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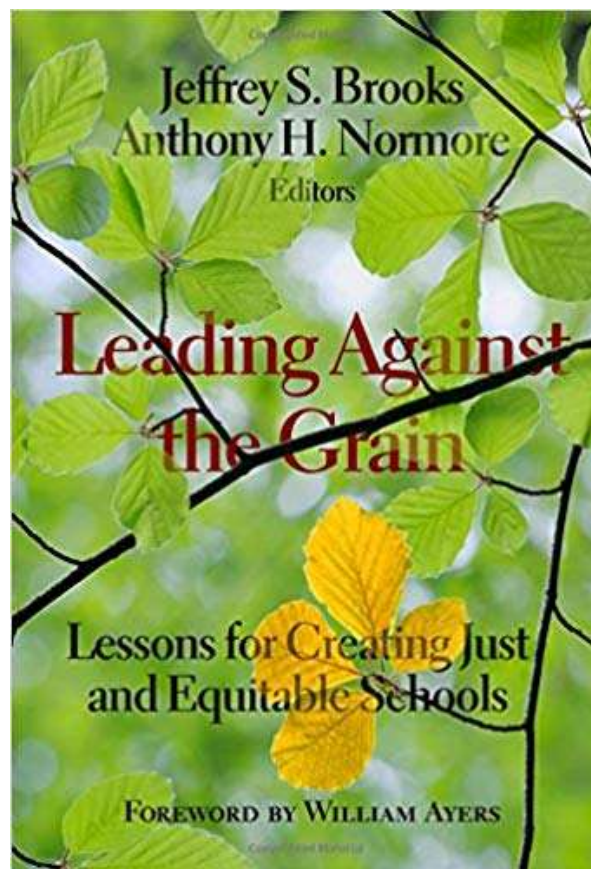
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In *Leading Against the Grain: Lessons for Creating Just and Equitable Schools*, editors Jeffrey S. Brooks and Anthony H. Normore provide education leaders with the opportunity to learn about effective leadership from outside their own field. The contributing author of each chapter shares lessons from “inspirational leaders outside of the mainstream Western canon of leaders” (p. 1). The profiled leaders operated in a variety of fields including environmental activism, politics, and literature, among others. William Ayers, author of the foreword and a teacher himself, describes the connections that can be made to school leadership:

There are for me two major lessons I hope to pass along to teachers.... The first is I want them to understand their agency and to understand that the source of that agency is drawn from within.... Second, I want them to understand that there is always a great deal of wisdom in any classroom, and



that their job is not to teach students in some kind of top-down way but is rather to go on a journey with people that encourages them to share that wisdom and to draw from the wisdom of others as a way to grow and develop. (p. viii)

Most chapters follow a similar structure, beginning with an introduction of the leader, their life experiences and personal background, their leadership style, and what they accomplished and how. This is followed by lessons we can learn from the leader and how the lessons can be applied in an education setting. The editors aim to spark curiosity and introduce the readers to new perspectives to “help expand our conceptualization of leadership, expanding our familiarity with new leaders as we learn new lessons and allowing school leaders to reflect on their practice” (p. 4).

Despite the diversity among the leaders presented, we found commonalities in terms of what makes an effective leader. The characteristics shared among the leaders in this book included knowing the community and embracing its culture; leading from within the community and among its people; putting others before oneself; and uplifting others to become leaders so that leadership is sustainable. We expand on each of these themes below.

