

Tui tui tuituia - Weaving together: What can be generalized from these articles?

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As has been often acknowledged amid the articles presented in this JELPP special issue, the impetus for its focus on leadership for social justice arose out of the editors' involvement in the international research project exploring the same phenomenon. One of the key questions guiding this particular international research project is: *How can an international and comparative research enhance our understanding of what social justice leadership means in different national contexts?* To date, this research project has attracted the involvement of some 36 universities across 25 different countries. Indeed, there are research sites in each and every continent. It seems that the issue of social justice, and how it can be proclaimed and established through suitable leadership, has become a global concern. Arguably, there is growing scepticism about the panacean social benefits of neo-liberal economic policies. Despite the economic influence of such policies for more than 20 years, people are not witnessing the heralded social benefits of a free market. Quite the contrary, it seems that the rich are getting richer and more people are becoming disadvantaged (OECD, 2011). Now it seems that rather than leaving socially just outcomes to the insentient vagaries of national economic policies, a significant number of people around the world are striving to reclaim this perceived essential human responsibility. Thus, a laudable aim of this international research project is, first, to understand what constitutes leadership for social justice and then, provided there are discernible universal norms and principles, propose ways in which such leadership can be nurtured and enhanced. Surely any means for broadening and hastening the spread of leadership for social justice is a worthwhile achievement.

However, inherent within this admirable aim is the assumption that such leadership is not an idiosyncratic event; that the commitment to social justice outcomes by a leader is not caused by happenstance alone. In other words, a fundamental aspiration at the heart of this international research project is that a commitment to social justice can be imbued in leaders, generally, and not left as a possible outcome of individual choice caused by some random personal life experience. But how realistic is this aspiration? In fact, the apprehensiveness around this important issue surfaced during a recent international conference presentation by eight researchers involved in this international project in which the following crucially important questions were raised for discussion:

Can we find conclusions about ... the agency of social justice leaders? Is it possible to generalize/ theorize or will we only be able to illuminate?

Certainly each of the articles presented in this special issue provides a unique and important illumination upon the issue of social justice. Much can be learnt about the specific social justice issues in focus in each article but no two contexts are identical. Hence, in the spirit of the Māori phrase, *Tui tui tuituia* – sew, stitch and bind together -this concluding article seeks to find that which might be generalizable from across these articles. It seeks to describe that which can be woven together from the many important threads of experience, knowledge and wisdom presented in each of the articles. More specifically, this concluding article will, first, highlight the essential general leadership qualities of inclusivity, presence and advocacy when promoting and implementing social justice outcomes. Then, secondly, this article and, indeed, the essence of this special issue devoted to describing leadership for social justice, will be shown to be providing further support for the call for a new theory of leadership.

A devotion to inclusivity

Previously, the concept of ‘inclusion’ has largely been associated with the education of special needs students whereby these students were returned back into mainstream classrooms for much of their learning experiences rather than being located in a separate specialist classroom. Here, the focus of inclusion is aligned with the joining together of one particular group of students with the general student body. However, in today’s multi-cultural, multi-socioeconomic, and multi-ability educational communities, such a narrow focus is insufficient. Hence, more recently the focus is about inclusivity rather than inclusion. Today, school leaders devoted to inclusivity, through strategic change management practices, respond to the need for creating schools as inclusive and diverse communities, where each member experiences belonging, value and relevance (Bristol, 2014). Moreover, such school leaders apply the concept of inclusivity in two ways. First, these leaders move the field of inclusion beyond the boundaries of disability or disadvantage to incorporate the recognition of social diversity regardless of its form amongst the learners, staff and community (Bristol, 2014). Secondly, such leaders recognize and locate the ownership and responsibility for maximising inclusivity not only in the domain of their own leadership practices but also in the culture of their school. In other words, these leaders not only model inclusivity but also strive to ensure that it becomes a naturally accepted norm within the school. Inclusivity thus becomes not something to be achieved but rather the way the school community is experienced by all associated with it.

