Place Matters:
Reconceptualising early childhood leadership
for the 21st century

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Abstract: This article willexplore the current "neo-liberal"global approach to policy, and argue that what is needed is a reconceptualising of leadership for the 21st century. It will be suggestedthat the current dominant notion of leadership based on individualism and one size fits all is ignoring the interconnectedness between economic, social and environmental sustainability(Bottery, 2011). It will then go on to explore the notion of reconceptualising leadership toward amore critical "place-conscious"approach to leadership,so as to better participate in debates around what constitutes "good society" and what counts as well-being. Lastly, it will argue the relevance of a critical place-conscious approach to early childhood leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Key words: leadership; early childhood; place-conscious; reconceptualising; social justice; interconnectedness; global

The definition of *place* in the context of this literature review is more than about just setting, it isabout a group of people living in a particular location who have a sense ofcommunity and connection. Trickett and Lee (2010) argue that this sense of community and connection is"organised around kinship and family ties at the level of the town or the village", and that this kinship is based on "the need to belong not to 'society' in the abstract, but to somewhere in particular" (p. 430).Duhn (2010) adds to this understanding by arguing that place is more than location, it is also about how relationships between people and things coalesce to produce new possibilities and new meaning.

Massey (2005, as cited in Collinge&Gibney, 2010b) takes the understanding *of place* to another level when they argue that place "is absolutely not a seamless, coherent identity, a single sense of place which everyone shares", but rather place is an ongoing negotiation that is fluid, open and a mixture of wider and more local social relations.

Collinge, Gibney, andMabey (2010) add to this understanding of place by suggesting that despite all the changes in society associated with globalisation, including shifting patterns of demography and the information and communication revolutions, "we remain profoundly attached to 'place' in economic, social, cultural and emotional terms" (p. 368).

What is Critical Place-Conscious Leadership?

Trickett and Lee (2010) argue that *place-conscious leadership* is multidimensional professionalism that is concerned with the bringing together of a range of interests and needs including diverse talents and knowledge so as to develop inclusive and sustainable places. Theysuggest that these leaders understand their local context, develop multiple relationships, and respond in ways that are applicable to the local needs and circumstance.

This is supported by Hambleton (2011), whoargues that place-conscious leadership serves a public purpose in a given locality, where leaders have concern for the communities living in a particular place.Hegoes on to suggest that this style of leadership is inspirational, collaborative and emotionally intelligent, as it invites leaders to move outside their *organisation* to engage with the concerns facing the place. In fact, it isthe awareness of the needs and concerns of the people living in a particular place that drives these leaders to act. Lyons (2007, as cited in Collinge,&Gibney, 2010a) adds to this understanding by arguing that place-conscious leaders take responsibility for the well-being of an area and the people who live there.Collinge,andGibney (2010a) add another dimension to the place-conscious leadership discussion by suggesting that "open source networks", like those linked closely linked to place, are likely to have a leadership that will take on a form that is more "follower dominated", where the leader can be viewed "as an expression of the social group or network", and where the community plays a decisive part in the decision-making process.

Collinge,andGibney (2010a) note, however, that although the concept of place is being returned to prominence, it is importantalso to be aware that the leadership relationships on any occasion will be located somewhere between leader-dominance and follower-dominance. They go on to suggest that only leader-dominance is consistent with leadership theory as it is conventionally understood, where the leader exercises active control over others; conversely, follower-dominance has a stronger focus on others selecting the leaders by which they will be led on any particular occasion, according to their objective and priorities.

Why Do We Need Place-Conscious Leadership?

Globalisation in its current phase is usually referred to as *neo-liberal globalisation*, which according to Dale (2008) means"the forces of the global economy are setting new limits on countries' abilities to control their own policies and strongly influencing the direction of these policies" (p. 25).Litz (2011) adds to this by arguing that economic globalisation has led to the expansion of the private sector and private sector values such as productivity, efficiency and standardisation,"with the resulting removal of local individuality in many aspects of society including education" (p. 49).Fukuyana (1995, as cited in Edwards 1995) goes on to suggest that this trend towards "rights-based" liberalism can be implicated in the increase in violent crime, breakdown in family structures, and a decline in civic participation and general national pessimism.

