



Advancing Youth Leadership Development Research:

Moving the Field Toward Greater Access and Quality



EDITORS

John P. Dugan, Ph.D.
Sydnee Patterson, M.Ed.
Kristan Cilente Skendall, Ph.D.
& Associates

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Jasmine Adams*	Matt Johnson
Javaune Adams-Gaston	Mark Kenyon
Noha Al-Khalqi	Renique Kersh
Kristina Alcozer Garcia	Mark Kueppers
Pamela Alvarado	Michelle Kusel
Cameron Beatty	Bernard Liang
Gabriel Beaver*	Jana Lithgow
Lesley-Ann Brown-Henderson	Phillip Lockhart
Scott Brown	Nicole Long
Jacob Clemens	Kevin Martin*
Blake Comeaux*	Kenechukwu (K.C.) Mmeje
Rosalind Conerly	Jennifer Montana
Ben Correia-Harker	Elizabeth A. Nessner
Farouk Dey	Julie Owen
Kaitlyn Done*	Patty Perillo
Karen Done	Darren Pierre
Antonio Duran	Kent Porterfield
Katie Fitzgerald	Nicholas Presley*
Derrick Fleming, Jr.	Melissa Rocco
Kayla Foster*	Dave Rosch
Cheryl Green	Ally Schipma
Lindsay Hastings	Frank Shushok, Jr.
Leonette Henderson	Will Simpkins
Beth Hoag	J. Malcolm Smith
Courtney Holder	Krista Soria
Aja Holmes	Gayle Spencer
Ryan Holmes	Olivia Toro
Luoluo Hong	Natasha Turman
Runzhi Hu*	Vernon Wall
Keith Humphrey	Juan Zarco*
Sharra Hynes	Kathleen Zimmerman-Oster
Ramsey Jabaji	* Indicates a Youth Impact Fellow
Kisa Jafri*	

SUGGESTED CITATION

Dugan, J. P., Patterson, S., Skendall, K. C., & Associates.(2023). *Advancing youth leadership development research: Moving the field toward greater access and quality*. Aspen Institute.

This document and the funding to support the work of the Aspen Index Impact Fellowship are generously provided by:



THE HAGERTY FAMILY



© 2023 The Aspen Institute. All rights reserved.



● Introduction

“Research (or lack thereof) drives what is taught in leadership development programs, classes, and training. What is taught informs what is practiced in our politics, neighborhoods, and businesses. And what is practiced creates the world we live in.”

- Juan Zarco*, Blake Comeaux*, and Courtney Holder

The opportunity gap for youth leadership development is substantial. Fewer than 16% of youth in the United States access leadership development experiences with demonstrable impact by age 25. This is despite research affirming the positive role leadership development plays in educational completion, workforce readiness, civic engagement, social trust, and building social capital.

That only 16% of youth experience a leadership development program is a function of both access and quality. Access to influential leadership experiences are too few and often too focused on attainment of positional leader roles and basic skill development rather than the cultivation of *all* young people’s leadership talent and potential. Quality is also an issue with more than half of youth leadership

programs demonstrating no meaningful impact on learning or development. This should give every reader pause. Although the percentage of youth participating in high-quality leadership programs increased over the past decade, the rate of increase is shallow and fails to meet demand.

Two critical questions arose through the exploration of these issues:

- What would need to occur to optimize youth leadership development and increase reach while simultaneously increasing quality?
- What would it look like to collectively leverage youth leadership development to drive longer-term goals (e.g., educational attainment, workforce readiness, civic engagement, and social cohesion)?

These two questions guided the inaugural cohort of the Aspen Index Impact Fellowship. Impact Fellows spent more than 25 hours in design-thinking, text-based dialogue, and problem-based learning. Fellows include youth, parents, scholars and practitioners

from across disciplines working across nonprofit, secondary, and postsecondary institutions - all focused on advancing access to and the quality of youth leadership programs.

This publication reflects an urgent agenda focused on the research, interventions, pedagogies, and strategies necessary to accelerate the access to, and quality of, youth leadership programs nationally. The goal of this initiative is to lift youth access to high-quality leadership programs above the 50% threshold in the United States over the next 10 years. This means reaching at least 2.5 million additional youth annually. Although audacious in scope, this goal is achievable through coordinated efforts across sectors to secure the resources, research, and evidence-based practices necessary to expand access and improve quality.

Throughout this publication you will read calls to action from our fellows. We hope you hear the voices throughout this report and consider how you can advance this critically important work in your own spheres of influence.

ACT

THE MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Leadership learning via academic and co-curricular experiences is a powerful intervention that empowers students to build and apply essential knowledge and skills, access, opportunity, and drive change for themselves and their communities.

BENEFITS OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- Learning Outcome Gains (Resilience, Teaming, Empathy, Civic Engagement, Creative-Problem Solving, Curiosity, and more)
- Increases in Social Capital
- Ability to Buffer Stereotype Threat
- Increased Social Cohesion
- Educational Persistence
- Workforce Readiness

↕
ACADEMIC
CURRICULUM

↕
CO-CURRICULUM

↕
COMMUNITY
PROGRAMMING

THE PROBLEM

ACCESS
.....
**FEWER
THAN
32%**
of youth have exposure to a leadership development program by age 25

QUALITY
.....
**FEWER
THAN
50%**
of existing youth leadership programs yield any meaningful impact

ACCESS
.....
**FEWER
THAN
16%**
of youth have exposure to a meaningful leadership development program by age 25



OUR IMPACT POTENTIAL

Could we reach

2.5 MILLION ADDITIONAL YOUTH

under age 25 annually with quality leadership development opportunities to lift the national average above the 50% threshold?

Could we partner with

200 EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

to increase program impact locally while training for sustainability and growth?

What new knowledge, training, and development must occur at the field-level to drive

ACCESS AND QUALITY?



IMPACT STRATEGY

- Reimagine Where and How Leadership Development is Measured
- Demonstrate the Value Proposition of Youth Leadership Development
- Position Cultural Relevance as Core to Leadership Theory and Research
- Expand Knowledge and Understanding of Leadership and the Context in Which it Occurs
- Deepen Knowledge About the Role of Leadership Educators, Adults, And Peers in the Leadership Development Process
- Invest in Brain-Based, Neuroscientific Research to Understand and Unlock Knowledge to Drive Program Quality
- Staging the Next Generation of Youth Leadership Scholarship: A Call to Action



Reimagine Where and How Leadership Development is Measured

Author: Lindsay J. Hastings

Background

The United States is expected to encounter one of the largest leadership transfers in its history, considering approximately 55% of managerial positions are occupied by individuals aged 45 and over (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Accordingly, many young adults may find themselves assuming senior leadership

roles earlier in their career and will not have the opportunity to accumulate significant work experiences and reflective learning from those experiences prior to assuming them. Thus, early leadership development experiences will increasingly gain significance in preparing a young workforce to shoulder the burden of a considerable positional leadership transfer.

○ Reimagining how leadership development is measured facilitates more precise understandings of how individuals and collectives (i.e., groups and teams) develop their leadership capacities over the course of their lifetimes (Note: The term “leadership development” refers to both leader and leadership development). If youth leadership development is measured with greater precision and in a way that is more representative, then the programmatic elements that impact leadership growth become clearer. Additionally, reimagining how leadership development is measured provides the opportunity to rethink programmatic quality and envision leadership development as a longitudinal system of variable experiences, not any one experience within any one context. Reimagining leadership is not only about *how* but *where* leadership development is measured.

Importance

Leadership developmental processes from youth to adulthood are dynamic and iterative, requiring a life course perspective (Liu et al., 2021; Murphy, 2019; Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Most lifespan leadership research concentrates on the impacts of childhood factors and experiences on adult leadership potential and emergence (e.g., Gottfried et al., 2011; Guerin et al., 2011; Li et al., 2011; Oliver et al., 2011; Reichard et al., 2011) Youth leadership experiences are critical as they indicate real developmental windows and readiness for later developmental experiences

(Liu et al., 2021). Reimagining how leadership development is measured facilitates more precise understandings of lifespan leadership developmental trajectories, which will allow for stronger design, delivery, and evaluation of early leadership developmental experiences as well as a deeper understanding of the multitude of variable experiences and contexts that might also facilitate leadership development processes.

