Technological University Dublin

ARROW@TU Dublin

Internationalization, Globalization and Exchange in Higher Education

Higher Education in Transformation Conference, Ontario, 2016

2016

Examining New Vistas in Leadership Learning with Technology

Lorayne Robertson
University of Ontario Institute of Technology, lorayne.robertson@uoit.ca

Jill Harvey
University of Ontario Institute of Technology, jill.harvey@uoit.net

Janani Srikantha
University of Ontario Institute of Technology

Damali Thomas
University of Ontario Institute of Technology, damali.thomas@uoit.net

Kavita Anand
Adhyayan Quality Education Services,

Follow this and additional works at: https://arrow.tudublin.ie/heit166

Part of the Higher Education Commons

Examining New Vistas in Leadership Learning with Technology

Dr. Lorayne Robertson

Jill Harvey

Janani Srikantha

Damali Thomas

Faculty of Education

University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Canada

Kavita Anand

Executive Director

Adhyayan Quality Education Services, Mumbai

Abstract

Technology-enabled learning can open new vistas in higher education. Moving a course online, however, does not guarantee that students will be more engaged, nor that they will think more critically, or understand more deeply. Online learning does create new digital learning spaces where students can make connections without the constraints of physical co-location. This case study outlines the experiences of a small group of students in the same graduate course who chose an opportunity to work in an authentic, cross-continental context within a global, professional learning community. The students were able to "see" leadership theory in practice through the investigation of real-world scenarios taking place on another continent.

Online learning theory and intercultural competence theory merge in the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of this case study. The findings indicate that e-learning can offer more authentic learning opportunities. The students were fully engaged in conversations with school leaders across the globe and gained first-hand cross-cultural leadership knowledge. Students also acquired research skills as they met model leaders online and witnessed leadership in action across borders. The findings suggest prudence in maintaining an open, investigative stance toward the potential of e-learning environments as catalysts for cross-cultural competence in authentic contexts.

Keywords: online learning, graduate, cross-continental, intercultural, authentic, competency, leadership, case study

Introduction

This case study presents the experiences of a triad of graduate students, enrolled in the same on-line leadership course, who elected to pursue their leadership investigations in the real-world context in a global professional learning community. The graduate students, co-authors of this paper, chose to deepen their learning on leadership by investigating authentic leadership scenarios on another continent using social media and online affordances such as live chat and synchronous online discussions.

We construct a theoretical framework based on a theory of quality learning in online courses and cross-cultural learning theory. These theories are merged into a theoretical framework that guides the analysis of students' reports of conversations with school leaders in India. The findings indicate that online courses in higher education can provide opportunities for students to personalize their learning and explore new vistas previously not possible due to geographical constraints.

The findings of this study show that graduate students can identify the benefits they gained from conversations with school leaders across the globe. The students reflected on their own cultural stances and identities during this process. They also acquired investigation skills when they explored leadership across cultures. The findings suggest that it would be prudent to maintain an open, investigative stance toward the potential of e-learning environments as catalysts for deeper and more individualized adult learning.

Context

The preparation of future educational leaders for the realities of evolving global and multicultural education communities is an important area of study in Canada. There is significant evidence that the population of Canadian schools is continually changing and it reflects growing

diversity. Immigration patterns are changing due to the dislocation of citizens from their

homelands of origin and prompted by global crises such as war and famine. There is significance

in the fact that one in five Canadians is foreign-born, as it introduces cultural diversity in our

schools and as a result a need for culturally-responsive pedagogies in our education system.

Patterns of immigration in Canada reflect a wide range of homelands of origin; more than 200

ethnic origins were reported in a recent national survey (Chui, Flanders & Anderson, 2014).

More than 6 million Canadians (approximately 19.1 % of the population) state that they identify

as a member of a visible minority group and three-quarters of the Canadian population speak at

least two languages (Chui et al., 2014). These changes in school populations affect the culture of

the school and create pressing demands for new approaches to inclusive school leadership (Ryan,

2006).

