidence in student engagement and instructional strategies.

Method

Participants

The study sample consisted of 33 graduate students enrolled in an education methods course at a suburban university near New York City during the spring and fall semesters of 2023. Among the participants, 31 were female. Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and informed consent was secured from all participants.

The graduate students, known as pre-service teachers, were randomly assigned to mentorship groups that included field supervisors, course instructors, and enrichment specialists, each with relevant experience. Field supervisors were professors or classroom teachers with expertise in their developmental areas. Course instructors were professors who had managed the enrichment program for over a decade. Enrichment specialists were pre-service teachers with prior participation in the program and demonstrated skills in collaboration, lesson planning, and teaching.

The community-based educational outreach program consisted of one-hour Zoom sessions held weekly over four weeks. These sessions utilized children's and young adult literature to deliver lessons focused on foundational Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and English Language Arts (ELA) skills to students from preschool to eighth grade.

Design of the Study

The study collected both quantitative and qualitative data from pre-service teachers. A pre-post survey design was used to evaluate changes in self-efficacy. The researchers administered two subscales — student engagement and instructional strategies — from the Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (London Schools Excellence Fund, 2015), consistent with prior research to the pre-service teachers before and after the program (Cerruto et al., 2023). At the program's conclusion, pre-service teachers engaged in reflective journal writing to explore the role of mentors within the MLS design.

Data Collection

Data was collected from the pre-service teachers at the beginning and end of the spring and fall semesters of 2023. They completed a version of the Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Survey (see Appendix A). This survey, consisting of 16 items, measured participants' overall sense of self-efficacy on a scale of 1 to 9. The survey included two subscales, Efficacy in Student Engagement and Efficacy in Instructional Strategies, calculated by computing the unweighted means of the items that load on each

subscale. The pre-service teachers also were asked to reflect on mentors' role and impact. Upon completing their microteaching lesson program, pre-service teachers were asked this question: How did the interactions with your mentors/field supervisors/ course instructors impact your confidence as you planned, revised, executed, and reflected on the sessions? Students submitted their responses via Canvas (LMS) in a Discussion Post, which were consolidated into a Word document yielding 22 double-spaced pages to be analyzed. Personal identification was stripped prior to the analysis to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Results

Quantitative Data Analysis The results of the paired-samples t-test Spring 2023 (see Table 1 in Appendix B) indicated that there was a statistically significant increase in the pre-service teachers' overall sense of self-efficacy from the pre-test to the post-test stage, with a t-value of 4.86 and a p-value of .000 (at 95% confidence). The treatment also increased pre-service teachers' sense of self-efficacy in student engagement (t = 4.63, p = .000) and in instructional strategies (t = 4.74, p = .000). These results suggested that the MLS was effective in increasing pre-service teachers' sense of self-efficacy in the two subscales selected for this study.

The effect size of the paired-samples t-test for Spring 2023 was measured using Cohen's d, a statistic used to measure the magnitude of the difference between the means of the two groups. Cohen's d for the overall scale was 1.01, indicating that, at the post-test stage, the participating pre-service teachers' average sense of self-efficacy is 1.01 standard deviations higher than at the pre-test stage. Similarly, Cohen's d was 0.96 for the Efficacy in Student Engagement subscale and 0.98 for the Efficacy in Instructional Strategies subscale. While the interpretation of Cohen's d values can vary depending on the field of research, a value greater than 0.8 is usually considered a large effect size. However, it is important to note that effect sizes of small samples are not stable. Therefore, caution is needed when using them to approximate effect sizes at the population level.

The results of the paired-samples t-test Fall 2023 (see Table 2 in Appendix B) indicated a statistically significant increase in the pre-service teachers' overall sense of self-efficacy from pre-test to post-test, with a t-value of 4.496 and a p-value of .001 (at 95% confidence). The treatment also increased pre-service teachers' sense of self-efficacy in student engagement (t = 4.138, p = .003) and in instructional strategies (t = 4.445, p = .002). These results suggest that the microteaching lesson study effectively increased pre-service teachers' sense of self-efficacy in terms of the two subscales selected for this study.

The effect size of the paired-samples t-test for fall 2023 was also was measured using Cohen's d. The Cohen's d for the overall scale was 1.42, indicating that, at the post-test stage, the pre-service teachers' average sense of self-efficacy is 1.42 standard deviations higher than at the pre-test stage. Similarly, Cohen's d was 1.30 for the Efficacy in Student Engagement subscale and 1.40 for the Efficacy in Instructional Strategies subscale. While the interpretation of Cohen's d values can vary depending on the field of research, a value greater than 0.8 is usually considered a large effect size. However, it is important to note that the effect size of small samples is unstable. Therefore, caution is needed when using them to approximate effect sizes at the population level.

Qualitative Journal Findings

Coding and Interpreting Qualitative Data

Qualitative data analysis employs a grounded theory approach, an inductive process which brings order and interpretive meaning to the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study, the researchers used both first- and second-cycling coding methods known as In Vivo coding (Charmaz, 2006) and Focused coding (Saldaña, 2009), respectively. Both are considered appropriate when working with data such as the participants' responses. First, each line of data was analyzed extracting words, ideas, and phrases to determine what meaning developed. This is consistent with coding as Creswell references the emerging aspect of qualitative research, rather than being "tightly prefigured" (2003, p. 81). The next phase of coding included a focus on the themes which emerged from the data, the results of which are discussed below.

Mentorship plays a crucial role in enhancing pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and fostering their growth and professional development. The primary theme identified in this study was Professional Development and Growth, with key subcategories including self-confidence, constructive feedback, and collaboration. Among the 33 pre-service teachers' reflections, a strong pattern emerged showing how constructive feedback within collaborative settings led to mutual reinforcement between professional skills development and growing confidence in the classroom. The section below is devoted to these qualitative results.

Team Collaboration and Self-Confidence Contribute to Teacher Efficacy

Collaboration emerged as a significant factor in building self-confidence among pre-service teachers. One participant reflected, "I think that collaborating with my classmates helped boost my confidence as a teacher." Another pre-service teacher wrote, "Our collaboration with other enrichment specialists impacted my confidence as a teacher because it showed me that progress is possible and trying new methods can work." This participant stated, "Collaborating with enrichment specialists definitely boosted my confidence because learning from other teachers that are more experienced than you is the best way to learn all new strategies and ideas that we can use in our classroom and having that constant support and motivation is the best way to support others." This increase in confidence is intricately linked to teacher self-efficacy, which has been shown to positively impact student achievement (Klassen & Tze, 2014).

Constructive Feedback

One of the attributes explained in the five-factor model for mentoring effective teaching includes constructive feedback (Hudson et al., 2012). This study highlights the significance of constructive feedback in developing pre-service teachers' confidence. Participants frequently mentioned the impact of the feedback from their mentors, with one stating, "Not only would our mentor give us feedback and corrections to make for future sessions but also would reassure me and my co-teacher that we were creating meaningful and engaging lessons for our students based on their age." Another pre-service teacher commented, "It was very important to have their guidance and support during the planning process, we revised the plans with any feedback that was given." And finally, this participant wrote, "Hearing positive and real feedback from individuals who have been through if not the same but similar situations was a great way to boost my confidence as a teacher as well. It was a reminder that when teaching alone or in collaboration, to lean on the support around you, since we are all in this field and career path together." The evidence indicates that the mentors are contributing to their proficiency in the field with positive feedback. These insights underscore the necessity of structured mentorship programs in teacher preparation, aligning with the National Council on Teacher Quality's call in 2020 for robust clinical experiences and quality feedback mechanisms.

Self-Confidence

Self-confidence emerged as the most frequently mentioned concept in student reflections. As one student commented, "The interactions with our mentors/field supervisors/course instructors really impacted our confidence as we planned, revised, executed, and reflected on the sessions in a positive, helpful, and supportive way." Another student stated, "They have helped improve our skills and knowledge as a collective, which in turn aided in boosting our self-esteem overall as a team."

This comment from a participant sums up the impact of this reflective activity:

"Through interactions with my mentors, field supervisors, and course instructors, I have seen the impact and critical role they have played in my development of confidence. Through guidance, feedback, and support, these individuals have helped me grow my skills and my knowledge through the lens of differentiation, adaptations, and experiences to feel more confident in my abilities and professionalism."

Such comments clearly indicate how this experience is connected to building on the pre-service teachers' self-efficacy – believing they can fulfill their professional goals and empowering them to improve their preparedness when entering the field. The findings in this study concur with Darling-Hammond (2020), indicating immense value in creating supportive communities for pre-service teachers.

Discussion

The findings of this study are significant for the field of teacher preparation. In line with the findings from Cerruto et al., 2023; Fernandez, 2010; Fernandez & Robinson 2006, the research provides evidence that a microteaching lesson study is an effective approach for a teacher preparation program to positively impact pre-service teachers' overall sense of self-efficacy, as well as their sense of self-efficacy in student engagement and instructional strategies in the field of education post-pandemic. Furthermore, initial and focused coding to assess the impact of mentors during the microteaching lesson study reveals that a team of mentors and pre-service teachers engaging in planning, executing, and reflecting on the experience results in pre-service teachers feeling supported, increasing their self-confidence and decreasing their fears and anxiety. These findings should lead to further exploration of the microteaching lesson study as an intervention with the potential to improve new teachers' adjustment to entering the field of education in the post-pandemic climate of burnout, unreasonable expectations, and doubt that their efforts are meaningful and impactful. The increase in self-efficacy measured by the pre-service teachers counteracts the sentiments of self-doubt and effectiveness dominating the field of education now. The use of mentors and practical MLS applications may be effective in other educational settings to improve outcomes for teachers who are struggling with their sense of self-efficacy.

It is important to note that this study has methodological limitations, and that its findings should be supported by other analyses and be replicated with new samples and in different settings to generalize the findings. This study included a convenient small sample of pre-service teachers that were enrolled in a required course. It would be interesting to implement a microteaching lesson study with a larger sample. Additionally, it may be useful to run the MLS in a student-teaching situation in which the pre-service teachers engage in the teaching and learning experience for a full semester. This would allow the researchers to explore the impact of MLS over the span of 14 weeks with frequent mentoring opportunities and lesson planning.

