

EDITORIAL

Rachel McNae, Michele Morrison, and Christopher M. Branson

Guest Editors JELPP - Special Edition: Educational Leadership for Social Justice

We are delighted, on behalf of the New Zealand Educational Administration and Leadership Society, to introduce this special edition of the *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*. This edition explores the complex nature and practices of leading for social justice, highlighting the actions, deliberations and contemplations of school leaders who deliberately seek out and address instances of injustice in educational settings, nationally and internationally. It aims to extend contemporary work on social justice by locating examples of socially just educational leadership practices across a range of contexts and conceptualizing the construct within educational leadership theory.

It is our hope, in the current educational climate, that this edition will be a timely and useful contribution that sensitizes educators and leaders to the importance of relationships and the significance of contextual influences. The kaupapa (basic principle) of this edition has been to seek and illuminate the experiences of leaders who work for socially just means in diverse settings. This has been achieved through supporting academics, practitioners and postgraduate students to write about their work and interests, scoping a range of contexts, and providing a beginning point for further conversations about leading for social justice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Educational leaders and practitioners are positioned to take increasing responsibility for the welfare of students who walk through their gates each day. For many school leaders, this becomes the central pillar of their work as they seek to draw in and support those who, in many cases, live at the margins of society. To work in socially just ways requires attention, not only to the broader socio-cultural contexts in which leaders lead, but also to the individuals that they lead for and with. Hence, as the editors of this special edition, we place prominence on the relational aspects of leadership, emphasizing the importance of attunement to culture and context and, most importantly, relationships.

Hutia te rito o te harakeke, kei hea rā te kōmako e kō?

Kī mai ki ahau, he aha te mea nui o te Ao?

Māku e kī atu, he tangata, he tangata, he tangata.

If you were to pluck out the centre of the flax bush, where would the bellbird sing?

If you were to ask me, “What is the most important thing in the world?”

I would reply, “It is people, people, people.”

As such, understandings of social justice can be relational, contextual, and subject to change. They include a variety of contrasting characterizations that are both complementary and critical to socially just educational leadership in school settings.

An overview of the special edition

This special edition opens with the article *Multiple hues: New Zealand school leaders' perceptions of social justice*. This article scopes selected case studies from the International School Leadership Development Network (ISLDN) project. This is a key international project which poses the question of what social justice leadership is and what it means in different national contexts. In this introductory article, Michele Morrison, Rachel McNae and Christopher Branson examine the perspectives of eight secondary school principals

who participated in the New Zealand component of the project. In the absence of a national conversation and universally accepted definition of social justice, the authors report on research in which New Zealand school leaders endeavour to make sense of what social justice means and what the pursuit of socially just outcomes entails. The findings reveal the importance of paying attention to personal and vicarious experiences and observations of social justice and injustice. The authors seek to illuminate the tensions inherent in the varying contexts in which school principals lead for social justice and the challenges in aligning professional perspectives with current educational policy. They echo calls for deliberate and increased attention to the importance of social justice in New Zealand education.

In *E rua taha o te awa: There are two sides to the river* David McLeod articulates a very different perspective on social justice. Using a narrative approach, David explores and discusses his lived experience as a Māori educator (indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand) within a mainstream New Zealand higher education institution. This article illuminates the complex and difficult undertaking involved in reconciling widely accepted professional standards and practices with competing personal cultural sensitivities and insights.

Shifting from the national to the international context, Katherine Cumings Mansfield shares findings from her ethnographic research which focused on the lived experiences of female secondary students in an all-girls college preparatory school. Her article *The importance of safe space and student voice in schools that serve minoritized learners* shares the story of a group of women educators who deliberately sought to disrupt and transform the dailiness of the sexism, racism, and classism they observed. Katherine communicates the ways in which these teachers collaborated with their students to reflect and act upon historical and current discourses, with the aim of building a novel school culture that supported strong relationships and revolutionized the future trajectories of the minoritized individuals the school sought to serve.

A common theme that extends across and through the articles in this special edition is the importance of leading relationally. This notion is further underpinned by the concept of dialogue and in his article *Dialogue as socially just communication*, Jeremy Kedian argues that engaging in dialogue can promote school leadership practices that effectively address equality and social justice concerns. Using the notion of dialogue as a form of communal professionalism, he illustrates, through a thorough scoping of the literature, the potential for dialogue to reduce perceived barriers between school principals, other leaders, teaching staff, parents in schools, and students.

Becoming attuned to notions of injustice within educational contexts is a critical aspect of being able to lead for social justice. As such, Susanne Maezama illustrates the contextual challenges women face in higher education contexts in the Solomon Islands. She explores women's ways of leading in education, illustrating the importance of recognizing women's embodied notions of leadership within matrilineal society. Previously employed as Head of School, in the School of Education, Solomon Islands National University, Susanne skilfully highlights the complexities within cultural and contextual practices of leadership that are distinctly different from Western and Eurocentric constructs.

Continuing the theme of women and leadership in developing countries, Jill Sperandio and Joyce Eku Wilson-Tagoe share the findings of a study that contributed to the International School Leadership Development Network (ISLDN) research project. The research underpinning this contextual examination involved three women heads of school in the West African country of Ghana. Positioning this piece from the women's perspectives of their professional lives, personal understandings and experiences, *Leading for social justice in Ghanaian secondary schools* illuminates the complex interactions between these women and their school contexts. Specific socially constructed understandings and practices are identified which support these leaders to address issues of social justice in their schools.

Rhetoric and action in educational leadership is a topic often examined as researchers seek to make sense of ways in which leadership is perceived and enacted. In their article *To what extent can headteachers*

be held to account in the practice of social justice leadership?, Deidre Torrance and Christine Forde examine the policies that underpin the Scottish education system and the expectations placed upon school leaders and teachers to enact such policies in order to meet their professional responsibilities for ensuring socially just practices within their schools. The perspectives from two Scottish headteachers are shared to highlight the dislocation between policy and the current realities in educational contexts. In making these tensions visible, they seek more socially justice outcomes for staff and students alike.

While education is considered to be a moral enterprise, Rose Symes argues that the structure of New Zealand's special education policy and the resulting devolution of responsibility to schools have sparked increasing ethical dilemmas for educators and leaders within the field of special education. These are often exacerbated when educators are positioned to advocate for children with disabilities, a group often minoritized in educational contexts. Based on principles of and for inclusion, Rose's article *Researching social justice for students with special educational needs* elaborates upon these perspectives to highlight the seriousness of this issue and draw our attention to the important implications for school leaders.

New Zealanders are no strangers to distress and trauma. In recent times our small island nation has faced challenging times as communities have been devastated by events such as increasing poverty, diminishing indigenous rights, environmental hazards, workplace accidents, flooding, drought and earthquakes. Events of this magnitude influence school contexts and, as such, the school leaders within, as they seek to re-establish the balance that once was or create the harmony that could be. Drawing on his experiences of working in post-conflict and post-colonial environments, Tim Goddard explores the nature of disruptive events and the importance of leadership within these critical times. *When the walls have fallen: Socially just leadership in post-traumatic times* describes the impact of traumatic events upon the decision-making processes of school leaders. Tim illustrates how personal belief and value systems guide the work of socially just school leaders and identifies possible future strategies for responding appropriately in unanticipated and demanding environments.

The final article in this special edition serves as a concluding piece that draws the contributions together. In *Tui tui tuituia - Weaving together*, the editors seek similarities and differences across each of the articles and examine the themes arising. Inclusivity, presence and advocacy are presented as three key leadership elements and the call is made for a more holistic, coherent and comprehensive approach to theorizing about educational leadership for social justice.