In this way, inclusion becomes the combined effect of the school community’s affairs in how it seeks, welcomes, nurtures, encourages and sustains a strong sense of belonging and high performance from all associated with the school. As explained by Smith and Lindsay (2014), this holistic perspective embraces the understanding that “inclusion is a state in which all organizational members feel welcome and valued for who they are and what they bring to the table. All stakeholders share a high sense of belonging and fulfilled mutual purpose” (p.1). This view of leading does not invoke inclusion to focus on cultural, social, financial, academic or physical inequity specifically; rather it summons inclusion as a medium for interrogating existing practices that explicitly or implicitly undermine inclusion.

Indeed, even though the Symes article is more specifically focussed on issues associated with the inclusion of special needs students in mainstream New Zealand schooling, there is a very clear call for the school leader to also engender an essential and more general commitment to interrogating existing practices that undermine inclusion. Specifically, Symes argues that if school leaders are authentic in supporting the inclusion of special needs students then,

Rather than being motivated by bureaucratic mandates or directives, school leaders should be motivated by a moral commitment to students, an awareness of their needs, and a belief about the significance of their role as leader in each student’s life.

This view strives to impel school leaders to keep the needs of these particular students as the sole source of motivation and inspiration for inclusive action rather than being predominantly guided by current governmental policies and guidelines that have been shown to be potentially contradictory and limiting. Thus, these policies and guidelines may undermine the school’s attempts to implement the most effective inclusive practices for its special needs students.

Similarly, the Sperandio and Wilson-Tagoe article describing the leadership for social justice outcomes of three female Ghanaian school principals illustrates how each of these women “saw their role ... as bringing reasonableness and impartiality in providing the opportunity” for each and every student to learn regardless of their social or cultural background. Implicit within this insight is the actions of each principal in being willing to interrogate, challenge and change any school or local community belief, attitude or behaviour that would directly or indirectly undermine the inclusion of a student or group of

students. Moreover, this article is about inclusivity, rather than simply inclusion, since all three women principals “located their active involvement and commitment to the education of all students” because they each shared the view that “education was a leveller – allowing those that had it to access opportunities regardless of their social background”. The social justice focus was not aligned with a particular student based on a singular descriptor, such as cultural or socio-economic background, but rather the capacity of each and every student to feel wanted in the school and, thereby, be able to fully concentrate on achieving their academic best.

The Morrison, McNae and Branson article provides research participant views that clearly acknowledge the desire for inclusivity rather than more simply inclusion in school leader social justice understandings, aspirations and actions. For example, Sarah described her commitment to social justice as “giving every student the chance to be the best [they] can be,” which is very similar to that expressed by Hemi, who described his leadership for social justice as being about “... trying to find the solutions to get our young people to where they want to be, their dreams and aspirations, and for our community.” Also, Nettie suggested “that it doesn’t matter what you call it, [social justice] is about giving everyone a chance.”

A commitment to inclusivity from a more holistic perspective is provided by the Mansfield article which vividly tells “the story of a group of women educators who created a novel school culture, and the female students who meet them there, to disrupt and transform the dailiness of sexism, racism, and classism.” As described by Mansfield, this story highlights how a particular supportive school culture was successfully “working to confront the past, interrupt the present, and revolutionize the future trajectories of historically minoritized peoples.” Importantly, this narrative epitomizes a devotion to inclusivity rather than inclusion because it does not single out a single student, or a group of students that share a common feature, but educates each and every student in such a way that the special needs of a student, or a group of students, are addressed as a matter of course. Extending Goddard’s claim more generally, “socially just school leaders must work diligently to ensure that each population served by the school is treated with equity and respect.”