Thisdiscussion concerning the impact of globalisation on policy development(Dale, 2008; Litz, 2011)is supported by Hambleton (2011) and Bottery (2006, 2011),who argue thatunfettered marketscan destroy communities and allow the excessive use of environmental resources.Stiglitz(2006, as cited in Hambleton, 2011) explains this by sayingthat due to neo-liberal globalisation,"some of the most powerful decision-makers in modern society are 'place-less' leaders in that they are not concerned with the geographical impact of their decisions" (p. 14). To counter or balance the impact of the current neo-liberal approach to policy, it is arguedthat what is needed is a stronger focus on place-conscious leadership, where those exercising decision-making power have a connection, concern and respect for the communities living in a particular place(Collinge&Gibney, 2010b;Collinge, Gibney&Mabey, 2010; Hambleton, 2011; Kroehn, Maude & Beer, 2010; Trickett& Lee, 2010).

This literature review has also identified the importance of place-conscious leadership (or *critical place-consciousness*) in relation to ensuring that school curricula support individual students'

success, relationships, and connections to the community in which they live (Bauch, 2001; Bottery, 2006; Budge, 2010; Edwards, 1995; Johnson, 2006;Litz, 2011; Malaguzzi, 1994).Starratt (2005, as cited in Budge, 2010) argues that critical place-conscious leaders "connect students' moral agenda of becoming authentic persons who can claim their own identities and their life trajectory, to their academic agenda of learning about the cultural, natural and social worlds they inhabit" (p. 18).Codd (2005, as cited in Dale, 2008) also looks atthis global/neo-liberal shift in relation to its impact on public education policy, and argues that it has"eroded fundamental democratic values of collective responsibility, cooperation, social justice and trust", thus rendering teacher work visible through reporting systems that focus on "effectiveness and measurable outputs and accountability [that are a] formal, externally imposed, low trust requirement" (p. 33).

Place-conscious leaders are also aware of and understand their own personal sense of place, and they bring this awareness to their work.Rogoff (1993) argues that inherent to any enquiry is the premise that individual, social and cultural levels are inseparable. She goes on to suggest that analysis may focus on one area, but there needs to be reference to the others.

This is supported by Ritchie et al (2010), who states that it is important to recognise our own cultural self-knowledge – i.e. our personal (both intrapersonal and interpersonal) planes of analysis –because cultural self-knowledge is a crucial element in the construction of knowledge and understanding.

Duhn (2010) states that "professionalism in education ... is a continuous process of experiencing the ... self in relation to the world"(p56). This is supported by Budge (2010) who argues that place shapes identity, and that leaders need to pay attention to the way place has influenced them both personally and professionally.

Knowing who we are and where we are from makes us stronger in all aspects of our lives.An individual's overallhealth and well-being, and the health of our planet (taiao), are strongly influenced by the individual's ability to connect with place on both an emotional and spiritual level (Budge, 2010; Gill, 2005;Litz, 2010;Louv, 2005;Love,2004).Therefore,progressive educational traditions that foster a connection with place, such as community-based education, outdoor education and indigenous education, maybe endangered "if leaders take a myopic view of standards-based education" (Budge, 2010, p. 18).

Budge (2010) argues that orientating leaders"towards critical place-consciousness might help them to be better prepared to engage in a balancing act between local interests and needs extralocal policy"(p17). This opens the possibility, says Budge,"... that critical place-conscious educational leaders will nurture individual development and community connectedness, and appropriately "nest" this educational aim within the broader aims of the community at large" (p17).

What Leadership Theories Support Place-Conscious Leaders?

It appears that the challenge for place-conscious educational leaders is the expectation that they will be able to work effectively within the complex policy challenges that arise in the 21st century while also upholding the core principals of social justice, cultural and environmental connection, and equity (Litz, 2011).

Zembylas&Iasonos (2010)argue that there is no single style of leadership that is best suited to meet the needs of a particular situation or place, while Duhn (2010) suggests that there is a "discursive shift towards new and multiple meanings of professionalism" (p.55).

Trickett and Lee (2010) also state that no one leadership approach or mindset can be matched to any given place. Instead they suggest the place-conscious leadership dynamics need to reflect the local context, "system thinking in a spatial context" (p. 439).This is supported by Kroehn et al. (20010), who argue that place-conscious leaders "generally [demonstrate] ... significant contrast in respect to style, impact and aspirations" (p. 501).

Bauch (2001), on the other hand, argues that for a "partnership" approach to educational leadership to be effective, what is needed is a *constructivist leader*. Lambert et al. (1995, as cited in Bauch, 2001) suggest that constructivist leaders have a reciprocal approach to leadership that leads towards a common purpose of education. They have the maturity needed to move outside themselves, are flexible and are driven by a sense of moral purpose, not by institutional and bureaucratic constraints.

