



# COMMITTING TO ACTION

Socially Just Leadership Education

*Edited by*  
Kathy L. Guthrie  
Vivechkanand S. Chunoo  
Brittany Devies

A VOLUME IN  
CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON LEADERSHIP LEARNING

# **Committing to Action**

## **Socially Just Leadership Education**

A Volume in Contemporary Perspectives on Leadership Learning

Series Editor

Kathy L. Guthrie  
*Florida State University*

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*editors*

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### ***DEDICATION***

“When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.” —Toni Morrison in the November 2003 issue of *O, The Oprah Magazine*

To all those who are doing the (damn) hard work, committing to action, and empowering others to create a more equitable, just world.

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# FOREWORD

**Darren E. Pierre**

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“The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can come as we are and not be questioned.”—Dr. Maya Angelou.

I remember when I first heard the aforementioned quote, I was in San Francisco, California at Glide Memorial Church. I was in the throes of writing my statement of purpose for applications to various doctoral programs. For me, a statement of purpose is a nebulous document, and as one who struggles with things not being black and white, I found the process of crafting that particular piece of writing stressful and arduous.

It was on an uneventful Sunday at Glide where my statement of purpose—and the force that drives my career in higher education became clear. The choir was singing, and behind them were images and inspirational quotes, including Angelou’s quote on home. As soon as I saw the quote on the screen, it was a lightbulb moment, where I could name my purpose and passion for service within higher education and, more specifically, leadership education and development. At Glide, I recognized my goal as an educator which is to curate spaces where students can feel a sense of “home” on college and university campuses: where they can come as they are and not be questioned.

For the queer student in college, who is finding agency in crafting their identity outside of hegemonic norms, I hope for them to find home. For the first-generation college student, whose family comes from a working-class background, I hope for them to find home. For the female identified

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college student, who is finding themselves in a gendered major (that is a byproduct of a gendered-based society), I hope for them to find home. Regardless of the stripes or patterns of tapestry that describe a person's identities, I desire for all students to feel a sense of community, belonging, of *home*.

I suspect my passion around this notion of home is from my own personal sense of not fitting in. I now look back on my college experience: a member of a fraternity, student body president, accomplished in numerous ways—many would argue, but with all the accolades, and positional titles of “leadership,” I rarely considered or classified myself as a leader. In many ways, I fell suspect to the temptation of the “Great Man Theory” of leadership—the belief that a leader was physically strong, male, White, straight—in other words not me. Over time, I have learned the preconceived notion of leadership I carried was a myth. I have spent my career through presentations, writings, and research trying to dismantle my own mis-informed archetypes of leadership so that others can see within themselves, things that have taken me decades to see within myself.

For people like me, this book, *Committing to Action* serves as good company for the leadership journey. Drs. Kathy Guthrie, Vivechkanand Chunoo, and Brittany Devies have elevated the conversation on inclusive and diverse narratives of leadership. Picking up where *Changing the Narrative* and *Shifting the Narrative* left off, this timely piece speaks to what is needed to approach leadership in contemporary times. The chapter authors of this book attempt to answer the call of not only leadership for what, but also leadership for whom. The critical question of the “who” in leadership learning, education, and development is more important now than ever before. As a leadership ambassador, promoter, and educator, I am accountable to ask (and answer) the question, “Who is involved in leadership?”—and just as important, who is not.

There is a need to discern how the socially constructed identities we carry, and historical legacies of power and privilege, have determined the diverse ways leadership is described, experienced, and enacted in society. Our journeys, identities, and differences matter, because each of them explains how we come to the table of leadership. Those journeys, identities, and differences should be celebrated and seen as an asset rather than a liability in the collective goal of fostering space for leaders fashioned to elevate the human condition.

Works like the one you are about to read honor the fact to talk about leadership without a conversation on identity is lacking, is limited and, in the context of leadership learning, education, and development, is a form of malpractice. So, I take this book as a resource, as a leadership educator committed to do work that expands the arena in which leadership learning, education, and development occurs. I carry gratitude in abundance for

works like *Committing to Action* because I believe they are essential in the ongoing pursuit to cultivate the opportunities for students of all stripes and patterns to find their “home” that sacred place where people can come as they are and not be questioned.

### **AUTHOR BIO**

**Dr. Darren E. Pierre** (he/him) is a Senior Lecturer in the Office of Global Engineering Leadership in the A. James Clark School of Engineering and holds an appointment as an affiliate assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of Maryland-College Park (UMD). He is a thought-leader within student affairs and leadership education. Darren is a 2023 ACPA Diamond Honoree recipient.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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No book is constructed in isolation, especially when it is focused on collective voices coming together to move forward and take action. It takes countless conversations, listening, thinking, reflection, and learning to build upon each other's ideas and concepts into something worthy of others reading and, hopefully, learning. When we think about all the individuals who have taken us up on engaging in the tough conversations about leadership and social justice, those who have taught us, and not only modeled what socially just leadership education is, we probably could write a book on just those lessons.

