

WHEN CULTURE DISAPPEARS: US Perceptions on Educational Leadership in other Countries

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ABSTRACT:

This review examines US perceptions of educational leadership in non-US contexts. Specifically, the review seeks to address three related questions: 1) What does the research literature tell us about how the US perceives educational leadership in other countries? 2) How are leaders (principals, school superintendents, etc.) inducted into their roles? 3) Finally, how do leaders use/do not use their “social arrangements” (or connections) for professionalism and improvement? By looking at a broad range of recent research literature on educational leadership authored by “American” researchers, this review explores how US researchers talk about educational leaders outside the US. Based on their perceptions, I argue that social processes and “cultural scripts” that govern leadership in such settings become important artifacts for understanding educational leadership in more globally progressive ways. Hence leadership is a cultural practice tied to moral responsibility and other culturally acquired practices, which are suddenly disappearing under the consuming glare of western society. I offer this review to raise questions about global leadership trends that displace indigenous cultures and traditions for market-driven western ones.

When “western” researchers look at educational leadership beyond their geographical borders, they see at least two things: 1) a uniquely unfamiliar culture and context, which shapes educational leadership; and 2) a proliferation in western ideas and school market models, which influence educational leadership (see Chubb & Moe, 1996). This presence of both tradition and progression in the make-up of foreign educational leadership raises interesting questions concerning the impact of globalization in education, which point to a single yet illuminating contradiction. That is, educational leadership outside of the US boasts unique cultural ideas from which researchers might learn. However, at the same time, such ideas are ever-diminishing and are, therefore, threatened due to movements outside of the US to fashion schools and leadership roles in ways that reflect the western, top-down, market model. As such, this review seeks to examine “western” perceptions of educational leadership in other countries while illuminating the authentic role of culture and tradition in leadership in such contexts. In addition, I will comment upon the “social arrangements” that leaders use for professional improvement in order to make a case for a global leadership perspective that looks beyond the west for effective models.

LOCATING THE WEST

The “west” and the “east” can be conceived in a variety of ways. For example, if we look at the west in terms of geography (global context relative to the Atlantic Ocean), the west would essentially be defined as the Americas, and the east would constitute the geographic land masses east of the Atlantic Ocean. Yet, researchers rarely define east and west in relation to geographical boundaries alone. They instead more closely associate the west with European global hegemony; that is, as the west is defined by European global dominance (e.g., Great Britain and its colonial off springs [i.e., Australia and the US]), the east, by contrast, is defined by geographical and cultural contexts which have not been over-taken by such influences.

As such, terms like east and west connote cultural/ideological understandings that complicate simple geographical explanations of them. While Australia is clearly east of many “eastern” nations (like China), it is considered part of the west because of its linkage to European culture. Other countries and cultures like Mexico or Haiti are never identified as the west even though they are geographically located west of the Atlantic Ocean. Hence, for the purposes of this report, I abandon the east/west binary in favor of a less complicated one: US/non-US contexts (with emphasis on China).

Using this distinction, I was able to locate over fifty articles authored by “US researchers” (US born researchers, researchers that attended US universities, and research sponsored by US universities or publishers). Within this corpus of work, a few things are worth noting concerning the ways that US researchers perceive educational leadership in non-US contexts. First, the literature (taken together) suggests that leading (versus leadership) is a cultural practice. That is, leading varies across cultures and leadership roles are written into cultural scripts. By association, educational leaders learn to lead indirectly through years of participation in their countries educational system (s), which we can also consider as nested cultural contexts. The activity of leadership in such contexts is defined by leadership scripts, which are cultural patterns that outline the pragmatic role of “leaders” in an educational setting. With this said, there is an interesting bias that must be noted. US researcher tend to “learn” about leadership in positive ways from other develop countries, countries that increasingly reflect western ways of leading. However, western researchers tend to report on the [cultural] deficiencies (e.g., “lack values”) of leadership in contexts less affected by the western way.

LEADERSHIP AS A CULTURAL PRACTICE

Educational leadership in non-US contexts is shaped by a history of collective experiences. Such experiences mold the various scripts that educational leaders learn as they are inducted into their leadership roles. Given the influence of culture in the shaping of leadership, leadership in non-US contexts is fundamentally variable. That is, leadership is intimately tied to the politics and social arrangements of specific cultural contexts. As such, principles/values for leading follow from within the cultural aura of the context. This body of work discusses at least two large themes: leaders are cultural products and leadership is a cultural practice.

