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Editorial: Insights in leadership in education: 2022

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Editorial on the Research Topic Insights in leadership in education: 2022

This collection of articles provides an overview of educational leadership as we emerge from the pandemic crisis into a divisive era characterized by political unrest, social and cultural upheaval, and persistent economic hardship. Across the globe, leaders in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions are faced with the challenges of making up for student learning loss during the pandemic, educator burn out, parental and community concerns about curriculum content, mental health issues and the impact of artificial intelligence on education. Education leaders are taxed with meeting these challenges with scant resources in a conservative policy climate that favors traditionalism at the expense of a liberal progressive outlook.

The nine articles included in this Research Topic offer a variety of perspectives on issues pertaining to education leadership. Orr's overview of leader preparation in "*Reflections on leadership preparation research and current directions*," reinforces the importance of leadership outcomes – particularly those related to improvement of student learning. Now recognized as a field of its own, the study of leadership preparation has developed over the past 20 to 30 years. Yet we know little about the relationship of preparation to leadership effectiveness in facilitating marginalized and under-represented students' academic achievement. Orr identifies partnerships between schools and universities as a key element of quality preparation programs in the U.S. echoing a more general commitment to collaborative approaches to leadership development and institutional effectiveness.

For instance, Pashmforoosh et al.'s study of 40 school leaders who participated in virtual professional learning communities (VPLC) found these communities of practice across schools in Texas were instrumental in building principals and assistant principals instructional leadership capacity. "*Building school leaders' instructional leadership capacity through virtual professional learning communities*," highlights the effectiveness of community building through collaboration. Participants worked with each other to identify creative solutions to problems of practice in their high-needs schools.

In another example of collaboration, Washington and Johnson, in their article, "*Toward culturally sustaining/revitalizing indigenous family-school-community leadership*," identify promising leadership models that are more respectful of indigenous communities' self-determination over education. The collaborative partnerships advocated in this review are focused on learning from the indigenous communities' ways of knowing, being and doing to craft education policies and practices to benefit indigenous students and their families.

Fahrenwald et al. also focus on collaborative partnerships between higher education institutions and the civil society in Austria. “*Taking the lead for campus-community-partnerships*” is a brief research report, which raises questions about how these CCPs are led, managed, and sustained. Their research findings indicate that despite the importance attached to the potential of CCPs to foster social innovation through collective action, there is little institutional support for them. Most are initiated voluntarily by mid-career women faculty members. To realize the potential of these partnerships, the authors recommend greater institutional commitment and maintenance of support.

Another article that focuses on higher education discusses the results of a PhD program evaluation. In “*Leadership in PhD (LeaP): a longitudinal leadership skill building program for underrepresented biomedical research trainees*,” Doles et al. found the program effective in helping underrepresented biomedical research trainees build community and develop new leadership skills. The positive feedback from students suggests possibilities for the LeaP model to be adapted for other health professional programs designed to increase diversity in the field.

Klinck et al. studied School Management Teams (SMT) in South Africa to understand better the necessary competencies, abilities and attitudes that lead to improved service delivery. Findings reported in “*Creating a high-performing school management: bringing talent to the table for effective service delivery*” include a set of desirable interpersonal skills, managerial skills, emotional intelligence, effective communication, and team building skills. The authors recommend that the SMTs are provided training and development to strengthen these skills in order to provide better social justice education and increased academic achievement.

Finally, three articles consider different approaches to leadership including transformational leadership, caring leadership, and servant leadership. In “*Transformational educational leaders inspire school educators’ commitment*,” Kareem et al. studied the effect of leader’s transformational style on teacher commitment in India. They found that the positive effect of this kind of leadership encouraged a culture of collaboration and self-development. Steilen and Stone-Johnson report on a study of elementary principals’ caring leadership during the pandemic. In “*“There wasn’t a guidebook for this”: caring leadership during a crisis*,” the authors advocate for in-service and pre-service leadership development to help leaders prioritize care as central to their work not only for others but also for themselves. And Dami et al. discuss the results of a study of Christian higher education lecturers in Indonesia in their article “*Servant leadership and job satisfaction: the mediating role of trust and leader-member exchange*.” They found that servant leadership positively influences trust, leader-member exchange and job satisfaction.

At the heart of most of these articles is an interest in understanding better how education leaders work impacts others – students, community members and other educators. They illustrate the primary focus of leadership research over the past 20 years, which has been on the relationship between leadership and student learning. These articles contribute to this important agenda by offering different theoretical and conceptual approaches to leadership, global perspectives, and a variety of education settings. Moving forward, as the negative effects of racism, sexism, ableism, homo- and transphobia, and anti-migrant policies and practices place increasing numbers of our communities in jeopardy, courageous education leadership is imperative for the wellbeing of future generations. My hope is that in the next decade, education scholars and researchers commit to generating new knowledge of how leadership matters in the lives of those served. Leadership is fundamentally about prioritization and decision-making that has the power to elevate human potential or stifle it. To ensure the former, we will need a concerted global effort on the part of the academic community partnering with education practitioners, community members and students themselves.

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