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Abstract

This paper explores the notion of UBUNTU, an African centric approach to educational system leadership. Drawing on key messages from Black and White system leaders, located in two local education authorities (regions) in England, who have been selected to lead collaboratively, primarily through influence beyond the context of their individual school in support of social justice and equity. The author calls on years of extensive professional practice to examine the normative, conceptual framing of system leadership. The research presented as a qualitative narrative identified that traditional interpretations of system leadership in the literature present a normative, Eurocentric paradigm of leadership that is limited in an articulation of forms of collaborative school leadership as practiced on the ground and as expressed by a racially diverse school leadership workforce.

“No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it”

Einstein (Brainyquote.com)

INTRODUCTION

Conceptualizations of leadership, paradigms of leadership theories and approaches are typically framed from a western mindset, very much consistent with a Eurocentric philosophy and ideology of a modern, globalized world that is dominated by the power and influence of peoples of European descent (Turnbull, 2011). It stands to reason therefore that these same theories inform

educational leadership preparation programmes not only in the West but many other parts of the globe.

Very little is written in the UK about the theories and practice of leadership and management and the dynamic that is created when western processes and models meet Black and other global majority cultures in the form of the leader. Leadership theory remains trapped in a western mindset, with domestic theories masquerading, as universal paradigms, while the recipients of such leadership, have never been more diverse, particularly in urban settings. Yet, the fact that different bodies of knowledge continuously influence each other shows the dynamism of all knowledge systems (Dei, 2000), if only we could create the space for it, intellectually and actually. In addition, there is a preoccupation with leadership competences; traits and attributes, rarely are we invited to investigate their cultural roots, yet under-lying values and roots they have. This has implications for those leaders who come from different cultures to those of the knowledge creators accredited by the academy. The unspoken pressure on leaders and those who teach them, is to assimilate to ways of seeing, being and doing that maintain the status quo. In fact the degree to which your professionalism is recognised (and your career progressed) can hinge on the degree to which you are seen as a conformist to the prevailing wisdom.

The concept of Black and other global majority educators developing their capacity for leadership by working within their own cultural paradigms or indigenous knowledge and in so doing developing alternative narratives about underachievement, equity, social justice, disengagement and moral purpose, as well as contributing to the theoretical thinking about leadership was central to what leadership preparation programmes like Investing in Diversity (IiD) in the UK were all about. In exploring how we might reconceptualise leadership to include a broader global frame of

reference, we will also explore how leadership preparation needs to be recalibrated to prepare different types of leaders to lead differently, horizontally across the system. In so doing, we not only change the face, but the heart of educational leadership, and the presence of a more diverse leadership moves beyond simply occupying the space, to fundamentally changing the leadership space.

This paper is part of a larger more in-depth study on global conceptualisations of leadership and seeks to problematize the ‘majority’, dominant empirical leadership research and theory through an exploration of “leadership wisdoms originating beyond the Western world”(Turnbull, 2011, p. 170. Also consider Nisbet, 1993). This paper specifically explores the notion and foundations of the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which broadly translates as “human kindness”, and its applicability in educational system leadership (Fullan, 2004; Venter, 2004; Bush, 2007; O’Leary & Craig, 2007; Hopkins & Higham, 2007; Hatcher, 2008; Pont et al, 2008; Higham et al, 2009; Hopkins, 2009).

The paper, presented from a practitioner’s perspective, draws on a review of relevant education leadership literature, in-depth interviews and observations of school leaders and professionals from the African Diaspora of non-western heritage, located in the UK. The paper and study seeks to uncover and reflect on the application of Ubuntu an African philosophy and under-pinning approach to leadership within two very different UK contexts. It explores how the amalgamation of non-western global leadership paradigms such as Ubuntu, with mainstream leadership models, can support the radical transformation needed across educational leadership. It is envisaged that such an approach can deepen both the capacity and efficacy of a more sustainable system leadership model, focussed as it is on the pursuit of equity in the interests of the greater good. It is

intended that the in-depth study will make a contribution towards theory building in the area of global leadership paradigms.

