

**Book Review**  
**Educational Leadership: Culture and Diversity<sup>1</sup>**

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**Book Review**

Over the past several decades, fairly extensive research has been conducted on educational leadership, as it has been identified as an integral determinant of school capacity and school effectiveness. Notwithstanding the substantial progress in theory building that has established and consolidated educational leadership as an important scholarly field in education, there has been little discussion about the possibility that educational leadership may vary in terms of its manifestations and effects. Most debates in educational leadership have tended to evolve in universal terms without close analytic attention to the cultural context in which the notion of leadership is shaped and its practice exercised.

In their book, *Educational leadership: Culture and diversity*, Clive Dimmock and Allan Walker inquire into educational leadership in relation to culture, especially from an international comparative perspective. As they succinctly state on the first page of the book, "Educational leadership is a socially bounded process. It is subject to

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the cultural traditions and values of the society in which it is exercised. ... It thus manifests itself in different ways in different settings" (p. 1). Throughout the book, they advance and elaborate three central propositions—first, "leadership is a culturally and contextually bounded process [that is] inextricably intertwined with its larger environment;" second, "the cultural influence on leadership is multidimensional, often difficult to discern, subtle and easy to overlook;" third, understanding "leadership [in terms of its nexus to] cultural and contextual influences ... can lead to improvement in [leadership] practice" (pp. 3-4).

As a unique work on educational leadership that combines conceptual and research-based ideas with practical implications, the book is organized into twelve chapters in addition to an opening overview. Chapters 1 to 3 provide conceptual foundations and highlight the importance of considering societal culture as a factor influencing the ways in which educational leadership is construed and exercised. These chapters argue that cultural understanding, both cross-cultural and multicultural, will help educators and researchers contextualize their perspectives on leadership, as it can provide useful insights offering culture-sensitive implications for school improvement. Chapters 4 and 5 remind us that educational leadership is deeply nested in multiple layers of cultural context, including organizational culture and societal culture. These chapters look into such different yet intertwined levels of cultural context within which educational leadership takes place as a culture-bound activity. Chapters 6 to 9 expand the book's cultural perspective, applying it to some of the key aspects of leadership in schools, including strategic leadership, instructional leadership, staff management, and teacher appraisal, either with reference to different cultures or in the context of culturally diverse settings. Chapters 10 and 11 advance discussions further with respect to managing leadership dilemmas as well as exerting effective leadership for multicultural education. Finally, chapter 12 concludes the book with a summary of the key points and implications for future research.



Without hesitation, we believe that this book is an excellent work that provides valuable implications for a wide range of audiences in the field of education, especially in relation to educational policy and leadership. Most influential theories and conceptualizations of educational leadership have tended to evolve in the context of Western, mostly Anglo-American, societies, and those developments have been imported to other parts of the world rather uncritically. In the process of diffusion and/or transplantation of certain conceptual models of educational leadership across different parts of the world, the validity of the imported models has rarely been questioned, and systematic efforts have rarely been made toward a careful reassessment and recontextualization of the models.

The book's substantial reference to and careful reinterpretation of Geert Hofstede's research works on cross-cultural perspectives on organizational behavior and management is both its strength and its weakness. Classifying countries into several cultures—Geert Hofstede has produced seminal works in this respect—can naturally provide researchers with rare opportunities to make the familiar unfamiliar from a broader sociological perspective. However, as Clive Dimmock and Allan Walker are also aware, such cultural categorization may accompany the danger of overgeneralization or essentialization, often misleading us to attribute some essential and fixed characteristics to the members of certain cultural groups or societies. Conceptual and methodological complexities arising from the use and misuse of such a cultural approach to comparative research could have been discussed further in the book.

In sum, there is no doubt that Clive Dimmock and Allan Walker have made a significant contribution to the literature on educational leadership. The book draws attention to the analytic importance of revisiting the notion of educational leadership from cross-cultural and multicultural perspectives on schooling and society. The book's cultural perspective is truly valuable, as it reminds us that "if the field of educational leadership and management is to develop methodologically and analytically, it must take greater cognizance of

the diversity and characteristics of context and culture within which leaders function" (p. 205).

### References

Dimmock, C., & Walker, A. (2005). *Educational leadership: Culture and diversity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Pp. xiv + 218. ISBN 978-0-7619-7170-2

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