

Book Reviews

John MacBeath and Nigel Dempster (Eds.). (2009). *Connecting Leadership and Learning. Principles for practice*. London. Routledge. ISBN 10: 0-415-45295-3 (pbk.) 194 pp.

“Leaders lead and children learn, it’s as simple as that” is the opening statement to this edited book. Essentially this book is about learning, leadership and their interrelationship: what it means to lead schools. It also explores key principles for practice in respect of commitment to leading learning.

Emeritus Professor John MacBeath OBE is well known internationally for his research and consultancy in the field of educational leadership. He has worked extensively with the OECD, UNESCO and the European Commission and as an advisor to policy makers in Hong Kong on school self-evaluation and inspection. Adjunct Professor Neil Dempster has a long standing reputation in leadership for learning, school governance, school improvement, professional development to support leadership, policy implementation and institutional change.

The first three chapters review what we already know about learning, school leadership, and how these two aspects influence each other. This provides the background to the presentation of the ‘Leadership for Learning Project’. The project was based on identifying shared understandings of how leadership for learning played out in the classrooms of 24 schools, in eight cities, across seven countries, The findings from this project are presented in chapters four to eleven.

In Chapter Four, Joanne Waterhouse and Neil Dempster engage in the cultural and political differences of how leadership and learning are interconnected. They tease out the strands between learning and leadership in order to find some comparable baseline for practice. All the schools in the project endorsed the centrality of learning, leadership and the links between them (p. 63). Learning therefore is seen as social rather than an individual activity

In the following chapters the process which generated the principles of practice are revealed. In Chapter Five, David Frost presents: “Researching the connections, developing a methodology”. In any project, challenges are a given, and one can only imagine the diverse and complex nature of finding common language and agreed conventions of 24 schools spread over seven countries and eight cities. Frost discusses this challenge respectfully in order to develop a methodology that captures features such as, federalist, eclectic, emergent, practice-focused and educative – with a clear explanation of each. Frost introduces the five seminal principles that represent and encapsulate what the project identified in leadership for learning that would be of practical use as well as theoretical interest:

1. A focus on learning
2. An environment for learning
3. A learning dialogue
4. Shared leadership
5. Accountability – internal and external.

These principles point toward common strands which identify the need for self-evaluations, and processes of inquiry (not prescribed by governments but arising from a need to reflect on and reframe current practice). Seven years on since this book was published, schools are currently engaging in these principles. We are still reminded of the global pressures that bear down on fundamental concepts such as leadership and learning, but we need to be cognisant of the “need to continue to think creatively about ways in

which researchers and practitioners can collaborate to create professional knowledge that has meaning internationally as well as in our own schools and classrooms” (p. 72).

In Chapters Six to Ten, MacBeath and Dempster have structured discussions based on the five principles, with each chapter raising pertinent questions that are still relevant for school leadership, teachers and students today. Some of these questions are focused on the environment for learning and include student voice, as well as teachers and parents. The view of all the writers in this book is to draw the school students into a leadership for learning partnership to enhance their learning environment and their sense of belonging to it. With the dialogue presented from the data of each of the project schools, and the questions posed that accompany each of the key principles, I am drawn to thoughts of the latest government initiative: Communities of Schools (MoE, 2015). If learning pathways are to bring together communities of learning then the process identified particularly in Principle 3 – A Learning Dialogue - is extremely relevant for review in today’s changing climate:

1. Cross boundary comparisons of data and practice;
2. Face-to-face inter-school exchanges;
3. Virtual inter-school exchanges using internet tools;
4. Using the leadership for learning principles as an agenda for dialogue;
5. Employing questions derived from the principles as evaluative tools;
6. Analysing assumptions against practice; and
7. Engaging ‘critical friends’ and researchers for outside views (p. 118).

In Chapter Eleven, “Leaving a Legacy”, Frost, MacBeath and Møller defend the Leadership for Learning Project and insist that, “the legacy of the project was not just a set of insights and recommendations rather it can be characterised as a set of intellectual and practical tools to help people fashion their own discourse” (p. 157). Their vision for the project was to influence policy and practice and to build capacity for leading learning at school and inter-school level. The tools they argue draw on Engeström’s (1999) activity theory as a way of explaining the socio-cultural world in which to pursue our aspirations through the use of ‘mediating artefacts’.

The five key principles for practice are presented in this book as a framework for a wide range of discursive activities such as reviewing practice, consulting colleagues, students and other stakeholders or identifying priorities for development. In the final chapter these are summed up toward a practical theory.

Chapter Twelve is written by the editors, Dempster and MacBeath. They define the features of leadership for learning; describe the principles and questions for the self evaluating school, and consider the implications for policy. Leadership for Learning they declare is qualitatively different from other kinds of leadership. They further add that, “practical theory provides the means for new learning in new contexts with new people always with a view to the moral purpose of education – enhancing the lives of learners” (p. 183).

This book is worthy of being read by the discerning leader concerned and actively involved in leading for learning. There is much to learn from the findings of Leading for Learning Project. The book is well paced, and easy to read, and the examples provided are clear and relevant. It would be helpful to read a follow up from this project and to find out how well the five principles enhanced the lives of the learners in their schools.