Through the paper and study I argue that at a time of significant and radical system change across public sectors, radically different approaches to leadership, including the application of different cultural lenses, are needed to lead differently. This is true not just in ethnically, racially, linguistically and religiously diverse contexts, but in more homogenous, economically and socially disadvantaged contexts where communities have historically been under-served or failed by the education system.

Leadership preparation whether in London, Chicago, Delhi or Kingston needs to be culturally literate, enabling people from diverse backgrounds to find their authentic voice, provide appropriate service, and create different and inclusive culturally competent spaces for all. This paper asks that the call for more leaders from diverse backgrounds therefore be accompanied by the predisposition to enable those same leaders to use their difference to make a difference, by rethinking the role of indigenous knowledge in the academy and drawing on global leadership paradigms beyond Western models.

I go further to suggest that there are some leadership theories intrinsic to the cultural backgrounds of Black and other global majority peoples, that may not find their way into the mainstream canons of western literature on leadership, such as the African concept of Ubuntu or seva-centric leadership in the Asian tradition (Turnbull et al, 2012). Without the necessary theoretical underpinning they can be dismissed as simplistic and under-developed, and so go unrecognized (or affirmed) as legitimate and efficacious parts of leaders professional identities and practices. This does not mean that these global human principles are any less relevant or needed in today's

contexts, particularly as what is required of all leaders and service providers becomes more complex and challenging, leaving existing conceptualizations of leadership somewhat redundant. Turnbull (2011) concurs arguing that, indigenous and Eastern ideologies will be needed if we are to change educational mindsets and challenge the obsolete model of Western Business school education. There is a need not only for models of leadership that are relevant, but sustainable. There is a need for more responsible leadership education

UBUNTU – Collective Personhood and Morality

Ubuntu centers on collective personhood and morality as evidenced through various human acts, clearly visible in social, political, and economic situations, as well as among family (Mbigi, 1997). The common expression and tradition “*Ubuntu ngumtu ngabanye abantu*” that we owe our selfhood to others, that we are first and foremost social beings, are lucidly epitomized through the leadership style of Nelson Mandela (Stengel, 2010). Mandela’s approach and style of leadership demonstrates that Ubuntu, the philosophy of human kindness is not one of weakness but one of strength represented through community, social and political activism for the eradication of economic and social injustice and inequality in support of a greater, common cause.

THE STUDY

Within a context of diminishing resources, human and financial, as well as shifting responsibilities and accountabilities beyond traditional organizational boundaries, one of the challenges to the emergence of a self-determining, self-sustaining public sector system is inadequate capacity. Nowhere is this more so, than in the world of schools and children’s services. Schools have to

work together if they are to survive. Leaders have to find ways of working that speak to a higher order than just getting through the next inspection.

The application of Ubuntu was explored across three schools in Birmingham, a city and metro borough in the West Midlands, England, (this study is on-going) and nine schools in Darlington, a market town in the North East of England; both cities are in the United Kingdom, but with a very different demographic profile. Birmingham Local Authority is one of the largest in the United Kingdom with around 430 schools, a total population estimated at 1,085,400, with around 42% of residents from an ethnic group other than white. Darlington by contrast is the third smallest unitary authority in the country, the borough has a population of approximately 105,600 people, with only 2.1% of the population coming from BME backgrounds, there are 39 schools in Darlington.

12 school leaders from very different backgrounds, exemplified in their approach to leadership, a deep rooted ethic of responsibility to their peers, a strong sense of being connected to the communities they serve, a heightened sense of moral purpose, an affinity for leadership focussed on relationships and a conviction to collective responsibility and stewardship of the system. In this paper and summary, I draw largely on observations in the Birmingham context and interviews in Darlington of those leaders to ascertain how their leadership identities, values and behaviours have been shaped by their backgrounds.

It was found that the Ubuntu approach to system leadership assisted school leaders in working towards the development of a more responsible and ethical approach to the leadership and support of schools across a community. Furthermore, the practice of ubuntu encouraged the Teaching School Alliance observed in Birmingham who was tasked (alongside all teaching schools) with delivering professional training across its alliance, to go a step further, and integrate in explicit

ways, concepts of service and moral purpose within their training offer, whether for newly qualified teachers or aspiring leaders.

