

International Response Essay **Leadership for Social Justice: A Transnational Dialogue**

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This paper is framed in two ways. First, by an editorial concern regarding the Americentricity of a special issue for the *Journal of Research on Educational Leadership* on leadership preparation. And second, Jean-Marie, Normore, and Brooks' (2009) desire for a 'new social order' for a 'multinational dialogue' as expressed in their paper *Leadership for social justice: preparing 21st century school leaders*. I was asked to provide my 'unique view' of social justice, presumably as an Australian, a feminist scholar, a critical policy sociologist and an historian whose field of research has been on educational reform, leadership, and social justice for twenty years (Blackmore, 1989, 1999; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). My 'uniqueness' also lies in my centrality in feminist research within the field of educational administration and leadership and my marginality from 'the mainstream'. From this positioning, I have critiqued the mainstream for its subordination to the field of business in deriving new theories and practices of educational reform and for its selective appropriation of feminist and critical sociology and history without

acknowledging their origins or political intent with regard to social justice (see Blackmore, 1996).

Hanging off the Antopidean edge of the globe, Australian scholars are also geographically marginalised from the European and North American eco-political blocs and culturally marginalised from emergent Asian blocs. They are positioned in a socio-cultural /theoretical tension between the White and Asian North (Connell, 2007). As a white Australian feminist I am located in a nation struggling with its own identity around reconciliation with its indigenous people and policies that will address their distressing disadvantage. Thus I am examining how my whiteness accrues privilege, and how the whiteness of leadership goes unquestioned (Blackmore, 2009a).

Australian scholars are also insiders as Anglophones, but outsiders from the centres of academic publishing and educational research in the U.S. and the U.K. We are both participants in the game of 'quality research' and also close observers of cultural differences around research

practices, having to know both U.S. and U.K. research literatures and language practices in order to be recognised as 'international' against local and international measures. These are the multiple positions from which I am responding to this paper by Jean-Marie et al. with critical kindness to the authors and their commitment to social justice. I will briefly map the background to leadership preparation in Australia, and then develop a dialogue with Jean-Marie et al. around social justice and leadership preparation.

Australian leadership professional development

While many discourses and policies about leadership development and preparation resemble each other cross-nationally in terms of the lexicon and foci (e.g. discourses of self-management, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership), these discourses take on different meanings in national and regional contexts. How leadership is understood and enacted is shaped by the ethos of particular systems, some more bureaucratic (e.g. China), others more corporate (e.g. Australia, U.S. and U.K.) or more democratic (e.g. Sweden) (McBeath & Moos, 2004). In the U.S. and Canada, universities have well-established pre-service programs that focus specifically on leadership development as well as an array of in-service programs run by states, systems, and universities. In the U.K. there has been a more recent trend towards national programs with the establishment of the National College of School Leadership. The field of educational administration and school

leadership preparation and professional development emerged in Australian universities during the 1970s. While there continues to be specialist programs offered by universities in educational administration and policy, leadership professional development has been less systematic. Education systems have either developed internal induction programs for novice principals or more recently tendered out to private consultants and universities to develop leadership programs. There is a recent trend towards state based institutes of school leadership as well as statutory authorities to accredit university courses and register teachers. As yet, additional credentials are not required to move into the principal's job. The investment in the professional development of principals intensified to meet the new demands of educational restructuring during the 1990s that devolved systems of schooling.

As in the U.S. and U.K., there is now in the 2000s an acute awareness in Australia as to the need to attract and retain leaders, given an apparent disengagement with leadership after constant restructurings and the ageing of the teaching workforce (Gronn & Rawlings Sanaei, 2003). The Blueprint for Victorian Education (2005), focused on leadership capacity building amongst early- and mid-career teachers through practitioner school-based action learning projects and development of professional networks as research indicated that more distributed leadership was required as teachers are the key to improving student outcomes. Such school-based

programs relied on individual teachers acting as change agents. They were closely aligned with school and system strategic plans, and did not put building leadership capacity for whole school improvement in the hands of the principal. Few teachers have taken the opportunity to move into university programs. Other departmental strategies have been to pair principals with coaches and imposing regional network leaders to assist schools to focus on system wide priorities e.g. literacy and numeracy.

