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Book Review: School Leadership-International Perspectives

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School Leadership – International Perspectives, (2010). Edited by Stephan. Gerhard Huber, New York: Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg. 330 p. (ISBN 978-90-481-3500-4 [Print], 978-90-481-3501-1 [Online]. DOI 10.1007/978-90-481-3501-1

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The demands of globalization, coupled with neoliberal agendas, are driving multiple changes worldwide in education systems. One issue in particular is an increase in accountability, which has placed improving school effectiveness as a core competency resulting in heightened interest in developing more effective school communities. Subsequently, this focus has increased the demand to improve school leadership. As Dimmock & Walker (1998) suggest, a broaden cross-cultural research and comparative analysis of international initiatives of past and current leadership development is needed. *School Leadership: International Perspectives* provides such a collection. Stephen Huber, who is considered an expert in the field, edited the book. His work has focused largely on education management, system counseling, effectiveness and improvement of schools, and the professionalization of teachers and school leaders. In 2003 Huber joined an international conference organizing team and began hosting the conferences. Huber's aim of the conferences was to bring experts from the different fields of education together to discuss current issues, exchange ideas, and possible solutions to challenges faced in leadership. One of his strategies initiated from the conferences was a book project. The result is a collection of contributions from various conference attendees in the book, *School Leadership: International Perspectives*.

Based on a premise that better leaders will improve teaching, student learning, and thus overall school effectiveness, *School Leadership – International Perspectives* makes a significant contribution to the field of educational leadership. It brings together a range of international perspectives of emerging issues and research based evidence. The book is particularly relevant for people in the field of educational leadership. Among other things, the book sheds light on emerging issues and current directions of leadership development. It helps illustrate how and why better leaders will help schools become more effective.

Huber (2010) declares, the purpose of *School Leadership – International Perspectives* is to address the importance placed on school leaders as occupying the pivotal role to improving school effectiveness. This purpose provides the direction from which the book authors address current, international issues and trends in school leadership in areas such as professional development programs, professionalization, selection processes, qualifications and decision making authority. In the opening section of the book, to start the conversation, a remarkable collection of responses from the contributing book authors concerning *good* and *bad* leadership and metaphors of school leadership are included. The metaphors represent different perspectives on leadership and have different foci, depending on the context. This section is followed by a list of 16 significant discussions of the emerging issues of and reflections on school leadership, which sets the framework for the chapter topics to come. Therefore, the book is a collection of 16 chapters written by expert researchers in the field of school leadership. Considering leadership is a multilayered field of study, collectively the chapters provide a well-rounded discussion of cross-national research models, theories, comparative analyses of leadership approaches, professional development, methods for measuring leader effectiveness, and insight

into the future of school leadership.

For a book to be considered international status, it is important to present a variety of perspectives from both Western and Eastern points of view. Even though the international perspective is not all encompassing in the book, and may appear to be from a more western perspective, the chapters are promising in encouraging and providing transferability, valuable resources, and inspiration for other countries beginning to face emerging issues and developmental stages of school leadership. Specifically, the book includes chapters written from the contexts of Europe, the United States, Canada, Hong Kong, and Australia.

In addition, the preface of the book foregrounds that themes discussed are driven by globally emerging issues in both internal and external contexts such as changing demographics, increased diversity, and neoliberal agendas that inspire increased accountability and, as a result, standardized testing. These particular tensions have created the emerging issues and changing competencies for school leaders. *School Leadership – International Perspectives* focuses on these issues by presenting chapters on the impact of increased measurement and accountability, decentralized and centralized initiatives, the shifting roles and responsibilities to instructional leadership, and models of distributive leadership. More specifically, the book presents cultural changes in context and policies in chapters one, three, seven and fourteen; school effectiveness in chapter four; the changing role of school leaders with an emphasis on decentralization in chapters six and nine; instructional and system leadership development in chapters seven, twelve, and thirteen; agency development in chapters eight and ten; relationships of leaders with their staff in chapter five; recruitment in chapters fifteen and sixteen; and leadership models in chapter one. In addition, chapter two, authored by Björn Ahlström and Jonas Höög, is an interesting read as it discusses a study that used an emerging Social and Civic Objectives Scale (SCOS) to measure school effectiveness. The authors suggests that the SCOS scale is a response to the need as a way to judge whether school social and civic objectives are being met. They agree that further development of an instrument like SCOS will help school leaders evaluate their schools' results and improvement processes to become more successful. Overall, the chapters are purposefully organized to scaffold content from structure to agency and from theory to practical application.

