

Decolonizing Educational Leadership: Exploring Alternative Approaches to Leading Schools by Ann E. Lopez

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Decolonizing Educational Leadership: Exploring Alternative Approaches to Leading Schools.
By Ann E. Lopez. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. ISBN 978-3-030-62379-1 (Hardcover); ISBN 978-3-030-62380-7 (eBook).

Many researchers have highlighted the need to decolonize education to prevent one nation from maintaining dominance over other countries or nations (Lopez, 2020; Sua, 2013; Kituyi et al., 2015). Although several initiatives and campaigns have been established with the aim to empower underrepresented women, either face-to-face or online (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Fuller & Berry, 2019), no clear theory or models exist to help educational leaders become more aware of their own biases and perspectives, especially in countries that borrow educational systems from the West (Sellami et al., 2019).

In this book, Ann Lopez clarifies the importance of decolonizing educational leadership, as “the violence of colonialism is not only limited to occupation of land and resources but extends to the occupation of mind and being” (Lopez, 2020, p. 5). She explores issues related to decolonization discourse and practices, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the pandemic has highlighted inequities and systematic racism in education. Lopez shares her experiences in schools and academia in a unique combination, as she states in the book’s introduction:

This chapter situates this volume within the context of my research and ontological experiences. It sets out my personal, professional, and epistemological purpose for writing this volume. Reflecting on my positionality, experiences as a secondary school teacher, and experiences of the colonial education I received in Jamaica, has helped me to formulate the areas of focus for the rest of the book. The ideas posited are not a prescriptive but as a critical pedagogical exercise. (pp. 6–7)

Decolonizing Educational Leadership consists of seven chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. Chapter 2 focuses on school leadership and provides a brief historical overview of the evolution of educational administration, showing the Eurocentric knowledge and White scholarship in the field and the opportunities for increasing Black, Indigenous, and People of Color students’ outcomes by decolonizing theories and practices. Chapter 3, titled “Coloniality and Educational Leadership Discourse,” explores how scholars and practitioners can engage and collaborate in anti-colonial praxis following the work of Latin American scholar Aníbal Quijano. It shows “how coloniality gains power and connections to the day-to-day realities of education and schooling” (p. 21), which is crucial for all educators to be aware of and consider in their decisions and actions. Chapter 4 is one of my favorites, as it helps educational leaders to decolonize the mind. Drawing on the work of the Kenyan writer and scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, author of *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language*, she highlights the need to relearn, reread, and reframe educators’ knowledge and practice and provides examples to decolonize the mind, such as naming and reflection. Lopez ends the chapter with a call for action.

Chapter 5 begins with a review of “the capacity-building literature, which is prevalent in school improvement discourse, but anchored in technocratic, neoliberal agenda and familiar to many school leaders” (p. 51). Lopez highlights the need to restore capacity to support decolonizing

leadership and education, and she shares ideas of how this could be achieved. These ideas and suggested actions require the creation of a space for renewal, which is discussed in Chapter 6. Lopez notes how imagining and envisioning can support educational leaders in trying alternative approaches, especially when reconnecting with their own histories. She concludes Chapter 7 by “drawing on the work of Dei (2012) and his framework for Indigenous anticolonial knowledge as a way of exploring Black/African education in diasporic contexts” (Lopez, 2020, p. 83) as she reflects on her own space (a Black Jamaican who lives and works in Canada). Lopez notes that there are issues that she did not discuss in her book, such as “educational policies within a decolonizing framework, leadership in higher education and so forth” (p. 87).

This book is timely, as the issues Lopez discusses could represent other nations to a certain extent, including Arab and Muslim countries such as my home country Jordan. In addition, I recommend that student leadership be included as part of school leadership in similar books or future versions of this book. I recommend *Decolonizing Educational Leadership* to all educators who aim to decolonize their education practice and minds. This book is filled with “hope and [presents] a call to action for all educators to resist dominant colonizing knowledge in order to transform education and schooling” (Lopez, 2020, p. 83). It can help educators to re-reflect on and reconsider their perspectives, positions, and practices to decolonize their actions and decisions.

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