Implications and Recommendations

This mixed-method investigation examines the relationship between pre-service teachers'

self-efficacy and the microteaching lesson study process, with particular attention to mentorship team dynamics. The study engages groups of pre-service teachers in a graduate education program at a suburban university, working with pre-K through eighth-grade students in a Nassau County community-based educational outreach program. This provides a unique opportunity to investigate collaborative teaching experiences' impact on teacher preparation as pre-service teachers and mentors jointly create, revise, execute, and reflect on lessons.

Central to this initiative is implementing mentorship within the MLS framework. Using pre-post surveys and reflective journals, the research reveals that engagement in microteaching lesson studies enhances pre-service teachers' self-efficacy, particularly in the areas of instructional strategies and student engagement. The data shows improvements in both student engagement and instructional strategies, while mentorship helps reduce anxiety and increase self-confidence.

The findings suggest significant implications for teacher education programs, educational policy, and instruction quality. Several key themes emerged:

Professional Development and Growth: Pre-service teachers demonstrate strong professional development and growth through collaborative experiences. As one participant writes, "Being able to collaborate and bounce off new ideas from one another is a great way to learn and better ourselves as teachers." This finding aligns with the Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) research on collaborative learning environments in teacher preparation. For New York State stakeholders, this suggests that fostering collaborative practices could produce better-equipped new teachers, supporting federal initiatives, such as ESSA's emphasis on high-quality teacher preparation (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Validation and Constructive Feedback: The study highlights feedback's crucial role in developing teacher confidence. As one pre-service teacher reflects, "Not only would our mentor give us feedback and corrections to make for future sessions but also would reassure me and my co-teacher that we were creating meaningful and engaging lessons for our students based on their age." This finding supports the National Council on Teacher Quality's 2020 recommendations for robust clinical experiences with quality feedback mechanisms.

Self-Confidence and Teacher Efficacy: Data reveals that collaborative experiences significantly enhance self-confidence. The connection between increased confidence and teacher efficacy aligns with research showing positive impacts on student achievement (Klassen & Tze, 2014). This finding supports federal initiatives akin to the Teacher Quality Partnership program, aimed at improving new teacher quality in high-need schools (NCTQ, 2020).

Recommendations

Based on these outcomes, we recommend:

Replication of this research across varied geographical regions and universities to validate and generalize findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Expansion of micro-teaching experiences and structured mentorship within teacher preparation programs throughout the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2020).

Development of comprehensive mentorship structures to equip future educators with practical skills, confidence, and professional networks necessary for success in complex educational environments (Grossman et al., 2019; Cerruto et al., 2023).

Implementation of supportive communities for pre-service teachers, as indicated by research on teacher preparation effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2020).

The findings demonstrate that collaborative pre-service teaching experiences significantly impact teacher preparation. For education stakeholders at the state and federal levels, these results emphasize the importance of supporting and expanding similar programs. By cultivating environments that prioritize collaboration, constructive feedback, and student success, teacher preparation programs can develop more confident, skilled, and effective educators, ultimately benefiting education across the country.

Editor's' Note: For access to appendices, please contact the Journal for Leadership and Instruction, or the authors.

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PRESERVICE CONTENT AREA TEACHER SENSE OF SELF-EFFICACY ELL EDUCATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine secondary preservice teachers' sense of self-efficacy in English Language Learner (ELL) education. The researcher administered an adapted version of the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) to a sample of preservice teachers (N = 78). This adapted version of the TSES consisted of 12 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where participants indicated the extent to which each statement reflected their ability to influence specific teaching situations. Results indicated that participants reported the highest sense of self-efficacy in student engagement, followed by classroom management, and the lowest in instructional strategies related to ELL education. Findings from this study suggest a need for the evaluation and possible restructuring of preservice teacher education programs to ensure that future educators feel well-prepared and effective when teaching ELL students.

Keywords: English language learner, preservice teachers, content instruction, self-efficacy

Introduction

The United States has been experiencing waves of immigration since the 18th century. Over the last three decades, there has been an increase in the number of individuals who speak a language other than English in their homes (Bohon et al., 2017). "In 2018, a record 67.3 million (one in five people) U.S. residents (native-born, legal immigrants and illegal immigrants) ages five and older spoke a language other than English at home" (Zeigler & Camarota, 2019, p. 1). The Center for Immigration Studies (2018) recorded that the largest increase (up to four million) was among speakers of Spanish. This growth has had a direct impact on the nation's education system, the K-12 sector in particular. Schools have seen an increase in the number of "non-native English-speaking students, known as English Language Learners (ELLs)" (Bohon et al., 2017, p. 609). A growing number of secondary content area teachers are entering classrooms with English Language Learner (ELL) students without having received sufficient training in ELL instruction during their preservice education.As more ELL students join mainstream classrooms, teachers are facing challenges when delivering content that may stem from teachers lacking a sense of self-efficacy about ELL teaching strategies and theory.

The research question that this study will answer is: In which of the following areas, instructional strategies, student engagement, or classroom management, do preservice content area teachers perceive themselves to be most and least effective in supporting English Language Learner (ELL) students?

Literature Review

Content teachers who are not also TESOL (Teaching English to Students of Other Languages) certified or trained to work with ELL students are expected to effectively educate them. "Mainstream teachers who have not acquired any ESL (English as a Second Language) or ELL training are currently teaching ELLs" (Tran, 2015, p. 28). Studies (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) that have measured sense of self- efficacy have shown that preservice content area teachers are not receiving either adequate or any training during their preservice programs that will help them to feel effective when teaching ELL students.

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) worked with eight graduate students from Ohio State University, who were taking a seminar on self-efficacy in teaching and learning, to create a new measure of efficacy. The group decided to use the expanded scale format advocated by Bandura (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). "A 9-point scale was used for each item with anchors at 1-nothing, 3-very little, 5-some influence, 7-quite a bit and 9-a great deal" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 796). The instrument, "Ohio State teacher efficacy scale (OSTES), was examined in three separate studies" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 796). The data from the three studies produced a short form (12 items) and a long form (24 items). OSTES generated an overall reliability ($p < 0.001$) of 0.94 (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The creation of this instrument (short and long forms) is a useful tool in the study of teacher self-efficacy. "It has a unified and stable factor structure and assesses a broad range of capabilities that teachers consider important to good teaching (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, pp. 801-802). This tool can be utilized in higher education as well as in public/private schools.

A study done by Ross (2014) sought to investigate the extent to which practicing mainstream math teachers feel they receive the preparation and support they need to effectively instruct ELL students, as well as how professional development contributes to these feelings. This quantitative study consisted of 181 educators (94% from Pre-K-12 public schools) from a mid-Atlantic state in the USA. A four-part survey instrument based on the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) was used. Teachers reported lower efficacy scores with ELL students compared to non-ELL students (Ross, 2014). "69% of participants recalled being offered professional development one to five times. However, fewer than 45.6% participated in sessions" (Ross, 2014, pp. 94-95). This study highlights the lack of self-efficacy amongst mainstream teachers teaching ELL students and professional development opportunities taken/not taken by those mainstream teachers. These findings indicate that more attention needs to be given to the preparative process of these educators.

A study done at the University of North Texas by Yoon et al. (2016) aimed to "design and measure the effects of the Culturally Inclusive Science Teaching (CIST) model on thirty teacher candidates who will teach science to culturally and linguistically diverse students" (p. 322). The Science Teaching Efficacy Beliefs Instrument Form B (STEBI-B) was used to measure self-efficacy for teaching. Data were also collected in the form of teacher reflections and lesson plans. A rubric was used to determine how culturally inclusive student lessons were. Quantitative results indicated no significant improvement in participants' teaching efficacy or student outcome expectancy after instruction and practice using the CIST model. Researchers attribute this to students needing additional time to become comfortable with the CIST model (Yoon et al., 2016). However, qualitative results illustrated an increase in teacher candidate confidence to teach Science to culturally and linguistically diverse students. This study further supports the benefits of specific methodologies being taught to teacher educators in preservice courses.

In another study done on an urban campus in Mid-Atlantic USA, researchers studied the effects of an E-Pal project on preservice PK-12 teachers in a teacher certification program. Researchers looked to answer: "What are the effects of an E-Pal project on preservice PK-12 content area teachers' reported: (1) Self-Efficacy in supporting mainstream classes? (2) Knowledge about the nature of instructional approaches for ELLs in mainstream classrooms?" (Mahalingappa et al., 2018, p. 131). Seventy-four preservice content area teachers enrolled in a state mandated course to prepare them to teach ELLs participated in the study. A self-efficacy questionnaire (SEQ) and instructional support questionnaire (SIQ) were distributed to each of the two groups of preservice teachers. Results showed that all preservice teachers' sense of self-efficacy improved regarding ELL instruction (Mahalingappa et al., 2018). Preservice teachers who participated in the E-Pal project reported a higher sense of self-efficacy in two of the variables in the survey. Implications of this study speak to the benefits of secondary content preservice teachers participating in ELL instruction courses as well as direct interactions of secondary content preservice teachers with ELL students.

A study done in Arizona sought to determine readiness factors among in-service teachers and their reflection on preparation. Specific research questions included: "(a) What are the possible factors (both from preservice and in-service recollections) that impact teacher ELL readiness? (b) How does reported exposure to ELLs in preservice and in-service settings impact teachers' beliefs about their ELL self-competency? (c) What are practicing teachers' beliefs about reported self-competencies (readiness) in supporting ELLs?" (Okhremtchouk & Sahr, 2019, p. 128). Four hundred forty-four participants completed a survey. The results of the self-competency section showed that teachers felt the most competent in cultural awareness and least competent in acquisition theories, language assessment and evaluation. These areas are often key subjects of teacher preparation programs and covered during preservice preparation (Okhremtchouk & Sahr, 2019). Implications for this study speak to the need for specific skills that are necessary for teachers to feel competent to teach ELL students.

Methodology

This study is part of a larger study that investigated self-efficacy in ELL student education. The participant population for this study consisted of students who were currently enrolled in a teaching program for a secondary content specialty (math, science, English, social studies) or secondary special education. In addition, first-year teachers certified in one of the four content areas previously mentioned were also utilized to ensure a large enough n (80). The purpose of this study was to provide these individuals with the opportunity to reflect on the quality of their preservice program and to examine if it did in fact prepare them for ELL students in the classroom. The first-year teachers attended the same preservice teaching program in a private university as the currently enrolled students. The university that the preservice content area teachers are attending/attended served as the setting for this study.

