

Book Review

Title of Book: A Case Study Approach to Educational Leadership

Authors: Sharon D. Kruse and Julie A. Gray

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In the beginning of this year, I was asked to teach an introductory course of educational leadership to a newly launched prospective teacher training program in which all the participants already held their masters degrees in various disciplines ranging from pure sciences to social sciences. However, none of them had studied the field of education formally, especially, educational leadership as a subject in their entire academic career. Therefore, I was looking for a book which would enable not only me to introduce the key concepts of educational leadership but also provide me with an opportunity to inspire the participants to think how it can be applied in their real-life situations. With these considerations in my mind, I started searching and came across the book titled “A Case Study Approach to Educational Leadership” jointly authored by Sharon D. Kruse, the academic director and professor of educational leadership at Washington State university Vancouver, USA and Julie A. Gray, the assistant professor of educational leadership at the university of West Florida, USA. There are the two important features that attracted me towards this book: first, the title of the book which indicates authors’ commitment to providing teaching material to facilitate learner-centered methods of teaching especially the case-based approach of teaching/learning. It reminds me of the popular use of case-based method of instruction in various professional fields e.g. business, law, social work, for bridging the gap between theory and practice. Secondly, the image of multi-colored, overlapping and see-through leaves printed on the cover page of the book attracted me more deeply. Perhaps, multi-colored leaves indicate various perspectives of a case/situation, overlapping leaves tend to show the complexity of real-world issues and see-throughness of the leaves highlights some of the important leadership characteristics for example, transparency, honesty and integrity etc.

Consequently, I decided to read this book. While doing so, I was absorbed in its numerous salient features which eventually led me to adopt this book for teaching of educational leadership course to prospective educators/educational leaders. Later, I wrote a review of this book which may facilitate a reader to make a decision to read this book.

The preface of the book has a reasonable length and covers more than two pages. I found it to-the-point and informative with respect to the focus, instructional methodology and organization of the book. In the beginning, the writers have disclosed their commitment to promote three key theoretical ideas in the entire book: 1) social justice leadership orientation, 2) improvement at all levels of organization, and 3) leadership as a communal work. In fact, these ideas act as the backcloth for the book which can be recognized while reading the book. Moreover, while building the case studies, they focused on introducing concepts/theories and practical issues pertaining to six core areas of leadership practices; 1) organizational vision, 2) instruction, curriculum, and assessment, 3) school and external community, 4) school culture and internal community, 5) equity, and 6) improvement, innovation and reform. Another important feature of the book is that the authors have organized material for each chapter in a way that not only keep the focus of the chapter on the core areas but also make their linkage explicit to pertinent professional standards for educational leaders (PSEL).

There are precise as well as detailed table of contents in the book. The former just presents the headings of each chapter and respective page number while the latter enlists the detailed contents of each chapter. The detailed table of contents gives a very clear idea to the reader about the material presented in each chapter. However, there is only one heading, "Cases for Analysis", to show three short cases in each chapter. Consequently, the reader may face difficulties not only in knowing the number of short cases presented in a specific chapter but also in locating these short cases within the book. The suggested activities relevant to each chapter were also presented in the similar fashion.

The book comprises eight chapters which are organized in a logical sequence. All chapters are written in a uniform pattern which consist of eight segments/sections. In the beginning of every chapter, the authors clearly state the pertinent PSEL standard. In this regard, Chapter 1 is an exception, as it focuses on how to use a case method for learning. This feature facilitates the readers to identify and develop their knowledge and skill sets demanded by a particular PSEL standard. In the second segment, a brief introduction of the chapter is presented. It is followed by learning objectives section in which three learning objectives have been stated for each chapter clearly. A featured case study related to the theme of each chapter is presented in the subsequent section. It has various sub-headings and covered

ten pages on average ranging from seven to thirteen pages which makes it a relatively lengthy section of the chapter. In fact, it is the heart of the chapter, as the authors introduced a real-life situation embedded within the theoretical content area addressed in the chapter. It also provides the foundations for short cases placed in the next section labeled as “Cases for Analysis”. The length of each “short case” varies from half of a page to a couple of pages. There are three short cases in each chapter except Chapter 8 that has only two. All the cases are relevant to the themes of the chapter and based on real-life situations and events in schools. However, all cases have been written in such a way that the focus of each case remains on a particular aspect of a core area without compromising the complexity of real life. Moreover, identity of schools, leaders, and teachers from whom information was gathered to build these cases was protected by using pseudonyms and/or by concealing the information that may enable a reader to identify the sources. At the end of each short case, a group of five to ten discussion questions is given. The questions have been designed in such a way that not only stimulates the audience to participate in discussion but also encourages them to think on various aspects of the issues presented in the cases.