Because lifespan leadership development is a longitudinal system of variable experiences - not any one experience for a homogenous group within any one context - leadership development experiences throughout one’s lifetime are just as likely to be embedded within existing, everyday experiences as the result of any one program. Youth have fewer opportunities than adults to pursue and assume formal leadership roles and positions, as highlighted by the World Economic Forum’s Davos Agenda 2022 for why youth leadership needs to be actively cultivated (Shekhar, 2022). Thus, youth leaders will need to rely more on influence through personal relationships during formative years than adulthood where formal authority accompanies many leadership roles. Generating precise and holistic understandings of lifespan leadership growth must acknowledge and address complexity, both in the leadership learner as well as in the developmental pathway. Addressing complexity demands reimagining how leadership development is measured, primarily through fundamental

changes to inquiry related to unit of analysis, time, and context.

Recommendations For Action

Research advancements evolved our understanding of leadership as dynamic (not a static phenomenon at one moment in time), collective (not singularly about the leader),



“The results of outdated research can be considered questionable at best. If we continue conducting outdated research with outdated, archaic methods, our results will be stuck in the past as we are trying to craft leaders for the future.”

- Juan Zarco*, Blake Comeaux*, and Courtney Holder

and influenced by context (Day et al., 2014; People First Community, n.d.; Riggio, 2019). Thus, reimagining how leadership development is measured must involve:

#1: Recognizing multiple levels and time periods in how leadership development is measured.



Understanding leadership as dynamic, collective, and

contextually influenced acknowledges that leadership development will likely involve intrapersonal changes, interpersonal changes, and/or team/group leadership capacity changes, and that those changes will likely happen at multiple time points over an extended period of time (not just at the end of a program). Thus, this first imperative requires identifying and measuring short- and long-term outcomes of leadership development efforts at both individual and collective levels. For example, Wallace et al. (2021) define first-order (short-term) learning outcomes as, “changes in knowledge, skills, and abilities in individuals, or emergent states and processes in collectives,” and second-order (long-term) learning outcomes as, “the products of maturation processes that result in changing leadership identities and epistemologies” (p. 3). Depending on the desired focus and resources of a particular leadership development program, a leadership educator could identify short- and long-term outcomes at both individual and collective levels, articulate associated program goals and objectives, and identify measures whose item stems or prompts appropriately indicate individual changes versus collective changes (see Martin et al., 2022), short-term changes (i.e., leadership skills) versus long-term changes (i.e., leadership identity).

#2: Measuring leadership development in a way that accounts for change over time.

This involves recognizing that leadership learners develop over time in ways that can and cannot be explained by a straight line (Lord, 2019). Thus, utilizing

analytic tools such as growth curve modeling and multi-level modeling are increasingly important for lifespan leadership research and assessment (see Diaz et al., 2022 for illustrative research and assessment examples that practically describe growth in non-linear trajectories over time). Qualitative and mixed methods approaches also afford deeper insights into the ways in which leadership development compounds and regressions across time and context.

#3: Modeling and exploring the influence of intersections and context on leadership development.

The influence of context can be modeled statistically by accounting for the influence of “nests” within the data (that one individual’s developmental pathway might be influenced by their particular

team/classroom and by their particular school/community) – this is considered naming a multi-level system as the unit of analysis. However, lifespan leadership development is influenced by an entire host of contextual factors and their intersections, thus utilizing novel methods (such as constructivist and critical qualitative research) as well as utilizing multiple methods and/or multiple data collection modalities become important considerations. For example, researching leadership development might involve not just analyzing surveys and interviews at multiple timepoints, but also integrating journaling and artistic renderings that prompt reflection on the influence of various contextual factors and intersecting identities.



Bubuney's Story

Bubuney Havi, a 2022 Bezos Scholar, reflects on the value of her experience in understanding her own leadership journey. Her story exemplifies the importance of reimagining how, where, and when leadership development is measured.

When I got accepted to the Bezos Scholars Program (BSP) in my junior year of high school, it changed my perspective on leadership. As a cohort of 17 students and 13 educators, 12 from the United States and 5 from the African Leadership Academy in South Africa, we developed community change initiatives specific to our communities that will make a positive impact. Based on the needs of my local community and school, we focused on English language learners in my community. Additionally, I took part in life-changing experiences like storytelling and healing, problem-solving through design thinking, and identity and purpose workshops. I consider myself to be fortunate to have participated in the Bezos Scholars Program. BSP altered my perspective and planted a seed in me that was never there before. It helped me to understand that leadership happens everywhere around me if we choose to see it. Leadership isn't just in the boardroom, as president of an organization, or for adults. Each of us practice leadership everyday. Thanks to my BSP experience, I now see leadership all around me!

References and Additional Resources

- Day, D. V., Fleenor, J. W., Atwater, L. E., Sturm, R. E., & McKee, R. A. (2014). Advances in leader and leadership development: A review of 25 years of research and theory. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25, 63 – 82.
- Diaz, J., Reichard, R. J., & Riggio, R. E. (2022). Go for the gold: Hurdles and winning strategies for conducting longitudinal and nonlinear research in undergraduate leader development. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 175, 61 - 71.
- Gottfried, A. E., Gottfried, A. W., Reichard, R. J., Guerin, D. W., Oliver, P. H., & Riggio, R. E. (2011). Motivational roots of leadership: A longitudinal study from childhood through adulthood. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22, 510-519.
- Guerin, D. W., Oliver, P. H., Gottfried, A. W., Gottfried, A. E., Reichard, R. J., & Riggio, R. E. (2011). Childhood and adolescent antecedents of social skills and leadership potential in adulthood: Temperamental approach/withdrawal and extraversion. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22, 482-494.
- Li, W. D., Arvey, R. D., & Song, Z. (2011). The influence of general mental ability, self-esteem and family socioeconomic status on leadership role occupancy and leader advancement: The moderating role of gender. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22, 520-534.
- Liu, Z., Venkatesh, S., Murphy, S. E., & Riggio, R. E. (2021). Leader development across the lifespan: A dynamic experiences-grounded approach. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 32, 1-21.
- Lord, R. G. (2019). Leadership and the medium of time. In R. E. Riggio (Ed.), *What's wrong with leadership? Improving leadership research and practice* (pp. 150 – 172). Routledge.
- Martin, J. A., Weng, J., & Kliewer, B. W. (2022). Assessing leadership development in groups and teams. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 175, 83 - 92.
- Murphy, S. E. (2019). Leadership development starts earlier than you think. In R. E. Riggio (Ed.), *What's wrong with leadership? Improving leadership research and practice* (pp. 209 – 225). Routledge.
- Murphy, S. E., & Johnson, S. K. (2011). The benefits of a long-lens approach to leader development: Understanding the seeds of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22, 459 – 470.
- Oliver, P. H., Gottfried, A. W., Guerin, D. W., Gottfried, A. E., Reichard, R. J., & Riggio, R. E. (2011). Adolescent family environmental antecedents to transformational leadership potential: A longitudinal mediational analysis. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22, 535-544.
- People First Community. (n.d.) *Collective leadership as a path for sustainable development*. <https://peoplefirstdev.org/>
- Reichard, R. J., Riggio, R. E., Guerin, D. W., Oliver, P. H., Gottfried, A. W., & Gottfried, A. E. (2011). A longitudinal analysis of relationships between adolescent personality and intelligence with adult leader emergence and transformational leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22, 471-481.
- Riggio, R. E. (2019). Introduction: What's wrong with leadership? Improving leadership theory, research, and practice. In R. E. Riggio (Ed.), *What's wrong with leadership? Improving leadership research and practice* (pp. 1 - 6). Routledge.
- Shekhar, A. (2022). *Why organizations need to nurture youth leadership – and how to do it*. World Economic Forum Annual Meeting. World Economic Forum.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2017). Current population survey. <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11b.htm>
- Wallace, D. M., Torres, E. M., & Zaccaro, S. J. (2021). Just what do we think we are doing? Learning outcomes of leader and leadership development. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 32, 1 – 13.



Demonstrate the Value Proposition of Youth Leadership Development

Author: Krista M. Soria

Background

Empowering youth to discover and develop their unique leadership strengths transforms them into efficacious, motivated, and innovative students who are primed to engage more deeply in their educational pursuits (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013; Scott, Druery, & Pingue, 2022; Winchester 2018). Imbued with purpose, strategies, and a vision for utilizing their unique leadership capacities, youth can leverage their strengths and efficacy to draw relevant connections between their academics and life goals, achieve higher high school and postsecondary degree completion rates, and enter into meaningful career pathways. Thus, youth leadership development

has the potential to disrupt intergenerational inequalities and disparities.

