



Educational Leadership

Culture *and* Diversity

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and Allan Walker



Educational Leadership: Culture and Diversity

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Foreword

Just a decade ago a book that focused on culture and educational management would have belonged in the domain of social-anthropologists. Cross-cultural analysis was simply outside the field of vision of scholars in educational leadership and management. As Dimmock and Walker explain in this volume, the emergence of culture as a conceptual framework for theory building and the analysis of practice in educational leadership and management is a recent phenomenon.

Paradoxically, its emergence has been fostered largely by the same forces of globalization that some observers view as the ‘enemy’ of culture. Starting in the early 1990s, globalization began to alter the social, political, economic, and cultural fabric of societies throughout the world. Changes in economic structures, political systems and social lifestyles during the past decade have been far-reaching (Drucker, 1995). Yet, as Ohmae has observed: ‘The contents of kitchens and closets may change, but the core mechanisms by which cultures maintain their identity and socialize their young remain largely untouched’ (1995, p. 30).

Ohmae’s assertion highlights the role that education has always played as a process of *cultural transmission*. Culture resides in the background and represents the assumptions, values and norms that underlie our daily activities. Educational institutions are responsible for passing the values, norms and traditions of the particular society on to future generations. The process of changing a society’s values and traditions is, however, slower and more difficult than changing social fashions or economic treaties. Educational change always has and always will lag behind the pace of change in the world outside of schools (Tyack and Hansot, 1982).

In prior eras, the practices of cultural transmission that comprised what we termed ‘education’ were viewed almost entirely within the frame of our own particular society. Education was a *national* industry. Nations often prided themselves on the uniqueness of their education systems. National education policy-makers saw little need to be informed about never mind emulate the educational policies and practices of other nations.

Today, however, the same change forces that drive globalization – communication, economic scarcity and competition, technology, transportation – are also spurring on the study and practice of education as a social-cultural process. Global competition has raised the importance of education in the

eyes of government policy-makers. Education is increasingly viewed as a key lever for national economic competitiveness and development. For example, the Asian economic crisis of 1997 has been cited as a salient example of what happens when social systems fail to adapt to changes in a globally interdependent economy. This was noted at a seminar on social and educational reform in Thailand:

Mr. Amaret Sila-on and NEC [National Education Commission] secretary-general Rung Kaewdaeng were in complete agreement that Thailand's decline in global competitiveness was mainly due to poor quality of education and graft. The IMD's (International Institute for Management Development) study said Thailand's education system did not live up to global economic challenges ... (*Bangkok Post*, 1998a, p. 3)

Similarly, Professor Kriengsak Charoenwongsak of Thailand's Institute of Future Studies for Development noted: 'increasing the quality of Thai products also involves improving the quality of education. The current emphasis on rote learning does not help students assume positions in the workplace which stress problem-solving and other analytical skills' (*Bangkok Post*, 1998b, p. 2).

Education policy-makers are actively seeking out the optimal mix of policies that will foster the achievement of national goals. Less than a generation ago it would have been rare to see education policy-makers attending and speaking at policy forums and research meetings across the globe. Today it is commonplace.

Moreover, in the age of the Internet, policy-makers find it much easier to find out about the education policies and practices of other nations. Consequently, we find that the *policy du jour* adopted in London or Sydney is quickly taken up in Malaysia, Hong Kong and South Africa. As a case in point, take the development of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in the UK during the late 1990s. Before the NCSL had actually delivered its first training programmes, policy-makers in Malaysia were already making arrangements to import and deliver its programmes.

Other policy reforms spawned in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere have sped across the globe in a similar fashion. In under a decade, student-centred learning, school-based management, parental involvement and standards-based education have become the lingua franca of education almost regardless of the national context. The globalization of educational policies and practices, well described in this volume, is a 'done deal'. Education is today a global enterprise.

Yet as my former colleague, Terry Deal, used to observe, cultures function much like 'living organisms'. As such they do not respond well to the introduction of 'foreign bodies'. Whether the intruding element is a virus or

an education policy of foreign origin, the instinctive reaction of the organism is first to resist its entry and then attack and kill if it makes it past the initial defences. In the human body the white blood cells are the relevant agents of resistance; in the culture of societies and schools the agents of resistance are people.

Dimmock and Walker highlight the fact that globalization has fostered a 'cultural convergence' of values and norms across societies. In education, we see for example that the introduction of student-centred learning in Asia initially generated a strong negative reaction from teachers, students and parents. This approach to learning conflicted with strongly grounded local norms of what it meant to be a teacher or a learner. The widespread resistance that resulted from this policy change actually sensitized the local Asian societies to their own unique cultural values and norms (Hallinger, 2004).

