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Social Justice and the Study and Practice of Leadership in Education: A Feminist History

Jill Blackmore

This historical sociology deconstructs the interrelationship between the theory and practice of the troublesome notions of leadership, social justice and feminism. First, it tracks marginalised groups' relationship to the field of educational administration and their claims upon the state. Mainstream approaches have been informed by theories, practices and politics that do not focus on the core educational work of teaching and learning, therefore sidelining social justice issues. Second, it maps feminist and critical theorists' alternative conceptualisations, for example, of democratic leadership, which dissolve artificial binaries between formal and informal leadership. Finally, it considers what this means for re-theorising leadership for social justice.

Social justice, leadership and feminism are conceptual categories that emerge out of contestation over meaning, the conceptual categories themselves being part of a web of interconnections of social power. Leadership, social justice and feminism are highly contested notions, politically, epistemologically and ontologically. Each concept is difficult to define, as it has been produced discursively out of, and in turn represents, a particular set of economic, political and social relations, and therefore marked by temporal discursive shifts.

Feminist histories, with their focus, initially on gender and increasingly on race and class, in leadership, and on leadership for social justice, provide a view from, and through, the fault lines of the relations of ruling in education. Who benefits and who loses out, how does this happen and how can this be changed? In order to do this feminist deconstructive/reconstructive work, I track the interaction between the study and practice of leadership by identifying and mapping the historical conjunctures and disjunctures between discourses of feminism, leadership and social justice within/outside the field of educational administration. I then consider how feminists have provided alternative conceptualisations of leadership and schools, while identifying the fault lines within feminist theories of leadership. Finally, I explore how feminist histories, by producing multiple narratives, normative discourses and transgressive

trajectories as counterfactuals to the mainstream, offer ways of rethinking educational leadership *for* social justice.

Why Feminist History(ies)?

So why are feminist approaches to leadership and social justice of interest now? Feminist theories no longer merely focus on gender, as the following tale will tell.¹ Feminist histories, as feminist theories and politics, focus on domination, marginalisation, appropriation and the 'othering' of any social group. In so doing, feminism imparts numerous deconstructive possibilities of dominant storylines: challenging dominant categories and unpacking concepts (e.g., leadership); modifying optimistic accounts of empowerment;² identifying silences, such as the ethics of care;³ using women leaders' life histories to test dominant metanarratives of educational leadership;⁴ focusing on situatedness and specificity by reference to wider social, cultural and economic contexts that historically shape the social relations of gender in education;⁵ unpacking linear historical notions of universal progression and social change;⁶ while waiting until 'promising lines of inquiry become more fully excavated and new paradigmatic, philosophical and political boundaries are reached'.⁷ Feminist accounts can also be reconstructive, as they provide space for voices of the less advantaged and offer alternative representations of leadership through the narratives of marginalised leaders. Feminist histories also remind feminists to trouble their own discourses that can have regressive as well as progressive effects.⁸

Despite divergent theories, politics and practices amongst feminists, there is some consensus in terms of a shared political project based on the personal is the political; a desire to produce social change and improvement and a passion to undertake politically motivated research and politically engaged theory. Indeed, feminist deconstructive/reconstructive work in educational administration has been facilitated by the differences amongst feminists (liberal, radical, cultural, black, materialist, post-structuralist and post-colonial) and feminism's political orientation towards equity. But while there are 'family resemblances' between feminist activities and ambitions cross-nationally, they assume different theoretical positions, methods, forms, and strategies locally. Collectively, feminist histories illustrate the messiness of the categories of 'race' and gender, but also of identity, citizenship and nationhood. Certainly, gendered analyses in education are equally susceptible to fashionable theories in psychology, sociology and gender studies, as mainstream leadership studies have been to those in business and science. But feminist analyses tend also be transgressive and interdisciplinary, working in a disruptive and ambivalent relationship to master narratives. In so doing, feminist analyses highlight 'predicaments' for both theorists and practitioners, predicaments being 'problematic states of affairs that admit no easy solution; they may even have no solution at all, being by nature paradoxical'.⁹

