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Understanding and Acting on Issues of Diversity and Social Justice in Leadership Development

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Introduction
This paper argues for a clearer focus on social justice and cultural diversity in leadership development programmes. Leadership development has become a key element of career long teacher education in Scotland where it is recognized that leadership is vital in shaping school cultures and the experiences of learners. The Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) is used as an example of a leadership development programme to explore ways in which the concepts of equality, fairness and social justice can be embedded as core elements of leadership development intended to foster inclusive pedagogies that recognize greater social and cultural diversity. Since the early 1990s there have been several public articulations of values in education particularly around issues of inclusion, equality and fairness both as self-standing documents (SCCC 1991) and as part of other policy frameworks such as curricular guidelines (SE, 2004) quality assurance frameworks (HMIe, 2006) and professional standards (GTCS 2012). With the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and as part of 'nation building', there was a recognition of not only the increasingly diverse and pluralist nature of Scottish society but also of the experience of exclusion and marginalization particularly in poor communities (SE 1999, Iannelli and Paterson 2005). Bogotch (2008) sees the project for education as one of "seeking a pedagogy and leadership that might guide us towards change and social justice" (p 94). However, what drives education policy currently in Scotland as elsewhere, is the search for 'effective practice' that will improve pupil attainment scores. If we are to realize the intentions underpinning the several articulations of social justice and fairness we need to enable leaders through their development programmes to shape the conditions in schools and classrooms that foster inclusive and culturally responsive teaching.

There is an increasing academic interest in educational leadership and social justice both theoretically and in terms of professional practice. While one of the policy concerns in Scotland is educational inclusion there are questions about how far such ideas underpin the dominant constructions of leadership in leadership development programmes. This paper explores the place of leadership in realizing the ambitions related to social justice and education and considers the implications for leadership development. The paper will begin by examining the current policy context of education and the expected contribution of leadership in achieving the policy aspirations. The paper then moves on to consider the question of social justice in education and the contribution of school leadership. The paper ends by proposing ways in which discourses around 'leadership and effective learning' can be imbued with ideas of diversity and social justice to ensure equality and fairness in both the experiences of all young people in school and the outcomes they achieve.

The international policy context
Comparative studies of the performance of educational systems now dominate the policy imagination globally. Studies such as the two reports produced by the management consultancy McKinsey (Barber and Mourshed 2007, Mourshed *et al.* 2010) and the PISA assessment regime (OECD, 2014) have led to increased pressure on school systems. As national and state systems of education pursue an agenda of improvement one of the significant factors in determining high performance of a

specific system is the gap in achievement between the groups of high attaining and low attaining learners. This then would seem to be an opening where issues of equality and diversity might flourish, where improvement efforts are focused on engaging and enabling learners from those groups who have historically and who currently are marginalised in school education. A nexus of ideas around inclusion, equality and the building of an engaged citizenship sit within educational policy in the UK and internationally (Bell and Stevenson 2006). However, we should be cautious in claiming that now the context is set for developing educational establishments and practices where the needs of diverse learners are being met routinely. The policy driver around inclusion sits side by side with concerns about economic performance and so education is seen as the means of producing the necessary human capital to ensure economic prosperity. This is graphically illustrated in report produced by the OECD (2010) and written by two leading economists (EA Hanushek, EA & L Woessmann) entitled *The High Cost of Low Educational Performance.* In their conclusions, the authors, acknowledging a number of caveats regarding accuracy in the details of their analysis, nevertheless argue that "past experiences suggest that there are enormous economic gains to be had by OECD countries that can improve the cognitive skills of their populations" (p 27). The scale of the anticipated impact of educational performance is illustrated in their conclusions:

> The implications for the OECD countries as a whole are dramatic. A modest goal of having all OECD countries boost their average PISA scores by 25 points over the next 20 years – which is less than the most rapidly improving education system in the OECD, Poland, achieved between 2000 and 2006 alone–implies an aggregate gain of OECD GDP of USD 115trillion over the lifetime of the generation born in 2010 (as evaluated at the start of reform in terms of real present value of future improvements in GDP) […] More aggressive goals, such as bringing all students to a level of minimal proficiency for the OECD (a PISA score of 400), would imply aggregate GDP increases of close to USD 200trillion according to historical growth relationships […]. Bringing all countries up to the OECD's best performing education system in PISA, Finland, would result in gains in the order of USD 260 trillion […]. The report also shows that it is the quality of learning outcomes, not the length of schooling, which makes the difference (p 27).

