

Book and media reviews

Fascinating insights into school leadership and British values

Lundie, D. (2022). *School Leadership between Community and the State: The Changing Civic Role of Schooling*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 306 pp., €99,99 (Hardcover) ISBN: 978-3-030-99833-2; €99,99 (Softcover) ISBN: 978-3-030-99836-3.

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In the book's acknowledgments section Lundie humorously cites his son, who declares the work 'boring'. This, however, is not my assessment. This book offers a fascinating insight into the tensions between community cohesion and Fundamental British Values in modern British schools, with implications for school leaders and governors. As such, scholars of education leadership grappling to understand the conflict between political, religious, and civic interests that schools must address will find this work highly relevant.

Tracing back to the colonial era, Lundie tracks the evolution of religious, spiritual, and moral education in British schools. He argues that the 2001 terror attacks catalysed a shift, influencing the response to minority groups and identities. The election of the 2010 Conservative Government signalled another turning point, with the then PM David Cameron imposing a legal duty on schools to promote fundamental British values as ideals around which all citizens could unite. By 2015, the Prevent duty required schools to monitor and surveil those at risk of becoming involved with violent extremism. Thus, schools found themselves at the forefront of a political agenda aimed at reframing cohesion and prompting unification around specific notions of Britishness. As the 21st century progresses and we find ourselves in the post Brexit era, societal and school values have become increasingly politicized and

securitized. While the concepts of community cohesion and partnership, which defined schools in the early 21st century, have necessarily become more complex and been reimagined within this new context, they also have resonances with the debates on neutrality and tolerance in the colonial era.

This book tackles the complexity of these issues and skilfully explores the inherent tensions by interrogating concepts like pluralism, tolerance, and neutrality. In tying together the different threads of pluralism, cohesion, and values, Lundie carefully decodes the limits of such concepts and illustrates their instrumental nature as schools contend with the performative pressures underpinned by managerialism that have long motivated school activity. There is significant potential for schools and mid-level policy actors to embed inequality and discrimination rather than offer a space that is inclusive and responsive to the values of all groups. Lundie's analysis of the 'fault lines' between tolerance, plurality, and neutrality therefore challenges leaders to think more critically about the near instinctive tendency to perceive concepts such as tolerance and neutrality as inherently positive and 'celebrating diversity' as a benign goal when responding to diversity in schools.

Given the focus on community cohesion and the potential for discourses around British values to alienate, it might have been interesting to hear the author's views on how the concept of belonging relates to cohesion. At the risk of adding a further layer of complexity, Chin's (2019) work on belonging is relevant to the debate.

The empirical data Lundie draws upon provide a valuable insight into the realities of teachers' professional practice as they grapple with the conceptual tensions outlined earlier in the book. He reveals the impact of managerial pressures and the drive to transmit British Values, leading to 'unconsciously uncritical' teachers who lean towards assimilative pedagogical approaches. The idea that teachers are unable or unwilling to critically reflect on the values agenda underpinning their practice seems to align with the notion of 'uncritical attachments' described by Merry (2009). While these strategies often sanitize the harsh realities of group differences and cohesion, they also lead to schools presenting a dominant value narrative as 'normal', hence leaving untouched any discussion that might reveal dissension. Yet while teachers may be seduced by the apparent simplicity of Fundamental British Values, where contentious issues have been concealed (p. 204), further probing of the lenses which teachers apply to this might have been interesting. The data suggest that there are also grounds for optimism, as is shown in Janine's interview; perspectives and practices can be challenged and transformed with effective teacher education. Nonetheless, the nature and content of professional development courses that can cultivate such critical capacities and empower teachers to revise perspectives and explore controversial issues remain open to debate, as cross-jurisdictional research on the issue has shown (Pace, 2021b).

One notable strength of the book is its attention to recent issues affecting schools, such as COVID, technology, and the emerging focus on wellbeing and personal development in the post-pandemic era. Lundie acknowledges the growing complexity of creating social and community cohesion as pupils navigate various spaces – digital, home, and school. He highlights the need for solutions that address the interplay of new learning spaces to ensure that the values of all young people are respected. The rapid advent of AI and other technological transformations could yet again reshape the landscape of school values and cohesion debates in ways that remain unclear.

A relatively minor but significant point relates to referencing. The importance of adhering to academic conventions in scholarly work is assumed. Yet the section discussing school ethos, particularly the ‘ethos of outward and inward attachment’ on p. 214, does not fully reference the work from which this is derived, suggesting the literature search could have been more careful.

In addressing contemporary global debates on values in education, this incisive and detailed book contributes significantly to our understanding. As societies become increasingly diverse, schools are faced with balancing the competing demands of community cohesion against maintaining community groups’ distinct norms and values. By situating the notion of values in its colonial past and critiquing the conceptual strands of concepts such as cohesion, plurality, neutrality, and tolerance, Lundie challenges readers to move beyond superficial engagement with the intricacies of cohesion and values to deeply appreciate how these concepts and the tensions between them intertwine and play out in schools.

References

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