

BOOK REVIEWS

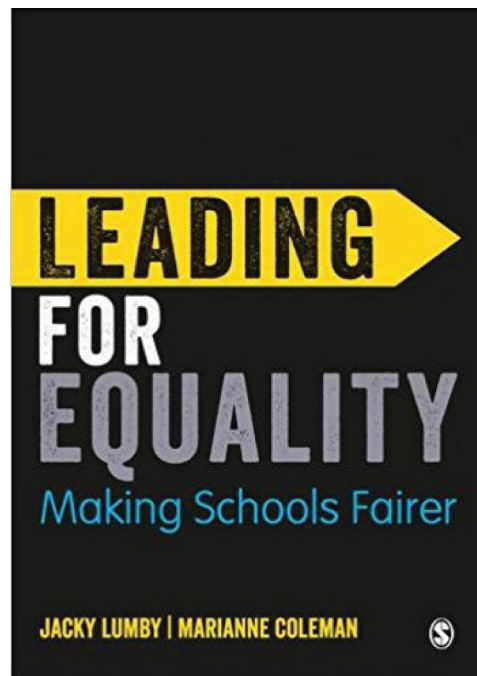
***Leading for Equality: Making schools fairer*, by Jacky Lumby and Marianne Coleman**

London: Sage, 2016, 206 pp., ISBN: 978-1-4739-1629-6 (pbk)

This very accessible book takes complex and challenging ideas and makes these practical and accessible without being patronizing. Lumby and Coleman are deeply reflective and open about the issues covered, and explain that there are no 'magic answers' in seeking solutions in the endeavours of educators to address issues of equality. They are also unflinching in urging us to reflect on our own practices and predispositions critically, which may, albeit unconsciously, be adding to misunderstandings, misconceptions and socially unjust behaviours. Furthermore, the authors do not pretend to address all aspects of equality but claim only to have picked out issues that they feel are particularly pertinent to the world of schools. Thus, through drawing upon literature and on illustrative data from schools, Lumby and Coleman expose a number of all-too-familiar scenarios and subject these to critical examination, while at the same time not making pejorative judgements of school leaders' attempts to address issues. They also provide the reader with a host of further readings, should individuals wish to pursue particular aspects of the debate.

Leading for Equality is therefore structured to raise issues, illustrate these issues with examples and give readers food for thought in relation to their own classroom and school practices. Alongside this runs a gentle humour that is utilized to make points clear. For example, the early use of the 'Matthew effect' (5) in the initial chapter is a fabulous way to illustrate the basic challenges that underpin much of our activity and their implications for equality and coherent understandings of what equality might entail. Moreover, this chapter makes clear the links and fractures between educators, leaders, and their values and practices. This then begins to set the context, along with the following four chapters, to give the reader a sense of the inequities faced within, and by, schools.

The following chapters in this section raise issues such as 'wobble room', which remind us that policy initiatives can be negotiated and reflected upon, and potentially resisted. Hence, we come to understand that teachers are not always wholly bound by external edicts, and that they need to engage with such directives critically. The authors tackle 'intersectionality', the



ways in which multiple aspects of people and attitudes conspire to create a varied landscape of response. Further, they ask us to consider how we may add subtlety to perceptions of inequality, and whether data can help or hinder in this respect. In Chapter 5, we are challenged to 'think differently and persist in the face of the likely resistance' (49).

Lumby and Coleman then move on to discuss approaches to addressing inequality. In this section, the reader is asked to examine the ways in which school structures may aggravate issues of inequality. Notions of class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, special learning needs and migration are all examined in relation to school practices and wider attitudes that have implications for, and influence upon, practices in schools. Challenges are offered to help the reader find ways of first discovering hidden aspects of practice, and then suggestions are made for beginning to address these issues. The authors focus the thinking of the reader on unwitting prejudice and the ways in which thoughtlessness can exacerbate discrimination. Moreover, Lumby and Coleman present us with the challenges that teachers and head teachers face in attempting to find solutions in difficult circumstances where there are no clear answers that can be acted upon. What they see as important within this, however, is the underlying notion of respect for others.

The final section is a chapter that attempts to pull these complex debates together while emphasizing why these are important considerations. In this the key, Lumby and Coleman argue, is to develop deep understandings of the issues, as only then can you make deep changes and shifts in structures and attitudes within educational practice. This book clearly helps to do this by awakening a deeper level of consciousness about everyday practices that have been taken for granted, and that have had detrimental effects on the practices of equality, albeit unconsciously. Clearly one book cannot possibly do justice to all aspects of the equality debate or do much more than raise awareness and some critical reflections that can shift sensitivities to this issue. However, this does not invalidate the value of this book. Its clarity of thinking, accessible written approach and illustrative material provoke readers to re-examine practices that are taken for granted and gain a deeper recognition of why issues of equality are so important to understand. I wholeheartedly recommend this as a core piece of reading for teachers, teachers in training, teacher educators, parents and school governors. It also has relevance for all of us in education who need some provocation to engage in considering aspects of prejudice that may have escaped our conscious attention and which need to be addressed in our practices.

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