This approach to professional development that is on going, is a spirited attempt to move training away from the mechanics of being an educator, towards a movement to encourage future leaders to reframe the purpose of education and thereby identify their purpose, not only as educators but as human beings. The providers of the professional development were also steeped in the Ubuntu philosophy centered on personhood, morality, social and political activism, in the case of the Birmingham schools primarily in the interests of an alliance serving a majority black school community.

The common expression of connectedness or collective personhood embodied in Ubuntu undermined the drive to competitiveness among the schools observed within the study, many of whom were academies, and supported the notion of leadership being a collective activity, which can be appealing to aspirant leaders who are otherwise put off by the well documented loneliness of leaders. This was clearly evident in interviewing Head teachers and principals in Darlington, serving a largely white school population with some pockets of deep deprivation. At the time of the study Darlington had a higher percentage of academies than any where else in the UK, but schools in Darlington chose to use the greater autonomy afforded to them as academies to seek interdependence within a collaborative values driven framework that they constructed together (see Lee, 2012). They called the process and themselves schools@onedarlington.

Acting with moral purpose in the interests of a school community beyond their own, appealed to leaders in Birmingham and Darlington at a time when the ethics of the direction of educational policy was being called into question by some. Supporting their peers, as well as seeking to

eradicate inequality and injustice within their part of the schooling system was all the incentive that these leaders needed to keep them motivated and to collectively take on the mantle of custodians. As stated by a school leader in Darlington,

“Collaboration is important in a small authority, in fact anywhere. In Darlington the Local Authority was seen as the custodian of the greater good: schools@onedarlington embodies and reinforces this notion.”

It is the contention of this paper that the adoption of leadership approaches under-pinned by the Ubuntu philosophy, can enable aspiring and existing educational leaders who come from a range of diverse backgrounds, especially those who are under-represented in leadership positions, to find their authentic voice. Through leaders in the study practicing indigenous approaches to leadership and professional ways of being, that echo global wisdoms, remnants of which could still be found in some of their family and community structures and practices, practitioners were discovering authentic ways to practice their values and beliefs through leadership. All leaders, including the White leaders in Darlington had a deep commitment, through their upbringing and socialization to issues of equity and social justice.

Ubuntu as an underpinning philosophy to system leadership is emerging as a way of systematising long held African sentiments and beliefs, such as, ‘it takes a village to raise a child.’ In a recent restructuring of the education service in Birmingham, the school leader charged with leading what is being described as ‘a scheme aiming to revolutionise schools in Birmingham’ started his stewardship by stating, ‘It takes a whole city to raise a child’, highlighting again, the utility of Ubuntu principles, he is a white man.

Teaching School Alliances (TSAs)

Teaching Schools form partnerships with other local schools and strategic partners to form Teaching School Alliances (TSAs), providing high-quality professional training and development to improve standards in teaching and learning.

In order to work effectively within collaborative partnerships, it is necessary to consider which professional skills are needed to begin and maintain such alliances. Hargreaves provides a useful model using the three terms “magnets”, “glue” and “drivers” (2011: 6). “Magnets” are the factors that initially bring a partnership together: the enthusiasm shared by partners and the determination and social cohesion they display in carrying out the partnership work (Hargreaves, 2011: 7). It is important that schools within TSAs come together with a strong moral purpose; shared vision and values (Gu et al, 2012: 4). Two such successful TSAs are St. Mary’s Teaching School Alliance Birmingham and schools@onedarlington. Based on my extensive years of professional practice and research, I argue that one of the keys to the Teaching Schools partnership’s successes, one of the magnets, is consensus on some fundamentals, such as a heightened sense of moral purpose and cultural competence, and political astuteness enabling the alliance schools to productively work together to drive improvement in their respective local areas with due regard to the key role that those schools needing support have played in the stories of the communities they serve.

