

Contemporary Perspectives on Leadership Learning

Exploring Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning

Case Studies for Leadership Educators



Kathy L. Guthrie & Derrick Raphael Pacheco

Exploring Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning

Contemporary Perspectives on Leadership Learning

Series Editor
Kathy L. Guthrie

This series is dedicated to contemporary perspectives on leadership learning, which includes leadership teaching, education, development, and scholarship. It is intended to appeal to academic researchers, leadership scholars, leadership educators, and university instructors looking for thought-provoking reference material for classroom use. The purpose of the series is to highlight foundational knowledge and emerging innovations in scholarship on curriculum, pedagogy, and methodology of teaching and learning in leadership. Each book showcases a different topic critical to the research and practice of leadership teaching and learning. With this approach, the mission of the series is to examine the complexities of leadership learning from a variety of perspectives to give the audience access to breadth and depth of scholarship in this area, as well as provide contemporary reference material and textbooks for leadership learning in the classroom.

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The Role of Leadership Educators

Exploring Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning

**Case Studies for Leadership
Educators**

Kathy L. Guthrie

Florida State University, USA

And

Derrick Raphael Pacheco

Florida State University, USA



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Just as the umbrellas on the cover of this book help guide others throughout their journeys, we hope this book does the same for you.

Kathy L. Guthrie and Derrick Raphael Pacheco

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CHAPTER 1

IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL RELEVANCE IN LEADERSHIP LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

Developing future leaders and contributing citizens to society was critical to the establishment of higher education (Bok, 2011; Chunoo & Osteen, 2016; Thelin, 2019). Although this history is rooted in exclusion and oppression for many groups, the focus on leadership learning is a part of the earliest conceptualizations of higher education. However, leadership studies as a discipline and leadership education as a profession are both still fairly new to the higher education landscape (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). As educators are still discovering ways to intentionally develop leadership learning opportunities, this book is offered as another resource on how cultural relevance is critical to the conversation. This book provides 40 case studies in which educators and learners can engage in complex situations rooted in one of the eight aspects of the culturally relevant leadership learning (CRL) model (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016; Beatty & Guthrie, 2021). The situations developed through case studies explore the complexity and nuances of leadership learning across contexts. Discussion questions are provided as a tool to evaluate and explore the different aspects of each situation. More details on the case studies and how to use this book are provided at the end of this chapter. First, we want to start by discussing our beliefs about leadership and how we frame this work using CRL.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Defining leadership has been a topic of scholarship and discussion for decades. Burns (1978) reminds us of the importance of understanding leadership from multidisciplinary perspectives, since leadership is a phenomenon that has been heavily studied throughout history is one of the least understood concepts. In 2012, Kellerman noted in a review of leadership literature that there were over 1,500 definitions and 40 models of leadership. Dugan and Komives (2011) mentioned that there is more debate of the definition of leadership than agreement. Rost (1991) even attempted to develop a definition of leadership after exploring the evolution of the term and analyses of hundreds of definitions provided by scholars and practitioners. He put in unbelievable work and even had criteria that the definition needed to be “clear, concise, understandable by scholars and practitioners, researchable, practically relevant, and persuasive” (Rost, 1991, p. 99). The definition Rost (1991) proposed was that “leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real change that reflects their mutual purposes” (p. 102). Although this definition had strong qualities including that it is accessible for everyone and not just those with authority, it might not fully resonant with all as it does not specifically mention who the leaders and followers may be or if it is an individual or collective endeavor. To further explore aspects of what leadership is, we will further share that leadership is a process, is socially constructed, and transdisciplinary in nature.

Leadership Is a Process

Guthrie and Devies (2024) shared the visual of triangle to represent the leadership process (Figure 1.1). In the triangle you will see leadership in the center, which is the process that occurs when a leader and follower interacts within a specific context. You will see the context, leader, and follower are at the points of the triangle, which frames the process of leadership.