However, leading in such a way so as to meet the needs of each population served by the school is not a simple and straightforward task. It asks the leader to ensure that the activity required to meet these needs does not, itself, become divisive. As the McLeod article explains, a Māori teacher striving to teach a largely non-indigenous class about the importance of improving the social circumstances of the many seriously disadvantaged Māori and Pasifika people in New Zealand can appear “to be promoting advantage for those of my own culture” in the minds of some non-indigenous students. In other words, this well-intentioned learning programme can actually induce in some students the very opposite effect to that which it is trying to achieve. Some students fail to accept the need for any positive discrimination for certain Māori and Pasifika because they interpret this in terms of a loss of opportunity and benefit for non-Māori and non-Pasifika. A devotion to inclusivity, rather than inclusion, as suggested by the Mansfield article, highlights the need to attend to the social circumstances of certain Māori and Pasifika not as discrete cultural concerns but rather as a New Zealand national imperative. Here the focus is on making New Zealand a far more successful country as a whole. This is about advantaging the country by ensuring that everyone, including Māori and Pasifika, is able to fully participate in its economic and social endeavours.

The interesting insight provided by the Kedian article into this understanding of a devotion to inclusivity for a leader seeking social justice is that it moves the discussion from the nature of the learning environment to the nature of the leader’s practice. The key message is that any devotion to inclusivity processes must model inclusivity. The desired outcome must be commensurate with the nature of the process. To this end, Kedian promotes the use of a “dialogic approach to oral communication in professional contexts [rather than] the more common, traditional forms of oral communication which are often characterized by transactional delivery and “‘expert to novice’ transmission modes.” According to Kedian, this dialogic

approach acknowledges that “knowledge is uniquely personal, subjective and acquired through interaction with others. It recognizes that conversation is a basic mode of human interaction.” If a commitment to social justice was a common, every day human activity there would be no need to explore how it can be led more effectively and successfully. Achieving social justice outcomes takes additional effort and commitment from all involved. Thus, the leader needs to be able to inspire and engage others to its achievement. Kedian urges the leader to realize that the oral communication process used to influence, convince and engage others to the desired activity is best supported by dialogue rather than argument, discussion or more adversarial forms of communication.

A commitment to presence

For Duignan (2009), “Presence means being there for the other in the sacred stillness of the precious space created between people within relationships” (p.5). More specifically, Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers (2007) posit that a commitment by a leader to presence involves “being fully conscious and aware in the present moment [through] deep listening, [and] of being open beyond one’s preconceptions and historical ways of making sense” (p.13). This implies that to be fully present the leader must be able to consciously feel, understand, analyse, and act upon her/his immediate reality and not be distracted or consumed unnecessarily by extraneous concerns or influences. Hence, it is about “paying close attention to whatever is unfolding here and now” (de Quincey, 2005, p.238), which involves being present to one’s self and being present to those others influenced by the situation. Being present to one’s self is about thinking differently whereby both objective and subjective data from the immediate experience is brought into awareness and, together, these inform the leader’s deliberations rather than simply repeating past habitual ways of thinking (Branson, 2009). Being present to others not only means being there physically and hearing what others have to say; it also requires authentic cognizance of the impact of the situation on the lives of those involved. As Starratt (2004) argues, presence in leadership implies that the leader willingly and consistently directs alert attention and empathic sensitivity to each of the others they are leading so that their presence activates not only their own credibility but also the engagement of those affected by the situation. Similarly, Tolle (2005) writes that a genuine leadership relationship can only be established when “there is alert attention toward the other person” (p.84) and involves a transformation of consciousness because “only presence can free you of the ego” (p.78) and its self-interested desires.