Hargreaves uses the term “glue” to refer to another significant aspect of successful partnerships: specifically, how to effectively maintain such an alliance. Hargreaves writes that it is necessary to “[develop] a culture in which people enjoy the work of the partnership as well as make gains” (2011: 7). This depends upon the prominence of “reciprocity and trust”, based on respect for all individuals in partnership (Gu, Rea, Hill, Smethem & Dunford, 2014: 54). Successful TSAs such as St. Mary’s Birmingham and schools@onedarlington possesses a culture of “integrity,

openness, honesty and respect” (Campbell-Stephens, 2013: 34), which has been the main driver for their successes. Creating an efficacious environment within partnerships is, therefore, another key skill that contributes to effective partnership work and is more likely to contribute to a sustainable position once those that initially provided support, begin to withdraw.

Harper Bell Seven Day Adventist School (HBSDAS)

Harper Bell Seven Day Adventist School (HBSDAS) in Birmingham was placed in Special Measures in 2013 at the time, the school was deemed to be inadequate in all four OFSTED categories. A series of school improvement and interim Head teachers were dispatched into the school by the local authority over a period of 9 months, to no avail. The school slipped further and further into trouble, with teachers leaving, the Governing body and Head teacher removed and a growing deficit, parents began to remove their children, even the Seven Day Adventist community seemed to have lost hope in their school. With Birmingham Local Authority under scrutiny by the Department for Education, one more small failing primary school, looked as though it were about to go under, that is until the Ubuntu factor kicked in, a radical rethink was required.

Fast forward to March 2015 and nearly two years after going into Special Measures and 12 months after the Ubuntu inspired intensive intervention led by 3 local leaders, was implemented, HBSDAS was brought out of measures, with Leadership and Management deemed good and the 3 other categories requiring improvement. The school is well on its way to becoming a stand alone sponsored academy, which will enable Harper Bell to retain its distinctive Seven Day Adventist ethos, within the family of the Anglican Diocese who will be its sponsor.

The manner of the intervention (and the approaches of the 3 school leaders) remains the subject of the in-depth study on global paradigms and system leadership on which this paper draws, but there

are already some clear findings. Models of school support often seem to favour a kind of analytical detachment over an experienced based-insight and deep understanding of cultural context. St Mary's Teaching School Alliance had both the analytical and experiential requirements, but it lacked capacity, due to the number of other schools that it was supporting, so the Executive Head brokered in the services of two leaders, a Head and a deputy who were part of its Teaching School Alliance. The three women are all of African Caribbean heritage and their successful schools serve a very multicultural community, similar to that of Harper Bell's, they understood at a very deep level the cultural context of the environment in which they all lived and worked. They were and remain invested.

The magnet that initially pulled the system leaders together was the understanding of the importance of Harper Bell, not just to the Seven Day Adventist Community, but also to the Black community in Birmingham. The city council had brokered in various levels of high-powered support, following the usual formula for struggling schools but something was lacking in their approach. The three leaders were not interested in competing with each other or building their respective empires, in the case of St Matthews school (the school brokered in by St Mary's Executive Head) they could easily have stood back and waited for Harper Bell to fold, as they had the capacity to take all of its 196 children and instantly become a large two-form entry school. Instead the Head and Deputy of St Matthews fought for over 12 months for the survival of Harper Bell. Both Head and deputy of St. Matthews spent in the order of at least 4 days a week in Harper Bell for 12 months, putting in 12-18 hour days, while still running their own school, which itself gained an outstanding grade in all categories the week following Harper Bell's inspection which

took it out of measures, when it had been at the brink of closure. This was an outstanding achievement by any measure.

The attributes displayed by these three African Caribbean women supported by the Chair and Vice Chair - also African Caribbean - of the Interim Executive Board (which was installed following the removal of the governing body) were those of leaders with moral purpose who believed in their collective mission to save the school. These attributes by their own admission, included being servants, stewards, architects, activists, advocates, coaches and storytellers, supported by high dosages of ethical, cultural and relational intelligence. These many faces of leadership are rarely addressed through leadership preparation programmes such as NPQH (the qualification for headship in the UK) but reference to the backgrounds of these African Caribbean women, found these ways of being in abundance, rich deep reservoirs on which to draw. They respected, believed and worked from an indigenous understanding of the interdependence and inter relatedness of people.

