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**Leading at the Intersections:
Reflections from a Multi-Track Journey**

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Leading at the Intersections: Reflections from a Multi-Track Journey

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A Leadership Life in Four Tracks

Years ago, I came across an article in the Harvard Business Review titled “Why You Should Have (at Least) Two Careers.” Kabir Sehgal argued that cultivating more than one professional identity can deepen clarity, creativity, and resilience. That insight helped me reframe my own path - I wasn’t splintering my focus; I was building coherence. Over time, four distinct yet connected tracks emerged - not as separate roles, but as an integrated model of leadership shaped by purpose, relationships, and responsiveness.

Today’s urban educational leadership demands more than operational expertise or positional authority. It calls for adaptability, a commitment to equity, and a willingness to lead across boundaries of role, system, and identity. Over the course of my career, I’ve come to understand leadership not as a single lane but as a constellation of interconnected commitments that inform, stretch, and sustain one another; what I’ve



come to call “multi-track leadership,” shaped by my experiences across four professional domains: system-level instructional leadership, educator preparation, advocacy, and public thought leadership. Each role emerged not from a master plan but from a series of questions, needs, and opportunities that invited me to lead in new ways.

Today, I lead across these four domains. I support schools and districts as a system-level instructional leader. I teach and mentor aspiring educators in graduate programs. I advocate for underrepresented educators and multilingual learners. And I contribute to public discourse through writing and reflection. These are not separate careers; they are extensions of the same core commitment: to lead with purpose, responsiveness, and care.

Must every leader follow these exact tracks to be effective? Not at all. Rather, I offer my experience as one example of how leadership can evolve over time, shaped by values, community, and opportunity. Your leadership journey may take different forms, and the key is to remain open to where you are most needed and where your work can have the greatest impact. Let’s look at each track in more depth.

Track One: Instructional and System Leadership

Like many educators, my journey began in the classroom, teaching in an urban school system, immersing myself in curriculum, assessment, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Early on, I also contributed to curriculum and test development projects, which deepened my understanding of how system-level decisions influence student access and equity.

Work in an evening high school program serving overage and under-credited students further shaped my leadership perspective. It became clear how traditional structures can fail those who need more support. When an administrative opportunity arose, I stepped into leadership, eager to build systems that better serve both students and staff.

Over time, the path led from assistant principal to principal, and eventually to my current full-time role at the district level. In this capacity, I support schools with instructional coaching and planning, conduct audits, and guide school improvement efforts. What grounds me in every facet of this work is the conviction that instructional leadership, rooted in student learning, teacher development, and equity that drives meaningful and lasting school transformation.



Track Two: Teaching and Mentorship

My second track centers on higher education and educator preparation. Over the years, I've taught a range of graduate-level courses in leadership, supervision, curriculum design, research, and instructional methods for adolescent learners. These include topics such as instructional leadership, data literacy, equity-focused curriculum development, and the use of research to inform educational change. In addition to teaching, I serve as a fieldwork and dissertation mentor, supporting emerging leaders and educators as they develop their practice in real-world contexts. Whether I'm reviewing a capstone project or facilitating a seminar on adaptive leadership, I see this work as a partnership grounded in reflection, growth, and purpose.

I am also a strong advocate for college and career readiness, including pathways such as the Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) credential in New York State. These align closely with the Portrait of a Graduate framework, which encourages schools to prepare students not only academically, but also personally and professionally.

In my leadership courses, we now also explore how AI can be used to streamline school operations, support instructional planning, and improve communication, while weighing the ethical implications for students, particularly multilingual learners. These discussions equip future leaders to navigate complex and evolving educational systems with clarity and care. This work matters because the quality of our schools tomorrow depends on the preparation, values, and imagination of the educators and leaders we invest in today.

Track Three: Advocacy and Representation

Union work has always felt deeply personal to me because I've seen how critical it is to the well-being of our schools. When we support and empower school leaders, we strengthen the entire school community. As President of the Asian American Association of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (A3 of CSA), I support the advancement, visibility, and empowerment of Asian American educators.

Through A3, I've had the opportunity to advocate not only for individual colleagues but also for the shared conditions that enable all of us to lead with integrity, equity, and purpose. A3 exists to unite and strengthen Asian American school leaders through strategic networks, mentorship, and professional learning opportunities. Our mission is to build community, foster pathways to success, and promote inclusive policies that elevate AAPI voices while championing multilingual learners.

As President of A3, I've had the privilege of working with a passionate team of leaders, hosting leadership panels that spotlight AAPI principals and district leaders, creating professional learning experiences that center equity and culturally responsive leadership, building a mentorship network for aspiring Asian American administrators, and advising on curriculum efforts that include and reflect AAPI histories, voices, and contributions.

