

REFEREED ARTICLE

The Impact of Oral Dialogue on Educational Leadership Wellness and Practice

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Abstract

Research shows that oral dialogue has a positive impact on educational leadership wellness and practice. Having regular focused and informal conversations about educational issues and daily challenges is instrumental in reducing stress, anxiety, and emotional distress among educational leaders. However, diverse tensions related to personal and professional situations, along with the lack of conversational competence, can affect educational leaders' wellness and practice. This article presents solid elements that demonstrate how constructive dialogue, through oral conversations with open-ended inquiries to understand perspectives, can positively impact educational leaders' well-being and, consequently, their professional performance.

The etymology of the word *dialogue* derives from the Greek word *dialogos*. *Dia* means “through,” whereas *logos* translates to “word” or “meaning.” Oral dialogue is a flow of meaning or a multidirectional exchange of speech. It is a conversation between two or more persons sharing ideas and opinions. Language is what humans use to communicate their thoughts while interacting with others. Dialogue is the cornerstone of these interactions and education is the result of them, whereas culture is the historical identity of a group (Kramsch, 1998). The satisfaction I experienced through my dialogic interactions with students was the main reason for my decision to switch from being a lawyer to a teacher a long time ago. Through dialogic interactions with students, teachers, principals, and parents, as a teacher and later as a vice-principal I comprehended the importance of oral dialogue to ensure clear communication, facilitate the teaching-learning process, and improve wellness and practice. My open conversations with the school community about daily struggles helped to reduce our levels of stress and increased performance. This life-changing experience confirmed that a dialogic approach – the focused, informal, and regular conversations with open-ended questions to understand perspectives – can enhance wellness and practices. When leaders and school communities work together in dialogue, transformational education occurs (Freire, 1970). Expressing thoughts and feelings through words is a powerful asset to the teaching-learning process.

Educational leaders dwell in between tensions aroused from conflicts at home and work. Currently, symptoms of many emotional issues can be perceived among educational leaders (Dor-Haim, 2023). From chief executive officers to educational assistants, tensions and lack of conversational competence are factors for wellness and performance loss. Principals, teachers, and other educational leaders are immersed in a problem-solving environment. Educational leadership often involves emotionally complex policy discussions and political matters like protests and voting policies (Grosland & Roberts, 2021). These policies directly affect not only schools but also the interactions among educational leaders, school districts, school boards, and school communities. The stress and anxiety caused by the pressure to follow such policies, which sometimes do not address the reality of all school communities, and the lack of oral dialogue contribute to leaders' burnout (Grosland & Roberts, 2021). Educational leaders' wellness and practice can suffer when they cannot handle the emotional distress triggered by various tensions and do not talk about it (Doyle Fosco et al., 2023). Emotional distress without proper oral communication can negatively affect the wellness and practice of educational leaders.

While Allen et al. (2023) and Hartney et al. (2021) suggested that a dialogic approach has the potential to develop only educational leadership practice, I argue that a dialogic approach

also impacts educational leadership wellness. Practice development is a result of wellness development. When educational leaders have open conversations about everyday challenges through constructive dialogue, their practices are improved because emotional distress is reduced (Jones et al., 2021). The reduction of anxiety, stress, burnout, and other emotional distresses motivated by a dialogic approach, results in better performances. A healthy and safe workplace environment is connected to generative dialogue among educational leaders (Stelmach, 2020). Hence, a dialogic approach empowers educational leaders with wellness and practice improvement (Rodríguez et al., 2020). There is a direct relationship between a dialogic approach and better wellness and practices. Better performances result in better well-being, which is feasible due to the power of oral dialogue.

The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) through the Positive Leadership Theory is used to fulfill the main purpose of this article: to demonstrate the significant influence of dialogue on educational leadership wellness and practice. Through specific educational issues inquiries, all voices are heard, and the strong suits of people are always highlighted within a positive core that helps them feel safe and reach their highest potential (Singh et al., 2023). Therefore, the impact of oral dialogue on educational leadership wellness and practice study is divided into three distinct aspects: the importance of oral dialogue on educational leadership wellness and practice, the problems related to educational leadership emotional condition, and the relationship between oral dialogue and educational leadership wellness and practice.

Literature Review

Dialogue is the essence of any oral communication. The use of language is what makes it possible. Successful conversations occur through the power of dialogue because “solidarity requires true communication, and the concept by which such an educator is guided fears and proscribes communication. Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning” (Freire, 1970, p. 55). A balance between talking and listening is required when it comes to generating effective conversations (Headlee, 2017). Unfortunately, people do not listen to each other properly anymore (Goleman et al., 2013). Conversational competence has been an ignored expertise in the 21st century (Headlee, 2017). People prefer texting to talking.