Further, the act of decentering leadership from the auspices of positional leaders or authority figures—typically adults—empowers youth to navigate complex challenges and apply novel solutions to effect change as they positively transform families, schools, communities, organizations, and society. Cultivating leadership capacities in today's youth ensures the prosperity, health, and development of future generations as youth are catalyzed to develop solutions, work across differences, and amend historical legacies of oppression, disenfranchisement, and marginalization.

○ But, to what degree have we
○ adequately developed an
○ evidence-base that demonstrates
○ the impact of youth leadership
○ development beyond development
itself? What are the longer-term
impacts of participation in youth
leadership programs? Without
insights into the explicit benefits
of youth leadership development,
shifting pressures in educational
institutions, politics, and societal
landscapes risk deprioritizing youth
leadership development efforts.
What are the greater impacts of
participation in youth leadership
programming related to economic



“In order to best honor the work of past researchers, we must build off their foundation and evolve our tactics to fit our evolving society and evolving conception of youth leadership development.”

- Juan Zarco*, Blake Comeaux*, and Courtney Holder

security, degree completion, job placement, community and family well-being, organizational citizenship behaviors, and civic engagement? Research is beginning to address the longer-term impacts of youth leadership, but the question still remains:

leadership development for what impact? Stakeholders will be better positioned to champion and support the enduring integration of leadership education and development into curricula and co-curricula with a more robust body of knowledge supporting its primacy to the educational process.

Importance

A growing number of politicians and policymakers are actively reversing or attempting to reverse decades' worth of progress to remediate centuries of oppression of individuals from marginalized and minoritized backgrounds. Bipartisan divides create roadblocks in developing consensus at all governmental levels and citizens feel disempowered, disillusioned, and disconnected from democratic political processes (Cummings, 2023). Poverty and social class disparities are endemic, spanning generations with little reprieve. Institutionalized forms of oppression—racism, sexism, classism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia—are bolstered by the systems that continue to uphold white supremacy, reinforce bigotry, and maintain the status quo. Concurrently, threats to democratic processes, war, poverty, slavery, and injustice threaten human rights and social justice across the globe.

Against the background of global warming and a global pandemic, the aforementioned community, societal, and global problems demonstrate the need for effective leaders more than ever to respond

to these crises. Hoping or wishing that better leaders will come along is no longer sufficient.

Recommendations for Action

#1: Examine the broader outcomes of youth leadership development using innovative approaches, multifaceted strategies, and novel outcomes.

To articulate and promote the benefits of youth leadership development, outcomes that are critically important in contributing to young people's capacities, skills, and abilities need to be examined. This includes the measurement of impact on youth development, but also the ways in which development, in turn, contributes to longer-term, broader goals (e.g., economic security, degree

completion, well-being). This approach to research requires a variety of methods (inclusive of quantitative, qualitative, and critical frameworks) to collect and analyze data, longer time horizons for research, and increased integration of contextual influences from across the complex ecosystems that youth navigate. Critical frameworks, methodologies, and approaches are vital to these processes (Dugan, 2017) and necessitate collecting data from a wide variety of youth to ensure representation, examine how leadership education and development perpetuates existing disparities, and determine how leadership education and development can be more culturally relevant, identity-responsive, and applicable to participants.

Case Example

"An ounce of data is worth a pound of opinion." Thomas Magoon

Youth leadership programs are powerful interventions that empower youth to build the essential knowledge, skills, and mindsets to access opportunity and drive change for themselves and their communities. The human capital benefits of youth leadership experiences are well-documented and include gains in socio-emotional learning, innovation, and teaming capacities (Dugan, 2017). To what extent, though, do these benefits accrue and compound to positively influence outcomes such as educational attainment, job placement, economic security, civic engagement, and well-being? Far less is understood about these longer-term outcomes.

Emerging research supports the benefits of leadership development for:

- educational persistence (e.g., Wolniak, Mayhew, & Engberg, 2012),
- the ability to buffer stereotype threat (e.g., Hoyt & Murphy, 2016),
- increased career readiness (e.g. Villarreal et al., 2018),
- gains in social capital (e.g., Soria & Cole, 2023), and
- greater social cohesion and civic engagement (e.g. Johnson, 2015).

The research above provides an important foundation from which to build a comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of participation in youth leadership programs. Scholars are now encouraged to drill more deeply into the above areas along with the influences of youth leadership programs on economic security, career readiness, community and family well-being, and other longer-term goals.

#2: Prioritize effectively communicating the benefits of youth leadership development.

It is vital that results on the short and longer-term benefits of youth leadership development are communicated to stakeholders in ways that address their preferences, knowledge, and needs (e.g., policy reports, social media posts, research articles). Developing an intentional, strategic approach to engaging stakeholders in the process of sharing communications is necessary to firmly establish the centrality of youth leadership development to both educational missions and the future prosperity of our country.

#3: Include youth in the process of better understanding the benefits of youth leadership development.

Youth are disproportionately excluded from engaging in research about youth—and practices like youth participatory action research can collectively and democratically engage youth in research design, methods, and analyses while honoring their wisdom about youth development (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Youth should be engaged at all levels of the process—from selecting outcomes and measures to collecting data, analyzing data, and communicating results. It should no longer be acceptable to conduct research on youth without youth at the table.



References and Additional Resources

Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. Routledge.

Cummings, M. S. (2022). Silence is poison: Explaining and curing adult “apathy.” In J. Wall (Ed.), *Exploring children's suffrage. Studies in childhood and youth* (pp. 27-46). Palgrave Macmillan.

Dugan, J. P. (2017). *Leadership theory: Cultivating critical perspectives*. Jossey-Bass.

Hoyt, C. L., & Murphy, S. E. (2016). Managing to clear the air: Stereotype threat, women, and leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly, 27*, 387-399.

Johnson, M. (2015). Developing college students' civic identity: The role of social perspective taking and sociocultural issues discussions. *Journal of College Student Development, 56*(7), 687-704.

Komives, S. R., Lucas, N., & McMahon, T. R. (2013). *Exploring leadership: For college students who want to make a difference*. John Wiley & Sons.

Scott, L., Druery, D., & Pingué, A. (2022). Reimagining student leadership development in urban schools. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*.

Soria, K. M., & Cole, A. (2023). Leadership education and first-generation students' social capital development. *Journal of First-generation Student Success, 1*-19.

Villarreal, S., Montoya, J. A., Duncan, P., & Gergen, E. (2018). Leadership styles predict career readiness in early college high school students. *Psychology in the Schools, 55*(5), 476-489.

Winchester, C. (2018). Investing in critical leadership development with high-school students. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 159*, 27-40.

Wolniak, G. C., Mayhew, M. J., & Engberg, M. E. (2012). Learning's weak link to persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education, 83*, 795-823.



Position Cultural Relevance as Core to Leadership Theory and Research

Author: Cameron C. Beatty

Background

Ladson-Billings (1995) defined culture as the combining of human activity, production, thought, and belief systems with cultural relevance referring to the incorporation of awareness, understanding, and responsiveness to beliefs, values, customs, and institutions. Cultural relevance

encourages educators to use an assets-based approach while engaging learners from culturally different backgrounds, including but not limited to: race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, learning differences, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

Cultural relevance is essential for advancing leadership theory and research with the potential to increase access to and the quality of leadership programs. This is because it shifts the focus of research from viewing participants through a monolithic lens to one that better recognizes how cultural context influences leadership experiences. Culturally relevant leadership puts theory into practice by considering different viewpoints and ways of seeing and living leadership (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016). It recognizes

the power dynamics embedded - but too often unaccounted for - in existing leadership theories while contributing to a new generation of scholarship that positions cultural relevance as core to this work. This approach enables exploration of what different youth bring to leadership spaces when their leader identities, capacities, and efficacies are considered when engaging in the leadership process (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021).

Importance

Understanding culturally relevant leadership requires an awareness of how social stratification and oppression can be perpetuated through leadership research and how this may affect youth leaders' confidence to instigate and direct social change. Culturally relevant leadership interrogates five critical dimensions of the learning environment for leadership, including the location and context for building culturally appropriate and socially just leadership education. Beatty and Guthrie (2021) offer key questions for researchers to consider for culturally relevant leadership learning research using the five critical domains (see Table 1).

Table 1: Key questions for researchers to consider for culturally relevant leadership learning research.