This work is both professional and personal. As an AAPI educator, I understand how powerful it is to see your identity reflected - and how isolating it can feel when it is not. At A3, we strive to ensure that Asian American leaders are not only represented but also supported, celebrated, and connected. By building that visibility and community, we help dismantle stereotypes and widen the pathway for others to lead with confidence and purpose.



Track Four: Public Thought Leadership

The fourth track is a newer venture centered on public writing and reflection. I write for journals, blogs, and professional outlets, and I share short reflections through my Class Talk series on LinkedIn. I explore instructional leadership, trust, equity, AI, and the hidden demands of school leadership.

Writing helps me reflect and connect. I don't offer easy answers but I bring to the surface questions that matter and pay forward the mentorship I've received. This public work sharpens my practice and connects me to a broader community committed to transparent, purpose-driven leadership.



These four tracks are deeply interconnected. My district work informs my teaching. My advocacy shapes how I coach and mentor. My writing helps me synthesize and share ideas. When one lane is heavy, another offers perspective and energy. This kind of leadership calls for perspective and adaptability. Leadership scholar Ron Heifetz reminds us of the importance of stepping onto the “balcony” - creating distance from the day-to-day action to see patterns, relationships, and deeper challenges more clearly. While technical work solves known problems, adaptive leadership invites us to rethink assumptions, shift mindsets, and grow alongside our communities.

Multi-track leadership is not about doing more; it is about doing work aligned with values, requiring boundaries, reflection, and discipline - and offering renewal, clarity, and deeper impact.

The Way Forward

Many aspiring leaders assume leadership begins only after a title is earned. In truth, impactful leaders start leading well before holding formal authority. In a previous piece, “Leading at the Intersections”, I shared how my multi-track journey shaped my growth across instruction, advocacy, and mentorship. In this piece, I turn to the aspiring leader and share how leadership can begin early - grounded in three key principles: Curiosity over Control, Contribution over Credit, and Coherence over Chaos.



Curiosity over Control

Great leaders don't need to have all the answers. They need to ask the right questions. Curiosity over Control means approaching new situations with an open mind, a learner's stance, and a willingness to step into the unknown. When I was asked to support a literacy initiative across multiple grade levels, the curriculum was still in development and the intended outcomes were only loosely defined. Rather than wait for a perfect plan, I began by asking questions, gathering input from teachers, and focusing on small, achievable steps. That process of learning my way forward ultimately taught me more about systems change than any formal training ever had. Especially in today's fast-changing school environments, this mindset allows leaders to adapt and lead with humility, not just expertise. It's also why I prioritize professional learning experiences that spark curiosity, because staying curious keeps leaders responsive, reflective, and ready to grow.



Contribution over Credit

Early leadership work often happens out of the spotlight: in committee meetings, hallway conversations, and quiet moments of support. Contribution over Credit is the commitment to serve the mission, not your résumé. It's about showing up consistently, helping the team move forward, and putting student success ahead of personal recognition. Often, it's these moments of quiet contribution that help establish credibility, forge relationships, and build momentum for lasting change. I've seen students lead major initiatives with no title - simply because they stepped in where there was a need and followed through with care and consistency.



