

Book review

Davies, B. & Brighouse, T. (Eds) (2008). *Passionate leadership in education*. London: Sage.

Brent Davies (the University of Hull) consistently delivers highly readable texts for educational leaders and those beginning a research program in educational leadership. *Passionate leadership in education*, co-edited with Tim Brighouse (visiting professor at the Institute of Education in London), is no exception. Individual chapter contributors include Brian Caldwell, Geoff Southworth, Andy Hargreaves, John MacBeath, Christopher Day, Alan Flintham and John Novak. This combination of internationally recognisable contributors makes this book a unique collection of global thought on educational leadership.

Hargreaves in chapter seven notes that it is hard, if not impossible to imagine our world with emotions. This text takes an emotional look at educational leadership through the particular stimulus provided by 'passion'. The book is divided into five sections: core ideas about passionate leadership (Brighouse); passionate leadership (Novak and Flintham); research on passionate leadership (Day and Davies); passionate leadership – schools and teachers (MacBeath and Hargreaves); and building a model of passionate leadership (Southworth and Caldwell). In his introductory text for the book, Davies writes:

Leaders in schools today operate in challenging environments with result-driven accountability frameworks that can often conflict deeper educational values. How do they [headteachers] manage to balance these short term approaches? How do they sustain themselves and their staff in this environment and remain passionate about their education vision and mission? This book provides a set of fascinating insights into how leaders in our schools remain passionate and committed to the success of all our children (p.9).

In addition to the preparatory work, this paragraph clearly articulates what Davies considers to be the purpose of the book. While acknowledging the well established contextual influences on school leadership, it seeks not to propose a single best way to move forward but rather to provide insights into how leaders remain passionate. In doing so, it moves beyond the Tayloristic notion of 'one best way' or even the popular 'what works' (Gorard, 2005) or best practice contribution to the field. The book encourages leaders to engage in reflections on their educational core values, or in Robinson's (2006) words, putting the education back in educational leadership.

Despite being impressed with the overall body of work, I have two major concerns with the text. The first is the use of 'passionate' to describe leadership, and the second is the nature of the discussions. In relation to the use of 'passionate', my main concern is that it offers yet another adjectival leadership to the literature of the field, and one which may be unhelpful to practitioners. Many scholars have warned of the proliferation of adjectival leadership present in the field of educational leadership (see for example Day &

Leithwood, 2007; Mulford, 2007). While one type of leadership style or approach may work for some leaders some of the time, in practice, most adopt a range of different leadership practices, therefore the labelling of any leader as 'passionate' is problematic.

This leads me to the second criticism of the work, the nature of the discussion. Rather than just offering a simplistic adjectival leadership to the field, the underlying assumption I found running through the text is a desire to make visible that which is directly inaccessible. The book has many examples where the authors seek to discuss the moral purpose, value or belief systems of headteachers (the British equivalent of our principals). However, in doing so, it is limited to an under-theorised discussion of such matters. For example, Novak explicitly uses the term 'theory of practice' (p.44) yet makes no reference to the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990, 1998) who is most frequently linked to such a notion.

Additionally, Davies describes a study of Academy schools¹ in the UK, yet deliberately does not engage with the politics of Academies. What is problematic with this approach is that the study of any particular school, or school system, independently, without acknowledging the position it holds within the broader educational and societal structures and roles is limiting. By ignoring the crucial fact that an academy is situated in the social space that is education in any region, nation or global community and that the academy owes much of its distinctive constitution to the relationship it holds with others, the initial conceptualisation of academy leadership all but destroys that which it seeks to study.

The criticisms I have directed at the text however should be read in what Townley (1994) has labelled the 'spirit of friendship'. My critical approach is based on a genuine respect and profound appreciation of the work, most, if not all of it, coming from scholars whose positions and achievements far exceed my own. Yet herein lies one of the most crucial challenges when writing in educational leadership, and arguably almost any aspect of education, how do we produce a text that is both accessible – to gain the widest possible market for the text – and academically rigorous enough to advance knowledge claims in the field.

Davies set the purpose of the text in his introduction, and consistent with this, *Passionate leadership in education* delivers. The book includes a set of interesting insights into the passion that drives educational leaders. For the practitioner, or coursework master's student, this book will serve you well. Higher degree research students may find the insights a useful beginning to conceptualising the field and the difficulties in developing research programs which seek to uncover that which is not directly accessible. For those more established in the field, this book provides yet another example of the need for research to move beyond the objectified lists of leadership traits and behaviours and to push the boundaries of knowledge claims within the field. What makes a passionate leader cannot be captured in questionnaires or documentary analysis, it requires an engagement with those who work in the schools and other educational institutions that make up our nations. *Passionate leadership in education* provides us with the framework from which to build as we continue our quest to better understand educational leadership for the

betterment of our current and future students. After all, an investment in knowledge about educational leadership is an investment in the future.

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Notes

- ¹ Academies are all-ability schools established by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups working in highly innovative partnerships with central Government and local education partners.

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