Women, previously considered to be the new source of talent for leadership positions have not progressed as much as expected, reaching a plateau in the 2000s (Blackmore, 2009a). While Australia has a strong history of equity driven professional development programs to encourage women into formal leadership, programs such as the Eleanor Davis Program in Victoria that involves shadowing a principal for week, these have now been opened up to men because women were considered advantaged. At the same time, the devolution towards self-managing schools and integration of equal opportunity units into human resource management centrally has meant there is less systematic data as to women's application for, and progress into, leadership as well as less focused advocacy [See Brooking (2005) for similar trend in NZ]. The notion of diversity has supplanted that of equal opportunity. While recognising individual difference, diversity lacks the same conceptual capacity to recognise structural and cultural inequalities (Bacchi, 2001). This mainstreaming has diluted the

equity imperative for women. Specialist programs targeting, for example, Aboriginal principals in remote schools or principals in disadvantaged schools, through mentoring and coaching fail to address underlying structural and cultural aspects of that disadvantage.

Most recently, government policy and the national authority on teaching, *Teaching Australia*, are linking leadership development to a professional standards agenda. Standards, with their focus on norm-referenced outcomes, tend to downplay the ethical and moral dilemmas that emerge when social justice is a central principle of leadership (Thomson, 2009). Yet programs use previously radical notions such as transformational leadership and feminist concerns about relational leadership and care, but still treat all leaders as gender-, race-, and culturally- neutral. Social justice is not a core principle although more equitable education is the stated aim: to improve the learning outcomes of all students. Attention to social justice in leadership professional development is mostly reliant, as Jean-Marie et al. indicate in the U.S., on university programs that are themselves highly variable in content depending on the interests of the academics or universities involved.

Why social justice now?

But why is there a recent "increased focus on social justice and educational leadership" in the discourses of leadership preparation now, and is social justice "a relatively new term in the field of educational

administration" (Jean-Marie et al., 2009, p. 5)? Jean-Marie et al. argue that a concern for social justice has arisen because we live in more globalised contexts and culturally diverse environments, leading to a generalised hyper-sensitivity as to our interdependence and shared risk arising from global warming, terrorism, and the financial crises. In such contexts, the search for alternative modes of leadership becomes more urgent. It requires, Jean-Marie et al. (p.6) argue, leaders to be advocates for the "traditionally marginalised and poorly served students" such that "traditional hierarchies and power structures [are] deconstructed and reconfigured". This concern for deconstructing the traditional hierarchies new within the feminist literature in education, schooling and leadership. And feminist practitioners and researchers have long been advocates for social justice (e.g. Arnot & Weiler, 1992). Feminist theory and research on gender equity in education, as a contested, eclectic and epistemologically evolving activity, have also been informed by critical social science, philosophy and cultural studies (e.g. Nancy Fraser, 1997). The question is more why is social justice now being foregrounded within the mainstream and how is it being understood in policy and practice.

Western nation-states are facing the need to reconcile a tension between the desire for recognition of diversity and difference on the one hand, and achieving social cohesion through a more equitable redistribution of education and all its national benefits on the other. The

imperative for the latter derives from the need for international competitiveness within global capitalism, and largely driven by economic rather than social justice perspectives. Fraser (1997) refers to recognition and redistribution as the two competing principles fundamental to social justice, a evident in the Australian, U.K. and U.S education policy mixes. There is a desire by governments to both improve educational achievement overall, as stated for example in the Melbourne Declaration of National Goals in Australian Education, but a refusal to address the structural and cultural factors that will make a difference. Evidence cross-nationally indicates an increased in the gap between rich and poor developing in the Anglophone nation states during the 1990s at the time when neoliberal policies of choice and marketisation in education dominated (Teese, Lamb, & Duru-Bellat, 2007). Policies of choice may lead to recognition e.g. of religious or cultural difference, but often lead to great socio-economic fragmentation through education, polarising rich and poor students, schools, and communities.