The Darlington Model

Darlington in contrast to Birmingham is the third smallest unitary authority in the country; at the start of 2013 it had the largest percentage of academies in the country with a disproportionately high number of 'good' and 'outstanding' schools. In the current climate of economic austerity, this could have provided a platform for schools to stand apart from the local authority (small authorities are unlikely to be able to deliver the full range of support services at a competitive cost) or to stand apart from each other (as high performing schools with autonomy). However, Darlington Academy Trust's head teachers and principals elected to use their autonomy to

collaborate and to partner, rather than to compete, as a way of improving standards and importantly developing their own brand of system leadership.

As Earley et al. (2012) observed in their review of the school leadership landscape, “This complex educational landscape and increasingly autonomous direction bring both challenges and opportunities and reconstitutes school, college and academy leaders’ relationship with local authorities, as well as other local educational institutions in important ways.”

While schools@onedarlington remains a work in progress, there is much that can be gleaned from the journey to-date. One of the important ways in which the schools@onedarlington model is unique, is that while there is a higher percentage of academy leaders in Darlington than anywhere else in the UK, yet schools, academies and college leaders in Darlington have used their greater autonomy to seek an interdependent relationship with each other, the Local Authority and elected members within a collaborative values-driven framework that took years in the making.

From 2007, Darlington Head teachers and Principals, uniquely led by their then Director of Children’s Services, in partnership with elected Members, were both positive and pragmatic in embracing the opportunities and challenges emerging from the political and educational landscape. Their principle aim has been to find a process by which to continue to provide a supportive environment for fellow Head teachers, with appropriate peer professional challenge, thereby enabling all schools to best serve the children and families of Darlington. This basis for collective and sustainable self-improvement has been at the heart of schools@onedarlington.

The model of service delivery and system improvement that is being practiced in Darlington has been in response to radical changes in public service delivery as a result of new national policy direction, aligned in the case of Darlington, with local ambition. Each region or local authority

area has had to determine the best way to meet the challenges that the changing context presents; Darlington has opted for interdependence. The emerging model of sector-led school improvement established in 2008 is described as schools@onedarlington.

While, “system leadership, or leading beyond one’s own school, has roots, in part, in response to the challenge of leadership succession” (Tunnadine, 2011), the drivers for the model of collaboration and system leadership in Darlington have even deeper historical roots, within a sociological tradition, beyond the education system. They build on a range of factors, including the universal principles and values of co-operative movements, including Ubuntu. A strong sense of community, an enterprising culture and a spirit of innovation, are all significant, features in the history and culture of Darlington as a borough. The ideological drivers in this small local authority of 39 schools, predates the dramatic expansion of the academies programme since 2010; collaboration, partnership and support is in Darlington’s political and school leadership DNA.

The practical leadership of schools@onedarlington is provided by an elected group of Head teachers and Principals, meeting each half term with officers. This model of leadership is essentially informal, based on compelling personalities able to convey an equally compelling narrative, which the group believes and around which it coheres. Yet this system now manages millions of pounds on behalf of thousands of stakeholders.

The influence that this group has depends on its efficacy in delivering outcomes for all the young people of Darlington, irrespective of background. The effectiveness can be measured quantitatively; in that the majority of schools in Darlington are high performing. Equally, effective co-operation is heavily reliant on the quality of the relationships within the alliance. The

schools@one darlington model is timely; it could be described and even dismissed as simply a pragmatic and expedient response to current systemic challenges, using the Government's preferred structural solution of acadamisation. Where schools@onedarlington moves beyond pragmatic opportunism, is a commitment that predate 2010, to democratic, ethical ideals and practice, in good times and bad.

Factors commonly associated with supporting effective collaboration include, a common ethos; trust, honesty, respect, openness; a sense of joint ownership, with different views taken into account.

The Darlington model of collaboration relies heavily on a balance between the moral imperative of Head teachers, Principals and other senior leaders, the director and elected Members to do the right things and guided by well-established, agreed principles, to doing things right, in the common interest of the whole community. There is unwillingness among the majority to promote self-interest over others. Shared values, history and purpose have essentially become the Darlington way.

