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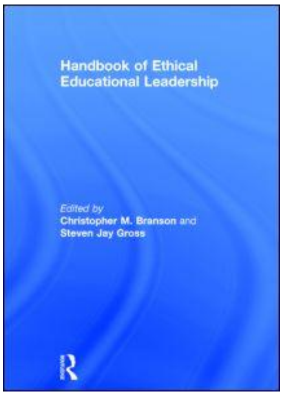

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Seeking Social Justice

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SEEKING SOCIAL JUSTICE

RACHEL MCNAE

> He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata! He tangata! He tangata![1]
>
> [When asked, “What is the most important thing in the world?
> The reply is: It is people, it is people, it is people!”]
>
> (Maori proverb)
>
> The passion of people, and the reality of our limitations when meeting the needs of many, or just a few, as the case may be—is immense.
>
> Social justice is about people, their interaction and actions with and for one another.
>
> Socially just educational leadership comes about through asking what direction are we going in and does this indeed have the importance of ‘people, people, people’ at the forefront?
>
> (Reneti, 2012)

The Maori *whakatauki* (Kōrero Māori, Whakatauki proverbs) shared above frames the focus of this chapter. It encourages those who read it to focus their attention on nurturing the people around them and the relationships that connect and embrace these people. It is my belief that such a whakatauki is pertinent for educational leaders as they bring forward past stories and experiences to navigate the increasingly complex challenges within their centers for learning, schools, and wider communities while at the same time holding relationships central to their work. Reneti (2012), an educational leader working in the area of early childhood education, has contextualized this whakatauki in her work to illuminate its relevance to the relational focus of socially just educational leadership.

To this end, the purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it examines the concept of social justice within an educational context. Complexities associated with defining social justice leadership are identified and core principles of social justice are illustrated in educational contexts as an attempt to make sense of the key facets of leading with socially just intent. Second, the building of respectful relationships, through the engagement of student voice, is presented as an example of socially just leadership practice within educational settings. Through presenting a detailed case study, actions toward raising socially just consciousness and upholding core principles of social justice are described. Overall, this chapter provides an insight into ethical educational leadership, which is epitomized through a commitment to social justice. The intention is to engage the reader in broader social action to transform oppressive and exploitative circumstances in educational settings that not only marginalize and exclude student voice from school decision-making processes but also impact on student learning.

DEFINING LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

> *Leadership and social justice are not natural bedfellows; nor are leadership and inclusion. The extent to which leadership meshes with social justice or inclusion depends on the way in which leadership is conceived, that is, in the way that relationships are envisioned among members of institutions, in the roles that are prescribed for individuals and groups, and in the ends to which leadership activities are directed.*
>
> (Ryan, 2006, p. 7)

Radical shifts in educational leadership arising from increasing globalization continue to challenge traditional notions of what it means to be an educational leader. With an increasing emphasis on the growing complexity and diversity of educational contexts, paramount have become the protection and promotion of equal rights and justice and care required to ensure that differing perspectives are valued and included when ensuring the effectiveness of educational leaders (Rapp, 2002). While there is an expectation for educators to lead this continuous change in order to keep up with accelerated globalization across broader social, political, and economic contexts, there is an implicit expectation for educational leaders to also protect and uphold principles of social justice (Blackmore, 2002). It is therefore not surprising that school leaders in their increasingly diverse communities play a key role in supporting social justice practices in schools.

Thus, recent scholarship scoping the role of leadership preparation programs in developing "socially just" leaders is becoming increasingly prominent as educationalists seek support to manage the increasing diverse communities that walk through their school gates. However, as outlined above by Ryan (2006), the relationship between leadership and social justice is neither clear-cut nor well defined, and defining social justice leadership becomes a complex task. With a multitude of definitions in the literature illustrating varying understandings of what social justice leadership can be (for example, Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Rapp, 2002; Strachan, 2005), the topic itself is rife with complexities and uncertainties. Not surprisingly, then, Furman (2012) laments the paucity of social justice research particularly in relation to its essential role in the practice of educational leadership.

