

Book Reviews

Leadership and learning

Edited by Jan Robertson and Helen Timperley
London: Sage, 2011
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The main premise of this book is that, while leadership in schools is and has been an important and ongoing area of study, there has been little examination of the impact of leadership on learning and the resulting effect on raising student achievement. From my own perspective, previously as a deputy head of a secondary school and currently as a teacher-educator, most studies of leadership have been organisational, concerned with leadership structures. The editors, Robertson and Timperley, have attempted to redress this, with contributions from educationalists from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and Hong Kong.

My attention was soon attracted to the question posed on p. 3: 'Leadership of who, for what?' Borrowing from the work of Kenneth Leithwood and Doris Jantzi, the editors propose that, while leadership has consistent relationships with measures of school engagement, the relationships with student achievements are more equivocal, with effects that are perceived to be largely indirect.

The book is structured into three sections: 'Exploring models of leadership', 'Challenges in developing learning-focused leadership', and 'Broadening ideas of learning and knowledge development'. Each section explores a theme: empowering relationships; patterns of leadership distribution; and leadership for the improvement of teaching and learning. One key strand which I think is appropriate to consider at this point is that of leadership distribution (p. 5), where 'activities and interactions are distributed across multiple people and situations' – in other words where leadership is shared. This prompted me to read again the discussion comparing two basic leadership styles: distributed leadership as opposed to delegated leadership (probably initially the most commonly

used model). How do they differ? In the latter, the 'heroic leader' (p. 13) delegates responsibility, but not necessarily authority, to others, in a hierarchical manner. In the former, the distributed leader engages in discussion with other leaders (such as heads of department), who will take responsibility and authority for some aspect(s), and where all will have the ultimate goal of improving student achievement.

Two chapters seemed to me to be of most significance and indeed to be the pivot points of the book: chapter 4, which looks at 'Leadership and student learning' and focuses on what works and why, and chapter 5 entitled 'Leadership and student outcomes'. Well worth a look are the case studies, from different schools and countries, used to illustrate the arguments presented by the many contributors.

How would I rate the usefulness of this book? It is not an 'easy reader'! While I would not necessarily expect most head teachers to have this on their bookshelf as it does not lend itself to lifting ideas easily, there is much well-researched and -presented material here, with key points to reflect on and discuss, that makes it an ideal reader for a module on leadership in master's-level study.

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