For the first time in the short history of our field, scholars have become interested in how the practice of leadership and management in schools is influenced by culture. Since 1990, Dimmock and Walker have been among the most active international scholars in educational leadership and management investigating the application of cultural frameworks to our field (see also Bajunid, 1995; 1996; Cheng, 1995; Dimmock and Walker, 1998a; 1998b; Hallinger, 1995; Hallinger and Kantamara, 2000; Hallinger and Leithwood, 1996; Heck, 1996; Walker and Dimmock, 1999). This volume draws together much of their work and focuses it more specifically on the tensions inherent between globalization, cultural identity and the management of educational systems.

The question whether the social processes involved in educational leadership and management are 'culturally constructed' seems to have been answered in the affirmative during the past decade. The manner in which schools are organized and managed is fundamentally related to the cultural values of a society. The terminal values of a nation that guide its educators to focus on holistic development of the child, student achievement on tests, reproduction of knowledge, ability to solve problems or social integration of ethnic groups vary demonstrably across societies. The instrumental values that describe the acceptable and unacceptable means by which people work together to achieve those ends are no less culturally determined.

Initially, interest in cultural processes in educational leadership and management was stimulated by the apparent differences that exist between education in Asia and the West. Debates about 'Asian values' centred on their role in stimulating the economic and social transformation of Asia's dragons and tiger nations. Obvious differences in the practices of education and educational management in these nations were linked back to their cultural values and norms.

Singapore, for example, stood out as a nation that had succeeded on Western terms in the construction of a modern educational system. Yet for

many years Singaporean education resisted the value-driven policy associated with heterogeneous grouping of students. Singaporean policy-makers grounded their argument for ability grouping explicitly on a unique combination of Confucian values and meritocratic principles.

Pressures for global convergence have more recently raised interest in cultural differences among nations that are at first glance much more similar than comparisons of the East and West. The integration of Europe has caused Europeans from many nations to reflect more closely on the cultural values and normative practices of their own societies. These differences extend to management and labour practices in the societies.

For example, the inclination for workers to go on strike is clearly related to the national culture of European nations. France, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands – all members of the European Union – have very different traditions with respect to the meaning and use of striking as a form of labour protest.

A country like France treats a strike as a form of expression, whereas in the Netherlands, it is a last resort ... In Germany, the most effective strike is the one that never gets called ... it's the threat of the strike that produces the result ... [In the Netherlands], we are more interested in ending the discussions in peace ... We hardly strike and we are rather proud of it. (Fuller, 2004, p. C-1)

Explanations for why the Dutch approach strikes in this manner are explicitly framed in the light of the labour union's Protestant roots. Indeed, union leaders even cite a biblical passage from Romans 13 that reads: 'Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has instituted, and those that do will bring judgment on themselves ... [While the union] no longer officially considers this passage as doctrine ... [it] remains true to its Protestant roots' (Fuller, 2004, C-1).

Explorations of the processes of educational leadership and management demonstrate equally significant differences related to the cultural values of the society (Bajunid, 1995; 1996). The issues involved in understanding management in general or educational management as a cultural process are complex. As Dimmock and Walker delineate in this volume, there are numerous approaches to inquiry drawn from a cultural perspective. Religion, cultural values and norms as well as institutional traditions are all relevant to our understanding of educational leadership and management as a cultural process.

As someone involved in the practice and study of educational leadership and management, I believe that this book makes three distinct contributions to the field. First, for those still unacquainted with the rationale for viewing management as a cultural process, it will provide a firm foundation. Second, the book provides a deeper analysis of this rationale in both theory and practice than has appeared in published journals. The authors critically assess

competing perspectives on culture and its utility as a conceptual framework for understanding school leadership and management. Finally, the authors explicitly apply a cultural framework to current perspectives on school leadership and management in practice. In doing so they demonstrate the manner in which cultural values from one culture can be used – unwittingly – to define the discourse around administrative processes. The result, in this era of globalization, can be the untested application of normative practices defined as ‘preferred’ or ‘good’ in one culture to education in another culture.

These contributions define the value of this volume. While the authors provide few empirically proven answers to important questions concerning school leadership, their discourse both drives forward the global debate and reframes key questions. In doing so, Dimmock and Walker are pressing scholars to address what Ron Heck and I have termed ‘blind spots’ in our field. These represent the unseen issues and assumptions that underpin our models and limit the potential of inquiry in educational leadership and management (Heck and Hallinger, 1999; in press). For helping us to see the field more clearly, the authors are due our debt of gratitude.

