

The Lives and Careers of Generation X Leaders in London, New York City, And Toronto: Examining Career Trajectories and Future Aspirations

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Our ESRC-funded, three-year Global City Leaders study aims to develop a preliminary understanding of the emerging Generation X (GenX) school leaders by examining their career trajectories (Gronn, 1999), professional identity formation (Busher, 2005; Luhrmann and Eberl, 2007), and their own perceptions of the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender on their experience and work.

This paper draws on evidence from individual semi-structure interviews and career mapping exercises from over 60 principals and vice-principals in New York City, London, and Toronto. More specifically, we examine the career trajectories of our GenX leader participants to identify within- and between-city patterns and trends related to leadership experiences, moves between/within organizations, mentoring, training and development, and defining moments. We also examine how leaders are planning forward and where they believe they will be in five to ten years' time.

The findings presented in this paper identify several key trends that point to stark differences between leadership career developments across the three cities. In North America, leaders are more likely to identify their leadership opportunities at an earlier age than in the UK. UK leaders are more likely to identify only formal leadership posts as developmental, whereas North American leaders have experienced both formal and informal roles as influential. The role of mentors is clearly identified across all three cities; however, informal mentors are by far the most influential in terms of succession-planning and career development. Finally, there are stark differences between where leaders see themselves in the near and more long-term future. Almost all leaders intend to remain within education across all three cities. However, in New York City and London, the majority of leaders foresee leaving their school-level roles within the next five years.

The evidence from this research has significant implications for policy and practice, and this paper builds a policy and practice-relevant model of Young Global City Leadership. This paper will of interest to academics, policymakers, and practitioners interested in the current and future career progression of GenX leaders and the implications for city-based education systems.