While larger ideological forces factor into the formation of leadership, the primary formation of leadership seem to be culturally related (Walker & Dimmock, 2000). That is, there are cultural and even moral aspects to educational leadership. These cultural/moral influences bring to bear necessary lenses through which westerners might learn beyond market model leadership. In this way, Wong (1998) notes that the theme of moral leadership in education is only emerging in the West. According to Wong, moral leadership is consonant with a long intellectual tradition in Chinese culture. Since very early in the Chinese civilization, there has been an emphasis on ethical humanism in Chinese culture. This strain of ethical humanism reached its climax in Confucius who paid little attention to spiritual beings and focused almost exclusively on human activities. Confucius believed that the function of education was character training, training people to be conscientious and altruistic. He believed that education should train people to be upright and moral and to apply what they have learned to serve the people so that eventually, serving the state became one of the main purposes for learning. Similarly, the move for moral leadership in schools, as discussed by Western analysts, emphasizes values and behavioral norms over rules, regulations, and policies.

Wong (2001), in later work on Chinese culture and leadership, maintains that Chinese culture, like the other cultures in the world, is rich in history and content. Therefore, both history and content become principal components in the making leaders and the doing of leadership. The

Chinese culture, as a social practice, has a long history of valuing leadership and preparing leaders on moral grounds. Huang (1988) argued that the Chinese culture and values have been quite consistent over the long years despite the change of time. As such, we can draw on Chinese cultural history to explore the influences of cultural practices and products on leadership. In this way, Wong focuses on moral leadership, a mode of leadership that has received considerable attention in the English-speaking world. He offers an indigenous perspective to leadership theory in general and in education in particular by directing us to begin to consider the relationship of culture to leadership.

The relationship between educational leadership and cultural practice as realized through such cultural phenomenon as morality is not exclusive to China. According to Ehrich (2000), moral (rather than "corporate") accountability in education is essential; so is a human-centered leadership approach. Findings from Ehrich's study suggests that elementary principals' responsiveness to teachers' learning show how these leaders exercised their moral, professional, and contractual accountability to support a caring, learning ethic. Similarly, McEwen et al. (2002) looks at how British elementary principals' values were enacted in the school environment. They utilized data from online research journals kept by principals over two 4-week periods. These data indicated that government policy of improving school leadership in order to raise standards was seriously compromised by educational market pressures. Many principals reverted to a leadership style of contingency management to cope with daily contingencies, with more complex issues falling by the way. As such, the pressure to accommodate western ideas in leadership (I will talk about this more in the next section) in complicated situation was displaced by the ethical choices of the individual leaders.

While leaders are cultural constructs, leadership practices vary based on cultural contexts. In a study of educational leadership, Ardichvili (2001) surveyed 695 managers and 1,696 employees in Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Russia. The study revealed significant differences in cultural values between the two groups. Significant differences among countries were found in terms of cultural value dimensions of leadership style, such as masculinity, paternalism, and long-term orientation. In this light, we see that educational leaders are inducted into their roles based upon cultural scripts. Dossdall and Diemert (2001) describes how the public schools in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, worked to empower principals by making them part of the management team, reporting directly to the superintendent. They describe three factors (e.g., separate leadership and training programs for these principals, ongoing support including principal teams, and principal institutes) that have helped principals transition into their new roles. For them, leadership tended to be measured by government participation. Unlike Dossdall and Diemert, Simkins et al. (1998), in studying the role of government and nongovernment influences on leadership in secondary schools in Karachi, Pakistan, found nongovernmental principals had more managerial freedom, but governmental principals operated under less personal control by their superiors. The latter used a nondelegative, direct-supervision approach and seemed threatened by parent involvement.

The nature of culture in educational leadership, although prolific, tends to be ambiguous. According to Arthur (1998), leadership is important, but it requires a critical mass of students and believing teachers who can co-lead school communities. School systems must find, enlist, train, and support teachers who share its value system. Part of the cultural script of educational leadership, then, is to reinforce, create, maintain, and alter culture and atmosphere (Riley, 1998). According to Johnson (1998), staff quality is an important school attribute. Strong, determined leadership requires a principal's personal readiness to take issue with underperforming teachers, challenge cynicism and negative elements in the school, and recruit, retain, and develop high-quality, dedicated staff based on moral reasoning. A collaborative leadership culture emerges from empowering/absorbing even the most resistant faculty into the culture that educational leaders promote.

This work of educational leaders, as culture brokers, is extremely complex. Caldwell (1998) examines school reform's effects on principals' professional leadership culture, drawing on research findings from 1993 to 1998, and highlighting possible future reforms in Victoria, Australia. According to Caldwell, principals are more satisfied with present, than past, work arrangements. Leadership is more strategic and empowering than heroic or hands-on. The imperative then for the foreign educational leader from the US perspective is much the same as it is within the US, to manage and maintain the cultural norms and standards of the given society.