Five Critical Dimensions	Questions to Consider for Leadership Theory and Research
The Legacy of Inclusion and Exclusion Throughout History	<p>Whose ideas of leadership are represented in current leadership theories?</p> <p>In what ways can context and environmental history be explored throughout the research methods?</p>
Compositional Diversity	<p>How can research recruitment methods be more inclusive and culturally relevant?</p> <p>How can leadership learning research be more inclusive of researchers who hold minoritized identities?</p> <p>To what extent are youth engaged in the design and interpretation of research?</p>
Psychological Dimension	<p>How can researchers continue to educate themselves on critical methods and culturally relevant approaches to research methodology?</p> <p>How can researcher reflections be guided with prompts that are guided by CRL?</p>
Behavioral Dimension	<p>How can researchers constantly answer for themselves, “what makes this research design culturally relevant?”</p>
Organizational And Structural Elements	<p>How can leadership development be made accessible in meaningful ways outside of formal educational settings?</p> <p>What does the practice of civic leadership look like, and how might this inform civic leadership development and research outcomes?</p>

Adapted from Beatty, C. C., & Guthrie, K. L. (2021). Operationalizing culturally relevant leadership learning. Information Age Publishing.

- The integration of cultural relevancy as a core - not optional
- - component of leadership theory and research aids in removing constraints on the full development of talent needed in society to advance and address complex issues. There is a need to center ways of knowing and being in leadership research for minoritized youth leaders. Otherwise, youth leadership theory and research run the risk of replicating oppressive norms. If youth leadership theory and research are to be more inclusive, they must include



“If we expect to meet the complex challenges in our world, we have to understand the full complexity of all of those who lead within it. Leadership isn’t identity neutral, leadership research shouldn’t be either.”

- Juan Zarco*, Blake Comeaux*, and Courtney Holder

diverse and divergent leadership perspectives and frameworks. This can be done by rooting culturally relevant frameworks and approaches in theory and research by considering the environments in which marginalized and minoritized identities are learning leadership. Research questions should explore:



1. What do youth learn about leadership given their unique contexts, identities, and positionalities?
2. What assets do historically marginalized and minoritized youth bring when engaging in the leadership process?
3. How can those assets advance equity and justice outcomes for youth engaging in the leadership process?

Assessing the larger community and organizational climate and how youth engage in the leadership learning context is the important piece to creating the inclusive space for all youth to build their leadership capacity. Additionally, considering how the intersections of social identities informs who is seen as a leader and who is afforded opportunities to engage in youth leadership development is central to a more culturally relevant and identity responsive youth leadership research agenda.

Recommendations for Action

#1: Research on youth leadership development must move the needs of historically marginalized and minoritized youth from the margins to the center.

Research should examine the unique obstacles and opportunities that arise from a person’s culture, identity, and positionality as well as how this impacts access to and the relative impact of leadership programs. This not only identifies the intersections of social identities in relation to leadership development, but also stresses the importance of equity in youth leadership development research. This includes conducting research



that contributes to greater access for historically marginalized and minoritized youth to high-quality leadership development experiences. Providing access to these minoritized voices builds their stories as counternarratives expanding the visibility and learning that comes from a more expansive and culturally relevant approach to leadership development. .

#2: Researchers must reconsider what they explicitly label as leadership.

Our understandings of leadership are too often constrained by what we “qualify” as leadership. Without a lens of cultural relevance, we miss opportunities to study and understand leadership as it manifests uniquely through family dynamics, engagement with faith communities, engagement through school, community-based work, activism, and more. This affords the opportunity to truly move beyond individualistic approaches to leadership to explore collective leadership and its unique impacts. Culturally relevant leadership research also advances more global, intersectional, and inclusive approaches to understanding how youth leadership development unfolds along with the influences accrued from engagement with cultures and communities beyond their own.

#3: More participatory action research (PAR) that centers youth as experts in their own leadership development. Research must avoid “doing onto” communities.

Participatory action research produces an ongoing process of change, and it promotes learning among the people closest to the change. This means research must include the voices of those for whom this call to action will serve. Historically marginalized and minoritized youth should be the co-designers and co-theorists of leadership development research. They should be engaged from the start by helping to create research questions, thinking about how data can be collected and analyzed, interpreting results, and key voices in theory design and application. Youth must be called into the process of researching leadership by sharing their experiences. For youth leadership research to be more culturally relevant, youth’s cultures must be honored and respected as an integral part of understanding how youth define leadership and decide to participate in the leadership process.



References and Additional Resources

Beatty, C. C., & Guthrie, K. L. (2021). *Operationalizing culturally relevant leadership learning*. Information Age Publishing.

Bertrand Jones, T., Guthrie, K. L., & Osteen, L. (2016). Critical domains of culturally relevant leadership learning: A call to transform leadership programs. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 152, 9–21.

Dugan, J. P. & Velázquez, D. (2015). Teaching contemporary leadership: Advancing students’ capacities to engage with difference. In S. Watt (Ed.), *Designing transformative multicultural initiatives* (pp. 105 – 118). Stylus.

Eagly, A. H., & Chin, J. L. (2010). Diversity and leadership in a changing world. *American Psychologist*, 65(3), 216–224.

Guthrie, K. L., Beatty, C. C., & Wiborg, E. R. (2021). *Engaging in the leadership process: Identity, capacity, & efficacy for college students*. Information Age Publishing.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, 465 – 491.

Museus, S., Lee, N., Calhoun, K., Sánchez-Parkinson, L., & Ting, M. (2017). *The social action, leadership, and transformation (SALT) model*. National Center for Institutional Diversity. [http://prod.lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/ncid-assets/ncid-documents/publications/Museus%20et%20al%20\(2017\)%20SALT%20Model%20Brief.pdf](http://prod.lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/ncid-assets/ncid-documents/publications/Museus%20et%20al%20(2017)%20SALT%20Model%20Brief.pdf).

Ospina, S. & Foldy, E. (2009). A critical review of race and ethnicity in the leadership literature: Surfacing context, power and the collective dimensions of leadership. *Leadership Quarterly*, 20, 876-896.



Expand Knowledge and Understanding of Leadership and the Context in Which it Occurs

Author: Renique Kersh

Background

Leadership is a process that is transformative and oriented toward positive change (Northouse, 2021). The context in which leadership occurs can serve as both a driver and a barrier to achieving systemic and sustainable change. Over time, the perspective has shifted from leadership as an inherent trait or behavior to leadership as relational, complex, and values-driven (Northouse, 2021) moving away from leadership as an individual endeavor toward a posture of service and collective influence. In doing so, there is an inherent acknowledgement that leadership does not reside in only

one context. Instead, leadership is an invaluable commodity that is situated within multiple contexts.

Leadership occurs within systems fraught with competing values, environmental conditions, ingrained and often inflexible norms and patterns, and embedded inequities. Leaders must also concurrently understand the broader context in which they are situated, leveraging this knowledge to identify possible threats and opportunities and creating space for diverse perspectives including the often unacknowledged perspectives of today's youth.

Importance

The World Economic Forum asserts that youth are growing up in a society that is fraught with turmoil and marred by crisis (Schwab, 2021). They are navigating multiple stressors including mental health and mass shootings, which now rank among the top five concerns for youth (Olson, 2023). Many youth have no choice but to learn how to live within this context, much of which is not their doing, but within which they are left to push past feelings of powerlessness and angst to find the agency and voice to recognize their own talent, potential, and impact. UNICEF (n.d.) notes that youth, “are directly affected by the decisions world leaders make... but are often excluded from the decision-making.” The process of leadership is often devoid of the voices of those who are most influenced by the decisions being made. This can lead to policy decisions that reproduce inequities and increase disparities.

The future of the research on youth leadership must acknowledge existing disparities, elevate the value of youth voices, and the power of the collective to influence positive change. There must also be an acknowledgement of the context that many youth have lived within, both in their local communities and beyond, that undoubtedly influences how they view and access leadership opportunities. Take the experience of Aspen Youth Leadership Fellow, Blake Comeaux (2021) for example, he explains:

- *In my community in St. Louis,*
- *the fight for equity in education*

has been a long struggle. Seeing how hard those before us have fought and continue to fight while disparities are still rampant can be extremely discouraging. It makes us ask ourselves, ‘If they have worked so hard but these problems are still present, can we really make a change?’ If past experience tells us we do not have power to effect change, we have no incentive to participate in the actions that could make it happen.

Blake’s reality articulates the weight of social change which can cause today’s youth to question whether they can make a difference. His word choice confirms that there has been a persistent process that has involved multiple individuals working toward systemic change and suggests that real and sustained change is challenging and does not have an end-date. He goes on to assert that,

We must address this limiting belief because our communities require leadership from within for change to be effective and sustainable. If we do not first tear down this barrier of perceived powerlessness, we can never expect to be the changemakers in our communities. (Comeaux, 2021)

Blake affirms the process as ongoing and requiring self-work to address the sense of powerlessness. His plea rejects the notion that leadership is an individual endeavor nor is it one that can easily occur without a full understanding of the environment in which it is occurring.