So, the question needs to be asked: What is meant by the phrase "social justice"? Research *on* and *for* social justice holds increasing prominence in scholarship. As this concept has received more attention, a number of definitions have been promoted as reflecting the contextualized nature of social justice leadership. In this burgeoning body of literature, some common themes prevail. Lee's (2007) definition below encapsulates many of the discourses considered essential by scholars when describing social justice:

> Social justice involves promoting access and equity to ensure full participation in the life of a society, particularly for those who have been systematically excluded on the basis of race/ethnicity, gender, age, physical or mental disability, education, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or other characteristics of background or group membership. Social justice is based on a belief that all people have a right to equitable treatment, support for their human rights, and fair allocation of societal resources.
>
> (p. 1)

Within the limitations of this chapter, providing a definition that encapsulates all of these areas of social justice is unrealistic, therefore it is useful to examine this definition with the purpose of highlighting themes that permeate the literature specific to socially just, ethical educational leadership.

Firstly, leading in socially just ways involves addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools. Giving attention to issues of social justice encourages educational leaders to focus "on the experiences of marginalized groups and inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes" (Furman, 2012, p. 194).

Secondly, themes of inclusion underscore most social justice work as educational leaders seek to break down barriers to opportunity. Ryan (2006) believes that "if people are meaningfully included in institutional practices and process" (p. 5), social justice can be achieved. However, meaningful inclusion requires thoughtful and embedded change. For example, integrating marginalized groups into an already existing system can actually become an unjust practice. These new members may become situated in a system that further perpetuates their marginalization, as they may not have the skills or resources to participate within the system. Ryan argues, "Inclusion involves more than engineering minor problems; it can only be achieved when the structure and inherent features of an already unequal system are changed" (p. 7).

Thirdly, there is an implicit understanding that educational leaders will not only come to *know* instances of injustice and systems that perpetuate marginalization, but they will also *act* with socially just intent to eliminate the discourses and systems that create these situations in the first place. Leaders who are cognizant of social justice are concerned with the common good and, as Howell and Avolio (1992) note, will sacrifice self-interest for the sake of the collective good. The essential actions of educational leaders in bringing stakeholders together to understand their role in an unjust system, to transform the people who are part of the problem so they become part of the solution, and to access capabilities to reverse injustice cannot be overlooked. It is these actions of socially just educational leaders that shift institutional arrangements and systems toward participation and inclusion as they strive to create equity through transforming traditional discourses and conditions. Consequently, a key role of the socially just educational leader is to reveal instances of injustice and to disrupt and subvert arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes (Lyman, Strachan, & Lazaridou, 2012). Thus, educational leaders are called to action simply by the nature of their profession, and Stevenson (2007) argues, "The school principal, with the authority and influence that their position confers, is clearly a pivotal individual in shaping the organisational culture" (p. 774).

Whether it is through the implementation of programs that address the needs of marginalized groups or actions that seek to interrogate and change systems that exclude individuals, educators play a key role in modeling socially just action and supporting others to do the same. Theoharis (2007) calls for educational leaders to "make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions . . . central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision" (p. 223). However, such action must be informed, and Lyman and colleagues (2012) highlight the importance of having knowledge or experience of "local manifestations of global issues" so that leaders and school communities are moved individually and collectively to leadership commitments that emphasize social justice.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO SOCIALLY JUST LEADERSHIP

Leading for social justice is frequently touted as the magic bullet to solve societal woes and address academic underachievement in schools. However, Scanlan (2012) purports that although "socially just educational leadership focuses on reducing inequalities within schools" (p. 348), such practice can be difficult, and eliminating educational inequalities is "an ambitious and elusive goal" (p. 349). Significant barriers exist to addressing social justice. Most commonly experienced is what Theoharis (2004) terms "internalized oppression" (p. 6), whereby existing structures and systems may provide benefits for particular communities or individuals, and there may be resistance to changing the status quo, as these actions may disrupt current entitlements or advantages. Strachan (1997) calls for leaders to develop ongoing resistance to these oppressive contexts. By committing to actions of social justice, such as democratic decision making, establishing meaningful relationships, and integrating stakeholders in decision-making processes, educational leaders can seek to disrupt oppressive practices.

Furthermore, a lack of understanding, knowledge, and commitment to issues of social justice can prevent social justice issues being addressed. Darling-Hammond (2002) indicates that social justice issues may not be well understood and educators may not want to engage in such issues, either because they may not know they exist or tackling them is perceived as too difficult. Rusch and Horsford (2008) believe that "social justice is much easier to study and intellectualize than to actualize in practice"

(p. 354). Shields (2004) warns that a "commitment and good intentions are not enough" (p. 8) and suggests that educational leaders can be supported in their work through embracing core principles of social justice in their leadership practice. It is therefore useful to illustrate this literature in such a way as to be able to emphasize the core principles that support the work of socially just leaders in educational contexts.