If someone had told us nine (!) years ago when we started the first socially just leadership education book that we would end up editing two more by now, we likely would not have believed them. In the time since we have started, we could not be prouder of how so many of you have taken these ideas and adapted them in incredible and unpredictable ways. What started as a complaint about resources we could not find has turned into the most spectacular journey filled with new experiences, relationships, and ideas we could not have foreseen at the start. We are more grateful than ever to be on this journey together, with all of you, and moving more rapidly than ever toward a brighter and fairer future for all.

Kathy continues to sit in a place of complete gratitude. I am beyond thankful I get to do this work and continually learn from so many awe-inspiring people. To V., thank you for being one of my people for over 10 years now. I am so deeply thankful you are back at FSU for so many reasons. One is so I can see your smiling face in person more. Brittany, you are such a gift to me and the whole field of leadership education. I am so

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thankful you jumped into this project with both feet and I continue to be in awe of you. Team Guthrie, I am nothing without you. Brian, you have always been the love of my life, and I do not take you for granted. Kinley, you are one of the kindest and coolest humans and I feel lucky I get to be your mom. Ahsoka, you are seriously the best dog. You have added to Team Guthrie in ways I could not have imagined.

V is grateful for the team in the LLRC at Florida State University; for their community, camaraderie, and love. I would also like to thank my colleagues and friends from across the country (and around the world)—both new and long-standing, for hearing out the ideas that sounded impossible until we made them happen. Eternal gratitude to you who saw the grand piano under the dollar store tablecloth.

Brittany is beyond thankful for her friends and mentors, Kathy and V., for inviting her into the work and conversation that is *Committing to Action*. You both are my guiding lights and sense of stability in our collective, critical work. I am eternally grateful for my brilliant colleagues, peers, and students at both the University of Maryland, College Park and Florida State University; my time at both places and spaces contributed immensely to this work. Above all, I sit in deep gratitude for my family (Mike, Julie, and Marcus), partner (Ryan), and friends who continue to love me unconditionally in the writing process.

Kathy L. Guthrie, Vivechkanand S. Chunoo, & Brittany Devies  
February 2024

## CHAPTER 1

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# ALIGNING INTENTION AND IMPACT

## Our Commitment to Socially Just Leadership Education

**Vivechkanand S. Chunoo,  
Kathy L. Guthrie, and Brittany Devies**

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Wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Eroding faith in elected and appointed officials at all levels. A global climate crisis. The wonderful and terrifying rise of artificial intelligence. Developing nations struggling to find a place in the world, while superpowers hoard wealth and resources. Nothing is so constant as change, and with it, heightened demand for individuals who can lead, guide, navigate an increasingly complex world. Subsequently, it falls to the leadership educators among us to craft the individuals who will not only change our world but save it from the brink of disaster; a position that has become all too familiar for far too many. These are the risks and responsibilities we face as we commit to socially just leadership learning.

One of the biggest challenges of integrating social justice with leadership education is proving that it works. Many of us are routinely required to produce evidence that what we do, and how we do it, matters. Beyond the anecdotal, we have more evidence than ever on how socially just leadership learning yields positive results; for our students and the wider world. We are proud to showcase the work of our colleagues in research, assessment,

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and evaluation who, collectively, are generating the data and information to verify what we have always been saying, and presenting it in ways that uplift (and not shame) those seeking to incorporate their wisdom into our efforts. As their ambassadors, we thank them for trusting us, and this platform, for their labor. We hope their stories inspire you to do what you can in your context.

Empiricism, however, is only one part of our story. No single volume can encompass all the socially just leadership scholarship that exists. Thus, we continue to amplify as many voices as we can, with special attention to those omitted in the past. In addition, we revisit some topics covered in our previous books as scholarly engagement in these areas has evolved rapidly in a very short time. *Committing to Action: Socially Just Leadership Education* both continues and accelerates the trajectory of what was started in *Changing the Narrative: Socially Just Leadership Education* (Guthrie & Chunoo, 2018) and carried forward in *Shifting the Mindset: Socially Just Leadership Education* (Guthrie & Chunoo, 2021).