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- 2 Dimmock, C. and Walker, A. (2000). 'Globalization and societal culture: redefining schooling and school leadership in the 21st Century'. *COMPARE*, 30(3), 303–312.
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Introduction and Overview

As the title signifies, our aim in writing this book is to explore the relationships between school leadership and culture. Both concepts have proven difficult to define, despite both promulgating a wealth of past and present literature. However, the voluminous writing on both educational leadership and culture has mainly focused on each as separate entities, with relatively little consideration to their interrelationship. It is this interrelationship between leadership and culture that is the focus of this book.

Our aim is to begin to redress this situation. Our research and publications over the past ten years have been focused primarily on studying educational leadership from a cultural and cross-cultural perspective. Our interest in this aspect of leadership emanates from the fact that we were Westerners living and working in a Chinese city (Hong Kong). At first hand we became aware of important and significant differences in people's expectations and in how things were done in society and its organizations. Equally, when it came to improving practice in those organizations, we realized a high dependency in that environment on Anglo-American ideas, policies and practices that often seemed to be misapplied and adopted unquestioningly in settings that were very different from those in which they originated. This concerned us.

Educational leadership is a socially bounded process. It is subject to the cultural traditions and values of the society in which it is exercised. In this it is no different from other social processes. It thus manifests itself in different ways in different settings. In this sense it is remarkable that many current debates in educational leadership continue to be couched in general or universal terms without taking into account the particularities of the local cultural context that influences and shapes. A good example is the current somewhat sterile and overly generalized debate taking place around the concept of 'distributed' leadership, most of which focuses on clarification of the concept and its wholesale advocacy, irrespective of context or culture. Yet, the relevance and the form of the concept should be seriously questioned, especially in those societies whose cultural and power relations assume a totally different configuration from more egalitarian 'Western' countries. Even for schools within the same societal culture, their conditions may be so diverse that factors such as recent problematic history, size, characteristics and functions render statements about the appropriateness of 'distributed' leadership highly questionable.

This book aims to explore and highlight the cultural and contextual basis of leadership. It argues against assumptions underpinning much of the current

leadership literature that would have us believe in the universalistic nature of leadership. It holds that leadership studies are needed that identify the particularity and diversity of cultural and contextual conditions within which leadership takes place. While acknowledging the importance of generic and universal leadership characteristics, it argues that previous studies have ignored the particularities and contextual diversity of leadership, and it is this aspect that needs redressing. It challenges the universalistic nature of much that is written about leadership, especially from a 'Western' perspective. It is highly suspicious of Western ideas, theories and frameworks applied to non-Western settings as means of understanding leadership. Rather, it champions the cause of developing authentic leadership studies grounded empirically in the distinct societal and cultural conditions of particular societies and their organizations.

Another way of making the point is that, as we have documented elsewhere (Dimmock and Walker, 1998a; 1998b), far too much of the current educational leadership literature is ethnocentric and written from a monocultural standpoint. This phenomenon not only leads to the overgeneralized nature of claims and applications; it also means that opportunities to learn about leadership, a process that can enhance the understanding of leadership in one's own culture in other societies, are lost.

We freely acknowledge that both of the core concepts of the book – leadership and culture – are contested and difficult to define, in education, as elsewhere. Hence it is a further aim of the book to attempt to bring some further clarification and definition to these hitherto loosely defined terms.

Our research agenda to date has emphasized two thrusts within the nexus of societal culture and leadership. As elaborated below, the first concerns societal cultures per se and their relationship with leadership and schooling; the second relates to the leadership of multi-ethnic schools, and the mix of different societal cultures within the same organization and community.

Connection between societal cultures and multi-ethnic schools

When we discuss societal cultures per se, we tend to look at the interrelationship between particular societal cultures and schooling and educational leadership within their defined geopolitical boundaries. However, when attention shifts to multi-ethnic schools, the focus changes to the interrelationships between a mix of societal cultures within particular schools. These interrelationships refer, on the one hand, to the mix and juxtaposition of different societal cultures forming the school and its community, and on the other, schooling and educational leadership. Furthermore, this interaction and the relationships between the different cultural groups within multi-ethnic school communities are invariably complex and variable. For example, the relationship is often one of coexistence between a prevailing culture and minority cultures. The complexity to which

we refer may apply to a predominant culture associated with an indigenous group and one or more minority cultures. Alternatively the situation might be reversed, that is, the so-called minority cultures paradoxically become the predominant influence in a particular school community.

