
3-2022

Book review: Sider, S. R., & Maich, K. (2022). Leadership for Inclusive Schools: Cases for Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 978-147-585-276-9. Paperback. 320 pages

Lisa Devall-Martin
ldevall-martin@redeemer.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/icctej>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Devall-Martin, L. (2022). Book review: Sider, S. R., & Maich, K. (2022). Leadership for Inclusive Schools: Cases for Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 978-147-585-276-9. Paperback. 320 pages. *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal*, 17(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/1932-7846.1285>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

Book review: Sider, S. R., & Maich, K. (2022). *Leadership for Inclusive Schools: Cases for Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs*. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 978-147-585-276-9. Paperback. 320 pages

Book Review: Leadership for Inclusive Schools

Sider, S. R., & Maich, K. (2022). *Leadership for inclusive schools: Cases for supporting students with special educational needs*. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 9781475852769, Paperback, 320 pages.

Lisa Devall-Martin, Redeemer University

Today, multiple educational 'gaps' are discussed globally, including the achievement gap, the funding gap, and the accessibility gap, particularly within the wake of COVID-19. In *Leadership for Inclusive Schools: Cases from Principals for Supporting Students with Special Needs* (2022),

Steve Sider and Kimberly Maich outline the longstanding (but seldom addressed) leadership gap between school administrators' primal 'going with your gut' decision-making based on positive and negative accumulated critical incidents, and research-informed decision-making in order to create inclusive learning conditions for all students.

Unlike familiar leadership books, Sider and Maich provide an expansive resource through a rigorous case *story*, rather than case *study*, design. This literary structure is purposefully chosen in order to reflect the authenticity of the variety of narratives from shared and carefully documented lived experiences of principals.

Sider and Maich chose the term case stories due to the fact that details normally embedded in case studies including extensive data and

solutions are not present. The case stories within the book reflect the complexity of human needs in education and, for Christian readers, present the opportunity to embrace Imago Dei in each individual with compassion and respect (Norsworthy and Belcher, 2015).

Whether used individually, academically or within professional development, this book is designed to shift school administrators' leadership beyond interpreting and implementing district policy. The author's literary structure provides opportunities to critically self-reflect and discuss each case story to develop inclusive leadership competencies so all schools can be safe, caring and inclusive especially for those students with special needs.

As stated by Sider and Maich, private and public-school administrators (principals, vice-principals, or school leaders) are powerful determinants of whether all students feel safe, cared for and included. Globally, the core of inclusive school leadership permeates five foundational international agreements including the Sustainable Development Goals (2015), which prioritize equitable access to quality education globally by seeking to remove gender and socio-

Dr. Lisa Devall-Martin, Assistant Professor of Education, Redeemer University, Canada

economic barriers. In Canada, the Ontario Human Rights Code (2005) and the Ontario Ministry of Education's *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) require districts to thoroughly examine policies for biases and stereotypes while creating new policies championing inclusive education as a central part of daily school leadership. Consequently, Sider and Maich provide a focused review of the scholarly literature in special education and share a concise framework of 16 competencies categorized by Skills, Knowledge, and Attitudes for Inclusive School Leaders. They then present 27 detailed case stories accompanied by expert and insightful commentary from 31 scholars and leaders, including principals from across Canada, the US, and Australia. The case stories each have thematic titles, such as "Overstepping Boundaries", "No One is Listening to Me", and "Overheard in the Staffroom", and explore transitions, early years, elementary and secondary school specific stories, and also address community and school board supporters and school teams. In addition, Sider and Maich offer complex case stories including "I Was On Autopilot", and they close out the book with three case stories capturing the necessity of effective collaboration, communication, and cultivating self-efficacy in new teachers.

Sider and Maich's facilitate principals' exploration of critical incidents within the defined context of education, and provides the opportunity for critical self-reflection, while considering insight from others, which is central to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991; King, 2009). These critical incidents "play a significant role in influencing principals' development of day-to-day leadership practices...[and] are crucial in the shaping of principals' views on inclusive school contexts" (p.10). Each case story begins by identifying cross-cutting themes, including communication, agency, efficacy, collaboration, relational trust, legal implications, and advocacy, and also clearly indicates which inclusive leadership competencies are explored. For further inquiry, each case story ends with several supporting resources, including videos, books, articles, and websites. Most importantly, after each case story, Sider and Maich outline a number of probing questions for the reader to consider in order to facilitate deepening professional reflection *before* sharing the expert opinions of others.

As a recently retired public elementary school principal, I applaud Sider and Maich for creatively and collaboratively publishing this resource that addresses critical incidents while at the same time seeks to develop inclusive learning environments in schools through school leadership. Even more impressive are the multitude of professional voices with expert opinions resounding throughout the book. Consequently, I concur with the authors, and highly recommend using this book within a professional learning community (PLC), book club, or post-secondary classroom in conjunction with the *case study method*. According to Harvard's Business Review, seven key meta-skills are developed when using the case study method: preparation, discernment, bias recognition, judgment, collaboration, curiosity and self-confidence, all of which are specified in Sider and Maich's 16 competencies for Inclusive School Leaders. Therefore,

strategically using this resource in collaboration with system and school administrators, staff, and even teacher candidates in teacher training programs will bring about the desired result; boosted inclusive leadership competencies.

Without the strategic use of these case stories, I am concerned this innovative resource will gather dust on the shelves of libraries and principals' offices, and be archived rather than being used explicitly. Put simply, neglect of this book will result in a missed opportunity and an ever-growing leadership gap with inclusion as a diminished priority.

Sider and Maich have innovatively created a resource like no other on developing school administrator's inclusive leadership. Uniquely, this book presents an opportunity for quiet contemplation, journaling and confession for Christian school principals.

By actively reflecting on the provided questions to identify personal biases and barriers in establishing inclusive learning conditions, principals can bridge the inclusive leadership gap to make research-based decisions in the future.

After all, Calvin wrote, “Nearly all wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves” (Inst. I.1.i).

References

- King, K. P. (2009). *Handbook of evolving research of transformative learning: Based on the learning activities survey*. Information Age Publishing.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Nohria, N. (2021). *What the Case Study Method Really Teaches*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2021/12/what-the-case-study-method-really-teaches>.
- Norsworthy, B., & Belcher, C. (2015). Teachers' understanding of Imago Dei. *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal*, 10(2). <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ictej/vol10/iss2/4>
- Ontario Ministry of Education (2009). *Realizing the promise of diversity: Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy*. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf>
- Ontario Human Rights Commission (2005). *Racism and racial discrimination: Your rights and responsibilities*. <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/issues/racism>
- United Nations (2015). *Millennium development goals* (and associated annual reports). United Nations. [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015 MDG Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20%28July%201%29.pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20%28July%201%29.pdf)