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Transformational and Distributed Leadership
RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

Editors
Donnie Adams
Chua Yan Piaw
Kenny Cheah Soon Lee
Bambang Sumintono
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Research is part of the academic exercise of every postgraduate student. The product becomes a milestone for the student when they eventually submit a thesis or dissertation that completes their postgraduate degree requirement. Beginning research is always a challenge for a novice researcher, from finding a topic, collecting relevant information and eventually, the know-how in preparing a final research proposal.

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We begin writing this book based on a survey administered to existing IEL postgraduate students and alumni entitled the ‘Top five most important areas that interest you when you’re skimming through a Dissertation and Thesis.’ The feedback from students, as indicated in the figure, shows which five information areas they often seek when skimming through the dissertation and thesis. Thus, the structure and content of the book are written based on the students’ interests and needs. We emphasised only the abstract, statement of the problem, research objectives, research design, research instrument and summary of research findings from each Dissertation and Thesis. Only minimal editing was carried out on these sections without changing the content and the writing style of the original authors. In addition, the original full
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Based on our experiences as research supervisors, we are often questioned by prospective postgraduate students on what sort of research was done before. What kind of research is expected? Is there any background literature on a theory of their interest? How do they go about writing their research proposal? This book will assist students to answer these vital questions. We hope our readers will benefit from this book in their efforts to write and produce high-quality research.

Editors
Transformational and Distributed Leadership: Research and Evidence
About the Editor and Contributors

Editors

Dr. Donnie Adams is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya. He obtained his PhD in Educational Leadership from the University of Malaya. He is a recipient of the University of Malaya’s Bright Sparks scholarship - a special programme at UM to upgrade research and publications by selecting outstanding researchers (Bright Sparks) from within UM and other universities to serve with UM and a recipient of University of Malaya’s Excellence Award 2016: PhD Completion in Less than three Years. Dr Donnie Adams is also a candidate of AKEPT ‘Young Scholars Leadership Programme’ 2016 and University Malaya’s Emerging Scholars Leadership Advancement programme (EmeraLd). He is an author and reviewer of Web of Science ISI (Social Science Citation Index) and SCOPUS journals and the Editor-in-chief for the International Online Journal of Educational Leadership (IOJEL). He is actively involved in research and development work towards the area of leadership in special educational needs and school-wide reformation of inclusive education agenda in Malaysia.

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Contributors

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Dr. Lu Huong Ying completed her PhD in Educational Leadership from University Malaya in 2013. Her research is focused on learning and teaching methods in higher education settings, specifically in the emerging issues of technology integration and pedagogical innovations. She obtained her Masters in Parasitology from the Borneo Malaria Research Centre in 2003, a world renowned malaria research centre of excellence under the leadership of 2017 Merdeka Award Recipient, Professor Balbir Singh. Her early exposure to biotechnology during her undergraduate years has culminated in a keen interest in tropical diseases research. She has more than 14 years of working experience in the management of higher education from teaching to operational excellence. Since 2014, she has been appointed as the Chairperson of the Board of Governors for a leading private institute in Sarawak with approximately 1,000 students. She assists the board to implement new operation systems as well as enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall organisation. Lu also assisted some NGOs in raising awareness on cancer prevention and addressing the pressing need for action by the government through her translation work.

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The demands in educational institutions are rapidly changing, and it is no longer sufficient and practical to solely rely on one person to run the vast and ever-expanding task of a principal (Adams, Raman Kutty & Mohd Zabidi: 2017; Harris et. al.: 2017). As school functions evolve, it is natural for schools to restructure their leadership teams and create new roles in fulfilling the needs of the workforce (Harris: 2008). Schools need to play to the strength of their workforce to fulfil the demands and pressures of internal and external stakeholders. It is now a norm for teachers to wear multiple hats in school; beyond just teaching inside and outside the classroom but being in charge of a myriad committees that may or may not consist of managerial and clerical tasks (Adams, Samat, & Abu Samah: 2018).

