
Guest editorial: Leading for deeper learning: moving from niche to norm

Guest editorial

1

This special issue is dedicated to the topic of leading schools for deeper learning. We open this special issue with a commentary from Bathon and Richardson about how they understood better what is happening around leading for deeper learning (see [Richardson *et al.*, 2021](#)). In this issue, we present school-based approaches, network-based approaches, and university-based approaches. Each study highlights the power of doing school differently and the various ways that school leaders are learning about, enacting, and engaging in deeper learning to improve the schooling experiences for students. The research in this special issue show how leading for deeper learning means putting kids first and designing learning spaces for their needs. We hope this special issue informs the field about the role leaders play in redesigning teaching and learning towards deeper learning. The special issue concludes with a commentary from Mehta, the author of *In Search of Deeper Learning: The Quest to Remake the American High School*.

School-based approaches

In “Struggling toward symmetry: leadership for restorative justice and deeper learning at an urban charter school” Fine captures a leadership team’s experiences transforming culture and instructional practices. Rooted in both restorative justice and deeper learning, Fine detailed how restorative justice added coherence to the deeper learning initiatives by linking culture and instructional practices. In doing this, the leaders shifted mindsets, cultures, and teaching and learning.

Malin, Poetter, Graft, Durham, and Sprankles present leadership actions that propelled deeper learning at Butler Tech, a career and technical education (CTE) school outside Cincinnati, Ohio. In “Culture -leadership intersections in support of deeper learning at a career and technical education center” Malin *et al.* described three features of this school that demonstrated enactments of a deeper learning vision. First, the Butler Tech leadership team was driven by a moral purpose. Second, the leadership team was open, collaborative, and trusting. Finally, the leadership team demonstrates ambition and entrepreneurship. The research adds to the limited body of knowledge directly linking deeper learning leadership in the CTE space.

University partnership approaches

Williams, Atkinson, Dean, McCarty, Mathews, and Jaques-McMillin provided a case study of a 17-year partnership between the K-20 Center at the University of Oklahoma and a rural school district. In “Deeper learning and leadership development in a school–university partnership with a rural district” the authors described how the partnership support shifts toward deeper learning. By taking a multi-pronged approach to professional development, the district saw shifts in leadership approaches, teacher capacity, and student learning.

Umpstead, Hacker, and Akanwa examined leadership teams from four schools participating in a university-supported deeper learning academy. In “Transformation of school leaders’ understandings and practices of change leadership, deeper learning and



equity through participation in a leadership academy” the authors described how these schools transformed the culture, focused on the whole child, and rethought collaboration. The lessons presented in this study will help leaders better understand how to enact equity-focused deeper learning work.

Networks and systems approaches

Kallio conducted a case study titled, “Deeper professional learning: how leaders design for teachers to share their deeper learning practices.” In this case study, the author examined a network improvement community (NIC) focused on improving teachers’, and leaders’, skills to foster deeper learning in their schools. By focusing on three design principles, the author found that the network successfully supported educators’, shifts toward deeper learning in their schools.

Gatz and Akiva present a study titled “Education networks for deeper learning.” Here, the authors detailed how an educational network can serve as the precursor to implementing community-based deeper learning. The authors linked how professional capacity to implement deeper learning initiatives aligned with the degree to which participants participated in this network.

Sliwka, Klopsch, Beigel, and Tung dove deep into how a network of schools adopted deeper learning. In “Transformational leadership for deeper learning: shaping innovative school practices for enhanced learning” Sliwka *et al.* differentiated between transactional and transformational leaders and how they approached integrating deeper learning in their contexts. The authors present a structured deep learning model that leaders can implement and personalize.

In “Leading for deeper learning: international perspectives” Harris, Jones, Azorín, Southern, Griffiths, and Astvaldsdóttir captured evidence of how deeper learning is enacted in all-through-schools in Iceland, Spain, and Wales. Leaders of schools in this initiative enacted a common vision, were guided by instructional leadership, had a data-driven mindset, and had a keen understanding of the students and families they served. The experiences of these leaders help the field understand how leaders supported deeper learning in a different model to traditional schooling.

Humanizing schools through deeper learning

In “Leading from equity: changing and organizing for deeper learning” Kim, Yang, and Oh investigated how school leaders in Korea adopted equity mindsets that helped facilitate deeper learning during COVID-19. The authors argue that equity-minded leadership is core to creating deeper learning, inclusive, student-centered systems.

Richardson, Bathon, and McLeod present leadership lessons from 30 deeper learning school initiatives. “From vision to reality: how school leaders nurture deeper learning” is a study of how k-12 school leaders manifested, created, changed, or sustained deeper learning in their schools. The authors noted three themes: These leaders listened intently to their community; student empowerment and agency were at the core of instruction; and humanizing the school experience was key. Leaders wanting to engage in deeper learning can focus on these shared characteristics as an entry point into this work.

Jal Mehta helped to frame this work of leading for deeper learning. In his concluding commentary, Mehta paints an eloquent picture of the p-12 deeper learning school leader: Courage. Humanity. Stance. Symmetry. Equity. Curiosity. Community Cultivator. Systems Thinker. Pioneer. Organizer. Listener. Weaver. Storyteller. The articles in this special issue hit on these characteristics as well. In the end, researchers and practitioners in the field of educational management, administration, and leadership engage in deeper learning work to

improve the lives of kids. We hope these studies and commentaries inspire the field to rethink why we do what we do. Deeper learning is the heart work as it places the students front and center.

Guest editorial

Jayson W. Richardson

*Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of Denver, Denver,
Colorado, USA, and*

Justin Bathon

*Department of Educational Leadership Studies, University of Kentucky, Lexington,
Kentucky, USA*

3

References

Richardson, J.W., Bathon, J. and McLeod, S. (2021), *Leadership for Deeper Learning: Facilitating School Innovation and Transformation*, Routledge, New York, NY.

Further reading

Mehta, J. and Fine, S. (2020), *In Search of Deeper Learning: the Quest to Remake the American High School*, Harvard University Press, Boston, MA.