Expanding our knowledge and understanding of leadership therefore, requires a liberatory point of view that invites, restores, and makes room for diverse voices and perspectives. This view

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ interrupts deficit thinking and reinforces leadership as an enabler for justice, equity, and opportunity (Tchume, n.d.; Tchume, 2022).

Recommendations for Action

#1: Understand the Context and the System

Leadership occurs in classrooms and at the local community center as often as it occurs in the boardroom and yet our research and theory-building often fails to study these sites. It involves strategy, innovation and the ability to analyze the environment to make sense of the root cause for challenges or inequities that exist. Sense-making involves gathering multiple perspectives, understanding the factors influencing decisions and outcomes and gaining a better understanding of the environment in which leadership occurs (Foldy, Goldy, & Ospina, 2008). As this process unfolds, complex forces, not unlike those identified in Blake's comments, become more clear and they can be constructive or destructive (James & Wooten, 2022). Sense-making is an active process of becoming organizationally and situationally aware, monitoring potential opportunities and assessing potential risks. There are examples of this type of analysis in many disciplines including

public health, education, and engineering. However, we need to now study the direct influences of sense-making on youth leadership development as well as integrate the concept more comprehensively in leadership theory.

#2: Create Space for Liberatory Leadership

Liberatory leadership provides an opportunity for individuals and groups to bring their authentic selves into leadership spaces. By its very nature, it recognizes that the starting point is not the same for every individual who engages in leadership and it also acknowledges the important truth that Carla Harris, Vice Chairman and Managing Director at Morgan Stanley, shares "talent is evenly distributed but opportunity is not." Liberatory leadership leads to transformative organizing (Tchume, n.d.), which addresses both the self-work needed to understand one's social location and the system work needed to identify how one's thinking may need to shift to more effectively reduce gaps in opportunity and access. Tchume (n.d.) suggests that the following actions are critical for liberatory leadership to be effective: (1) self-awareness; (2) intentional practice of new ways of being; (3) envisioning the shared societal goal; and (4) organizing strategically and in community. Youth leadership research and

Case Example

Sense-making is an active process of becoming organizationally and situationally aware, monitoring potential opportunities and assessing potential risks (Foldy et al., 2008). Systems engineering provides a great example of this approach. As part of the process, systems engineers seek to understand the current state and use this knowledge to inform the path to the desired state. This is done by asking a series of questions in four phases (Adams & Meyers, 2011). Adding a liberatory point of view to this approach encourages additional questions centering equity and social impacts (see Table 1; Harvard, n.d.).

theory-building would benefit from a deeper, empirical understanding of how liberatory approaches unfold, their impact, and the learning strategies that advance their application across contexts from education and nursing to business and law.

#3: Embrace Diverse Voices and Perspectives

Historical definitions of leadership as an innate trait, transaction, or solely manifest through a position limit our ability to more regularly embrace the collective posture that values diverse voices and perspectives. This posture is particularly important for youth leadership. Leadership is not a transaction, but a process that should, in theory, impact both the leader and those with whom the leader engages. It is an act of reciprocal transformation that requires humility, self-awareness, and insatiable curiosity (leap.

club, 2022). Bringing diverse perspectives to the table also creates an opportunity to leverage a liberatory point of view and actualize equity as a strategic outcome. We desperately need more research on the impact of these approaches and how they relate to both short and long-term leadership outcomes for youth.

Youth leadership development research can benefit from integrating this structured approach as a way of reframing. The systems engineering approach achieves change by both appreciating and interrogating the context. The assessment also considers the impact of addressing concerns. The addition of the liberatory point of view also considers both unintended consequences and systemic and community impacts.

Table 1: System Engineering Process with a Liberatory Point of View

Phase	Questions to Ask	Liberatory Point of View
Identification	What are the relevant aspects of context that are of concern?	What does this context encourage or discourage?
Assessment	What are the potential impacts?	Who is being affected?
Response	What strategies, initiatives or activities will be pursued in response to the assessment?	Who will be affected by the actions taken? How do these actions support the empowerment of communities historically most affected by inequities?
Impact	How will changes in context be identified, processed or scanned?	How will system change address racism or other inequities?

Adapted from Adams and Meyers (2011) and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (n.d.)

References and Additional Resources

- Adams, K. M., & Meyers, T. J. (2011). Perspective 1 of the SoSE methodology: Framing the system under study. *International Journal of System of Systems Engineering, 2*, 163-192.
- Comeaux, B. (2021, February 9). *What makes a changemaker?* The Aspen Institute. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/what-makes-a-change-maker/>
- Foldy, E. G., Goldman, L., & Ospina, S. (2008). Sensegiving and the role of cognitive shifts in the work of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly, 19*, 514-529.
- Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health. (n.d.). *Equity lens for decision making*. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/diversity-dev/wp-content/uploads/sites/2597/2021/08/ODI-Equity-Lens-for-Decision-Making-WCAG.pdf>
- James, E. H., & Wooten, L. P. (2022). *The Prepared Leader*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- leap.club. (2022). *learn with leap.club | 6 lessons from indra nooyi*. <https://leapclub.medium.com/learn-with-leap-club-6-lessons-from-indra-nooyi-f3610fe0ef1d>.
- Northouse, P. G. (2021). *Leadership: Theory and practice*. Sage publications.
- Olson, M. (2023). *Mental health, recession and mass shootings among college students' top concerns in 2023*. <https://timelycare.com/college-students-top-concerns-2023/>
- Schwab, K. (2021, August 12). *Young people hold the key to creating a better future*. World Economic Forum. www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/08/young-people-hold-the-key-to-creating-a-better-future/
- Tchume, T. A. (n.d.). *Four Frameworks for Living Liberation*. Non-profit Wakanda Quarterly. <https://www.nonprofitwakanda.com/blog/four-frameworks-for-living-liberation>.
- Tchume, T. A. (2022). *Three Lessons (so far) for Funding Liberatory Leadership*. <https://www.rsclark.org/blog/2022/8/10/nnrbfirzx-otup0scr86zdf09vxhwid#:~:text=Liberatory%20leadership%20invites%20leaders%20to%20power%20interact%20with%20our%20work>.
- UNICEF. (n.d.). Adolescent participation and civic engagement. <https://www.unicef.org/adolescence/participation#:~:text=When%20adolescents%20contribute%20to%20social%20change%2C%20entire%20communities%20benefit.&text=Adolescents%20are%201.2%20billion%20strong,-excluded%20from%20the%20decision%20making>.



Deepen Knowledge About the Role of Leadership Educators, Adults, and Peers in the Leadership Development Process

Authors: Darren E. Pierre and Melissa L. Rocco

Background

A leadership educator is any adult or peer with influence on the spaces where leadership is understood, recognized, and practiced (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Seemiller & Priest, 2015, 2017). Leadership educators have much, if not complete, control over what leadership lessons are shared with youth across varied experiences. Youth are continuously learning about and engaging in leadership education and development in formats such as classrooms, community programs, coaching,

youth organizations, activism efforts, family relationships, and intentionally designed learning environments. Yet, have we adequately explored the ways in which leadership educators' own development influences youth learning? Can we name the unique impacts of family and/or community-based leadership educators on youth learning and development?

Those involved in youth leadership development need to be deliberate and mindful stewards of the learning environments they curate,

and be thoughtful about how that environment may interact with the multiple and simultaneous other learning environments youth navigate. Leadership educators must also be willing and able to push the boundaries of their thinking about leadership and acknowledge the historically exclusionary nature of leadership learning (Dugan, 2017) to produce the relational, equity-minded, community focused leadership environments required for uplifting communities and addressing society's biggest challenges. With this understanding in mind, it is important to note the need for further research on the role of leadership "educators" (including, but not limited to: instructors, administrators, family, community members, faith leaders, organizers, and peers) and the important responsibility they hold for cultivating and evolving leadership learning and development experiences for youth.