This case study examines student learning outcomes in a graduate leadership course

which included a focus on inclusive leadership and added a cross-cultural leadership study as an

optional student assignment. Data include student responses to this global learning option

through their assignments and reflections. The particular course under examination in this

research was online and synchronous. Online learning in general and technology-enabled

learning (TEL) hold the potential to open new teaching and learning vistas (see for example,

Chan et al., 2006) but there is room for more exploration of TEL in higher education. The extent

of technology's reach for improving the graduate academic experience is not fully known.

Although online courses offer new learning affordances such as the ability for students to

present using multimedia and to be assessed using multiple modalities, there is no automatic

assurance that online courses have improved quality over physically co-located classroom

models. E-learning in higher education needs to be researched carefully and critically to

document the potential learning opportunities and barriers from different modes of course

offerings. One way to do this is to determine how students' e-learning or mobile learning skills

and activities (as they connect to people and contexts outside of school) can be harnessed to build

on their learning pursuits in higher education courses. What can be claimed and reasonably

defended, however, is that online learning brings with it a multitude of online spaces and

opportunities where learning can potentially occur because these spaces and opportunities are not

bound by the constraints of class time or geographic proximity.

Another consideration is that, while academic learning used to take place in the confines

of the academy, today's adult learners learn almost continuously through multiple online means.

In-school learning and out-of-school learning are merging in almost seamless ways as students

interact with peers online, both within and outside of their courses (Chan et al., 2006). The online

classroom can now be considered a digital learning space where students may make global

connections in their quests to understand course curriculum and personalize their learning. This

was the case in the program which is at the heart of the present case study, and this context is

important. The news that students routinely hear outside of class is global news, and increasingly,

events in the global sphere (such as free trade agreements) impact national and local decision-

making. When students seek answers to complex leadership questions, the literature searched to

supplement their learning is increasingly available through large, congregated search engines (such

as Google Scholar) where students have access to research on leadership from multiple countries.

Theoretical Framework: Quality Learning and Intercultural Competence

Several theories both illuminate and explicate this case study, specifically: online

learning theory (Anderson, 2008); quality learning theory (Bransford, Vye & Bateman, 2002);

inclusive leadership (Ryan, 2006); intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006); and boundary-

breaking leadership (Robertson & Webber, 2000). Considered together, these theories form a theoretical framework which guides the study's qualitative data analysis and informs the assessment of the quality of the learning experiences for these graduate learners in educational leadership.

The findings from this study indicate that innovations in e-learning and e-teaching in higher education can translate into innovative and more connected forms of course-based intercultural research. This study also finds that there were *value-added* elements for the students: increased capacity to understand cultural similarities and differences, and opportunities to engage in cross-cultural and reciprocal forms of learning, supporting Robertson and Webber's (2000) earlier findings. In addition, students acquired skills as researchers and were able to personalize and deepen their understandings in the course. The findings indicate that e-learning environments can be catalysts for intercultural learning and deeper engagement, moving students beyond Western educational leadership models to consider leadership theory and practice in international contexts.

Some educational leadership theorists have identified the importance of cultural learning and cross-cultural learning in educational leadership courses (e.g., Hallinger, 2003; Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2002). Little has been written, however, regarding the means by which intercultural competence and its concomitant skills of cognitive openness to other frames of reference can be addressed in a graduate leadership course. Even less has been written about acquiring global competencies in an online course. What has emerged in the literature, however, are definitions of intercultural competence as well as definitions of quality in e-learning at the tertiary level.