The three aspects of context, leader, and follower are essential for the process of leadership to occur. If one of these aspects are missing, the process cannot occur. The leader (a person) and the follower (an individual or multiple people) engage within a context. A context is a situation, environment, or setting in with leadership unfolds (Guthrie & Devies, 2024). Context is complex, nuanced, and can evolve rapidly. When you think about context, this not only includes physical space, the history

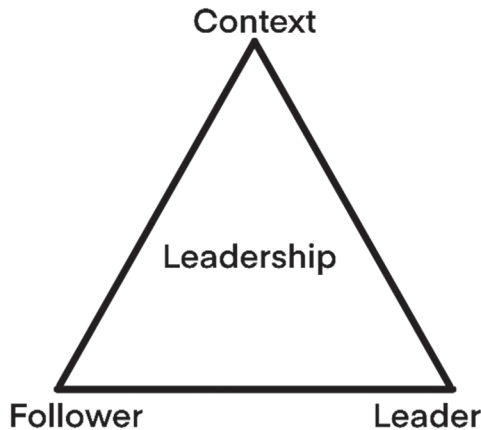


Figure 1.1 Leadership triangle. *Source:* Reprinted with permission from Devies and Guthrie. Copyright 2023.

of the group, and the actions of everyone involved, but it also includes the multiple layers of context that influence the direct situation you are engaged in. For example, if you are working with a student organization, the context is not just the organization itself and those involved, but the department, university, local community, state, and country in which this student organization is situated. Some models and theories, like the CRL model (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016), take context into consideration, but many historic models just focus on the leader or the relationship between the leader and follower and do not include this much needed context. However, we feel it is critical to look at the leadership process with these three aspects in mind.

Leadership Is Socially Constructed

As stated, leadership has many different definitions, but these definitions are based on the social identities, lived experiences, and various worldviews that individuals hold. Leadership, in fact, is socially constructed because it holds different meanings to different people across different contexts (Dugan, 2017; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Crotty (1998) points out that in order to achieve social construction, a concept needs social cultural influence to develop and transmit meaning. This then leads to leadership being socially constructed, meaning that over time the concept of leadership has developed with some shared assumptions that are

culturally contextual and influenced by culture (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021). This social construction is important when defining leadership, Bordas (2012) shared the unique ways that leadership is socially constructed in African American, Latiné, and Native American communities, offering an *intranational* perspective on leadership learning within our US context. Honoring the complexity of context and centering cultural relevance in leadership learning is essential for both leadership learners and leadership educators.

Transdisciplinary in Nature

Leadership education has been widely accepted as being interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary (Guthrie et al., 2013; Harvey & Riggio, 2011; Sowcik & Komives, 2020). However, the idea of leadership being transdisciplinary has entered the conversation relatively recently (Francovich, 2020; Gleason et al., 2021). Piaget (1972) introduced transdisciplinary approaches, which suggests integration between and across all academic disciplines. Leavy (2016) stated, “Transdisciplinarity aims to provide a holistic and synergistic approach to studying an issue or a problem. Further the key principles of transdisciplinarity also include transcendence, emergence, synthesis, integration, innovation and flexibility” (p. 29). Framing leadership studies and therefore leadership education as transdisciplinary brings forward an integration of ideas needed to construct knowledge and elevate learning to enhance more complex and nuanced cognitive abilities (Guthrie et al., 2021).

Given the value of transdisciplinary approaches, leadership educators, scholars, and practitioners have responsibility to advocate for this integrated approach to leadership. However, as Gleason et al. (2021) shared, there are barriers to fully embracing this integrated approach. One barrier is the existing cultures within higher education structures, these powerful and complex subcultures often create perceived boundaries which can prove to be challenging to navigate. These existing cultures can also be seen in how siloed academic disciplines can be. Every discipline has their own shared language, expectations, shared assumptions, and professional activities (Gleason et al., 2021). Even with barriers in mind, these can be overcome. The study and practice of leadership can be a bridge and launching point for collaboration from transdisciplinary approaches through college courses, co-curricular programming, and additional innovative initiatives that focus on the purpose of higher education in developing future leaders.

CRLM MODEL

Considering the framing of leadership as a process, socially constructed, and transdisciplinary in nature, CRLM provides a framework to intentionally develop socially just and CRLM opportunities. Understanding the historical evolution of CRLM enlightens how this model is only beneficial if used. [Figure 1.2](#) highlights the major publications that contributed to the advancement of CRLM in scholarship and practice. While no model or theory is perfectly aligned with every situation, considering how parts of a model can be used is valuable in developing leadership learning opportunities in various contexts.