*Committing to Action* can also serve as a starting point for social justice-oriented leadership educators. We hope you find within its pages useful recommendations, helpful suggestions, and a source of light in the darker moments. Whether this is where you join us, or if you have been with us all along the way, your impact has never been more important. Only by sharing the best of what each of us has to offer can we find the route to success. Our roadmap for the journey ahead starts in the next section.

## **CONVERGING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND LEADERSHIP EDUCATION**

Several notable resources useful to the pursuit of socially just leadership learning have been created since our last outing in this vein. While a comprehensive review of even these selected examples would be beyond the scope of this introduction, their utility cannot be overstated. Perhaps most prominently, Komives and Owen's (2023a), *A Research Agenda for Leadership Learning and Development through Higher Education*, helpfully aggregated and interrogated what we think we know about leadership education in general, and leadership education research in particular, while challenging researchers and practitioners to apply social justice frameworks to their research, assessment, and evaluation projects. Specifically, this text pushed for equity-minded research agendas (Komives & Owen, 2023b), advocated for social justice as the beating heart of leadership education (Chunoo & Guthrie, 2023), extolled the virtues of liberatory pedagogy in leadership learning (Rocco & Beatty, 2023), and illuminated pathways toward liberatory leadership scholarship (Owen & Komives, 2023). While robust experience with socially just and/or critical approaches is not required

prior to engaging with these authors and editors, they nonetheless drive us toward deeper innovation and creativity in leadership scholarship across contexts.

Tremendously important socially, just leadership literature has been generated by the *Contemporary Perspectives on Leadership Learning* series (the line to which this text also belongs) in recent years. For example, [Beatty and Guthrie \(2021\)](#) had taken to operationalizing the culturally relevant leadership learning model; a sorely needed addition to any leadership educators' toolkit. Also, [Guthrie and Priest \(2022\)](#) helped us move toward critical hope through their recommendations on navigating complexities in leadership learning. Moreover, vital lessons on engaging Black men in leadership learning have been provided ([Beatty & Ford, 2023](#)). Likewise, women's narratives around socially just leadership development has served as [Teig and colleagues' \(2023\)](#) sharp focus. Meanwhile, [Rosch and colleagues \(2023\)](#) helpfully provided guidance on how to conduct research in leadership education, with an orientation around socially just outcomes and processes. For the social justice-oriented leadership educator, there has never been a more well-resourced time to commit to this work.

The *New Directions for Student Leadership* (NDSL) series has also recommitted to advancing socially just and critical frames in recent years. The year 2021 saw scholarship related to: intersections of leadership learning and social class ([Guthrie & Ardoin, 2021](#)); the use of inventories to augment durable leadership growth ([Shankman & Gigliotti, 2021](#)); a keen focus on marginalized institutional environments in advancing racial equity ([Whitney & Collins, 2021](#)), as well as admonitions for protecting leadership education during times of tumultuous change and transition ([Chung et al., 2021](#)). In 2022, NDSL focused on engineering students' leadership learning experiences and contexts ([Kendall & Rottmann, 2022](#)); the use of games as leadership pedagogy ([Egan & Banter, 2022](#)); leadership development research and assessment methods ([Rosch & Hastings, 2022](#)); and [Breen and Gleason's \(2022\)](#) emphasis on leader development in graduate and professional school contexts. In the current year of 2023, additional scholarship in social action, leadership, and transformation ([Puente et al., 2023](#)); deep leadership identity development ([Owen, 2023](#)); leadership learning for environmental sustainability ([Satterwhite et al., 2023](#)) and applications of theories and models toward socially just leadership program construction and curriculum design ([Rocco & Pierre, 2023](#)) shine as examples of continued commitments to converging social justice and leadership learning.

Not to be outdone, developments in 2024 will carry on the legacy of what has been established. In addition to this text, the *Contemporary Issues* series will add texts on the theoretical foundations of leadership learning, case studies in cultural relevant leadership learning, the role and identities

of leadership educators, the theory and practice of leadership, and leading in global contexts. The editorship of *New Directions for Student Leadership* is very excited to be working on issues related to intentional emergence in leadership education, applications of the leadership learning framework (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018), facilitating leadership development in training contexts, and the use of pop culture in leadership learning. Furthermore, the *International Leadership Association's Guiding Principles* (2009) are being revised to account for the global context where leadership occurs. Taken together, it is quite clear the moral trajectory of leadership learning is growing and converging on social justice.

## COMMITTING TO ACTION

In collaboration with our contributors, we are taking this opportunity to reconfirm and redefine our commitment to socially just leadership education in action. Later, in this extended introduction in Chapter 2, Adrian Bitton levels sharp criticism of our field while also highlighting how far we have come alongside a detailed analysis of how far we have left to go. Attendant to these remarks, Josh Taylor in Chapter 3 uncovers significant taken-for-granted assumptions about race and how leadership learning occurs. Our main body of writing, however, is organized into three parts.

