

# Leading for Equality: Making Schools Fairer

By Jacky Lumby and Marianne Coleman

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Lumby and Coleman's book *Leading for Equality: Making Schools Fairer* provides an excellent overview of the policy context across Europe and its impact on in/equality. The authors highlight evidence from an EU report that states inequality is at its highest level in 30 years in most European countries and the OECD. Schools play a key role in perpetuating this inequality or reducing it and this book offers excellent practical guidelines and case study examples of how to address in/equality. This is a book for all who would like to influence what happens in a school and not just for those in formal leadership roles.

It is however acknowledged that as many countries move towards high stakes testing there is arguably a tension between equality/equity and excellence with many schools struggling to understand how both can be achieved simultaneously. This book, which is divided into three parts and 13 chapters, may support the reader in understanding the current policy context and in/equality landscape in order to reduce the 'Matthew effect' of those who have the most being able to use it to get more, thus perpetuating inequality.

Part 1 presents the policy context in an accessible and engaging manner by drawing on several case study examples to show how in/equality is understood. The impact of intersectionality, learners with multiple characteristics such as socioeconomic disadvantage and special educational needs, and how practitioners might respond is also clearly explicated through case study examples. Parallels are made between Norwich's (2006) individual and group differences approaches in Part 11, which considers various approaches to addressing in/equality relating to group characteristics such as: socioeconomic class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, migrant status and special learning needs. However, in Part 111 the authors draw together several threads for action with a call for fine grained data

gathering around individual learner's experiences of school as a central part of any approach to addressing in/equality.

In my opinion, the predominant contribution of this book is in helping all practitioners understand their role in the production of in/equality in schools and the fact that many learners come to school with a value system that is different from what is offered in schools. 'Leaders' are encouraged to give at least equal weighting to embedding certain social and civic values in a school as is given to quantitative outcomes. This is especially pertinent in times of increasing emphasis on high-stakes testing. Understanding of value systems within schools needs to be prioritised and in particular consistent reflection on whether practice matches these values, for example, are decisions made in line with the values of the school?

The authors posit three particular strategies for addressing in/equality which seem to build on earlier work by Gewirtz and Cribb (2002) who called for a focus on economic, social and associational justice:

- *distributive justice* (allocating resources to areas of greatest need)
- *cultural approach* (recognition and acceptance of difference (Gewirtz & Cribb))
- *relational or participatory justice* (learners equipped to take a social and economic place in our unequal society/ equip them to become dissenting citizens (Lumby, 2013).

The authors are to be commended for unpacking each of the above strategies into practical activities that can be embraced by practitioners. This is particularly timely in the Irish context where a focus on distributive justice is part of the revised model of allocation of support for learners with additional needs. While the authors admit this is often met with objections they do offer support in terms of key actions for schools which focus on building capacity in staff, learners and parents.

Throughout the book the reader's attention is gained at the beginning of each chapter by asking the reader to think about 3 or 4 key points related to the upcoming content, and at the end of each chapter with 'Key Actions' and ideas 'For reflection and discussion' in his/her own school/context. These are very helpful in focusing the reader's attention and encouraging reflection on personal and professional understandings, values, and beliefs related to in/equality which is key in promoting change towards a more equal society (Brown, 2006; King, 2017). Additional reading at the end of each chapter is very helpful and often

divided into categories which makes it more accessible for the reader, for example, “[reading] *for approaches to developing staff capacity*”. Finally the combination of policy and practice makes this book relevant for all involved in education. An enjoyable and thought-provoking read!

**LEADING FOR EQUALITY: MAKING SCHOOLS FAIRER** by Jacky Lumby and Marianne Coleman is published by SAGE PUBLICATIONS, 2016 and costs £20.49.

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