Importance

Identified through both research and experience, adult and peer influences are powerful in the process of youth leadership development (Dugan et al., 2013; Komives et al., 2005; Winchester, 2018). Meaningful relationships with adults and peers are often catalysts for youth to access leadership development programming as well as recognize their own potential for leadership. Educators create formal and informal learning experiences that help youth explore and understand leadership and reflect on their capacity for impact. Each of these connection points helps



young people build self-efficacy for leadership; or their belief in their ability to effectively engage in the leadership process (Bandura, 1997; Dugan et al. 2013; Hannah et al., 2008). These opportunities and support systems also help youth connect their personal stories and identities to leadership, helping them develop agency over their leadership development (Priest et al., 2018). Whether through intentional design or informal interaction, adults and peers provide and facilitate leadership learning through a wide array of spaces and experiences.

Although the impact of leadership educators on youth leadership development is demonstrated through empirical research, the extant literature is limited in both focus and context. For example, the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) shows mentoring relationships with educators, community members, and peers as influential in the process of youth leadership development (Campbell et al., 2012; Dugan et al., 2013). However, mentoring is not the only way that adults and peers engage in youth leadership development: teaching, coaching, organizing, and advocating are also common strategies (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). While literature on pedagogy and practice for leadership educators does exist, empirical research on the impact and effectiveness of these approaches is limited (Dugan et al., 2013; Johnson & Soria, 2020). Who and how one identifies as a leadership educator has also been explored, but primarily with those working in higher education (Jenkins & Owen, 2016; Rocco & Pelletier, 2019; Seemiller & Priest,

○ 2015, 2017). Peer impact on youth leadership development outcomes is also underexplored, with the majority of peer impact centering on peer mentoring, excluding peer education and facilitation of leadership development experiences and processes. Finally, the vast majority of the research on adult and peer influence on youth leadership development explores only those with formal educator professional roles, and primarily within the context of higher education. Ultimately, further research is needed to understand nuances related to adult and peer impact on youth leadership development, including: the leadership lessons, skills, and themes being emphasized in those developmental relationships and experiences; how those relationships and experiences are developed with a specific focus on leadership; leadership educator preparation and training; and the influence of leadership educators beyond post-secondary education, to include primary and secondary school environments as well as family and community contexts.

We are all leadership educators. Yet, those who are known, studied, and acknowledged for their role in youth leadership development are often those who hold formal titles and responsibility for structured leadership programs. “Leadership educator” should be a fluid construct and not exclusively coupled with one’s vocational identity. Identifying and understanding those who contribute to youth leadership development and what they emphasize about leadership is also necessary for designing and optimizing training and support

to move leadership thought and practice beyond historical leadership paradigms that too often fail to recognize the nuanced ways in which leadership development is formally and informally taught and modeled. If we aspire to see access to high-quality leadership learning and development opportunities expand across diverse communities and contexts, we must acknowledge, understand, foster, and celebrate the vast network of adults and peers who are a part of the leadership development journey for today’s youth. The continued evolution of leadership thought and practice demands further research on peer and adult engagement in the leadership development of young adults.

Recommendations for Action

#1: We must expand, interrogate, and reimagine who is considered a leadership educator.

Leadership learning happens in and outside of the classroom, and is not limited to only those with formal positions or credentials as “leadership educators.” Start recognizing family members, community organizers, civic leaders, and engaged members of the community who are playing an active role in the leadership development and learning of youth as “leadership educators.” With that awareness, broaden the research on leadership educators to include all who play a central role in leadership learning and development regardless of title or position.

#2: Further research is needed to understand how one becomes a leadership educator.

If the role of leadership educator goes beyond a formalized position or title, then we need to ask how one is designated, adopts, and develops as a leadership educator so that we can better support this crucial community of adults and peers. Research should explore the informal pathways one takes to become a leadership educator, beyond workforce experiences, scholarly communities, academic preparation, and other formal routes reflected in the current literature.

#3: Leadership development is taking place in routine day-to-day activities.

Therefore, we need to challenge preconceived notions of the spaces, places, and times where leadership educators are engaging in youth leadership learning and development. Leadership

educators are not simply doing the work in a classroom, formalized activity, or sport; the work is also happening in places of worship, around a dinner table, and through informal encounters with youth. With the acknowledgment of the diverse range of spaces where leadership development is happening, further research is needed to understand the ways in which leadership educators facilitate leadership learning and development across varied contexts, including the messages and lessons emphasized in those interactions, and why those interactions are effective.

Coach's Story

Dr. Phillip Lockhart, lovingly known as “Coach,” a core facilitator and delivery team member with the Aspen Young Leaders Fellowship (AYLF) program somehow found time to serve his community in the Mississippi-Arkansas Delta AYLF ecosystem on top of his work as an educator, principal, and active community member. Coach served as the School Principal for KIPP Delta College Preparatory School in Helena-West Helena, Arkansas. He also was interim School Principal for KIPP Delta Collegiate High School, received the Phillips County Teacher of the Year Award, and served as a Camp Director for the Common Ground Foundation founded by Dr. Mahalia Hines and her son, Common.

No title can capture the fullness of Coach’s commitment to youth and community. He exemplified what it meant to center the needs of youth with a spirit of generativity. His commitment to being “not just another adult” in a young person’s life but the adult who makes time, believes in youth more than they believe in themselves, and advocates for youth voice at the table. Coach mentored from dusk until dawn giving everything he had to, in his own words:

Create a support system for youth in the Delta and a conduit to a more sustainable life mitigating the effects of poverty and violence. This mission is bigger than myself, knowing that if I am able to make a difference today, it could potentially have a dramatic impact on the community my children are able to live in years from now.

References and Additional Resources

- Arminio, J., Carter, S., Jones, S., Kruger, K., Lucas, N., Washington, J., Young, N, Scott, A. (2000). Leadership experiences of students of color. *NASPA Journal*, 37(3), 496-510.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. Harper Collins.
- Campbell, C. M., Smith, M., Dugan, J. P., & Komives, S. R. (2012). Mentors and college student leadership outcomes: The importance of position and process. *The Review of Higher Education*, 35(4), 595-625.
- Dugan (2017). *Leadership theory: Cultivating critical perspectives*. Jossey-Bass.
- Dugan, J. P., Kodama, C., Correia, B., & Associates. (2013). *Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership insight report: Leadership program delivery*. National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs.
- Guthrie, K. L. & Jenkins, D. M. (2018). *The role of leadership educators: Transforming learning*. Information Age Publishing.
- Hannah, S. T., Avolio, B. J., Luthans, F., & Harms, P. D. (2008). Leadership efficacy: Review and future directions. *Leadership Quarterly*, 19, 669-692.
- Harper, J., & Kezar, A. (2021). Leadership development for racially minoritized students: an expansion of the social change model of leadership. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 20(3), 156-169.
- Guthrie, K. L., & Jenkins, D. M. (2018). *The role of leadership educators: Transforming learning*. Information Age Publishing.
- Johnson, M. R., & Soria, K. M. (2020). Deepening, broadening, and charting: Extending the reach and impact of evidence-based practices for leadership development. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 169, 109-115.
- Komives, S. R., Longerbeam, S., Owen, J. E., Mainella, F. C., & Osteen, L. (2005). Developing a leadership identity: A grounded theory. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46, 593-611.
- Jenkins, D. M., & Owen, J. E. (2016). Who teaches leadership? A comparative analysis of faculty and student affairs leadership educators and implications for leadership learning. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 15(2), 98-113.
- Priest, K. L., Kliever, B. W., Hornung, M. and Youngblood, R. J. (2018), The Role of Mentoring, Coaching, and Advising in Developing Leadership Identity. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 158, 23-35.
- Priest, K. L., & Jenkins, D. M. (2019). Developing a vision of leadership educator professional practice. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 164, 9-22.
- Pierre, D., Dunn, A.L., Barnes, A.C., Moore, L.L., Seemiller, C., Jenkins, D.M., ... & Odom, S.F. (2020), A critical look at leadership educator preparation: Developing an intentional and diverse approach to leadership learning and development: Priority 4 of the National Leadership Education Research Agenda 2020-2025. *Journal Leadership Studies*, 14, 56-62.
- Rocco, M. L. and Pelletier, J. (2019). A conversation among student affairs leadership educators. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 164, 39-53.
- Seemiller, C., & Priest, K. L. (2015). The hidden "who" in leadership education: conceptualizing leadership educator professional identity development. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 14(3), 132-151.
- Seemiller, C., & Priest, K. L. (2017). Leadership educator journeys: Expanding a model of leadership educator professional identity development. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 16(2).
- Winchester, C. (2018). Investing in critical leadership development with high-school students. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 159, 27-40.



