When the walls have fallen: Socially just leadership in post-traumatic times

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Abstract

Although educational researchers and theorists accept that there is a degree of ambiguity and uncertainty endemic to organizational life, school leaders in democratic countries tend to address issues through the use of strategies structured to take place within a stable environment. However, many would argue that such stability is a false perception. Traumatic events can occur at any time and at any place. Every country might one day find itself having to cope with the after-effects of colonialism, conquest, conflict or catastrophe. This article describes the impact of traumatic events upon the decision-making processes of school leaders. Specifically, it describes the ways in which personal value systems influence how school leaders attend to appropriate, diligent and socially just responsibilities following a traumatic event. The purpose of this article is to identify and examine possible future strategies for a socially just school leader when confronted with an unanticipated and demanding environment.

Keywords: *Socially just leadership; post-catastrophe education; post-conflict continuum; Organizational Post-Traumatic Disorder*

Introduction

Although educational researchers and theorists accept that there is a degree of ambiguity and uncertainty endemic to organizational life, school leaders in democratic countries tend to address issues through the use of strategies, which are structured to take place within a stable environment. Many would argue that such stability is a false perception, with various discriminations and cultural maladaptation roiling beneath the surface. Nonetheless, schools are generally considered to be institutions nested inside wider educational systems, guided by laws, regulations and policies, and serving a commonly accepted societal purpose. The role of the school leader, then, is to maintain due diligence over the daily operations of the institution within such a seemingly stable and predictable environment.

There is a growing understanding that this "due diligence" is not exercised in a moral or political vacuum. The work of school leaders is seen to occur under the influence and guidance of personal belief and value systems (Starratt, 2004). What is less well understood are the ways in which these personal value systems influence and interact with the appropriate and diligent responsibilities of a school leader following a traumatic event. The purpose of this article is to identify and examine how such events might be defined, and to suggest possible strategies that might be implemented by a socially just school leader.

The article is organized into five sections. The first section describes the importance of education within a post-traumatic environment based upon data gathered from four specific traumatizing contexts. Then a conceptual framework for the article is presented, along with the provision of definitional nuances of trauma and a discussion of aspects of the relief-to-development reconstruction continuum. The third section analyses the ways in which certain major legislative influences guide and determine the behaviour of school leaders in times of response to a traumatic event and introduces the concept of Organizational Post-Traumatic Disorder (OPTD). This leads to the description of a three-factor model for psychosocial analysis (Goddard & Martineau, 2014) that can guide the role of school leaders when responding to the ramifications of a major traumatic event. In the fourth section, a number of possible strategic actions are presented and discussed.

Education following a traumatic event

How to lead a school community following a traumatic event is not something usually studied in educational administration, management, and leadership graduate programmes. This is unfortunate because, as Earthman (2013) points out, such events can occur at any time, in any place, and for any reason. In a review of recent research trends in the area of post-disaster reconstruction (Yi & Yang, 2014), education merits only a passing mention. Discussing the need for an integrated developmental approach, Yi and Yang (2014) note that "building and infrastructure development issues should be tackled in a connected way, with considerations of urban planning, energy supply, economic development, education, community building and social welfare aspects" (p. 28). However, research indicates that the frequency of serious natural traumatic events is likely to increase at an exponential rate due to increases in human density (Gomez & Hart, 2013). As schools are located so as to best serve human populations, it follows that there will be more schools in areas prone to the effects of these natural traumatic events. Therefore, schools need to be aware of the increased likelihood of their being affected by a major event. Fortunately, "it is not necessary to experience a crisis or disaster in order to learn how to react to it" (Earthman, 2013, p. 40) and it behoves all school leaders to develop their own knowledge and expertize regarding their personal and organizational reactions to such extreme situations.

However, it is crucial to recognize that not all natural traumatic events are of the same nature. Indeed, it has been observed that "the differences that appear between disasters and catastrophes can be especially seen at the organizational, community and societal levels" (Quarantelli, 2006, n.p.). The understanding that catastrophes require different kinds of planning and managing than do disasters is further illustrated through examples later in this article.