Leadership *and* social justice have been key foci of feminist deconstructive/reconstructive work in educational administration. Representations of leadership are indicative of the state of the field of educational administration, highlighting its

priorities, illuminating its assumptions, measuring up the rhetoric against social practices. Feminists sought to deconstruct leadership *because* leadership is symbolic in terms of who and what gets represented, a ready reckoner against which feminist success can be measured. But not all women and leadership research is 'feminist' when gender is treated as just another variable and not an organising principle. For feminists, leadership is about gendered power relations that impact on social justice. Access to leadership promised some capacity for women and 'marginalised others' to change structures, processes and cultures to be more equitable. Focusing on social justice meant:

- addressing issues of inequality, power, responsibility and ethics
- understanding changing relations between education, society and the state; education and work; education and the family
- examining individual and collective strategies and claims for social justice upon the state and education on the basis of needs, interests and rights.

Conjunctures, Disjunctures and Feminist Interjections

Using Larson and Murtadha's framing of feminist strategic interventions in the field of educational administration,¹⁰ I next 'deconstruct the existing logics of leadership', then identify how 'feminist histories portray alternative perspectives of leadership', and finally seek to 'construct theories, systems and processes of leadership for social justice'.

Deconstructing Existing Logics

Education has long been of interest to the modern state. From the 1870s into the early 20th century, the paternalistic 'modern' state of 'developed' Western nations was manifested in the form of strong centralised bureaucracies. Leadership was constructed as a 'masculinist enterprise' within this hierarchical mode of governance.¹¹ Embedded in early 20th-century state welfarism, social and industrial relations policies, legal and administrative regulations and popular belief, was a particular middle-class notion of the role of women as both dependents (on men) and nurturers (of children).¹² Liberalism was premised upon a sexual contract based on separate public/private domains. This binary was central to psychological, social and political theory, and had explanatory power when justifying as natural how the 'private' familial gendered division of labour was carried over into the 'public' domain of schools. Women were responsible for the affective domain (teaching and children) and men the intellectual (leadership and youth). The political rights won by the first wave of the woman's movement did not extend to economic equality in the workplace, where women had no equal pay for equal work until the 1970s. Yet feminist historians also point to teaching as a radicalising activity for women that fed into feminist political activism.¹³ The 1890s saw women principals and women's teacher unions as a dominant force in education in the USA, UK and Australia.¹⁴ Certainly, educational

bureaucracies were imbued with a sense of public service as public education was perceived to be central to social and economic order. But education systems were also socially, culturally and economically reproductive as differentiated by class, 'race' and gender. The Anglophone nation state was also a *white* masculinist state, excluding any representation of indigenous peoples, while partially including that of immigrant and 'racialised' populations. The cultural knowledge of Aboriginals and immigrant groups was absent as they were expected to assimilate.¹⁵ White middle-class women, while marginalised, were complicit in this subordination.¹⁶

Social justice was understood at the turn of the 20th century as access to male-stream educational institutions. Feminists, in making claims on the state, sought either to demand inclusion on the same terms as men as equals and supposedly 'gender neutral' citizens, or to press the case for the recasting of citizenship's premises so as to accommodate women's particular interests/needs as gender-differentiated citizens. Women teachers could, therefore, be head mistresses of girls' schools – a feminine domain – but not of co-educational or boys' schools. Both approaches effectively positioned women's leadership capacities during the early 20th century as complimentary to dominant norms embodied in white male leadership, while girls had unequal access to the mainstream.

