

Lumby, J., & Coleman, M. (2016). *Leading for equality: Making schools fairer*. London: Sage publications. Pages: 214. ISBN: 1473916291

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The book *Leading for Equality: Making Schools Fairer* is remarkably crafted as a resource for any practitioner who endeavours to provide equal education opportunities for all learners. The authors, Lumby and Coleman, target school leaders, but they delimit the role to cover head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, department and subject heads, as well as teachers and learners. The authors arguably use *equality*, a word that is construed in many contexts as *sameness*, as an abbreviation for ideas related to equity, inclusion, diversity, and social justice. The book is pragmatic to an extent where the authors invite their audience to think through pertinent practice-based aspects of education relating to equity, inclusion, diversity, and social justice and connect them to how learners are perceived and how their needs are met. Lumby and Coleman specifically cover socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, migrant children, special learning needs, disability, and equity. They engage readers by including key actions resulting from the discussions of each topic, questions to guide reflection, and additional readings on the topic.

The authors differentiate the topic of equality into 13 chapters, subdivided into three sections of the book. They use the first five chapters to discuss the context within which inequality happens. This section is followed by the larger portion of the text where Lumby and Coleman engage the audience in discussing ways of addressing inequality, covering each of the following areas as a chapters: socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, migrant children, special learning needs, disability, and equity. The last chapter, which is the third section of the book, “draws together the threads for action” (Lumby & Coleman, 2016, p. 167).

The authors start by acknowledging that inequality in education is an issue for both developing and developed economies in the 21st century. They use the biblical analogy of *the Matthew effect*, the ideal that “those who have most can use it to get more,” to illustrate how education systems remain unfair, and that the transformational power of education is less likely to be experienced in the lives of children from minority groups (Lumby & Coleman, 2016, p. 4). The discussion is extended to the adults in these minority groups, posing that these adults are less likely to have access to leadership positions.

While stating the purpose of the book, the authors acknowledge the commitment of schools to mitigating inequality, but are of the opinion that schools in general do not articulate their goal coherently. Therefore, an overarching purpose of the book is to help schools to clarify their goals and find alternative approaches to developing equitable practices. The authors admit that there is no definitive answer to the inequality question (the Matthew effect) and offer a challenge to their audience to find ways of weakening the catastrophic results of inequity in places of practice such as classrooms, schools, clusters of schools, and school districts. The authors use examples from school practice in the United Kingdom (UK) to discuss the various characteristics of inequality with the suggestion that these examples are relevant to other parts of the world.

In the first chapter, *Ideas and Policy Context*, the authors use cases from schools in the UK to provide the ideological and policy context within which advocates of equality work. They paint a picture of an unclear understanding of fairness and a misguided tendency among practitioners to use past experience to resolve inequality. According to the authors, using past experience perpetuates past practices that have

resulted in inequalities. Lumby and Coleman emphasize the need for leaders to have an understanding of how inequality manifests, and the part leaders play in such manifestation. With this understanding leaders should clarify their values and actions towards achieving equality. The authors' recommendation is that the concepts of equality, equity, inclusion, and social justice be examined and used to generate principles, criteria, and choices about policies and actions regarding inequality.

In the second chapter, the UK policy framework is used to explain the freedoms and restrictions within which educational practitioners aspire to promote equality. The readers are reminded of the various levels where policy is set, including: classroom, school, department, region, nation, as well as the delicate nature of its implementation. The authors allude to the opposing view and unintended results that may arise with the implementation of policy related to equality, but also remind leaders and other educational practitioners that they always have a choice about how to respond. They call on leaders to engage in identifying and influencing policies that disadvantage marginalized groups and increase or decrease inequality, and to empower learners to influence policy.

In the third chapter Lumby and Coleman use gender, ethnicity, socio economic status, and religion to discuss whether leaders should focus on single or multiple characteristics of inequality, or use an intersectional approach to mitigate inequality. Basing their argument on the multiple characteristics that affect how marginalized learners are perceived, the authors advocate for the intersectional approach as crucial for understanding complex experiences of learners with inequality. They call on leaders to map out characteristics within the school and understand the intersections that may influence how certain groups are perceived. The authors also emphasize the importance of collecting and reviewing data to gain a clear understanding of the progress of learners and to avoid assumptions that lump groups together.

