

## Book Review

Pam Ryan, *Wise Heads, Wise Hearts, Conversations with Asia-Pacific School Leaders*, ACER Press Camberwell Victoria Australia, 2016-10-09 ISBN 978-1-74286 373-3, \$39.95  
Available from ACER website <https://www.acer.edu.au/>

This slim volume (133 pages) is divided into two parts. *Part I: Talking about Leadership* is a readable profile of 11 leaders in 11 short chapters, each introduced by a short context statement and then allowing school leaders to speak about their leadership style.

The profiles in *Talking about Leadership* are followed in *Part II: Understanding leadership* in which three notions are explored: Understanding Leadership, Conceptions of leadership and Advice for new and emerging leaders.

Early impressions arising from a first reading of this anthology of leadership are threefold:-

- The author Pam Ryan has lived and breathed educational leadership in New South Wales Australia as well as latterly in South East Asia, principally in Hong Kong. Pam clearly developed an appetite for educational leadership when she developed collaborative schools across five schools in Orange, New South Wales, before becoming a regional director in both New South Wales and later in Hong Kong. This part is the story of a regional educator who crossed borders in global citizenship and who recognized the ease with which this is possible.
- A second observation is that of the 10 school leaders, only 3 of their places of work are schools in Australia, 8 are located in South East Asia (2 in PRC, 2 in Thailand, 2 in Hong Kong, 1 in Singapore). The theme of the book is that schools are “the same but different” everywhere, but that “voices of experience will provide the most pertinent and valuable answers to questions of effective leadership”.
- To an extent this volume captures the mobility of western educators to cross borders and operate successfully in vastly different cultures and languages by, wait for it, sharing practice. Only one leader of the 10 happens to be himself ethnically Asian (Wei Luo). All others are either in Australia or operating as expatriates in South east Asia.

The book’s purpose was to gather multiple perspectives on leadership from a arrange of contexts in order to identify any common elements and suggest ways for further professional leadership development.

The book is framed around four predicators: *Believe, Think, Act* and *Impact*. This review would do a disservice if it attempted to speak to each of the 10 profiles. Readers are urged to familiarize themselves with the leadership biopics. Instead, the second part begins by describing leadership as having three common elements: Analysing, Synthesizing and Conceptualizing.

Underpinning these distinct processes of educational leadership, are common values: under the Rubric of *Believe*, vales are Service, Respect, Trust, Fairness, Empathy, a Learning Focus, Vision, Responsibility and Dispersed Leadership. Added here are Collective Responsibility, Resilience, regard for the self and Humility.

Under the Rubric of Think are concepts such as Language, Business acumen, Strategic Thinking, Intuitive Action, Collaboration, Decision-making, Policies and systems, Generosity, the Power of mistakes, Risk Taking, Being open to Criticism and debate, envisaging one's role beyond the school, taking the temperature, and the loneliness of leadership.

Under the third rubric of Act, headings are around Setting high standards, Doing the hard stuff, Enjoying executive collegiality, Showing vulnerability, and Using humour. In most cases impact was perceived to be improvement. Assessing leadership capability in the Australian Public Service when considering recruiting a potential section leader, is commonly scrutinized by four scenarios in the person's work history: what was the situation and what were the targets, what action did you undertake with what impact/result. The book concludes discussing Michael Fullan's 10 key lessons of leadership and stresses the importance of relational and organizational dimensions of leadership.

Advice for new and emerging leaders is around four topics: do your homework, have a philosophy, be clear in the person you are, and always be your professional best. Altogether, this collection is light, non-controversial and aims to show universal attributes of successful leaders and sits well on any educator's shelf that is serious about the game. As the title implies, experienced heads are balanced with wise hearts.