

Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

Exploring School Leadership in England and the Caribbean

by Paul Miller

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Reviewed by / Revu par

Clinton Beckford

University of Windsor

Paul Miller, the author of *Exploring School Leadership in England and the Caribbean*, is currently Reader in Education at Brunel University, London, UK. He is a former lecturer at the University of Technology in Kingston, Jamaica and his teaching experience in the Caribbean and the UK lends credibility to his ability to write about the subject matter explored in the book. The promo for the book argues that, “Rather than applying theory to practice, *Exploring School Leadership in the UK and the Caribbean* draws on how school leaders practise and experience their own leadership.” One of the promotional pieces cited on the book cover credits the author for “cleverly welding together practical examples and theoretical insights.” Another piece found that the book highlights the “individualism and humanness” of UK and Caribbean principals, and a third described the book as relevant and essential reading for school leaders across the world.

The book is comprised of an introduction and eight chapters. The introduction provides a context for the book, setting the table by discussing the rationale for, and objectives of the book. The author briefly explores the methodology for the research on which the book is based, the participants, and structure of the book. Chapter 1 discusses

the nature of school leadership making the case that the context is changing. The author highlights some aspects of this changing context making specific reference to workload, policy reforms, social justice, multiculturalism, gender, inclusion, technology and economic environment. There follows a brief discussion of leadership effectiveness and conceptualizations of school leadership.

The other seven chapters are discussions dedicated to different types of leadership, which while not explicitly stated as such, represent emergent themes from the research conducted. Chapter 2 discusses what the author refers to as curricula and instructional leadership. Case studies presented speak to principals' value of issues related to effective instruction, the principal as a teacher, resources and effective instruction, providing feedback to teachers, and achieving success in difficult circumstances. Chapter 3 explores diversity leadership and examines principals' perspectives of their role in creating inclusive school environments that are welcoming and safe to all stakeholders. Chapter 4 focuses on what is termed "technology leadership." The chapter starts with a discussion of the importance of technology in contemporary education. It explores how principals experience ICT integration in their schools. The author briefly explores the use of ICT by principals themselves, teachers, and students and provides some interesting insights into the challenges of integrating technology in the context of lack of infrastructure, resource constraints, geographical remoteness, and fear of technology. Chapter 5 discusses policy leadership, exploring principals in a fast-paced and dynamic policy environment. Challenges posed by this and responses are discussed by principals with mention of accountability and implementation issues. Chapter 6 introduces the reader to the theme of "people leadership." This chapter raises a wide range of issues related to staff development, hiring and firing, mentorship, and working with stakeholders such as school boards and parents. "Entrepreneurial and safety leadership" are the subjects of Chapter 7. These are two issues that are not a natural fit and do not seem to work together. Readers who are not familiar with the concept of entrepreneurial leadership will be surprised by the subject matter discussed. The chapter looks at school practices that are designed to do things differently and give schools and their students a competitive advantage. Principals discuss their efforts to respond to the diverse and changing needs of students through adaptation and creative engagement. Chapter 8 brings the book to a close with a synthesis of the main themes and findings and implications for school leadership practice. Perhaps

the biggest take away based on the cases discussed is that there is no one best way to lead. However, approaches to leadership among the respondents were tied to leadership abilities, contexts, the environment in which they operated, and the people whom they worked with and supervised. Interestingly, although this was not raised as a theme in the book, the author mentions servant leadership as a fundamental characteristic of the school principals in the study.

Exploring School Leadership in the UK and the Caribbean is a useful book at a time when school leadership is increasingly in the spotlight. This increased attention, some might say scrutiny, is warranted as the spectre of “failing” schools loom large and school systems across the globe struggle to address growing concerns about student success, school success, and often growing achievement gaps among students. The book takes a comparative look at principals’ conceptions of their leadership in the UK and the Caribbean. Contrasts between the two systems are hard in terms of structure given the profound and enduring British influence on education in the English-speaking Caribbean. However, the difference in the maturity of the two systems, resource availability among other things, do provide some bases for comparative analysis.

Readers should be wary of their expectations based on the title of the book. Although it purports to look at “the Caribbean” what you will see is entirely Jamaican. This is a fundamental problem with much of the regional literature on various subjects in many academic disciplines. The word Caribbean is too often used when there is reference to only one or two of the counties of the region. This book therefore, does not provide a Caribbean perspective as there is no evidence that Jamaica is representative of the region in regard to school leadership.

Readers should also bear in mind that the book is based on a very small sample of school leaders in the UK and Jamaica. Only ten principals were interviewed. The book is also on the brief side, which I thought made it difficult to explore many of the interesting insights raised in a more comprehensive way. The book might also prove difficult to read for some visual learners. It is totally dependent on text without any type of graphic or illustration.

Exploring School Leadership in the UK and the Caribbean is a good addition to school leadership literature. It provides some interesting insights about various leadership issues provided by practicing principals in two countries. Given the general lack of reference to the Caribbean region in the literature on this topic, the book is especially timely.