In the fourth chapter titled *Inequality Landscape: Some Differences Matter More Than Others*, Lumby and Coleman refer to a range of data as they map the inequality landscape in the UK. They challenge the common focus on examination results for progression to further training or employment in assessing educational inequality. The authors also highlight the need to consider how differences in socio economic background, ethnicity, family, nationality, and the socio capital influence how learners experience school. They call on practitioners to remember that school can be a pleasant environment for some learners and staff, but it could also be an unhappy, distractive, and disabling environment for others.

In the final chapter of the first section of the book, titled *Approach to Attacking Inequality*, the authors invite readers to think through critical aspects that impact equality in the UK school system. One of the examples provided involves the extent to which categorizing of schools that serve the low socioeconomic communities as *public* and those that serve the privileged as *private* segregates and disadvantages some learners. With this categorization the education system ends up favouring privileged students because they end up having access to more talented teachers and better resources. They also refer to the in-school practices of *streaming*, where students are divided into groups of perceived ability, and how this practice disadvantages those who start behind. Using the example of the lower value for vocational qualifications in the UK, the authors explain how policy can restrict the curriculum to an extent where schools cannot meet the needs of all their learners. But they also emphasize that learners, teachers, and leaders can make choices that enable them to either strengthen or weaken the structure and processes of these inequalities.

Lumby and Coleman suggest that equality can be enhanced if leaders provide a supportive learning environment, as well as through parental education and distributive justice. While they acknowledge that both physical and social redistribution of resources, what they call *the robinhood effect*, may be hard to achieve, school leadership can contribute to such redistribution by recruiting and retaining suitable staff, avoiding negative streaming, providing fair access to experienced teachers and resources, and providing space within schools. While recognising the changes in school communities, the authors also suggest a cultural approach where schools and their systems adapt structures, processes, and resources to accommodate different learners. They advocate for meaningful adaptations that include restructuring the education system, having more inclusive curriculum and pedagogy, increasing diversity among students and staff, redressing staff imbalance especially among senior staff and leadership, and considering rational participatory justice.

In the second part of the book, which focuses on *addressing inequality*, the authors invite the readers to think about socio economic status, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, migrant children, and special needs and disability, as specific characteristics that impact equality. For socioeconomic differences the authors comment on how schools play a part in the low attainment of learners from a low socioeconomic

class. They mention how learners from a low socioeconomic class tend to have limited experience, lesser confidence, and lower expectations from the education system. The authors reiterate how school segregation and ability grouping polarizes learners by socioeconomic status and the effects of this polarization on student learning.

When it comes to gender, the authors discuss how gender might disadvantage or advantage learners and the ways in which leaders can support each student. According to the authors, school leaders need to be aware of, and confront the ways in which gender stereotypes limit academic and career possibilities. They propose that leaders have the following in mind: an understanding of how gender identity is developed, the feminization of education and how it disadvantages boys, ways of narrowing the attainment gap between girls and boys, and information about how gender affects learners' experience of school.

The chapter on gender is followed by a chapter on sexual identity and inequality. The authors consider sexual identity to be potentially the most difficult and sensitive challenge that youth face, especially for those who are perceived as different from the heterosexual norm. They discuss how homophobic attitudes and language embedded in school processes impact the way lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students experience school and their ability to benefit from education. The authors urge their readers to consider ways in which leaders might promote policy and practice that ensures equality and establishes ethos where all students and staff are equally valued irrespective of their sexuality. They acknowledge an increase in the acceptance of all kinds of diversity, especially the legislation that protects the rights of individuals on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation, but admit that there still remains covert prejudice and attitudes. They also acknowledge the conflict between religion and the aims of the state to respect and provide the rights to people of all sexual orientations.