Analysis
Much can be learned from cross-national studies for national, regional, and local contexts. Yet Johansson and Bredeson (2010) caution "simple translation, application and transfer from one setting to another are neither sufficient nor appropriate for successful implementation" (p. 300). However, issues of transferability is a strength of *School Leadership – International Perspectives* because of the specific attention in each chapter to contextual transference. Huber (2010) states that contextual differences matter and that adaptation should be expected when importing findings from one context to another. It is evident that attention was given to transferability in each chapter. For example, Hopkins (2010) in chapter 11 when discussion system leadership in England also provides similar parallels of evidence emerging in other leading educational systems in Europe, North America and Australia.

In addition, topics of transferability, comparative analysis of research design, conceptual frameworks, and applications would likely generate excellent discussions in graduate leadership classes or leadership development training and therefore further the implications of research and development in cross-cultural analyses of international leadership.

A goal of any academic book is to provide readers with unique and/or ground breaking research and ideas. There are two chapters of particular interest that satisfy this goal. In his chapter Michael Chirichello (2010) provides unique research from the USA context that explores role perceptions from dual perspectives of teachers and their school leaders. The results demonstrate a misalignment of perceptions in the goals and therefore hindered school effectiveness even with the best intentions of the school leader. Highlighting the importance of alignment and communication for embracing collective leadership and working collaboratively towards goals is a different direction to the study of leadership. Chirichello (2010) concludes that confirming alignment is a critical aspect of school effectiveness that is often ignored, but should be valued in leader effectiveness.

One of the most interesting insights in this book is a comparative analysis of leadership programs around the world. Huber (2010) has compiled an exceptional comprehensive, comparative international study of leadership development programs in 15 different countries worldwide. Such an overview provides key understandings of the influence of global trends to improve citizenship connected to economic capacity. As well, Huber argues that the analysis indicates a responsiveness for governments to shift and re-evaluate the direction of leadership development; an indirect means to improving school capacity through preparing better leaders to improve school effectiveness. In conclusion, he confirms the need to continue to expand the literature on school leadership.

School Leadership – International Perspectives could undoubtedly be considered a contemporary, valuable, and leading resource in providing such a collection of literature. One suggestion that could have been included in the collection is a chapter that connects technocratic skills and agency, such as identity construction and personal leadership resources (i.e., problem solving expertise, managing emotions, self-efficacy, resilience). As Shields (2010) suggests, if there is a preoccupation in school leadership with greater school effectiveness and improvement that is only focused on organizational effects and outcomes, then the moral and ethical aspects of leadership is lacking. Any limited focus of school leader development will undoubtedly produce leaders who are not fully competent in the competing priorities of leadership in such demanding times.

School Leadership – International Perspectives is a rich resource of current and emerging trends of school leadership with a focus on international comparative cross-cultural issues. I recommend this book a an exemplary resource or textbook in courses that explore issues in educational leadership. The book offers quality cross-national research for comparative debates and best practices. Throughout the book, Huber supports and delivers an extensive body of international research that will help advance the development of school leaders in any country. An engaging initiative for school leadership development is to extend beyond local context for more comprehensive and global development plans, but also to be sensitive and conscientious to local context. The purpose of this book was to bring together internationally located experts in the area of school leadership and provide an exchange of ideas, reflections and research of emerging issues of school leadership to generate and expand the discussion. *School Leadership – International Perspectives* has undoubtedly accomplished this goal.

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