SOME CORE PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Shah (2010) reminds us that in order to encapsulate the "concepts, practices and perceptions in diverse contexts" (p. 27), it is useful to define and theorize about educational leadership in multiple ways. This chapter has highlighted the importance of including social justice as integral in any definition or theorization of educational leadership. Thus, the following core principles of socially just leadership are described so as to aid this outcome.

Socially just leaders are reflective. Hence, educational leaders lead in socially just ways when they critically reflect upon, and understand, how their "underlying beliefs, values, and attitudes may be counterproductive in our quest for education that is both just and excellent" (Shields, 2004, p. 8). Reflection is an important part of developing a conscience of and for social justice. Through the processes of reflection, McKenzie and colleagues (2008) believe that educational leaders can develop a critical consciousness that not only allows them to become attuned to injustices along with the educational practices in their schools and wider communities that generate and perpetuate these. Reflection of this kind is key to creating action within socially unjust situations.

Socially just leaders are action orientated and transformative (Shields, 2010). Making the case for transformative leadership as a core part of socially just leadership practice, Shields (2009) states that such leadership raises questions in relation to "justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others. It inextricably links education and educational leadership with the wider diverse social context within which it is imbedded" (p. 55).

Socially just leaders are purposeful. Within this transformational approach to leadership, actions that reflect inclusive and democratic behaviors are displayed, which are linked to a clear agenda of achieving social justice. As McCashen (2005) suggests, "Lobbying, campaigning, advocating, taking direct action, and protesting are important forms of action for social justice" (p. 35). Central to this work is the importance of relationships and recognizing this; a key focus for educational leaders must be that they ensure that their schools are culturally responsive to the needs of students. To this end, the needs of young people should be central, whereas frequently students' voices (the very means by which these needs can be expressed), are ignored, which therefore is an issue of social justice.

Finally, socially just leaders are orientated to socially just pedagogy. A social justice orientation is embedded within leadership practice and cannot be separated from the business of leadership itself. In acknowledging this fact, Theoharis (2008) lays down a challenge for conceptualizing social justice leadership:

> To better understand social justice leadership, it is necessary to come to grips with the notion that social justice leadership is not a job someone does from a distance and is not a position for which a principal punches in and punches out. This work with all the bold possibilities and all the turmoil requires grounding in social justice and a complex, highly intelligent, passionate, personal, and humble leader.
>
> (p. 19)

With such a challenge in mind, it is therefore not surprising that leading with socially just intent requires courage and resilience, as well as conviction, for socially just leaders are compelled to be fully involved participants in their own initiatives. Socially just leadership requires the full embodiment and immersion of the leader in any action that seeks to address social injustice.

SOCIALLY JUST EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Within educational contexts, it is frequently the teachers who are the designers of curriculum and instruction (Scratchley, 2003). Beane (1990) has suggested that many students, although the key stakeholders in this context, have little control over their learning experiences because the conditions under which they learn have been determined almost entirely by adults. Within the school environment, this culture positions the students as passive recipients of adult protection and knowledge (Smith, Taylor, & Gollop, 2000) and places the students in powerless situations with no meaningful role other than what Kress (2006) describes as passive consumers of information that lacks relevance to their lives. Increasing contributions of scholarship to the area of youth participation research call for the students to be involved in the creation of their learning experiences so that their needs can be more adequately met. Examining the needs of the students and contextualizing this issue within a socially just ontology underpin these relational approaches.

Engaging Student Voice to Shape Teaching and Learning Approaches

Research investigating student voice is rapidly expanding and many researchers espouse the benefits of involving students in school decision-making processes and curriculum design (Lodge, 2005; MacGregor, 2007; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004; Thomson & Gunter, 2005). This body of research challenges assumptions made about the way young people want to learn with the aim of further meeting their needs. Young people's perceptions about their learning provide researchers and educators with a much-needed source of knowledge, and this can play a key role in creating better conditions for learning in the future.

The literature surrounding students' involvement in decision making within school communities is generally based on one of two United Nations initiatives: the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1998 Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programs (the Lisbon Declaration). However, in New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi[2] is also relevant as Maori draw on cultural knowledge to establish appropriate ways in which *rangatahi* (youth) can best participate in decision making. Despite these conventions, declarations, and treaties, the processes of involving youth in decision making in schools is still in its infancy, as evidenced by those calling for further action in this area (for example, Bolstad, 2011; Campbell, 2000; McNae, 2010; Saunders, 2005; Zeldin, Petrokubi, & MacNeil, 2007).