In the chapter about ethnicity and equality, the authors acknowledge how the increase in migration has put a spotlight on ethnicity in schools and in society. They suggest that in the context of growing ethnic minority population, schools need to continuously reassess their practice to ensure that they offer the best possible experience to learners of all ethnicities. The authors provide the context of school populations in England and draw attention to the complexity of issues related to ethnicity because of two intertwined aspects: culture (e.g., language, dress, and customs) and skin colour. The authors also acknowledge the intersectionality of ethnicity with socioeconomic status and likelihood of incidences of racist stereotypes among staff and students, especially covert perceptions that influence in subtle ways decision making about special needs, discipline, and access to higher education. They propose that leaders take cultural or recognition approaches where ethnic groups are acknowledged and supported. They ask leaders to focus on providing a curriculum that recognizes different cultures while offering equal opportunities, nurturing relationships, working with parents and the local community, and creating a school ethos of inclusion and cultural justice where the community shares the same values.

The chapter where religion and equality are discussed provides a historical account of religion in schools and diversity due to migration. The authors mention recent terrorist attacks and how radicalization has drawn attention to policy about appropriate religious and spiritual education in schools. Lumby and Coleman refer to literature about Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and sectarianism among Christians and the contribution of this literature to discrimination among learners and staff. The authors reiterate the importance of faith and school communities finding ways to nurture what is valued in religion while protecting students and staff from discrimination. To do this, they suggest that leaders should have a clear understanding of religious inequality and the stance that their school can take to enhance equality. Such stances include providing guidance on how far religious practice should be accommodated in schools or finding a common ground and promoting shared values.

The authors look at equality and the experience of migrant learners as overlapping with the issues they encounter because of their ethnicity, religion, and socio economic status. They refer to the chances of immigrant learners to secure equality in schools as problematic because they are classified with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, and have few or no members of staff with whom they can identify. Lumby and Coleman also explain how immigrant parents may not trust schools because they have experienced racism or discrimination. Referring to literature, the authors reiterate how *ability grouping* tends to marginalize immigrant learners because of biased assessment of their learning needs. They encourage leaders to think about: increasing diversity among staff, responding to learners from various cultures, supporting language development, nurturing positive relationships among peers and staff, adjusting the curriculum in response to needs, experience or prior knowledge of migrant learners, and working with families.

While discussing equality with regard to special needs and disability, the authors rightfully reckon that the term inclusion is more appropriate than equality or equity. They draw attention to changes in how people with special needs are seen and the challenges school leaders face with conflicting agendas and policy demands. The authors encourage leaders to use external professionals, professional development of staff, and learning support assistants as strategies for equality.

The authors use the third part of the book to pull together strands of action from the aforementioned chapters. They synthesize the strands of action into values, ethos, and actions, and ask their audience to work at encouraging school culture with values that advocate for a fair and inclusive ethos. According to the authors, the ethos should manifest in the choices that are made regarding recruitment, enrolment, acceptable behaviour, the nature of the curriculum, and pedagogy. The actions the authors suggest include building the capacity of staff, learners, and parents to eradicate attitudes and behaviour that enhances inequality; recognizing diversity by focusing professional development on specific marginalized groups, and equipping staff to better support learners who are seen as the “other.” Professional development also needs to enable staff to work towards participatory justice by empowering learners to achieve in the system, and to be sufficiently confident to challenge it. Professional development could also take the form of distributive justice through shifting resources to even the playing field.

Like many other educational leadership scholars, Lumby and Coleman, affirm that education is “a driver for greater equality” (Lumby & Coleman, 2016, p. 170) (see also: Liou & Herman, 2017; Shields, 2010; Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011). The book is grounded in research, theory, and practice considering the citations, the additional readings, and the case studies that the authors use to provide context. It is suited for practitioners, and is also a valuable resource for faculty who seek to prepare educators for work in contemporary schools. As an academic researching school leader preparation for working with minorities, and an instructor for both graduate and undergraduate courses in educational leadership, I would recommend this book as a text for school leadership preparation courses. The ideas expressed in the book are pragmatic, hence making it an excellent example of scholarly work that narrows the gap between knowing and doing.

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