Pashiardis, P. & Johansson, O. (Eds.) (2016). *Successful school leadership: International perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

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In their edited volume *Successful School Leadership: International Perspectives,* Petros Pashiardis and Olof Johansson write,“School leadership has been identified as being second only to classroom teaching in its potential to influence student learning” (p. 42). Research shows that school leadership has an impact on student success (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Coelli & Green, 2012), but what characterizes a successful leader? This answer is often different based on whom is asked and the expectations set for that leader. The editors of this volume, both of whom have edited and written books on principals previously, provide international perspectives on successful and effective school leadership while recognizing that there is no singular “homogenized” definition of either word. Chapters from contributors from across the globe provide varying perspectives on how a certain region of the world defines successful and effective school leaders, prepares educators to become administrators, and practices successful school leadership. This work aims to address the research gap in knowing the needs of educational administrators in varying contexts and creating preparation programs to meet those needs.

The editors set the framework of the book in the introduction with a review of literature about what makes a successful and effective leader and explain why principals matter. First, they note that successful and effective are defined in different ways. In the introduction, Pashiardis and Johansson provide a working definition of successful leadership as being able to help all students achieve, regardless of background or school readiness. Effective leadership is a principal’s ability to meet school targets. One contributor, Disraeli Hutton, further links the two ideas. “Overall, what the definitions revealed is that there is a relationship between successful and effective leadership. Successful leadership is about implementing the basic structure and systems, which provide the platform on which effective leadership performance is achieved” (p. 168). The contributors’ nuances in definitions of these two terms throughout the book show how different cultures expect varying skills, characteristics, and outcomes from successful and effective leaders.

Pashiardis and Johansson also note in the introduction how the role of the school leader is now changing, given the importance policy makers and researchers have placed on principals. “[V]arious stakeholders have increased their expectations from school leaders demanding for instance, higher academic results and performance standards. However, despite the changing roles and higher expectations of school leaders, it seems that most receive little formal or structured preparation for the job.” (p. 1). This has been echoed in other US based research, which shows the principal’s role becoming more managerial with increased autonomy and accountability (Henig & Rich, 2004). Contributors throughout the book expound on this notion of the changing role of the principal and identify characteristics and skills that successful school leaders possess to create positive student outcomes, which can be defined in different ways such as test scores, school climate, or community relations.

The editors divided the book into two parts: the first is focused on the development of successful and effective leadership and the second is dedicated to the practice of successful and effective school leadership. Each part contains chapters highlighting the following regions of the world: Africa; South Asia; Australia and Pacific; North America; Caribbean; and Europe. South America is only featured in the first part of the book. The contributors in each chapter present either a review of current research or provide their own research from the particular region. The editors recognize the limitation of this organization by stating “we do understand the difficulties and limitations of trying to generalize from a few case studies in one or two countries in the various regions covered in this book” (p. 196). For example, the South Asian chapter in the practicing successful leadership section only includes studies from Hong Kong, and they are author-defined exemplars of exceptional leadership rather than the norm. This provides limited voices and examples from the regions and readers must recognize that expectations placed on school leaders may vary dramatically in other areas of the same region.

The different chapters presented in the book clearly demonstrate that context matters, not only between the regions, but within them as well. The two chapters on the African region, both of which ultimately focus on South Africa while referencing limited information from other countries, highlight the importance of the Ubuntu philosophy in leadership. Jan Heystek explains that Ubuntu “holds that the group is more important than the individual – a communal societal approach, with a strong emphasis on the humanity of people and interaction. This seems to link to shared leadership or participative leadership” (p. 17). The influence of this philosophy is evident in the findings of a qualitative study by Raj Mestry in South Africa that asks school leaders what skills and traits contributed to their success. Three primary findings are that the leaders set the direction for the school, develop the people in the school, and develop the organization. Distributive leadership and an awareness that leadership occurs within the organization and wider society draws on the idea of Ubuntu.

The role and expectations of the principal in Southeast Asia varies from South Africa, once again highlighting the importance of context. In countries such as Thailand and Malaysia, the principal has historically been a government official and acted as the figurehead of the school, focused primarily on politics. As Tai Hoi Theodore Lee, Allan David Walker, and Philip Hallinger explain, as more western ideas of school governance are incorporated into Southeast Asian schools, principals are now expected to be instrumental leaders and actively lead instruction. Preparation programs have not adjusted to this change in expectations and therefore most principals do not have the capacity to take on this new role. The authors of this chapter note that one challenge principals face is that “[a]lthough borrowed policies are interpreted as a move to stimulate local education development, they often carry values which can clash with the traditional values that guide societal behaviour [sic]” (p. 29). Expectations of increased site-based management, particularly of instruction are forcing Southeast Asians to change their expectations of a successful and effective leader from figurehead to instrumental.