According to Scratchley (2003), adults make assumptions about what is important for young people to know and do and fail to ask young people what they think, resulting in the creation of "one-size-fits-all" and "top-down" approaches to learning. These are frequently based on their own experiences, and Stanton-Rogers, Stanton-Rogers, Vyrost, and Lovas (2004) warn that there is a need for adults to step away from using their own personal experiences to shape learning experiences:

> If we [school staff] have a concern for what current life is like for today's generation of young people, or what may help them in their futures, we cannot use our own experiences of being young or the aspirations we then held as much of a guide. If we want to promote the life opportunities of young people, if we want to help them to prepare for their futures and make well-informed choices about them, then we need to find out about this 'new world' in which they are growing up.
>
> (p. 117)

Bishop and Glynn's (1999) research emphasizes the importance of changing power relations and creating a learning environment where the learners' sense-making processes are used and developed so they can successfully participate in gaining and constructing knowledge. It is refreshing that they stress the importance of the role of the teacher when interacting with the students so that knowledge is co-created. Including and valuing student voice therefore becomes central to this process, as it is believed by many researching in the area (e.g., Archard, 2013; Mansfield, 2013; McNae, 2010; Mitra, 2003; Saunders, 2005) that if students were engaged in school decision-making approaches and were viewed as active agents of change, which would extend their roles beyond a consultative function, they would be more likely to engage in conversations about learning and how schools can better meet their learning needs.

It is timely to introduce an example of socially just leadership in action. This example is situated within the New Zealand educational context and illustrates the importance of building, establishing, and sustaining relationships in order to address inequities in educational participation. "Revolution" is a leadership development program generated with young women through the formation of youth–adult partnerships and the engagement of student voice. This case study illuminates the power of voice and makes a case for educational leaders to consider the importance of including the voices of students in school decision-making processes.

“REVOLUTION”: ENGAGING STUDENT VOICE TO CO-CONSTRUCT A LEADERSHIP PROGRAM WITH YOUNG WOMEN IN A NEW ZEALAND HIGH SCHOOL

Situating the Case Study

This qualitative action research study was located in an urban girls’ Catholic secondary school and examined the leadership perceptions and experiences of 12 young female students. The focus of this research was to develop an alternative model of leadership curriculum development and engage students in co-constructive pedagogies as a means for them to share their voices. Prior to embarking on this research, I was a teacher at a girls’ secondary school in New Zealand. It was during my time there as the Year 13 Dean,[3] that I observed young women being required by staff to take on leadership roles within the school. Moreover, there was minimal preparation for the few opportunities that were available to these students, and in most years, leadership preparation was generally nonexistent except for a loosely termed “leadership camp.”

As a feminist, I was concerned on a number of levels. Firstly, the way that leadership was promoted within the school, solely through formal leadership roles that provided opportunities for only a handful of students, gave students the message that leadership was reserved for “the finest.” Secondly, I was concerned by the lack of inclusive and contemporary leadership development opportunities provided to the young women. Thirdly, I was disheartened by the message that the young women received from seeing student leadership existing only in the final years of school. As a result, many of the young women were not engaging in leadership practice within or outside of the school prior to this year level or once they had left school after their final year. This led to my first encounter with leadership development with young secondary school women and, from this, to my ongoing research activities in this area.

Background to the Research

> *Sarah shuffles into the hostel meeting room, her slippers scuffing the already worn carpet as she slowly and deliberately moves across the floor. With a* MILO *carefully balanced on top of a* Cosmo *magazine, she looks at me and exhales a sigh of what could only be read as frustration. Placing her mug on the coffee table, she looks over to one of her peers, rolls her eyes, and plunges herself into a space on the awaiting couch. “How long will this take, I’ve got study,” her eyes piercing mine, “AND I’ve got better things to do.”*

As a teacher of young women in a secondary school I recall the occasion described above as stemming from the invitation by a school principal to provide leadership guidance for a group of young women in their final year of schooling. I responded to this request by designing and implementing what I thought to be an effective leadership development program for a group of 16- and 17-year-old young women. Supported by postgraduate study in the area of leadership, I scoured my lecture notes, theories, and course readings to design a program that focused on defining, explaining, and practicing leadership. The program took place the following term, and upon reflection I am now not surprised about the "not-so-positive" response I received from the students. As Sarah illustrated in the above example from my research journal, the desire to learn, be involved, and be engaged in what should be a positive learning experience was nonexistent. Upon reflection, I can now see that the content of the program was far removed from the actual contexts in which the young women exercised their leadership, and the definitions and theory were irrelevant to their day-to-day experiences. I cringe as I reflect and feel apologetic, and even embarrassed, that I subjected anyone to such a learning (or not) opportunity.