While educational leadership styles in US and non-US systems seems to be converging under the influence of western social and economic pressures, there remain differences between the leadership models of different contexts. A comparison of educational systems of several developed countries (England, Germany, Denmark, Japan, and the United States) shows that U.S. principals have a more frenetic work day than their international colleagues, shouldering heavier responsibilities for student discipline, teacher supervision, student activities, and community relations (McAdams, 1998). Differences in autonomy, training, classroom teaching responsibility, school schedules, and compensation persist. By contrast, in Israel, principals exhibited certain work characteristics (brevity, variety, fragmentation) supported in other research (Rosenblatt & Somech, 1998). They differed from conventional job descriptions in demonstrating internally oriented social (but not political) inclinations, using a personal approach to students, and being high in initiative and low in planning.

The educational research literature on leadership—from an American perspective—makes a convincing case as to the cultural contingencies that mark leaders. Given the cultural diversity of our global landscape, it is helpful, if not effective, to locate leadership in relation to the cultural complexities that make leading in context beyond the US quite different than leading within the US. From the array of leadership scripts, researchers can learn much about models of leadership that might prove more effective than the top-down, market model most US schools espouse. With this said, there is a sad danger occurring across the globe. Educational leadership beyond US contexts is becoming more and more in line with the western ideal of leading, which has always been authoritative and bureaucratic. In sum, we stand to learn much from studying leadership in diverse places; however, such opportunities to learn are quickly fading, as educational systems beyond our borders become more like ours.

WESTERN INFLUENCES ON LEADERSHIP OUTSIDE THE US

While educational leadership is traditionally shaped by culture, the presence of western global pressure has influenced leadership in some important ways. While some remnants of existing cultural scripts remain beyond US borders, the influence of western thought on educational leadership seems to be pushing leadership scripts in directions that begin to diminish the value of non-western leadership models. That is, leadership in the globalized world has increasingly adopted a western cultural perspective as opposed to the local cultural practices (i.e., morality) which once shaped it. In this way, Portin (1998) addresses two broad themes related to the study of school leadership in four countries. The first is the changing role of the principal/head teacher as a result of legislated change and societal expectations. The second is the implications of these changes for the roles of principals and head teachers. Portin finds that schools beyond US borders (and maybe even within) have become more and more westernized. Thus, the influence of westernization on globalization and the local leadership scripts that maintain a diversity of educational systems is changing what the school leaders look like in many regions throughout the world.

Educational leaders beyond US contexts are beginning to look a lot like US educational leaders and have increasingly become concerned with similar educational issues. Liggett (1997) explored the perceptions that elementary and secondary school principals in China have of the reform

expectations currently demanded of them. His subjects were over 150 Chinese school leaders who shared their instructional concerns through the activities of the Sino-American Seminar on Educational Leadership between 1993 and 1996. Findings showed that principals had four broad prevalent instructional concerns (highly reminiscent of the US educational discourse): teaching methods, student motivation and behavior, the one-child policy, and assessment (Yu, 2002).

The research literature clearly points to a push to transform non-US educational leadership into the US market model. Hallinger and Kantamara (2000) uses a case study of change leadership in a Thai school to illustrate the salience of multi-cultural perspectives (primarily American) on school leadership. Their case study explores the role of leadership in implementing 'modern' systemic reforms in a traditional Thai school. The study employs a cultural analysis of the change process that contrasts the nature of the 'empowering' reforms with the underlying cultural norms of Thai society. The results suggest differences in the nature of educational change that are rooted in the social culture of the country, leading educational change in the direction from East to West.

In this way, much of the western discourse surrounding leadership has centered on change/transformation and efficiency, which is the iconic label for a marketized leadership style. In this way, one must note that western leadership perspectives have much to offer but must never overshadow the offering of non-western localities. Wasserstein-Warnet and Klein (2000) suggests that we could learn to improve educational leadership throughout the globe by looking beyond the west for a model. In a recent study, they used interviews and observations to explore principals' practices in building new cognitive perception and meaning in 20 Israeli schools. Changes of perception are intrinsically complex. Principals' ability to change perspective results from expertise in handling the interaction between a transformative, open-ended process and a time-cognitive orientation.