Contradictions within the policy mix highlight this tension. On the one hand, the orthodox policy fix is to focus on performance outcomes not the conditions of student learning which may require greater investment based on need (i.e. redistribution). Certainly high stakes testing may identify patterns of inequality and put pressure on governments, systems, and individual schools to act (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). Recent PISA results, for example, indicate that Australian

school systems are characterised as high quality and low equity—ranking well on average against other Anglophone nations, including the U.S. and U.K., but with a long tail of underachievement. This tail is evidence of the impact of disadvantage concentrated in rural and outer suburban areas characterised by high levels of cultural diversity and Aboriginality, poor health and well being, inadequate community infrastructure and localised unemployment. But the policy response is increasingly to target individual low-performing schools through intensified surveillance without altering school funding based on enrolments, a policy that encourages competition. What is required is needs-based, system-wide support so that principals and teachers under intense pressure have the resources to make a difference (Thomson, 2009).

A second effect of high stakes testing is that it acts as a technology of performativity in the education market, with detrimental consequences for the same resource-poor, predominantly public, schools that usually have the greatest social mix and student need. The focus on comparison between schools based on standardised outcomes and not what value individual schools add to their particular student cohort means judgements about ‘good schools’ are poorly informed (Campbell et al., 2008). Instead, in Australia, parental choice policies have encouraged those parents with the capital (resources, knowledge, mobility, and time) to ‘choose’ asset rich but increasingly state subsidised fee-paying non-

government schools, and, in so doing, residualising the resource- and image-poor public sector where seventy percent of students attend (Campbell et al., 2009). In so doing they restrict choice for the majority.

On the other hand, the policy rhetoric in the U.K. (e.g. Excellence in Cities) and some Australian states is that of joined-up governance and interagency collaboration to support community capacity building (Campbell & Whitty, 2003). Principals have to deal with the ‘uniqueness’ of their school in terms of the social mix of its student body, parent background, location, the specific nature of its local education market, its community infrastructure, the employment market etc as well as pressure for breadth and depth of curriculum, personalised programs and pathways, and improved student health and wellbeing. In order to achieve these ends, principals also have to work collaboratively with multiple agencies, in partnerships with universities and industries and inform their practice with evidence. Partnerships and networking and the development of environments of sustained systematic inquiry require different skills in leadership. This complexity that puts issues of social justice- recognition and redistribution- at the core of their work tends not to be recognised in leadership professional development (Thomson, 2002).

A further problem with leadership development programs in Australia and, as identified by Jean-Marie et al. in the U.S., is their failure to trouble existing leadership practices

in the field. Internships often merely replicate ongoing practices, while accreditation processes set standards that can only guarantee bottom-line professional competency. Neither challenge the professional identity of aspirant individual leaders. A concern for social justice would recognise that despite the greater cultural diversity amongst students and communities, "the population of potential leaders and their own experiences are themselves homogeneous" (Jean-Marie et al, 2009, p. 14). This requires leaders to reflect on their own position within the relations of ruling. How does their whiteness and/or masculinity privilege a particular perspective on leadership and what can be learnt from 'the other' (Blackmore, 2009a)? Leadership preparation may require pedagogies of discomfort even for the well-intentioned leader in order to develop a heightened degree of reflexivity about how others see them as leaders (Blackmore, 2009b; Boler & Zembylas, 2003). Understanding of, sensitivity to, and a capacity for two way learning about issues of class, gender, race, culture and religion become the cornerstone of leadership for social justice. Furthermore, leaders do not impart agency to others, merely creates the conditions that provide students, parents and teachers with a sense of being able to change things and make choices. Agency is gained through participation in decisions impacting on one's lives and opportunities. Leaders need to learn how to create deliberative democratic processes of decision making within school communities.

Finally, I would agree with Jean-Marie et al. (2009) that generally

"the literature related to educational leadership and social justice has suffered by not connecting to extant lines of related inquiry in the social sciences and other related disciplines" (p. 32), such as critical pedagogy, critical theory, and feminist post-structuralism. But feminist debates about social justice precede feminist post structuralism, some of which have informed educational administration and leadership. For example, women's under-representation in leadership has an well developed body of literature that explores different notions of social justice over time informed by liberal, radical, cultural and post structural feminisms :- in the U.S. Shakeshaft (1987), Marshall (1994) and Capper(1993); in Canada, Acker(1993); in the U.K., Arnot and Weiler (1993), Al-Khalifa (1992), Ozga,(1993); in Australia Blackmore (1989), Limerick & Lingard (1995), and in New Zealand, Strachan (1993). Likewise social justice is central to the expansive literature on gender equity for girls during the 1980s and the 'boys in crisis' literature after the mid 1990s. These bodies of feminist literature have drawn on multiple notions including equal opportunity, equality and equity as well as social justice. The issue is more how, when, and why social justice is mobilised discursively and which discourse is mobilised strategically. The references in this paper indicate how discourses of social justice and feminism were closely connected to educational reform in the more optimistic progressive educational period of the 1980s and early 1990s. These same discourses were to be denigrated and silenced during the feminist backlash

