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Caring Practices and Social Justice leadership

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Abstract

This article explores how headteachers/principals engage in social justice leadership practice using data gathered from the Scottish and American contribution to the International School Leadership Development Network's (ISLDN) research on social justice leadership. While the literature focuses on high level strategies to address issues of equity there is limited discussion of the day-to-day practice of social justice leadership. In fostering inclusive cultures, the day-to-day practice of headteachers/principals is critical in challenging low-level forms of discrimination, micro-aggressions, which create hostile environments for diverse groups of learners. The article considers the concept of 'leadership practice' by examining the notion of relational leadership to highlight the social processes of 'organising activities' of leadership. In this we focus on caring practices and explore these through four case studies of headteachers/principals recognised for their social justice leadership. A framework of Noddings' caring practices of modelling, dialogue and confirmation as relational organising activities, is used to begin to capture the day-to-day practice of social justice leadership.

Key words: social justice leadership; ethic of care; caring and leadership practice; Noddings' ethic of care and leadership; relational leadership.

Introduction

This article explores how headteachers/principals engage in social justice leadership practices. At a point in many education systems where the policy rhetoric is about equity, fairness and 'closing the gap' between advantaged and disadvantaged learners and where schools are simultaneously judged on their achievement of mandated targets, there is a danger that performativity - an unwavering preoccupation - dominates the day-to-day work of headteachers/principals to the neglect of the quality of the lived experiences of learners and teachers. While there is considerable rhetoric about the importance of social justice and equality in education, there is limited material on the practices used by

headteachers/principals in their social justice leadership. This article explores such practices through the examination of data gathered from the Scottish and American contribution to the International School Leadership Development Network's (ISLDN) research on social justice leadership. The ISLDN research project involves a collaboration between the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS) and the University Council on Educational Administration (UCEA). It comprises two strands: leadership in high needs schools and social justice leadership (Angelle 2017). The wider literature identifies practices such as 'difficult conversations' and critical reflective practice (Jean-Maire 2010). However, there is still little consideration of the day-to-day practice of headteachers/principals endeavouring to create and sustain schools in which all learners can achieve. The article seeks to illuminate the practice of social justice leadership and provide a means by which school leaders can reflect on their day-to-day practice.

First, we consider the term 'leadership practice'. We then consider social justice leadership, arguing that as well as delineating high level sets of strategies, we also need to understand the day-to-day practice of headteachers/principals challenging low-level forms of discrimination. To do so, we examine the notion of relational leadership exploring the social processes of 'organising activities' of leadership. We then use Noddings' (1988) caring practices of modelling, dialogue and confirmation as a set of relational organising activities (Eacott 2019) to capture the day-to-day practice of social justice leadership.

Leadership Practice

The term 'practice' is used broadly to cover tasks and activities undertaken by practitioners in school. 'Practice' can be used to describe behaviours, actions and decisions at different levels of specificity: core sets of leadership practices such as "building vision and setting activity" (Day and Sammons 2013, 10). At a more detailed level, leadership practice can be conceptualised through identifying and analysing routines and their constituent tasks contributing to the execution of the organisational operations. Both Spillane et al. (2004) and Day and Sammons (2013) provide important framings of leadership practice, mediated by the day-to-day interactions across a school. In this article we are interested in these day-to-day interactions. While often fleeting, they can carry potent messages for learners, staff and the wider community.

The lenses provided by others help to build such understandings. Crevani et al. (2010, 77) step aside from a leader-centred, approach - which typically characterise particular strategies - and advocate a “processual ontology where by leadership is seen as a continuous social flow” in daily interactions. The shift is from leadership (person located) to leading (practice located), acknowledging that we still need some means to identify and characterise practices and interactions. Our investigation has been to find a way of characterising these interactions.

Social justice leadership and practices

Leithwood et al. (2020) acknowledge an increased focus on leadership to address inequities in pupil achievement partly reflecting the OECD’s (2012) dual messaging of equity and excellence. Leithwood *et al.* (2020) elide the terms leadership for equity, social justice leadership and culturally responsive leadership. While maintaining a common focus on enabling diverse groups of pupils to learn and achieve, social justice leadership in many ways retains the overarching concept. Thus, culturally responsive leadership (Johnson 2014) focusing on ethnic and cultural diversity, contrasts with Theoharis’ (2007, 223) broader lens for social justice leadership, a term describing headteachers/principals who “make issues of race, class, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the USA central to their advocacy, leadership practice and vision”.

Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) draw from the literature to develop a conceptual framework of equitable leadership practices. They describe these as high leverage equitable practices designed to address the barriers experienced by learners from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, these broad practices contain actions and tasks. While high level leverage practices are vital, social justice leadership needs also to be woven into day-to-day practice. Indeed, the school principals in Norberg et al.’s (2014) study looked to address social justice issues both through their day-to-day interactions as well as through their strategic leadership. Advocacy combines with considerable political acumen where school leaders use a range of political strategies (Ryan 2010). These day-to-day interactions are woven into the fabric of a school culture through often subtle messages.

Micro-aggressions and hostile environments

Used initially to describe racial discrimination, micro-aggressions identify forms of low level discrimination experienced through everyday interactions. Sue *et al.* (2008) identify three forms of micro-aggression: micro-assaults are more overt and conscious forms; micro-insults and microinvalidations are not often expressed intentionally. Micro-insults are “actions (verbal, nonverbal, or environmental) that convey insensitivity, are rude, or directly demean a person’s racial identity or heritage” and micro-invalidations are “actions that exclude, negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiences of people of colour” (Sue *et al.* 2008, 331). Arshad (2017) adds ‘mis-recognition’ where assumptions are made about an individual which can disrupt the building of relationships. Sue *et al.* (2008) argue that micro-aggressions are seemingly trivial and so we overlook them. Nevertheless, micro-aggressions can have a profound impact on learners by creating a hostile environment, affecting their learning and well-being. Differences in power and status can intensify the impact of micro-aggressions. A core challenge of social justice leadership is to counter these micro-aggressions, both through leaders’ own behaviours and through the behaviours of members of the school community, in ways that build relational trust (Edwards-Grove 2016).

Relational leadership and the exercise of social justice leadership

While it could be argued that current thinking in educational leadership has a strong relationship orientation, the notion of ‘relational leadership’ is not simply about building effective working relationships but rather marks a change from entity constructions of leadership to examining the processes inherent in leading. Uhl-Bien (2006) tackles the question of whether relational processes can be regarded as acts of leadership, arguing that it is only from these relational processes that influence is exercised to bring about change. Dachler and Hosking (1995) propose moving from examining the behaviours and traits of leaders to instead examine social processes underpinning the leadership activities, where relational leadership is part of the daily pattern of interactions in an organisation (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011). Our purpose here, is to describe typical day-to-day relational practices of the case study headteachers/principals as they build schools, with the intention of enabling all learners to learn and achieve.

Cunliffe and Eriksen's (2011) investigation of relational leadership highlights the importance of small details spotlighting what the leaders themselves perceived as important, including their values and the decisions and challenges they faced in maintaining relationships. A relational ontology proposes that leadership influence is generated through social exchange within a particular social context, where organisational cultures shape are shaped by and form the patterns of these interactions (Uhl-Bien 2006). In order to explore day-to-day leadership practice, we bring together a construction of social justice leadership combining a relational ontology of leadership with a processual ontology of leading (Crevani et al. 2014).

Caring Practice

To begin to capture the organising activities of headteacher/principals exercised across a school community, we draw from Noddings' (2010) conceptualisation of caring practice. Caring is both a processual and relational set of practices at the heart of which is an ethic of care (Noddings 1984). The first step in enacting an ethic of care involves enabling learners to enter a caring relationship where both parties have an active part. Being cared for is not passive but has a clear relational ontology in which the one-caring and the cared-for actively engage. In proposing an ethic of caring, Noddings (2010) raises questions about understandings of 'justice' in education. While justice is increasingly a key concept in education policy and practice, Noddings proposes that it should be guided by ideas of caring. An ethic of justice rests on issues of fairness, rights and abstract principles which must be adhered to regardless of the circumstances.. At the core of 'caring' are 'relational ethics' which focus on relations and experiences: "attentiveness, trust, responsiveness to need, narrative nuance, and cultivating caring relations" (Noddings 2010, 90), attributes that align with relational leading.