Intercultural Competence

Deardorff (2006) found that there is a lack of consensus in higher education around the terms *internationalization* and *intercultural competence.* Internationalization may include efforts to increase international student enrolment or provide opportunities for faculty and students to research and study abroad. Deardorff's investigation across 73 American tertiary institutions reveals that most definitions of intercultural competence reflect a predominantly American-centric and Western perspective on intercultural competence, which "resides largely within the individual" (p. 245) rather than in group relations or interpersonal relationships. She defines the top elements of intercultural competence to be: awareness, valuing, and understanding of cultural differences; the experience of other cultures; and the growing awareness of a person's own culture. She found 80% consensus that the ability *to communicate effectively* and also the ability *to be adaptable and flexible in one's own frame of reference* were key skills of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). Robertson and Webber (2000) investigated the cross-cultural skills acquired in a graduate Canada-New Zealand study exchange. They found that leadership students' reflections of their own educational contexts were enhanced through examining other contexts. In addition, students became more engaged with their learning, developed more critical perspectives, moved beyond a focus on self, and began to develop agency when they were introduced to inter-cultural learning (Robertson & Webber, 2000).

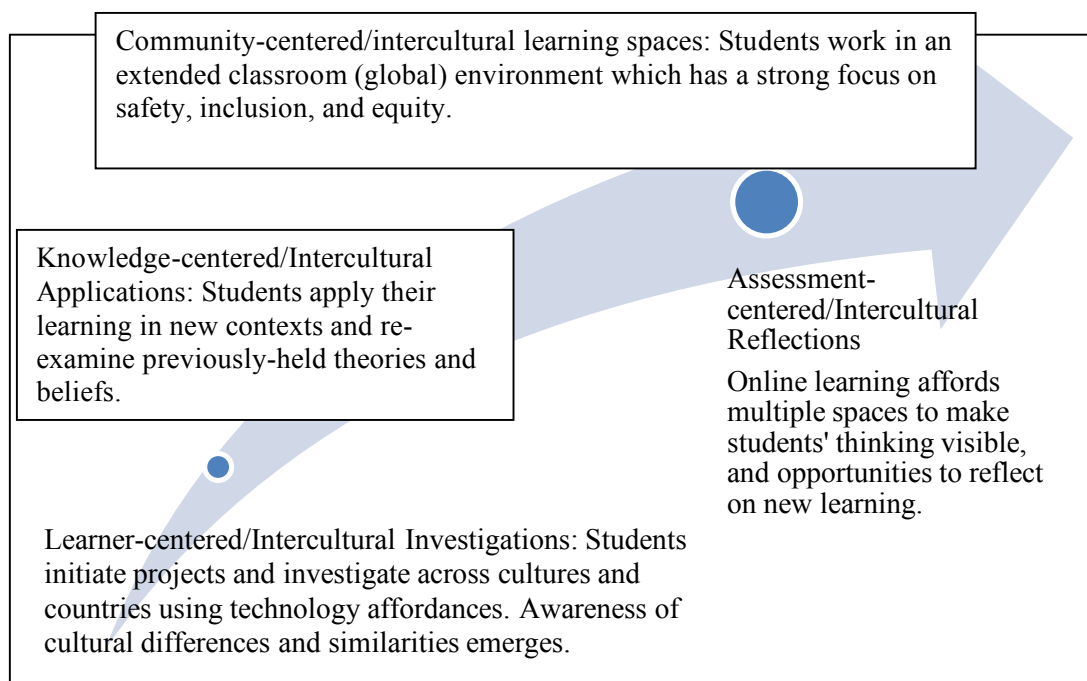**Defining Quality in Online Learning**

Bransford et al. (2002) in the *How People Learn* framework theorize quality learning as learner-centered, knowledge-centered, community centered, and assessment centered. Anderson (2008) builds on Bransford et al.'s (2002) categories to theorize quality learning in online environment settings, viewing the online learning space as an opportunity for an increased

number of interactions in an increasing number of spaces (Anderson, 2008). In an enhanced Web 2.0 environment, students can both create and co-create knowledge. The online modality allows students to time-shift, work a-synchronously or synchronously online, and/or engage in global learning in real time.