There are two key issues to note here which are significant for school leaders. Firstly, the focus is on improvement in learning as defined by the areas covered in the PISA assessment programme and the potential of this for valorizing specific areas to the neglect of others particularly around issues of culture, arts and holistic development. Secondly, the focus is not just on the system of education as a whole – the final sentence relating to the quality of the learning outcomes suggests the importance within each school of the learning and teaching processes around the areas valued in the PISA programme.

Side by side with the focus in policy on the performance of specific national and state systems have been discussions about the means to achieve this. Donaldson

(2011: 2) in his review of initial and continuing teacher education in Scotland *Teaching Scotland's Future,* declared that:

> The two most important and achievable ways in which school education can realise the high aspirations Scotland has for its young people are through supporting and strengthening, firstly the quality of teaching and secondly the quality of leadership.

The set of policy reforms being undertaken in Scotland as a result of the Donaldson review are echoed internationally. Successive international summits (Asia Society 2011, 12, 13) of the Ministers of Education from the top performing and most improved educational systems have been meeting to examine the issue of teacher and leadership quality as part of the overall drive to continue to improve education even where there is already 'high performance'. In these discussions leadership of schools is seen as the key to improving and sustaining development and so there is a closer policy focus on the selection and development of leadership.

> A consistent thread throughout the discussion was that high-performing systems rely on effective leadership at the school level, and have implemented policies to ensure professionalized recruitment, systematic and high-quality training and experiences, and ongoing support and appraisal of principals. In these systems, school leaders can focus on what matters most: supporting the development of effective teaching, setting school goals, measuring performance, strategically allocating resources for teaching and learning, and partnering with community institutions to support the development of the whole child (Asia Society, 2012:24).

The significance of leadership in schools

The policy gaze on leadership in schools draws from a growing body of work that not only has identified it as a significant factor in school effectiveness but where there has been a focused exploration of the nature of leadership and its impact on pupil learning and the outcomes they achieve. Consistently from early studies of school effectiveness (Mortimer *et al.*, 1988, MacGilchrist *et al.*, 2004) onwards, leadership has been identified as significant in a school being effective and in a school achieving improvement. Attention more recently has turned to investigating firstly, the impact of leadership on pupil learning outcomes and secondly, on the forms of leadership that have a positive impact. Several synthesis studies have been conducted to explore the relationship between leadership and pupil learning outcomes. There is limited body of work to draw on and the complexity of the issue is demonstrated in the conclusions reached by one of the first synthesis studies conducted by Bell *et al.* (2003: 3, italics added) where leadership was seen as: "*probably* being an important factor in a school's success". The impact on pupil learning would be mediated through the actions of others particularly teachers but also through the wider organizational culture and relationships between the school and parents and the community. There is an increasing empirical body of work exploring these constructions of leadership. In a series of studies Hallinger and Heck (2010a and 2010b) point to the importance of collaborative approaches but like Bell et al. (2003) are more tentative in their findings. Thus Hallinger and Heck (2010a) argue that school leadership (that is leadership exercised by the headteacher or principal) alone is insufficient there are some indicators from this research suggests that leadership

as a collaborative enterprise will yield results. The other aspect of that has emerged from recent studies on leadership complements this idea of leadership as more distributed, that is the idea of what in the American literature is called instructional leadership (Murphy 2005) and elsewhere as leadership for learning (MacBeath and Dempster, 2009) or pedagogical leadership (Robinson *et al.,* 2008). In the meta-analysis of existing studies Robinson *et al.* argue that the form of transformational leadership which has dominated the literature (Fullan, 2007) is only one aspect. Robinson *et al.* (2008: 665) conclude that:

> Educational leadership involves not only building collegial teams, a loyal and cohesive staff, and sharing an inspirational vision. It also involves focusing such relationships on some very specific pedagogical work, and the leadership practices involved are better captured by measures of instructional leadership than of transformational leadership.

Within both the policy discourses driving improvement and the academic debates around the nature and impact of leadership in schools, the issue of learning is now centre stage. Perhaps more importantly there is an imperative that improvement is about the learning outcomes achieved by all learners. Potentially then there is space to strengthen issues related social justice and equality in order that the needs of different learners can be addressed holistically. However this raises the question of how leaders 'do' social justice and how we might best prepare leaders to be able to address constructively the issue of diversity and achievement for all learners. In this we need to explore further the concept of social justice and then consider the implications for leadership development.

