Introduction to Special Issue

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Introduction

In 2009, an idea grew from a conversation between a British scholar and his American counterpart regarding a research collaboration exploring educational leadership across countries. This dialogue initiated the creation of the International School Leaders Development Network (ISLDN), which would receive support from the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS) as well as the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). By 2011, the project planning commenced and two distinct research strands identified, leadership in high needs schools and leadership for social justice.

For the leadership for social justice strand membership, a number of challenges arose as the group attempted to solidify protocols even before beginning the research process.

Acronyms, language, structures, and operations, as well as ways of being and ways of doing had to be understood by each researcher across 40 countries involved in the project. Definitions, most importantly the definition of social justice, and the myriad enactments of social justice were discussed, dissected, and negotiated as we sought common terms and understandings of the work we were about to pursue (Angelle, 2017, p. xvi).

While there were many issues the group needed to address, paramount was identifying a common definition of a socially just leader for the purpose of the research. Collectively, the group chose to represent the term in this manner: "a principal who is committed to reducing inequalities and makes this aim a high priority in leadership practice" (Angelle, 2017, p. 308).

Upon establishing a shared definition, the research group's guiding questions were generated through group consensus.

- What is social justice leadership and what does it look like in myriad international macro, meso, and micro contexts?

- How can our international and comparative methodology enhance our understanding of what social justice leadership means in different international contexts? (Angelle, 2017, p. xvi).

In order to best examine how a social justice leader is able to lead in a school, community, and in national contexts, the ISLDN-SJ researchers developed a conceptual framework over numerous iterations (see Morrison, 2017) to identify the interplay between the micro, meso, and macro levels of social justice leadership.
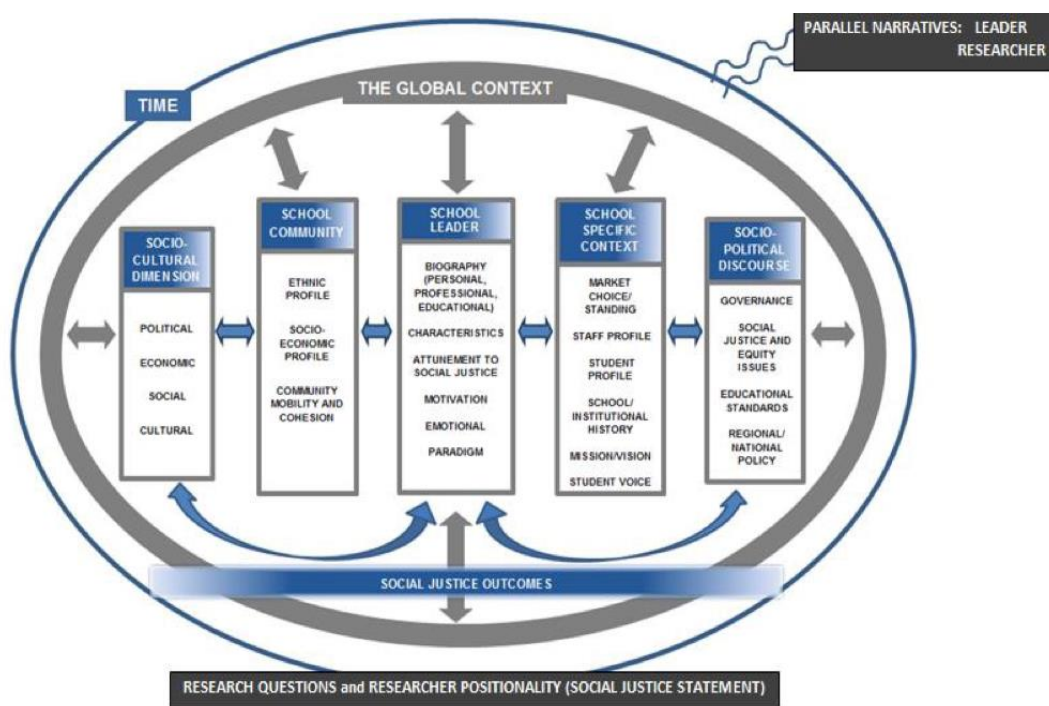
From the initial meetings held at annual UCEA and BELMAS conferences, it was determined that more opportunities to meet collaboratively were necessary. Additional ISLDN meetings were held in 2014 (Atlanta, Georgia, USA), 2015 (Gosport, England, UK) and 2016 (Hamilton, NZ) to allow for continued dialogue and collaboration between network members. These meetings proved fruitful for the network as additional projects were undertaken. A special issue in Management in Education (MiE), published in July 2014, highlighted the research being done by members of both the social justice strand

