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Title

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Leadership

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7bm0d1xd>

ISBN

9781806863600

Authors

Hacıfazlıoğlu, Özge
Cheung, Rebecca
Yang, Chunyan

Publication Date

2026-06-15

DOI

10.1108/978-1-80686-359-420261016

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AFTERWORD: RESILIENCE AS A COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP

**Özge Hacırfazlıoğlu
Rebecca Cheung
Chunyan Yang**

This book is intended to provide a platform for generative discussion among scholars, leaders, teachers, and leadership educators related to the issue of leader resilience. In Section I, the authors elevate the perspectives of practicing leaders who help us to complexify and understand issues of resilience. We then focus on ways in which structures can be integrated to support the wellbeing of school and system leaders, which eventually creates a ripple effect on school contexts. As can be seen throughout the book, leaders' resilience moves beyond bouncing back from adverse circumstances to building the capacity to respond to uncertainties and crisis situations. What is echoed in all the experiences reflected here is that context matters when navigating in challenging circumstances and that leaders need support structures in both their personal and professional lives while traversing the waters of uncertainty and crisis. As noted by Michelle Young in the foreword, leadership is not a solo action; various forms of professional communities, interdisciplinary and interprofessional efforts, and cross-institutional collaboration all underscore the power of connection and collective action.

To continue the discussion beyond these chapters, we conclude with some final thoughts.

REDESIGNING FOR A HIGH STRESS PROFESSION

For far too long, leaders have reactively coped to a stress filled profession. Proactive redesign of the profession requires the identification of preventable stress as well as the acceptance that stress (of various types) is endemic to the profession. Accepting education as a stressful profession may be the only way to truly provide educators with what they need. Social justice leaders begin their work assuming that they will face pressure and challenges to the changes they are charged with making, especially if they must advocate for marginalized students. In US society, some professions are accepted as high stress, high reward, essential fields and therefore the working conditions of the profession have been adjusted to ensure a talented, and stable workforce. Examples include firefighters and emergency room doctors. What would happen if working in public education was fundamentally accepted as high stress, high reward, and essential? What shifts would be made to preparation, hiring criteria, working conditions? If we were to accept education as a stressful profession, we would expand our focus beyond stress reduction to include increasing the capacity for coping with stress by changing the system rather than blaming individual leaders. Regardless of the exact policy and practice shifts, our school leaders have sounded the alarm on how the structures and systems that underpin their very role are also sources of stress that afford little refuge at times of immense challenge.

RECOGNIZE THAT IDENTITY AND CONTEXT MATTER

School leaders respond to risk factors by leaning on their individual network of peer, collegial, familial, and immediate community relationships. Some lean into bonds that had been strengthened in a team's collective support. Others, at times, focus on their loved ones and their communities. What seems to run through their experiences and stories is the almost seamless, deft navigation across and within spheres of life. The resulting generative insights reveal school principals to be not simply passive recipients of stimuli but to be active and engaged navigators of their own wellbeing. While students attending US schools now reflect the global majority, the educators who teach remain primarily white. The researchers who contributed to this book present compelling evidence that underrepresented and marginalized leaders, as well as leaders in urban contexts, experience additional risk factors, which is a major barrier to diversifying the workforce. More research is needed to better understand what contributes to the risk and resilience of underrepresented and marginalized leaders as well as what systemic interventions are needed.

RECOGNIZE INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND NETWORKS AS ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS TO TRANSFORMATION

Multiple examples in these chapters point to the power of interconnectedness and network-based communities of practice as sources of resilience in times of change and transformation. Our findings reveal that collegiality, thought partnerships and interconnectedness are essential elements for improving practice while cultivating individual and collective resilience. Furthermore, there were powerful examples of the benefits received from learning across different contexts and in cross disciplinary spaces.

FOSTER INTERPROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION AS A SIGNATURE PRACTICE FOR DEVELOPING LEADERS

The stories shared in these chapters highlight the power of interdisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration among faculty while creating a shared learning experience within which students graduate in educational leadership and school psychology programs. This attempt at interprofessional preparation during pre-service is essential for creating what [Edwards \(2011\)](#) calls the relational expertise and agency necessary for interdisciplinary colleagues to seek cross-sector solutions in practice. Such collaboration carries critical implications for schools and students, particularly for intersectionally marginalized and/or multi-system involved youth, those whose needs are rarely met by fractured silos of inadequate support. Our experience at a graduate course once again reminded us why interprofessional learning spaces should be prioritized in the design and practice of our leadership development programs in order to enhance interprofessional understanding of roles, perspectives, and contributions to common issues in schools.

VALUE THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES AND WELLBEING

Throughout the book, the interplay between professional communities and wellbeing in the challenging lives of school and system leaders is revealed. The examples shared highlight the ways in which signature practices can be enacted to support the intellectual and psychological wellbeing of teachers and students through supporting school and system leaders. Selected examples show us how structures can be created within school contexts to develop equity-centered leaders. While preparedness is key, our evidence also points to the need for remediating the very structures that

shape school leadership. Beyond the oft-noted call for increased funding in public education to enable more highly qualified individuals to attend to the logistical, operational, and programmatic demands of schools, we invite researchers and policymakers to think more expansively. How might districts, state education agencies, and other public education entities better support principals in fulfilling the promise of quality education for all? More than offering additional professional development (a solution that largely targets the individual sphere of the ecological model), the principals in our studies suggest another path: finding ways for district and state labor to shoulder some of the burden of responding to rapidly changing situations. COVID-19 did not cause issues of leader turnover. The pandemic merely elevated what was already present to a crisis level in the United States and around the world. Now that so many are finally paying attention, it is time for all of us to join together and move the field of social justice leader risk and resilience forward.

The voices represented in this book all echo the importance of intentionally strengthening professional communities in multiple contexts—schools, districts, communities—all of which serve as powerful means for sustaining leaders' capacity to lead with equity, courage, and care. As we dove deeply into the stories of school and system leaders, it became evident that professional communities were far more than spaces for collaboration, where they cultivate the lifelines for resilience and growth. This collective deep reflection process has revealed how their individual and collective identities evolved and transformed into the service of their communities. The stories of school and system leaders have pointed us toward the need for critical perspectives regarding the social conditions of students and recognition of the basic needs required to support development of their well-being and resilience building. The stories emphasize the importance of enacting social justice leadership through frameworks that support settings that foster wellbeing within educational contexts through various forms of communities of practice.

REFERENCE

- Edwards, A. (2011). Building common knowledge at the boundaries between professional practices: Relational agency and relational expertise in systems of distributed expertise. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 50(1), 33–39.