While the previous paragraph clarifies the shift in focus from societal cultures to multi-ethnic school communities, the process by which we link the two remains unexplained. Accordingly, we set out below the steps in our research agenda in moving between and linking up the twin thrusts of, first, leadership and societal cultures, and, secondly, the leadership of multi-ethnic schools.

- 1 Our agenda to date has been to investigate how particular societal cultures influence schooling and school leadership in their indigenous settings. This work has focused on how particular societal cultures influence schools and leadership in the same geopolitical area. An example would be how the Hong Kong Chinese culture influences understandings and behaviours in Hong Kong schools. Much of our work over the past few years has drawn attention to the relative neglect of such work and to its importance in furthering the knowledge base in educational leadership. In our opinion, this remains a significant avenue of research deserving of further development.
- 2 Increasing mobility and migration characterizing the world today inevitably results in people from different societal cultures forming communities within the same geopolitical areas. These multi-ethnic communities give rise to multi-ethnic schools.
- 3 Multi-ethnic schools themselves comprise complex and varied relationships, depending on the composition of, and relative influences among, the different ethnic groups and between them, and what is seen as the indigenous group.

Three main propositions

Threading through the book are three central propositions. These are presented as follows. First, leadership is a culturally and contextually bounded process that means it is inextricably intertwined with its larger environment – at levels ranging from the organizational, to local community through to larger society. Writers and practitioners who continue to ignore this fact fail to appreciate the conceptual and practical complexity of leadership and invariably present a piecemeal picture at best.

Second, the cultural influence on leadership is multidimensional, often difficult to discern, subtle and easy to overlook – to the point that it is underplayed by many, and even dismissed and ignored by some. Yet it is no less important for that. Its true recognition by researchers and practitioners often involves them in ‘mining deep’ to find it.

Third, we contend that recognizing the nexus between leadership on the one hand, and cultural and contextual influences on the other, can lead to improvement in its practice. For example, we argue that given the multi-ethnic nature of schools around the world, leaders nowadays shoulder responsibility for shaping their organizations in ways that value and integrate heterogeneous groups into successful learning communities for all. The successful leadership of such communities calls for very specific knowledge and skills attuned to ethnicity and multiculturalism. More generally, according to our argument, improving leadership practice and effectiveness involves a more integral and harmonious fit between leadership per se and the particular characteristics and requirements of the context with which it interacts and within which it is exercised. Among a host of considerations that need to be taken into account in this respect, ‘distributed’ leadership may need to assume a very specific form, and may not even be a priority.

Target readership

The book has been written with a wide audience in mind. To begin with, every society has educational leaders and its own culture(s). We have written the book for broad appeal across a wide and diverse spectrum of cultures – including those grouped and labelled as Western and Asian. We have combined theoretical, conceptual and research-based ideas with very practical material. Hence, the ideas and issues discussed will be of relevance and appeal to professionals in education – practitioners and academics alike. As stated above, one of our aims is to provide a better understanding of why leadership assumes the form it does, and how it is shaped by, and differs according to, context and culture. We intend the book to enable practitioner-leaders to understand their own contexts better, while appreciating the contextual differences with their counterparts elsewhere.

School principals and leaders at all levels – including middle managers and teachers – will find substantial sections of the book helpful to their practice. Many such practitioners may also be studying for postgraduate degrees and/or professional qualifications, such as leadership training programmes aimed at preparing for, or improving, the principalship. If so, then this book contains much that will be of assistance in furthering understanding of leadership and placing it in context. In this regard, because a key aim is the consideration of leadership in its cultural context, the book is of relevance for practitioners wherever they happen to be – whether in Asia, the UK and Europe, the USA and North America or Australia.

Lastly, the book will be of interest to academics engaged in lecturing, course development and researching who are increasingly looking for references and ideas to extend knowledge of leadership beyond their immediate environments.

This book will help them to gain an understanding of their local practice and, moreover, to place it within a wider, international setting.