and the high-needs strand (Barnett, 2014; Bryant, Cheng, & Notman, 2014; Duke, 2014; Gurr, Drysdale, Clarke, & Wildy, 2014; Medina, Martinez, Murakami, Rodriguez, & Hernandez, 2014; Norberg, Arlestig, & Angelle, 2014; Richardson & Sauers, 2014; Sharvashidze & Bryant, 2014; Slater, Potter, Torres, & Briceno, 2014; Szeto, 2014)and the importance of "effective cross-national partnerships" (Barnett, 2014, p. 77). These collaborations continued for social justice strand members through journal articles (Angelle, Arlestig, & Norberg, 2016; Arar, Beycioglu, & Oplatka, 2017; Arar & Oplatka, 2016; Morrison, Branson, & McNae, 2015; Torrance & Forde, 2015), book chapters (Angelle, Morrison, & Stevenson, 2015; Branson, Morrison, & McNae, 2015), an edited book (Angelle, 2017), and numerous research presentations across continents.

The idea for a special issue of the Research in Educational Administration & Leadership (REAL) journal came from ideas that were shared during the BELMAS symposium *Unlocking the Path to Social Justice Leadership: Leadership Stories from Head Teachers/Principals* in (2016) as well as during the convening of the International School Leaders Development Network (ISLDN) in New Zealand in 2016. Numerous members of the Social Justice strand of ISLDN had recently contributed to an edited book, *A Global Perspective of Social Justice Leadership for School Principals* (Angelle, 2017), which allowed the authors to explore the actions of school leaders from around the world as they worked to promote social justice leadership in their schools. The idea behind this journal special issue then was to explore the leadership stories of the principals/ headteachers as they attempted to make sense of the genesis of their leading for social justice. The resulting five articles cover leadership spanning several countries: Costa Rica, Mexico, Scotland, Spain and the United States.

The exploration begins with the article *Leading Authentically: A New Principal in Challenging Circumstances* by Pamela Angelle. Her article highlights the importance of values, the leader's awareness of these values, and the behaviors and relationships that emanate from these values, which are formed from the life stories of the leader. While

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leaders may have shared values, how the leader arrived at these values is built through their stories and the experiences in their stories. Angelle recognizes that authentic leaders will draw from their experiences and will find opportunities to demonstrate their personal values in action, inspiring others in the school and community at large as they work together for all students.

The importance of values continues with the article *Social Justice Leaders: Critical Moments in Headteachers'/Principals' Development* by Christine Forde and Deirdre Torrance who focus on positionality and the relationship of critical externalities and schooling internalities. From the interviews with four headteachers, Forde and Torrance talk about the importance of leadership development and how this interrelates with headteachers' own social position, personal experiences as well as professional experiences, especially in regards to their own professional status as well as managerial power. A central issue highlighted by Forde and Torrance was headteachers being ready to articulate and act upon their values related to social justice.

Stephanie Ogden's article *Becoming an Educational Leader for Social Justice: A Micro/Meso/Macro Examination of a Southern U.S. Principal* shares the story of a principal named Mary whose personal values solidified through her leadership preparation. By exploring the complex system of micro, meso, and macro contexts within her setting, Mary now has developed tools intentionally influencing her teachers as they develop the multi-cultural skills they need to transition from their middle class personal lives in suburbia to their professional lives serving a school of diverse students in the economically disadvantaged urban center.

In a comparative article that looks across three countries, Charles Slater, Patricia Silva, Serafín Antúnez, Gema Lopez Gorosave, Nancy Torres, and Adriana Romero present *Women Becoming Social Justice Leaders with an Inclusive View in Costa Rica, Mexico, and Spain*. This article identifies both comparisons as well as commonalities. One example is the importance of formative experiences within their own

contexts. Two of the three leaders had personal familiarity with injustice and the third was ashamed of injustice. All three saw the importance of community and relationships with parents. One was also active politically and fought injustice in this manner as well. What resonated throughout this article were the stories shared by these women highlighting the early family experiences that gave them strength and core values. These values were a driving force with an intensity that they brought to their work each day. They had a keen sense of economic, cultural, and social justice (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003).

The last leadership story *Becoming a Social Justice Leader: A Fictionalized Narrative Approach* by Lee Flood drew a parallel with the other stories presented in this journey, that of the emergence of an accidental leader. While Flood's teacher had initially only viewed leadership as a way to increase his pension, it was only through the prompting of others that caused John Kelly to examine the ways in which he chose to lead. By utilizing a fictional narrative approach to highlight the findings, this leader explained that relationships had the most influence on his development as a social justice leader. Flood also draws attention to the conceptual model utilized by the social justice strand of the ISLDN and suggests future studies might consider adding depth and complexity at the very center of the model, the social justice leader themselves.

The final article, *Making sense of it all: Values, relationships and a way forward,* written by the guest editors, provides connections across articles, critical commentary as well as recommendation for further research exploration, for not only members of the research network, but for those doing any research on social justice leadership. We hope that this collection of articles provides insight into the importance of leadership stories in the development of a social justice leader as these principals/headteachers work to provide opportunities for all of the students in their care.

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