Distributed leadership presents a new insight of leadership in an accustomed mould (Harris: 2011). Although the theory has historical and theoretical roots dating back to the 1960s, it has gained acceptance in the mid-1990s (Bolden: 2011). At that time, the conditions for acceptance arose, and the need to move from the traditional view of leadership as “top-down” has gained traction (Bolden: 2011). Furthermore, researchers had started to acknowledge the merits of distributed leadership (Gronn: 2008).
The popularity of distributed leadership in recent years can be attributed to several of its perceived charms. Prior to the emergence of distributed leadership, there was a void of information on how principals and other school leaders could create and sustain factors that foster successful schooling (Diamond & Spillane: 2016; Spillane et al.: 2004). As Spillane et al. (2004) explains, while there is considerable literature about what school structures, programmes, roles and processes are necessary for instructional change, we know less about how these changes are undertaken or carried out by school leaders (Harris et. al.: 2015). This means that other educational leadership theories such as instructional and transformational leadership were unable to address the practice of leadership in schools.

Conceptualisation

The definition of distributed leadership vary, and a few of them illustrate the concept of distributed leadership with wide and sometimes fundamental differences between them (Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey: 2003). In general, distributed leadership refers to a central redefinition of leadership as a practice and dominates the traditional concepts about the relationship between official leadership and structural act (Harris: 2013).

Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) set out to build their point of view in distributed leadership through two hypotheses. First, one should consider the tasks or responsibilities of leadership in order to develop an understanding of school leadership. The second focuses on leadership enactment that is distributed among leaders and supporters based on the school context or circumstances. In addition, Robinson (2008) has simplified the concept of leadership as a ‘task distribution’ which Spillane has built in his perspective and added another perspective which views it as a ‘process of influence’. This refers to the importance of considering leaders as an impact process that changes how others think or respond (Hallinger, et. al.: 2018; Robinson: 2008; Harris: 2013).

As an influence process, Spillane et al. (2004) posits that distributed leadership is a series of interactions constituting leadership practices that involve a web of different actors (the ‘leader’ and ‘followers’), situations and artefacts in the school ecosystem. Interactions between these parties are crucial for principals to create a culture of leadership within schools. This can be done by leaders talking to teachers and cultivating trust. The underlying principle is that the interaction and
interdependencies within schools will benefit all parties and eventually spillover to positively impact student outcomes.

This is significant in that the basis of authority is now centred on the expertise, as opposed to the formal position. It emphasises applying skills within the association instead of searching for it solely through official positions. Leadership and management activities are not only in theory but also in practice, whereby the formal and informal leadership produce differing patterns in activity with multiple realities reflecting different ways in which leadership is stretched over leaders, followers and situation in collaborated, coordinated or collective patterns (Adams: 2018; Torrance: 2013; Harris, Jones & Adams: 2016).

Distributed leadership is described as a type of leadership in which educators create practice by collaborating (Harris: 2004). Viewed as a concept of leadership shared within and between schools, the understanding of leadership is linked to common or created senses within the system (Harris: 2011). In schools, distributed leadership emphasises the need to involve the teachers in school leadership to make them feel interested and appreciated, and giving them the opportunity to exchange experiences, learn from each other, and participate in decision-making (Preedy, Bennett, & Wise: 2011). In addition, the principal can rely on other school leaders who possess specific sets of expertise such as instruction, discipline and classroom management to mobilise the school. This collective approach to some extent contributes to increased teachers’ capacity and motivations (Devos, Tuytens, & Hulpia: 2013; Harris: 2013).

While distributed leadership carries several likenesses to concepts like ‘shared’, ‘collective’, ‘collaborative’, ‘emergent’ and ‘co-leadership’, it diverges in several ways. The main differences between them is how these perceptions are applied and their comparative commonness in the various literature. In distinguishing this style from other leadership disciplines, it should therefore be viewed with a normative perspective (Bolden: 2011).

However, Woods et al. (2004) argued that distributed leadership included democratic processes and insisted on their differences and distinctiveness from democratic leadership. Hartley (2007) noted that distributed leaders are appointed, and not elected like democratic leaders (Mifsud: 2017). In addition, according to Bennett et al. (2003), what distinguishes distributed leadership from other similar concepts such as shared leadership is its emergence from the interactions of a network of individuals, from a joint agency rather than an individual agency. Ultimately, what distinguishes it is its concept of leadership as a dynamic and community activity (Ho & Ng: 2017).
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