Invest in Brain-Based, Neuroscientific Research to Understand and Unlock Knowledge to Drive Program Quality

Authors: Jennifer P. Montana and Benjamin P. Correia-Harker

Background

The urgency to foster prosocial leadership capacities combined with technological research advances strongly encourage us to invest in brain-based, neuroscientific research to understand and unlock knowledge to drive program quality. Much of leadership and leadership development's disciplinary groundings are in political science, sociology, psychology, business management, and education

(Sowcik & Komives, 2020). A relative disciplinary newcomer, neuroscience (i.e., the study of the structure, functions, and development of the nervous system, particularly the brain), is a burgeoning area of contribution to the leadership discipline given its potential to elucidate from a brain-based perspective, new, more precise, and more nuanced ways of understanding the psychosocial and cognitive processes engaged in leadership (Goleman et al., 2013). A new line

of scholarship, neuroleadership/ neuro-based leadership (i.e., the intersection of neuroscience, leadership development, and leadership), draws attention to the physiological components and functioning of the brain to better understand how people learn, enact, and respond to leadership. If leaders and leadership educators better understood aspects of how the brain functions in relation to various leadership and development processes, they could design more effective educational and engagement experiences to advance leadership efforts.

Importance

As our conceptions of human development change and what people are capable of learning expand, so do possibilities for accelerating leadership formation. Today, scholars and practitioners understand that learning and development are foundational to leadership (Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Komives et al., 2005). However, it was only 50 years ago when mainstream neuroscience denied the possibility of development beyond about age 18, and more conventional definitions of leadership suggested that leadership was a function of personality, rather than capabilities and dispositional traits that could be learned.

Today, psychosocial maturation is widely accepted as a phenomenon linked to leadership development (Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Komives et al., 2005). However, relatively little is known about the neurobiology of psychosocial development at a time when the tools and methods of neuroscience have expanded

exponentially and can contribute to our understanding of this foundational element of leadership formation. Given that leadership is a socially constructed process that employs cognitive, metacognitive, and psychosocial meaning-making along with action-oriented skill sets (Dugan, 2017), understanding how the brain develops, what parts of the brain are activated, and how the brain processes these skill sets is vital for more effective leadership development interventions.

Emotional intelligence represents one example of the effective translation of neuroscience research to leadership (Mayer et al., 2008). Business management scholars, who popularized this concept, highlight specific brain activities associated with emotional responses to stimuli (Goleman, 2012). Specifically, they encourage leaders and leadership educators to attend to the amygdala's survival response to threats with multiple tactics for mitigating the physiological response in the brain so that one can make better executive functioning judgments in the moment (Goleman, 2012). Connecting neuroscience with educational interventions so that leaders can better respond to conflict with intention is a tactical example of what could be learned about the brain's functions and how knowledge of it could be leveraged for more meaningful leadership.

At a more expansive level, neurobiological understanding and its applications to leadership has the potential to transform understanding of leadership development in ways similar to how neural plasticity





“Youth hold a responsibility in making sure that youth leadership development continues to grow and be pushed forward, but even more so leadership educators, adults, and peers are the links to communicate with those in power or make leadership happen.”

- Juan Zarco*, Blake Comeaux*, and Courtney Holder

malleability” by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD, 2019, 2020) is a direct consequence of this neurobiological breakthrough about brain plasticity. It is a powerful and strategic illustration of how scholars and researchers translate neuroscience advances (Blackwell et al., 2007; Broda et al., 2018; Colbert & Arboleda, 2016; Dweck, 2006; Yeager et al., 2019) and then opinion leaders and decision makers apply this learning

fundamentally challenged thinking about learning potential and educational theory and practice (Mateos-Aparicio & Rodríguez-Moreno, 2019). The 2018 adoption of a “growth mindset instrument to gauge students’ beliefs about intelligence and

to affect positive societal change. Now used as a “global yardstick for evaluating the quality, equity and efficiency of school systems” worldwide, this measurement informs economic, education, and social policy making in 88 countries (OECD, 2021).

Recommendations for Action

#1: Encourage collaborative exploration of existing brain-based, neuroscience research/scholarship to make explicit connections to leadership development scholarship.

Scholars need to collaborate across disciplinary fields to continue building theoretical and research-driven connections between neuroscience and leadership literature. Scholars also need to explore theoretical connections based on leadership theories that emphasize collective process and prosocial values that foster collaboration rather than individualistic leadership. Bolstering these theoretical connections will pave the way for empirical research that can be undergirded by such scholarship. These reviews should be aimed at tapping existing research to advance and critique youth leadership development theories, models, and practices. As a process of cross-fertilization, it should also form the foundations for surfacing key questions and gaps to which neuroscience research could contribute to accelerate youth leadership development.

#2: Advance research initiatives that expand physiological understandings of the brain in relation to leadership development.

Researchers should collaborate

to conduct brain-based empirical research to examine theoretical connections between brain physiology, functioning, and development with various leadership activities and developmental models and processes. A growing body of knowledge is emerging about physiological brain functions resulting from new technologies (e.g., fMRIs) that enable scientists to see various activities in the brain. Using this and other tech-enabled research, scientists are exploring questions about the neurobiology of emotions, mindfulness, compassion, social development, spirituality, and moral cognition, (e.g., Atzil et al., 2018; Barrett, 2012; Ferguson et al., 2022; Hölzel et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2020; Ochsner et al., 2012; Sevinc & Lazar, 2019; Singleton et al., 2021). Yet researchers have conducted little brain-based leadership research that explicitly connects brain activity with leadership development and enactment. In addition to reviewing existing brain-based research that scholars may be able to generalize to leadership studies, researchers need to expand and deepen understanding of the ways in which brain-based functions inform leadership formation.

#3: Initiate research that evaluates brain-based/ neuroscience-based interventions in leadership development initiatives.

As leadership educators develop interventions that employ learning from neuroscience and leadership research, researchers must also empirically evaluate these various interventional approaches to understand their effectiveness

and impact. Whether leadership development models and activities are based on neuroscience theory or empirical brain-based research, educators must evaluate the efficacy of such interventions to understand the degree to which these frameworks and activities foster leadership capacities as intended and whether the activities have a consistent impact on participants across identities and contexts. The generalization of their efficacy needs to be carefully assessed in light of construct biases that could be introduced at many junctures from theory to practice.





References and Additional Resources

Atzil, S., Gao, W., Fradkin, I., & Barrett, L. F. (2018). Growing a social brain. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2, 624-636.

Barrett, L. F. (2012). Emotions are real. *Emotion*, 12(3), 413.

Blackwell, L., Trzesniewski, K. & Dweck, C. (2007). Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention. *Child Development*, 78, pp. 246-263.

Broda, M., Yun, J., Schneider, B., Yeager, D. S., Walton, G. M., & Diemer, M. (2018). Reducing inequality in academic success for incoming college students: A randomized trial of growth mindset and belonging interventions. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 11(3), 317-338.

Colbert, V. & Arboleda, J. (2016). Bringing a student-centered participatory pedagogy to scale in Colombia. *Journal of Educational Change*, 17, 385-410.

Dugan, J. P. (2017). *Leadership theory: Cultivating critical perspectives*. Jossey-Bass.

Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset*. Random House.

Ferguson, M. A., Schaper, F. L., Cohen, A., Siddiqi, S., Merrill, S. M., Nielsen, J. A., ... & Fox, M. D. (2022). A neural circuit for spirituality and religiosity derived from patients with brain lesions. *Biological Psychiatry*, 91(4), 380-388.

Goleman, D. (2012). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam.

Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. E., & McKee, A. (2013). *Primal leadership: Unleashing the power of emotional intelligence*. Harvard Business Press.

Hölzel, B.K., Carmody, J., Vangel, M., Congleton, C., Yerramsetti, S.M., Gard, T., Lazar, S.W. (2011). Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density, *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*, 191, 36-43.

Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. L. (2010). From subject to object: A constructive-developmental approach to reflective practice. *Handbook of reflection and reflective inquiry: Mapping a way of knowing for professional reflective inquiry*, 433-449.

Kim, J. J., Cunnington, R., & Kirby, J. N. (2020). The neurophysiological basis of compassion: An fMRI meta-analysis of compassion and its related neural processes. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 108, 112-123.

Komives, S. R., Owen, J. E., Longersbeam, S. D., & Mainella, F. C. (2005). Developing a leadership identity: A grounded theory. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46, 593-611.

Mateos-Aparicio, P., & Rodríguez-Moreno, A. (2019). The impact of studying brain plasticity. *Frontiers in Cellular Neuroscience*, 13(66), 1-5.