This essential leadership role of presence in the achievement of socially just outcomes is captured in a very simple way by Symes when she implores school leaders, who are seeking the best outcomes for special needs student, to “be motivated by a moral commitment to students, an awareness of their needs, and a belief about the significance of their role as leader in each student’s life.” This is about the leader striving to see the school life of a special needs student as it would be seen and experienced by the special needs student and then acting in accordance with this new insight. Indeed, the Morrison et al. article provides an example of this ideal. James reflected on how his commitment to “empathy towards students who are in the lower aspect came about because [he] was there” as a result of his family moving from New Zealand to Northern Ireland at a time that coincided with the eleven plus examination. Due to the lack of academic similarity between these two countries, James did extremely poorly in this examination and was thus placed in the lowest academic class level in his Irish secondary school. As James described, “I could have just kept quiet because I was a reasonably shy kid, still young, thirteen. I took the initiative to make a difference [for myself] because, really, it couldn’t get any worse.” Despite feelings of uncertainty, James acted to rectify his educational misplacement but the personal experience – the sense of actually being present in the reality of an underachieving student – has remained with him and now strongly influences his commitment to social justice issues in his school community.

Presence calls for the leader to emotionally feel the social justice issue rather than solely understanding it from a cognitive perspective. For example, McLeod explains,

when confronted with disparity, disadvantage and the realities of societal discrimination, my indigenous worldview, and the legacy of agentic action inherited from the struggle of past tūpuna (ancestors), provides the platform for me to promote further awareness and consciousness of social justice issues related to the Aotearoa New Zealand educational context from a Māori perspective.

McLeod cannot teach the necessary social justice knowledge about Māori without experiencing and expressing the emotion that is directly attached to it. In a similar way Maezama describes how the genesis of the manner in which the three female school principals in her research strive to address the career discrimination for other Solomon Island women seeking to become school leaders lies not only in being seen as exemplary school principals themselves but also by remaining true to their cultural place and role as Solomon Island women. As these three women each described in their own way, their form of leadership reflects the culture because it

starts in their homes, in their sleeping, cooking or birthing houses, under the shady trees, in their gardens, rivers, forests and seas, where granddaughters are watching their grandmothers and mothers teaching their daughters. Locating leadership in this way affirms that leadership and context cannot be separated.

The presence of these three women is seen and felt by others through the unequivocal devotion to their cultural roles and norms.

Mansfield then expands upon this personal or self dimension of presence by highlighting the leader's responsibility to truly know the beliefs and perspectives of those for whom social justice action is being implemented. In the specific example described by Mansfield in which the particular school was trying to create a safe space for minoritized learners, it was essential that the voices of the students "were respected, supported, deployed, and developed. This particular safe space was made possible by building robust relationships more akin to 'familia' and 'sisterhood.'" Indeed, the success of this school in achieving this laudable outcome was recognized as directly emanating from the students believing that the staff truly understood "what their students are going through because they have literally lived where they live."

The importance of the Kedian article in furthering this examination of why it is important for a leader seeking social justice outcomes to have a commitment to presence lies in its insight into the effect of this 'presence' on the other. As explained by Kedian, the nature of dialogue calls upon the leader, and indeed all of the participants in the dialogic process, to be open, supportive and accepting of the other and their views and perspectives. This is about being present to the other's communication and, thereby, their person. Should this be possible, then, as the participants in Kedian's research explained, each person involved in the dialogue is likely to feel

appreciation of being accepted unconditionally into a group, being listened to irrespective of their level of experience, being valued as professionals, contributing as equals and being empowered to challenge current orthodoxies and the opinions of others in an intellectually rigorous way in a trusting environment.

Furthermore, Kedian's research participants reported that, while listening to the contributions of others, they sensed that their own thinking became substantially more refined such that they "developed a far greater sense of agency". While a commitment to presence is founded upon subjective and implicit tenets, its likely outcomes are far more objective and explicit.

A fidelity to advocacy

In its simple form, 'advocacy' implies that the leader "takes action on behalf of others" (Collay, 2014, p.789) or that leadership is "the act of supporting an idea, need, person, or group" (London, 2008, p.313). But, in the field

of leadership for social justice, more is required because the origins of social injustice are often multifaceted. Although a direct cause might be apparent, this could well be underpinned by other communal or systemic norms, beliefs or policies. Hence, having fidelity to advocacy calls upon the leader to advocate at all levels and all forums in which the perceived social injustice is engendered. As described by London (2014), a leader committed to this multifaceted form of advocacy takes,

public action to engender fair treatment or further the cause of people in need who can't speak for themselves. ... Advocates speak out and take action to effect change, often overcoming resistance. They increase awareness of an issue and generate positive attitudes. They recruit and retain volunteers who become advocates themselves. They influence government policies. They deliver services, raise money, and build organizations to sustain their advocacy goals. (p. 314)

