Education Review
Reseñas Educativas Resenhas Educativas
October 9, 2026 ISSN 1094-5296

Gaines, C. B. (Ed.). (2019). *Leadership for school improvement: Reflection and renewal*. Information Age Publishing.

146 pp. **ISBN 978-1641136020**

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Education is a national priority in the United States, and efforts to improve schools exist at a federal, state, and local level with contributions from policymakers, researchers, and educational practitioners. Thus, school improvement is a systematic effort that requires input from many. *Leadership for School Improvement*, edited by Cherie B. Gaines, gathers the contributions of eight scholars in the field of school improvement who highlight the context of school improvement through history, policy, leadership, and student populations. This book is the first volume in a series on Leadership for School Improvement by the Special Interest Group of the same name of the American Educationl Research Association. The research discussed in this text pushes the field of school leadership forward by increasing awareness of the role of federal policies in school improvement, how leadership continues to evolve, and stronger coherence and partnerships amongst schools and districts.

The first two chapters lay the foundation for school improvement through a historical examination of policy, research, and education reform. Gaines (Chapter 1) provides a review of the historical evolution of school improvement between 1960 and 2000, and Lomascolo (Chapter 2) discusses federal initiatives that had significant contributions to the educational landscape. Organizing these two chapters at the beginning provides a foundation for understanding how policy and federal initiatives

have been applied over the years. The reader walks away with a deeper understanding of key education legislation, policies, and research that have directly impacted school improvement efforts. Furthermore, discussion of major reform efforts allows for examination of assumptions and unintended consequences, further highlighting the complexity of policy initiatives.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide complementary systematic literature reviews that expand the book's discussion on school improvement beyond policy and reform. Koerber and Ritchie (Chapter 3) synthesize trends in educational research since the passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and found leadership practices, discussed later, that evolved as a result of various federal policies and initiatives. Martinez (Chapter 4) synthesizes the literature on leadership practices for marginalized youth. Both reviews cover nearly the same two decades of literature, but their approaches to school improvement diverge. Koerber and Ritchie emphasize leadership practices related to school improvement through an organizational approach, whereas Martinez takes an equity-focused approach and examines research on marginalized student populations. Collectively, the authors approach school improvement through an organizational-to-student lens, reinforcing the reader's awareness of its multifaceted nature.

Characteristics of leadership, training, and partnership were identified as some of the major takeaways in Chapters 5 through 7. Kirk (Chapter 5) emphasizes the role of shared leadership in schools, Olivier (Chapter 6) highlights the critical role of district leadership in supporting school improvement efforts, and Berry (Chapter 7) discusses the vital role of leadership preparation programs in providing field-based internships for principal aspirants and partnerships with school districts to connect research with practice. The book concludes with Gaines (Chapter 8), who highlights connections and themes across the first seven chapters with an emphasis on the ever-changing roles of school leaders, how leaders develop collaboration, shared and supportive work cultures, connecting schools to the people and communities they serve, and how school leaders must be data-driven and monitor accountability.

The authors provide a clear, easy-to-follow organization of the book. However, I noticed three leading themes across the chapters after multiple readings. The first theme relates to policy, research, and educational reform. The second theme focuses on leadership from an organizational and preparation perspective. Lastly, I identified understanding the relationship between school improvement, students, and communities as a third theme.

T**heme 1: Policy, Research, and Education Reform**

The federal government has consistently pursued policies and initiatives to improve schools despite education being considered a function of the state (Eginton, 1931). Gaines (2019) discusses the role of

federal policy as "loosely monitored and enforced" (p.3) in the 1960s, which eventually increased as the federal government recognized gaps in student success on a global scale. Federal initiatives such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Goals 2000: Educate America Act, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTTT), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) were examples of the government's attempts to address educational concerns. Additionally, Lomascolo (Chapter 2) highlights how the faults and flaws of past federal initiatives such as RTTT and NCLB increased attention and awareness to the condition of education.

The relationship between policy and research was one trend that sparked national attention to schools. The book discusses the contributions and limitations of the Coleman Report, the Jencks Report, A Nation at Risk, and other research that informed the federal government's commitment to increase its involvement in education. For example, the Coleman Report "supported what educators knew-there were disparities-but provided no solid plan for improving the situation," thus leaving many leaders from schools, districts, and states actively searching for school improvement efforts (p. 6). Lomalsco (Chapter 2) further argues that systematic and organizational approaches are needed to improve schools, and cannot be accomplished solely by federal mandates, funding, or penalties, which leads to the next theme, leadership characteristics within schools.