The case studies

The ISLDN project on social justice leadership has four research questions covering how social justice leaders understand social justice, factors that help or hinder their work and their own development. Our focus is on the question 'what do social justice leaders do?'. These case studies were conducted in Scotland and Tennessee. The headteachers/principals were selected on the basis of reputation, recognised in their local authority/district for their work on issues related to equality and social justice. In-depth interviews were conducted and

recorded in which the participants were asked to reflect on their own position and values and then describe the types of activities they used to pursue their role in social justice leadership. The transcripts were analysed to identify key themes with a report drawn up, framed by those themes alongside the school profile.

From the larger set of case studies, we noted expressions of an ‘ethic of care’ (Noddings 1984) in the articulation of the values and educational philosophies of four headteachers/principals. Drawing on Angelle’s (2017) suggestion that the ethic of care can form part of a theoretical framework to examine social justice leadership, it was decided to return to the data, notably the in-depth interviews and pursue this theme of care/caring. A two stage analysis of the data was conducted (1) identifying relevant aspects of the data using a broad notion of care/caring and (2) using Noddings’ (1988) three practices to categorise examples of caring practice. In this discussion we draw from the case studies of two Scottish primary headteachers (Morag and Sandra) and two Tennessee principals, an elementary principal (Ingrid) and a high school principal (John). The contexts of these case studies are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Contexts of the Case Study Headteachers/Principals

Case Study	HT	Sector	Size	Location
1: Scotland	Morag	Infant 4-8 years Nursery 3-5 years	259 120	Small town near city, commuting distance
2: Scotland	Sandra	Primary 5-12 years Nursery 3-5 years	240 90	Small rural town tourist attraction
3: USA	Ingrid	Elementary 5-11 years	475	Small town technology & research hub
4: USA	John	High School 15-18 years	320	Post-industrial city

There are considerable differences between the four schools in terms of sector, size, geographical location and demographic profile. The profile of each school set out in Table 2 reveals particular challenges for the headteachers/principals in exercising social justice leadership. All schools served families living in poverty but were also experiencing changing demographics which posed challenges in addressing the needs of increasingly diverse groups of learners. There were two points of contrast between the Scottish and American schools:

funding, which was an issue for American schools; and ethnic diversity. Whereas the population of the Scottish schools was overwhelmingly White Scottish, the American schools were more ethnically diverse particularly case study 3. However, common to each headteacher/principal was a strong drive to work with their school communities to build an inclusive environment for all learners. A strong ethic of care was evident in the educational philosophy of the four headteachers/principals.

Table 2: Specific Issues

1: Scotland	Traditional communities: high social need and deprivation Changing with more mixed socio-economic profile Increasing numbers of middle class families Issues of community cohesion Population profile Scottish White (approx. 99%)
2: Scotland	High levels of poverty through unemployment or low waged jobs Seasonal employment with zero hours contracts Population profile Scottish White (approx. 98%) with small number of families from Asian or eastern European background
3: USA	Established community alongside new housing projects US Dept of Ed. Title 1 funding for at-risk pupils Historically predominantly Caucasian but changing Caucasian (44.9%), African-American 40.5%; Latino 13.9%
4: USA	Low socio-economic circumstances for families 64.9% living in poverty in government subsidised housing 15.3% physical or learning disabilities Predominantly Caucasian (87.2%) School population reflecting wider socio-economic decline Lack of funding with declining student population - capacity for 900 students currently, 320.

Values and Caring

We now turn to the case study headteachers' discussion of their values and educational philosophy to tease out some of the dimensions of caring in their social justice leadership.

