Exploring the Relationship Between the Framing of Cultural Diversity and the Strategies Used in its Management Among Educational Leaders

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Abstract: Educational leaders have influential roles in their institutions, including how cultural diversity is managed. Some scholars have examined the relationship between how educational leaders frame cultural diversity and patterns in their leadership behaviour. One way that this is done is by applying the concepts of multiculturalism types and leadership styles. Some studies have suggested that certain multiculturalism types, or approaches to cultural diversity, are associated with certain leadership styles. For example, conservative multiculturalism, or a cultural-deficit approach, is associated with a transactional leadership style. Liberal multiculturalism, or a culture celebration approach to diversity, is associated with a social justice or critical leadership style that seeks to understand and address inequalities and injustices. This research approach is instructive, but it may benefit from an expanded view of the factors that affect the actions of educational leaders, for example the norms and values of an organization, community, or sector.

Keywords: Intercultural leadership, Educational leadership, Multiculturalism

Introduction

Educational leaders have a significant influence on almost all aspects of educational organizations, including areas such as structural operations and policies, quality of staff, teacher, and student experiences, curriculum development and delivery, community engagement, and the overall culture of their organizations (Hudson, 2012; Savory, 2014; Deal & Peterson, 2016; Bolman & Deal, 2017; Tarc, 2018). One important influence of educational leaders is on the way that their institutions engage culturally diverse staff, faculty, learners, and members of the broader community. This has become more important than ever because educators are required more and more to fulfill their roles within contexts that bring together increasingly diverse professional, teaching, and learning communities. In response to such developments in educational contexts, Lipman-Blumen (1996) has argued that "to succeed in this dramatically altered environment, where inclusion is critical and connection is inevitable—that is, in the Connective Era—we need a new kind of leadership" (p. xiii).

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the development of this new kind of leadership by highlighting some of the important themes in the literature around how educational leaders frame cultural diversity and how this might relate to the strategies they use in their decision making and management roles. It is meant to inform the reflective practice of educational leaders, as well as any relevant supports or interventions that might be offered to educational leaders, in engaging appropriately, effectively, and meaningfully across cultural differences. While this paper will include research findings from a range of contexts, it is meant to be an early exploration that will inform part of the literature review for a larger PhD research study into the relationship between the framing of cultural diversity and the strategies used in its management among educational leaders within the English for Academic Purposes context.

Framing and Strategies Around Diversity

Various studies have indeed pointed to a relationship between the way in which educational leaders frame cultural diversity and the strategies they use to manage cultural diversity in their institutional contexts (McGlyne, 2008; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010; Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2018; Green, 2017; Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2014; Keung & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013; Andersen & Ottesen, 2011; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2017). An important way that this relationship is approached is through a consideration of typologies deriving from multicultural theory and leadership theory. This can be done using a unidimensional approach or a multidimensional approach. The next two sections of the paper address each of these in turn.

A Unidimensional Approach

Green (2017) looks at one type of leadership, authentic leadership, and critically examines its compatibility with one type of approach to engaging with cultural diversity, the cultural congruence proposition. Authentic leadership refers to a leadership style that is in accordance with the leader's own values, beliefs, goals, and emotions, thus inspiring similar authenticity among other members of an organization, as well as mutual trust (Green, 2017). Green (2017)

points out, however, that the cultural congruence proposition proposes that a leader forego one's values, beliefs, goals, etc., and instead adopt those of culturally different "others" so as to facilitate effective interactions and build successful relationships. While it may seem like a sensible strategy of adaptation in intercultural communications, Green suggests that the inherent contradiction with authentic leadership in fact leads to mistrust and therefore this approach is not recommended (Green, 2017). It is a fair criticism since such an approach may be seen as simplistic and, rather than reflecting a level of complexity in multiple dimensions of a leader's identity (Kinginger, 2013; Jackson, 2014), may be perceived as a utilitarian and disingenuous means to an end, or even as cultural appropriation. From the perspective of research methodology, it is useful to note that a unidimensional approach like this examines a particular conception of and approach to cultural differences as it relates to a particular style of leadership.