The present case study explores the question, "What happens when an online leadership course encourages students to investigate leadership in cross-cultural settings?" A theoretical framework based on inclusive leadership theory and quality in online learning was developed to aid in the analysis of the data from this research. This framework borrows from Bransford et al.'s (2002) categories of quality learning, Anderson's (2008) online learning theory, Deardorff's (2006) identification of the most-valued inter-cultural competencies, and inclusive leadership (Ryan, 2006).

Community-centered/intercultural learning spaces: Students work in an extended classroom (global) environment which has a strong focus on safety, inclusion, and equity.

Knowledge-centered/Intercultural Applications: Students apply their learning in new contexts and re-examine previously-held theories and beliefs.

Assessment-centered/Intercultural Reflections

Online learning affords multiple spaces to make students' thinking visible, and opportunities to reflect on new learning.

Learner-centered/Intercultural Investigations: Students initiate projects and investigate across cultures and countries using technology affordances. Awareness of cultural differences and similarities emerges.

Theoretical Framework: Developing Intercultural Competence in Leadership Studies

Case Study as a Research Methodology

Case studies provide an in-depth exploration of a situation, its process, and related activities (Creswell, 2012). An *instrumental case study* sheds light on a specific issue (Cresswell, 2012), which, in this case is the development of intercultural competence. This case is located in a global context. Fossey and Crow (2011) identify four essential elements to a case study in educational leadership: the case must have context, complexity, relevance, and ambiguity. It should be in a unique setting, rich in context, and should present an interesting problem requiring fluid thinking and expert problem-solving (Fossey & Crow, 2011). In this case study, the instructor of a graduate leadership course was contacted by the director of a leadership foundation in Mumbai, requesting to observe the pedagogy of online classes. Initially, two school leaders from India met with the Canadian graduate class in real time through the synchronous online video affordance of the course. During one of the online chats, a group of school principals from India came online and chatted with the students. As a result of the initial contact, three students elected to learn more about leadership in India and participated in a longer, live synchronous dialogue with the leader of a quality schools movement in India (http://Adhyayan.asia/site/). In 2016, this movement has now reached 250 schools and in excess of 300,000 students in 27 States and 9 languages. Encouraged by this dialogue, the students elected to speak further with school leaders in India, designing their questions collaboratively and discussing at length with school leaders in India. The students transcribed the meetings and shared these transcriptions with each other and the leaders from India, and reflected on what they had learned. Using the lens of intercultural competence, findings emerged.

This research design aligns closely with Wagner's (1997) delineation of *research as co-learning*. At the co-learning level, the researchers and participants work together in a form of

professional collaboration focused on continuous dialogue and reflection. In co-learning

research, all of the participants have intimate knowledge of all aspects of the research (Wagner,

1997). In the case of the present study, all of the participants authored this paper, and contributed

to the data collection, the analysis, and the publication of the findings. This aligns nicely with

Ryan's (2006) description of inclusive leadership practices that acknowledge the need for voice

and authentic engagement in decision-making.

Findings

The findings are presented as they aligned with the four categories of this case study's

theoretical framework. The intercultural competences identified by Deardorff (2006) include:

awareness, valuing, and understanding cultural differences; experiencing other cultures; and

increasing awareness of one's own culture.

Learner-centered/intercultural investigations. Throughout the discussions with school

leaders in India, the similarities and disparities between experiences of the Canadian educators

and educators in India were evident, and the discussion revealed the extent to which one's own

culture is tied to one's identity and perspective. For example, it was essential to understand the

history of education in India including pre and post-colonial periods (Pellissery, 2008). The

conversations began with understanding the geography, economics, and history of the schools,

along with the background and philosophies of the school principals, to give a context for deeper

exploration of educational leadership. The conversations between the students and Indian school

leaders engaged students' curiosity, natural exploration, and creativity. In India, most educators

and adults were educated in a post-industrial model that focuses on standardization and high-

stakes testing. Both Canadian and Indian educators quickly became aware that there were

significantly large differences of scale between the context of schools in India and the context of

