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Book Review

School leadership in the Caribbean: Perceptions, practices, paradigms. Edited by Paul Miller. (2013). Oxford, UK: Symposium Books. 204 pp. (ISBN 978-1-873927-81-6)

Reviewed by Donna H. Swapp, Western University

Dr. Paul Miller's (2013) edited book, *School Leadership in the Caribbean: Perceptions, Practices, Paradigms*, explores key socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-historical constructions and practices of school leadership in Caribbean territories across micro, meso and macro levels of education systems. Together, the chapters interrogate regional similarities and local differences across school contexts, highlight persistent challenges to educational development in island states, and in the region, and describe urgent, transformative steps to bring school leadership in the Caribbean on par with international standards. This book fits the theme of this Special Issue "School Leadership: Opportunities for Comparative Inquiry", and readers of the Canadian and International Education journal will find it makes a timely and important contribution to the discussion on school leadership in the Caribbean.

Miller's book is dually situated within the fields of educational leadership and comparative and international education; an evidenced-based interrogation of the current nature, practices and challenges of school leadership in local and regional jurisdictions adds to the international educational leadership literature. Overall, the discussions facilitate a more nuanced understanding of school leadership in the Caribbean, particularly in relation to the region's history of colonization and the subsequent postcolonial trajectories of individual island states. The book also raises interesting and important areas for research, especially given globalization, the region's dependence on foreign aid, and the concomitant, heavy involvement of international organizations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank in local governance. Educators, researchers, and policymakers alike can draw from the leadership situations and challenges described in this book to inform practice, debates and planning in the region, particularly in problematizing context when making universal claims regarding 'best practices' in school leadership.

The book is divided into three parts. The first examines common perceptions which frame discourse and practice around school leadership. The authors engage with theories of distributed leadership and emotional intelligence in disrupting the still dominant authoritarian style of schooling, and in countering 'transient' school leadership in and after natural disasters in Montserrat, a volcanic-prone island. The second juxtaposes notions of leadership practice for performance and existence. Here, authors assert a strong postcolonial stance in examining inclusion and special education in Trinidad and Tobago and the current deleterious context of an inherited elitist, exclusive nature of schooling in Guyana. Other authors draw on distributed leadership in studying successful principalship and the middle management leadership base in Jamaica. The third part of the book addresses paradigms of change, improvement and leadership. Researchers report on teacher professional development in Trinidad and Tobago and principals' reactions to Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) education in Jamaica. Other authors engage in theoretical and experiential discussions of the political dichotomy of Caribbean school leadership and current problems facing Caribbean principals.

Overall, Miller's book advances several important themes in current debates surrounding school leadership and the future of education in the Caribbean. The book's attention to context suggests an important caution against sweeping claims of 'successful' school principalship, especially given the region's unique socio-historical trajectory and geo-economic reality. The book assiduously attends to the pervasive influence of colonization on the perceptions, articulations and practices surrounding school leadership, as other Caribbean educational researchers and scholars have addressed, including Anne Hickling-Hudson, Barry Chevannes, and George Brizan. Another timely, well-articulated theme is the dominant leader-centered, authoritarian leadership style still flourishing in Caribbean territories. The book's unified advancement of transformational, distributed leadership represents an effort to disrupt, specifically, such inherited autocratic perceptions and practices. More broadly, it introduces a culture of leadership as influence and empowerment, in keeping with the global literature on educational leadership and school improvement. Further, the vulnerability of the Caribbean region to natural disasters including hurricanes, volcanoes and earthquakes is another important theme which, given its implications for principal leadership, constitutes an important area of future study.

Three other important themes taken up very well in the book are elitism in schooling and principal recruitment, lack of formalized, professional development for school leaders in the Caribbean, and local ministries of education's dominant focus on the managerial and technical aspects of leadership development. In making claims for radical change in education, the chapter authors engage with current international thinking on school leadership (e.g., Gronn, 2003; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999) and emphasize the importance of developing the human side of school organizations and systems (MacGregor, 1978; Owens & Valesky, 2011). In disrupting current elitist practices in principal recruitment and promotion (centered largely on hiring and promotion based on years of experience as a teacher and the current trend of younger, more qualified teachers joining the system), the authors argue for the raising of professional standards to represent merit and formal qualification.

Despite the book's strengths, two shortcomings are evident. The first constitutes a somewhat paradoxical engagement with, and distancing from, the international literature on school leadership in discussions on the future of education in the Caribbean. On one hand, the authors argue that unique, socio-historical and geo-economic circumstances necessitate a context-driven approach to education development in the region; nevertheless the propositions they advance reflect the transnational contexts from which they originate. In this way, the authors fail to engage in a more nuanced discussion of broader themes relating to policy borrowing and policy transfer to illustrate how the Caribbean can draw from global development initiatives to inform indigenous educational efforts. The second shortcoming relates to the misrepresentation of the term 'transformational leadership'. In the book, claims of there being a "difference between the rhetoric and the reality of transformation" (p. 149) and the assertion that "symbolism and rhetoric must give way to action" (p. 152) can be applied to overall discussions of transformational leadership. Oftentimes, these discussions hint at simplistic, unexamined understandings of the term, the substance of which is at times profoundly different from the intent of the concept's originator, James McGregor Burns. More specifically, the book's positivistic focus on administration and system change as a phenomenon that literally metamorphoses school organizations is at odds with Burns' (1978) more humanistic conceptualization of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership, according to Burns, privileges higher order outcomes of equality, justice and liberty in emphasizing the nature

of human character, values, power and conflict in specific contextual settings to realize mutual fulfillment of leaders' and followers' needs. The book's authors fail to discuss the concept to appreciable depths within such theoretical foundations and thus miss out on an opportunity to offer meaningful, evidenced-based accounts of what transformational leadership can really look like in a Caribbean context and how it may be applied to develop school leadership and improve the overall delivery of education in the region.

Notwithstanding its shortcomings, Miller's book makes a timely and important contribution to the literature on Caribbean school leadership. Its strength is in its detail to relevant themes of colonialism and post-independent developmental challenges in Caribbean territories, including elitism in schooling, sustaining change and school reform, and vulnerability to natural disasters. The authors must be credited with responding to the call to make inroads to regional integration and development through educational research. Progress can only come from such concerted, empirical effort. I definitely recommend this book to readers of this journal.

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