Several other regions address the changing role of the school leader into a site-based manager with greater autonomy. In Helene Arlestig’s chapter on Europe, she cites how the principal role is more managerial, and yet administrators still need to practice distributed leadership to be seen as successful. In Candido Alberto Gomes, Alexandre Vertura, and Magali de Fatima Evangelista Machado’s chapter on South America, they provide the historical and economic circumstances that lead to the decentralization of school governance, funding diversification, and external evaluation. These policy changes make the role of the principal more autonomous but also beholden to greater accountability measures and democratic governance. This change results in clashes between community expectations of a more democratic leader and a principal’s desire to maintain a bureaucratic role. Leadership preparation programs have not adjusted for the principal’s new role which has left many school leaders without the necessary skills to meet the new expectations. While South America has already decentralized much of their school governance, the Caribbean primarily has not; Hutton cites this as the cause of unsuccessful leadership in this region based on student outcomes. He highlights Jamaica as the exception, because it built a system that fosters successful and effective leaders by granting them more legal authority to make decisions previously performed by the central ministry. “[H]igh performing principals are emerging from the traditional management role and responsibilities, partly because they have to be more inclusive in order to bring all constituents on board” (p. 173). This has resulted in greater student outcomes in Jamaica, as contrasted to countries such as Trinidad and Tobago and Antigua, which continue to see poor student performance and where the bureaucratic systems from colonial times still thrive.

Different regions discuss the importance of autonomy in being a successful leader. Stephen Jacobson highlights a study in America that found that school leaders are most successful when they have a mix of autonomy and the right supports. Success also includes the development of distributive leadership and the ability to build relationships, especially within the school. Though “the quality of its teacher workforce remains a school’s strongest determinant of student motivation and achievement, it is the ability of principals to motivate and enhance the quality of their teachers’ work setting that has the second greatest impact on student performance” (p. 158). Similarly, the importance of building capacity, creating a positive climate, and communicating a shared vision are found in studies in Australia and New Zealand. Studies from both of these regions as well as those highlighted in the European chapters were part of a larger study called the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP), which is indicated as a source for more information about international perspectives on successful school leadership.

Petros Pashiardis, Georgia Pashiardi, and Olof Johansson conclude this book by summarizing overall international trends in defining successful and effective leadership. While reiterating the importance of context, they identify four commonalities across all regions. First, successful school leaders are aware of their schools’ internal and external contexts and they know how to adapt to meet their students’ needs. Second, principals must be effective instructional or pedagogical leaders. “This leadership style improves the quality of teaching and enhances the school climate, which should be conducive to teaching and learning, and instruction becomes the leader’s priority and a measure of success and effectiveness” (p. 206). Third, principals need to practice distributed leadership by building collaborative structures both inside and outside of their schools. Finally, school leaders must be value-driven and trust-driven. They need to be able to translate these values into a shared vision, which is then communicated broadly.

While the contributors provide a diverse review of literature on the subject, the major limitation is that this book privileges countries where more research on school leadership is conducted. Elson Szeto, Yan Ni Annie Cheng, and Allan David Walker note that Hong Kong is the source of 50% of publications from East Asia and 25% of studies in Asia overall. Lee, Walker, and Hallinger state that there is a large Chinese language literature that is inaccessible beyond China, which can provide more information about school leadership but is hidden primarily from the global academic community. This limitation is also noted in both chapters devoted to the African region. Since South Africa is most prolific in its research, it was primarily featured. This begs the question about the countries and cultures that were not included and what new dynamic they might have brought to the conversation about successful and effective leadership. All contributors are accomplished researchers in the field, but there are likely many voices and perspectives not represented. Overall this engaging book provides a range of perspectives. It also demonstrates the commonalities between regions of good administration as well as how context has a large impact on the varying expectations of successful and effective leadership. Principals and educators studying to be school leaders will gain greater insight into what is necessary to be a successful and effective administrator by reading this book. The audience that will likely benefit most is the educators of future school leaders since this book provides strong evidence of gaps between expectations for principals and the preparation they receive. The questions posed by this work also prompt discussion about how we define success and effectiveness for school leaders which is necessary for any policy maker to strongly consider. Measures for success will incentivize how a school leader acts, which can affect students’ experiences and outcomes. It is important to consider as a society what we want from our school leaders.

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