

**FOREWORD: THE NEED FOR SHIFTS IN MINDSETS AND LEADERSHIP ROLES
IN PK-20 SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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Let us frame the preface to this edition from a few lenses that might help in drawing practical implications for each contribution by the authors. First, the current cycles of ignorance and vicious war against schools and the academy should not be ignored especially by those who have continued to mislead through hypnotizing rhetoric that might lead people to believe that equity and social justice are on the top of their agendas. Second, the contemporary realities around us provide ample testimony that the much-needed change has been hampered by complicity, silence, and often resistance to change by those who enact passive roles in social and educational institutions. Third, narrowing the leadership gap is a fundamental prerequisite for combating racism and achieving equity and social justice in schools and beyond. More importantly, the paradigm shifts should be measured against informed and courageous actions, rather than words, that contribute to the meaningful and desired change of the status quo and its beneficiaries.

Over the past three decades, many pronouncements and reform initiatives occupied the top of agendas to no avail, for the most part—especially, as they pertain to providing equitable and socially just educational opportunities for People of Color and underrepresented groups. Thus, schools continue to flounder and struggle because of the continual mismatch of expectations between schools' input and students' expectations on the one hand, and the existence of the large instructional and leadership gaps that have continued to widen, on the other. This underscores the need for revamping teacher and leader preparation programs across the PK-20 educational spectrum. Recognizing this urgency about 30 years ago, Gupton (1995, pp. 73-74) postulates an approach that should shape instructional and leadership roles in schools and the academy. His timeless scheme can serve as a promising blueprint only if educators and leaders shift in their mindsets and roles:

<i>from</i>	<i>to</i>
technician	professional
manager	leader
prescribed	constructed
boss	team player
autocratic	transformational
defensive	responsible
direction-taker	decision-maker
solo player	collaborator
lesson planner	school improvement planner
reactive	reflective
implementor	initiator
risk dodger	risk maker
follower	empowered
research consumer	action researcher

Equally important, mindsets and roles should defy unjust contemporary political climates to promote socially and culturally relevant environments which require educators and leaders to leverage their roles to implement a vision that is empowering to themselves and people around them (Gupton, 1995; Moore & Suleiman, 1997; Suleiman, 2013, 2014; Suleiman, 2001; Suleiman, 1997; Wasley, 1991). The remaining task for socially just and equitable institutions rests heavily on educators and administrators who understand the complex contextual demands of the institutions for which they are drafted to serve (Conchas & Acevedo, 2020; Suleiman & Huber, 2022). These are generally dictated by a wide range of political, social, cultural, and individual needs and aspirations and require a sound understanding of the job and the perils and challenges they face in *doing the right thing* rather than *doing things right*; more importantly, they are keenly aware of the courageous and difficult tasks and risks needed for *doing* their job rather than *keeping* it.

At the Center for Leadership, Equity and Research (CLEAR), through *JLER*, we are keenly aware of these realities and challenges. We also see the resistance and ambivalence around us, both from friends and foes alike. Simultaneously, we are determined to continue working on changing the reactionary mindsets and passive, and often destructive, roles through empirical data dissemination and action research projects. The center will continue to provide a forum for those who “*do* diversity, equity, and social justice” despite the resistance, complicity, and barriers facing them.

The collection of articles in this regular edition focuses on timely and pressing *racial projects* (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2022) that provide an antidote to the venom of racism and bigotry that continues to plague society and its institutions including schools—indicators, both overt and covert abound. By looking around within the confines of their institution and workplace, there is

no shortage of such symptoms that have made many numb to the harsh realities People of Color have to endure daily. The lack of actions and courage on the part of those who are in leadership positions has made the problems worse. Despite the abundance of empty rhetoric, PK-20 school “managers” have resorted to defensive leading styles to protect themselves and maintain the status quo that benefits them. The articles in this important *JLER* edition speak to these challenges and point us to resistant practices that can empower against the status-quo.

Ashley Flynn sheds light on the underlying premise of universal and intellectual capitals that have long been wasted in schools and their programs because of the endemic racism that disenfranchises students of color including Black learners. She illustrates how giftedness has been narrowly defined and limited to the mainstream White populations while discarding the biologically endowed intelligent and gifted human beings regardless of their race, color, gender, ethnicity and the like.