Mayer, J.D., Salovey, P. and Caruso, D.R. (2008). Emotional intelligence: New ability or eclectic traits? *American Psychologist*, 63, 503-517.

Ochsner, K. N., Silvers, J. A., & Buhle, J. T. (2012). Functional imaging studies of emotion regulation: a synthetic review and evolving model of the cognitive control of emotion. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1251(1), E1-E24.

OECD, (2021) Sky's the limit: Growth mindset, students, and schools, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/growth-mindset.pdf>

OECD (2020), "An implementation framework for effective change in schools", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 9, OECD Publishing, Paris.

OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Assessment and Analytical Framework*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Sevinc, G., & Lazar, S. W. (2019). How does mindfulness training improve moral cognition: a theoretical and experimental framework for the study of embodied ethics. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 28, 268-272.

Singleton, O., Newlon, M., Fossas, A., Sharma, B., Cook-Greuter, S. R., & Lazar, S. W. (2021). Brain structure and functional connectivity correlate with psychosocial development in contemplative practitioners and controls. *Brain Sciences*, 11, 728.

Sowcik, M., & Komives, S. R. (2020). Emerging themes in disciplinary based leadership education. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 165, 163-181.

Yeager, D. S., Hanselman, P., Walton, G. M., Murray, J. S., Crosnoe, R., Muller, C., ... & Dweck, C. S. (2019). A national experiment reveals where a growth mindset improves achievement. *Nature*, 573(7774), 364-369.



Staging the Next Generation of Youth Leadership Scholarship: A Call to Action

Authors: Juan Angel Zarco*, Blake Chretien Comeaux*, Courtney Holder

Leadership theory and research drive what is taught in youth leadership development programs, classes, and training. What is taught, in turn, informs what is practiced in our politics, neighborhoods, and businesses. What is practiced creates the world in which we live.

Despite the exponential growth of youth leadership research over the past two decades, the ways in which it is conducted needs to change. To meet the needs of today's youth and our ever-evolving world, research must clearly demonstrate the impact and outcomes of youth leadership development initiatives, examine a wider range of leadership approaches and contexts, center culture and social identity, innovate beyond status quo methods of measurement, utilize brain-

based learning to unlock new understanding, and extend what we know about the influence of educators, adults, and peers on youth leadership development.

Youth are experts in their own experiences and therefore should be included in the participation, analysis, and publication of research. How is it that we continue to study a population without their active engagement in the very production of research on the population? Let's give youth their data back so they can shape the future of developmental opportunities to meet their needs and preferences. If we did, we would likely learn just how valuable and transformative leadership learning actually is along with its short and long-term impacts not just on youth but on groups, communities, and organizations as well.

○ Leadership happens *everywhere*
○ - in our homes, on the sports
○ field, among friends on the
○ playground, in part-time jobs -
○ and is for *everyone* - regardless
of age, expertise, race, gender,
socio-economic status, language,
or creed. However, the majority
of youth leadership research is
often limited to school settings
and predominantly White, college-
aged participants. We need
researchers that will use culturally
relevant and identity responsive
approaches across the full range of
environments in which youth are
engaged. If we expect to meet the
complex challenges in our world,
we have to understand the full
complexity of all of those who lead
within it.

If youth leadership practice is
to expand and improve, novel
approaches to research are
needed to ensure important stories
are not missed or worse yet:
disregarded. Innovative research
methods can capture data that
more widely reflects the human
leadership experience. Connecting
to emerging scholarship in fields
such as neuroscience can begin
to unlock new understanding
of and strategies for developing
leadership efficacy, motivation,
capacity, and enactment. Examining
the interactions between all of
those who are involved in the
leadership process - peers,
mentors, parents, teachers,
coaches, others- may be able to
further push leadership learning
beyond trait and behavior-based,
leader-centric ideology.

It is time for the next wave in
youth leadership research. This is
a paradigm shift in how we think
about the study and application

of leadership to real-world
issues. It is a shift that requires
us to reclaim the power of youth
leadership development as a
vehicle for expanded learning,
opportunity, and impact. While
youth are ready and willing to
grow and advance a more just and
community-centered leadership
agenda, we are waiting for the
researchers to recognize the role
we can play and to use their tools
to effectively communicate our
stories with those in power or who
make leadership happen. We invite
you to share and use this report
to more fully explore the inputs,
environments, and outcomes
associated with leadership in
your communities and leverage a
renewed commitment and strategy
for research and theory-building
to usher in the leadership practice
our world needs.



Where Do We Go From Here?

This publication opened with the alarming statistic that only 16% of youth from the United States engage in any form of leadership development by age 25 despite its demonstrated impact on educational completion, workforce readiness, civic engagement, and more. In an address at the University of Pennsylvania in 1940, President Franklin Roosevelt shared, “We cannot always build the future *for* our youth, but we can build our *youth* for the future.”

The authors and editors of the publication offer a number of key strategies and recommendations for changing the current trajectory of opportunity for youth in the United States. However, this list is neither exhaustive nor can the goals of greater access and quality be achieved by maintaining the status quo. The next phase of youth leadership development necessitates:

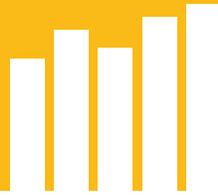
- Centering youth and communities as co-creators of content, research, and strategy;
- Dedicated attention to issues of power, identity, and opportunity that influence access to and the quality of youth leadership programs;

- Boundary-spanning partnerships that transcend bureaucratic silos that constrain learning; and
- A collective campaign to generate both low-potency and scalable interventions that expand reach along with novel interventions that increase quality.

Where do we go from here?

The inaugural Aspen Index Impact Fellowship catalyzed a movement bringing together 92 stakeholders from across more than 70 organizations. Now, we must expand the aperture. Thirty years ago, there was a major movement in the United States to prioritize and understand youth leadership development. From the Eisenhower Grant that led to the creation of the Social Change Model of Leadership Development to the Kellogg Foundation’s investment in the design, implementation, and study of 31 youth leadership programs nationally, there was a concerted effort to advance the work of youth leadership development.

Now, we are presented with an opportunity to expand on these important foundations to harness our collective knowledge in service of advancing the field once again.



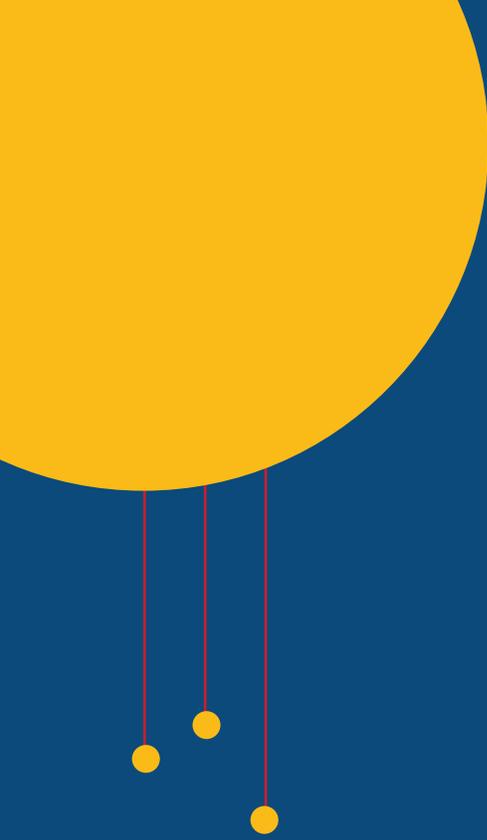
If you are reading this publication, you are likely already engaged in these efforts locally, nationally, and internationally. But, what if we did this together? How do we ensure that this publication does not join the long list of position papers and thought pieces on the state of youth leadership but actually leads to tangible action and impact?

We are pleased to announce the opening of the new **Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity (CELO)**, a nonprofit, 501(c)3 organization committed to advancing access to and the quality of youth leadership programs. Spinning out from and in ongoing partnership with the Aspen Institute, CELO will begin operations in summer 2023.

The work of CELO will include **The Index**, a scalable, low-potency leadership learning intervention

and assessment tool built on 20 years of research through the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) that yields a catalytic impact for individual users while retaining rigorous psychometric standards. The Index was born out of Youth Leadership Programs at the Aspen Institute, was built in partnership with youth and community, and will be a primary vehicle for scaling access while also driving quality. We look forward to co-creating the future of CELO in partnership with youth, educators, and communities committed to the work of expanding access to and the quality of youth leadership programs. We invite you to join us in these collective efforts in this next phase of youth leadership development.





index.expandingleadership.org