In other words, should a school leader recognize the existence of a social justice issue within her/his school community, their fidelity to advocacy mandates that s/he advocates at student, staff, parent, community and system/political levels where necessary, in order to redress the issue and all of its causes. Solely advocating at the school level may not be sufficient.

Together, the articles presented in this special issue highlight the various levels of advocacy that may be required in redressing a socially unjust issue. Symes describes how decisive social justice leaders “successfully manipulate events and people so that a vision becomes the reality.” Sperandio and Wilson-Tagoe account for this commitment of the leader towards ‘manipulating events and people’ in their use of the phrase “change agent” and describe how the three Ghanaian women principals,

had a vision of themselves as having a degree of agency with regard to the energies they expended developing their schools, a belief that they could affect the quality of their students’ education through their actions.

Moreover, they add to this understanding of the nature of advocacy with the view that the leader must take personal responsibility for ensuring that the resources supporting the social justice activity are evenly and effectively distributed to all involved.

More specifically, the Maezama article illustrates how it might be necessary for a social justice leader to advocate at a socio-cultural level, too. When describing the difficulties Solomon Island women have in being appointed to school leadership positions, she argues that,

the disjuncture between the women’s experiences was shaped by Western ways of defining and practising leadership and this continued to marginalize women in their workplace. Historical and cultural ways of leading became undervalued as women struggled to find space in their male dominated institutions.

Similarly, the Goddard article, which describes and critiques how nations generally respond to natural disasters, challenges the perceived dependency upon a “relief centric” response and argues for a “disaster risk reduction and prevention response so that this planning will help alleviate the degree to which organizational post-traumatic disorder impacts schools.” Goddard claims that most planned responses to the devastating effects of natural disasters tend to prioritize re-establishing buildings and infrastructure before caring for the needs of the people, particularly the school aged youth. Hence, he urges school leaders and educational authorities to become advocates for national change in this unique arena; one in which the lives of school aged children can be readily and extensively traumatized.

The Mansfield article raises two forums for social justice advocacy. First, she shares the view of Goddard that national and societal policies need to be challenged. When describing how the school helped

to redress the marginalisation of some people within the American society, Mansfield relates how the school provided time and space for critical conversations that spoke against societal norms and entrenched “isms.” There was a conscientious effort on the part of the principal and teachers to incorporate a “critical pedagogy” defined as an

open and transparent exchange between faculty and students about some of the barriers students might face either as a person of color, or as a woman (or at the intersection of ethnicity, sex, and socioeconomic status).

Secondly, Mansfield portrays how, in this particular school, there was a need to challenge the beliefs and views of some of the families of the very students who needed most help. As recorded in this article,

the next ‘voice’ stage, to speak against, was sometimes painful for participants. It meant having to face the fact that, perhaps, one’s very own family had held prejudicial attitudes toward women. Furthermore, it often meant engaging in difficult conversations at school and at home about cultural expectations.

A fidelity to advocacy demands that all necessary sources of injustice are challenged – the easy and the difficult, the obvious and the not so obvious.