Participants completed a block of demographic questions created by the researcher: age range, their current standing (third year undergraduate, fourth year undergraduate, first year graduate, second year graduate or first-year teacher), content area they will be certified in (math, science, English, social studies), if English is their first language and if they have taken a class where they were taught how to teach ELL students. The researcher used a survey instrument developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) and adopted by Ross (2014) to measure teachers' self-efficacy in ELL instruction in the areas of student engagement, instructional strategies and classroom management.

Permission was obtained via e-mail from Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy to use and to adapt the survey instrument so that the questions were reflective of ELL students for this study. The short form of the TSES consists of 12 questions and "assesses issues and situations that teachers find difficult in their professional activities" (Ross, 2014, p. 89). The three different factors that the TSES measures are: instructional strategies, student engagement and classroom management. The researcher adapted the TSES to focus on ELLs. The word "ELLs" was placed before the word "students" in questions 2,3,4,5,7,8, and 10. In questions 1,6,9,11 and 12 the words "ELL students" were placed in the appropriate places to make the questions particular to that group of students. Participants were told in the prompt before this section of the survey to answer all questions in this portion in regards to ELL students. In this survey, participants indicated "the degree to which each question corresponded to their ability to affect a given situation. Scores for "self efficacy could range from "1" point (respondent can do nothing to influence students) to "9" points (respondent can do a great deal to influence students)" (Ross, 2014, p. 89). Mean scores for the three components of the TSES (student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management) were determined by computed total scores of Q5, Q9, Q10, Q12 (instructional strategies), Q2, Q3, Q4, Q11 (student engagement), and Q1, Q6, Q7, Q8 (classroom management).

Regarding limitations of this study, the first was time. In order to have completed the study in a timely manner, data needed to be collected and analyzed within a five-month period of time. Though time was limited, the validity and reliability of the survey instrument helped to ensure the data collected and analyzed is accurate. The limitation of time gave rise to another: sample size. Due to limited time, the survey was distributed to participants from one university even though there is more than one university on Long Island, and in New York, that has a preservice teaching program. Additionally, the fact that this study was conducted at one of many educational institutions in New York limited generalizability. Again, to address this and any other limitations that may have arisen throughout the study, the aforementioned validity and reliability of the survey instrument helped to ensure the data collected and analyzed was accurate.

Findings and Conclusions

Area of Certification

Participants were asked to indicate their area of certification. The participant sample included 23.2% (n=19) with a concentration in mathematics, 11.0% (n=9) with a concentration in the area of science, 19.5% (n=16) with concentrations in English, social studies, and special education, respectively. Table 1 shows a breakdown of participant certification areas.

ELL Course Offerings

Participants were asked whether their preservice program offered courses related to English Language Learner (ELL) instruction. Of the participants, 22.0% (n = 18) indicated that their program does/did offer such courses, 18.3% (n = 15) indicated that their program does/did not offer such courses, and 59.8% (n = 49) reported being unsure. Table 1 shows a breakdown of participants' responses to this question.

Table 1

Demographic Questions

Characteristic	*n*	%
Area of Certification		
Mathematics	19	23.2
Science	9	11.0
English	16	19.5
Social Studies	16	19.5
Special Education	16	19.5
ELL Course Taken		
Yes	15	18.3
No	67	81.7

Reliability - Adapted Version of TSES

A confirmatory test for reliability was done by the researcher on the adapted version of Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2001) instrument. The subscale consisted of 12 items. A Cronbach alpha value of .96 was obtained (Table 2). The construct, engagement, generated an alpha value of .89. The construct, instructional strategies generated an alpha value of .96. The construct classroom management generated an alpha value of .89. These values indicate strong reliability for the survey instrument.

Table 2

Reliability of Adapted Version of TSES

	M	*SD*	alpha
Adapted TSES	4.9	.51	.96
Engagement	5.2	.54	.89
Instructional Strategies	4.4	.47	.96
Classroom Management	5.1	.34	.89

Mean Scores of Adapted TSES

The mean self-efficacy score for student engagement was 20.73 (SD = 6.94). The mean self- efficacy score for instructional strategies was 17.58 (SD = 9.43). The mean self-efficacy score for classroom management was 20.65 (SD = 6.11). Of the three constructs, participants felt a greater of a sense of self-efficacy in student engagement, followed by classroom management, then instructional strategies (See Table 3).

Table 3

Mean Scores of Adapted TSES

	n	*M*	*SD*
Self-Efficacy in Student Engagement	78	20.73	6.94
Self-Efficacy in Instructional Strategies	78	17.58	9.43
Self-Efficacy in Classroom Management	78	20.65	6.11
Valid N (listwise)	78		

Of the three constructs measured, participants felt the greatest sense of self-efficacy in student engagement, then in classroom management. Participants felt the least sense of self-efficacy in instructional strategies. These results can be attributed to the fact that 81.7% of the participants surveyed had not taken a course pertaining to the instruction of ELLs. That is a very considerable percentage of this sample population and can be connected to the low self-efficacy score for instructional strategies. Only fifteen individuals in this study took a course related to ELL student instruction. Without having taken a course specific to ELL student instruction, how can participants feel effective to teach ELL students? There appears to be an organizational error creating a disparity among preservice teachers. All preservice teachers need to be trained to teach ELL students, no matter their area of concentration. The means for self-efficacy in student engagement and classroom management differed by 0.08. These two constructs are a little more universal in the sense that there are general methods when it comes to capturing the attention of a student or disciplining a student. A general set of classroom rules can be made for all students to follow; they may just have to be translated for an ELL student. Things like videos, images, and sounds can all be used in a lesson to "hook" students. However, in order to fully engage ELL students, videos, images, and sounds from their native countries can be incorporated to really grab their attention. All educators need to have a working knowledge and

understanding of oral language development, academic language, and cultural diversity and inclusivity (Samson & Collins, 2012). Studies have shown that by the end of a course where students are taught instructional strategies for ELL students, there was a greater sense of self-efficacy and higher confidence levels (Jimenez-Silva et al., 2012).

Implications and Future Studies

The participant sample of this study consisted of secondary education preservice teachers who would be certified in either mathematics, science, English, social studies or special education. Teachers who are enrolled in preparation programs with ELL methodologies feel more effective in the classroom compared to teachers who do not receive ELL methodologies in their coursework (Tran, 2015). Content area teachers who are exposed to explicit ELL pedagogical instruction and/or field experience involving ELL students are able to implement specific practices compared to those who are not exposed to explicit ELL pedagogical instruction (Lyon, et al., 2018). Results of this quantitative study are similar to those referenced in the literature review. Receiving training in ELL student education can lead to a greater sense of self-efficacy in secondary educators. In Ross's (2014) study, teachers who did not receive training focused on ELL student education reported lower efficacy scores toward ELL students compared to non-ELL students. Preservice teachers who participated in an E-Pal project incorporating ELL students into mainstream classes reported a higher sense of self-efficacy in two of the variables in the survey distributed (Mahalingappa et al., 2018). In a study done to determine readiness factors among in-service teachers and their reflection on preparation, teachers felt the most competent in cultural awareness and least competent in acquisition theories, language assessment and evaluation. These areas are often key subjects of teacher preparation programs and covered during preservice preparation (Okhremtchouk & Sahr, 2019). Each of the studies discussed, as well as this study, speak to the benefits of preservice teachers participating in ELL instructional courses. More thought and attention needs to be given to the preparative process of educators. Higher educational institutions need to offer ELL instructional courses that allow preservice teachers to gain a working knowledge of language development, academic language, and cultural diversity. This foundation of knowledge will benefit both teachers and students. Teachers will carry a higher level of confidence and a greater sense of self-efficacy in classrooms with ELL students. ELL students will gain a more lucrative educational experience, setting them up for success in the classroom and in life.

Preservice content area teachers who participated in this study were not receiving the explicit instruction that they need to effectively teach ELL students. New York has many other preservice teacher programs (state universities and private) that consist of future educators who would benefit from evaluating their sense of self-efficacy in a similar manner. An expanded study in New York would provide a larger sample size and in turn, more generalizable data. Additionally, higher educational leaders would have the opportunity to communicate and collaborate with one another about how well preservice teacher preparation programs in New York are meeting student needs. Higher educational institutions could then evaluate and restructure their preservice teaching programs in such a way that prepares their preservice teachers to confidently and effectively teach ELL students.

Christina Carnovale, Ed.D *is a passionate and devoted educator. This article is dedicated to her dissertation chair, professor, and mentor, the late Dr. Eustace G. Thompson.*

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EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN MODERN TIMES: HARNESSING THE POWER OF SELF-AWARENESS, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, AND INTENTIONAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

This article examined the evolving role of educational leaders, emphasizing a shift from reactive decision-making to intentional, reflective practices. Grounded in contemporary leadership theories, it underscores the integration of emotional intelligence, with self-awareness as a cornerstone, and purposeful communication to achieve desired outcomes. By drawing on key insights from research and literature, the article outlines strategies for navigating the complexities of modern educational environments.

Keywords: leadership, reflection, emotional intelligence

Theoretical Framework

Navigating the multifaceted challenges of educational leadership requires a framework that addresses conflict, fosters resilience, and builds authentic connections. This discussion integrates insights from Otto Scharmer's Theory U, Judith Glaser's Conversational Intelligence, and Hougaard and Carter's The Mind of the Leader. Scharmer's concept of presencing emphasizes deep reflection and collaborative co-creation as essential for meaningful action. Glaser's principles of conversational intelligence highlight the role of trust and open dialogue in fostering productive relationships. Meanwhile, Hougaard and Carter's leadership model—centered on mindfulness, selflessness, and compassion—equips leaders to remain steadfast amidst conflict and societal pressures. Together, these theories provide a holistic blueprint for empowering educational leaders to transcend division, embrace shared purpose, and unlock the potential within themselves and their organizations.

Review of the Literature on Effective Educational Leadership: A Synthesis

This article delves into the critical role of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and intentional communication in modern educational leadership. It draws upon three key theoretical frameworks integrated with the empirical research of educational administrative literature.