After completing the delivery of this leadership program, I thought to myself that there had to be a better way to teach young women about leadership. I was a feminist who was supported by my core value of social justice. What should have been important was the leadership experiences of the young women, not the theories and definitions of leadership. These experiences, and the context in which they exercised their leadership, should have been central. I therefore set about redesigning how I might go through this process differently.

The Purpose of the Research

The underpinning philosophy for the design and implementation of the second leadership program described in this case study was that it had to be a collaborative process between the young women and myself (Saunders, 2005). Also, it was critical that the program be relevant for this group. An imported leadership program created by adults, for adults, was not likely to meet the needs of the young women in a secondary school. This research used a collaborative action research approach to examine the leadership perceptions and experiences of young women in order to co-construct and evaluate a leadership development curriculum to meet their needs. I believed that by understanding their leadership beliefs, and their leadership contexts, learning experiences could be designed to develop their leadership practice in a meaningful and relevant way. From my study of the literature, and previous work in this area, I believed that the use of adult–student partnerships (presented in the form of learning communities) and the inclusion of student voice in the negotiation and evaluation of a leadership development curriculum would assist in the creation of a leadership program that met the needs of this particular group of students.

Description of the Research

Having the voices of the young women as a central part of this research required detailed planning, using a variety of research methods and ensuring that the methods selected allowed for this to happen in a safe and valid way. Methods that also contributed to the formation of the strong youth–adult partnerships were essential. Semi-structured interviews allowed the young women to individually share their voices. Focus group discussions allowed for engaging and interactive discussions among the young women, as well as between the young women and myself. Field notes and artifacts of students' work from workshop activities provided further means by which to gather important information and observations throughout the research.

Over 12 months, a number of key phases were located within an action research framework. The first phase of the research involved making initial contact with the school involved, fulfilling school access requirements, and selecting students for the leadership program and associated research. The second phase involved gaining informed consent for the research from the students and their parents. The third phase involved creating a community of learning so that students got to know each other. Team-building activities and icebreaker games were used as a means for group members to get to know each other. Initial focus group interviews were held to ascertain the young women's views of leadership and their perceptions and beliefs about what it meant to be a leader. The fourth phase involved developing the content and creating the structure for the leadership program. This was done through a second series of focus groups. During these conversations, students shared what they wanted to learn, how they would like to learn it (different learning strategies, both practical and theoretical), and what order the content should follow. Working together, we negotiated a framework that illustrated what the students felt was important to learn, what order to learn it in, and what activities they would use to allow the learning to happen. I also drew on my leadership knowledge and teaching experience to contribute to this and expand the students' ideas about what leadership could be and offer a variety of teaching and learning approaches.

The fifth phase involved facilitating and participating in the leadership program. At the end of each session, the students evaluated what worked in the leadership session and what did not and made suggestions for future improvements and changes. In the sixth phase, a final evaluation of the content and structure of the Revolution program was made by the participants, and changes to the leadership program were suggested. Using evaluation field notes from each of the previous leadership sessions, students participated in focus group conversations and evaluated the whole of the program, making suggestions as to what might work better and what might have more impact or have been more relevant. During this phase, the students also made a presentation to the board of trustees outlining what the program looked like, why and how they created it, the benefits and challenges of the program, and the changes and ideas they would make for the following year.

Summary of the Research Findings

The findings demonstrated that the process of co-construction provided a valuable opportunity to work with the young women in a youth–adult partnership and create a contextually relevant leadership program. As Kate stated:

> Well I don't really know that much about leadership, so how helpful am I going to be? Like shouldn't we just get told what to do?' . . . But then it got me thinking that maybe the whole thing of being a leader is being able to create stuff and then . . . with your help, of course, which thank God we have your help because I wouldn't know where to start. But then, you didn't know the school, or us so

> we helped you there. So, it was good that we sort of realized what a leader needs and then with your input of how we can achieve getting these things with the activities and stuff. That was quite good.

