Griffiths, D., Lowrey, S., & Cassar M. (Eds.). (2018). *The Principal Reader: Narratives of Experience.* Burlington, ON: Word & Deed Publishing

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Recent events afford a unique opportunity to observe international response to a global pandemic in real-time. From countries that reacted swiftly, followed the advice of health officials, and implemented public safety protocols; to those that delayed or didn't – it is clear that in politics (as in education), leadership makes a difference. Much depends upon timing, knowing what you don't know, consulting judiciously, and taking action appropriate to the context. Just as political leaders must rely upon the best available knowledge, collaborate with epidemiologists and researchers, and forge a way ahead in rapidly changing and chaotic environments, so too must principals lead their schools in uncertain times.

Against the backdrop of Covid-19, citizens protesting race-based violence and pernicious inequities have taken center stage in Canada and the U.S. Political leadership in the face of civil discord has also varied, from strengthening anti-hate legislation to strengthening the military capacity of civilian police forces: political decisions materially influence individual lives. So too, in education, principals exercise significant influence, directly and indirectly, on students' daily lives and learning (Leithwood et al., 2020). Schools, of course, reflect the social conditions of our larger communities. Improved preparation programs for pre-service principals and evaluation of in-service principals take into account the rich diversity of children and families, the increasing heterogeneity of communities, and the need to do a better job of providing equitable opportunity and access to education (Alberta Teachers' Association, & Canadian Association of Principals, 2015). How principals lead can diminish or widen educational equity gaps based on race, ethnicity, language, and class (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). In other words, much depends upon the knowledge, skill, and will of the principal (Briscoe, & Pollock, 2017).

Research continues to signal the intensification of principals' workloads (Wang et al., 2018) and the increasing complexity of their leadership roles and responsibilities (Fullan, 2014; Scott, 2016). Principals use several mechanisms to make sense of their roles and to determine action congruent with their values and suited to the situation. Sense-making has been defined as "an active process of constructing meaning from present stimuli mediated by prior knowledge and embedded in the social context, which allows individuals to navigate through profound disruption" (Schechter et al., 2018, p. 2). Pre-service training and in-service professional development provide principals with formal avenues of sense-making: narratives and stories provide them with informal ways to make sense of their multi-faceted responsibilities. As philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt noted, "storytelling reveals meaning, without committing the error of defining it." Arendt was reflecting on fellow writer Dinesen's work; nevertheless, the quote is apt when considering the needs of school leaders. Storytellers communicate complex meaning succinctly, leaving listeners free to negotiate the context in which to apply the lesson.

In the current iteration of *The Leader Reader: Narratives of Experience*, editors Griffiths, Lowry, and Cassar have solicited and organized narratives from a wide range of practitioners, including school and system-level leaders, as well as educational leadership theorists and scholars. The collection features contributors from Canada, the U.S., and the U.K., as well as countries from around the world,

such as Malta, the Netherlands, Qatar, and Singapore, to ensure an array of international perspectives. (A previous iteration of *The Leader Reader* focused primarily on school-level leaders from Canada and the U.S.). Participants were asked to reflect upon "leadership moments" that led to lessons and improved practice. The resulting 100+ short narratives have been grouped thematically into nine sections (described below), although threads running through all the narratives include the primacy of moral purpose, the urgency of including all voices, and the necessity to think on one's feet in the face of ill-defined problems, shifting contexts, and unsettled times.

1. *Leadership Mindset: Metacognition, Empathy, and Innovation* – leaders' ways of thinking are characterized by a keen self-awareness, by gratitude for others, an optimistic outlook, and a focus on growth.
2. *Content of Character: Principles of Principals* – the alignment of leaders' thoughts, feelings, and behaviour define character; *both* word and deed exemplify principles.
3. *Children's Champions: Equity and Inclusion* – principals' socio-cultural awareness and acumen influence how they champion all children, particularly those who are minoritized or marginalized. Starting by celebrating differences may stop short of the deeper action necessary to topple systemic obstacles.
4. *Practices of a Community: It Takes a Village* – school leaders must work *with* and *for* the communities they serve; community trust is hard-won and easily lost.
5. *Leading in a Culture of Status Quo* – principals shape school cultures; expecting, modeling, and measuring whether the status quo should be sustained or changed.
6. *Only the Beginning: Moving Along Transactional, Transformational, and Transformative Continuum* – educational leaders understand, assimilate, and apply multiple facets of leadership theory to practice; such integrative thinking (Martin, 2009) permits leaders to select among theories to resolve tensions in practice creatively.
7. *To Thine Own Self and Community Be True: Leadership Lessons and Reflections* – principals are lead learners who create conditions for the individual and collective learning of others.
8. *Journey's Beginning, Journey's End* – school leaders reflect on firsts: the first day on the job, the first setback, the first promotion, the first success of a mentee, and, not the last day on the job, but the first day of retirement.
9. *In the Leader's Office: Do You Have a Minute?* – a disingenuous question provides the impetus for stories that "will bring smiles to faces" (p. 381).

Stories can soothe, comfort, inspire, and instruct. These short vignettes eschew war stories and military metaphors in favour of recounting "warts and all" (p. 393) moments that sparked leadership lessons. These narratives will surely provoke a range of reactions, from chagrin to rueful recognition, to pride in small wins, to delight in the rough and tumble of working in schools with children. For example, John Portelli of OISE recalls retreating to a bookstore after yet another inconclusive meeting: there he finds inspiration from an unexpected source – the poetry of rapper Tupac Shakur (pp. 194-195). Marta Milani of the University of Verona recounts sidestepping an awkward moment with a young Muslim woman from Tunisia and reflects upon how she might have done better by engaging the student in "intercultural dialogue" (p. 204) to negotiate a shared solution. Wendy Dunlop currently practices law in Toronto but relates how her experiences pre- and post- 911 as a principal at a private school in Kuwait whetted her interest in issues of social justice (pp. 155-159). Rosemary Campbell-Stevens of University College London describes the initial resistance to a bespoke leadership development program for "Black and (my parlance) and other Global Majority aspirant school leaders" (p. 102) that went on to serve over a thousand candidates. Chizoba Imoka of the University of Toronto challenges "intellectual racism," that erases "history and the socioeconomic/sociopolitical context of schooling… in the education of youth from colonized communities" (p. 376). Finally, threaded through the collection are a series of vignettes that remind us that schools are places where we should expect the unexpected: the volume concludes with a piece by practicing principal and adjunct professor, Catherine Zeisner, entitled "Have you seen the giant rabbit?" The rabbit, of course, is really a kangaroo.

Now more than ever, principals and school system leaders face extraordinary challenges as they work with public health officials to design a series of equitable and excellent educational options. This volume does not purport to encompass all eventualities of school leaders' lives; however, it does offer up the lived experiences and hard-won wisdom of those closest to the action in schools. In short, *The Leader*

Reader: Narratives of Experience will prove to be interesting reading for equity-minded school leaders (Galloway et al., 2019) with "precious few minutes" (Jutras et al., 2020).

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