When it comes to educational leaders’ relationships, building trust and listening with empathy are crucial to ensure a healthy, safe, and inclusive workplace environment. The best leaders know how to work through emotions because it is connected to having conversations with team members and openness to understand their perspectives and assumptions (Goleman et al., 2013). Oral dialogue is fundamental in these conversations due to its capacity to communicate ideas (Klein, 2017). The act of being truly heard and respected affects leaders’ emotional condition and professional performances.

Associate teachers and mentors are positively impacted by the dialogical mentoring approach and relationships are strengthened by authentic learning conversations, which stimulate critical thinking, extend understanding, and generate wellness (Jones et al., 2021). Dialogue and deep reflection of teachers on pedagogical content can improve their self-efficacy and wellness (Rodríguez et al., 2020). Thus, chief executive officers, directors, superintendents, consultants, coaches, mentors, counsellors, principals, vice-principals, teachers, professors, assistant professors, deans, and all educational leaders have their well-being and work impacted when they communicate through constructive oral dialogue.

The Problems Related to Educational Leaders’ Emotional Condition

Educational leaders are immersed in constant tensions at home and work. Coping with stress, anxiety, depression, panic syndrome, burnout, eating disorder, and insomnia among other emotional conditions, is quite challenging and daunting. The pandemic increased the

tensions experienced by educational leaders (Dor-Haim, 2023). The imperative use of new technologies and the overload of work journeys in education prompted resignations, including educational professionals who could not manage their emotions (Doyle Fosco et al., 2023). Some of these educational professionals did not have the appropriate support or dialogic approach to succeed. Educational leaders still struggle with numerous emotional issues driven by tensions that lead to performance and wellness deficits (Dor-Haim, 2023). Emotional issues negatively affect educational leaders' well-being and professional practice.

Educational policy discussions impact school communities and the interactions among educational leaders (Grosland & Roberts, 2021). The intense pressure to follow these policies affects curriculum outcomes and contributes to leadership burnout, stress, and anxiety (Grosland & Roberts, 2021). Principals are always busy with meetings, calls, emails, budgets, supervision, and appraisals. Similarly, teachers are busy planning, teaching, supporting, assessing, and managing classrooms. Directors, superintendents, principals, teachers, and other educational leaders dwell in a problem-solving workplace embedded in sheer tensity (Doyle Fosco et al., 2023). When they are not able to handle the emotional distress that such tensity provokes, there is an imbalance in their wellness and practices.

According to Headlee (2017), modern society has not valued conversational competence to the extent it deserves; hence, personal and professional conversations are often perceived as promotional opportunities where no one intends to learn from the other. Most educational leaders listen with the intent to reply, not to understand (Adams et al., 2019). As a result, this lack of generative oral dialogue is another factor for emotional problems and productivity decline.

The Relationship

Between Oral Dialogue and Educational Leadership Wellness and Practice

Dialogue is the flow of words in conversations. Educational leaders should be active listeners for more efficient communication (Klein, 2017). Opportunities for generative oral dialogue play a solid role in ensuring educational leadership performance improvement (Hartney et al., 2021). Additionally, using a dialogic approach and critical pedagogy empowers educational leaders to achieve better practice results (Allen et al., 2023). On that account, dialogue personifies improvement in educational leaders' professional performances because it is intrinsically connected to clear communication, which is important in all relationships.

Dialogue also personifies educational leaders' wellness improvement because "when mentors are fully invested in the dialogic process the associate teachers experienced less anxiety when they were observed teaching and formed supportive relationships that allowed them to take risks in the classroom" (Jones et al., 2021, p. 10). Providing teachers, professors, and other educational leaders with focused, informal, and regular conversations with open-ended inquiries grants them a more in-depth understanding of the school environment and issues. Hence, "drawing on dialogic speech, participants in the seminar can understand the contributions of the previous research in teaching and related learning fields, providing them with key information to understand current school problems, school performance, and learning outcomes" (Rodríguez et al., 2020, p. 7). Providing opportunities for open conversations through oral dialogue is vital to comprehending educational issues, finding potential solutions, and reducing emotional distress.