New to readers of either *Changing the Narrative* and/or *Shifting the Mindset* is a section focused on empirical derivations of socially just leadership education. Next, we include an area on identity development in our continued pursuit of robust representation in leadership learning. Our final major section underscores methods of realizing our commitment through actions each of us can take. Every chapter is intended to be imminently useful regardless of having read any of the others here, the order in which you approach them, and whether you have read any of the other texts in this subseries or not.

### Committing to Empirically Based Action

Our section on empirical socially just leadership education evidence showcases the early work of four emerging scholars. In Chapter 4, Michael Daniels's grounded theory study provides evidence of his Black men's leader identity development model (BMLID). Ana Maia's Presidential Fellows Program provides a backdrop for her model for fostering culturally relevant leadership development (FCRLD) in Chapter 5. Laura Irwin, in Chapter 6, problematizes leadership education's perceived boundaries toward the incorporation of social justice. Completing this area in Chapter

7, Vivechkanand S. Chunoo uses his own mixed methods study of cultural responsiveness as an example of systemic inquiry in leadership education. Taken together, these studies serve as both content and process for leadership educators seeking empirically based and evidence-supported socially just leadership education, with implications for how we might all go about documenting our impact.

## **Committing to Identity Development**

In Chapters 8 through 15, our contributors contend with significant intra- and inter- personal elements of leader and leadership identity development. In Chapter 8, Derrick Pacheco takes us from the beach to the palm trees to better understand Caribbean-American student leadership development. Next, Challen Wellington critically interrogates issues of size, weight, and shape by asking if leadership is for every body type in Chapter 9. Desi leadership and the interactions of southeast Asian identity, culture, and language center Chapter 10 by Ravi Bhatt.

In Chapter 11, Adam Kuhn uses the environmental dimensions of the culturally relevant leadership learning model to add to our enlightenment around queer student leadership learning. Laura Vaughn, in Chapter 12, keenly deconstructs and reconstructs important assumed-to-be-true factors in socially just leadership education for international students studying in the United States. High-achieving students and the importance of attending to their unique experiences in leadership learning is the focus of Amy Haggard in Chapter 13.

Advancing from the foundation established by [Farinella \(2018\)](#) in *Changing the Narrative: Socially Just Leadership Education*, Lisa Jackson extolls the virtues of foster youth as peer leaders in Chapter 14. Continuing in this optimistic thread, Darius Robinson closes our section on identity in Chapter 15 with his discourse on critical hope and its unique applicability to Black students' leadership development. With these chapters, we hope to reignite conversations about students we have discussed in the past while continuing to represent as many, and as diverse, experiences of socially just leadership education as we can.

## **Making Action-Oriented Commitments**

Chapters 16 through 21 comprise our section on action-oriented commitments to socially just leadership education. Brittany Devies's inquiry into leadership learning for capacity and efficacy development yielded important implications for the creation and maintenance of women-only

and/or predominantly women spaces, which we are proud to underscore, in Chapter 16. In Chapter 17, Holly Henning frames academic advising spaces, relationships, and dynamics as avenues for socially just leadership education. Similarly, mentorship of Black students is addressed as a way of developing leaders and social justice agents simultaneously by Johnnie Allen, Jr. in Chapter 18, Ashley Archer Doehling depicts social justice peer educators as leadership educators-in-training, in Chapter 19, by leveraging the integrated model for critical leadership (Dugan, 2017).

To help us bounce back from the challenges and fatigue associated with socially just leadership education, Gen Ramirez extolls the virtues of resilience—while honoring our commitments, in Chapter 20. Chapter 21, by Antonio Ruiz-Ezquerro, demonstrates the power of tabletop games as socially just leadership pedagogy. Concluding with Chapter 22, we share some of our ongoing perspectives on doing the work of socially just leadership teaching and learning across contexts.

## DOING THE WORK

*Shifting the Mindset* concluded with the bold assertion that, “Action is long overdue for justice, fairness, and equity” (Guthrie & Chunoo, 2021, p. 278) for socially just leadership educators and their students. *It still is*. At a time when even more of us, our rights, and our future are at risk, committing to socially just action has become a moral imperative. It is no longer a question of “if” each of us will be affected by injustice; rather, they are questions of “when,” “how,” and “who will come to our aid?” Perhaps, by offering each other assistance in these trying times, we will each not need to look as hard for help when it is our turn to receive it. *Committing to Action* is our offer of support.

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