A Principal of an outstanding College and Executive Head of a Primary School in Darlington is a signatory to the schools@one pledge, she joined Darlington Local Authority twenty years ago. She is from the locality, but moved back from London following her father's illness. The College is an outstanding school by all measures.

Examples of schools@onedarlington in action, provided by this principal and others included; Darlington's discretionary home to school transport policy and its impact on historic patterns of school admissions, which when the Council needed to make cuts the schools@one forum picked up. Another Principal having supported the transport proposals despite not actively benefiting

from it, goes on to say that she sees it as her way of “paying back” or at least supporting other schools by making a contribution to the family of schools in Darlington. She has had colleagues support her over changes from which they may not have benefitted directly or immediately, including the building of the Education Village which this leader is the executive head of, and more recently and potentially controversially, her intention to set up a free-school, both of which would have implications for other schools. She felt that supporting the transport policy although it does not help her school directly, is her moral obligation to the wider school community and the values she signed up to as a signatory to schools@onedarlington.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Calls for leadership preparation programmes to develop leadership for social justice abound in the U.S. educational literature, such calls are more nuanced to the point of being muted in mainstream leadership preparation in the UK. The potential for such programmes to shape the identities, behaviours and predispositions of future education leaders across the globe is undeniable. Yet to date there are few guidelines about how to either reform leadership preparation or reconceptualise leadership from a non-western mindset in order to develop the capacities needed for social justice and educating global citizens. This requires a move away from the reductionist view of leadership preparation to a narrow focus on managerial competences focused on developing an even narrower view of what constitutes knowledge.

Before a review of leadership preparation, there needs to be an ethic of conviction and some consensus among educators and policy makers about the fundamental purpose of education, and

therefore what functions we need schools and school leaders to provide, the entitlement of every child through the schooling process, with due regard to their background (not regardless of, as usually stated) and therefore what kind of leadership and professional training is needed to realize the vision.

Most leadership preparation programs in both the US and Britain maintain a colorblind perspective where leadership theories, practices, and curriculum are viewed as neutral and free of cultural perspectives and beliefs. This paper argues for race conscious and culturally conscious leadership development that goes beyond the colorblind approach, develops a critical consciousness about issues of race, identity and belonging, and promotes new leadership approaches borne out of global wisdoms, that foreground considerations such as the importance of culture and context.

Lumby (2006) argues there has been little discussion about social justice-oriented leadership development in England because transformational and distributed leadership approaches tend to dominate and homogenize the field. In particular, there is a paucity of research that examines the leadership philosophies and practices of black head teachers and other school leaders of color, how they respond to their unique cultural contexts, and leadership preparation programs that might help nurture and support their self-defined perspectives on leadership.

This colorblind approach (Mabokela and Madsen, 2005) to leadership preparation, where leadership theories, practices, and curriculum are viewed as neutral and free of cultural perspectives and beliefs, characterizes aspiring school leaders as a homogeneous group “where what they do matters more than who they are” (Lumby and Morrison, 2010, p. 5).

There is considerable corollary between the foundations of *Ubuntu* and the increasing prevalence of the system leadership phenomena in education leadership. Within the context of education,

system leadership refers to collaborative approaches to leadership that extend beyond a single school site (Bush, 2007; Highman, Hopkins, & Matthews, 2009). Bush (2007) highlights the utility of the principles of Ubuntu as part of a changing leadership paradigm in schools, and also the need for more research to examine the extent to which *Ubuntu* and other African models of leadership may influence school leadership more broadly.

This approach to school leadership extends beyond Britain to other national contexts as well. In a recent comparative study between a racially diverse English and South African school, Lumby and Heystek (2011) found that white leaders at both schools ignored issues of race and that recent dramatic demographic changes appeared to have little impact on how the leaders viewed themselves and exclusionary practices in their schools. The authors conclude that leadership development programs should encourage aspiring leaders to reflect on their identities.