Theory U by Otto Scharmer emphasizes the importance of "presencing" – a state of deep listening and mindful presence – for leaders to connect with their authentic selves and foster collaborative solutions. Scharmer's work aligns with the growing body of literature on mindful leadership in education, which suggests that self-awareness and reflection are crucial for effective decision-making and navigating complex challenges (e.g., Fullan, 2011; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Judith Glaser's seminal work on Conversational Intelligence highlights the power of communication to build trust and shared understanding. Glaser's work resonates with research on relational leadership (e.g., Spillane, 2006) and the importance of open dialogue in creating collaborative school cultures (e.g., Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

The Mind of the Leader by Rasmus Hougaard and Jacqueline Carter develops a model that focuses on cultivating mindfulness, selflessness, and compassion in leaders. It connects to the broader literature on emotional intelligence (e.g., Goleman, 2006) and its impact on leadership effectiveness, particularly in managing conflict and fostering resilience (e.g., Boyatzis, 2008).

These seminal theorists, Scharmer, Glaser, Hougaard, and Carter, collectively redefine leadership by moving beyond traditional managerial approaches. They emphasize the importance of Relational Leadership, which builds trust, fosters

collaboration, and empowers others; Emotional Intelligence, which develops self-awareness, empathy, and strong interpersonal skills; Adaptive Leadership, which enables leaders to navigate change, embrace continuous improvement, and foster resilience; and Sustainable Leadership, which prioritizes well-being and creates conditions for long-term success. Together, these concepts offer a holistic framework for responsive, empathetic, and forward-thinking leadership (Boyatzis, 2008).

This shift in focus reflects the increasing complexity of educational environments and the need for leaders who can effectively navigate social-emotional challenges, foster a sense of community, and inspire collective action toward shared goals (Mahfouz et al., 2025; Lorenzi, 2004).

Research Question

By integrating these frameworks, the article aims to provide a comprehensive approach to leadership development in modern challenges such as societal division and organizational change. It addresses a timely and relevant research question:

How can educational leaders integrate self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and purposeful communication to foster collaborative school cultures, effectively navigate conflict, and promote systemic improvements in the face of societal division and organizational challenges?

This question reflects the growing need for leadership approaches that go beyond traditional management techniques and delve into leadership's deeper interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions. The article's focus on self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and communication aligns with current trends in educational leadership research, emphasizing the importance of social-emotional competencies and relational leadership for creating positive and effective learning environments (Leithwood et al., 2020; Volpe-White, 2024).

Methodology and Research Design

This article builds upon the foundational work of theorists in effective leadership literature and contemporary educational leadership thought, utilizing a theoretical research design. This approach emphasizes analyzing and synthesizing existing theories and frameworks to generate new insights or address specific research questions (Swedberg, 2014).

The article manifests itself in two ways: conceptual analysis and theory building. Conceptual Analysis explores the core concepts of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and intentional communication, drawing on the selected theoretical frameworks (Theory U, Conversational Intelligence, and The Mind of the Leader) to define and elaborate on these concepts. It then conducts Theory Building, which aims to integrate these theoretical frameworks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of effective leadership in modern educational contexts. This involves identifying connections, similarities, and differences between the chosen theories and synthesizing them into a coherent model. Finally, by synthesizing conceptual analysis and theory building in the context of heuristics applied to common leadership challenges, educational leaders can develop a pragmatic and practical framework for effectively navigating the complexities of contemporary educational leadership.

Limitations

While a theoretical research design can be valuable for developing new ideas and frameworks, it's important to acknowledge potential limitations. Lack of empirical evidence: This design primarily relies on existing theories and literature and may not involve collecting original data. This can limit the ability to test hypotheses or draw definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of specific leadership practices. Potential for bias: The researcher's perspectives and assumptions can influence the selection and interpretation of theories. The authors must be transparent about their theoretical lens and acknowledge potential biases. Limited generalizability: The insights derived from a theoretical analysis may not be directly applicable to all educational contexts. Further research may be needed to test the applicability of the proposed framework in different settings.

Despite these limitations, a theoretical research design can be a valuable tool for advancing the understanding of complex phenomena like educational leadership. By drawing on established theories and synthesizing them within a practical context, this article can offer valuable insights and guidance for educational leaders seeking to navigate the challenges of modern times.

Discussion

Introduction: The Challenge of the Current Reality

The adage "Just do what's right for the kids, and you can't go wrong" has long guided school leaders. It doesn't take long to realize the naivete of this oversimplification.

Educators today, in the board room, District Office, building, or classroom, must now navigate treacherous waters where tensions simmer beneath the surface. School board meetings, once mundane affairs, have transformed into battlegrounds. Threats, accusations, and acts of violence against school officials have sadly become distressingly common, prompting intervention to safeguard the physical and reputational safety of educators. Further, faculty and staff grapple with increased stress and dwindling morale, compounded by the relentless critique often received (McMahon et al., 2022).

It takes very little for an action one disagrees with, an uncomfortable feeling, or an idea one finds offensive to trigger a cycle that culminates in blame and conflict. Often, this conflict manifests not physically but as a more insidious and intense form—attentional violence. Attentional violence is the inability to see the other in their highest future possibility. If energy indeed follows attention, how can anyone in a leadership position effectively direct the attention of those whose efforts shape day-to-day operations and overall success (Scharmer & Hubl, 2019)?

II. The Power of Uncritical Attention: From Observation to Conflict

Effective leadership starts with acknowledging how emotions drive actions. “Too often we fall into the trap of thinking that if we give employees the facts and explain why change needs to take place from an economic point of view, they’ll buy into the change. We overestimate the power of logic and underestimate the power of storytelling, an appeal to belonging, and the positive emotions of belonging” (Glaser, 2016, p. 196)

We live in an age where we are bombarded with more information than we can process. Questioning what we see and read demands time and effort, and asking what we think and feel requires even more, demanding a willingness to face discomfort and the possibility of being wrong. As a result, we often settle for our initial conclusions (Bandura, 2001).

This tendency to leap from limited data to fixed conclusions reflects what Argyris (1990) termed the Ladder of Inference, where unchecked assumptions quickly solidify into beliefs and drive behavior. When coupled with what Goleman (2005) describes as emotional hijacking—reactive emotional responses that override rational thinking—this dynamic can accelerate conflict and erode trust. As a result, we often form conclusions from incomplete or faulty information and then cling to them as absolute truths. Such uncritical attention magnifies conflict, turning minor disagreements into major hostilities, transforming possibilities into perceived threats, and replacing dialogue with division, distraction, and drama. Left unexamined, these patterns trap us in recurring problems, forcing us to extinguish the same fires repeatedly rather than addressing the underlying conditions that cause them to ignite.

Does any of the following sound familiar?

Example 1: Community Interaction - A community member expresses frustration during public comment, criticizing the Board for not addressing a specific issue. Some trustees view this as an attack on their efforts rather than an opportunity to gather feedback. This assumption creates a rift between the Board and the community, fostering distrust and reducing productive dialogue.

Example 2: Workplace Communication - An email from a colleague is interpreted as curt or dismissive, leading to assumptions about the colleague's attitude or intentions. Without seeking clarification, this assumption can lead to workplace friction and reduced collaboration.

Example 3: Parent-School Conflict - A parent receives a lower-than-expected grade on their child's report card and immediately confronts the teacher, accusing them of unfair grading without reviewing the assessment criteria. This escalates tensions, alienates school staff, and hinders productive communication.

These scenarios and countless others are woven throughout our daily experiences, producing intense emotions and a stream of self-talk that manifests in thoughts like: "They don't care about us," "They're so disrespectful," "The teacher is biased against my child," "Why are they so inconsiderate?" "No one values my ideas," "Management doesn’t appreciate us," and "I can’t wait until retirement."

Emotional reactions can create cycles of misunderstanding that damage relationships and impede growth. These internal dialogues can intensify our responses, leading to strained relationships, missed opportunities, and chronic stress—yet we often hope others will change, rather than examining our own patterns (Goleman, 2005).

III. From Impulse to Intention: The Practice of Responding Rather than Reacting

Though we can't control others' actions or spontaneous thoughts, we can control our responses. We can control how we interpret reality and envision our desired outcomes. We can delve deeply into self-understanding, recognizing and transforming our habitual reactions. “Self-regulation… frees us from being prisoners of our feelings. People who have mastered their emotions can roll with the changes” (Goleman, 2005, p. 83). By exercising this control mindfully, we can navigate our personal and professional lives with greater intention, clarity, peace, resilience, authenticity, and fulfillment.

Lao Tzu said it best: “Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power.” (Tzu, 2019) So, how do we embark on this pursuit and reap its many benefits? It begins with choosing between perpetuating familiar patterns or embracing a new way of being. By recognizing these patterns and committing to critically examining information, seeking deeper understanding, and fostering open dialogue, individuals can break free from the cycle of uncritical attention. This approach not only cultivates personal wisdom and inner strength but also promotes a more harmonious and productive environment, personally and professionally.

The principles to follow resonate across many aspects of life but hold particular significance in a profession that serves as the bedrock of society: education. Teachers and administrators wield profound influence, shaping the minds of future generations and preparing them to thrive in an increasingly complex world. By cultivating self-

awareness and intentional practices within schools, educators can create nurturing environments that foster academic achievement and promote emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and greater empathy—qualities that, when amplified, have far-reaching impacts on communities, economies, and every facet of society.

So how do we do it?

If lasting change was easy, we wouldn't be the most in-debt, overweight, over-medicated, and anxious cohort in human history. While quick, simple solutions are appealing—which is why self-help trends are so popular—true transformation requires more profound and sustained effort. It involves adopting practices aligned with the future we wish to create rather than resigning ourselves to "how it is" (Brown, 2015).

Cultivating self-awareness and emotional well-being through intentional, consistent practices can reshape our emotional responses, reduce stress, and support long-term mental health. These same practices offer significant personal benefits to educators as well: by focusing on their own emotional landscape, teachers and administrators can experience lower stress levels, improved mental health, and deeper professional fulfillment (Brackett, 2019; Davidson, 2012).

Similar to overcoming many challenges, this journey begins with heightened awareness and focused intention. A school leader can be excused for not making the time for either, especially when each day brings a myriad of interruptions, requiring them to set aside what they had planned. These might include -

A parent calls expressing deep concern about their child's treatment by another student on the school bus, leaving the leader to navigate the delicate balance of empathy and action.

A social media post criticizing the actions of a school member inaccurately cites facts. It spreads misinformation, stirring a whirlwind of panic and defensiveness as the leader strives to set the record straight while protecting the school's reputation.

