Making Sense of It All:
Values, Relationships and a Way Forward

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Abstract	Article Info
This study aimed to find	

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Introduction

Policy developments across the world continue to reinforce and intensify the importance of social justice underpinning philosophies

and praxis in education. However, the enactment of these policies varies both within and across countries. One aspect that has been generally accepted as orthodoxy in whether schools perpetuate the status quo or contribute to reducing inequalities is the significant role of leadership in promoting social justice in schools.

This special issue set out to explore "Leadership Stories" and in particular *Unlocking the Path to Social Justice Leadership* in various countries around the world. All stories emanated from participants involved in the social justice strand of the International School Leadership Development Network (ISLDN), which defines social justice leadership as "a principal who is committed to reducing inequalities and makes this aim a high priority in leadership practice" (Angelle, 2017, p. 308). This Special Issue aimed to unpack how social justice leaders learned to become social justice leaders, the foundational aspects that influenced these leaders to work for a socially just educational experience for all children. Synthesis of the various perspectives presented in the articles reveal two key themes that have emerged across all papers in this Special Issue, albeit in varying degrees; values and relationships. A central tenet emanating from all papers is the concept of values and awareness or self-awareness of one's values.

Values

In the literature values are often used synonymously with the terms attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and for the purpose of this critique values will be used to represent these terms also (Gross & Shapiro, 2016; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Arguably all leadership is values driven (Goddard, 2017) based on personal or individual experiences throughout one's personal and professional life. These values influence actions, behaviours and decision making (Angelle, 2017). Of concern is how values and beliefs "masquerade as knowledge in the form of Brookfield's paradigmatic assumptions" which can be entrenched and therefore difficult to change even when informed by theory (Jackson & Burch, 2016, p. 515).

The degree to which people recognise their values is arguably different and this is reflected in Torrance and Forde's paper where they call for leadership development programmes to focus on exploring values or positionality. From one perspective this stands in accordance with the voluminous literature (Brown, 2006) which

emphasizes the importance of all teachers from preservice level (Bond, 2011; King, 2017) to veteran educators participating in continuous professional learning (Forde, 2014) to ensure their values are in line with their enactment of practices. An example of this is provided by Ogden, in her paper, where Mary talked about having *poor awareness of internal or organizational cognitive maps* until embarking on her doctoral studies which provided her "*with the "vocabulary and framework" to articulate decisions and actions she had already undertaken just because they were right.*"

From another perspective, being aware of whether or not their values and beliefs are limiting or liberating is also key (Jackson & Burch, 2016) as individuals can measure everything else against these beliefs as a norm (Lumby & Coleman, 2016). Becoming free of habits of mind and developing new assumptions can enhance problem solving approaches and decision making (Mezirow, 2000). This opportunity to reflect upon situations that had already occurred would help ensure Mary would continue to operate in this way, being able to verbalize decisions and to share with others.

This self-awareness was highlighted again by Angelle, in her paper, where she talked about the importance of authentic leaders *understanding their strengths and weaknesses and finding happiness through living their true self.* This is particularly important in a time where educational values are dominated by an increasing emphasis on high-stakes testing, standardisation, accountability, outcomes and supporting a knowledge economy. Happiness is often overlooked in the leadership literature, but so critically important to the health of the leader, and ultimately, the school (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014; Noddings, 2003; O'Brien, 2016). However, where multiple tensions exist it is not uncommon for people to lose sight of their values (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2015) resulting in frustration from being a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1989). This was reflected by Ingrid, in Angelle's paper, where *she quickly learned that not being true to self was more difficult than socialization.*

While Flood also argued for a "*subjective positioning and understanding*" in his paper, Forde and Torrance call for a broader view of positionality than the other papers suggest, an awareness of not only one's own personal values but also an awareness of how these intersect with the professional and political contexts of the leader and how they are viewed by others. The awareness of this

positionality aligned with the "*power and authority they derived from their role*" plays a pivotal part in leaders being able to enact social justice leadership. This is largely unexplored with the ISLDN network to date and may be worth considering as part of the journey to further understand social justice leadership in the context of the social justice leader at the micro level.

Relationships

Arising from this is a second theme running throughout a number of the papers, relationships. Noteworthy is the fact that not many of the leaders aspired to become leaders, much less social justice leaders at the beginning of their careers. However, through relationships with others and resultant experiences, they felt they could make a difference if they became a social justice leader/principal. For example, the principal in Flood's paper believed in and valued social justice, but highlighted the influence of relationships with his parents, teammates in college, and his mentor all coalescing to result in him being committed to the practice of social justice leadership where all students had equal opportunities, the same opportunities "*as students in the more affluent, white, and privileged communities that surround us."* This was also reflected in Forde and Torrance's paper where each of the four headteachers had different starting points. Their experiences and relationships with mentors, role models or tutors over the course of their career led them to being committed to making a difference as a headteacher.