Social Justice and Education
Bogotoch (2008) highlights the complex nature of the idea of social justice and the lack of a clear understanding how this might be realized societally. He argues that education could be a 'test site' for the enactment of social justice. While, in an influential article, Gewirtz (1998), argued that social justice in education has been undertheorized, there has been an increasing focus on the issue of social justice including discussions about social justice and teacher education (Cochran-Smith *et al.* 2009). A dominant understanding of justice is Rawls's (1972) idea of justice being constructed in terms of the balance between competing claims particularly with regard to 'goods'. This idea can relate to question in education particularly around the allocation of resources, access and opportunities and equality of opportunity. This idea of social justice does not help us understand issues related to marginalization and oppression experienced by different groups. A major outcome of the liberatory politics of the 1960s and 1970s was the importance of the presence and of recognition of different groups and their active engagement in the public domain. In the light of this Fraser (1997) argues that we should expand this notion of justice to include recognition. Gewritz (1998: 471) drawing from Young (1990) includes Fraser's idea of recognition in a second dimension of justice, justice as 'relational' which is about "the nature and ordering of social relations, the formal and informal rules that govern how members of society treat each other both on a macro and at a micro interpersonal level" and which incorporates the idea of

recognition. This relational aspect again can be connected to the context of education and covers both institutional processes and interpersonal interactions. Education takes place in social settings where relations are regulated through structure and rules defining roles, responsibilities, procedures. These affirm what should be visible and what should set aside; this determines those who have the power to decide what is to be valued and what is not. Within these processes, structures and regulations, the recognition of the place, contribution, needs and agency of diverse groups is a critical issue. Therefore in the idea of social justice in education, there are two elements that we need to consider: (1) access and opportunities in education (2) the recognition and engagement with different groups of learners.

Cochran-Smith (2010) draws from this wider body of work to build a model of teacher education for social justice. Cochran-Smith (2010) presents three key ideas which build on Gewritz's two dimensions of social justice but which also recognize that this is a deeply contested area where there are some inherent tensions:
- *equity of learning outcomes*: where equality of opportunity is available to all but this is accompanied by a focus on challenging practices and attitudes that act as barriers to learning particularly of minority or disadvantaged groups
- *respect for social groups*: in which not only is there recognition of difference but a focus on drawing from diverse cultural traditions in terms of knowledge and 'ways of knowing'
- *acknowledging and dealing with tensions*: the importance of recognizing the inherent tensions and of seeking ways to address these in practice

Social Justice as defined in the professional standards for teaching
Since the early 1990s there have been several public articulations of values in Scottish education particularly around issues of inclusion, equality and fairness both as self-standing documents (SCCC 1991) and as part of other policy frameworks such as curricular guidelines (SE, 2004) and quality assurance frameworks (HMIe, 2006). With the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and as part of 'nation building', there was a recognition of not only the increasingly diverse and pluralist nature of Scottish society but also of the experience of exclusion and marginalization particularly in poor communities (SE 1999, Iannelli and Paterson 2005). In the latest iteration of the Scottish professional standards for teaching and for leadership a set of values has been set out for the teaching profession in which the concern for inclusion, equality and fairness is evident. These values are:

- social justice
- truth and respect
- integrity
- professional commitment

At one level these could be seen as largely covering the ethical dimensions of professionalism relating to personal conduct: trust and respect, integrity and professional commitment (GTCS 2012a,b,c). The theme of social justice runs through these three aspects set out in the standards: developing a critical awareness around

the impact of personal values and beliefs, an inclusive and participative approach and an awareness of the context of learners: "acknowledging their social and economic context, individuality and specific learning needs and taking into consideration barriers to learning" (GTCS 2012c: 7). However these ideas around personal conduct are complemented by an explicit statement concerning the centrality of social justice as part of the set of professional values for the teaching profession.

In the statement of social justice as a professional value in the professional standards we can see the two broad constructions of social justice in education both as access and opportunities and as recognition proposed by Gewritz (1998).

Table 1: Social Justice in the Professional Standards

Social Justice

- Embracing locally and globally the educational and social values of sustainability, equality and justice and recognising the rights and responsibilities of future as well as current generations.

- Committing to the principles of democracy and social justice through fair, transparent, inclusive and sustainable policies and practices in relation to: age, disability, gender and gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion and belief and sexual orientation.

- Valuing as well as respecting social, cultural and ecological diversity and promoting the principles and practices of local and global citizenship for all learners.

- Demonstrating a commitment to engaging learners in real world issues to enhance learning experiences and outcomes, and to encourage learning our way to a better future.

- Respecting the rights of all learners as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and their entitlement to be included in decisions regarding their learning experiences and have all aspects of their well-being developed and supported (GTCS 2012a: 5).