schools in Canada, which in turn (it was speculated) contributed to a disparity in the understanding and execution of transformational leadership practices. The number of schools in India was estimated at approximately 1.5 million whereas Canada has 15,500 schools (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) (2016). This is almost a ratio of one Canadian school to 98 schools in India. In addition, school populations in India range from 700 students to well over three thousand (United Seed Fund, 2016), while the average elementary school in Canada is 350 students per school (CMEC, 2016). One school leader with whom we spoke indicated that their school was located in a fast-growing, intentionally-developed business city near the capital of India, which impacts the community to whom the school caters. The school was at capacity with eight sections of each grade and 30 students per section or 3500 students. School and class sizes influenced decisions related to infrastructure, pedagogy, and leadership.

One school leader in India reported that, while class sizes were gradually decreasing, 66 students in a classroom was still commonplace. For the graduate students from Canada, this indicated that this organization required a significant commitment of leadership and strategic coordination of human and physical resources in order to implement pedagogical changes such as learning through inquiry, and activity based learning. Additional learning about the schools in Mumbai came through sustained conversations with a leader from the Adhyayan foundation. One lever they employ to support the transformation of school leadership in India is the development and use of a combined external and internal review process. School leadership teams become 'lead learners' by setting the conditions for professional learning, being involved in professional development alongside their staff, and making a concentrated effort to conduct instructional walk-throughs where they document classroom observations of teaching and learning based on quality indicators. Adhyayan-trained leaders assist schools in the development

of observational checklists and examples of classroom *look fors* that they now use for quality

assurance reviews. This two-step school review process also involves school stakeholders.

Schools conduct the observations collaboratively and the review team (which involves

community members) comes to a consensus on how the school is performing. This supports their

goal of building more community-centered schools. (For more specifics on this project which

assesses the quality of education in the schools see Hillman, Anand & Gupta, 2015.)

   A second focus in Adhyayan leadership training is to have more transfer of the skills,

values, and knowledge from the training to actualization in schools. The Adhyayan leadership

professional development program is having an impact which is being realized at the school

level. The school leaders talked about implementing the review process with their schools using

shared and distributed leadership. One Indian school leader explains:

> I had a training program for all the leaders of the school at the beginning of last year
>
> and Adhyayan helped me with that. And we had a beautiful session and explained to
>
> the leaders of each of the sections [that we] would now operate with a lot more
>
> responsibility and they would be allowed to take a lot more decisions and we would
>
> meet regularly once a week to come together and see how we are proceeding and what
>
> were the challenges they were facing. And so I helped many of my leaders who had
>
> potential and who were just taking shelter under my leadership now come to the
>
> fore…with of course my support and my presence always there.

This discussion between the graduate student and the school leader helped the student understand

the application of distributed leadership theory to practice which resulted in changes in teacher

behaviour. The school leader personalized the graduate student's understanding of leadership in

a more global sense.

Knowledge-centered/intercultural applications. The graduate students applied their

learning in new contexts and re-examined previously-held theories and beliefs. They found

similar leadership terminology across cultures and similar understandings of distributed

leadership. After a discussion with a school leader in India, one Canadian graduate student

wrote:

> The primary goal of the school leader in India is to ensure that the school is on par
>
> with international educational institutions when it comes to implementing current
>
> pedagogy and best practices. In order to achieve this, the school administration
>
> introduced distributed leadership which requires educators in the school to have a
>
> sense of autonomy along with the ability to have their voices heard for successful
>
> collaboration.

The distributed leadership was related to community participation, sharing information, and

building the capacity of teachers to engage them in improving pedagogy in the schools. Another

school leader from India explained the new style of leadership this way:

> [P]previously the kind of leadership that I had was very authoritative leadership where
>
> everything had to come to my table, that I was the whole and soul of everything. After
>
> getting into this, I realized it was just not possible for me to continue with the kind of
>
> leadership I was doing; very authoritative, like everybody had to get permission from
>
> me before they did any change. Then I realized that I needed to have a more
>
> distributive leadership.