The transferring of leadership styles is not bi-directional. Sapre (2000) analyzes the dilemma of developing countries in the non-Western world in their struggle to achieve economic and social development. The dilemma, according to Sapre, results from two opposing pulls that accompany the urge for modernization: the application of new knowledge and technology from the West and the preservation of cultural identity, enduring traditional values, and wisdom that have held the society together over the centuries. The analysis is focused on India where the dilemma and the tensions inherent in the transition are quite pronounced. The debate over tradition and westernization is examined against the background of India's exposure to western ideas through its system of higher education. To realize the potential of management, a shift is proposed from the predominantly centralized, bureaucratic model of educational administration to a managerial-professional model that would synthesize western and indigenous perspectives. The concept of leadership is examined in terms of western theories and compared with the traditional view projected in Indian scriptures. He reviews the recent shift in western management thought in terms of its promise for a synthesis with the eastern perspective.

In a similar way, Johansson (2001) delineates the decentralization of power in Swedish education, describing the National Headteacher Training Program, which was designed to ensure that school leaders have the competence to lead the development of educational activities and to promote respect for the rights of students and parents. The main goal is to create school leaders who are democratic, communicative, and ongoing learners. Even critical analysis of educational leadership finds elements of westernization written into leadership scripts. Hence, male leaders are not the only participants shaped by western influence (Strachan, 1999; Watts, 1998). Women who serve as leaders also adopt such roles. Using a qualitative, feminist, case-study methodology to research the feminist leadership of three women secondary principals in New Zealand, Strachan (1999) found that being student-focused was central to feminist educational leaders' practice within a neoliberal context

demanding increased financial, accountability, and marketing responsibilities. They prevailed by working long hours.

While countries around the globe scramble to adopt western leadership models, it should be noted that there are limits to the influence of educational leaders on student learning. According to Lee's and Dimmock's (1999) study of two Hong Kong secondary schools, principals did not significantly influence curriculum monitoring or innovation. However, the vice-principal and teachers in one school emphasized these duties more than counterparts at the other school. The difference may stem from students' greater demands on teachers. Also, there is bias in much of the work written on leadership beyond the US, especially when the work features less developed nations. When research look at non-western educational leadership models in other countries, they present a deficit picture. In this way, Llamas and Serrat (2002) examines educational improvement in Spanish schools, focusing on participation and leadership with the principalship as a point of reference. In their work, they describe how in Spain, in fact, there have been few advances in democratic participation and little development of educational leadership in the schools. There is a suggestion in their work that advancement is equivalent to becoming more westernized.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The educational leadership literature, specifically that written by US researchers concerning non-US sites, fail to acknowledge the social and cultural dimensions of leading and, as a result, depict foreign places in ways that, by situating leadership around unfamiliar social process, exclude many traditional leadership models. In this way, non-western educational leadership is a distant place, ubiquitously hidden from us. As such, practices such as leading are legislative as they sanction and are sanction by culture and climate. It is through leadership, moral and otherwise, that nations acquire a sense of collective importance, generate ideas and assume identities. Leaders are inducted into their roles culturally, where they learn the rules for mainstream social participation and find themselves seldom alone in a sea of others.

I connect my findings with other works that push to inform new century agenda, policy, and research. Things such as cultural competence (Brundrett, 2000; Johansson, 2001), and charisma (Morris, 2000) need to be explored when examining leadership. In all cases leadership is less tied to student achievement (van der Grift & Houtveen, 1999) and teacher transformation (Day, 2000; Eden, 1998; Wilson & McPake, 2000). So the western model, while helpful, alone is incomplete. Further, we can easily equate leadership to school reform in general (Deeks, 1998; Dimmock, 1999; Portin, 1998; Renihan, 1999), but factors such as local contexts (Moeller, 1998) and attitudes are important (Blanford & Squire, 2000) as well.

While the market model is the preferred leadership model in US society, this review suggests that schools and society would be greatly served by examining leadership beyond US borders before it is too late. As such, the studies in this paper have not only been used to make a case for exploring educational leadership across social and cultural contexts, they have also been used to help us understand ways that west's sponsorship of educational leadership might be adapted to include non-western leadership practices that eclipse global boundaries and are specifically involved with being moral. As such, this work suggests at least four implications for future educational research:

- 1) Future research must begin to be sensitive to social indices in order to theorizes about educational leadership while also addressing the intersectionality of culture and context in the making of a leader.
- 2) It must begin to challenge western epistemologies, which engender the thinking behind top-down market leadership models.

- 3) In addition to quantitative studies, it must continue to rely upon qualitative empirical data to illustrate leadership script in the social lives of non-US educational leaders.
- 4) And, lastly, future research must continue to raise pivotal questions about conventional practices, neither of which recognize the complex, leadership practices of leaders who occupy non-US educational systems.

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