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Malott, Curry Stephenson. (2010) *Policy and Research in Education: A Critical Pedagogy for Educational Leadership*. NY: Peter Lang.

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In *Policy and Research in Education*, Curry Stephenson Malott brings critical pedagogy, normally in greater prominence in teacher training, to educational leadership in three distinct stages. First, he juxtaposes a more traditional discourse in leadership studies with the ideas of critical theory. Second, in two historical case studies, Malott shows different perspectives on controversial issues, and ties them nicely to contemporary counterhegemonic work. Finally, through four different interviews, Malott provides a “behind the scenes” view of critical leadership practices. He concludes the work with potential research themes when injecting critical pedagogy into educational leadership.

The call for injecting critical scholarship into educational leadership is timely considering the trends in education

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policy at present. As Malott notes, upcoming neoliberal reforms of No Child Left Behind may increase surveillance and standardization. Moreover, the content of the book surveys key historical and contemporary issues that problematize common sense understandings of what education leadership looks like. With such an widespread survey in a book of this size, however, the cost is making explicit connections between the economy, oppression, schooling, and Western Civilization. The book is framed as an introduction of critical studies into leadership; thus, it requires a clear exposition of critical theory, critical pedagogy, or hegemony at some point for these new readers. Otherwise, the audience that could be most influenced, those school leaders and leadership students unfamiliar with critical work, will be lost. As one advanced reader praises, Malott writes in “clear revolutionary code,” which means readers not well-versed in critical theory or not grounded in Marxist fundamentals may need to seek other sources to understand everything in the text. This process is not without reward and is exactly what Malott promotes.

Section One, Foundations of Educational Leadership—Toward a Critical Pedagogy

According to the author, the first two sections are designed “to provide the reader with a multitude of critical lenses to view the policies and practices of educational leadership. Chapter One situates educational leadership in a broad historical framework highlighting the three major trends in the discipline,” social efficiency of Frederick Taylor, behaviorism of B.F. Skinner, and systems theory (p.12). The content of Chapter One delivers an array of trends and concepts for leadership students and school leaders. Malott provides a contextualized overview of historical figures such as: Fredrick Taylor, Edward Thorndike, B.F. Skinner, and Abraham Maslow. This section is an excellent refresher for those who have been away from the literature and a starting point for those who are new to the history.

It may not have been time well spent, however, providing an overview of traditional perspectives of school leadership when the focus of the work is on critical pedagogy. Understandably, the author wants to illustrate what will be critiqued, setting up the “understood”

leadership discourse, before setting out the critique. The first quarter of the book is one point where more of a focus on historicizing Critical Studies may have been useful. The switch in purpose in the section “Consequences of Modern Day Mechanics in Education” is another example. In an attempt to show the influences of a wider social context to educational leadership, Malott melds Keynesian and free-market economic theories with the communications theory of Walter Lippman and the cultural critique of Noam Chomsky. This discussion is (implicitly) grounded in a strong critical theory, but since the reader has not yet been provided these concepts, the section seems disjointed. Fellow critical researchers or Marxist scholars will find this portion clear if a bit dated, but those without this framework may find it merely biased.

Chapter Two successfully lays out the following argument: Although “data-driven” is a current buzzword, if research contradicts the motives of the powerful, it may be marginalized; thus, if we *really* take the call to research seriously, here are a few typical examples of what that would look like from a critical perspective. One may agree or dissent from the above position, but the resources in Chapter Two provide an excellent initial reading list for those who want a deeper understanding of the claim before making that decision. Furthermore, the pace of the chapter is brisk enough to clearly see the connection between the opening and closing points.

A small section in the middle, however, is the second example of the general concern regarding readership. Although insightful, attempting to make separate points regarding the media and economics in the middle of the research argument distracts attention. Yes, they are related, and a critical perspective urges a contextual vision. But, if this book is designed as an introduction to the topic, attempting to tie together the complex issues of hegemony, media devices, a policy elite, and capitalist accumulation for new readers, in three pages, is slightly overwhelming.

