

Book Review

Managing Effective Relationships in Education



By **Carol Cardno**

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In her book *Managing Effective Relationships in Education*, Cardno employs an accessible and engaging language to guide current and future practitioners through a complexity of educational leadership and management. Drawing from her own experience as a school principal and an academic, the author offers both practical and theoretical guidance to leaders at a variety of educational organisations ranging from an early childhood to a tertiary education level. By focusing on 'productive relationships' as a core condition for the achievement of effective practice, she provides tools on how to adopt a particular attitude to solving complex problems that impact on quality teaching and learning. The author introduces the book as conveying a 'tough message' because of many challenges associated with establishing productive relationships.

The book covers 194 pages and delivers a theoretically underpinned message of managing relationships in education through eight chapters that are divided into four themes. The chapters share the use of a similar framework that makes referring back to different parts of the book easy. Each chapter begins with a brief paragraph linking productive relationships to a specific topic followed by sections relevant to the topic and illustrated by learning cases for reflection. Although the learning cases draw from the author's extensive professional experience in New Zealand, they describe issues and situations that are common to other educational contexts and may be applied elsewhere.

Chapters 1 and 2 centre on understanding the importance and relevance of productive relationships in an educational context. The opening chapter clarifies the terms administration, management and leadership. It is a helpful entry point as the three terms are often used interchangeably. According to the author, they indicate different activities and influences. While educational administration encompasses a philosophical position, planning and policy making, educational management relates to policy implementing, mobilising and motivating. Leadership permeates both the concept of administration and management. For example, educational leaders may be "engaged in administration in the morning and management in the afternoon" (p. 11). The second chapter further develops different conceptualisations of educational leadership and its various levels and layers. Applying the most valuable messages from the literature, the chapter skilfully orients the educational leaders toward relationship-building as an essential element of effectiveness.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on productive relationships in the resolution of educational problems. The third chapter delves into a complex field of organisational learning and learning organisation. The author maintains that only strong relationships will sustain the challenges associated with both individual and organisational learning that is vital to long lasting resolution of complex educational problems. Sifting through the seminal and current literature on organisational learning, the chapter offers practical advice to educational leaders on how to uncover defensive reasoning and adopt productive theories of action in the process of improvement of practice. The following chapter discusses the theory and practice of

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recognising and managing dilemmas or complex and tension-fraught problems. By approaching dilemmas through a five-step process, the author argues that it is possible to manage them to resolution. This view differs from a generally believed view that simply dealing with dilemmas is sufficient. Educational leaders are advised to make a conscious choice to manage dilemmas and learn from them.

Chapters 5 and 6 identify ways in which productive relationships lead to collaboration and trust building. The fifth chapter describes one of the leadership dilemmas – performance appraisal, which is based on a tension between organisational goals requiring accountability and individual goals related to development. It can be resolved productively by acknowledging all four dimensions of performance review including curriculum, school, personal and management development. A holistic approach to performance appraisal promises to highlight the knowledge and skills necessary for a dilemma resolution through productive dialogue. A further discussion of managing dilemmas through productive and collaborative dialogue in decision-making is the focus of the sixth chapter. Because educational leaders work with and through others to achieve organisational goals, it is essential to involve others in decision-making. To prepare for effective decision-making and avoid involving everyone, leaders are advised to ask questions in four decision areas: *why* decisions, *who* decisions, *how much* decisions and *how to* decisions.

Chapters 7 and 8 highlight the role of productive relationships in effective teamwork and goal achievement. The seventh chapter highlights dynamics between task achievement, team building and individual development in the context of teamwork. It includes two reflective exercises to help self-assess leadership behaviour preferences and emotional intelligence domains that many practitioners will find useful. The closing chapter focuses on strategic leadership and management. As in the previous chapter, it underscores the role of human resources who lead and manage organisational strategies. Supported by the relevant literature, it pays attention to different ways of strategic thinking, analysis, planning and reviewing. It also provides easy-to-use templates for different strategic operations.

Although numerous books have been written about educational leadership and management, the originality of this book lies in applying a relationships lens to a variety of educational contexts. The book “confirms the view that the focus on productive relationships between people in the organisation is essential if goals are to be achieved” (p. 69). Because educational leaders report to several internal and external stakeholders and are involved in varied activities with differing purposes, their ‘daily bread’ includes coping with complex problems and dilemmas. Cardno has gathered evidence that effective resolution of the daily difficulties finds its roots in relationships. A relationship that is productive then creates a setting in which complex problem-solving occurs enabling collaborative learning.

Though carefully structured, one of the book’s shortfalls is the lack of concluding remarks summarising each chapter. The book provides a wealth of knowledge integrating different aspects of the selected context. To have a summary centralising key takeaways at the end of each chapter would have been beneficial. Additionally, it is equally disappointing to read the enclosed learning cases and find more questions than answers. Although each learning case may have multiple approaches to resolution, they beg for a clear sign to point practitioners in the right direction when they are called to make choices about their priorities for action.

With the potential to help educational leaders better understand the relevance and implications of adopting a relationship-building attitude to the practice improvement, *Managing Effective Relationships in Education* makes revealing reading that promises to stimulate further research and questioning for all those working within or caring about leading and managing an educational organisation.