Structure of the book

In keeping with the book's central theme, each of the 12 chapters addresses a key aspect of school leadership from a specifically cultural viewpoint. Chapter 1 provides a backdrop by juxtaposing the ubiquitous trend of conformity through globalization with the equally compelling influence of diversity represented by societal cultures. The rather contradictory tensions that both of these present to educational leadership are noted. In Chapter 2, we outline a framework within which to map and locate a systematic approach to leadership and culture. We argue the need for such frameworks in attempting to bring clarity, rigour and systematization to culturally based studies of leadership. Some of the present deficiencies in studying leadership from a cultural perspective are acknowledged in Chapter 3. Many of these are caused by the infancy of the area as a field of study, and prompt a sketching of the problems and possibilities of applying research methodologies as the field develops.

Our approach to leadership engages culture at two levels – societal and organizational. Much of the book centres on the former, but in Chapter 4, we address the theme of leadership and organizational culture, mapping and explaining a model by which to gauge and understand the relationship between leadership and culture. We acknowledge that more has been written about organizational culture and educational leadership than about culture in its other manifestations. Yet, despite this, the symbiotic relationship between leadership and organizational culture remains ambivalent and difficult to chart. In Chapter 5 we turn attention to the wider societal context, and major comparisons and contrasts between Asian and North American societies in terms of family, home, socializing and parenting influences. Many of these differences provide a backcloth against which to understand significant diversity in school leadership behaviour and priorities.

Chapters 6 to 9 address key aspects involved in leading and managing schools. Chapter 6 specifically argues for a particular new approach to strategic leadership in schools – one that encompasses culture as part of the organization's future design. Chapter 7 focuses on the important axis between teaching and learning, and leadership, a relationship increasingly accepted as vital in achieving school improvement. However, little credence hitherto has been given to the cultural aspect. For example, learning, teaching and leadership are all activities and processes that are culturally influenced. They will thus reflect differences (and similarities) around the world and, often, differences within schools in the same society. In Chapter 8 we approach the leadership and management of staff from a cross-cultural perspective. Chapter 9 continues the

theme of approaching human resource management from a cultural perspective by focusing on appraisal. Both Chapters 8 and 9 argue the danger of overgeneralizing about human resource management when cultural differences come into play. The cultural differences to which we refer may be found between schools in different societies, and even within schools in the same society.

In Chapter 10 we move the discussion forward by considering leader reactions and responses to dilemma situations. It is our belief that we often learn most about cultural influence on leaders when they find themselves in situations of extreme difficulty. At such times there is a tendency to revert to basic cultural values, and these seem to differ cross-culturally. The focus on culture shifts in Chapter 11; here, we discuss cultural difference within multi-ethnic schools and the implications this phenomenon has for their leadership. Besides the fact that such schools are increasing in number, it is somewhat surprising that relatively little attention has been devoted to their leadership. Finally, in Chapter 12 we summarize key points from the book, and point the way to possible future developments in leadership as a field of study and practice that necessarily embraces culture in one guise or another.

1

Leadership, Culture and Globalization

In this opening chapter, we provide a backdrop to our argument in later chapters by juxtaposing globalization, and its accompanying trend towards conformity across societies, with the equally compelling influence of societal culture, and its connotation of diversity and difference between societies. We explore the relationship between these somewhat contradictory tensions and educational leadership, and draw some important implications therefrom.

Our aim is to highlight the importance of the concept of societal culture to developing theory, policy and practice in educational leadership within an increasingly globalizing educational context. A key argument is that tensions between globalization and societal culture make the recognition of societal culture and cross-cultural similarities and differences more, not less, important. Consequently, the inclusion of societal culture as a factor in investigations covering such themes as the curriculum, teaching and learning, leadership and school-based management, is seen as an imperative for the future development of educational leadership as a field of research and practice. Accordingly, the first part of the chapter clarifies a number of key concepts, notably culture, globalization and leadership. In the second part, globalization and societal culture are juxtaposed and the interface between them is explored. The third part provides an illustration of our argument for greater cultural sensitivity by raising some key issues concerning leadership, school reform and improvement in globalized settings. It is also worth stating that we see the relationship between societal culture and globalization as complex and dynamic. While the nature of globalization is fast changing, so, too, are many societal cultures. Both are evolving and interdependent phenomena.

Culture and related concepts

In a book devoted to culture and leadership, it is important to clarify some of the core concepts, the most important of which is culture itself. Sociologists define culture as the values held by members of a given group that distinguish it from other groups. These include the norms they follow, and the material goods they create (Giddens, 1989). Values are abstract ideals, while norms are definite principles or rules that people are expected to observe. Thus 'culture' refers to the whole way of life of the members of a society or group. It includes

how they dress, what and how they eat, marriage customs and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies, leisure pursuits and works of art. It is displayed and expressed through language, thought and action. It is also expressed through physical objects, such as works of art, books, icons, monuments and museums, and through social interaction such as how people relate to one another, make decisions and share experiences. It is the last of these – social interaction – that is perhaps of most significance for educational leadership.

