



September 2015

Leadership for Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Schools (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Reynolds, A. D. (2015). Leadership for Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Schools (Book Review). *Journal of Catholic Education*, 19 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1901162015>

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BOOK REVIEW

Leadership for Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Schools

Martin Scanlan and Francesca A. López

New York: Routledge, 2015

208 pages ; \$ 155.00 USD (hardcover), \$45.95 USD (paperback)

ISBN: 978-0-415-71028-2 (hardcover), 978-0-415-71029-9 (paperback)

<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415710299/>

Reviewed by Andrew Reynolds, Boston College

Martin Scanlan and Francesca López present a vision for school leadership to better serve culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Recognizing that the United States is projected to have a majority population of people of color by 2060 and that the country continues to increase in linguistic and cultural diversity as a result of immigration trends, Scanlan and López argue that preparing schools for this “new mainstream” (Enright, 2011, p. 80) of CLD students is needed not just in some, but in every school community. This text aims to support principals and school leaders with strategies for meeting this demographic reality and providing quality education for CLD students.

The book’s argument focuses on school-level strategies for integrated service delivery through sociocultural integration, language acquisition, and academic achievement. The authors’ vision encourages school leaders to concentrate on four areas: equitable educational opportunities, location and arrangement of services, high-quality teaching and learning, and resource and policy mechanisms. These four methods of service delivery are integrated throughout the text as the authors introduce readers to research literature, specific interventions, and practice recommendations for addressing culture, language, and academics.

The first two sections summarize research literature and practice recommendations for sociocultural integration in schools. Scanlan and López highlight key theoretical orientations in sociocultural integration literature,

taking time to focus on teaching practices, school climate, belongingness, and community relationships. The authors then suggest some approaches to help make sociocultural integration an integral part of the wider school culture, including revising mission statements, conducting both formative and summative assessments to examine the reality of school culture, and developing leadership through a community engagement team. The authors also provide creative approaches to professional development and staff meetings that could be used to implement these practice recommendations. Principals looking for resources for discussing the difficult topics of race, ethnicity, language, and culture in a staff meeting will find this text a helpful resource.

The middle part of the text calls school leaders to reflect upon and improve how their communities cultivate language proficiency. Perhaps the book's strongest section, the text introduces readers to a continuum of language acquisition models from structured English immersion (SEI) to dual language programs, describes the research evidence base for each model, and makes a strong case for the academic and social benefits of bilingualism. Acquisition models also extend beyond students' language learning to involve the entire school community. The authors present strategies for teaching teachers the languages of their students and for running language-learning programs for parents. Moreover, all teachers—not just language teachers—teach language, and thus are called upon to make instructional choices that are informed by best practices for teaching and learning with CLD students. The authors also remind readers to be cautious of adopting overly ambitious language acquisition programs that might not fit the context of a particular school community, and emphasize the importance of assessment and community consensus before making changes in a school setting.

While the final section focuses on student academic achievement, the primary contribution of this section is the authors' connection of research literature on organizational studies and school practice for the purposes of supporting teachers. Principals may find this section particularly helpful, especially the recommendations for developing peer networks—both among fellow principals from similar school contexts as well as among teachers—to collaborate and share best practices for working with CLD students.

Readers may find the text limited in its ability to help school leaders negotiate the inevitable conflict that arises in culturally and linguistically diverse community contexts. At some point, parents, teachers, students, and members of the community will disagree over the language of an event, the

cultural heritage of a holiday, the pedagogical decision of a teacher, or the bias of a student—among many other issues. While the authors provide resources for how to engage in dialogue on some of these issues, school leaders might benefit from a more refined theoretical understanding of conflict and from specific strategies for handling moments of cultural and linguistic conflict in school settings.

Although the text is not written explicitly for a Catholic audience, Catholic educators will note several resonances with Catholic tradition. The organization of each of the book's three sections call to mind the "see, judge, act" method of pastoral reflection developed by Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn and the Young Christian Workers movement, which became particularly influential after the Second Vatican Council (Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, n.d., p. 1). The authors call upon school leaders to see the context of their school environments, make a judgment on that environment in light of theoretical and practical considerations for teaching CLD students, and act on those judgments with the goal of developing a supportive learning architecture for students in schools serving CLD students and communities. In the context of Catholic education, this paradigm encourages school leaders to respond to the call of Vatican II to "read the signs of the times" (p. 2) and make intentional school leadership decisions in light of the present needs and realities of students of the new mainstream.

On leadership, the authors also explicitly mention the use of subsidiarity and encourage leaders to develop broad-based support for CLD initiatives through teamwork, consensus building, and shared responsibility. Such leadership strategies also evoke subsidiarity-minded efforts at leadership reform by the present Pope. In a church context, changes that are most effective and responsive to reality emerge from those who are working on the ground. Similarly, efforts to change school practices and culture come not from dioceses and school districts or top-down policies but from building a committed leadership team that includes parents, communities, teachers, staff, and other stakeholders (such as pastors, in Catholic schools) in addition to the principal.

It should be noted that while the research literature and best practices presented in the text could be applied to the great variety of cultural and ethnic groups in American schools, the authors draw much (though not all) of their work from research on the Latino experience. Some readers may find that this limits the applicability of the work to their specific school context.

Nevertheless, the main arguments of the text, while drawn heavily from a body of research with one cultural group, provide a framework that could be useful in a variety of cultural settings. Catholic school leaders of school communities with Latino populations will find this text particularly relevant.

Readers will find the text approachable, linked to present realities, and rooted in practice. It is a timely read for those working in or supporting school and school systems serving CLD students.

References

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