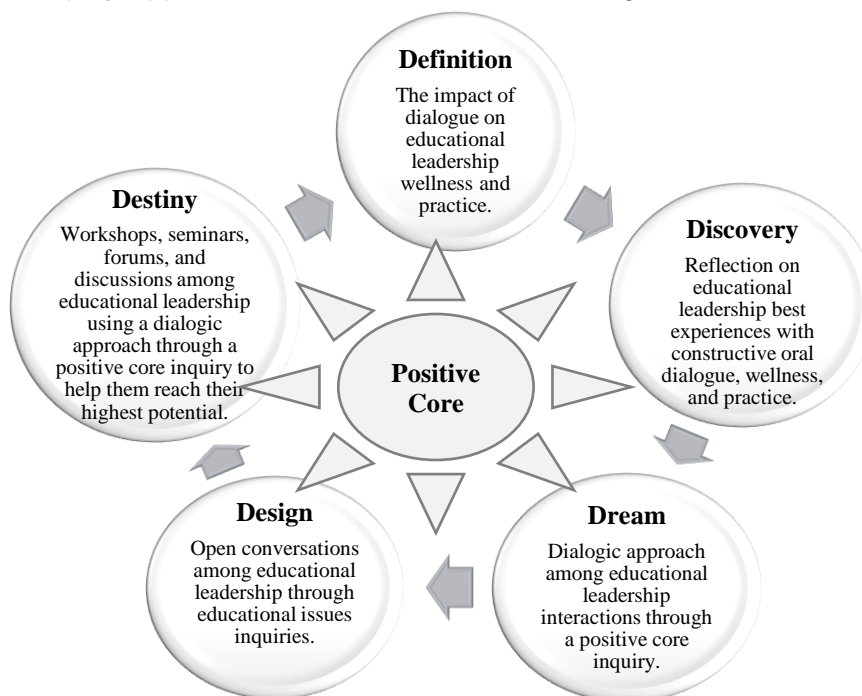
Stelmach (2020) highlighted that generative oral dialogue is a process of deliberate conversations among school leaders, focusing on learning. Dialogue implies listening with empathy and learning from another person. When educational leaders are provided with open conversations about educational issues and challenges, there is a consistent enhancement in their well-being because their voices are heard (Goleman et al., 2013). Therefore, firstly, their emotional condition is balanced and, consequently, their performances are boosted.

The Positive Leadership Theory

David Cooperrider developed the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach which belongs to the Positive Leadership Theory, representing a shift from individualistic and weakness-focused leadership to relational-dialogical and strength-focused leadership (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2011). When it comes to effective motivation, people sharing their stories and images of success makes the entire difference in an organization's development (Carr-Stewart & Walker, 2003). AI focuses on leveraging an organization's positive core strengths, eliminating authoritarian attitudes and promoting collaborative attitudes for an efficient and sustainable future (Whitney et al., 2010). It is a revolutionary method of change management that is implemented using the 5D Cycle: Definition, Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny through a positive core. The 5D Cycle regarding the impact of oral dialogue on educational leadership wellness and practice is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Appreciative Inquiry Approach and Constructive Oral Dialogue



Note: The 5D Cycle is in the order demonstrated in the text.

AI initiatives are based on the 5D Cycle through a positive core that irradiates resonance throughout the cycle like the sun in the solar system. Educational leaders are led to reflect on their best experiences with constructive dialogue and how that impacted their wellness and practice. A dialogic approach is used to conduct these interactions among educational leaders. Open conversations related to daily challenges and educational issues inquiries are provided through regular workshops, seminars, forums, and discussions among educational leaders using constructive oral dialogue. Through specific educational issues inquiries, all voices are heard, and the strong suits of people are highlighted within a positive foundation that helps them

reach their highest potential (Singh et al., 2023). AI is related to the dialogic approach and its capacity to positively impact, first, educational leaders' wellness and, second, their practice.

Educational leaders can perform well with imbalanced emotional conditions. However, such good performance is temporary. Sooner or later educational leaders will not be able to control their emotions anymore, affecting their professional practices (Goleman et al., 2013). On that account, a dialogic approach through informal and regular conversations among educational leaders is essential to promote better well-being and performance.

As previously mentioned, when educational leaders can discuss educational issues and challenges together, potential solutions are found, their voices are heard, and the feeling of belonging is achieved. Also, trust is built when educational leaders listen to each other with empathy (Headlee, 2017). Consequently, their emotional condition is enhanced, which is directly reflected in their practices. Thus, AI embodies a dialogic approach through a positive core that makes oral conversations about challenging topics achievable (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2011). Allowing educational leaders to voice concerns is a means of demonstrating that their wellness is as vital as their performance since they are intercorrelated and interdependent status.