The overarching theme is that of learning and the importance of all learners: "educational…values", "learning experiences", "engaging learners", "enhance learning experiences and outcomes". Explicitly in the professional standards is a sense of the idea of 'justice of recognition' where specific characteristics are identified and are underpinned by a rights model and where there is an anticipation of "fair, transparent, inclusive and sustainable policies and practices" (GTCS 2012a: 9). In addition, there is a sense of distributive justice implied in ideas of citizenship, sustainability and the future orientation. However, what is less explicit is the third

idea identified by Cochran-Smith (2010), that of "acknowledging and dealing with tensions." The values in the professional standards underline the expectations on teachers and leaders to understand and appreciate diversity among learners and more importantly, to act to serve the learning needs of different groups of learners. However, we need to acknowledge that some of the inherent tensions in the grappling with issues of social justice in schools places particular demands on school leaders and so has implications for leadership development.

Leadership Development

Bogotch (2008: 94) sees the project for education as one of "seeking a pedagogy and leadership that might guide us towards change and social justice". If we are to realize the intentions underpinning the several articulations of social justice and fairness we need to enable leaders through their development programmes to shape the conditions in schools and classrooms that foster inclusive and culturally responsive teaching. Leadership development has become a key element of career long teacher education in Scotland where it is recognized that leadership is vital in shaping school cultures and the experiences of learners. Given the policy concern for leadership it is not surprising that there is a significant investment in leadership development. However, there is considerable debate about what form leadership development should take. A key issue is about the relative importance of knowledge building and experience in developing effective school leaders (effective in terms of leading successfully school improvement). Knowledge based programmes have been substantially criticized (Levine, 2005) because of the dangers of a disconnection with practice but 'learning on the job' through experience is seen as inadequate. Increasingly, some form of structured preparation especially for school leadership is recognized in policy and established practice in many systems (Pont *et al.* 2008, Asia Society 2013). In Scotland the bias is towards experiential learning with particularly the processes of mentoring and coaching being favoured (Forde et al, 2013a, 2013b) and the place of knowledge building remains problematic (Forde, 2011). Therefore we need to look to the discussions and empirical studies of leadership and social justice to consider how leadership development can support leaders in this enterprise. In this there are a number recurring themes which are of importance in the development of school leaders:

- the knowledge base
- questions of identity and stance
- advocacy and the political dimensions of leadership and change

Knowledge base: programmes for the preparation for school leadership in Scotland are predicated on the Standard for Headship (GTCS 2012c). As part of the knowledge base headteachers are expected to develop and use is an understanding of teaching, learning, education policy wider social and environmental developments and leadership and management. However within these is little specific reference to diversity. In the delineation of 'Social and environmental trends and developments' there is some sense of a wider more complex world:

> Leaders keep abreast of, and apply their enhanced knowledge and understanding of, contemporary developments in society, digital technologies,

the environment and the wider global community (including trends and changes in family patterns, work patterns, the media, leisure and politics) and consider their implications for leadership (p 9).

The emphasis in other sections is using the latest research to improve learning outcomes and developing a critical awareness with no clear reference to issues of diversity.

One of the challenges faced by many educational systems including Scotland is not just raising achievement but closing the gap between high attainment and the outcomes achieved particularly by marginalized groups. There is a danger in this that an additive short term approach will be adopted with individual pupils targeted for additional work to raise grades in examinations without any fundamental change in the curriculum, teaching and learning processes and the wider culture that shape the lived experiences of learners. Further such actions take place without any understanding of the context of different groups of learners. There does seem to be a need for a richer knowledge base that enables headteachers to move beyond simply short term targeting to building more inclusive practices systemically where tracking and monitoring is premised on issues of equality and fairness rather than simply attainment scores.

Identity and stance

A theme reiterated by successive cohorts of participants undertaking the Scottish Qualification for Headship (one of the headship preparation programmes in Scotland) is the impact that pursuing the programme has had on their understanding of the place of values in their leadership role (Forde, 2014). Consistently many participants will report that this is the first time they have thought about their values in any depth and for some this process in itself is transformative through which they gain greater understanding and become more skilled. They report that they are able to set out their values are part of their practice and to recognize the contested nature of these values. The exploration of values is similarly an important element of the coaching process in the *Flexible Routes to Headship* (Davidson et al. 2009, Forde et al 2013a). However, to pursue an equality agenda takes more than simply the articulation of a set of values.

One of the important outcomes of headship preparation programmes is the development and strengthening of the participant's identity as a school leader. Exploration of the impact particularly of the Scottish Qualification for Headship highlight the way in which, during this process, the identity of the participants is in flux as they move to headship (Reeves at al., 2004, Reeves and Forde 2005). Given this flux then there seems to be another dimension of preparing leaders for social justice in the form of consciousness raising around issues of social justice. Blackmore (2009) argues for the adoption of a critical pedagogy in leadership development to disrupt taken-for-granted-assumptions. Jean-Marie (2010) demonstrates this in her reflections on the leadership programmes she leads by considering ways in which her own identity and position shape her practice. Therefore there does need to be space for those preparing to be school leaders

explore their identity and stance and consider the ways in which this can support or hinder leadership practice based on social justice.