Caring is a multi-faceted concept and lacks a simple definition when applied to leadership in school. Schools are often assumed to be 'caring institutions' and so it follows that caring is embedded in the processes of leading and teaching. However, the risk of such assumptions is that caring gets overlooked. Therefore, Marshall et al. (1996) call for caring as a perspective on leadership which can be used as a balance against standardization and increasingly performance driven policies. This tension between policy demands and caring is evident in the case study of Ingrid. Ingrid was troubled by policy mandates, noting that accountability for a child encompassed more than standardised test scores. In thinking about the intersection between policy and the school context, Ingrid stated:

...I get frustrated because I feel like, I either have a choice to do the right thing, what I know is the right thing by the student or be in accordance with this policy and...it's frustrating because the policymakers lots of times say "Well, this is the right thing to do for this kid" but then I think when you get in there and start looking at the data that's not so tangible and start working with people, you see that it's not really.

Caring is not simply empathy but rather is about taking corrective action (Noddings 1984) which may include challenging current policy demands. Caring can be the means to resist the possible negative impact of these policy driven strategies for learners such as 'academic press', the demand for improvement by focusing all efforts on increasing academic attainment (Louis et al. 2016) or zero tolerance policies which take no account of a learner's circumstances (Bass 2012). Similarly, for Ingrid also, her focus was not on policy orthodoxies but was instead on the people in her school. Ingrid described her work as centering on valuing people: "we are in the people business. I value people above everything else and that could mean staff, that could mean parents, community people, that could mean the little people, the kids of course, but I value how we are interacting with people." She continued: "I look at in this line of work I'm in, these are the kids I've been given. The task that I've been given is when they graduate they've become fully functioning, contributing members to society. I have a hand in that. What am I going to do with it?"

In this we can see caring is central to social justice leadership because an ethic of caring enables school leaders to appreciate the needs of individuals and the impact that their decisions and actions may have (Boske and Diem 2012). The focus on individuals was at the

core of John's leadership as he supported, advocated for, and consciously oriented drawing on his strong faith in his leadership actions to address inequities within the context of school:

I never really focused as much on what the student did as who the person was. Being raised in a church and being raised in a family of strong faith and having that belief that we are to take care of everyone. We are responsible for everyone and everyone is responsible for us and for what happens in this world. It has really pushed me to seek opportunities where I can help those that may be underprivileged for whatever reason, whatever demographic they fit in.

Central to these values is caring for the individual within an understanding of leadership as relational (Noddings 1988). For Morag too, her leadership stems from her wider beliefs. She had dedicated her adult life to contesting injustice at individual, school, community and societal levels and looked to *"giving voice to those who find themselves in marginalised positions"*. Caring therefore, relates to valuing the individual as a person (Van der Vyper et al. 2014). The idea of an ethic of care as a core educational value might seem to be counter to the central task of schools to educate. However, for Noddings, caring and learning are not polarised concepts. Instead through the relational dimension underpinning an ethic of care, relationships are the means to foster growth and competence among learners who themselves can then build caring relationships with others. Moreover, Louis *et al.* (2016) found school leadership founded on caring contributed to both building student achievement and creating a sense of community and belonging.

Caring as an essential element in creating vibrant learning environments in school (Marshall et al. 1996) is central to Sandra's educational philosophy. Sandra worked to develop inclusive education through her commitment to engaging with others to build community through learning. Addressing learning needs through an inclusive culture underpinned Sandra's approach: *"our big focus in school is about raising attainment universally but it's about that targeted work to close the gap for wee people who have challenges with engaging with good learning"*. 'Good learning' for Sandra was about holistic development – teacher growth and pupil growth. As Sandra records: *"we use the word 'learning' unashamedly, constantly ... that makes the difference and I suppose ... [what this] sums up for us would be that notion that social justice is about learning ... whatever it takes that's critical for children"*.

Caring is embedded into the educational values of these four case study headteachers/principals underpinning their social justice leadership described here as: (1) valuing individuals and recognising their circumstances; (2) being open to building relationships across the school community and; (3) seeing success in learning and achievement, not in terms of achieving targets but as part of the building of competence, capability and caring of individual learners. The strong theme of care in the educational philosophies of all four case study headteachers led us to explore whether Noddings' practices provided us with a way of delineating aspects of the daily flow of relational leadership.