Discussion and Recommendations

The dialogic approach positively impacts educational leadership wellness and practice. Having open conversations regarding educational issues and difficulties from a positive lens is proven to reduce stress, anxiety, and emotional distress among educational leaders (Jones et al., 2021). This reduction of emotional distress generated by constructive oral dialogue echoes educational leadership professional development (Allen et al., 2023). Thus, a relationship exists between oral dialogue and educational leaders' wellness and practice.

Building trust and listening with empathy are imperative when it comes to establishing a safe, inclusive, and healthy workplace environment (Goleman et al., 2013). The dialogic approach is what makes oral communication sustainable among chief executive officers, superintendents, principals, teachers, and the whole educational leaders. Constant discussions, seminars, workshops, and forums about challenges faced by educational leaders are vital for a reflection upon their professional practices and, especially, on their well-being.

Educational leadership wellness and practice are both affected by the power of oral dialogue. Nonetheless, educational leaders' wellness is affected first and their practice second (Rodríguez et al., 2020). Educational leadership practice enhancement is an immediate consequence of a harmonized emotional condition perceived as wellness. The more stable the emotional conditions are, the more proactive educational leaders are (Goleman et al., 2013). This means that balanced emotional conditions have a primal relationship with productivity. There is a proportional connection between them.

Generative oral dialogue is the cornerstone of emotional and professional growth (Stelmach, 2020). When educational leaders feel heard and respected, there is a shift in their emotional condition. They feel comfortable expressing their thoughts related to delicate issues because there is a positive atmosphere that highlights their strengths, not their weaknesses (Whitney et al., 2010). In this way, educational leaders seek responses to daily challenges together as a group, not individually. Appreciative Inquiry and constructive oral dialogue make this viable. Hence, I agree with Doyle Fosco et al. (2023) that educational leaders deal with many tensions and demands at home and work, negatively influencing their emotional conditions. I also agree with Headlee (2017) that conversational competence is necessary to ensure clear communication. Stable emotional conditions are an outcome of conversational competence.

As reported by Freire (1970), constructive dialogue is what makes human interactions truly meaningful. That is why open and authentic oral dialogue among educational leaders generates better well-being and performance (Klein, 2017). Adams et al. (2019) affirmed that the power of

generative dialogue lies in social, emotional, and professional development. The dialogic approach engenders better well-being conditions in educational leadership and, as a result, better practices.

Dialogue positively impacts wellness and practice not only for educational leaders but also for informal and formal leaders of other fields because of the deep relationship between the dialogic approach and well-being and professional improvement. When educational leaders receive opportunities to express their ideas about daily challenges and educational issues through constructive oral dialogue, from a positive perspective, there is an enhancement in their wellness and, consequently, in their professional performances. Some challenges are the lack of funds from school districts or divisions for promoting specific workshops, seminars, forums, and discussions; the prioritization of a dialogic approach in educational leaders' relationships; and the fear of showing vulnerabilities of educational leadership. However, such boundaries are mitigated when school districts or divisions, professors, deans, principals, teachers, and other educational leaders cooperate to increase their own wellness and practice through a dialogic approach embedded in trust and listening with empathy, always focussing on their strengths.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates the extent of the impact of oral dialogue on educational leadership wellness and practice, regarding the causal factors of educational leadership emotional condition and performance imbalance: various tensions aroused from home and work, and lack of conversational competence. Educational leaders must be provided with opportunities to have open conversations related to educational issues and challenges through a positive core that makes them feel comfortable enough to seek potential solutions to daunting educational inquiries. Oral dialogue plays an important role in developing educational leaders' wellness and professional practices through building trust and listening with empathy. On that account, knowing why there is a lack of balance in educational leaders' emotional and professional conditions is vital to understanding how educational leadership well-being and performance are associated with the use of a dialogic approach.

When it comes to managing emotional distress, it is easier for educational leaders to deal with diversified tensions at home and work within a constructive oral dialogue environment, where conversational competence is properly valued. The dialogic approach through a positive foundation resonates with harmony in educational leaders' relationships. This resonance brings balance to educational leadership emotional conditions. As a result, their professional practices are enhanced. This is feasible due to the power of dialogue, to the flow of meaningful words in conversations. For these reasons, educational leaders will benefit from focusing on their strengths, enhancing their wellness and practice through a dialogic approach encapsulated in a positive atmosphere. Oral dialogue firstly impacts educational leaders' emotional conditions and secondly their professional performances. There is a shift from finding solutions individually to a collaborative perspective where weaknesses are not ignored but strengths are positively emphasized. Enhancement in educational leaders' wellness and practice benefits the entire educational system.

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About the Author

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