During the 1920s, the striving for professional status by the academic field of educational administration in the USA was inextricably tied up with developing a distinctive body of professional knowledge that drew from outside education (e.g., business) in order to distinguish itself as different from teaching with its core focus on learning and students.¹⁷ Leadership within the scientific management frame was construed as rational, objective and directive. Any research on leadership was based only on male experiences, the aim being to identify the psychological, intellectual and physical characteristics of bureaucratic and management masculinities as *the* personal attributes required for leadership. Thus masculine heterosexual hegemony was maintained within a numerically feminised profession.¹⁸

The post-Second World War liberal democratic settlement between labour and capital negotiated in Western liberal democracies produced a rapid expansion of public education systems. The 1950s was marked by the entrenchment of the ideals of the middle-class nuclear family in social and economic policy, and a political and economic divide between capitalism and communism. Both sought solutions through science and technology. In the USA, academics in educational administration resorted to theory and science for legitimacy. This consolidated, both in theory and practice, the Enlightenment dualisms between science and the humanities, rationality and emotionality, mind and body, male and female. This positivist epistemological tradition – based on a distinction between fact and value, means and ends, claims of generalisability, prediction of universal theories of knowledge and a value free science – was seductive to the emergent fields of educational administration in the UK, New Zealand and Australia during the 1960s and 1970s. There, leadership had historically been achieved through seniority, also debilitating to women seeking leadership.¹⁹ The male principal/head teacher was the embodiment of this rational science of administration.

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The notion of merit was central to the gendered order of state welfarism and a social liberalism underpinned by the epistemological framework of administrative science. Leadership was portrayed as a 'rational' activity in which leaders assumed a moral but 'neutral' authority attained through their hierarchical position and administrative procedures based on merit.²⁰ But merit is not an unproblematic 'neutral' concept. It has historically been constructed through the eyes of middle-class males in ways that suited their interests and conditions of work and family life.²¹ The rise of educational bureaucracies was linked to a particular hegemonic masculinity which, through rule-governed behaviour, distanced itself from the messiness of daily life in which women's voices were thus subjugated.²² This gendered division of labour was legitimised by organisational, sociological, psychological and political theory which assumed the experience of men could be universalised. Women's (as students') failure to climb that ladder into leadership (or academic success) was depicted as their individual failure – due to their 'natural' emotional dispositions, psychological attributes, physical and even genetic capacities, rather than the numerous organisational, legal, financial and practical obstructions in their way.

Feminists from a labour process perspective have argued that women, in the educational labour markets constructed during the 20th century by both state and church employers through hiring, firing and promotion practices, have been a major source of marginal labour to facilitate expansion or contraction.²³ While teacher unions increasingly demanded, gained and protected rights for male teachers through collective action, promoting them rapidly into school leadership, equivalent rights were extended to women teachers when their interests coincided with that of 'the profession' or 'the state', or through independent action. While teachers' (and administrators') professional status was contingent on women achieving equal pay, it was not contingent on women achieving equal representation in leadership. Professionalism and unionism were for women two-edged promoting strategies of exclusion as well as legitimisation of service and professional knowledge.²⁴

The democratisation of secondary schooling during the 1960s led to the expansion of higher education. Social movements, critical of the lack of responsiveness of the paternalistic bureaucratic state and education, focused first on civil rights for blacks in the USA, which gave rise to the women's and environmental movements. Education became for activists the means of social transformation to increase participation and reduce inequality; and for governments the means to regain legitimacy and national advantage through reform. Claims upon the state increasingly associated rights with needs in ways that demanded unequal/different treatment to overcome prior disadvantage. Unprecedented state intervention focused on class and comprehensive schooling through programmes for families in the USA, neighbourhoods in the UK, and schools in Australia, with significant impact.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the field of educational administration was theoretically informed by rational models of decision-making from political science, organisational theory and economics (e.g., cost benefit and opportunity cost analyses). Education was defined as human capital in which individuals 'chose' to invest in varying degrees, although this abstracted self-interested individualism did not represent the experience

of most people and certainly not women, whose 'choices' were constrained by relational responsibilities. The field largely ignored contemporary educational sociology with its focus on schools as reproductive of inequality: Bernstein on curriculum and pedagogy, Bourdieu and Passeron on cultural, economic and social capital, and Bowles and Gintis on capitalism, class and race, all equally gender-blind.²⁵ Instead, well into the 1980s the field was preoccupied with the paradigm wars, an epistemological battle not grounded in, or relating to, the politics and practices of what were increasingly culturally pluralistic societies.²⁶