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Ann R.J. Briggs, Marianne Coleman and Marlene Morrison (Eds.). (2012). *Research Methods in Educational Leadership & Management* (3rd edn.). London: Sage Publications. ISBN 978-1-4462-0044-5 (pbk.) 432 pp.

When I was completing my doctoral thesis in 2013, I received this book as a gift from my supervisor to help me in the final stages of my writing. I wish I had had it at the start of my doctoral journey rather than at the end. This book is clear and easy to read, with each chapter and each section providing a sequential pathway.

This is the third edition, and it expands on the research approaches of earlier versions and invites a broad range of researchers to discuss their experiences in the use of their specific research approach. With the meticulous presentation and structure of the book, it is easy to see why it is a valued resource for Masters and Doctoral students and used as a core text in many United Kingdom and Canadian universities. Ann Briggs – a longstanding friend of NZEALS - and her fellow editors Marianne Coleman and Marlene Morrison are all regular contributors to the discipline of educational leadership.

The editors have sought a wide range of authors to strengthen the international focus of comparatives that concern educational leaders in areas such as school achievement and the interplay of policy and practice. Specifically, this book was written to address the needs of researchers in educational leadership and management. However, it also addresses broader social science topics of research design, grounded research, ethnography and mixed methods, and as a resource, the contributing authors have captured a diverse range of impressive voices to present a rich range of methodologies to be used when studying in educational settings.

Each chapter presents key objectives and finishes with reflections and questions as well as recommended further reading. Chapter One quickly engages the reader/researcher to understand and clarify what constitutes educational leadership research and why it is important. Educational leadership and management research is not without its challenges. Challenges offer researchers likely areas to investigate further – such as the links between leadership and student achievement, teacher learning and development and the impact on student achievement. This book enables such research by offering a wide range of possible purposes and approaches when considering research design and choosing the appropriate research tools. The book is in four sections: the concept of research; approaches to research; research tools, and analysing and presenting data.

Part A: The Concept of Research

Here, the reader/researcher is asked to explore the wider questions which underpin any choice of research approach and research tool. We are guided toward an understanding of ‘methodology’ and become familiar with the concepts of ontology, epistemologies, and paradigms in order to “knowingly choose the methodological approach which best fits their research study” (p. 14). I appreciate the authors’ suggestion that research paradigms will challenge us to think about the nature of knowledge and being, and its relationship to methodological issues and that these challenges will constantly occupy our minds as researchers.

The reader/researcher is also encouraged to take a critical stance and is exposed briefly to some of the stances that have been employed in educational leadership and management studies. These include postmodernist, critical race-related, feminist, queer and postcolonial concepts and tenets. In this section our minds are further opened and are taken deeper into the areas of culture, authenticity, reviewing educational literature and ethics. These notions lead us to consider more deeply the nature and purpose of our research, the importance of its context, in order to provide authentic, ethical research. This section is purposefully presented to guide the reader/researcher to a point where we consider the type of research we are to undertake. Only then do the muddied waters begin to clear as our research focus becomes more acute and we can begin to frame research questions and start looking at the different approaches to research.

Part B: Approaches to Research

In this section, research design, frameworks, strategies, and methods of collecting data are presented. In Part A we looked at the philosophical, ethical and conceptual foundations to research, and now the editors expand the discussion to research approaches such as: mixed methods, surveys and sampling, case studies, practitioner research, grounded theory research, ethnography, narrative and life history, and learner voice in educational leadership research. With a wide range of methodological approaches to research explored, the reader is well placed to move to the design of their research project. able to appropriate the right research tool to be employed in order to collect rich, and meaningful data.

Part C: Research Tools

In this section, the six chapters discuss: interviews, developing and using questionnaires, making use of existing data, documents and documentary analysis, discourse analysis and reflection as research, and using diaries and blogs. Templates and examples are provided to model and explain the use of specific research tools. Once data have been collected, this book then provides a guide toward data analysis, presentation and the dissemination of the research.

Part D: Analysing and Presenting Data

The last four chapters provide examples of analysis from a range of research, such as: using SPSS and NVivo for quantitative and qualitative data analysis, and using advanced quantitative data analyses such as statistical modelling in leadership research. The fourth and final chapter of the book focuses on the practitioner and student researcher to consider the nature of academic writing and the writing process itself. Writing is linked with the process of analysis and the author offers examples of conceptual modelling to illustrate her point. In this final chapter, we are urged to consider the ways we disseminate our findings as a means to share and publish our research, so that we might all grow and gain practical insight within the community of educational leadership and management.

Conclusion

This book is arranged to meet the needs of Masters and Doctoral students and practitioner researchers, and is a 'must have' for anyone conducting research in educational leadership. I especially like the additional website materials which can be found on the SAGE Publications website:

<https://au.sagepub.com/en-gb/oce/research-methods-in-educational-leadership-and-management/book236072#resources>

The authors and the editors of this book are well regarded in the field of educational leadership and are committed to building the knowledge base of expertise in their field. Finally, I thoroughly enjoyed this book, which reached its target audience through intelligent and intellectual conversations from the various authors.

Dr Fiona McGrath

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