Leading and caring

The engagement with people in the school and its community is a common focus across these case study headteachers/principals with a concern for how this builds a sense of belonging and community to create effective learning environments. This reflects growing understandings across the literature. Louis *et al.* (2016) tracked strategies deployed by school principals identified as 'caring leadership'. These leadership strategies chime with Theoharis's (2007) construction of social justice leadership as advocating for disadvantaged learners, dismantling structures and systems that marginalize individuals and groups. Ryu *et al.* (2020) argue that such leadership strategies to build a culture of care go beyond the caring behaviours of school leaders. Bass (2012) goes further usefully distinguishing between institutional care, strategies to create the conditions for effective learning for all across the school and interpersonal care, the dyadic caring relationship in the one caring and the cared for (Noddings 1984). In describing their leading and caring practices, valuing individuals is central to the educational philosophies of the case study headteachers/principals. Analysing their description of what they do as social justice leaders in relation to valuing individuals and to building inclusive learning environments helps better understand these practices. Central to caring are the day-to-day interactions. As Sandra records: "*I value how we are interacting with people*". However, Noddings (1984) argues that caring is not just about empathy but about taking action to tackle circumstances where there is a lack of care and injustice. Such practice requires further consideration

A number of issues arise through the construction of caring as three discrete sets of practices for school leaders. Firstly, Noddings' (2010) suggestion that the caring of mothers for their child, instinctive caring, as the foundational form of caring seems to be a deeply gendered construct. Indeed, the focus in the literature has tended to be on aligning caring with the work of women leaders (Bass 2012). As an alternative Noddings, proposes that both men and women are capable of 'natural caring', the building of relationships to address needs. Natural caring is a learned process. This to some degree helps to reconstruct caring as a non-gendered process but there remain tensions. Bass (2020) found Black male principals tended to hide their caring practices in action because of wider expectations of male behaviour. The second issue is the applicability of natural caring to school leadership. Marshall *et al.* (1996) argue that a crucial factor in caring is persistence, natural caring is sustained by and sustains long term relationships - the teacher and learner relationship. However, Noddings proposes a third form, 'ethical caring' which is essential where there is evidence of limited natural caring or where the context is too large to create meaningful dyadic relationships and so we look to explore this form of ethical caring as evident in the practice of social justice leaders. Marshall *et al.* (1996) caution against reducing caring leadership to narrow set of actions. However, caring "is something that is at play all the time" (Louis *et al.* 2016, 312) and so we need some way of characterising the practices of caring in social justice leadership.

Noddings (2010) describes sets of practices teachers can use to build caring relationships: modelling, dialogue and confirmation. Modelling is the means of exemplifying caring in everyday practice and dialogue is the means by which leaders build the relational dimension of their leadership. Through dialogue, experiences are shared including instances where there are differences in attitudes or values at either the individual or cultural level. Trustful and honest dialogue is crucial to confirmation, where the teacher seeks to affirm the individual learner while at the same time address issues related to unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour and attitudes. From our analysis of the data, we have characterised specific areas of day-to-day practice using Noddings' caring practices of modelling, dialogue and confirmation as a framework. We now consider evidence of each of the three caring practices in the case studies of Ingrid, Sandra and Morag. We then use a vignette provided by John to bring these three practices together in one episode.

Modelling

Roffey (2007) found that through their interactions, school leaders can powerfully model their expectations including their expectations of teachers through their own consistency and resilience in challenging circumstances. In these four case studies, modelling was identified an important strategy for working with staff to build an inclusive culture where teachers also use modelling. Ingrid in the first instance, worked with her teachers to serve as models for a caring environment. Ingrid spoke to the teachers about her experiences of working in challenging schools, making clear expectations she had of them to model care to the students. She explained:

I told teachers after years of working in an urban school environment, it didn't take me long to figure out that in most of these kids' homes when mom and dad get in an argument...how do they see this handled in their neighbourhood? They see slamming doors. They see yelling. They see cuss words. They sometimes, unfortunately, see guns and knives and other things like that. Why are they coming here and we are modelling that for them? Why are we going to model more of that for them? Let's not slam doors. Let's show them [care].