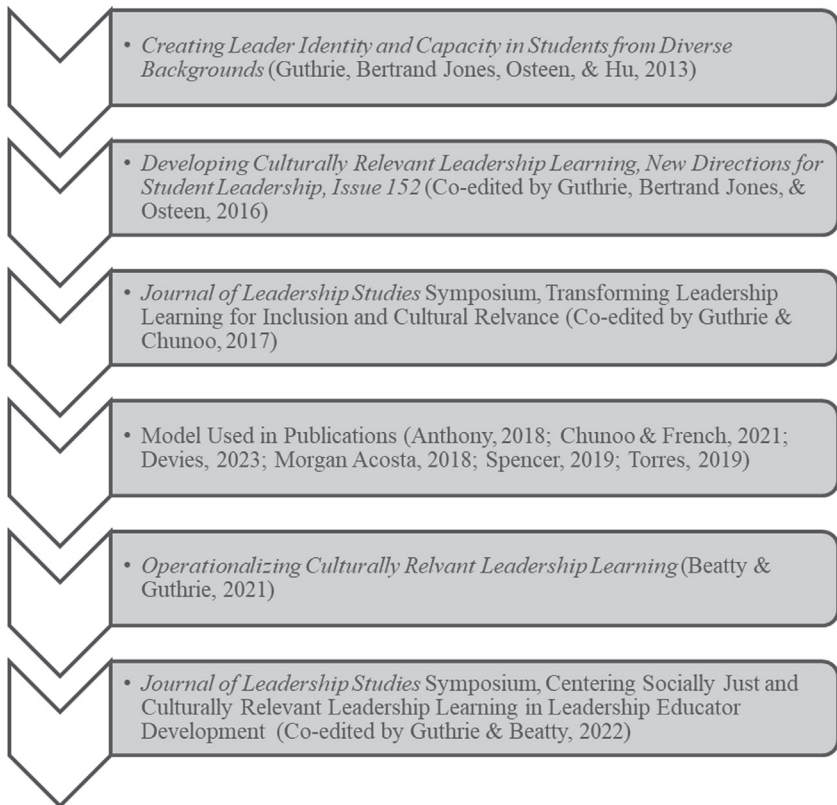


Figure 1.2 Evolution of the culturally relevant leadership learning model. *Source:* Author's own.

Idea Formulation to Creation

CRLI conversations began in 2011 when Kathy L. Guthrie, Tamara Bertrand Jones, and Laura Osteen began meeting weekly to discuss the need for higher education to center diverse student voices in leadership education. It began with leadership identity and capacity as the focus and resulted in a 2013 publication sponsored by the Association for the Study of Higher Education titled *Creating Leader Identity and Capacity in Students From Diverse Backgrounds* (Guthrie et al., 2013). This publication focused on the intersection of diverse college students and the creation of leadership learning outcomes that intentionally centered identity for enhanced capacity development.

Building off the Guthrie et al. (2013) publication focusing on the development of identity and capacity of students from diverse backgrounds, the team of researchers, Kathy L. Guthrie, Tamara Bertrand Jones, and Laura Osteen continued to meet weekly to discuss ways to continue moving this work forward. With the publication of the 2016 *New Directions for Student Leadership* (NDSL) issue titled *Developing Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning* the model was introduced, as well as named and specified the model's constructs. As stated in the issue's editorial, CRLI "proposes infusing the leadership development process with an understanding of how systemic oppression influences educational contexts and with an engagement in and across cultural differences" (Guthrie et al., 2016, p. 6).

Although this NDSL publication that named CRLI was released several years ago, this statement continues to be true and at the heart of what CRLI is about:

The societal issues we face cannot be solved by a few, individual leaders or by the narrow, dominant leadership narratives that often inform leadership development programs. It is the collective and pluralistic ability across our diverse perspectives to create shared understanding and responses in order to solve our seemingly intractable societal issues. (Guthrie et al., 2016, p. 6)

The diverse authors in the NDSL issue not only introduced the model and its constructs, but amplified the significance of this work, and offered ways to use it. Brilliant authors such as Susan R. Jones, Sherry K. Watt, Antron D. Mahoney, Juana Bordas, Eboo Patel, and Tanya O. Williams, in addition to the issue editors shared how this model is essential to the work of socially just leadership education.