Although the young women initially found the co-construction process difficult, as it challenged the traditional pedagogical approaches they were familiar with, it was also personally rewarding and a source of enjoyment, with the majority of the reasons for this relating to the youth–adult partnerships that were created. The students appreciated the opportunity to work alongside an adult, be consulted about their prior knowledge and learning needs, and see their opinions acted upon. Anna commented:

> So, why don't all teachers do this [ask us what and how we want to learn]? I mean, if they did, I reckon we would learn more, and enjoy it. I mean, teachers could have made Revolution, but it would've been lame. Had like heaps of those peer support games and theory 'cause that's what teachers like. But, I reckon, it's cool because our ideas are there and they suit us. Like heaps of drama stuff, discussions, and different activities . . . we have all included how we like to learn.

Other benefits of this youth–adult partnership included enhancing the young women's sense of agency in school decision making about learning as they actively sought solutions to instances of marginalization in their school context. Some students felt the need to challenge the lack of leadership development opportunities that existed within the school and made plans to bring the school on board with what was happening. Kate took it upon herself to write to the principal and ask for funding to support the program. She received over $400 to buy resources for the following year to ensure that the leadership learning was sustained for another group of students. In her discussions afterward, she reported:

> I know, cool, eh? But I just wished she had read my letter, she kinda went . . . skim . . . as she flicked through to the numbers . . . she didn't even read it and I had spent heaps of time on it . . . we even had a letterhead from Revolution . . . she just gave me a slip and sent me to the office [for the money].

The findings reported that it was important to the students that adults showed they valued what the students contributed to the school community. These findings support key themes in the literature, such as the work of Meier (1993), who highlighted the need for connection, inclusivity, participation, and collaboration. Furthermore, the sense of *agency* (Watkins, 2005) assisted the group to work as a collective, generating a belief from all members of the learning community that they could make informed choices and take action on issues that mattered to them. By being a part of the learning community, there was also a sense of *belonging* through membership. Respect, inclusion, acceptance, and support were key ingredients for this to occur, reflecting what Watkins deems as important elements of an inclusive, socially just learning community. Through developing a sense of belonging, there was a growth of commitment within the community, which illustrated the *cohesion* among the community members. This cohesion assisted in the creation of joint action when required. Lastly, recognizing and embracing the differences of others illustrated that *diversity* was a key facet in the creation of the learning community. This may have assisted in creating an inclusive community of difference as described by Shields and Seltzer (1997), in which culturally diverse viewpoints and practices are accepted and celebrated.

SOCIALLY JUST LEADERSHIP—CREATING SPACES FOR VOICES, ACTING UPON CHOICES

> *The tide is turning from the antiquated notion of students as passive recipients of teaching, to a new recognition on the interdependence that is necessary between students and adults.*
>
> (Fletcher, 2004, p. 4)

This case study is an example of engaging students' voices to challenge the traditional notion of the teacher–student relationship and, as emphasized by Fletcher above, set out to reshape the relationship between the teacher and the student. Founded on the notion that young people and adults could work together in partnership within a learning community to share their voices and make decisions about teaching and learning, this work illustrates leaders purposefully engaging in socially just leadership practices as they seek to include and act upon the voices of students.

Boomer, Lester, Onore, and Cook (1992), among others, call for both students and teachers to work in partnership to create curricula in schools that are truly meaningful and beneficial to all involved. This is often termed "negotiating the curriculum," and to this end, Libby, Sedonaen, and Bliss (2006) assert:

> Youth have the right to participate in the decision-making that affects their lives not only because it provides a key developmental process, but also because the systems in place to address their needs will be better positioned to achieve positive youth outcomes when they have integrated young people into their planning and decision-making processes.
>
> (p. 14)