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the rapid circulation, transnationally mediated by the international policy activities of the OECD, IMF and World Bank, of neo-liberal ideologies and the economic orthodoxies of reduced public expenditures, deregulation and devolution. The resulting splintering of the post-war liberal democratic settlement led to the dismantling of the welfare state in Anglophone democracies. New regional formations emerged (e.g., North American Free Trade Alliance and the European Union) in response to the intensification and speeding up of flows of people, money, goods, images and ideas. Neo-liberal policies imposed privatisation, marketisation and new managerialism throughout the public education sector in New Zealand, the UK, and then Australia, more so than in Canada and the USA. Post-welfare states sought to steer education by devolving responsibility and risk down to self-managing, self-governing or charter schools, while restructuring educational work through outsourcing, deregulation and downsizing.²⁷ Increased state/executive regulation was achieved through strong accountability requirements of outcomes-based education and performance management. Discourses of choice, competition and accountability supplanted those of equity, comprehensiveness and cooperation.²⁸ Markets, through individual choice, were to distribute equity. This discourse of choice was rights rather than needs based, informed by neo-liberalism's competitive individualism rather than collective interests of social liberalism.

Strong managerial and entrepreneurial principal leadership was central to the success of restructuring linking education tightly to national economies, to the neglect of educational leadership and equity. Indeed, during the 1990s educational inequality was intensified.²⁹ The principal was *the* initiator and innovator of organisational change, 'out in front' due to his/her superior managerial skill and increased executive authority. Women, encouraged by gender equity reform in the 1980s, were the new source of change agents and middle managers (i.e., principals). In mainstream research, notions of transformational leadership were appropriated from their civil rights origins and social justice commitment by the school effectiveness and improvement movement to be realigned to serve predetermined managerial outcomes. Schools, assumed to be consensus-driven coherent units rather than sites of contestation over power and values and socially constructed by gender, race and class, were de-contextualised from external influences and constraints, yet blamed for what they could not control. Teacher loyalty was assumed, thus ignoring teachers' and principals' political and professional commitments to the profession, colleagues, students, equity and care.³⁰ Thus mainstream research de-politicised education at a time when it was being highly politicised.

The 1990s saw simultaneous moves towards managerialism and the supplanting of discourses of equal opportunity (and multiculturalism) with those of managing diversity.³¹ Population flows cross and intra, together with the rapid internationalisation of education during the 1990s, produced a cultural diversity that required schools be more responsive through individualised pedagogy and inclusive curriculum. Within the new managerialist frame, diversity was seen to be a problem to be managed rather than engaged with as productive. Whereas previous equity discourses (affirmative action in USA, equal opportunity in UK and Australia) imparted a sense of entitlement to particular groups to rectify past structural and cultural disadvantage, the discourse of diversity is individualistic and does not privilege group claims based on race, class, gender or disability over individual preferences. The discourse has also arisen in the context of cultural and structural backlash against affirmative action and equal opportunity from those, largely men, losing their 'natural' advantage and feeling insecure due to restructuring.³² Throughout the 20th century, the field of theory and practice in educational administration has been more reactive than proactive with regard to social justice.

The predicament now for both theorists and practitioners is about mediating the politics of choice and equity. The evaluative state advocated choice and competition during the 1990s, encouraging marginalised populations (e.g., blacks, Latinos, Aboriginal communities) to claim ownership over local schools (e.g., charter in USA, self governing in New Zealand) in order to celebrate cultural difference through recognition. But such schools are usually in poor neighbourhoods with high unemployment, poor health, and lacking the school, familial and community capacities to improve student learning.³³ Choice policies also fund white middle-class parents' 'choice' to live in more prosperous neighbourhoods with schools populated by 'people like them', and ethnic and religious groups to similarly form homogeneous cultural and religious enclaves.³⁴ Choice linked to privatisation of costs is institutionalising, through schooling, social fragmentation and economic disadvantage based on class, race and religion.³⁵ Choice as the mechanism to distribute schooling does not deliver equity because of the unequal capacities of the majority to have the same range of choices as the minority.