A community member asked about the district's plans for improving school safety measures after recent incidents in neighboring schools, pressing the leader to provide reassurance and concrete plans in an already tight schedule.

Unsurprisingly, each day involves constantly juggling priorities and the compounding emotional toll of certain decisions. As a result, many school leaders view taking time to think and reflect as a luxury rather than a necessity. However, this perspective comes at a cost, as the success of any intervention depends on the internal state of the person implementing it; our thoughts and feelings directly impact our performance. Yet, how often do we monitor and assess the quality of our internal state—let alone cultivate it?

For many, it's easier to dive into the never-ending to-do list immediately upon arriving at work, often continuing late into the evening. Responding to emails and getting lost in the minutiae of the day can create a false sense of productivity, yet the list never ends. This constant cycle of microstress can drain our energy while offering only the illusion of progress (Cross & Grant, 2022). In doing so, we sacrifice the opportunity to reflect, recharge, and engage meaningfully with our work and the world. Nurturing our inner state is no longer a luxury but a crucial aspect of effective leadership. Emotionally intelligent leaders must intentionally create space to reflect and renew to avoid burnout and lead with clarity (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 2013).

IV. The Role of Beliefs: Unconscious Drivers of Behavior

In a culture of busyness, we often need to be made aware of why we are doing what we are doing. This lack of awareness can lead us to engage in responses that convey dismissiveness, avoidance of responsibility, and a lack of proactive problem-solving. Such behaviors result in unresolved concerns, dissatisfaction, and potential escalation of issues. Yet, how often do we pause to reflect on the underlying beliefs that shape our responses, even when hidden from our conscious awareness?

This reflection is crucial, for our reactions are often filtered through our past experiences, assumptions, and beliefs. These profoundly ingrained beliefs frequently operate beneath our conscious awareness, influencing our reactions and effectiveness. Despite their profound influence, many of us fail to recognize these beliefs for what they are—fundamental drivers of our behavior. They reside in our subconscious minds, controlling our actions without our consent. Whether we acknowledge it or not, our beliefs are the silent architects of our reality. (Weinzweig, 2016)

Without awareness and intention, our initial internal thoughts may sound like the following:

"Why can't parents handle their problems? They blow everything out of proportion and expect me to fix it. They're so unreasonable."

"Why is this teacher always complaining? Can't they see I'm dealing with more important issues? They're just making my job harder by not handling their workload."

"This student is just impossible. They don't listen and don't care about their education. Why bother trying to help when they don't want it?"

These examples illustrate the human tendency to perceive others not as they truly are, but through the lens of our narratives. Consequently, our judgment and decisions are often grounded in incomplete or flawed information.

V. Ladder of Inference

The Ladder of Inference, developed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (Argyris, 1982), offers a powerful framework for understanding how our internal thinking processes shape our perceptions, beliefs, and actions. It illustrates the mental steps we often subconsciously take to move from observing a fact or event to taking action: selecting certain data, assigning meaning, making assumptions, drawing conclusions, adopting beliefs, and ultimately acting on them. This cognitive shortcut helps us process complex information quickly, but when our assumptions go unexamined, it can lead to misunderstandings and conflict. By becoming aware of the rungs on this ladder, educators can pause and reflect before leaping to conclusions, fostering more accurate understanding and constructive dialogue.

The ladder of interpretation consists of several steps:

*Observing Data and Experiences: We begin with raw sensory input, perceiving a flood of information—words, actions, tone, body language—but consciously register only a fraction.

Example: Mrs. Jones shares concerns about her son Max's declining grades and disengagement.

*Selecting Data: We focus on specific details shaped by biases and prior experiences, often overlooking broader context.

Example: The teacher notices Max's declining grades but not potential external stressors.

*Adding Meaning: We assign meaning based on assumptions, cultural norms, and personal context.

Example: Max's behavior is interpreted as a lack of interest in academics.

*Making Assumptions: Inferences fill gaps, often without verifying accuracy.

Example: The teacher assumes Max is unmotivated or lazy.

*Drawing Conclusions: These inferences shape perceptions and inform decisions.

Example: The teacher concludes Max's disengagement needs intervention and advises Mrs. Jones to address it at home.

*Adopting Beliefs: Over time, conclusions solidify into beliefs influencing future interpretations.

Example: The teacher believes Max is habitually disengaged, affecting future interactions.

*Taking Action: Beliefs drive actions, creating feedback loops that can either resolve or worsen issues.

Example: Confronting Mrs. Jones with flawed assumptions risks escalating tensions instead of uncovering root causes.

VI. Practical Strategies for Leaders

Understanding concepts such as the Ladder of Inference (Argyris, 1982) is essential, yet the real value lies in applying this understanding to guide action. These practices enable leaders to behave wisely and intentionally—critical qualities for effective leadership. Because one of the things leaders do most is engage in conversations—many of which take place in the form of meetings—they must approach these interactions with intention. As Glaser (2014) explains, "To get to the next level of greatness depends on the quality of the culture, which depends on the quality of relationships, which depends on the quality of conversations."

Using tools such as Conversational Guidelines and the 4-Step Meeting Process helps leaders navigate these moments with clarity, collaboration, and purpose, ensuring that their words and actions align with the outcomes they hope to achieve.

Conversational Guidelines

The Conversational Guidelines provide a foundation for fostering trust, understanding, and collaboration in dialogue. By emphasizing active listening, openness, and respect for diverse perspectives, these principles help leaders navigate complex conversations with clarity and purpose. They encourage thoughtful reflection, meaningful exchanges, and actionable outcomes, creating a culture of connection and growth (Glaser, 2016).

Listening to Understand

Listening to understand means focusing entirely on the speaker's meaning, silencing inner dialogue, and avoiding distractions like planning responses or making judgments (Brownell, 2012; Glaser, 2014). This practice fosters a shared understanding and requires consistent effort to overcome cognitive noise—thoughts that distract us during conversations. Leaders must also challenge untested assumptions, as highlighted in the Ladder of Inference (Argyris, 1982). Asking open-ended questions such as "What led you to this decision?" or "How can we support you in this process?" can surface hidden factors behind decisions or behaviors, building trust and uncovering actionable insights.

Speaking from the Heart

Speaking from the heart requires vulnerability, trust, and openness, fostering meaningful conversations and preventing miscommunication. Rooted in courage (from the Latin cor, meaning heart), this practice encourages sharing true thoughts and inviting quieter voices into discussions. As part of Glaser's (2016) Conversational Guidelines, it involves authentic self-expression to build trust and deepen relationships. Techniques like "Announce and Ask" (AA), stating intentions and seeking input, create transparency and invite collaboration, ensuring all voices are valued.

Suspending Certainty

Suspending certainty involves setting aside assumptions to foster open, unbiased dialogue. This practice creates space for listening and understanding while requiring self-awareness of personal attitudes, beliefs, biases, and assumptions (ABBAs) that shape thinking. The Ladder of Inference highlights how individuals move from observing data to making assumptions and taking actions based on untested beliefs. Leaders can disrupt this automatic process by asking reflective questions like “What might I be missing?” or “What evidence supports my conclusion?” Recognizing that decisions are influenced by personal experiences, biases, and emotions allows leaders to counteract these influences, fostering openness to new perspectives and more reflective, objective decision-making (Senge, 2006; Argyris & Schon, 1978).

Holding Space for Difference

Holding space for difference involves valuing diverse perspectives and encouraging all voices to contribute. Conflict, when approached constructively, leads to deeper understanding and creative solutions. This practice requires respectful acknowledgment of differing viewpoints, open-ended questions, and nonjudgmental language (Mahfouz et al., 2025). By embracing diversity, conversations become richer, more creative, and more inclusive, cultivating a deeper respect for others' ideas.

Slowing Down the Conversation

Slowing the conversation fosters reflection, thoughtful responses, and deeper understanding. This practice emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and responding respectfully to contributions, ensuring all participants feel valued and heard. Allowing silence for processing enhances discussion quality and decision-making (Glaser, 2016). Although counterintuitive, this approach brings focus and lasting impact to conversations. Since the brain forms conclusions in just 0.07 seconds, leaders often react instinctively, risking misjudgments. By pausing to engage the prefrontal cortex—responsible for rational thinking—leaders can avoid impulsive reactions. This discipline not only promotes respect but also leads to more thoughtful, goal-aligned decisions that benefit the team and organization.

The 4-Step Meeting Process

The 4-Step Meeting Process is designed to transform meetings into opportunities for learning, engagement, and collaborative action rather than mere information-sharing. By following these steps, leaders can ensure meetings are purposeful, productive, and aligned with organizational goals (Jorgensen, n.d.; Hurst & Jorgensen, 2009; Tuckman, 2006; Heifetz, 1994; Schwartzman, 1986).

1. Create Focus

Begin by clarifying the intention of the meeting using a CPO framework—Context, Purpose, Outcome. This approach helps participants understand:

Why the discussion matters (Context),

What they need to know or achieve (Purpose) and

What actions are expected as a result (Outcome)?

This step fosters a shared vision among participants and encourages preparation. By setting a clear focus, leaders can align the group's efforts and ensure everyone is working toward a common goal (Jorgensen, n.d.; Hurst & Jorgensen, 2009; Schwartzman, 1986).

2. Surface and Clear Obstacles

Address potential barriers to participation and understanding early in the meeting. Leaders should:

Create a safe space for open dialogue,

Invite diverse perspectives and

Encourage participants to ask clarifying questions.

Active listening is key in this step, as it helps uncover and address misunderstandings or concerns. Leaders can use provocations to explore different viewpoints and ensure everyone feels heard.

3. Develop Common Understanding

Ensure all participants have a shared understanding of the meeting’s content and objectives. Misinterpretations can derail even the best intentions. To achieve this, leaders should:

Slow down the conversation when needed,

Confirm key points to ensure alignment and

Clarify the intended message and its implications.

This step reduces ambiguity and sets the stage for effective collaboration.

4. Generate Committed Actions

The final step turns the meeting’s intent into actionable outcomes. This is where plans are solidified, responsibilities are assigned, and timelines are established. Leaders should:

Align actions with the meeting’s objectives,

Clearly define the next steps, and

Secure commitment from participants to follow through.

By focusing on execution, this step ensures that meetings drive meaningful progress and results. Leaders can elevate the quality of their conversations and meetings by combining an awareness of the Ladder of Inference with tools like the Conversational Guidelines and the 4-Step Meeting Process. This integrated approach enhances their ability to lead intentionally and create a more collaborative and effective work environment.