Theme 2: Leadership Characteristics in Schools

Although principals are "at the heart of learning" (p.123), they are not the sole contributor to school improvement efforts; instead, it is how they establish a collaborative approach amongst staff and build up staff. Koerber & Ritchie (Chapter 3) highlight professional learning communities (plc), distributed leadership, school improvement plans, and leadership behaviors as several foundational elements of school improvement reforms. Similarly, Kirk (Chapter 5) discusses the vital work of principals as relationship builders who establish a culture of shared leadership amongst teachers.

School leaders must not only collaborate with their campus but also district personnel. Oliver (Chapter 6) discusses leadership through districtwide school reform and district-level professionals. The author provides a framework for district staff to consider in their actions and intentionality with school-level staff, supporting the district's transformation into a culture of learning. District-level roles and responsibilities were not limited only to school personnel but were also evident in partnerships with colleges and universities.

Berry (Chapter 7) notes that partnerships between educator preparation programs and schools are necessary for researchers to stay up to date on educational trends. District-level staff can serve in adjunct

faculty roles that can allow for education candidates to learn from practitioner and researcher perspectives. Students in preparation programs can benefit from district and campus-level partnerships through internships that provide job-embedded practices, which can better prepare them for their field. Developing leaders who improve schools continues to be an interconnected effort amongst many stakeholders. The relationships that school staff and school leaders exhibit did not stop at the organizational level of schools and their partnerships with higher education institutions, but were also evident in the community context.

Theme 3: Students, Schools, and Community Context

An essential element the book includes is the role of school systems and school improvement in responding to marginalized students. In Chapter 1, Gaines introduced Brown v. Board of Education, emphasizing a "change in United States public schools which many systems were not prepared" (p. 1) due to the unconstitutional segregation of public schools. Next, generational poverty is discussed through President Johnson's War on Poverty, and the role of the US education system as a tool for escaping poverty is examined. Gaines (Chapter 1) further expands on the relationship between schools and communities by highlighting findings from the Jencks report on the role of family background and non-school environments on student achievement.

Martinez (Chapter 4) further expands on the need to understand school improvement and instructional leadership, with a focus on marginalized youth from diverse community backgrounds. This chapter adds an added layer of depth to the literature on school leadership because of its specific focus on marginalized students within school systems by highlighting how socioeconomic status, English Language Learners (ELL), race, at-risk identification, and students who receive special education services are served in relation to policy, instruction, and federal initiatives. Gaines (Chapter 8) further expands on the connection between schools in supporting students outside of instructional hours, partnering with the community the school serves, and developing meaningful relationships with families.

Overall, *Leadership for School Improvement* makes a substantial contribution to the field of school improvement and education research. The eight contributing authors show how school improvement involves multiple stakeholders, including policymakers at the federal level, educational practitioners within schools, and school districts and preparation programs, in connecting research with practice. The text serves as a foundational reading that is useful in education preparation programs that specifically focus on school leadership, school improvement, and education policy. This book is also beneficial to current educational practitioners and policymakers because it provides a knowledgeable foundation on trends in education and leadership approaches, of which they may be unaware.

References

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About the Reviewer



Lebon Daniel James III is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at Sam Houston State University and a former K-12 administrator with experience in elementary and secondary education across rural and urban settings. His research focuses on school leadership, organizational conditions, educator preparation, and the factors that influence school improvement and educator retention. Drawing on both practitioner and researcher perspectives, he examines how leadership decisions, workplace conditions, and contextual factors shape outcomes for students, teachers, and schools. Dr. James' scholarship has been published in a variety of educational outlets, including *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, Journal of Research on Leadership Education, The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, School Community Journal*, and *Education Week*. He supports educators, researchers, and school leaders in using evidence-informed practices to strengthen schools and improve educational outcomes.

About the Book Editor



Cherie Barnett Gaines is an Associate Professor with a demonstrated history of working in middle schools and the higher education industry. She is skilled in E-Learning, Educational Technology, Instructional Design, Public Speaking, and Curriculum Development. Lexis+ Proficiency Certified. Currently, she teachs in a doctoral program focusing on Qualitative Research, dissertation writing, and instructional leadership courses at Lincoln Memorial University. She holds an MS (Education) and an EdS from from Tennessee Technological University, and a PhD from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

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