On the other hand, the neo-bureaucratisation arising from market and managerial accountabilities has bred a rapacious desire for data to facilitate comparisons locally, nationally and internationally. These comparisons highlight these concentrations of inequality, poverty, poor health and educational underachievement that require some form of redistribution and state intervention. Reforms in the past decade now focus on schools in 'challenging circumstances', neighbourhoods, community capacity building, networks, education action zones underpinned by more integrated support systems in health and welfare. But mainstream administrative theory lacks both the theoretical frames, and a language of, of social justice to undertake this task because of its disposition towards managerial accountability, principal-focused leadership, universalising best practice, and de-professionalisation through standards-driven reform.

With regard to equity, education policy, framed by social liberalism up to 1960s, focused on equality of opportunity and access by removing structural barriers, but

5 treated the marginalised as victims. The identity politics of the 1970s and 1980s saw a convergence between a social democratic tradition in politics and education, multi-culturalism and gender equity, within a pluralistic frame strong on recognition and participation, but weak on re-distribution. The late 1980s and 1990s saw the rise of
 10 neo-liberalism and the splitting of economics from, and privileging it over, the social aspects of education, while reconstituting educational relations between school, family and state on the basis of competitive contractualism and choice. Now steering from a distance through strong policy frames and performance accountabilities, the state regulates a mix of public and private provision with residualised public schools that provide for the marginalised. The dominant model of leadership has become 'a conduit through which individualising markets are installed in education, rather than a dialogic process located in civic democratic values connected with social justice and equity'.³⁶

15 **Portraying Alternative Perspectives of Leadership**

20 Feminist (and critical) theory has provided alternative approaches to rethinking leadership. The social movements of the 1970s also led to a growing scepticism over the infallibility of science and the nature of knowledge. Drawing from the new sociology of knowledge and Habermasian critical theory during the 1980s, critical theorists from the geographical and theoretical margins (Greenfield in Canada, Bates in Australia, Grace in the UK) challenged the epistemological assumptions of positivism. They, as feminists, disputed positivism's fact/value distinction and its claims of neutrality and generalisability, perceiving knowledge to be partial, situated and socially produced. Critical theory in particular focused, as did feminists, on issues of
 25 social justice; on power, language and culture, asking who benefits from particular policies, practices and arrangements, how and why; who are marginalised; and whose voice dominates? Leadership was a means to address inequality.³⁷ Yet critical theorists in educational administration focused on class disadvantage, ignoring feminist work. Gender and race were more central to critical pedagogy scholars who drew from feminist, cultural studies and post-colonial theory. Feminists also criticised both strands generally for being highly theoretical, disengaged from practitioners and not recognising agency).³⁸

35 Feminists working strategically for gender equity in social movements, community organisations and teacher unions, were leaders as professional and policy activists. In the decade after 1970, social democratic government policies and activists in the woman's, multicultural, black and indigenous movements temporarily converged to focus on equity (access and participation in the mainstream) in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Scandinavia. State feminism meant feminist bureaucrats were incorporated into policy production and decision making to work within/against the state. They created an equity infrastructure underpinning policy production and implementation at all levels of government and into many schools.³⁹ Policy was the mechanism for both restructuring education but also gender equity reform. In
 40 Australia, women's audits of budgets monitored the impact of decisions. Top-down

AQ3 equity policy frameworks were supported, contested and adapted through federally and state-funded school-based programmes by teachers and principals. By contrast, in the USA and UK, where relations between the state and women's and civil rights movements were oppositional to the state, activists worked locally through non- and local government organisations (e.g., Local Education Authorities).⁴⁰