Key Theorists / Framework

Core Concept(s)

*Practical Strategy in the Article

Example in Leadership Practice

*Otto Scharmer – Theory U

Presencing: deep listening, mindful reflection, co-creation

Self-awareness practices, intentional pauses before reacting

A principal pauses before responding to a parent complaint, reflecting before seeking clarification to uncover root issues.

*Judith Glaser – Conversational Intelligence

Building trust through dialogue and relational leadership

Conversational Guidelines (Listening to Understand, Speaking from the Heart, Holding Space for Difference)

Superintendent uses 'announce and ask' during a tense board meeting to build trust and transparency.

*Hougaard & Carter – The Mind of the Leader

Mindfulness, selflessness, compassion

Emotional intelligence practices: leading with empathy and resilience

A leader practices mindfulness in staff conflict, validating emotions while guiding the group to collaborative solutions.

*Chris Argyris & Donald Schön – Ladder of Inference

Awareness of hidden assumptions shaping beliefs and actions

Slowing down, questioning assumptions, CPO framework in meetings

The teacher assumes a student is lazy; the leader uses the Ladder to reveal external stressors affecting performance.

*Ray Jorgensen – Conversational Leadership (4-Step Meeting Process)

Structured, intentional meetings

CPO (Context–Purpose–Outcome), clearing obstacles, building shared understanding, generating actions

Department meeting begins with CPO, surfaces obstacles, and ends with committed next steps.

*Daniel Goleman – Emotional Intelligence

Self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills

Applying EI to manage conflict, build relationships, and foster resilience

Principal de-escalates a heated parent exchange by regulating emotions and demonstrating empathy.

*Ronald Heifetz – Adaptive Leadership

Distinguishing technical vs. adaptive challenges; mobilizing people to face tough realities

Framing challenges as adaptive, not technical; engaging stakeholders in joint problem-solving

Superintendent frames community safety concerns as adaptive, requiring shared responsibility across staff, parents, and the community.

*Peter Senge – Learning Organizations

Systems thinking, shared vision, team learning,

Embedding reflective practices and collaboration across the district

The leadership team uses systems mapping to identify underlying causes of teacher burnout and designs shared solutions.

Conclusion

Leadership is often defined by how individuals respond to moments of discomfort and uncertainty. Navigating these situations with confidence and care requires deep awareness and intentionality. A proactive and reflective approach—grounded in structured communication methods like the Ladder of Inference—enables leaders to avoid hasty judgments, resolve conflicts, and foster collaboration through thoughtful, deliberate decision-making.

Today’s leaders are increasingly challenged to shift from reactive responses to intentional engagement. Scharmer's Theory U, focusing on mindful reflection and "presencing," provides a framework for breaking free from habitual reactions and embracing purposeful, transformative communication. Similarly, Judith Glaser's Conversational Intelligence highlights the critical role of trust in effective dialogue, emphasizing how intentional conversations can foster understanding, resolve tensions, and build stronger relationships.

Effective leadership begins with cultivating self-awareness, mindfulness, and compassion—qualities championed in Hougaard and Carter’s The Mind of the Leader. These attributes empower leaders to transcend task-oriented management, fostering authentic connections rooted in mutual respect and empathy. Practical tools, like the Ladder of Inference, guide leaders in challenging assumptions, managing emotional escalation, and approaching decisions with clarity and emotional intelligence.

By integrating reflective practices, trust-building dialogue, and compassionate leadership, educational leaders can transform difficult

conversations into opportunities for growth and meaningful change. Listening with the intent to understand, speaking authentically, and fostering trust and collaboration are essential practices that enable leaders to inspire and sustain the results they wish to see for themselves, their employees, and their organizations.

Recommendations

To cultivate a more intentional and effective leadership style, leaders must take decisive action to strengthen their interior condition. One of the most critical steps in this process is prioritizing self-awareness through regular reflection. Leaders should engage in self-reflection individually and with trusted partners to deepen their understanding of emotional patterns, triggers, and subconscious beliefs. This practice helps provide clarity and informs intentional decision-making. Additionally, leaders must develop the habit of pausing and reflecting before reacting, utilizing techniques such as deep breathing or mindfulness exercises to engage rational thinking and avoid impulsive decisions. This reflective pause helps leaders separate their emotional reactions from their decision-making, allowing for more mindful leadership.

Leaders must also examine and question their beliefs using tools like the Ladder of Inference. By slowing down the decision-making process and identifying the data on which they base their conclusions, leaders can ensure they see the complete picture, preventing misunderstandings and promoting fact-based decision-making. Additionally, fostering transparent and respectful dialogue within teams is crucial. Leaders must model vulnerability and create space for difficult conversations, ensuring all voices are heard and respected. This practice fosters collaboration and encourages innovation by embracing diverse perspectives.

Leaders should adopt structured communication frameworks, such as the 4-Step Meeting Process, to ensure that conversations are productive. These frameworks help ensure discussions remain focused and aligned with organizational goals, turning meetings into opportunities for learning and action. Investing in the communication skills of team members is also essential. By offering training in active listening, conflict resolution, and constructive dialogue, leaders can foster a culture of collaboration and mutual respect where meaningful conversations thrive.

Leaders must also embrace proactive leadership, focusing on long-term goals and thoughtful reflection rather than reacting to immediate challenges. This strategic thinking helps leaders stay aligned with their vision and make informed decisions. Cultivating a culture of accountability is equally important. Leaders can foster an environment of ownership and responsibility by setting clear expectations, defining outcomes, and regularly revisiting progress. Finally, enhancing emotional intelligence (EQ) is vital for leaders to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, manage conflict, and build strong relationships. Developing EQ through training or coaching enables leaders to lead with empathy, understanding, and greater effectiveness.

By adopting these strategies, leaders can take ownership of their internal state, fostering improved well-being, resilience, and effectiveness in their leadership practices. This holistic approach will ultimately lead to a more intentional and impactful leadership style, positively influencing their teams and organizational culture.

Leaders can implement frameworks to structure conversations with clarity and focus, ensuring that discussions are purposeful and aligned with desired outcomes. Investing in the development of communication skills across teams is equally important. Providing training in active listening, conflict resolution, and transparent dialogue creates a shared language that promotes more productive and meaningful interactions. By focusing on these strategies, leaders can take ownership of their internal state, resulting in improved well-being, resilience, and effectiveness in their leadership practices. This approach enables leaders to lead with greater purpose and mindfulness, positively influencing their teams and organizational culture.

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FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE AND DETER TEACHERS FROM SEEKING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

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Abstract

The dearth of candidates seeking school leadership positions has been a nationwide concern over the past two decades. The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that currently deter teachers from seeking school leadership positions and the factors that influence teachers to pursue careers in school leadership. The study also provides a comparative analysis of how these factors have changed over the past decade, due to the numerous new and controversial issues affecting our nation's education institutions today. A study conducted by Dawson, Hancock, Black, and Bird (2006) found several factors motivating teachers to become school administrators, "Challenge, Altruism, Personal/ Professional Benefit/Gain, and Leadership Influence," and inhibiting factors to be "Insufficient Gain/Personal Benefit, Personal Needs/Issues, and Increased Risk" (2006, p.91). Much has changed since 2006, so it is important to understand how these new challenges have impacted teachers' perspectives on pursuing school leadership positions. Survey responses from 52 candidates currently enrolled in the Master's Degree program at a large and diverse urban university located in the northeast United States, and graduates of the program, some currently in school leadership positions, and others who did not pursue this career path, were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics.

Keywords: leadership, educational administration, motivation

Introduction

Attracting qualified candidates to fill school leadership positions, such as school principal and assistant principal, continues to be problematic. The lack of qualified teachers pursuing school leadership positions is a nationwide problem. The responsibilities and pressures of school leaders have increased due to many issues that have evolved in education over the past two decades. The lack of adequate support and professional development opportunities for aspiring leaders leaves many teachers feeling unprepared for the complexities of leadership, as traditional teacher training programs often do not equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to transition into administrative roles (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005). The absence of mentorship and clear pathways for advancement exacerbates this issue even further. As noted by Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2017), effective professional development is essential for fostering a leadership pipeline, yet many districts fail to provide structured programs that facilitate this transition. Managing the impact of the recent pandemic, the growing accountability measures for student, school, and school district performance, school safety, controversial issues in curricula such as Critical Race Theory, book banning, and other daunting challenges are concerns for prospective school leaders.

The problem of diminishing interest in school leadership positions is exacerbated by the fact that a high percentage of principals currently in the job expect to leave their positions in the near future. The National Association of Secondary Principals (NASSP, 2021) released a nationally representative survey of principals in December 2021, indicating that job satisfaction among principals was at an all-time low and that 4 out of 10 principals plan to leave within 3 years. This survey cites concerns of principals including, "implementing blended and distance learning, providing mental health support to students, and providing guidance and mental health support to teachers and staff" (NASSP, 2021, n.p.). The NASSP (2021) survey also highlighted principals' concerns about teacher shortages, as well as new challenges such as the political environment, heavy workload, state accountability measures, and compliance requirements.

A lack of qualified school leaders puts our nation's schools at risk. Therefore, bolstering teacher interest in pursuing school leadership positions is crucial to ensuring the effectiveness of

our educational institutions. We need to find strategies to restart this pipeline and seek highly qualified, capable, and committed educators for school leadership positions to ensure success. This study was conducted to discover the factors that either inhibit or motivate teachers to pursue school leadership positions and present recommendations to address the study's findings.

A study conducted by Dawson, Hancock, Black, and Bird, (2006) found several factors motivating teachers to become school administrators, "Challenge, Altruism, Personal/Professional Benefit/ Gain, and Leadership Influence," and inhibiting factors to be "Insufficient Gain/Personal Benefit, Personal Needs/Issues, and Increased Risk" (p.91). Over a period of nineteen years, factors motivating and inhibiting teachers' decisions regarding pursuit of school leadership have become more complex and multifaceted.

Literature Review

Numerous research studies over the past two decades have addressed the issue of a shortage of candidates needed to fill school leadership positions. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that many school administrators are planning to leave their positions in the near future. Qualified candidates will be needed to fill these vacant positions. This task has become more daunting as new, controversial issues and other factors serve to inhibit interest in school leadership positions.