Creation to Application

The first publication applying CRLI was an edited symposium in the *Journal of Leadership Studies* titled *Transforming Leadership Learning for Inclusion and Cultural Relevance* (Guthrie & Chunoo, 2017). The four articles included in this symposium focused on teaching and learning from a culturally relevant perspective. Each article amplified the importance of the context in developing leadership learning programs. As Dugan (2017) pointed out, oftentimes leadership development programs and initiatives often perpetuate dominant narratives and simplify ways to engage across differences. This symposium provided context to new ways that teaching, learning, and being can emerge with CRLI at its core.

As seen in [Figure 1.2](#), starting in 2018, publications citing CRLI supporting scholarship (Spencer, 2019; Torres, 2019), applied to educational contexts (Devies, 2023; Morgan Acosta, 2018), used as a practical framework (Antony, 2018), and interrogating the ways in which CRLI can best be used (Chunoo & French, 2021) began to emerge and thankfully continues today.

Amplifying Narratives and Leadership Educator Experiences

With the first glimpses of how CRLI could be used and beneficial to new ways of intentionally developing leadership learning opportunities, Beatty and Guthrie (2021) sought to further amplify leadership educator narratives and experiences. The result was 51 narratives highlighted in the book titled *Operationalizing Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning*. As narratives were collected, the authors invited constant interrogation and evolution of the model. Their goal was to maximize the usefulness of CRLI across context. Although they acknowledged that the model was never meant to serve everyone to the fullest (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021), the original purpose of offering constructs to situate the work of leadership learning that considered diverse perspectives remained the same (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016).

With the 51 narratives leadership educators shared for this book, Beatty and Guthrie (2021) found eight contexts the narratives naturally grouped into. These contextual areas are the ways educators were using CRLI in their praxis. These included personal development, professional development, development of co-curricular programs, implementation of co-curricular programs, development of academic programs, implementation of academic programs, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and lastly research methods. Some themes were contextually the same, for example

the co-curricular contexts, but how they used CRLI in the process of development or implementation of leadership learning opportunities differed.

Continuing to build off leadership educator narratives and how CRLI continues to be used, Guthrie and Beatty (2022) introduced the integrated model for contextualizing leadership learning. This new model centered CRLI (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016) and incorporated the leadership learning framework (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018) through social justice pedagogy. Such an integrated model is needed to address not only a leader's understanding of leadership, but how the leadership educator informs the learning process through their own identity and lived experiences. Specifically, this model amplifies how a leadership educator influences the leadership learning process through their own identity, capacity, and efficacy. The impact that culture and lived experiences have on an educator's commitment to teaching and learning, and more specifically addressing social justice in developing leadership learning opportunities for students, is explored. As stated, the constant evolution of how CRLI can be applied across contexts is critical to its advancement.

Brief Overview of Model

Understanding how CRLI has evolved is helpful to better digest the nuances of this model. CRLI is grounded in Ladson-Billings (2014) culturally relevant pedagogy and literature on university campus climate (Hurtado et al., 1999; Milem et al., 2005). As seen in [Figure 1.3](#), CRLI incorporates identity, capacity, and efficacy as pathways for individuals to learn about the process of leadership. Leadership learning does not occur in vacuum, but instead in various cultural contexts. The environmental dimensions often found in a university's campus culture and climate influence the identity, capacity, and efficacy development of everyone involved in the educational process (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021; Bertrand Jones et al., 2016; Guthrie et al., 2017). CRLI challenges previous paradigms of leadership learning and instead "confronts the myriad ways racism, sexism, religious oppression, heterosexism/cisgenderism, and classism advantages and disadvantages individuals' lives" (Guthrie et al., 2017, p. 62). Although the intent of CRLI was never to answer all of the complexities that come with developing leadership learning opportunities, it hopes to be helpful in offering constructs to situate this important work. Various factors such as learner demographic, context of environment, intended learning outcomes, and actual content being provided can alter what certain constructs might be useful, or in contrast, if even using it as a process rather than an outcome makes more sense.

Starting in the middle of the model, identity, capacity, and efficacy are the pathways to learning leadership. The active exchange between the leader