

## *Changing the Narrative: Socially Just Leadership Education*

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Though U.S. higher education has long sought to prepare students as leaders, a significant gap exists in leadership education literature and published research regarding ways to teach leadership through a social justice lens. Kathy L. Guthrie and Vivechkanand S. Chunoo's *Changing the Narrative: Socially Just Leadership Education* explores the evolving role of leadership education and development within U.S. higher education. The book includes voices and perspectives of experts from various backgrounds, professional experiences, and institution types. Contributing authors discuss the importance of linking leadership education and social justice work and provide curricular and cocurricular examples to implement at different types of higher education institutions. *Changing the Narrative* challenges readers to deconstruct oppressive systems that still exist on college campuses and reimagine what it means to teach and engage in leadership education.

The intended audience for this volume is leadership educators and administrators working in U.S. higher education. Readers at all institutions are likely to find something of value in the book, though it may be more relevant for practitioners working in predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Many of the authors in the book discuss how their identities shape their worldviews and perspectives, research, and writing. Diverse backgrounds and voices are represented, although many contributors appear to be based in PWIs, and their chapters speak most clearly to the PWI context. Educators situated in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), or Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) may find the examples and recommendations less applicable to their contexts.

College students are a secondary audience though the book's academic focus and themes may make it less accessible. The contributors provide valuable and timely critiques of the U.S. higher education context, offering "a look behind the curtain" and exposing problems within educational systems that continue to promote inequity and injustice. While it is vital to scrutinize systems of inequity, the harsh criticisms and examples provided may dishearten students, especially those filled with hope and optimism as they embark on college journeys. Further, the scholarly approach, context, and theory may not be the best starting point for introducing social justice concepts to college students. Finally, more privileged students may not be developmentally ready for the advanced treatment of these concepts.

Yet, many college students have the capacity and desire to promote social change on campus. Moreover, higher education professionals should empower them to participate in leadership processes to encourage change. That said, it may be inappropriate to place that responsibility on students, to charge them with dismantling oppressive and inequitable educational systems while they are inside them. Instead, leadership educators and college administrators should be responsible for promoting and enacting such change.

Despite these limitations and cautions, we recommend using the book with special interest groups on campus or within learning communities. Individual chapters read like journal articles; they are focused, concise, and cover a breadth of topics with a common tie of leadership and social justice. They are also rich in meaningful and intellectual content, lending themselves to powerful educational discussions. Academic departments could incorporate parts of the book for classroom discussion and projects. For example, courses in women's studies, African American studies, or Latino/Chicano studies could use selected chapters, especially those focused on identity development, as the basis for discussions, assignments, or cocurricular programming. Segments of the book could also be adapted for common core or general education courses, especially within the humanities. Finally, for institutions with a first-year seminar, chapters can support activities and discussions related to leadership, diversity, and equity topics.

Selected chapters could also be used in spaces where student affairs administrators can engage in intentional, in-depth conversations about

leadership and justice. Potential student affairs departments include those focused on spirituality and religious life; diversity, equity, and inclusion; social justice education or racial justice offices; identity-based organizations or support services; women's centers; or LGBTQ+ offices. Engaging partners from these offices will most likely create effective learning spaces that this text requires and deserves.

In closing, we would like to draw the reader's attention to a handful of topics and chapters that might be most valuable for educators. Chapters 5 through 11 address specific identity groups, including racial and ethnic groups, first-generation students, foster care alumni, and different spiritual traditions or worldviews. If used in coursework or with special interest groups, these chapters could help students understand the historical, systemic, and institutional challenges faced by specific populations. Second, several chapters reference Guthrie et al.'s (2017) culturally relevant leadership learning (CRL) model, which depicts intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences influencing leadership development. Educators might ask students to apply their own lived experiences to aspects of the model, considering how background, culture, and external influences shape their leadership styles. Finally, in Chapter 9, Maritza Torres deconstructs Latina identity development and leadership development through frameworks such as critical race theory, intersectionality, and sentipensante pedagogy. While these topics may be advanced for the average reader, Torres's analysis of Latina identity and leadership development illustrates how students can deconstruct their own lived experiences related to self-awareness, self-efficacy, and self-authorship.

In addition to offering content that would elicit meaningful intellectual discussion, the book provides several unique perspectives worth mentioning. For example, Guthrie and Chunoo articulate the overarching theme of the book in their introduction: "To us, socially just leadership education begins with the acknowledgment that we cannot have relevant leadership education without social justice nor can meaningful social efforts exist without leadership knowledge, skills, and values" (p. 2). Understanding and analyzing how this idea could shape their college experience may be an interesting perspective to share with students.

Sonja Ardoin introduces another unique perspective in Chapter 5, where she describes six different types of cultural capital: aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, resistant, and social. Defining and exploring

cultural capital within a college setting might interest students who are curious about justice, equity, inclusion and their intersection with leadership. While it may be a more advanced concept for some students, Ardoin's treatment of the topic makes it clear and easy to understand. She describes how each type of capital relates to leadership development and suggests that challenges created by cultural, institutional, and historical barriers and oppression may result in a lack of capital. Educators may ask students to explore their own experiences with these types of capital and how cultural capital has shaped their personal and leadership development journeys in college.

Overall, this book offers a valuable professional development, pedagogical, and justice resource for educators and administrators in higher education. With powerful voices, the contributors speak to justice, equity, and decolonizing the work of leadership education. While primarily for a professional audience, selected chapters and concepts can be effectively introduced to new students in special interest groups, learning communities, and spaces that allow for well-facilitated, intentional conversation and debriefing.

## References

Guthrie, K. L., Bertrand Jones, T., & Osteen, L. (2017). The teaching, learning and being of leadership: Exploring context and practice of the culturally relevant leadership learning model. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 11(3), 61-67. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21547>