In the next session, the authors provide at least three activities related to the key ideas discussed in the chapter. Being a teacher, I found these activities very useful while explaining how core concept of educational leadership are operating in the real world. The second last section of each chapter enlists some of the relevant (web-based) resources which may facilitate the reader in comprehending the complex linkage of theoretical ideas to leadership practices. Moreover, brief description of each resource has also been included in this section that gives a fair idea about the nature and type of information available at the suggested resources. At the end of each chapter, a reference list has been provided. Most of the references are not older than ten years which indicates the authors have consulted the latest information while drafting the cases.

In Chapter 1, authors develop a case for highlighting the importance of learning about complex social world, such as the working of educational leaders, through case-methods. It is followed by an introduction to inductive, deductive and abductive reasoning methods and how these methods can be applied for analyzing a case. They have also suggested an interconnected set of strategies for analyzing the key concerns within a case scenario. This set consists of the following strategies which can be recalled as mnemonic IPLAN.

- **I**-Identification of issues
- **P**-Players, perspectives, and positionality
- **L**-Links to theory and research
- **A**-Assessment and evaluation

- N-Next steps, including action plan

Based on IPLAN strategies, the authors have also provided a rubric for determining the understanding level of students/readers about the key aspects of the situation presented in a case. In this rubric, the skill for employing each IPLAN strategy is classified as “exemplary”, “proficient” and “developing” level and corresponding indicators have also been tabulated. There is another rubric which has been developed to formally evaluate students’ learning when case-method is employed as a tool of instruction. This is a great support/resource for those teachers/instructors/facilitators who want to teach educational leadership through case-methods in general and, especially, by adopting this book.

In Chapter 2, the authors organized cases around the importance of “Organizational Vision”. In these cases, the authors highlight the critical role of a school’s vision and mission in enhancing students’ academic achievements. They also pointed out that schools need to revisit their vision and mission regularly in order to make it compatible with continually changing external and internal environments. Moreover, they appreciate the importance of student-centered education and of shared vision/values among stakeholders for continues improvement of an educational institution. In fact, the ideas promoted in this chapter are directly connected with PSEL standard 1.

The cases presented in Chapter 3 embedded the idea of instructional leadership i.e. the principle should contribute to and be held responsible for students’ performance/learning. It has been illustrated that school leaders need to adopt intellectually rigorous approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to deal with the situation. It has also been discussed that an educational leader should take substantive and symbolic data into account while making a decision. In this way the connection between PSEL standard 4 and leadership practices is elaborated in this chapter.

In Chapter 4, the authors examine how school, family and community partnerships/involvement/engagement can be built and maintained. They also discuss how the nature of partnerships/involvement/engagement varies in different contexts. Consequently, the link between leadership practices and PSEL standard 8, which emphasis on meaningful engagement with families has been explained in this chapter.

In Chapter 5, It has been illustrated with the help of cases how school leadership contributes to the performance of students by influencing the school climate and culture. The subsequent chapter provides insights into the role of equity-oriented and culturally responsive leadership practices for addressing the issues emerged from diverse population of students and teachers in the context of school. Chapter 5 and 6 also deal with those

leadership practices/skills/theses which are compatible with PSEL standards 7 and 3 respectively.

In Chapter 7, the issues of organizational effectiveness, complex learning and equity have been discussed in the context of school and school leaders which make it relevant to PSEL standard 10. In the cases presented in this chapter, the authors emphasis on the importance of continuous improvement efforts of school leaders for achieving school vision, mission, and goals.

In Chapter 8, the authors skillfully sum up discussion about educational leadership presented in the book under three themes, which are labeled as “intensifying leadership”, “clarifying means and ends of activities and actions”, and the “importance of communal action for success”. While writing cases for this chapter, they not only take these themes into account but also consider PSEL standard 6. Although most of PSEL standards are clearly connected with selected core areas discussed in this book while PSEL standards 2, 5 and 9 are ignored. Perhaps, it may not be clearly connected to the core theoretical ideas discussed in this book. For tracing the required topic by the reader, a well-tuned-up subject index is provided at the end of the book.

Overall, this book is well-organized and organized in a uniform pattern which facilitates the reader in comprehending the provided information/concepts/situations. The feature cases presented in the book are a good mix of theoretical and practical issues which make this book appropriate for the students of introductory leadership courses. The reader even with basic understanding of educational leadership concepts may learn how to put these ideas into practice. The leadership activities in relation to PSEL standards and pertinent web-based resources offered in each chapter may be used for mentoring and coaching the prospective educational leaders. In this way, this book is also useful for educational leadership practitioners. In short, this book can be considered as a valuable addition to the existing domain of knowledge of educational leadership, especially for those interested in learning/teaching it through case-method.

Reference

Kruse, S. D., & Gray, J. A. (2019). *A Case Study Approach to Educational Leadership*. Oxon: Routledge.

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