Book Review of Brooks, J. S., & Normore, A. H. (2018). *Leading against the grain: Lessons from creating just and equitable schools.* Teachers College Press.

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Introduction

Profound demographic shifts in society have resulted in significant changes in student populations and their learning needs. Consequently, schools face the imperative of promoting equity by adopting more inclusive and culturally responsive approaches. While previous research has extensively explored the impact of principal leadership on student inclusivity (e.g., Gross, 2008; Szeto, 2019), limited attention has been given to the influence of other forms of leadership in this regard. To facilitate the reinvention and reevaluation of leadership in schools, Brooks and Normore (2018) have compiled a diverse collection of works by various researchers in their edited volume, *Leading against the grain: Lessons from creating just and equitable schools*.

The content of this collection offers fresh perspectives on leadership through global leaders' practical and insightful examples. Each chapter in the book narrates the life story of a leader, providing applicable lessons for educational leadership. By delving into these stories, readers are able to understand how these leaders prioritized the greater good of groups, organizations, or countries despite personal adversities and external oppressions rooted in gender, race, social class, and political stance. Notably, the leaders featured in this book occupy diverse roles such as politicians, researchers, social activists, and artists, and they hail from various geographical locations including the United States, Canada, China, Burma, the Philippines, Japan, Israel, and Kenya. These social and geographical complexities provide readers with an opportunity to view leadership beyond Western-centric perspectives, thus embracing multifaceted forms such as moral, ethical, heroic, courageous, and place-based leadership.

Upon closer examination, many chapters in the book approach leadership through a critical lens by addressing power imbalances between dominant and marginalized groups of people (e.g., the haves and have-nots, as observed by Golda Meir in Chapter 12). While this critical perspective is used throughout the book with good intentions to foster social transformation, a possible weakness lies in the occasional problematic representations of marginalized individuals' experience—they are at times portrayed as individuals who solely require assistance or contribute minimally to society. Audiences of the book, therefore, need to remain critical of the critical and exercise caution when interpreting minoritized people's lived experiences, issues, and barriers. Non-dominant groups are significant contributors because they enrich new environments with their unique cultures, values, and identities. This recognition of minoritized individuals' strengths has been widely exemplified in research studies, such as those focusing on Chinese immigrants in Toronto (Xu, 2017). Essentially, it is imperative to acknowledge the agency and capabilities of less powerful individuals while actively challenging hierarchical ideologies to foster greater social inclusion.

Another recommendation for this compilation has to do with the loose connections among the chapters. Although the original organization of the book may allow readers to establish the said connections by themselves, we believe that reorganizing the chapters thematically would have been useful. This thematic approach enables readers to discern clearer connections between different chapters and more effectively comprehend the commonalities among various leaders, thus better guiding readers' own educational leadership practices. While various approaches can be employed to generate themes, we anticipate that the themes presented below will elucidate connections and implications for (critical) curriculum studies.

Thinking Creatively and Critically

Several leaders featured in this book defied social norms by generating innovative ways of thinking, aligning with the book's overarching concept of leading against the grain. Chapter 4 highlights Sun Yat-sen, a Chinese revolutionary who advocated for the Three Principles of the People: nationalism (mín zú zhǔ yì), democracy (mín quán zhǔ yì), and the people's livelihood (mín shēng zhǔ yì). By borrowing ideas from Western societies and adapting them to Chinese traditions and realities, Sun Yat-sen exemplified the potential for educators to cultivate cross-cultural awareness and implement culturally responsive teaching. His story resonates with research evidence regarding contemporary curriculum localization. For example, Wu and Tarc (2016) discovered that English higher education curriculum in China has successfully incorporated Western inquiry-based pedagogy in a localized manner, highlighting the complexity of international curriculum transfer. Similarly, some teacher education programs in North America have embraced contemplative practices, such as meditation and deep learning, by drawing inspiration from Eastern and Indigenous cultures (Scott & Donald, 2009).

Chapter 15 introduces another creative and critical thinker, Ella Flagg Young, a highly educated scholar in the United States. As a former PhD student of Dewey, Young went on to become a professor collaborating with numerous educational specialists, civil rights movement leaders, and artists. Her ability to elucidate the connection between democracy and education served as inspiration for Dewey and many others, advocating for the freedom and individuality of both teachers and students within educational systems. These innovative perspectives challenged prevailing social inequalities during specific historical periods, offering implications for contemporary educators to engage in creative and progressive approaches while striving for educational and social change.

Building Trusting Relationships

Equally important, educational leaders need to be aware that building trusting relationships is a reciprocal process, and that it involves caring (Noddings, 1984). Adopting a caring perspective in relationship building is advantageous for educational leaders as they engage in discussions and deepen their understanding of leadership within power dynamics. Chapter 1 highlights the inspiring story of Antonia Pantoja, a community organizer who established numerous community-based institutions in America to empower youth in their career development. Pantoja's unwavering commitment to collaboration with communities, rather than imposing solutions, offers valuable insights into leading in a non-hierarchical manner. In Chapter 2, the leadership of Wangari Maathai, an influential African leader, is showcased through her spearheading of the Green Belt movement, which focused on environmental and social justice. Maathai's authentic grassroots leadership underscores the significance of building trust and emphasizes a philosophy of working *with* the people rather than *for* them. These practices underline the importance for education leaders to engage in collaborative work *with* students, rather than simply working on their behalf. In terms of curriculum, Miller (2019) suggests that educators should transcend the transmission of knowledge and skills; they should strive to foster cognitive engagement through meaningful interactions and facilitate transformative learning experiences by teaching in socially and personally relevant ways. This approach contributes to the establishment of a holistic curriculum and trusting relationships in the classroom (Miller, 2019).

thematic reorganization and careful presentation of minoritized individuals' experiences, the book is a valuable resource for educators, researchers, and policymakers interested in promoting social inclusion. Overall, it encourages transformative leadership practices for a more equitable future in education.

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