One graduate student, reflecting on a conversation with a school leader, wrote:

> I recognized a connection between Hallinger's (2003) …transformational leadership
>
> and the culture and infrastructure of many schools in Mumbai, where the leader with

whom I spoke is working toward changing the leadership role from that of managerial

to transformational. He recognized that it takes a different leadership approach to lead

in the 21st century – one of collaboration and a shared vision. Networking the schools

in Mumbai is a vital step toward systemic change (Fullan, 2002). The school leader

…was both insightful and reflective…led by example, by embracing change at school,

then taking a systemic approach to change and introducing the review process to other

schools in Mumbai, making critical partnerships with the schools and sharing a clear

vision, offering resources and support to facilitate change, monitoring the change, and

constantly striving for improvement. In my opinion, these are all traits of a

transformational leader.

 One student spoke with a school leader who has the responsibility of negotiating a

centrally-administered curriculum policy across and among what has been reported as one of the

world's largest student populations (over 50,000 students) (Overdorf, 2015). The graduate

student saw that the school was transitioning from traditional leadership structures and

introducing new forms of leadership. The student applied her understandings of leadership

theory to reflect on this and reported that:

> She tells me that her leadership philosophy is focused on sharing power and decision-
>
> making among the teachers and essentially advocating for an open door policy
>
> wherever possible. She has made efforts for her teachers to become more collaborative
>
> and open about developing their voice. Her philosophy embodies Fullan's (2002)
>
> views of a cultural-change principal, a principal "who is the lead learner in the school
>
> and models life-long learning by sharing what he or she has read lately, engaging in

and encouraging action research and implementing inquiry groups among the staff" (p.

18).

Assessment-centered/intercultural reflections. There were multiple examples that the

graduate students were reflecting on aspects of culture in their conversations with school leaders.

One student who met online with a school leader in Gurgaon reflected that inclusive leadership is

supported by the intercultural competence of the school leader. The school leader she spoke with

had a goal of ensuring that the school met international standards of pedagogy and best practices.

The school leader introduced distributed leadership including voice and autonomy for teachers in

collaboration. School leaders who wish to guide and transform school cultures need the

knowledge, skills, and attitudes that facilitate effective interactions across cultures. The student

reflected:

> As a learner of South Asian descent with a British and Canadian education
>
> background, reflections on how culture and experience shape identity became an
>
> integral part of the conversation. By belonging to the South Asian community, the
>
> ability to understand and relate to cultural nuances enabled a deeper analysis of the
>
> supportive and limiting role that culture can play, especially for female education
>
> leaders. As a learner with a Western education, it was apparent how diverse
>
> experiences that support personal development beyond cultural barriers are beneficial
>
> to becoming an education leader who is able to see themselves on par with others,
>
> voice their thoughts on best teaching and learning practices, and have a degree of
>
> autonomy in their position.

Community-centered/intercultural learning spaces. The global space of the extended

classroom in which the students worked had a focus on equity and inclusive leadership. One of

the students reflected that fostering of intercultural competence depends on minimizing ethnocentrism. She found that intercultural learning requires leaders and students to be open, setting aside their own biases and withholding judgment. Those who engage in intercultural learning should seek to understand the societal and cultural forces impacting others, and make connections between contexts to deepen cross-cultural experiences. She reflected that suspending judgement and objective analysis opened more spaces for learning and allowed her to ask further questions in order to understand school leadership models. This objective stance also allowed her to understand relationships, cultural meaning, and possible causalities.

Discussion

Opening up the online leadership course to intercultural discussions and focused dialogues heightened the quality of learning for the students. They saw leadership theory applied in authentic contexts in India. The students and Indian school leaders participated in discussions nuanced with global, social, and cross-cultural contexts. This prompted both critical analysis and reflection, both of which are significant graduate learning outcomes. The conversations with the school leaders in Mumbai allowed for deeper understandings both during and after the conversations, as students' critically analyzed their cultural knowledge, awareness, and attitudes. Both the students and school leaders made strong connections to leadership theory which builds on Robertson and Webber's (2000) findings in an important way, extending their findings into the online space.

