

Diversifying Leadership Pathways in Schools: Key Lessons from the Counternarratives of Leaders of Color

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(she/her/ella)

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Grounding in gratitude...

Mi familia... especially my parents Estella and David Rodela *y mis hermanas Amanda y Rebecca*

Dr. Gay Selby

- George Brain and Gay Selby Faculty Award in Educational Leadership

Colleagues and co-conspirators in this work in districts across Oregon, California, and Washington

My students...

- Especially my former students of color...

Three questions guiding my talk

- A. Why does diversity in school leadership matter (according to the research)?
- B. What have I learned in my research?
→ *will spend most of my time here*
- C. Where do we go from here?

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Research has shown that leaders of color can have important impacts in schools..

1. Cultural and racial mirroring of student body (role models, sense of belonging)
2. Positive equitable outcomes for students & families (cultural bridges, improved attendance, participation in TAG)
3. Positive outcomes for teachers and staff

“Principals of color may be high-leverage actors”
(Grissom et al., 2021, p. xv)

(Auerbach, 2009; Bass, 2019; Grissom et al., 2021; Liou & Liang, 2021; Martinez et al., 2016; Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020; Wilson, 2016)

Three questions guiding my talk

- A. Why does seeking to diversify leadership pathways (according to the research)?
- B. **What have I learned in my research?**
- C. Where do we go from here?

The study

Guided by Critical Race Theory (*can talk more about later if questions*)

Counternarrative interview study with 15 educational leaders of color on the West Coast

Interviews ranged between 1.5 hours to 3 hours

Their upbringings, experiences in schools, experiences as educators and administrators

Research participants

Gender identity

- 7 cisgender women
- 8 cisgender men

Diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds:

- 1 identified as Middle Eastern
- 1 identified as Multiracial
- 4 identified as African American / Black
- 4 identified as Asian American (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Vietnamese)
- 5 identified as Latino/a

Variety of leadership positions:

- 2 finishing admin program (counselor, teacher)
- 1 teacher on special assignment (TOSA)
- 6 associate principals
- 3 principals
- 3 district administrators

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Today I want to focus on
experiences of
administrators in
sub

All names are
pseudonyms & have
shifted some identifying
markers to protect
participants' identities.

Why suburban school districts?



Most students in the U.S. attend suburban schools.

Most Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous people in U.S. metro areas live in suburbs (Diamond et al. 2020).

Context mattered for my research participants...

Changing demographics in their school districts, with growing racial diversity, especially among Latinx students and multiracial students (many worked in schools with majority of students of color)

Still vast majority of staff and leadership were White (and many still surprised by demographic changes and yearned for “teaching ghosts”)

Deep sense of being “the only” or one of just a few educators or leaders of color in their schools and districts

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When I moved here, I felt like I had jumped out of a boat into the Columbia in December. Like it is cold, but you cannot fully understand how cold it is until you're in.

-Blair, middle school principal

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So my first year as an admin ... I was past the shock. Now this is what it is. I'm not going to see, I just don't see Black people. I could go all week and not see another Black person.

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So my first year as an admin ... I was past the shock. Now this is what it is. I'm not going to see, I just don't see Black people. I could go all week and not see another Black person.

And I never realized how demoralizing that could be. You just don't see someone who looks like you.

-Blair, middle school principal



Across 14 of 15 interviews was the theme of **needing to navigate White dominant school spaces** as both student in K-12 schools AND professional educator.

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I just always felt... **I was renting space in these white spaces that I should have been welcomed in.**

-Jada, associate principal, high school

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There were always these underlying... Either in the curriculum, or in how the teacher was facilitating instruction. You just are always being told you don't belong, or ...

-Jada, associate principal, high school

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There were always these underlying... Either in the curriculum, or in how the teacher was facilitating instruction. You just are always being told you don't belong, or...

We're allowing you to be here for right now. You need to be on your best behavior because you could be not in this space...

-Jada, associate principal, high school



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...I think my whole professional life as a student, as well as an educator, and now leader, I feel like I'm being allowed to be in a space.

-Jada, associate principal, high school



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...I think my whole professional life as a student, as well as an educator, and now leader, I feel like I'm being allowed to be in a space.