Hambleton (2011) and Edwards (1995) both suggest that*civic leadership* serves a public purpose in a given locality. Putnam (1995, as cited in Edwards, 1995) argues that civic or "responsive communities"leadership involves horizontal networks of engagement, reciprocity and cooperation. Hambleton (2011) adds to this understanding by arguing that civic leadership is "inspirational, collaborative ...invites leaders to move outside their organisation ... to engage with the concerns facing the place" (p.15).

Bottery (2006) offers another perspective to place-conscious educational leadership. He argues for an *ecological leader*, one who is strongly connected to the place in which they work while also having a"global conception of all humanity" (p.17).Meanwhile, Collinge and Gibney (2010a) suggest that the style of leadership they believe supports place-conscious leaders is that of "intelligent host", which they argue is a type of "second-order leadership" that is followerdominant, and therefore allows other leaders to emerge (p. 486). Alternatively,Clarkin-Phillips (2011) argues that *distributive leadership* encompasses many aspects including "practice as locality". She goes on to suggest that the focus is "on the openness of the boundaries of leadership"through responding, negotiating and ultimately strengthening relationships with families and the local community.

Litz (2011), however, argues that despite the success and attractiveness of approaches such as "transformational" and "distributive"to place-conscious leadership,these can be quite Western in their slant, and therefore may not be suited to the needs of developing countries. He argues for the evolution and the development of new and relevant leadership conceptual frameworks that include a refocusing on the understanding of local customs and cultural norms,with the consideration of local idiosyncrasies, specific contextual issues, and localised indigenous knowledge. Litz(2011) is supported by Tamati (2011), who argues that from an indigenous perspective there is a need to "strip away traditionally understood Western structures and notions about leadership, and instead, focus on what really matters – people and relationships"(p. 70) with the view to connecting with community and seeing everyone as a leader.Benham and Murakami-Ramalho (2010), in their study of leadership in indigenous communities, also argue for educational leaderswho focuson place and the collective will, andwho have a vision for "leading, learning, teaching and living that is culturally respectful and socially just" (p. 77).

Finally there is an argument to recognise the multiple dimensions of leadership within the various leadership theories. Blackmore (1999, as cited in Woodrow and Busch, 2008) suggest that a failure to do this means that leadership could still be viewed as "exceptional"and something different from what most leaders do every day, and that this perception may prevent many from assuming more formal leadership roles as they do not see their work as leadership.

RepositioningEarly Childhood Leadership with a Stronger Focus on Place

It is argued by Woodrow and Busch (2008) that there is a growing understanding for the need to reconceptualise early childhood leadership given the complexity of the role, the reluctance of many early childhood professionals to identify with the concept of leadership, and the link between the quality of leadership and the quality of individual programmes. They suggest that "this is intensely problematic for the field when strong leadership identity is especially important in advocating for the interest of children, families and the social justice agenda in the face of the growing hold of neo-liberal agendas" (p. 84).

The importance of the connection to community and place for young children is supported by the New Zealand early childhood curriculum,*Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), which argues that all children need to have a strong sense of community where they are able to "make connections across time and place; establish different kinds of relationships; and encounter different points of view"(p. 9). This is supported by Cullen (2004, as cited in Ritchie et al., 2010), who argues that "*Te Whāriki's* philosophy and framework is an ecological approach derived from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory" (p. 16) which acknowledges that interconnectedness of the child with their immediate and larger environment, and the importance of these systems working together effectively. Meanwhile, Clarkin-Phillips (2011) argues that the sociocultural underpinning of *Te Whāriki*"highlights the mediated nature of the curriculum" (p. 21) and the need for leaders to include children, family and community in the negotiation and facilitation of meaning.

New understandings of leadership in early childhood contexts need to be developedThe leadership styles identified in this article as being consistent with critical place-conscious leadership suggest that there are multiple possibilities and dimensions of professionalism depending on the place. The Literature review has also highlighted that there needs to be a strong focus on open, horizontal networks of engagement and leadership, where leaders move outside themselves to serve and advocate for others, in ways that are culturally respectful, environmentally sustainable and socially just.Leaders also need to know themselves and what they bring to their role, with a realisation of how place has influenced them both personally and professionally.

Conclusion

This article strongly suggests that early childhood leaders, and early childhood leadership training and development programmes, need to better prepare potential leaders for the balancing act between individual and local interests and those of the global context. The one-size-fits-all policy does not always serve individuals and local communities. Therefore, there is a need to develop stronger models of place-conscious leadership in order to refocus educational leaders' attention on the needs of the individual and the local community within the intent of the neo-liberal agenda. Stronger place-conscious leadership models will, in turn, better prepare early childhood leadersto participate in debates around what constitutes "good society" and what counts as well-being.

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