Section Two, Leadership Critically Examined (Two Historic Examples)

Both chapters in Section Two function identically, but cover different content. “Chapter Three explores the tendencies of educational leadership within the African American context, which began after the Civil War, and Chapter Four examines the system of education for Native Americans developed by Captain Richard Pratt during the late 1800s around the last of the United States’ *Indian Wars*” (p.12). The text clearly represents a critical reading of two historical trends in education leadership. Both chapters follow a similar pattern in: presenting a common sense historical context, problematizing this understanding, and concluding by providing examples of critical scholars doing transformative work. As such, they are excellent, focused examples of how critical scholars talk about particular issues.

The chapters work less well as an introduction to how critical studies can form a clear research program to influence contemporary policy. One could argue that this was not the point anyway; the point was to critically examine two historical examples of educational leadership. But, in a book that claims “to offer teachers and professors intellectual and practical tools” the reader should expect this to be at the forefront of the discussion rather than serving as a brief conclusion. To reiterate, so this structural critique does not overshadow the praise for content: for critical scholars, Chapters Three and Four are fascinating examples of how we can think about issues of leadership; but, leadership scholars unfamiliar with critical work will need much more legwork to see the connections in the examinations.

In Their Words

In the final two sections, each chapter represents “the perspectives and experiences of an educational leader. These chapters provide invaluable insights for current and future educational leaders interested in democratizing their practices” (p.12) The questions and answers are presented as a transcript, with no editorial comments interrupting the interviewee. Malott provided each volunteer with identical questions regarding leadership as practice and identity. We get to hear from leaders in a variety of situations doing critical work. Having access to this first hand material is invaluable. First, it serves as witness to critical work in leadership contexts—material that may be marginalized by

more “mainstream” reform efforts. Second, it shows particular expressions of the general concepts covered earlier in the book. Finally, it provides a comforting resource for readers who may be wondering what, exactly, are they are suppose to *do* with all this new understanding.

Lacking an editorial frame by Malott, though, this reader found it difficult to see the relevance of the Chapter Five interview. Critical studies promote peace and downplay the usefulness of market-based approaches. Yet, in Chapter Five, the interviewee talks of using the Israeli Army Handbook for physical fitness (p.123), cites a book on why good companies survive for management advice (p.127), shares his influences from Kraft (p.128) and other major sales and marketing people (p.131), and promotes guerilla tactics as a basic philosophy (p.133). As the first interview, therefore, it can send mixed messages to new readers. Is this an example of the contradictions in all of us? Is this practice of which to be critical? Is this an example of practices Malott is promoting? Some guidance from the author could have been useful here. To be fair, the disclaimer for the interviews in the introduction may be strong enough for most other readers, and this could merely be a disagreement on style.

Policy and Research in Education should be read by anyone interested in critical studies, education leadership, and/or educational policy studies. The timing of the work could not be more opportune as Education leaders in a variety of positions will be soon implementing the newest federal reforms. The content introduced in the first section is an excellent starting point for those looking to dig deeper into the literature, and the interviews provide a refreshing new perspective. If one seeks a conversation about education leadership studies that interrogates common sense understandings, this is the right choice.

My critique in this review of the weak connection between “what the book is framed as doing” and “what the book does” is not to suggest one avoid the work. Instead, my intention was to help readers better understand how to approach the piece. For example, the book is perfect if you are a critical scholar in policy or curriculum and wonder what the research looks like in leadership. Or, if you are an education leader at the early stages of reading critical studies, this is an excellent illustration of theory in action.

If the reader has limited background in critical work, a bit more supplemental reading should accompany this text for full affect—a project well worth the effort.

About the Reviewer

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My dissertation and two other publications focus on the role of military recruiting in high school policy. I am interested in both the encroachment of militarism in schools and the privatization movement afoot in secondary and higher education (which are interestingly intertwined). I also historically analyzed Japanese/American education reforms during the occupation years post-WWII in my master's thesis and have published the conclusions. Moreover, I am predisposed to a range of critical topics centering on the politics of education and curriculum.

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