The fact that culture is attributed to a group of people raises the question of group size. In this book, we refer principally to two levels of group size – the society and the organization. Making international comparisons between cultures at societal level inevitably involves simplification and reduction. Simple and convenient descriptions of a society's culture are bound to be reductionist for the following reasons. There have always been regional differences in customs, values and norms within a society. In addition, waves of population migration and increased mobility have nowadays left relatively few culturally homogenous societies. Rather, an increasing heterogeneity or hybridity characterizes most societies, especially the more advanced, developed and urban societies of Europe, North America and Australia. Furthermore, while ethnic and migrant groups tend to cluster within multi-ethnic societies, emphasizing internal cultural divides, a process of intermarriage between peoples, especially among second and third generation migrants, has tended to blur and reduce cultural divides within societies. And while ethnic groups may cling to many of their traditional values and religions, they also gradually assimilate to the host culture. Despite the cultural complexity and hybridity within societies, we still feel compelled to recognize distinctive national cultures. Governments, the media – and people in general – foster and perpetuate the notion of nationality, and its expression through predominant cultural values. We still find it useful and relevant to draw comparisons and contrasts between the cultures of different societies based on their predominant features. These may mask finer points of detail and difference, but they enable groups of people to gain identity.

Culture is clearly a difficult and abstruse concept to define. For example, it is distinct from, but very closely linked to, society. Whereas society is simply the system of interrelationships connecting individuals, culture is the 'glue' that binds people together through a shared and common understanding of an accepted way of life that is distinguishable from other groups (Giddens, 1989).

It is also a contested concept. There is, first, debate about whether it incorporates religion, and what its precise relationship is to politics and economics. Close relationships and overlaps exist between all three. Since basic values constitute the essence of culture, and both politics and religion are underpinned by such values, a strong case can be made for claiming that culture underpins them both. Secondly, there is dispute as to whether culture refers exclusively to the traditional and enduring values and norms of a society (often centuries old), or whether it should include more recent and contemporary

changes and additions. Thirdly, there are differences between sociological and anthropological definitions of culture (for a full discussion, see Dimmock and Walker, 1998a).

While universals exist across all cultures – for example language, family system, and religious rituals – the remarkable feature of cultures is their diversity. Values and norms of behaviour vary widely across cultures. Such variety may be found in almost every aspect of life, including socializing the young, teaching the young and ways in which the young learn. As Giddens (1989) claims, small, agrarian and less developed societies tend to be culturally uniform and homogeneous, whereas developed and industrialized societies tend to be culturally diverse, embracing many subcultures. Cities in such societies contain many subcultural groups living side by side. In Chicago's west side, for example, in just one neighbourhood, Suttles (1968) found Jews, Greeks, Puerto Ricans, blacks, gypsies, Italians, Mexicans and Southern whites living in close proximity, each with their own 'territories' and ways of life. Societies receptive to past, present and future migrant waves are clearly bound to be culturally diverse.

Every culture contains its own unique patterns of behaviour that often seem alien to people of other cultural backgrounds. We cannot understand specific practices and beliefs unless we take into account the wider cultures of which they are part. A culture has to be studied in terms of its own meanings and values. That means, wherever possible, we need to avoid 'ethnocentrism', that is, the judging of other cultures from our own cultural perspective. If ethnocentrism is to be avoided when studying schools and school leadership, then understandings need to be explored in terms of the particular cultures (plural) represented in a given community, not simply from the standpoint of the indigenous culture alone. Equally, to avoid ethnocentrism when considering educational leadership in other societies, it is just as important to view and interpret them from within their own cultural perspective as it is to do so from another cultural vantage point.

A number of key concepts related to the notion of culture can now be examined in more detail.

Multi-ethnic and multicultural

Clarification of these key terms is essential in the cultural analysis of schools and their leadership in order to minimize disagreement or misunderstanding. For example, the definitions of, and differences between, the terms, 'multi-ethnic', 'ethnic minority' and 'multicultural' schools, is crucial. Such terms are contestable and arouse people's sensitivities. We use the term *multi-ethnic school* to describe a school whose student/staff profile has more than one race represented. The term *ethnic minority school* refers to a situation where at least one ethnic group experiences or perceives discrimination, group closure and solidarity. The term *multicultural school* describes a school that is achieving