Multidimensional Approaches

Other scholars have gone beyond a unidimensional examination of one particular type of perception or approach to diversity and one particular leadership style. Important leadership types that have been considered include transactional (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Avolio, 2011), transformational (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Avolio, 2011), shared or distributed (Pearce, Manz, & Sims, 2009), values-led contingency (Fiedler, 1993), social justice or critical (Wang, 2018; Chandler & Kirsch, 2018), bureaucratic (Weber, 1947/2019), and culturally responsive (Muhammad, Gooden, & Davis, 2016) leaderships. These leadership styles describe the patterns of behaviour that particular leaders demonstrate. On the other hand, in order to conceptualize approaches to diversity, some scholars have found Kincheloe and Steinberg's (1997) typology of multiculturalisms to be useful. Some types of multiculturalism that have been considered include conservative, liberal, pluralist, leftist essentialist, and critical multiculturalisms, as well as a cultural-deprivation or cultural-deficiency approach, and a cultural-celebration approach. Studies that use these sets of concepts set out to look for patterns and correlations of certain leadership styles with certain perceptions or approaches to diversity.

Several studies, for example, suggest that an approach to diversity that can be characterized as conservative multiculturalism, or a culture-deficit approach, is associated with a transactional leadership style (Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010; Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2018; Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2014). Conservative multiculturalism is characterized by assumptions of one's own cultural superiority and a deficiency in culturally different "others". This results in leadership actions toward "assimilation of diversity into the normative culture" (Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010, p. 166) since cultural diversity is viewed as "a problem situation, which [leaders need] to overcome" (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2014, p. 70). Studies like these suggest that such leadership behaviour indicates a transactional leadership style which "focuses on the smooth running of the school" (Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010, p. 167) by developing clear policies, procedures, and systems in order to ensure fairness. These leaders seem to "approach the acculturation process on the basis of assimilation without taking the cultural variables in managing diversity into account (Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2018, p. 449).

On the other hand, a liberal or pluralist multicultural approach, or a cultural-celebration approach to diversity, attempts to address, rather than neglect, cultural differences. These leaders tend to see "diversity as an asset rather than a problem" (Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010, p. 176) and hold "that diversity [is] not a 'burden', [but] rather a resource to take advantage of" (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2014, p. 74). This kind of leadership behaviour suggests a values-led contingency model or a social justice or critical leadership style (Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010), which strives to go beyond seeing cultural differences in neutral terms by trying to understand and address social inequalities and injustices. Some scholars have argued that this is the kind of leadership that is needed to engage appropriately, effectively, or meaningfully with cultural diversity. They argue such leadership goes further than superficial and simplistic recognition of differences to a critical multicultural approach that results in social justice or critical leadership with its "critical analysis and interrogation of power relations and structural inequalities" (Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010, p. 168; see also Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2014).

Conclusion

These studies are instructive insofar as they are attempts to look at patterns in the relationship between the framing of cultural diversity and leadership actions and strategies. It would be useful to analyze further the nature and relationship of these approaches to diversity, or types of multiculturalism, and their associated leadership styles since it may suggest ways for leaders to further develop their sensibilities and enrich their decisions and actions in contexts of

cultural diversity. This will form part of the literature review in a PhD study that will explore some further related questions: Why do there seem to be patterns in the relationship between how leaders frame cultural differences and the actions they take in intercultural contexts? What can we understand about the causes of this relationship? How can this inform training and supports for educational leaders? Furthermore, are there factors that are overlooked in the research approaches of the studies discussed above? What, for example, are the factors that contribute to an educational leader adopting a certain multiculturalism type? What other factors influence an educational leader's actions, decisions, and strategies around cultural differences other than the individual's perceived multiculturalism type? Is there too much emphasis on factors that reside within the leader? What about the role of norms, values, and expectations that may be prevalent among members of an educational institution, community, or broader sector?

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