The parent movement was, in some Australian and Canadian states, the training ground for participation and leadership in policy production and local community leadership.⁴¹ Likewise, women learnt about leadership in teacher unions in most Anglophone states, which were a source of professional knowledge and gender equity reform.⁴² Policy was produced through dialogue between policy-makers, practitioners and parents. Consequently, many women teachers understood leadership as earned, negotiated within democratic frames, without leader/follower divides, not recognising these activities as leadership as defined by job descriptions and the academic field. Yet their capacity as change agents was recognised.

Feminist academics also bridged the gap between educational research and policy, developing feminist critical policy sociologies that focused on social justice.⁴³ Certainly feminist theoretical shifts informed gender equity policies: reflected in moves from 1970s sex role socialisation theories of liberal feminism, 1980s cultural feminism's celebration of difference, and 1990s post-structuralism's gender subjectivities. But liberal feminist policies focusing on individual merit, procedural justice, improving women's skills and removing structural barriers were more amenable to state feminism. The rise of neo-conservative politics and feminist backlash saw the collapse of this dialogue between policy, theory and practice.

Those feminist scholars in educational administration not only focused on women's under-representation in formal leadership but also on substantive issues of leadership (teaching and learning) and context (the cultures of leading and learning). The notion of inclusion, in the context of 1980s identity politics, converged with the interests of people with disability and from non-English speaking backgrounds, and their claims for the right to participate fully in social and political life. Gender equity reform promoting inclusive curriculum and pedagogy benefited many marginalised groups.⁴⁴ By contrast, within mainstream theory, curriculum and assessment became a focus (e.g., instructional leadership) with the move to outcomes-based education, just as the current pedagogical focus arises out of external pressures to produce 'learner-earner' identities for lifelong learning in the new work order.⁴⁵

At the same time, 1980s identity politics promoted an assimilationist view – a mosaic multiculturalism – which assumed different perspectives/groups would fit together to produce unified togetherness without privileging one or other voice. Equity programmes for indigenous students (as for women in leadership) were largely 'additive' (food and fashion, the token woman) made 'synonymous with multiculturalism'. 'As an educational practice, however these approaches do little to resolve the gendered and racialised cognitive imperialism of the curriculum [or leadership] ... Additive projects are a management technique of cultural diversity'.⁴⁶ This assimilationist approach is common to women's rights in the 1970s, gay rights in the 1980s and Aboriginal education in the 1990s. Bringing in Aboriginal teachers, cross-cultural

units of work or women into leadership, merely 'add[s] diverse voices to contemporary education intolerance. These additive units leave intact the ... gendered and racialised environment'.⁴⁷ As token women leaders find, their representation without authority did not change the dominant cultures or inherent systemic biases. Legitimation issues about whose knowledge and what values are privileged were ignored; the knowledge of the 'other' rarely disrupted the metanarrative. AQ4

Certainly, feminist scholars in educational administration have viewed schools as institutions for citizenship formation in social democracies. Leadership, when construed as a democratic practice, promotes alternative models of shared leadership and co-principalships.⁴⁸ Thus feminist and critical scholars sceptically question the current popularity of 'distributed' leadership at a time when managerial and market accountabilities control teachers and principals more than ever. Democratic leadership differs ontologically, epistemologically and ethically from distributed leadership based either on cognitive activity theory or school effectiveness.⁴⁹ The latter emphasises technical professionalism framed by professional standards, competencies and quality assurance. Managerial tasks and responsibilities are redistributed, but not power and agency. Both reconfigure emotional/rational either as a divide or not gendered. Both ignore power inequalities and the unequal conditions of teaching and learning.