Personal and professional factors influence the decision for teachers to pursue school leadership positions. One of the primary factors influencing teachers' decisions to pursue leadership roles is personal motivation. Research by Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivations, such as a desire to impact student learning and contribute to school improvement. Similarly, Crow and Glascock (2019) found that teachers who felt a strong commitment to their educational values were more likely to consider leadership roles. One significant motivator is the desire for increased autonomy and influence over school policies and practices (Baker, LeTendre and Rosenthal, 2017). Altruism is a motivating factor that drives teachers to pursue an administrative position, holding the belief that they can have a positive impact on the educational process. (Dawson et al., 2006).

Professional development and mentorship play an important role in shaping teachers' aspirations for leadership. According to Smith and Ingersoll (2004), mentorship and training opportunities were found to enhance teachers' perceptions of their readiness for leadership. This is supported by research from O'Brien (2020), which highlights that teachers who engage in leadership-focused professional development are more likely to pursue formal leadership positions. Work-life balance, school culture and environment, and professional networks also impact on teachers' decisions regarding leadership.

Despite these motivators, several inhibitors continue to affect teachers' decisions regarding leadership. One significant barrier is the perception of increased workload and stress associated with leadership roles. Many teachers worry that taking on leadership responsibilities will detract from their primary role of teaching and lead to burnout. Another inhibitor is the lack of adequate support from school administration and district policies. A survey of teachers in Louisiana who held administrator certification found numerous disincentives to pursuing school leadership positions. They viewed leadership positions as growing more complex and stressful, providing insufficient salary, and a lack of support, long hours, and a negative work-family balance (Howley, Andrianaivo, and Perry, 2005). Over the past five years, more inhibiting factors have emerged, such as diminished confidence in K-12 principals during the pandemic (Superville, 2022), book banning, Critical Race Theory, and most recently, opposition to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives.

The motivators and inhibitors influencing teachers' decisions to pursue school leadership positions involve a complex interplay of personal motivations, professional development opportunities, organizational culture, and external support systems. Understanding these factors can help educational stakeholders, including school leadership programs, school superintendents, school boards, and professional organizations develop targeted interventions to encourage and prepare teachers for leadership roles, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of school leadership and improving educational outcomes.

Methodology

To determine whether the factors that motivate and/or discourage teachers from aspiring to future leadership roles had changed since the Hancock, et al. Study (2006), during the spring of 2024, we surveyed a cadre of 52 graduate students at a large and diverse urban university located in the northeastern United States. The students included in that survey were either in the process of completing an M.S. program in School Leadership or had recently completed that program. Our survey included several multiple-choice questions pertaining to subject demographics (see Appendix A). Additionally, the respondents were asked to rate the importance of potentially motivating and discouraging factors using a three-point Likert Scale, in which 1 indicated "No Importance", two signified "Some Importance", and 3 symbolized "Great Importance". The results of the survey were then analyzed using basic descriptive statistics.

Results

Approximately 70% of our survey respondents reported serving as classroom teachers for between 3 and 14 years. Respondents were overwhelmingly female, a fact that closely corresponds with the university's enrollment patterns in School Leadership, and between 24 and 50 years of age. Most of our samples have served either as pre-school or elementary school teachers in an urban setting and almost all reported holding a master's degree. Not surprisingly, 66% of respondents identify as white, 15% as Hispanic, and less than 10% as Black or African American. Also not surprising is the fact that most respondents indicated that they aspired to a building-level school leadership position (principal or assistant principal).

With respect to motivating factors (see Table 1 below), most respondents reported that the increased salary and benefits were at least of some importance, as was their desire to leave the classroom. Additionally, the desire to effect change was of great importance, as was the desire to continue an upward career path. Similarly, most respondents attributed at least some importance to the personal challenge, prestige, and status offered by a leadership position, as well as the increased freedom/flexibility in their daily routine that such a role might afford them. Finally, most students indicated that the desire to relocate to a different locale was not an important motivating factor.

Table 1

Motivating Factors

Factor	No Importance 1	Some Importance 2	Great Importance 3	Total
Increased Salary & Benefits	5.77% (3)	36.54% (19)	57.69% (30)	52
Personal Challenge	3.85% (2)	34.62% (18)	61.54% (32)	52
Prestige & Status	44.23% (23)	36.54% (19)	19.23% (10)	52
Ability to Affect Change	0.00% (0)	15.38% (8)	84.62% (44)	52
Leave the Classroom	30.77% (16)	38.46% (20)	30.77% (16)	52
Desire to Continue Upward Career Path	1.92% (1)	15.38% (8)	82.69% (43)	52
Increased Freedom/Flexibility in Daily Routine	23.08% (12)	50% (26)	26.92% (14)	52
Relocate to a Different Local	65.38% (34)	26.92% (14)	7.69% (4)	52

Regarding those factors that could be seen as discouraging to school leadership aspirants, most respondents indicated that they considered each one of the factors listed in the survey as at least of some importance (see Table 2) Those factors which the greatest percentage of students regarded as either of some importance or of great importance were giving up tenure/job security (75%), controversial curriculum issues (75%), lack of resources (71%), dealing with crises, such as the recent pandemic (69%), salary differential is too small (69%) and a longer work year (65%). Less important were factors such as accountability/ pressure from standardized tests (62%), distance from students (62%), student discipline issues (62%), personal safety (60%), increased in demands/involvement from parents (59%), and certification requirements (56%)

Table 2

Discouraging Factors

Factor	No Importance 1	Some Importance 2	Great Importance 3	Total
Salary differential is too small	30.77% (16)	50% (26)	19.23% (10)	52
Give up tenure/job security	25% (13)	46.15% (24)	28.85% (15)	52
Accountability: Pressure from standardized tests	38.46% (20)	48.08% (25)	13.46% (7)	52
Distance from students	38.46% (20)	40.38% (21)	21.15% (11)	52
Concerns for personal safety	40.38% (21)	46.15% (24)	13.46% (7)	52
Longer work year	34.62% (18)	42.31% (22)	23.08% (12)	52
Controversial curriculum issues	25.00% (13)	48.08% (25)	26.92% (14)	52
Increase in demands/involvement from parents	32.69% (17)	48.08% (25)	19.23% (10)	52
Lack of resources	28.85% (15)	38.46% (20)	32.69% (17)	52
Increase in student discipline issues	38.46% (20)	40.38% (21)	21.15% (11)	52
Dealing with a crisis such as recent pandemic	30,77% (16)	48.08% (25)	21.15% (11)	52
Certification requirements	44.23% (23)	42.31% (22)	13.46% (7)	52

Discussion

As previously stated, one of the motivations for our study was to determine whether the factors identified in the Hancock, et al. Study (2006) as either motivating teachers toward or discouraging them from pursuing school leadership positions had changed. The results of our survey clearly indicate two things:

The same variables that appeared to motivate or discourage teachers from school leadership positions in 2006 still appear to be valid for 2024.

To those 2006 factors that were said to discourage teachers, we can now add factors such as controversial curriculum issues and dealing with crises such as the recent pandemic.

With respect to controversial curriculum issues, it cannot be denied that those pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion have come under attack from conservative politicians and voters. For example, since 2021 at least 44 states have enacted laws, state policies or executive orders intended to restrict school curriculum related to race, sexuality, and other "divisive" topics such as ethnic studies programs (Schwartz, 2025). While the state of New York has not yet adopted such measures, teachers are left to ponder whether they would want to work in a more restrictive curricular environment. After all, during the writing of this study, the President of the United States issued an executive order that requires all school principals to swear that they are not currently housing or supporting and DEI-related initiatives at their school (Clossen, 2025) Although the New York State Education Dept. has refused to comply with that directive (Clossen, 2025) potential leadership candidates, especially those who

would likely serve students in our nation's urban centers, might think more than twice about taking on a principalship given such an uncertain and polarized political environment.

The Covid Pandemic of 2020 was tremendously challenging for school leaders and teachers. Many of our P-12 schools were grossly unprepared to address their associated instructional and political issues. What made things even more difficult for principals and superintendents was the loss of local control over fundamental decision-making matters, such as school closings, as well as the requirements governing the reopening of campuses, which were made by the Governor of each state. Our respondents were all working as either teachers or school administrators during the pandemic. They understand the challenges of working in a crisis such as the Covid Pandemic as they have had front-line experience. Has that experience impacted on the career trajectories of some teachers who were previously inclined to pursue state certification for school leadership?

Recommendations

Without question, the challenges associated with P–12 school leadership have grown more numerous and complex during the past 20 years. Our study was but one attempt to identify and highlight those challenges as they will affect the career decisions of teachers. As former P–12 public school leaders, the authors acknowledge the ever-growing complexities of leading schools, especially during the present time of social, economic, and political uncertainties. It is in consideration of those uncertainties that we will offer a series of recommendations for encouraging experienced teachers to aspire to school leadership positions

Addressing the shortage of school administrators requires a proactive approach to identifying, training, and supporting teachers interested in leadership roles. By providing professional development, financial incentives, mentorship, and work-life balance, schools can create an environment where educators feel empowered to take on administrative responsibilities. Through these strategies, the education system can cultivate a new generation of skilled and passionate school leaders who will contribute to the success of school communities and students.

The shortage of school administrators has become a growing concern affecting school operations, leadership continuity, and student learning outcomes. Many experienced teachers possess the skills and knowledge necessary to transition into administrative roles but may be hesitant for numerous reasons. The results of this research study and a review of the literature suggest strategies to encourage public school teachers to pursue school leadership positions to address the leadership gap.

School districts and school leadership preparation programs should develop strategic partnerships to help cultivate a pipeline of well-prepared, skilled leaders who are ready to take on the challenges in schools. By working closely with leadership preparation programs, school districts can ensure that aspiring administrators receive hands-on, relevant training tailored to the specific needs of their schools and communities. Traditional leadership training programs may not always align with the unique demands of a district, but a direct partnership allows for customized coursework, mentorship opportunities, and real-world leadership experiences. This approach bridges the gap between theory and practice, equipping future leaders with the skills necessary to navigate complex educational environments, support teachers, and drive student success. Furthermore, these partnerships can promote leadership development among a more diverse pool of candidates. Ultimately, investing in these collaborations is not just about filling vacancies, it is about strengthening schools and improving student outcomes by ensuring that every school has a strong, capable leader at the helm.