Modelling comes into other aspects, building the culture and community of the school (Van der Vyper 2014). Morag referred to the importance of consulting fully with staff and community and through modelling, she felt that she could “*show others what can be done*”. For Sandra, modelling was evident in her approach with a staff who had been neglected. Her emphasis on hospitality was a deliberate strategy to create a sense of community, an overt sign of a caring approach enabling her to work constructively with a staff who had been much neglected previously. Sandra’s modelling of the caring approach towards the school community helped to shape the ethos of the school and staff practice:

I think it started off walking the talk, and modelling and ... setting expectations ... I walked it, the deputes walked it and a small number of highly committed outstanding teachers grabbed it and went with it and just got so enthusiastic and started talking in the staffroom.

Modelling was also about pedagogy with a collaborative development project on common teaching approaches to strengthen the focus on learning: *We now know that every child in this school experiences reciprocal strategies, because every teacher is teaching reciprocal*

reading. In this, Sandra had undertaken substantial work through modelling to build staff knowledge and skill collectively: *“actually it’s a huge support to staff, to have whole school processes that they just do”.*

Dialogue

The reciprocal nature of caring places dialogue as a central practice, complementing modelling and confirmation (Nodding 2010). Respect for others was a value emphasised by Ingrid to the school community in which dialogue played an important role. She believed that respect and relationship building formed the core element of a caring culture. Ingrid told the story of two students who learned the connection between respect and care:

There was a situation that happened in the morning that [a teacher] witnessed. She sent the student [to the headteacher’s office] with a good friend... they were eating their breakfast in here just sitting and being good. When I came back [to the office] they sat down and calmly told me what had happened and what they said...if they had any part in [the situation] that was not a good decision to make, they owned up to it. They said "I didn't do that and I know I should have done that." We just talked about it and so I told them, “OK well I'm going to fill out the paperwork... seems to me like we have learned from this. Let's go forward. Let's have a good day. Let's be a role model to others.” They just really responded.... Because nine times out of 10, they just want to be heard. They just want to be respected.

Ingrid’s description illustrates the importance of dialogue in a conflict situation. Similarly, dialogue with the full school community was important for Morag in dealing with conflict: who reported that, *“I believe in empowering others and I see things through”.* We can see here what Boske and Diem (2012) characterise as interrupting oppressive practices by hearing different voices. Morag felt it important to take the concerns of parents seriously, developing parental power for school and community decision-making. She gave a recent example of *“parent voice”* through the Parent Council - even though this resulted in criticism from a colleague and an education authority officer. Her position as a headteacher, in her view, allows Morag to tackle issues: *“It enables you to dialogue with communities like that whole Islam thing ...I couldn’t do that as a teacher because I wouldn’t have permission to do that”.*

For Morag the school's community influenced her actions and decisions as a social justice leader, believing that: *Your community is not static. Your community is changing. And you are always reflecting on that and changing your focus, changing your approach where needed in response to your community.* The incident referred to here, led Morag to investing considerable time and energy engaging with parents who were highly vocal with their concerns using "open dialogue, actively listening and responding to others" (Marshall et al. 1996, 280). The use of dialogue was extremely powerful and Morag described her actions "*rippling through the community*". Sandra also illustrated the way in which dialogue was crucial in improving pedagogy. Sustained dialogue with staff was part of her approach to building teachers' commitment and skill in addressing learners' needs. Sandra undertook to meet with each teacher and to review the progress and individual learning needs of each child:

it kind of underpinned everything we did ..., let's look at how we can make that more inclusive, what about that wee person how can we do that and these conversations went on day in day out trying to get it right for every child.

Confirmation

In all these examples, dialogue provides a means of establishing mutual respect (Boske and Diem 2012). For social justice leaders, there is the additional task of addressing unacceptable behaviours and attitudes, those micro-aggressions that can cumulatively contribute to a hostile environment for specific groups of learners. Confirmation provides a means to both underline what behaviours are acceptable or not acceptable and to maintain a sense of the worth of the individual (Van de Vyper et al. 2014). Morag's work with the community addressing prejudicial attitudes exemplifies this, while Sandra underlines trust as the means to build relationships: "*I think trust is at the heart of everything we do in this school*". Building trustful relations is about looking towards betterment in an empathetic manner (Noddings 2010). The possibility of betterment was the core of Sandra's practice of confirmation:

you go into a classroom, your teaching is terrible then that really depresses somebody because nobody wants to be told that but if you go into a classroom and say actually the learning experiences for the children aren't that great, could we look at how we could improve that, then they'll improve the learning experiences because it's not

personalised and it's not about them and so ... by making better learning they're becoming better teachers, it's about building that...

