

Harris, A., & Jones, S.M. (2016). *Leading futures: Global perspectives on educational leadership*. New Delhi, India: Sage. Pages: 284. ISBN: 9789351502555

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Introduction

In the last two decades improving student achievement(s) became one of the key issues among global and national policymakers, along with an increased focus on quality school leadership when discussing changes and issues of excellence in schools and education systems (Vaillant, 2015). System and school leaders' contributions towards the improvement of education systems, along with student learning outcomes, became a part of key educational policy that travelled globally among nations (Schleicher, 2012). In their enactment, these policy ideas and initiatives, once constituted globally (by supra-national institutions like UNESCO and OECD) and nationally, took on different forms when they entered the landscape of national policy, as the processes of reshaping such initiatives and ideas into national and local policy are complex and multifaceted. Consequently, an increasing number of scholars in the field of policy and educational leadership started to investigate some of this complexity in terms of the ways relations between educational leadership, system improvements, and student learning outcomes were framed and expressed by global, national, and local actors operating in culturally diverse educational systems (Bell & Stevenson, 2006; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Honig, 2006). *Leading futures: Global perspectives on educational leadership* provides a collection of chapters featuring the work of a diversity of scholars around the theme of educational leadership and school and system changes from the standpoint of different systemic contexts and countries. The book is a welcome addition to the field as it offers multiple perspectives on educational leadership and policy from the viewpoint(s) of scholars, policymakers, and practitioners. By introducing readers to a contemporary and comparative knowledge base about leadership, the book provides clues as to the global and local changes in the patterning of the work of educational leaders. It takes a multilevel and multicontextual view at ways contemporary educational leaders' lived-experiences are changing, not only as localized daily events but also as disruptions to the broader patterns of current leadership practices that come to redefine the ways individuals lead in initiating and sustaining educational changes. This book takes the scholarly discussion about the practice of leadership further by contextualizing educational leaders' work within not only school contexts and national education systems, but also within a global and globalizing political, economic, and cultural dynamics. For this reason, this book contributes to the study of educational leadership within in a fast-paced changing educational landscape by examining leadership as a phenomenon shaped by an interplay of global and local contexts and cultures.

Organization and Key Features of the Book

The co-editors cluster the chapters of this book into three sections: (1) Leading futures: System transformation; (2) Leading futures: Collaborative professional learning; and (3) Leading futures: Redefining educational leadership. The first section of the book offers a discussion about the various processes of policy formation and enactment in different contexts in response to a diversity of pressures faced by policy makers and educational leaders concerning systemic improvement within the field. The first chapter discusses the degree to which the process of policy formation influences international bench-marking as promoted by supra-national institutions like the OECD. The second chapter complements the previous one

by reviewing the most effective policy formation processes. In this chapter, the argument is that a co-constructed method of policy making (that places educators at the center of policy design and implementation) leads to better policy coherence and more focused professional development strategies in support of this policy enactment. The third chapter expands the discussion about policy formation by providing an account of practical examples of a balanced top-down, bottom-up policy formation, and enactment process that places innovative schools within a jurisdiction at the center of a co-construction transformational policy making approach. In chapter 4, the author examines the ways contextual and cultural factors might shape the direction of policy enactment in terms of its degree of congruence between the intent and actual level of attainment of expected policy outcomes. Chapter 5 explores the roles of 21st century leaders by situating them as key drivers in the creation of conditions conducive to innovative systemic changes in education systems through local and national policy formation and enactment processes. Chapter 6 provides an example of facilitating system changes through formal governance structures complemented by a more organic professional network that connects individual and collective leadership throughout an entire education system. The main contention made in this first cluster set of chapters is that school-based leaders play a central and active role in the process of translating policy into practice. Rather than acting as passive recipients of policy solutions constructed by policy makers, school-based leaders need to be actively instigators of change by offering original ways of enacting policy that build on the strengths of their own respective school or education system.

Section 2 looks at issues related to effective leadership development in various organizational settings from a range of perspectives and countries. Chapters in this section aim at describing and discussing approaches used in various national and local jurisdictions in developing effective leaders within the context of collaborative professional learning processes. Here, chapter 7 focuses on the notion of PLCs as an integral part of professional development for leaders and teachers in Hong Kong. The author reviews various case studies that indicate that further work is required in enabling schools to build a capacity for educators to engage in collaborative ways of working and leading within a PLC. Chapter 8 has an emphasis on the preparation process of school leaders in Malaysia. In this chapter, the authors address the policy imperatives and empirical findings that reinforce the centrality of the school-based leader in securing better school and system performances. In chapter 9, the author speaks to the importance of school principals for taking charge of their own learning through a process of principal certification. Chapters 10 and 11 focus on the challenges of improving schools in disadvantaged communities, and highlight how professional collaboration within and between schools can bring significant and sustainable benefits in terms of school improvements. Chapter 12 describes key core strategies deemed central in ensuring high-quality outcomes of leadership training programs in the educational context of Singapore. The author defines these strategies as follows: (1) developing educational leaders' ability to deal with complexity; (2) strengthening the theory-practice nexus through the completion of school-based projects; and (3) enhancing university-schools-government partnership. In all, the authors in this second cluster of chapters provide accounts of leadership conceptualizations, development models, and practices grounded in a detailed description of contextual differences. In comparing countries like Russia, Singapore, and Malaysia, the authors illuminate the various ways in which governments and local organizations in different parts of the world remodel their national and/or local programs of building-up educational leadership.

The final section of the book focuses on the actual work of a school or system leader. In chapter 13, the author speaks to issues of recruitment, retention, and progression of Generation X educational leaders within the context of a wider discussion about the redefinition of leadership reflecting an environment characterized by accountability and technology. In a review of relevant literature, the author of chapter 14 writes of the challenges of redefining the notion of educational leadership. The main argument presented is that we need to move away from defining leadership as a series of traits and behaviours, and focus on leadership as a practice identified through a more nuanced and empirically based analysis of what leaders actually do. In chapter 15, the authors argue that the key purpose of leadership is to make a difference to learning and learners, and asserts that school leaders can engage with pedagogy, curriculum, and data through visioning, strategizing, structuring, developing, and monitoring. Chapter 16 complements the previous one by situating the notion of instructional leadership within a broader context by identifying the accelerated growth of technology in education systems as central to the development of leadership practices conducive to the effective pedagogical use of educational technologies.

Concluding Comments

In order to capture both the details and the bigger picture, the two co-editors, Dr. Harris and Dr. Jones, successfully assembled a mosaic of chapters that looked at leadership challenges in several national contexts and from different perspectives. Books like this one that utilize a framework of comparative research are important in understanding education systems and their dominant ways of understanding and practicing leadership, not just for learning about other countries, but also for generating a critical understanding of domestic educational developments in the field of leadership. On one hand, some authors use comparisons made in this book to provide readers with more sophisticated understandings of the particularities of national perspectives on educational leadership. On the other hand, some authors emphasized the search for common characteristics in defining conceptual and practical educational leadership — indicative of global changes driving the reconceptualization of educational leadership models in response to global pressures faced by policy makers and educational leaders.

Although this edited book brings value to the field of educational leadership, it is not put together like an ecosystem with a structure that would clearly highlight the connections between the three sections of the book. Such a restructuring would add to the book's coherence and connectedness, particularly if the co-editors had provided, at the end of each chapter, the opportunity for the other authors to comment. However, this book remains a useful reference for those who want to be better acquainted with some of the strategies used globally in dealing with challenges specific to the field educational leadership in a world of rapidly changing policies.

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