Finally, the Torrance and Forde article provides many important insights into the nature and practice of maintaining a fidelity to advocacy. This particular article first chronicles the introduction of Scottish educational policy that places responsibility with school leaders to ensure socially just practices are maintained within their schools and then proceeds to examine the practical implications for two school leaders as they work to implement this policy. To this end, both school leaders “perceived themselves as activists within their professional roles, championing social justice, changing mindsets, school culture and practice. Despite at times being at odds with the views of others.” In order to accomplish this desired outcome, these two school leaders “focused their energies on challenging the attitudes and practices of staff, as well as of parents and pupils. Within their respective local authority, each headteacher raised specific challenges.” These article excerpts clearly depict the various levels of advocacy required from these two school leaders if they were to succeed in fulfilling their professional obligation as contained in Scottish educational policy. However, the authors add another advocacy level themselves when they posit that,

If the expectations contained within the revised Standards are to move beyond the aspirational to impact on the leadership practice of headteachers, significant emphasis will need to be placed at all levels of the education system to support the development of both understandings and practice in leadership for social justice. Only then will those aspirations become a reality, fulfilling their potential to reinvigorate the teaching profession to enhance opportunities for pupils. The economic and social disparity between the advantaged and disadvantaged in Scotland suggests that the public discourse around social justice is part of Scottish mythology. Much still needs to be done in order for Scotland to claim that it represents a socially just society.

Arguably, instances of leadership for social justice may often be focussed on the symptom and not the cause. School leaders can see the problem and do everything in their power to redress its ill effects but this may not be enough. A fidelity to advocacy calls upon these leaders, and those who support them, to challenge the cause of injustice to its highest level.

Conclusion

Calling upon school leadership to be founded upon inclusivity, presence and advocacy extends its theoretical principles beyond that often promoted. Mostly, leadership theorising has concentrated on the effective rather than the affective aspects of leadership (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Branson et al., 2015; Lakomski & Evers, 2011). Thus, our leadership theorising has tended to direct us toward the product of leadership rather than its enactment. This suggests that leadership theory has concentrated too much on the behavioural characteristics of leadership and has overlooked the more fundamental relational requirements. As can be gleaned from the articles presented in this special issue, leadership for social justice is essentially a relational phenomenon. It is a practical outcome based upon an emotional reaction to perceived social injustice. The leader feels for the disadvantaged person or persons and cannot avoid striving to rectify the situation.

What this means is that the elemental nature of social justice leadership is contextual and not generic because it first emerges out of the leader's sincere interpersonal engagement with those they are leading. Furthermore, its essence is a relationship that seeks to create an equitable culture based upon shared values. This is a culture in which all feel a sense of safety and security because they each feel that they can rely on each other in order to achieve their best. The actions of leaders, therefore, need to be understood as located in and framed by the specific context, while also serving to actively shape that context and the possibilities that it presents for leadership.

This view of the nature of leadership is more in keeping with a new and evolving theoretical perspective in which it is argued that, to become a leader, the person must first be accepted as the leader before they can begin to behave as the leader and gain the influence they desire. More specifically, Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011) argue that leadership embraces four sequential elements: be an "in group" member; champion the group; shape the group's identity; and, align the group's identity to its wider reality. Here, the feature of influence does not come into play until after the leader is authentically established as a member of the group and, as a consequence, can readily and willingly champion, affirm and promote the activities of the group, and its individual members, in various forums. To be able to truly champion the group, or its members, a leader must first be able to deeply understand and appreciate what is happening, which requires the leader to be at one with the group. The genesis of leadership is the quality, the interdependency, and the intimacy of the relationship between the leader and the group they are intending to lead.

The learning gained from the articles presented in this special issue provides support for the adoption of this new theoretical understanding of the nature of leadership. Inclusivity and presence are inherent within the call for the leader to be an "in group" member. Shaping the group is surely about addressing the socially unjust issue, while advocacy embraces both championing the group as well as aligning the group to its wider reality. Hence, we argue that this new understanding of leadership is far more attuned to holistically describing the role of leadership for social justice than those that preceded it. For example, we suggest that such descriptions of leadership as distributed, or ethical, or transformative, or whatever, may only capture a segment of the total task. As such, these descriptions might diminish rather than amplify the means by which a school leader can confidently and successfully address a perceived social injustice within their school community because each provides only a narrow description of what is expected of a leader. As has been shown in this special issue, school leadership for social justice requires a far more holistic, coherent and comprehensive approach that may well be more clearly articulated in this new theory of leadership.

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