Advocacy and the political dimensions of leadership and change
The theme of the school leader as an activist is a recurring theme (Theoharris 2010) where he/she actively seeks to bring about change that supports the needs of diverse groups of learners. Mackenzie *at al.* (2008) argue for an activist form of school leadership. the ideal of social justice for all learners is a weighty one and on the one hand school leaders have to balance the hope inscribed in a vision of inclusion and equality and the resilience to tackle barriers and resistance. School leaders also have to appreciate the partial nature of their own understandings and experience across areas of equality and inclusion and that working for the achievement of all learners is never fully accomplished. This is an ongoing stance and process rather than a delineated change project.

Managing change and tackling resistance are keynotes of the current orthodoxies of leadership practice where, through transformational forms of leadership (Bass and Avolio 1994) leaders bring about change by building a shared vision and sense of purpose, create opportunities for staff to understand and take ownership of the proposed change through professional development (Fullan 2007). In contrast, Hynds's (2010) study of resistance to a programme of change with a social justice orientation in New Zealand schools indicates that the process is much more contested and leaders need to engage with politically with different interests. Consequently, Hynds argues that headteachers have a twofold task in bringing about change: firstly to be prepared for the complexity and challenging nature of social justice reform and the impact on them individually and secondly, that in any change process leaders must "understand that collective dialogue and inquiry must be inclusive from the beginning and must be sustained" (p 389). This engagement Hynds explores has a strong political character.

Ryan (2010) argues that the use of political skills or acumen is critical in enacting equality policies. From his study Ryan identifies three broad areas of skills in this political acumen – an understanding of the political environment, developing political strategies such as "developing and establishing relationships, persuading others, persisting, planning, experimenting, being up front, keeping others off balance, playing ignorant, working the system and quietly advocating" (p 366). Given the statements about integrity and ethical practice some of these aspects might seem to challenge these practices especially "keeping others off balance, playing ignorant, working the system." Implicit in this construction leadership for social justice is the idea that school leaders have and are expected to exercise considerable power and so this is an inherently political process. The focus on influencing staff, members of the school community and wider stakeholders through setting a common vision and through developmental processes overlooks these political dimensions where school leaders face competing demands. In acknowledging the political processes of changing, though is not to set aside the core values underpinning school leadership and part of the task of leadership development programmes is to enable school leaders balance these two.

Much of leadership development points to the significance of the personal skills and attributes of school leaders and so part of this are political skills. Dimmock (2012) highlights the way in which demands of the specific context side by side with the increasing expectations of school leaders by policy makers have increased the pressures considerably. At a time when there are issues around recruitment into school leader roles (Gronn and Rawling-Sanaei 2003, Macbeath *et al.* 2009), the move to build emotional resilience and a sense of self efficacy are important and experiential learning processes particularly coaching, mentoring and collaborative learning help strengthen the personal qualities to enable leaders commit to and seek change. However, we also need to develop other sets of skills which acknowledge and prepare school leaders for the political processes they will have to address and enact to bring about change. Here there is a fine line between being political and simply acting on the basis of expediency and so there is a further dimension to be considered. Murphy (2009) in his analysis of the dilemmas headteacher face proposes that responses will be heavily laden with emotion and then politics. However reacting to the emotional aspects of the issue or seeking to assuage the competing political demands will not provide even partial solutions. A critical aspect is to enable school leaders to see such situations as ethical dilemmas in which there is no straightforward solution and where there will always be competing demands and positions. Many of these dilemmas will be about addressing the needs of diverse learners. Leadership development then has to focus on enabling those preparing for school leadership with the skills, knowledge and confidence to be political and base actions on values.

Conclusions

This paper highlighted the significant political dimensions of leadership from the policy expectations placed on school leaders to managing the micropolitics of a school. Current policy seeks to improve the attainment of all learners and there is an active concern with closing the attainment gap. However, there is a danger that unidimensional and politically expedient solutions will be generated which are short term and largely are concerned with targeting individual pupils to improve their exam scores rather than look at systemic change to address the needs of diverse learners. To enable school leaders to generate longer term strategies, leadership development has to be seen as a transformational experience. Programmes are not simply about school leaders acquiring skills and emotional resilience – important as these are. Instead areas of knowledge building, identity and stance around equality and diversity as well as an understanding of the political and ethical dimensions of school leadership need to be central to such programmes.

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