Democratic approaches see schools as sites of participatory democratic processes that facilitate influence amongst stakeholders (teachers, parents *and* students).⁵⁰ Agreement is negotiated through deliberative processes with equity objectives and informed by a professional ethics of democratic accountability.⁵¹ Leadership, therefore, is a situated, social and collective practice undertaken by different people, informally and formally, differently in different contexts. The past abdication of the responsibility to advocate for social justice is 'evidence of the overly technical-rational orientation of a professional largely rooted in the corporate ethos of business management theory and practice ... whereas social justice theorists emanate from a tradition of scholars who view schools as social institutions that exist to serve the public good'.⁵²

Despite the above, a large body of research on women in leadership since 1975 focuses on women's under-representation. Studies of women leaders have produced discourses about women's ways of knowing and doing leadership, and leadership was relational work developing caring, democratic, ethical and collaborative cultures.⁵³ While celebrating women's experiences, this discourse was readily appropriated by new managerialism during the 1990s because of women's 'natural' people management focus.⁵⁴ Women's desire to promote socially just outcomes was co-opted once they became middle managers and change agents expected to restructure schools along market and managerial lines. Their predicament was that their leadership represented feminism's success, yet they were contradictorily positioned by normative feminist discourses that equated being a good feminist to caring and sharing leadership, and bad feminism with the authoritative and managerial discourses positioning them as failed leaders when they were collaborative. Cultural feminists' strong normative and celebratory agenda led to an 'uncritical reversal' of masculinist

claims about leadership by feminist claims of moral superiority, complimenting but not worrying the masculinist norms or knowledge base. Simultaneously, post-structuralist feminists' refusal to provide a normative dimension led to a weak policy impact. Rather than styles of leadership, the issue is how the normative capacities of the new educational governance limit the possibilities for collective and collaborative leadership focusing on social justice for all leaders, male and female.

Finally, feminists' failure to address middle-class women leaders' whiteness has produced new theoretical trajectories. Post-colonial, indigenous and black feminists, drawing on notions of multiple identities, hybridity and transnationalism, challenge cultural feminism's assumption of the 'universality of womanhood', and post-structuralism's focus on fluid identities to the neglect of structuring processes (e.g., globalisation, labour markets), which increasingly impact detrimentally on Third World women and women in poverty.⁵⁵ Western feminism and liberal feminism are perceived as 'othering' black, Asian and Aboriginal women through their incessant refrain of individualistic rights and freedoms rather than collective responsibilities.⁵⁶

Accounts of and by post-colonial, black and indigenous school leaders also illustrate their predicament when selected as change agents within local communities because of their good community relations, race and language.⁵⁷ To prioritise a community's rights, interests and needs meant system-wide policies framed them as unsuccessful; when meeting system requirements, they were seen to be aligned with systematic domination of their community.⁵⁸ In seeking to be multilingual by speaking the language of systems and local communities, they were exhausted and alienated. And local communities are not safe havens, often being highly conservative about gender, where tradition can be mobilised to reassert masculine dominance in new ways.

Feminist perspectives therefore offer alternative ways of thinking about leadership as a situated social and political practice, a habitus produced over time and not merely equated to position. While feminists within educational administration and leadership research and practice have been transgressive, it has often been within the parameters set by others.

Constructing Theories, Systems and Processes of Leadership for Social Justice

The field of educational administration and leadership has been fraught, with little dialogue between the subfields (e.g., school improvement and effectiveness, leadership and policy sociology) or between theoretical perspectives. It is arguably a field in need of reinvigoration in ways that address the messiness of what schools and leaders actually do.⁶⁰ Sklra and Young also suggest that 'feminist research in leadership has reached the edge point where deep reflection and re-examination are required to move forward'.⁶¹ Feminist debates now simultaneously trouble universalistic humanist theories of social justice and identify differences/intersections/hybridities within/between the 'naturalised' categories of culture, gender and race. Neo liberalism's capture of rights-oriented discourses has aligned with an identity politics demanding recognition of difference over redistribution. The 'predicament' for school leaders

(and government) and for those theorising leadership is how to juggle claims for recognition of difference and fairness in terms of redistribution of resources to reduce educational inequalities. Within the field, the issue is not the distinction between leadership and management, as good leadership is reliant upon effective management, but between critical and non-critical approaches to leadership, i.e., those who explicitly argue an agenda for social justice.⁶² If school leaders and teachers are not prepared to lead to reduce inequality, who will?

