Book Reviews

School Leadership: 2ⁿᵈ Edition
J. O'Brien, D. Murphy. & J. Draper
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This little book in the Policy and Practice in Education series packs a great deal into its 100 pages. It will be a most useful guide for students and other readers unfamiliar with the Scottish system as well as providing a concise introduction to contemporary debates about school leadership.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the place of schooling in Scottish society and of the many twists and turns of government policy. Examining the tension between control (for national standards) and initiative (for local solutions), the authors characterise schools as a complex cultural mix of bureaucratic and organic features. In this complex cultural context, "leadership, particularly the leadership of the head teacher, is now often seen as the key 'solution', the place where the tensions and competing forces come together and are made to work together positively" (p. 13). It is this optimistic message which broadly informs the overall approach of the book.

Chapter 2 explores the practical expressions of leadership in national government, local authorities and schools. Various conceptions of 'leadership' are considered and their application to school explored. There is some discussion of the distinction between leadership and management, and of the fashionable notion of 'distributed leadership'. It is here that the treatment is perhaps a little constrained by word limits. While there is mention in Chapter 1 of Morrison's study on Complexity Theory, the full implications of this, and later work by authors such as Lakomski, which calls into

question both the feasibility of so-called 'strategic planning' and the very concept of 'leadership' itself, does not get a mention in what is essentially a 'mainstream' analysis. We do not get much beyond Bennis's profoundly mistaken remark that, "Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing" (p. 29).

Chapter 3, "draws on a series of Scottish studies to illuminate the contemporary practice of headship, and to enable comparisons to be made between the experience and practice of headship and the management and leadership literature" (p. 37). Here a wide review of the literature, mainly, but not exclusively from Scotland, provides an illuminating insight into the experienced reality for aspiring, newly appointed and more experienced heads. Their comments reinforce the earlier analysis of the tensions within the role and emphasise the emotional and ethical challenges involved, which lead the authors to consider questions of preparation for headship, induction and continuing support. This links naturally to Chapter 4 on Leadership Development, where early initiatives are briefly considered before a substantial section on the Scottish Qualification for Headship. The origins, development and possible future directions of the programme are described, although a significant feature in the early take-up of the programme, namely, a specific grant to local authorities to fund candidates, is not mentioned.

In the final chapter, "New models, Next steps", the authors seek to draw lessons from previous experience and to outline possible future directions. Much of this focuses on the detail of Government responses to the various powerful and somewhat insular stakeholders and influences in Scottish education. But even if we are trapped in a "limited evolutionary model of change" at least there can be agreement that, "Whatever the 'stage' of career development, everyone who participates in leadership activities within the school can benefit from access to a variety of professional development activities that help to structure and to interpret the complex events and interactions of the school community" (p. 83). This case is well made. What is less clear is the extent to which a dominant preoccupation with school leadership may detract from other concerns. While it may to some degree ameliorate, leadership in schools - however defined - is no answer to the structural and cultural problems in society. To pretend otherwise is a cruel deception.