School districts should provide professional development opportunities and mentorship initiatives to allow teachers to become familiar with administrative roles and responsibilities in a structured and supportive manner. Establishing mentorship programs where experienced administrators guide and support aspiring leaders can help with the transition to administration and real-world insights into the demands and rewards of school leadership. This would help to dispel the misconception that school administration is primarily a bureaucratic role rather than one that directly impacts student learning and success. School districts should host informational sessions, panel discussions, and podcasts featuring successful administrators to reshape perceptions and highlight the positive aspects of the role.

School leadership preparation programs can be expensive and therefore a deterrent for teachers to pursue administration certification. School districts and state education agencies should consider offering financial incentives to aspiring school leaders, such as tuition reimbursement or loan forgiveness programs. School districts need to provide competitive compensation structures to serve as strong motivators for aspiring school administrators.

Many teachers perceive administrative roles as overwhelming due to increased responsibilities and longer work hours. School districts should implement strategies to promote work-life balance, such as flexible scheduling and job-sharing options. Providing adequate support for staff and delegating tasks effectively can also help alleviate pressures associated with leadership roles.

Job security concerns serve as a deterrent for teachers considering transitions into school leadership roles. The potential loss of tenure, in particular, often discourages educators from pursuing such positions. Some states, such as New Jersey, have enacted regulations that permit teachers who assume leadership positions within the same school district to return to their former teaching roles prior to attaining tenure in the new position, under specific circumstances (New Jersey Statute 18A:28-6, N.J. Rev. Stat. § 18A:28-6). Other states should consider adopting similar statutes to mitigate job security concerns and reduce the perceived risk associated with pursuing leadership opportunities.

Editor's' Note: For access to appendices, please contact the Journal for Leadership and Instruction, or the authors.

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ARTICLE REVIEW

ACHIEVE DEI GOALS WITHOUT DEI PROGRAMS

Dr. Robert Manley
(Dowling College)

In the Harvard Business Review of July-August 2025, Frank Dobbin, Professor of Social Sciences at Harvard and Alexandra Kalev, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Tel Aviv University, discuss how many tools of High-Performance Management (HPM) have a better record of fostering inclusion than diversity training and grievances procedures do.

Dobbin and Kalev describe how High-Performance Management targets recruitment, retention, skills training for all employees, mentoring and wok life support to help recruits to find the right path at work. They note that to be effective HPM techniques must be applied to all employees.

The authors examined 800 firms in their research. They identified the management techniques when applied to all employees that resulted in major retention and diversity outcomes. In this article, Dobbin and Kalev focus on 5 firms among the 800 firms they studied: Oracle, Gap, Walmart, Costco, and IBM.

They reported that one innovative process related to significant retention, diversity gains, and productivity growth was an open-source referral system available to all employees for all open jobs in the company. The authors cite a workforce manager at a Boston Hospital Manager who reported that if you ask employees to refer friends, family members and people they would want to work with, one great hire leads to another and diversity just kind of happens.

A second innovative system these highly productive firms used was extensive skill development programs at work focused on practical skills, hands on exercises to learn retail models, teamwork development, merchandising and communication. Also, all participants were asked to state a career goal and received help to plan a pathway to their goal.

A third element of this HPM system focused on providing all employees with stability at work by publishing start and finishing times, hours per week and week to week schedules that were related to improved efficiency, job satisfaction, and diversity retention.

The authors observed that High Performance Management firms used employee referral systems to recruit, employee networks for new hires, skill training for all, mentoring for all, informal and formal on the job training, career goal setting and support, and work schedule predictability to retain and promote diverse, highly competent employees.

Human Resource executives in not-for-profit and for-profit enterprises could benefit from a careful analysis of Dobbin and Kalev's research and findings regarding the outcomes associated with High Performance Management techniques. The authors reveal how multiple companies expand workforce skills, increase promotions, and expand retention for women, and men in diverse ethnic, racial and cultural groups while experiencing increases in productivity. After examining this article, one can see how leaders, managers and human resource executives can develop systems that produce a highly productive and diverse workforce in school, university, hospital and other corporate enterprises.

Dobbin, F., & Kalev, A. (2025). *Achieve DEI goals without DEI programs*. Harvard Business Review.

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THE THINK TANK

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF LEGACY: A POETIC REFLECTION ON LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE IN SCHOOL BUILDING ADMINISTRATION

Dorothy Drexel
(Plainview-Old Bethpage School District, NY)

Every June, in the courtyard of my middle school, students plant sunflower seeds. To some, it's just a project made up of dirt, water, and a packet of seeds. Then, as if miraculously, by September, those forgotten seeds bloom into tall, golden flowers that tower over the students who planted them. They are reminders that hope, growth, and beauty can emerge quietly, even when no one is watching.

For me, as an assistant principal nearing retirement, those sunflowers became more than a project. They are a symbol for leadership itself. School leaders plant seeds daily: in students, in staff, in systems. We never know which ones will grow or when. Nevertheless, like the sunflower, leadership often blooms long after the work is done.

There is an emotional landscape when it comes to leadership in schools: it is not linear, nor is it glamorous. It is a job of contradictions. For example, one Friday afternoon, a teacher called my office to report that a student had placed melted cheese in a classmate's hair. Cheese. In hair. On a Friday. Eighth period. This was not a metaphor; it was middle school, and in that moment, like countless others, I learned that administrators must find humor or risk missing their chance to turn toward the sun and grow.

The truth is that leadership will ask for every ounce of your patience, stamina, and heart. You'll spend mornings on crisis response, afternoons on data analysis, and evenings at concerts, games, or board meetings. You'll navigate burnout, staff resistance, and parent criticism. You will carry other people's burdens while often struggling to find someone who will carry yours. However, within this weight lies purpose. The complaints will be louder than the applause, and victories may be quiet, but they exist. The sunflower blooms, even when no one is watching.

Early in my teaching career, I constantly feared I didn't know enough. Later, as an administrator, that fear returned. Yet, I came to realize that leadership is not about certainty. It is about curiosity. Leaders grow stronger not through expertise, but through the humility it takes to keep learning. Purpose doesn't shout, rather it whispers in the quiet victories. Every day, you decide whether you will lift others up or weigh them down. Apathy is contagious, but so is joy. You will be tempted to join the chorus of "that's not my job." Resist. Leaders dance between the raindrops while planting seeds beneath the surface. The choice is yours: to be the cloud that blocks out the sun, or the warm continual rays of sunlight that steadies and illuminates.

The culture of a school district or school building will challenge the leader you aspire to be. Often, schools resist change. You will be asked to inspire staff who are tired, wary, or afraid. You will run professional development sessions where teachers grade papers while you speak. You will feel invisible. Change is slow, and culture eats initiatives for breakfast. Lead anyway. Plant anyway. Find your people. Find your purpose.

Leadership is lonely. People will see your title but not your humanity. Some will treat you as a dumping ground for tasks, rather than a professional with vision and integrity. To survive, you must build your community. Never forget the colleagues who supported you when you began to wilt, the family who reminds you who you are, and the inner voice that tells you your worth is not defined by applause. Years from now, no one will remember the data dashboard you agonized over, but they will remember the kind word you offered, the moment you noticed their child's smile, or the sunflower you planted together. The little things are not little. They are everything.

Most importantly, remember this: leadership is not about titles or accolades. It is about planting seeds, walking with grace, and bringing joy into spaces that desperately need it. Specifically, when you feel weary. When the complaints are louder than the praise. When your office feels like a dumping ground. When you wonder if any of it matters--walk outside. Look for the sunflower, because it will remind you of the truth: Leadership is not about waiting for joy to find you. Leadership is about bringing joy, planting hope, and leaving behind something that will bloom long after you're gone.

This is the power that comes from planting a sunflower!

Dorothy Drexel *has been an educator for over 25 years and has been an Assistant Principal for now 10 years at The Plainview-Old Bethpage Middle School.*

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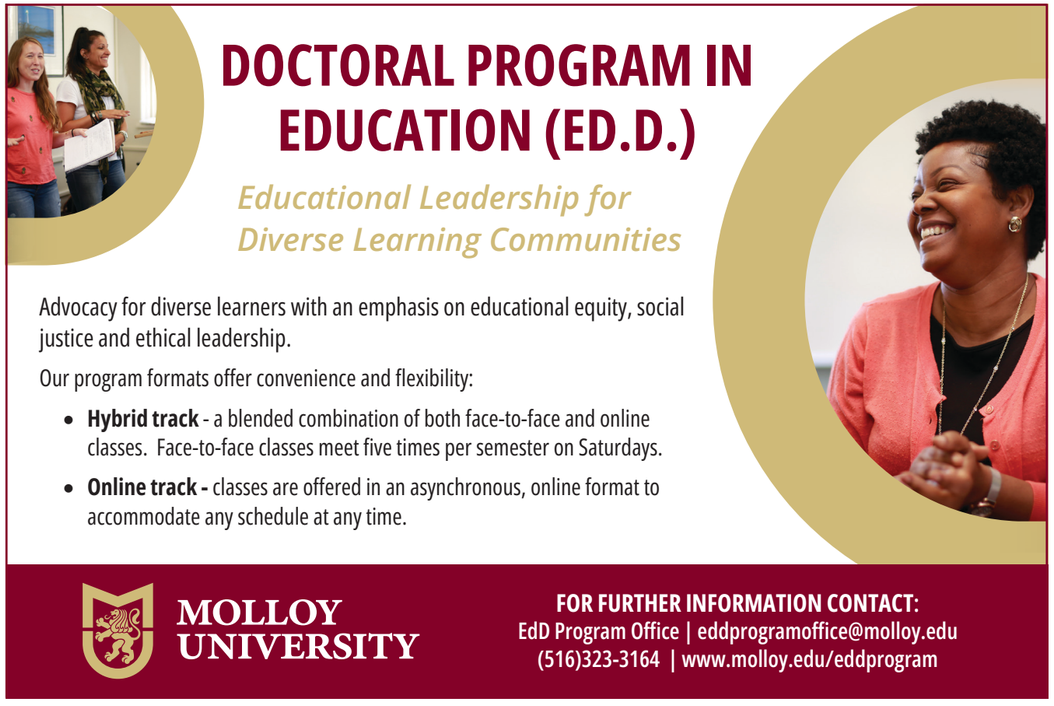

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