of neo-liberal markets, neo-conservative politics and crisis in masculinity, and then supplanted in the 2000s by the discourse of diversity.

Within each field—feminist, critical pedagogy, critical theory, critical race theory—there have always been debates about social justice and its implications for policy and practice. For example, white western feminists' assumptions as to the universality of their claims about women as a homogenous group were confronted by Black, post-colonial, Asian, and Latin American feminists (Collins, 1990; Tuhiwa-Smith, 1999; Ahnee-Benham & Napier, 2002; Battiste, 2005). Fraser's (1997) principles of social justice—redistribution and recognition—have provided some scope in informing educational policy, administration, and leadership in the U.K. and Australia (e.g. Gewirtz, 1998; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). A new theoretical trajectory is Sen and Nussbaum's capability theory that offers a more culturally nuanced notion discussion that is now being taken up in the U.K., within UNIFEM and other transnational women's organisations in the context of sociological concerns about global educational inequality and the Millenium Development Goals (e.g. Unterhalter, 2007). The challenge for any transnational dialogue is understanding the new global terrain beyond national borders.

What do we mean by social justice?

Finally, there is also a need for greater conceptual clarification. Do keywords such as 'critical pedagogy' encapsulate all understandings about

social justice? Jean-Marie et al. cite authors defining social justice as "equitable schooling" that address issues of "race, diversity, marginalisation, gender, spirituality, age, ability, sexual orientation and identity" (p. 6). But are all forms of difference of equivalent order of importance when it comes to social justice? Are age and identity and ability equivalent levels of difference/disadvantage to that of race and gender as structuring relations of ruling? What of class? Does equitable schooling mean equity in terms of outcomes, sameness or difference? Diversity is a descriptor, but what does it mean in terms of claims for equality? The notion of social justice encompasses a range of terms—some more powerful than others—such as equity, equality, inequality, equal opportunity, affirmative action, and most recently, diversity (Blackmore, 2004). Each takes on different meanings in different national contexts, each has its limitations. Often broad conceptualisations of critical or liberatory pedagogy lead to the 'commotisation' of difference—race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, class—without recognition of how each 'difference' produces social injustice or educational inequality differently, often in conjuncture with other forms of differences. And what 'difference' gets foregrounded within specific situations. For example, for a black women leader in a white male dominated school system—is it gender and/or race? Perhaps we need to consider a non-essentialising and fluid notion of difference in order to explore the intersices of difference (race/gender/culture/religion) that constitute hybrid leadership identities

within different cultural contexts around leadership. Such complexity around the concept of social justice is now the focus of an emergent body of work around culture and religion (e.g. Optlaka and Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2006) and research methods (Weis & Fine, 2004).

In conclusion, I have argued that the question or problematic is why is the notion of social justice now entering mainstream discourses and professional development? And if so, how is it being discursively re/constructed? Certainly, as Jean-Marie et al. have argued, increased accountability has focused system and media attention on social inequality. And as education has become commodified and an arm of economic policy in knowledge economies reliant on the upskilling of all, comparisons of national performance loom large in the political agenda of the nation state. The performative state is no longer

able to ignore issues of educational inequality, and this creates opportunities for researchers and practitioners long interested in social justice to inform the field through professional development of leaders who are, and will be, confronted with such issues in their daily practice. Social justice is central to leadership preparation because without addressing issues of difference and inequality then there will be no substantial improvement of student learning for those in 'challenging circumstances'. Without consideration of social justice issues, schools and teachers as well as leaders cannot nurture inclusive school communities that will benefit all children. Hopefully, the recent mobilisation of the discourse of social justice in educational administration and leadership is part of a forward-looking agenda about the empowering rather than reproductionist role of education in globalised knowledge societies.

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