This feminist historical sociology illustrates how there is no linear progressive advancement in education in terms of equity for marginalised groups. At particular historical conjunctures (socially progressive state, new social movements) there have been clear advances, as 'gains are made by feminists on some fronts, monolithic discourses and structures of oppression shift and adapt to continue'.⁶³ Some advances have been accommodated and appropriated within the mainstream. Oppression is not monolithic or static. Progress has been partial, unstable and not as institutionalised into systems to the extent that could be expected from equity reforms and 'post-feminist' discourses.

Furthermore, these multiple historical narratives indicate how studies of educational administration are framed ideologically and politically. Neo-liberal educational restructuring fundamentally altered how education mediates relations between the individual and the state, questioning whether education is a public or private good. At the same time, the rise of cultural pluralism raised questions about the nature of democracy and the role of education. Consequently, past notions of social justice need rethinking. Retaining a metanarrative of social justice means recognising that social justice works differently in heterogeneous communities differentiated by class, gender, age, disability, sexuality, ethnicity and race under conditions of greater polarisation of economic inequality and market principles. Nancy Fraser argues focusing only on difference will encourage social fragmentation based on categories of race, class, culture and gender.⁶⁴ You can exercise the right to choose with whom you learn, but may not have the resources or processes to improve that learning. Fraser therefore argues for a principle of redistribution. This requires state intervention to guarantee more equitable conditions of teaching and learning. Any state seeks legitimacy by balancing economic welfare and collective identity. But a democratic state needs to avoid economic rights curtailing other rights (e.g., union rights or social rights); overemphasising collective identity at the cost of minorities and dissidents; or privileging recognition over redistribution.⁶⁵ To promote equity locally, school leaders require systemic and systematic support through a policy frame focusing on equity. This also needs to be grounded on processes of deliberation and dialogue between the centre and the local, schools and community, which facilitate agency.

My analysis illustrates how the interrelationship between educational administration, leadership and social justice are underpinned by changing relationships cross-nationally, between the public and private, changing social relations of gender, and new work orders. Educational administration as a field can no longer ignore the material, social and cultural conditions under which students learn,

teachers teach, and leaders lead. This requires the field to broaden its scope, to recognise localised professional knowledge but to also draw from philosophy, sociology, psychology, politics, as well as management theories to focus on educational problems.⁶⁶

Finally, what if social justice becomes the purpose of leadership? Then the question becomes not what is good for each child, but also what constitutes a good society, one in which rights to choose are not privileged over responsibilities to others and/or the community. This means focusing on 'the ought' and not just 'the is', the 'what' as well as 'how much'.⁶⁷ Instrumentalism to achieve organisational ends, or a commitment to excellence, are inadequate normative bases to inform ethical judgements. For educational leaders, ethics is not an optional extra, an additional technique. Critical and feminist scholars in educational administration have defended social democratic traditions imbued with a sense of a 'public'. They promote a deliberative democracy that can sustain the conditions that encourage dialogue, deliberation and talk rather than the 'thin' democracy of markets and managerialism. This means addressing the imbalances of power within schools in order to pursue greater agency for all stakeholders (students and parents). Post-colonial and indigenous feminists have argued that dialogue within a culturally pluralistic society may mean identifying what is different and not shared, realising how different positions can expand and broaden notions of leadership and encourage intellectual diversity. Thus the criteria of recognition, redistribution, democratic deliberation and agency could be the basis for socially just leadership practices. As Connell concludes

an education that privileges one child over another is giving the privileged child a corrupted education even as it gives him or her a social or economic advantage. The issue of social justice is not an add-on; it is fundamental to a good education.⁶⁸

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