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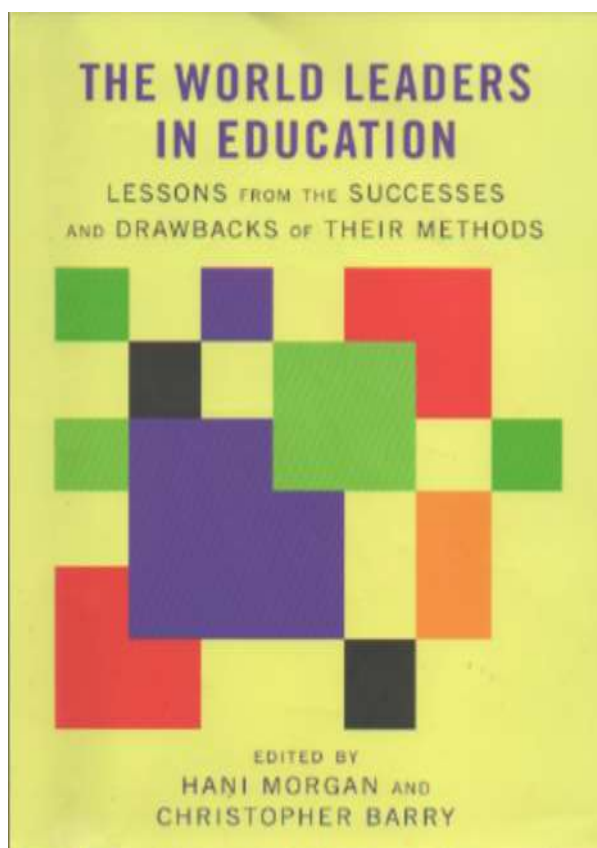
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Hani Morgan and Christopher Barry, editors of *The World Leaders in Education*, have brought together a group of experts to report on the beliefs and activities that support best practices in education and yield high-achieving student performance in their respective regions. The contributors present recent education trends among the top performing countries, such as Finland, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, China, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, and clearly explain why each country merits this prestigious recognition.

This history of comparing international data that reflect successes and drawbacks to education success has roots in the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), which started in 1948. The OEEC was developed to implement the Marshall Plan, which aided the reconstruction of Europe following World War II. It was first designed for economically developing countries; later, wealthy countries were included so that comparisons could be made.



In 1961, the OEEC was expanded to include membership from non-European states and renamed the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Every three years since 2000, this entity has administered the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) to 15-year-olds in about 70 countries that comprise almost 90% of the world economy. PISA evaluates student skills in mathematics, science, and reading, assesses higher-order thinking ability, and compares student achievement internationally. Although there are other international tests, PISA generally gets the most attention because these tests result in the global ranking of countries in education. When a country performs poorly on PISA, the country's leaders often develop a plan to address improvement since higher-level skills linked to workforce knowledge can also be linked to a nation's economy.

If I were not in an education-related field, I might not be aware of how many students in other countries outperform those in the United States. The fact that I am aware of this makes it all the more intriguing to read the similarities and differences among the world-class nations in education identified by these authors. According to the authors, world-class countries in education give high social status to teachers. Teachers are paid well and are considered valuable to society. Another aspect presented by the authors is that top nations have the belief that all students have the potential to learn at high levels and can perform well. The effects of poverty are also noted; thus, it is deemed important to equitably distribute resources. Providing adequate learning opportunities for all children can influence success. The teacher/student ratio can influence student performance, as can student motivation and engagement. Student-centered curricula that highlight problem solving and projects also yield positive results, meaning potentially higher achievement scores.

Another factor that contributes to high performances across countries can be found in the preparation of teachers. When a country has a shortage of teachers, it is not uncommon for there to be more lenient hiring practices so that needed positions can be filled. This makes it easier, and less rigorous, to become a teacher. In high-performing countries, applicants for a teacher preparation program often find entry a very competitive process. Though requirements vary, top-performing nations may select from only the top high school applicants. Some countries require that candidates obtain a five-year master's degree before allowing them to become teachers. Professional development and advanced or diversified career preparation are also emphasized in some leading countries.