Maria Javiera De Los Rios, Elyzza M. Aparicio, Hyun Ju Park, Leticia Oseguera, and Gilberto Q. Conchas provide a quantitative analysis of a STEM intervention and support program among Student of Color. Studying STEM Intervention Program (SIP) retention, particularly what distinguishes those students who remain in the program from those that leave, may be a key to better understand how to keep students on track towards STEM degree completion. This study focuses on the participation of Latinx and other underrepresented racial/ethnic minoritized (URM) groups in a STEM intervention and support program. The authors apply a STEM Engagement Framework on five cohorts of participants in a SIP and found that maintaining higher levels of scientific identity was related to program retention. Interestingly, women-identified participants were also more likely to remain in the SIP relative to their men-identified counterparts. The study reveals that for practitioners and institutions alike, study results indicate the need to create and implement support programs for women in STEM that go beyond the traditional components of academic support. The authors argue that intentionally designing programs that address systemic inequities and celebrate and affirm minoritized groups’ experiences can facilitate adjustment, belonging, and success.

Madeleine Mejia and **Julián Jefferies** provide two powerful testimonios that underscore the need to dismantle barriers faculty of color, especially Latinx females, are facing in the academy. Their voices reflect an authentic account of the unpleasant realities perpetuated in the system that yet has not cultivated their voice nor valued their cultural and intellectual assets. Their experiences echo those of many underrepresented faculty of color who face resistance while playing their courageous roles in educating future teachers and instructional leaders. Their work has far reaching implications for combating racism and complicity especially by those who reify whiteness.

James Martinez and **Jeana Partin** provide a nice synopsis and literature review on character education and preparation for school administrators in PK-12 settings. Using an established criteria and focused approach, their analysis outlines recurrent themes and aspects relevant that can have direct implications for character development for aspiring administrators. Their review provides an overarching framework of emergent themes that can serve as

foundational bases for administrator preparation to address challenging workplace issues, including matters that relate to inequity, racism and oppression.

Ardavan Eizadirad and **colleagues** share their efforts in implementing a multidisciplinary Community of Practice (CoP) workable equitable approach at a Canadian post-secondary institution to prepare faculty, staff, and students for remote teaching and learning while navigating pandemic conditions created by COVID-19. The CoP as a case study uses Critical Theory as a theoretical framework to examine the positive experiences of a collective group of faculty and staff from different disciplines leading a multidisciplinary university-wide initiative and the implications of the approach for promoting effective pedagogies for teaching and learning remotely. The authors recommend that although the CoP initiative was originally conceived as a response to the summer of the pivot, it should become an integral approach to promoting dialogue and innovative strategies to advance equitable practices in higher education by cultivating community networks. This requires a long-term commitment by higher education institutions to break away from historically normalized practices and invest in innovative ways to identify and meet the needs of various stakeholders.

Felipe Mercado examines the impact of Difference-Education Intervention (DEI) on first-generation Latinx “students’ sense of belonging, mindset, and hope at Hispanic Serving Institutions.” Grounded in the Social Learning Theory framework, the author examines the contextual aspects of socially relevant learning which is critical in achieving diverse students’ academic goals and ambitions. The study and its findings underscore the need to take into account the psychological, cultural, social, and academic needs of all learners especially students of color and underrepresented groups. Unless educational input is based upon their unique needs, students will continue to feel isolation, frustration and alienation in the very institutions publicly declared to serve them.

Patricia Lane and **Shaylyn Marks** provide a profound review of Kohli’s (2021) book titled *Teachers of color: Resisting racism and reclaiming education*. The book focusses on the power of counterstory telling and highlights the voices of teachers of color that have long been suppressed by an educational system designed for them to fall between the cracks. Organized in three sections, the book tackles three major issues: racialization, resistance, and reimagination. Lane and Marks aptly provided a keen synopsis for the main themes and their implications throughout Kohli’s work. More importantly, the reviewers intimately identify with these issues since they themselves, as bright young Black female scholars, have been the byproduct of a system whose flawed tissue and structure are apt to fail students of color and marginalize them. Their juxtapositions throughout the review are touching and powerful. Paradoxically, such system has failed in its prophecy since they both eventually have risen out of the ashes of low expectations to become prominent social justice educators and instructional leaders as evident from their actionable implications gleaned from the book being reviewed.

Readers of this regular edition will find yet another intellectually rich and rigorous collection of thought-provoking, action-driven articles on various issues related to educators and leaders alike. In addition, the implications gleaned from these contributions are far-reaching for

every serious educator whose passion and will transcend their egoistic positional authority or role.

Finally, on behalf of the JLER team, we are grateful to all partners for preparing this special issue as well as the contributors, reviewers, and everyone who assisted in the production of this rich edition.

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