Many chapters emphasize the importance of leaders knowing the community and embracing the culture of the people being led. Throughout the book, we see a number of examples of leaders who fought against oppressors who tried to invalidate the culture of a land and use the education system to force assimilation to the oppressor’s values. For example, John W. Tippeconnic III, an Indigenous American education leader, witnessed forced assimilation of indigenous children through public schooling (Chapter 9). Harold Gatensby experienced outsiders

forcing their views on Indigenous communities through boarding schools (Chapter 11). Gatensby advocated “place-based” education (p. 93) that serves the local community and embraces local culture. From these world leaders, we learn that education leaders must make a deliberate effort to include and value the cultures of students. To fail to do so is to damage the self-esteem and aspirations of children and also deprive society of the benefits of diverse viewpoints and cultures. This is relevant today as we see pervasive Eurocentric schooling practices in predominantly immigrant urban school districts, as well as inequitable tracking of students in mathematics and other subjects based on language proficiency as opposed to academic promise.

Rather than top-down leadership, many of the profiled leaders led from within the community and among the people. This is relevant to education leaders, who should see themselves as members of the school community and who should listen carefully to students, teachers, parents, and community members. Tseunesaburo Makiguchi, a Japanese politically minded elementary teacher and principal featured in Chapter 3, noted that “teachers needed to come down from their thrones to meet students as equals in the learning process, but so too did school leaders need to work collaboratively with teachers and parents” (p. 27). This belief is echoed in the chapter on Ella Flagg Young, a former superintendent of Chicago schools and the first U.S. woman to hold a superintendent position: “School leaders might ask themselves how they can release some of their own positional control and instead support the organic development of teachers’ professional growth and decision making” (p. 128). It is a misconception to think that effective leaders tell others what to do. Instead, effective leaders are willing to listen to and learn from their people.

Selflessness is a prominent characteristic shared among the world leaders. Throughout the book there are examples of leaders who put their community's needs before their own. Former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, profiled in Chapter 10, is one example of a leader who exemplified selflessness: "For Jimmy Carter, the moral purpose of leadership was service" (p. 85). The idea of leadership being selfless connects to schooling because we need to put the needs of the students first. If not for them, then for who? This leadership profile highlights how educational leaders must always make decisions with the primary goal of providing opportunities to students.

Another characteristic common to the leaders was the ability to uplift and teach others to become leaders. An example of this type of leader is Saul Alinsky, a Jewish-American writer and political activist who worked with communities to "create unity among very divided community members so that they could work together to improve their social and economic circumstances" (p. 49). Alinsky helped many communities throughout the years, but more importantly he focused on teaching the community members to be great leaders. He trained local leaders, guiding them to improve their communities, and did so by focusing on building relationships and trust. Alinsky was a teacher of others, providing community members with resources to become leaders and organizers. Teaching others to become leaders makes your work more sustainable. It will continue even after you step down from a leadership role.

The greatest strength of this book is the authors' unique approach to thinking about school leadership. Rather than learning about education leadership from leaders within education, we learn from stories of successful leaders in other fields like Harold Gatensby, a member of the Kookhitan clan of the Dakha T'lingit Nation in Canada who worked on resolving conflict between tribe members (Chapter 11) and Antonia Pantoja, a Puerto

Rican-born Black New Yorker who established organizations to uplift her community (Chapter 1). With this approach, the authors move beyond the latest education rhetoric that may funnel our ideas about leadership a certain way. Rather, this book allows us to step outside of our field and recognize the philosophy behind effective leadership more broadly. Do we have an education term for "a leader who grows alongside the members of her community?" Perhaps a better question is "do we *need* a term for this?" Instead, can we simply strive to *be* this without the burden of a label?

By looking to leaders outside of education, weaknesses in current education leadership can be better examined. For example, reading about Saul Alinsky's experience, we are forced to recognize that meaningful change in education often causes controversy:

Although some educational leaders desire change, many are averse to controversy, believing that their job is all about running a 'smooth ship' where conflict is not present and everyone is happy. Pursuing a real educational change agenda is not likely to produce a school of 'happy campers.' Change is also unlikely to please central office superiors who don't want to deal with protests, disenchanted parents, or a community embroiled in conflict. Only superficial change that actually changes little will not rock the boat. (pp. 54-55)

We are reminded that our job is not to keep everyone happy, but instead to continually improve schools for our students.

From Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat-sen (Chapter 4), we learn the importance of context. Like world leaders, education leaders should not hop on global trends without considering the unique needs of the students, schools, and communities. Yat-sen made it his

goal to adapt his country to the new advancements of Western countries while allowing his people to keep their identities and “self-respect,” and not forcing them to abandon their traditions (p. 34). Upholding the culture of our students within our schools is also important.

Six of the profiled leaders actually did work in education. Many of these education leaders were not ones whom we had encountered in our teacher preparation programs, and we learned much from them. For instance, the profile of Ella Flagg Young (Chapter 15) helped us to realize that poor experiences in schooling can inspire leaders to enact change and push for creative and unique experiences for all children.

Each chapter presented the leader’s background, historical context, and major accomplishments, followed by lessons to be learned from the leader. The uniform format helps readers connect the historical account tangentially related to education to actual implications within the walls of a school. An unfortunate exception to this, Chapter 5, breaks valuable cognitive momentum and profiles not one leader but two (Jesus Christ and Karl Marx). The chapter spends considerable time profiling the authors themselves, uses a “conversation” format (though even calling it an “interview” is generous, let alone a “conversation”), and does not draw connections to education leadership.

The deliberate attempt to profile a diverse set of leaders including both male and female leaders (though transgender and gender non-binary leaders are notably absent), leaders from different parts of the world, and leaders from different fields is a strength of the book. With our increasingly diverse student population and a teaching corps that does not yet reflect this diversity, such a deliberate attempt to honor diversity is not only appreciated but essential.

Although we appreciated the attempt to emulate leaders from fields other than education, at times the connections to education leadership seemed to be an afterthought. Understandably, historical context and background information about the leaders occupy quite a bit of space, at times leaving only a paragraph or two linked to education. For instance, Dr. John W. Tippeconnic III’s profile (Chapter 9) contains one paragraph of direct connections to education. Several profiles, like Fannie Lou Hamer (Chapter 13), do not explicitly mention education at all. There are noted exceptions to this, such as the profiles of Tseunesaburo Makiguchi (Chapter 3) and Golda Meir (Chapter 12), which provide the reader with four rich pages of education connections. When readers devote considerable time to learning the historical context and background information of the world leader, they should also get what they were promised: lessons for creating just and equitable schools.

In the introduction, the editors claim, “The emphasis here is on practical application, and authors have attempted to translate research, theory, and ideas from disparate contexts into practice of the key lessons that practitioners can use in their schools tomorrow” (p. 3). Sometimes this goal is achieved and the education conclusions are clear. For instance, Rev. Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor (Chapter 7) recruited and financially supported promising future teachers in underserved communities. Yet, at other times we are left with foggy lessons for education. After reading the chapter on José Rizal, a novelist from the Philippines, from whom we learn the lesson that “leadership is both art and science” (p. 70), we are left wondering what change an education leader should make tomorrow with this information. Readers should not expect a “how to” guide or a clear vision of changes to make in their school on Monday. Instead, the book may provoke a philosophical shift. The book plants seeds and provides opportunity for reflection. Ideas for

changes to actual classroom or school practice may not come immediately.

The book is clearly intended for school leaders. Education leaders can use this book as a resource to motivate current and future administrators, having them reflect on qualities of great leaders. Perhaps the book could also appeal to late career teachers or administrators who would like to reflect on their motivations to enter the profession. For high school teachers, the foreword and chapters written from the perspective of educators could be beneficial and prompt deep reflection on


leadership within a classroom. We think a second audience could be community leaders, as we found ourselves learning more about community activism and grassroots movements. Overall, this book should be classified more as a “pleasure read” than as an academic book. It is not meant to be read by a school leader who is currently in crisis, desperate for a new idea as soon as possible. Instead, consider it a fun summer read (bonus if the reader has a background or interest in history) that might provide readers with an opportunity to gradually rethink school leadership.

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