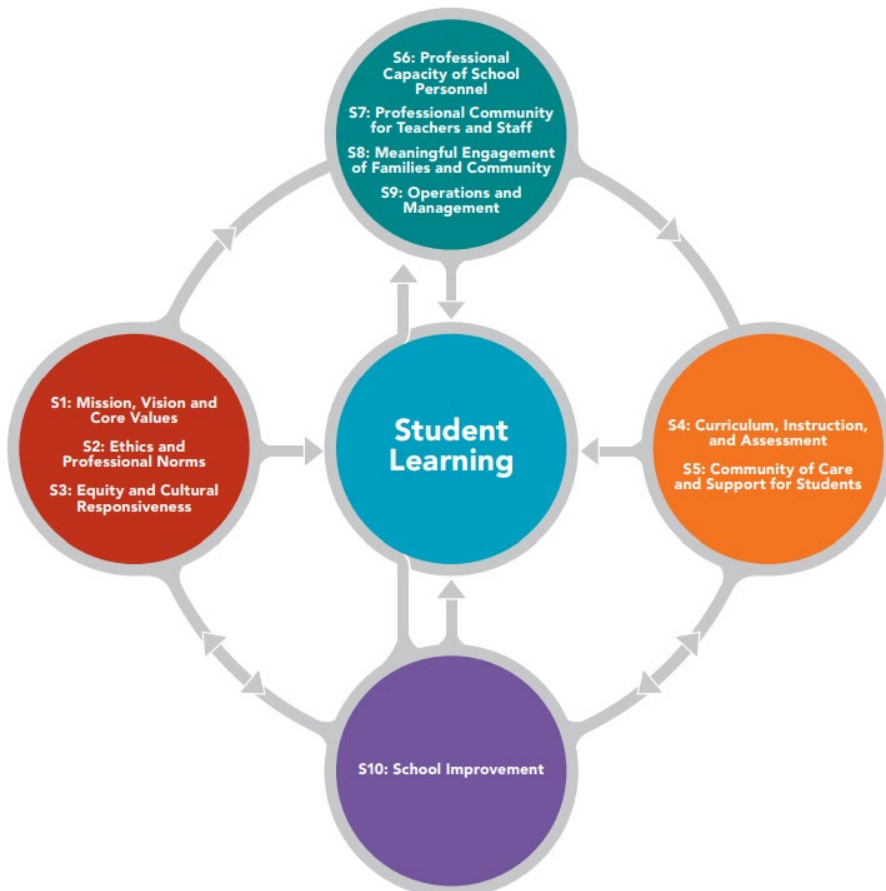
Coherence over Chaos

When everything feels urgent, purposeful leaders learn to prioritize. Coherence over Chaos means aligning your time and energy with what matters most - your values, your goals, and your vision for equity and impact. It also means letting go of roles or commitments that no longer serve your development. I once volunteered to reorganize the book depository at my old high school and help with departmental computer inventory. While those tasks weren't without value, I later had to ask myself whether they aligned with my goals. Part of growing as a leader is learning not just what to take on, but what to release. Over time, discernment becomes just as important as dedication.

Lead from Where You Are

A student once shared a curriculum-writing opportunity for the Office of Food and Nutrition. I encouraged others to consider it - not just for the compensation, but because it offered collaboration, experience, and insight into an overlooked department. Informal roles like these often shape a trajectory long before a title does. Another student asked me, “How do I know if something is worth saying yes to?” I encouraged them to go back to the three principles. Does it spark your curiosity? Does it allow you to contribute your voice and skills? Does it align with your goals and growth? If it checks even one of these boxes, it may be worth exploring.

To help students develop this kind of discernment, I often recommend a gap analysis using the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). It’s a reflective process that reveals where you’re already strong and where you still need to grow. The goal isn’t to check off boxes, but to act with intention - to focus on learning, not just doing. Leadership is less about having a roadmap and more about navigating with clarity and purpose, wherever you happen to start.



Some of the most meaningful growth in my own journey came from stepping into spaces that were overlooked or undefined. I joined committees on curriculum revisions, testing logistics, and school programming. I served as a testing coordinator. I wrote PD plans. I worked on affinity groups and led mentorship efforts. I contributed to projects I didn't design but was proud to advance. These weren't glamorous tasks, but they deepened my knowledge of pedagogy, systems, operations, collaboration, and equity.

These efforts didn't lead immediately to promotions or titles, but they positioned me to lead from day one when opportunities came. And that's the key - what you do now is what prepares you for what comes next. You don't need to wait for a job to start leading. You need to look for where your skills and values intersect with real needs. When you act with purpose, leadership will follow.

Final Thought: Grow with Intention, Not Anxiety



Not everyone will land a leadership role right away. The landscape is competitive, but what you do in the meantime still matters. Informal leadership, coalition building, and strategic contributions are how you grow into the leader you hope to become. Don't wait to be asked. Don't stop because you haven't yet arrived.



One of the best pieces of advice I ever received was this: "Don't worry whether what you're doing yields immediate results. If it promotes your growth, it's worth doing." Multi-track leadership isn't about doing everything. It's about leading with curiosity, contributing with purpose, and choosing with coherence. Every role teaches you something. Keep asking where you're most needed - and how you can grow to meet that moment. If you ask that question often and act on the answers, you're already leading.

If you are early in your leadership journey or seeking what comes next, consider that leadership may not always be linear. Powerful growth often comes from stepping outward - joining working groups, mentoring peers, publishing reflections, or attending conferences. You don't need multiple titles to lead in multiple tracks. You need curiosity, conviction, and the courage to ask the question: Where am I needed most?



Dr. Andy Szeto currently serves as an Education Administrator for the New York City Public Schools, where he focuses on academic policy and performance for overage and under-credited students. Additionally, he is an adjunct assistant professor specializing in educational leadership, teacher education, TESOL, and adult education at multiple colleges in the NYC metropolitan area. Previously, Andy was a school leader within NYC Public Schools, where he led initiatives to improve instructional practices and student outcomes, with a focus on meeting the needs of diverse and historically underserved student populations.  

Legacy is the official journal of The Worthy Educator, elevating the good work being done by leaders in education who are working to change the narrative on the profession and actively plan for impact that transforms its future to serve the needs of a diverse, decentralized, global society that is inclusive, equitable and open to all people as next generations adapt, evolve and contribute by solving problems and creating solutions that meet the needs of a world we have yet to envision.

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