Really, there's always this undertone of like, if you step out of line, your space can be filled with someone else...

So you might just want to watch yourself.

-Jada, associate principal, high school

Barriers faced

“renting space in these white spaces”

- “I didn’t fit the leadership)

When I didn't get hired for the middle school jobs, and they hired two white people.

I remember telling her that I really felt like I didn't fit the look, what [the district] was looking for in their administrators, to be honest.

-Joe, district administrator

Barriers face **“renting sp**

- “I didn’t fi
leadership
- Microaggr

I remember being called, we have these walkie-talkies that they call the administrators on when there's a need in the office, and there was a problem in the office and we need an administrator.

I come down to speak with a parent and that parent says, "Oh, I'm sorry they called you. I don't know why they called you. I didn't need a janitor, I needed an administrator." ...

-Dominique, associate principal, elementary

Barriers facing "renting space"

- "I didn't see you as a leader."
- Microaggression

..."Oh, I'm sorry. I am the administrator. I don't know what gave you, in my professional clothing that I am dressed in, that makes you think that I am the janitor, but I am an administrator. What can I help you with?"

And then that parent says, "Well, I want a real administrator."

I don't know how much more real you can get. So did that person mean, "I want a man?" Did that person mean, "I want a white man?"

-Dominique, associate principal, elementary

Barriers faced

“renting space in these white spaces”

- “I didn’t fit the look” (I don’t fit the mold of a leader)
- Microaggressions
- Resistance & in

Examples:

- How often they actually go to leaders of color versus white leaders
- How they speak to them (questions, defensiveness), or even ignore them in meetings
- It could create divides among the staff between white teachers and teachers of color.



Bo

I had a portion of the staff who would just never come to me for anything and they would always go to [the white associate principal]. Then I had another portion of the staff who would come to me for things and not her.

So I don't think I was expecting that.

We definitely didn't have a class on it in my Admin classes, my program.

There was no class on that.

-Alexandra, district administrator

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versus white

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Barriers for “renting”

- “I didn’t
- leader
- Microa
- Resista
- Naviga

There are a lot of unwritten rules that if you're not aware of, then how could you navigate them? So that's the piece that I continue to be mindful of, **because as a leader of color, you have to be able to understand the culture of the school, the culture of the district, so that you can be effective on the work that you want to do, and actually help those students that you know need additional support...**

-Jaime, associate principal, high school

Barriers faced

“renting space in these white spaces”

- “I didn’t ...But you cannot go in, head on and say, leaders “Hey, let's go ahead and talk about the
- Microag in justice or the inequities that this school is
- Resista doing that is hurting students of color.”
- Navigat **Because if you go with that approach, then pretty soon you're going to be out the door...**

-Jaime, associate principal, high school

Barriers for **“renting s**

- “I didn’t
leadersh
- Microag
- Resistan
- Navigat

...So that when I'm in those spaces, I could actually talk in a way that is... That I don't come across as this angry Latino, right? Because we're passionate and angry, right? Because you have to be able to talk calmly and explain your point and don't get angry...

It shouldn't be like that, but it is. And if you want to do... If you want to make a change or if you want to do something, you have to be able to navigate that.

-Jaime, associate principal, high school

In spite of these barriers...

There were deeper strengths and motivations...

Re-discovery and recovery of one's true self (especially when feeling like needed to assimilate to survive and succeed in schools they grew up in)

Being able to see and sense
embedded in how students
students were being treated
decision-making

**For another day and
other publications...**

Deep connections with students of color and families

Within this context and challenging interactions leaders of color have to navigate, **it means that school districts & universities must understand that diversifying school leadership (and teacher of color workforce) requires SYSTEMS-CHANGE.**