Confirmation was also evident in Sandra's approach with parents, where she needed to challenge attitudes and behaviours but still maintain their involvement, *"those tricky conversations [with parents], it's about how we get it right together so our children can be good learners and actually it takes a lot of the sting out of messages, that are really tough messages"*.

The practice of care through confirmation was evidenced as Ingrid negotiated bureaucracy at the upper levels of administration to support a group of children with disabilities (CWD) and their teachers. The year before the study took place there was only one classroom for the CWD where two teachers shared 36 students. Ingrid was troubled by this situation because, as she explained:

Because those kids, in every single one of their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), we promised the parents that they'll have small group instruction. That they have a disability. That they'll have their teacher one-on-one more often. They'll have this environment and they didn't have it... [I called] my supervisor and I said, 'We have got to do something about this... Several of them have very difficult behaviour. We need another teaching assistant and they need their own room.' ... I advocated for that and... so we now have both teachers and teaching assistants who have their own classroom. It was just the right thing to do. It was not easy. It took a few weeks just to get all of the logistics planned ... We just worked at it and it happened.

While this was not an easy situation to negotiate, this confirmed for the parents, the teachers, and, most importantly, the children that they would be cared for in this school.

Morag's stance also involved addressing the needs of the individual child as central. She recognised the potential misalignment of pupils' internal school lives and external home-community lives as impacting on their social and emotional literacy. Accordingly, Morag sought to bring those internal and external perspectives together to support each child appropriately. To do so, the strong relationships with parents she forged wherever possible were designed to build trust and through so doing, Morag had access to confidential information. Morag used these understandings of the pupils' background and many examples

of pupils traumatised by their experiences, to inform support for different pupils. Therefore, “social justice leadership is absolutely about treating everybody differently so that everybody has the best possible opportunity”.

Bringing the Caring Practices Together

Above we exemplified from the data the caring practices of modelling, dialogue and confirmation to capture elements of caring in the social justice leadership of these headteachers/principals. These practices come together in incidental encounters and engagements in the day-to-day work of school leaders. John shared a story about inappropriate behaviour in a student which illustrates these practices:

I have a special needs student who has a very difficult time with his anger management... I told him that if, for some reason, he needed to come talk to me, he could. He came to me one day and he was just mad. We talked about it and got to the reasoning of the situation and I helped him to understand about authority figures responses and his reaction to that response...But you can't do it in the classroom. You cannot interrupt that instructional time. He has been to me several times and...it has gotten better. He was in here for 15 minutes; the next time he was in here for five minutes; and the next time he just stops in the hallway and says, "This is crazy," and we talked it out in 30 seconds and it is okay. A lot of it is just getting him to understand that reaction of the teachers or why the teachers are making that request to them in the first place.

Acting as a caring adult, through dialogue and confirmation, John was able to encourage the student to think of volatile situations reasonably and influence this student to think in terms of the school community and the student's place within it. Further, in his way of engaging with the student, John modelled different and productive ways of responding to difficult situations.

For each headteacher/principal, their focus was on a commitment to building genuine community within the school, openly and actively engaging with parents and the diverse local community. For Sandra, this was about creating good learning for all, while Morag looked to give voice to those marginalised. For Ingrid and John, this was about demonstrating respect

and promoting growth and learning for the whole child. In John's words, social justice leadership recognises: *There are people that need extra help and extra support... But they need someone to care about them. They need someone to talk to them. They need someone to smile at them. They need someone to ask them how they are doing and find out what is going on in their life. It is not singular to a student who has a grandmother who takes care of them and an African American student who is struggling to pass a math class. It is not singular to those cases. It is universal. Everyone needs someone to care about them, to check on them, and someone to hold them accountable.*

Discussion and conclusion: Caring and social justice leadership

Recent studies (cf Leithwood et al. 2006) have looked to delineate successful school leadership, particularly in challenging circumstances. In the emerging model of successful leadership, defining vision, values and direction along with building trust are identified as the core strategies (Day and Sammons 2013). In the descriptions of their social justice leadership these core strategies are evident through the headteachers'/principals' articulation of their core values as educational leaders particularly the strong orientation to relational leadership. Further, the exemplification of their work to realise these values illustrates the building and maintaining of relationships with members of the school's community where engagement and collaboration were central to bringing about change and improvement. In this study we looked to illuminate the day-to-day work of building and maintaining these relationships.