The importance of both personal and professional experiences as being influential in developing social justice leaders was also highlighted by Ogden who argued strongly for social justice leaders to develop relationships with the communities that they serve, to understand the people and how they perceive the principal also, thus echoing the concept of positionality mentioned earlier and Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', teacher habitus and student habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). This was reflected in Mary's awareness of her own cultural blind spots and her *willingness to learn their perspectives and an eagerness to bring their unique contributions to the school through parent evenings,* for example, a Hispanic food night. This demonstrated Mary's commitment to developing relational trust between school and communities and also reflects Lumby's (2013, p. 20) 'relational or participatory justice' where everyone is empowered to engage in relationships and society.

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This notion of developing relationships was also highlighted by Angelle who talked about authentic leadership that involves modelling social justice behaviours within the community and developing shared values with others. Life stories as a methodology are posited by Angelle as useful and enlightening for leaders in terms of how they as leaders arrived at these values, to practise authentic leadership, perhaps reflecting the idea of 'practical theorising' (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006) or reflecting on paradigmatic assumptions (Brookfield, 1995). These values are made explicit to others through relationships. "*Making visible the deeply held values inspires followers to know, understand, and, hopefully, embrace these same values, encouraging authenticity in the larger community*" (Angelle, 2017b).

Similarly, all three principals in Slater et al.'s paper saw the importance of developing relationships in their communities, from working with parents, empowering them to be involved in the school and community, to modelling social justice leadership in their own school communities and in other social projects in their districts. The above relationships arguably reflect Slater et al.'s (2017) use of Cribb and Gewirtz's (2003) conceptualisation of social justice: economic justice, cultural justice, and associational justice with cultural justice defined as *recognition of a person individually and as a member of an ethnic group* and associational justice *referring to encouraging the participation of all.*

The ongoing commitment to social justice leadership was also contingent upon relationships, for example, networks developed through ongoing professional learning focused on reflective learning or 'practical theorising' (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006) which in the words of one headteacher *" really sustained me because it's quite easy to go under"* (Forde & Torrance, 2017). Understanding one's values and the power relationships at the micro and meso level along with opportunities to exercise power and authority "*to exclude or limit opportunities for members of a school community*" are essential aspects of such reflections. Exercising power can be met with remarkable resistance from within schools and the wider community as outlined by Forde and Torrance (2017) and Angelle (2017) with principals acting as '*boundary spanners' (Timperley, 2009) working across boundaries grappling with these 'critical externalities' and 'schooling internalities'* (Forde & Dickson, 2017).

A Way Forward

So what does this tell us about social justice leadership, and learning to become a social justice leader? "In many cases, while the ideas and practices of social justice may have developed from the ground up, the way to strategically move forward with a socially just school is through the leadership of the principal/headteacher" (Robinson, 2017, p.26). The importance of values and self-awareness of values along with relationships are central to understanding how to become a social justice leader. For Slater et al., these were based on the trials and tribulations of the three female leaders. Personal and professional experiences along with innate values and predispositions support leaders in their development of becoming social justice leaders. Flood calls this the 'perfect storm' for becoming a social justice leader.

However, the experiences of others were also highlighted by Forde and Torrance when they talked about positionality and how others perceive the leader and their associated power and authority to exercise social justice. Ogden further referenced this by advocating for principals to understand the cultural habitus of the people in their communities and how the people perceive the principal habitus.

Implications may include listening to the voices of others in the contexts of the social justice leaders already interviewed by those in the ISLDN network. These might include staff members, students, parents and people from the wider community. Social justice leadership is arguably not just about the social justice leader or principal of the school and therefore this complexity at the micro level may need further unpacking to explicate how to develop social justice leaders. While Flood, and Torrance and Forde called for further examination of the micro contexts this commentary suggests some practical theorising to be carried out by members of the ISLDN perhaps by embracing a sociocultural perspective which endeavours to understand the complexity of contexts where students have equal opportunities for learning and development.

Adopting this stance challenges the deterministic view of ability, class, gender, race, socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Instead "...development is seen as emerging as a result of interactions within a cultural and historical context, rather than unfolding in a biologically-driven sequence" (De Valenzuela, 2014, p. 298). A sociocultural lens would allow for further analysis and synthesis of the relationships

between individuals and their environments. While some members of the network have already explored social justice leadership from an ecological stance (King & Travers, 2017; Norberg, Arlestig, & Angelle, 2014), arguably this may need to be explored in more detail as well.

Critical theory might also be useful as a lens for explicating the voices of the marginalized groups and individuals within the school contexts (De Valenzuela, 2014). Leaders would gather data around in/equalities in how children, staff and parents experience the social justice ethos of the school (Lumby & Coleman, 2016) to further understand the complexity of social justice leadership in a time of increasing political agendas of high stakes testing and accountability agendas that may have adverse effects on those already marginalized within our schools and communities. This may help schools avoid perpetuating the status quo and reduce inequalities in a time when the latest EU report shows "inequality is at its highest level in 30 years in most European and OECD countries (European Commission, 2015). We hope that you enjoy this special issue and find it informative in terms of practice and guidance for theorizing social justice leadership.

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