The contributing authors note specific education trends within each of the eight leaders and discuss their challenges and successes. For example, for many years, the curriculum of the United States had an array of standards across the states, which challenged student success, but the country has come to support more universal high standards. The curriculum of leading countries is rigorous and focused. Equity is considered important; thus, children should learn the same content, with minimal overlap between grades.

World leaders in education encourage increased parent involvement and a greater sense of valuing education. They also recognize the gains from time on task; however, not all countries are willing to expand the school day to six days or have extended hours or fewer holidays. The amount of time actually spent on education varies; it is noted that in some countries, like the United States, teachers spend many hours of the day on nonacademic activity, such as transition times.

The effects of poverty on students living within high-performing countries are also

addressed. Although critics may differ on the extent to which effective school practices influence the lives of children in poverty, leaders in high-performing countries acknowledge and attempt to address this issue. Diet, low birth weight, and other factors contribute to development, learning, and behavior. Children in poverty may be at risk because of the poor nutrition of the mother, the incidence of alcohol abuse, unsafe environments, and other negative factors. World leaders in education have shown that strong welfare programs can make a difference by aiding these children and families. In higher performing schools, teachers meet as a team on a regular basis to determine how students are performing and how to best address challenges and needs. Time for collaboration, planning for instruction and assessment, and support in the form of personnel and professional development are viewed as factors that contribute to success. It is interesting to note that in Finland, a top leader, students attend school for fewer hours and have less homework than in many other countries.

The comments made about world-class leaders in education thus far in this review have been mostly general. However, embedded within the introduction and conclusion and the eight chapters representing the targeted leaders in between, much specificity and comparisons are provided. The book provides key lessons we can learn from, as well as appropriate statistics to support tenets of success.

Take, for example, Finland. My university colleagues and I have studied how this system has evolved as a world leader in education. Finland's education policy stresses equal access to high-quality education and training for all citizens. The Finns value education to such a degree that it is free at all levels from pre-primary to higher education. Recognized as one of the world's most literate societies, Finland's rates of school attendance and

completion are among the highest of most reporting nations. High-quality teacher education and equal opportunity for quality education are considered major contributing factors in success. There is a National Core Curriculum that establishes a framework for teaching; however, teachers and principals have input over what is taught locally. Teachers are well educated (e.g. basic and general education teachers have master's degrees). Their training is research based and their studies focus on pedagogical thinking, personal practical theory, reflection, and inquiry-orientation. Teachers have the autonomy to develop curriculum and instruction alone and in cooperation with others, as well as to analyze and assess what is happening.

Being from the United States, specifically Texas, I was curious to find out how these authors would report on what is happening in America. I had read elsewhere how students in other education-leading countries were outperforming American students. I found that a good number of American students have achieved the highest scores, which relates to economic potential. However, Americans hear less about this and more about lower-scoring students and the limitations and influence of socioeconomic inequality (e.g. immigrant children living in poverty). Long-term research-based efforts have yielded better results in world-leading countries. And, in general, world-leaders in education demonstrate effective strategies for the selection, training, and retention of teachers, including pay, professional development, autonomy, and social status.

The authors are diligent in their reporting and provide detailed information and statistics about each of the world-leaders of education (e.g. performance by gender, emphasis on homework, hours in school) in separate chapters. They also tie together their findings and address lessons from successes and limitations of methods in the conclusion.


Practicing educators and administrators will probably find the book interesting because it is applicable to their work; however, politicians, parents, and voters of all ages could benefit from learning more about effective ideologies, practices, and strategies to determine if their education system could benefit from the successes of other nations. The idea is not to lift and borrow what is to be done elsewhere, expecting a one-pattern-fits-all fix. It is to see how practices and beliefs could be

personalized to help each unique country or school find its best way of engaging and educating its youth, and addressing high levels of academic stress, bullying and cheating, which ultimately influence the future socioeconomic well-being of any country. The editors and contributing authors have done a very good job of presenting how world leaders in education have supported their students' success and have identified challenges encountered in the methods of education.

About the Reviewer

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