# Richardson, J. W. (2020). *Bringing innovative practices to your school: Lessons from international schools.* Routledge.

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In this Routledge *Eye on Education* book, Jayson W. Richardson brings together field-tested contributions from international school practitioners to highlight "cutting-edge educational innovations happening globally" and links these to teaching and leadership practices that "should and can occur in schools across the world" (p. xiii). The 32 authors provide a neat window into creative approaches to K-12 international school learning, teaching, and innovation. The lessons, strategies, and techniques offer vivid snapshots of innovative practices with the potential to be adapted to local school or district contexts.
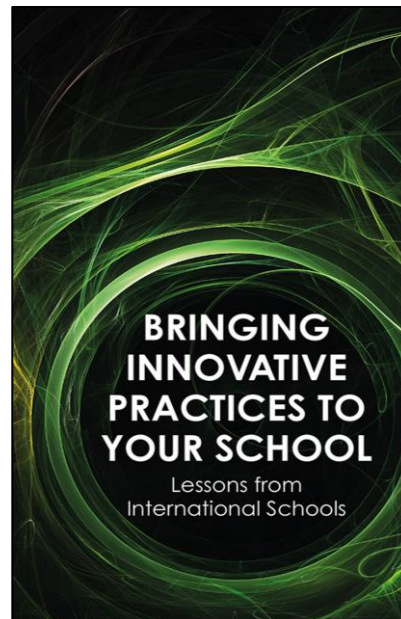
As Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver, Director of the Center for the Advanced Study in Technology Leadership, and Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Educational Administration*, Jayson Richardson is sensitive to the interplay of global, cultural, and technological forces. He is well-placed to focus his comparative, international, and development education lenses on this international schools arena, which is so often excluded from the mainstream discussion of education innovation. Given their complex communities and diverse, unique student bodies, how are innovative K-12 international schools preparing learners to be future-ready for a post-pandemic and ever-expanding digital world?

The edited collection is organized into six broad sections that explore: (a) student agency; (b) equity; (c) curriculum, teaching, and student learning; (d)

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management of schools; (e) teacher leadership; and (f) technology and school leadership. It features an introduction; biographies of contributors whose professional proving grounds span Chile, China, Colombia, Gambia, India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda, United States, and Vietnam; and 17 chapters and five vignettes. The user-friendly and intuitive index of main topics and key and related concepts (with valuable cross-referencing) makes it easy to navigate the different parts of the book.

Each section has its own introduction that usefully links the different contributions to the topic at hand. The fairly short chapters and vignettes, which further contextualize the array of innovative practices, are clearly written, readily digestible, and suitably referenced to external resources. They walk readers through both process (ideation, introduction, and implementation) and outcome or impact of the innovative practices in international schools. In most cases, this also includes brief critical reflections on the merits and limitations of a given innovation, as well as some considerations for potential next steps. In support of the readability of the text, a one-paragraph summary starts and a succinct "Innovative Leadership Practices" conclusion ends each chapter and vignette. Through teasing out the leadership-innovatory takeaways that could be pursued in other (non-international) school contexts, readers are encouraged to take a global perspective and imagine applying it to their own setting.

The varied educational settings add color and reach to the thematic action case studies, with at least six interrelated keys to enact innovative change being presented:
- clarify and align an outcome-focused vision for social, emotional, academic learning supported by constructivist pedagogy and responsive school structures;
- cultivate the conditions for inquiry, reflection, and action through learning design that is flexible (expanding on the principles of Universal Design for Learning);
- promote a "professional learning journey" perspective as an arc of growth, maturity, and renewal (because learning and progress are not always linear!);
- harness collective (i.e., teacher and leader) efficacy to strengthen existing systems-level approaches for stakeholder buy-in ("authorship is ownership");
- patience – creating a sustainable culture of innovation takes time; and
- "We cannot expect student agency without teacher agency" (p. 152).

A culture of collaboration, characterized by a will and confidence to experiment to promote inquiry and to enhance student engagement and professional learning, infuses the different international school ecosystems that are, for example:
- rethinking student schedules (more self-directed time);

- co-constructing course content or structures (increase opportunity for student choice, shift from content-driven to skill-based curriculum and assessment);
- redesigning physical (e.g., classroom, playground) and digital spaces; and
- developing more equitable and effective staffing practices (e.g., instructional coaching, team norms).

Demonstrating constructivist principles in action, the varied snapshots highlight how and why taking the time to get input, actively involving stakeholders in the construction of understanding, and sharing of perspectives, are so important. As one contributor notes, "Often in school we jump to brainstorming solutions to problems without understanding if our solutions are addressing a cause or an effect. If our solutions address effects, our ideas don't work, or they only work for a short period, leading to future frustration" (p. 140). As a set, the encouraging examples show schools that are intentionally reculturing and iteratively restructuring to make students "subjects" rather than "objects" of instruction (Freire, 2000), that is, part of a caring community of learners, all striving to author and connect their classroom learning to the curriculum of real life.

As a former international school teacher, middle leader, and principal – my path did cross some of the authors during my time as a Hong Kong-based volunteer evaluator and regional accreditation officer for the Council of International Schools – I found the portraits instructive, refreshing, and real. Though we know that the uncritical transfer of practice is rarely successful, aspirational education leaders arguably share the same goal: for children to achieve academic success, but not at the expense of their holistic and character development; and to be ethical, passionate, and engaged in "deep learning" (Quinn et al., 2020). Much as the stories and guidance from Richardson and the contributors show that generating momentum to innovate is indeed "complex," it does not have to be "complicated" (Cuban, 2010) or frustrating.

Despite the prevailing accountability mindset of modern education, schools can and should be places of learning through cultivating a culture of inquiry, reflection and growth, and action and impact for children and adults alike. Running a school does not have to be just about cost-to-benefit numbers, rules, and buildings; it can be about "putting learning first and doing that through concerted efforts to empower others and share leadership" (p. 86). As evidenced, building capacity among stakeholders, trust through intentional communication of vision and values, and distributed leadership can strengthen relationships to amplify voice and agency for a more engaged school community.

In sum, this edited book is an important contribution to the field of education administration with appeal to scholar-practitioners and school leaders, both local and international. It provides timely insights into mission-

driven, learning-focused schools that are innovating to connect classroom curriculum with relevant academic and post-school experiences. How important during the pandemic and beyond, with educators everywhere doing their level best to ready students for a world where the only constant is change.

References

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