Three questions guiding my talk

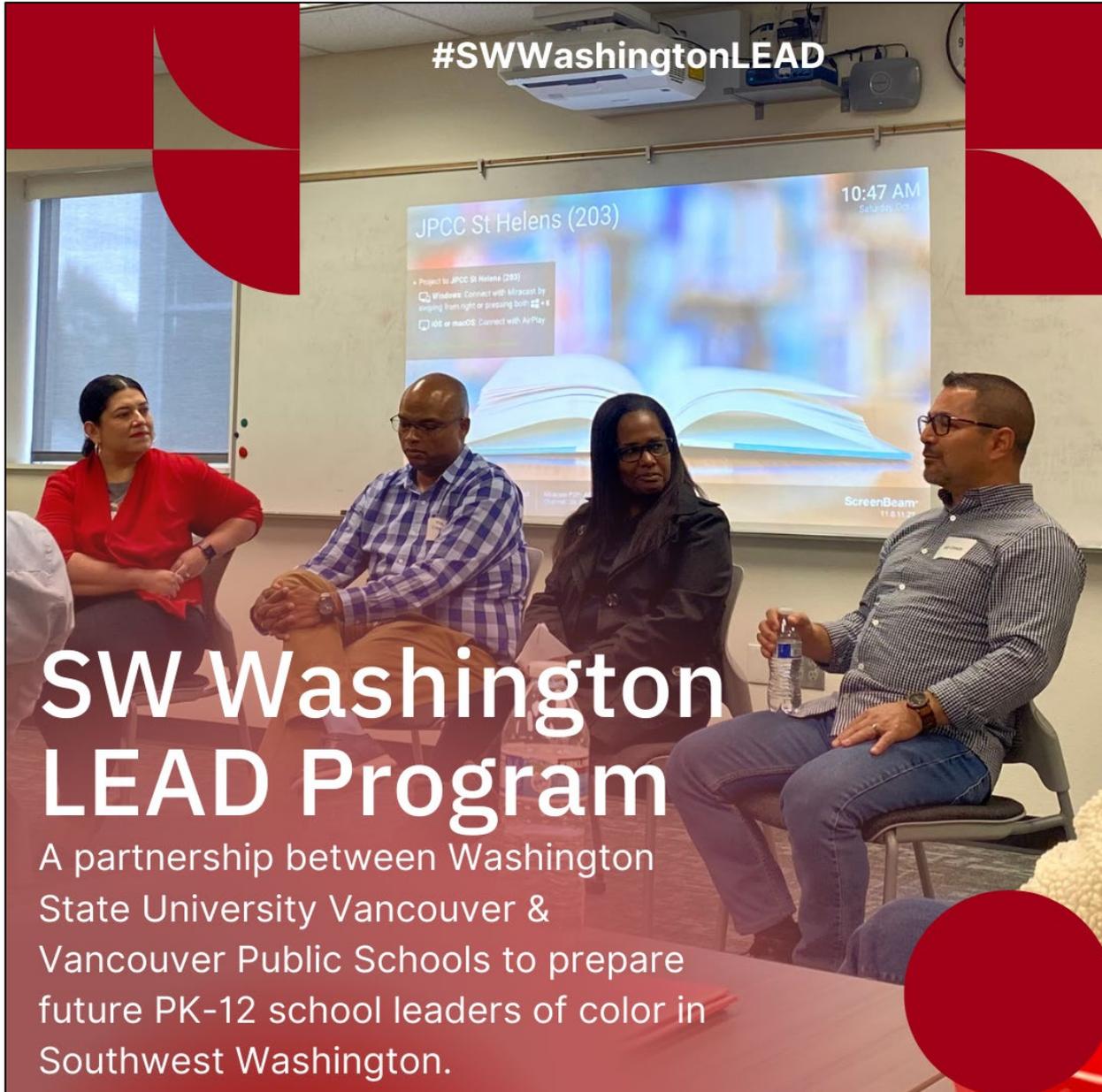
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Key lessons from research to support diversifying leadership pathways



1. Culturally sustaining, asset-based mentoring networks
2. Investing in equity-focused, race-conscious training for supervisors and mentors
3. Evaluate hiring practices & policies
4. Culturally responsive, equity-focused leadership preparation

New project w/ Vancouver Public Schools



SW Washington LEAD Program

A partnership between Washington State University Vancouver & Vancouver Public Schools to prepare future PK-12 school leaders of color in Southwest Washington.

Program for educators of color to earn their Principal or Program Certification

Beginning in January with first cohort!

Funded in part through Equity Education Fund from College Spark of Washington

Thank you! *¡Muchas gracias!*

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