Ubuntu

(Zulu/Xhosa pronunciation: [ùbùnt'ù]; English: /u'bu:ntu:/ oo-buun-too) or "uMunthu" (Chichewa) and "Botho" (Setswana) is a southern African ethic or humanist philosophy focusing on people's allegiances and relations with each other. Some believe that ubuntu is a classical African philosophy or worldview whereas others point out that the idea of ubuntu is a philosophy or worldview developed in written sources during the second half of the 1900s. The word ubuntu has its origins in the Bantu languages of southern Africa.

What difference does it make to the situation of the majority of the group that black teachers are supposed to represent, if the training and professional socialisation those black teachers receive, the institutional culture of which they become a part and the systems and processes they operate are identical to that of their white counterparts? (Ogbu, 2004)

My proposition is that the pleas for more black people to be represented in senior leadership positions and to be among the decision makers in public institutions particularly in schools and

children's services should be accompanied by the determination to embrace their additionally and enable us to recreate (where needed) different ways of leading from indigenous globalised wisdoms on leadership. The Harper Bell story in Birmingham exemplifies what can happen when Black leaders step from under the White gaze of the system.

CONCLUSION

“System leadership arises when political leaders and school leaders openly debate and agree on the moral purpose of education, that is, the kind of people that education creates for what kind of society; and then work in partnership to agree and to implement both the means by which such purposes can be realised in practice and the criteria by which success in such an endeavour is to be judged.” (Hargreaves, 2007)

Whether we are examining the kind of regeneration of Birmingham schools being led by black leaders in that city or the kind of school improvement being led by white leaders in schools@onedarlington, both emerging school-led models of system improvement have benefitted from global conceptualisations of leadership and in particular the deeply resonating principles of Ubuntu. The system leaders who are collaborating in developing their version of system leadership for their respective contexts have all said of the process, “the journey itself adds to our humanity” Like the concept of Ubuntu defined below, these models of system leadership are predicated on people coming together and acting in the common interests of the community, the children and families they serve and of which they are a part.

This summary review of their practices found that the very aspects of the structure that may make the model appear potentially vulnerable made the model in fact strong and resilient. The interviews conducted for the purpose of the full review were littered with references to the power of leading through influence, underpinned by trust and respectful relationships, rather than relying on formal or statutory processes. Equally important to the sustainability of these models was comfort with interdependence and developing consensus about the purpose of systems.

Essentially the academy programme has created hundreds of independent school units. In a locality such as Darlington, where the majority of schools have this independence, the freedoms that the Secretary of State has built into the system, coupled with diminishing resources could have moved schools, culturally, ideologically and practically away from collaboration towards competition. However, the converse has been the case in Darlington, where custom, practice and culture over time has been towards collaboration, partnership and inter-dependence. All Heads were mindful that with independence and autonomy came exposure and vulnerability, and in these times, the instinct can be to gravitate towards being a part of a greater whole, if only initially, to provide a greater chance of survival. The principles of Ubuntu foreground the importance of the survival of the community.

The fact that the Head teachers and Principals in Darlington and elsewhere are increasingly electing to use their freedom to collaborate in the interests of the greater good to which they feel connected, owes much to what has become over time an incorporation of global wisdoms and principles of sustainability and social justice, into the instrumental logic of the day.

Collaborative activity is often equated with good or positive change and this was certainly perceived to be the case by those leaders who took part in the review. However, evidence was also

provided of the very real practical challenges and tensions of establishing, leading and importantly, sustaining collaboration and partnership.

One such challenge is the perceived dichotomy between government policies that on the one hand promotes 'autonomous institutions collaborating with each other' (DfE, 2010). While on the other hand creates operational and financial obstacles to making collaboration work.

Innovative, proactive and hopeful, both sets of leaders have taken some chances and achieved some big system wins, in areas that are vitally important to the children in the communities they serve, at a time of colossal system change.

A theme running through this paper was the importance of narrative and the gift that some leaders had or developed enabling them not only to see the bigger future picture, but forcefully persuade, inspire and influence others of the merits of working as system leaders in the common interest.

Their authority to lead remains essentially informal, but none the less, hugely powerful, their influence is key in changing the consciousness of what is possible and by what means. This way of being will continue to change the face as well as the heart of leadership. A truly matures do resilient, system-led global model of leadership for schools is within our grasp.

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