Acquiring knowledge that is selected by people outside their contexts may cause students to become passive recipients and not motivated or encouraged to become lifelong learners (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). It is vital, therefore, for teachers to listen to the voices of students, allowing them to help shape the content, process, style, and language of their learning experiences. Hart's (1992) ladder of participation is a model frequently used by many in the area of youth development and student engagement. In this model he uses the illustration of a ladder and its rungs to show how the level of student engagement, and the influence of adults, can impact on the learning experience and engagement for young people. At the bottom of the ladder he shows a tokenistic approach to involving students in decision making that results in minimal student engagement. As they move up the rungs of the ladder, they pass through increasing levels of engagement. At the top rung, students have meaningful and student-driven ownership of learning processes and a high level of engagement. This model illustrates the important aspect of not just listening to the voices of students (which he describes as tokenism, decoration, and often manipulation), but also creating action from this, which can result in a high degree of participation (which he describes as child-initiated processes with shared decision making). Similarly, Fielding (2004) emphasizes key aspects of student engagement, calling for a move from dissemination, through discussion and teacher-led dialogue, to student-led dialogue. Hargreaves (2006) similarly focuses on the aspect of student voice and states: “Co-construction focuses heavily on the talk that takes place between teacher and learner—their learning conversations” (p. 18).

Drawing on research within the New Zealand context, the process of co-construction with students is a journey that uses group members’ voices as an essential tool to move us from power-imposing models to power-sharing models of interrelationships (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Bruner (1996) also believes in restructuring power relations and states that we need to:

> characterize the new ideas as creating communities of learners. Indeed, on the basis of what we have learned in recent years about human learning—that it is best when it is participatory, proactive, communal, collaborative and given over to constructing meanings rather than receiving them.
>
> (p. 84)

Bishop and Glynn (1999) purport that this kind of learning environment can be created through providing contexts where learning can take place actively and reflectively. The work of Beane and Apple (1995) is central to creating such an environment. They draw attention to the principles of democratic education, advocating for a learning environment that encourages the open flow of ideas, a concern for the common good, trust in the group’s ability, and the active use of critical thinking to evaluate experiences and ideas—all facets of socially just leadership. A variety of learning styles needs to be included and students must be given the power to determine which learning styles they need to use in order to learn best. Denner, Meyer, and Bean (2005) support this collaborative approach to learning when working with young women. They believe that settings in which young women have the opportunity to work together and practice a range of leadership styles in a supportive environment provide them with a forum where they do not have to choose between maintaining relationships or hiding their opinions (which is often the case in female youth peer groups). On a slightly broader agenda, Cook-Sather (2002) argues that “authorizing students’ perspectives is essential because of the various ways it can improve education practice, re-inform existing conversations about educational reform and point to the discussions and reform effects yet to be undertaken” (p. 3). It is unfortunate, however, that the voices of young people are not utilized and are rarely heard in educational leadership research, even though they are paramount to educational processes (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999). Highlighting the importance of drawing attention to this as an issue of social justice.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS—IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHICAL EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

> *Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we will not know ourselves.*
>
> *(Adrienne Rich, cited in Rapp, 2002)*

To lead with socially just intent highlights a number of implications for educational leaders. Leaders for social justice in educational contexts work with strong moral purpose and seek to educate the public on human rights and obligations toward others (Blackmore, 2002). However, as Rapp (2002) points out, the increasingly telescopic focus on performativity can lead to reduced attention paid to issues of social justice, or what Blackmore calls "the 3 R's of socially just learning systems, networks, alliances and partnerships" (p. 214)—responsibility, recognition, and reciprocity. Rather than being inspired by a shared vision for a just society, Rapp (2009) argues that "the activities of students and educators are increasingly governed by irrational criteria of efficiency, profit, and quick returns" (p. 81). Accountability and performance can easily become the key foci of educational leaders and dominate systems of education. The responsibility commonly lies with the educational leader to make sense of these complex times and place importance on the relationships within their educational contexts.

Educational leaders have a responsibility to ensure that spaces are created for the voices of all stakeholders in their communities. It is within these spaces that information can be shared to enhance the teaching and learning actions that take place.

Through coming to know the teaching and learning relationship as one of reciprocity, the Maori principles of *ako* can be emphasized to break down traditional discourses associated with models of power and ownership of knowledge. In Maori culture, the term *ako* is used to describe a teaching and learning relationship where the educator is also learning from the student and "effective teaching and learning is based on reciprocal relationships and incorporating the people and contexts of children's wider lives" (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 10). A key part of achieving this will be coming to understand the complexities associated with student voice initiatives and supporting staff to develop respectful youth–adult partnerships that allow students and teachers to learn together.