Both students and school leaders were reflecting on leadership. According to the graduate students, the inclusion of cross-cultural components allowed them to immerse themselves in education theory and practice in a global sense. It provided them the opportunity to observe, discuss, and reflect in different contexts without prejudice. In other words, involvement in this

study supported the development of intercultural competence for all of the participants. As a result of these findings, we conclude that the affordances of online learning and the open stance of the school leaders, instructors, and students helped all of the participants in this case study to refine skills of critical reflection while co-constructing understandings of the theory and practice of educational leadership.

References

Anderson, T. (2008). *The theory and practice of online learning*. Athabasca University Press.

Bransford, J., Vye, N., & Bateman, H. (2002, April). Creating high-quality learning

environments: Guidelines from research on how people learn. In *The Knowledge Economy*

and Postsecondary Education: Report of Workshop (pp. 159-198).

Chan, T. W., Roschelle, J., Hsi, S., Kinshuk, Sharples, M., Brown, T., ... & Soloway, E. (2006).

One-to-one technology-enhanced learning: An opportunity for global research collaboration.

Research and Practice in Technology Enhanced Learning, *1*(01), 3-29.

Chui, T., Flanders, J., & Anderson, T. (2014). Immigration and ethnocultural diversity in

Canada. Statistics Canada.

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) (2016). Education in Canada: An overview.

Retrieved @ www.cmec.ca.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). (Ed.) *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating*

Quantitative and Qualitative Research, 4th edition. Pearson: Toronto.

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student

outcome of internationalization. *Journal of studies in international education*, *10*(3), 241-

266.

Fossey, R., & Crow, G. M. (2011). The elements of a good case. *Journal of cases in educational*

leadership, *14*(3), 4-10.

Fullan, M. (2002). The change leader. *Educational Leadership, 59*(8), 16-20

Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and

transformational leadership. *Cambridge Journal of education*, *33*(3), 329-352.

Hillman, S. L., Anand, K, and Gupta, S. (2015). Assessing quality of education in Indian schools on six key performance areas. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ), 4*(1), 2146-2154. Retrieved from: http://infonomics-society.ie/wp-content/uploads/licej/published-papers/special-issue-volume-4-2015/Assessing-Quality-of-Education-in-Indian-Schools-on-Six-Key-Performance-Areas.pdf

Leithwood, K., Mascall, B., and Strauss, T. (2009) (Eds.). *Distributed leadership according to the evidence*. New York: Routledge.

Ontario Universities Quality Assurance Council, 2012. Quality assurance framework. Retrieved @ (http://oucqa.ca/framework/appendix-1/).

Overdorf, J. (2015). 52,000 students and 1.050 classrooms: Inside the world's largest school. The Guardian. Retrieved @ https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2015/dec/16/52000-students-and-1050-classrooms-inside-the-worlds-largest-school

Pellissery, S. (2008). Social hierarchies, economic inequalities and interpersonal relationships: an overview from India. *Interpersona*, *2*(2), 243.

Robertson, J. M., & Webber, C. F. (2000). Cross-cultural leadership development. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *3*(4), 315-330.

Ryan, J. (2006). *Inclusive Leadership*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA.

Shields, C. M. (2002). Cross-cultural leadership and communities of difference: Thinking about leading in diverse schools. In *Second international handbook of educational leadership and administration* (pp. 209-244). Springer Netherlands.

United Seed Fund (2016). Low-Cost Private Education Accelerating in India. Retrieved @ http://usf.vc/low-cost-private-education-accelerating-in-india/

Wagner, J. (1997). The unavoidable intervention of educational research: A framework for

  reconsidering researcher-practitioner cooperation. *Educational researcher*, *26*(7), 13-22.

Wiggins, G. P., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: Association

  for Supervision and Curriculum Development.