Understanding and developing people is one of several categories of practice identified by Leithwood et al. (2006) which has both a personal as well as a functional element. One way of describing this personal element is to identify traits that enable successful school leaders to bring about change, including being open-minded with a readiness to learn from others, to be flexible and persistent particularly in their expectations around learning and achievement, as well as being resilient and optimistic (Leithwood et al. 2006). These traits align with the findings of an early study of assistant principals' caring leadership by Marshall et al. (1996): open dialogue, persistence in refusing to give up on challenges and people, flexibility and building trustful relationships. Although identifying these traits helps conceptualise the personal dimensions of caring leadership, we are still left with only broad indications of how

these shape the day-to-day practice of school leaders seeking to exercise social justice leadership.

A key question of the ISLDN project has been to investigate the practice of social justice leadership and caring is evident in the behaviour of school leaders who look to exercise social justice leadership (Boske and Diem 2012). The findings from the case studies raise awareness of the importance of the day-to-day practice of headteachers/principals, conceptualising how they recognised success through tackling issues of inequality, discrimination and marginalisation in the exercise social justice leadership through engaging with members of the school community. The case study headteachers/principals worked in different contexts, serving communities with different demographic profiles and locations but at the centre of their social justice leadership was their relational leadership. Cunliffe and Ericsson (2004) highlight the importance of cumulative everyday interactions underpinning relational leadership. The building of trust is central to relational leadership (Edwards-Grove 2016) and is built up over time in a particular place between people. In this, authentic interpersonal exchanges are crucial (Branson and Marra 2019).

School leaders driven by targets and policy strategies that compound the disadvantage of groups of learners, are faced with a gap between rhetoric and lived experiences for members of the school community (Louis et al. 2016, Bass 2012). To date, much focus has been placed on the exploration of social justice leadership in the work of transforming schools to create the conditions for effective learning for all. Looking to issues of caring helps balance the drive for organisational improvement with the need to focus on the needs and experiences of individuals.

Successful school leadership has been found to combine transformational leadership with pedagogical/instructional leadership (Day and Sammons 2013). There is an issue here that overly focussing on the day-to-day actions of the school leader might result in a reductive construct of social justice leadership as being essentially transactional. Bass (1990) argue that effective leaders practice both transactional and transformational leadership. It might seem that by looking at the day-to-day interactions we are aligning caring practice in social justice leadership with transactional leadership. In Bass's theory of transactional leadership relates

to management functions. These interchanges, at one level, might be about ensuring adherences to the policies and standardised practices expected of all members of the school community. However, drawing from Noddings' (1984, 2010) work on caring, this study has highlighted sets of practice more aligned to the dimension of transformational leadership as individualized consideration which is about relating to members of the community as individuals, paying attention and providing support and advice (Bass 1990).

Studies of the impact of micro-aggressions (Sue et al. 2008) experienced by people in minority positions highlights the potency of everyday interactions in creating barriers to learning and achievement. Louis et al. (2016) argue that the actions and interactions of leaders can signal either caring or a lack of caring, both of which can have a profound effect on the individuals involved as well as on the wider culture of the school. We would argue from this study that social justice leadership combines a consciousness about the power of day-to-day interactions with those strategies designed to transform schools. One of the tensions is that, although school leaders remain pivotal in shaping the culture of the school and the attitudes and behaviours of others, they may well interact only intermittently with parents, pupils and even to some degree, staff. Centring their practice on ethical caring helps school leaders in the exercise of social justice leadership to move beyond good intentions, adopting strategies that combine a concern for the individual with strategies to bring about whole school transformational change and to build the conditions for effective learning for all.

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