With these ideas in mind, Theoharis (2004) suggests three vital steps for leaders of and for social justice. These steps include learning, infusing, and sustaining. An essential part of learning about social justice is to examine personal perspectives in deep-set assumptions associated with their current leadership contexts. Personal views of the world are formulated, determined, and shaped by experiences, culture, gender, and upbringing (Bishop, 1997). A key action of a socially just educational leader will be the ability to reflect upon the needs of the community and the direction the school must take to ensure appropriate provision for all (Furman, 2012; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). To lead in socially just ways, educational leaders are required to critically reflect and understand how their "underlying beliefs, values, and attitudes may be counterproductive in our quest for education that is both just and excellent" (Shields, 2004, p. 8).

It will be through dialogue and collaboration that educational leaders will be able to meet the needs of significantly diverse groups. Time and resources must be made available to consider other perspectives (Kana & Aitken, 2007). Through doing so, there can be an increased opportunity for school leaders and teachers to "honor the diverse cultural, linguistic, physical, mental, and cognitive capacities of their students" (Landorf & Nevin, 2007, p. 712). Campbell-Stephens (2009) argues that educational leaders must be aware of these views and the different lenses through which increasingly diverse communities view their rights and responsibilities. Providing opportunities through leadership development programs, for leaders to interrogate and reflect upon these values and beliefs, is a significant part of developing socially just leadership capabilities. However, Brown (2004) states that substantive changes must occur in the ways that educational leaders are prepared and in later work makes suggestions as to what is required for successful leadership training programs to enable leaders to lead effectively with a social justice understanding and the ability to critically reflect and question unjust practices. She believes:

> Courses . . . should require critical thought and systematic reflection . . . [where] students should be introduced to a variety of ideas, values and beliefs surrounding social life, cultural identity, educational reform, and historical practices. They could then be challenged to explore these constructs from numerous, diverse, changing perspectives. Personal biases and preconceived notions they hold about people who are different from themselves by race, ethnicity, culture, gender, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, and physical and mental abilities could be identified and discussed. As such, these courses would require an active, sustained engagement in the subject matter and an openness of mind and heart.
>
> (Brown, 2004, p. 15)

Infusing and sustaining practices that reflect equity and social justice throughout schools and the communities in which leaders work is an essential aspect of shifting social justice agendas forward, especially as they also have the responsibility of facilitating learning about social justice for others. Knowing the important role of educational leaders in teaching *and* leading for social justice within schools, most importantly, is the understanding of how they came to be, know, and act in socially just ways. As indicated by Rusch and Horsford (2008), these actions are not without their own challenges:

> Learning about social justice is far different from engaging in the emotion-laden work of learning social justice. Frequently, instructors of aspiring educational leaders find that when social justice content is introduced, the adult classroom

> becomes a messy community, filled with the untidy and unexamined viewpoints, multiple stereotypes, and carefully crafted biases. Transforming perspectives about critical social justice issues seems an insurmountable task.
>
> (p. 353)

With little research in this area about the development of socially just leadership practice (Furman, 2012), and even less focus on the New Zealand context, further research will be critical in addressing the injustices and inequalities in schools, both in New Zealand and internationally. The recent work of Lyman, Strachan, and Lazaridou (2014) makes a significant contribution to this body of work and pushes boundaries with regard to researching socially just leadership. Termed *critical evocative portraiture,* this new methodology explores the embodied nature of socially just leadership through the examination of narratives that describe lived experiences in leadership. There are a number of distinguishing features that set this methodology apart from other types of narrative inquiry, and it is not in the scope of this chapter to address these. However, one interesting feature of this work is the focus on voice, resonating with the underpinning messages provided by the case study described in this chapter.

Coming to understand social justice leadership as a way of being, a practice that embodies the personal and seeks to disrupt the political, is not easy work. Responding to the call to action requires a diverse range of skills that allows educational leaders to lead in socially just ways. It takes courage, thoughtful and informed action, and reflective processes. Leading in this way and modeling socially just ethical educational leadership can open the door to others, as the attention is drawn back to the central notion of why schools exist—for the students, the students, the students!

NOTES

1. This is a *whakatauki*, which is a quote or phrase in the Maori language that draws together the thoughts, values, and advice of past generations. Frequently used in Maori culture to share key messages between families and generations, they reflect metaphoric representations of past knowledge related to Maori culture and actions.
2. A significant and historical New Zealand document signed in 1840, outlining an agreement in which Maori gave the Crown rights to govern and to develop British settlement, while the Crown guaranteed Maori full protection of their interests and status and full citizenship rights (Waitangi Tribunal, 2013).
3. A position of pastoral care where a teacher on staff oversees a year group of students alongside her teaching position.

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