

# Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

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## **Perspectives on Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice in Educational Leadership**

Edited by Ashraf Esmail, Abul Pitre, and Antonette Aragon

Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 2017, 158 pages

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### **Reviewed by/ Revu par**

Kaschka Watson, Ph.D. Candidate

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

There is no doubt that over the last three decades, our schools have become more and more diverse racially, ethnically, and linguistically. In light of this, Esmail, Pitre and Aragon (2017) successfully argue in their theoretical book: *Perspectives on Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice in Educational Leadership*, that educational leaders are being called upon to implement effective strategies that will foster multicultural education in their schools. The authors maintain that academic disparities are cemented in structural inequalities in our education system, and in order for all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, or sexual orientation to receive equitable educational opportunities, education policies and practices ought to be transformative in an effort to promote equity and social justice in schools.

Esmail, Pitre and Aragon (2017) contend that educational leaders are tasked with the responsibility to set the tone for understanding and embracing diversity, equity, and

social justice in our education systems, but many school leaders, principals, district-level experts, and superintendents still do not grasp or diagnose the urgency of creating a school culture and community that are inclusive of their students' diverse cultures and lifestyles. They further argue that schools are also responsible for preparing educational leaders with the tools they need to lead not only in curriculum and administration, but also in confronting systemic inequities. Schools and educational leaders are encouraged to value the importance of transformational learning if they are to fully support the needs of each student by taking the time to understand the rich and unique cultural perspectives each learner bring to the learning environment.

Like Esmail, Pitre and Aragon (2017), Beachum and McCray (2004) also concur that the continuous growth in diversity of American and Canadian schools is a reality that cannot be overlooked, and presents numerous challenges for educational leaders to maintain equity and social justice in schools. For example, educational practices in schools are not reflective of the shifts in demography. Therefore, educational leaders are urged to fashion learning spaces that are more equitable and that will espouse more culturally responsive and socially just practices (Esmail, Pitre & Aragon, 2017). I agree with the authors that as our schools continue to diversify in student population, educational leaders will have to embrace the cultural difference that students bring to the classrooms and rethink the ways in which we examine our practices toward diversity, equity, and social justice in our schools.

The authors encourage educational leaders to construct more just and equitable schools by applying schoolwide restorative justice that will transform their schools into learning environments where relationships are a priority, and all students are empowered to support themselves and each other. For example, traditional zero tolerance policies were implemented to ensure school safety, but have resulted in the exclusion of hundreds of thousands of students, most of whom are black and brown males. Given this, educational leaders need to alter the trajectory of school discipline through the creation of safe, positive, and caring learning milieus for all students in spite of their cultural upbringing. The authors remind us readers that educational leaders, notwithstanding their race, are provided with a certain degree of "authority in student and staff discipline, school policy, and curriculum development and teacher supervision" (p. 66) which places them in powerful positions to support the needs and well-being of all students.

The authors maintain that it is up to the educational leaders to model transformative leadership, which offers a foundation for discourse and action that will create hope and improve the educational experience of all students. Unlike transformational leadership theories that concentrate on improving organization processes in order to maximize success, transformative leadership takes into account societal injustices such as racism, and allows students to embrace their social and cultural experiences in their learning settings. This approach to leadership, the authors argue, will maximize all students' learning experience and must be taken into account by educational leaders if inequities and injustices are to be eradicated from our schools.

Two strengths of the book: it is relevant and it provides the perspectives of several educational leaders with years of experience in education. Additionally, it offers readers the opportunity to model some of the strategies they used to combat inequities and injustices in their schools. Through their experiences the authors provide their readers with a vision that is rooted in equitable schooling, and present some strategies that lead to a better understanding of diversity, and best practices that promote equity and social justice through educational leadership in schools.

I value the richness of the authors' experiences in shaping school cultures and policies that are driven toward the promotion of equity and social justice in education for all students. As an educator myself, I recommend this book for all school administrators, teachers, principals, graduate students in education, policy-makers and stakeholders who hold multiculturalism, diversity, equity and social justice as their mandate. Additionally, this book is a great read for all those who place matters of inequity and injustices at the centre of their advocacy (Kemp-Graham, 2015), and have a robust desire to make a positive difference in education for all students. The book also expresses that a lot more needs to be done when it comes to placing emphasis on social justice leadership. Despite the increase in social justice preparation programs in schools, there remains evidence of persistent challenges and concerns faced by educational leaders and all of us as educators and leaders will have to do our part to ensure that diversity in our schools is nurtured, and that our leadership and practices are equitable to all students.

## References

- Beachum, F. D., & C.R. McCray. (2004). Cultural collision in urban schools. *Current Issues in Education*, 7(5). Retrieved from <http://cie.asu.edu/volume7/number5/>
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