

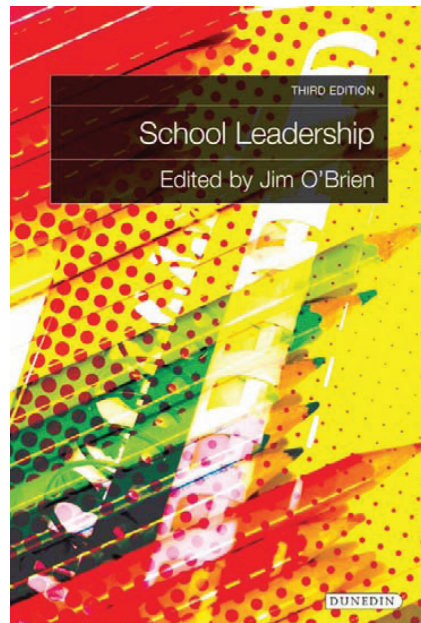
## BOOK REVIEWS

### ***School Leadership (3rd edition)*, edited by Jim O'Brien**

Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2016, 248pp., £21.99 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-78046-051-2

This publication is the latest edition in a sequence of three, of which the 2003 and 2008 versions belonged to the now closed publisher's series *Policy and Practice in Education*. The five authors who between them contribute the full nine chapters hail entirely from the University of Edinburgh or the University of Glasgow, and this explains the pre-eminence given to matters of leadership in the Scottish context. Indeed, the book is ostensibly an exploration of educational leadership within the Scottish system. This being said, editor Jim O'Brien makes a strong case for the relevance of the book content beyond the confines of Scotland on the basis that many of the challenges facing leaders and schools are universal rather than particular. While this claim is reasonable, the book is not for those seeking a more robust international contextualization of school leadership discourse. As an aside, despite the English penchant for policy borrowing from around the globe, unfortunately the adage 'What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas' seems to apply to educational matters north of the border and I found the inclusion of the Scottish dimension refreshing and informative. Moreover, for me, the product of and a subsequent operative in the English education system, the references to the Scottish context or 'experience' became a useful foil that highlighted the contrasting nature of the English system and its responses, including leadership ones, to what are presumably similar perceived or actual problems.

As noted, there are nine chapters and these are intended to 'act an introductory guide for the complicated territory that today's school leaders must learn to map and navigate.' (p. xiv). However, the edited collection is more than a guidebook for practitioners in or aspiring to leadership roles. The contributions from what are notable and experienced Scottish scholars present a compelling and, in the main, insightful chronicle, albeit from mixed perspectives, into the complex and arguably yet untamed construct that is school leadership. The general narrative weaves in neighbouring debates including teaching and learning, curriculum and, naturally, the ubiquitous and foregrounded performativity, accountability, responsibility, policy and professionalism discourses. For those relatively unversed in the finer nuances of leadership and school leadership, Chapter 1 proves to be a convenient and purposeful introduction to the field. O'Brien and Murphy skilfully lay out the theoretical territory around school leadership, paying homage to all the key theories/theorists, major tensions and gaps in the knowledge field. Accordingly, busy readers with a general grasp of such foundational matters may wish to fast-



forward beyond this point. A word of caution, though, to those tempted by this offer: if they did so, they would miss the rather fascinating account of the Scottish psyche as conceived by O'Brien and Murphy and how they contend that it has been the major determinant in shaping the Scottish education system into the unique entity it is today.

Chapter 2 is a totally different beast, offering readers an exploration of the intersection of democracy and school leadership. Murphy's initial staging of the argument as a precursor to the substantive part of the chapter on democratic leadership in a school setting is somewhat eclectic, weaving a thread between the ideals of the French Revolution, the concepts of trust, accountability/performativity/etc., Weber and PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), to name but a few. Nevertheless, if readers can stay with the initial Cook's tour approach (a rapid tour of many places), they are subsequently rewarded with a knowledgeable discussion of leadership in democratic school systems and a consideration of its implications for the type of leadership they imply or necessitate.

Draper clearly brings her considerable research experience to bear when she alights firmly on the territory of leadership within the context of headship in Chapter 3. She offers a comprehensive review of the empirical literature on the expectations and experiences of head teachers, including those aspiring to (and, perhaps more insightfully, those rejecting) the role. Draper's second contribution, Chapter 4, extends this consideration to wider leadership roles, both formal and informal, in school settings and she documents what she considers to be the ensuing implications thereof. Forde's chapter follows logically on from this examination of implications with a consideration of educational leadership development. With an introduction that is perhaps one of the most internationally orientated, the substantive content of Chapter 5 closes in dramatically to Scottish approaches to leadership development. Forde documents how the leadership development debates have been shaped by competing tensions and how impediments to the operationalization of final policy into practice have played out.

Learning, if not the whole *raison d'être* for schools then at the very least the mechanism by which the aims and goals of schooling are achieved, finally receives some detailed study in Chapter 6, which is entitled 'Leadership for learning, learning for leadership'. McMahon reveals how Scotland has positioned the leadership and learning agenda at the centre of its current plans for full system reform, based on the recognition that there is indeed a critical connection between leadership and learning that can be verified in terms of empirical evidence. The two notable consequences for leadership development are that all head teachers from 2018 are required to have a master's degree, and the creation in 2014 of a new leadership college, the Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL) to oversee this. It will be interesting to see how the planned empirical evaluations of the programme will support knowledge development in school leadership going forward. McMahon also authors the next chapter, on system-level leadership. In Chapter 7, which is the shortest offering in the entire book, McMahon explores how policy expectations now require Scottish educational leaders to work beyond the confines of their own institution in pursuit of policy attainment through community engagement. McMahon discusses the implications of this new type of system-level approach, termed partnership working, on leadership thinking and practice. Chapter 8, again by Forde, is devoted to the matter of teacher professional learning from a leadership perspective.

The partnership of O'Brien and Murphy return to round the book off with the final chapter, the name of which they tell us has remained constant across all editions, as has its purpose, which is to present an assessment of the future direction of school leadership based on an extrapolation of events in the recent past. In sum, on what must be an already well-populated library shelf, the scholarly exploration of school leadership situated within the Scottish experience offered by this revised edition marks itself as a worthwhile addition. As a contemporary resource for those

already in leadership roles in and around school settings, it extends a further appeal to students, new researchers and academics in the leadership field. I would also heartily recommend it to policymakers, especially English ones, as a possible blueprint for future policy moves.

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