It is also useful to recognize that over the past 50 years or so, since the end of the Second World War, the focus has shifted from short-term quick responses to a particular traumatic event taking place in a specific time and space to consideration of what is now considered "an aberrant disruption of social structures and the social system" (Letukas & Barnshaw, 2008, p. 1063). Concurrently, theorists have moved from examining the immediate aftermath of an event to contemplating the impacts of "longer-term individual, organizational and community social change …occurring across time and space" (p. 1063). Unfortunately, this movement to longer-term thinking has been counter-balanced by urban planning notions of a "'disposable' built environment" (Gomez & Hart, 2013, p. 275) where the purpose of architectural design is to preserve life while not necessarily worrying about maintaining the functionality of buildings and infrastructure during and after an event.

Types of disruptive event

For the purposes of this article, four global contexts are identified as the source of traumatic events that have the potential to affect the equilibrium of schools. Three of these contexts are commonly found in the literature.

Post-colonial context

This occurs when a subjected people emerge from domination by virtue of political independence or acceptance of indigeneity and aboriginal rights. The intergenerational impacts of colonialism reverberate among many indigenous peoples. Nineteenth century arrangements, such as the numbered treaties in western Canada or the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand, are honoured more in rhetoric than in fact. The Māori of New Zealand and the First Nations of Canada continue to exist in a socio-political and economic world, which frequently offers little, but ornamental recognition of the continued impact of past practice on current circumstances. Others, such as many African, South American and Pacific Island nations, strive to establish

identities which cross colonial borders and recognize ancient linguistic and cultural lineages. No matter what the specific context, the stormy waves of post-colonialism buffet the surface equanimity of dominant culture schools in many different ways. According to Adeola and Picou (2014), research has shown that

> subcultural ethnic groups … with prior traumatic life experiences such as exposure to war, concentration camps, and extreme prejudice and discrimination are more likely to display mental health problems, or exhibit symptoms related to acute stress disorder (ASD) or post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following exposure to various catastrophic events. (p. 125)

This would appear to suggest a multiplier effect, where prior exposure 'softens the psyche' and prepares the individual for an enhanced reaction to new traumatic events.

Post-conflict context

This exists after an external intervention by force, and/or an internal insurgency between elements of the state, that leads to the disintegration of a state into several discrete entities. The situation in Rwanda is a post-conflict context, for example, as are many of the countries of the Balkans. It seems to me that we need to rethink not only the type of educational development we undertake in such contexts but also the philosophies underlying that work. To start with, perhaps we should revisit the idea of the post-conflict continuum.

Conflict, itself, exists on a continuum. Some countries experience conflict in only one part of the nation state, or between only particular sub-groups of citizens. In others, the conflict embroils the whole population and may even cross national borders due to the engagement of cultural kinship groups whose traditional territories cross contemporary state lines.

Where educational reform takes place in a post-conflict environment, the roles of educational leaders in schools, and in policy-areas such as those controlled by a Ministry of Education, are changing as these countries transition from one state (often fairly dictatorial) to another (nominally more democratic) state. The layers of cultural, linguistic, religious, gender and other identities impact this transitional process, which is further exacerbated when there is a post-conflict dimension to the policy environment.

Post-catastrophe context

This happens when an extreme climatic or other event occurs with little or no warning, and results in major damage to the physical, social and economic infrastructures of the state. Recent earthquakes in China, Haiti and New Zealand are examples of catastrophic events, as are Hurricane Katrina in the United States, the tsunamis in the Indian Ocean and Japan, and Cyclone Pam in the Pacific Islands.

It is recognized here that not all natural hazards are, in fact, exclusively natural. The impact of the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, for example, was exacerbated by shoddy construction practices, which had left schools structurally unsafe and subject to collapse (Ng & Sim, 2015). The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 was especially deadly to tourists and those residents who had been relocated from mountainous inland regions; neither group had knowledge of how to recognize or respond to the early signs of a tsunami. For many researchers, it is apparent that large-scale catastrophes "are now beginning to be recognized as the combined result of human activity and the natural environment" (Green & Petal, 2008, p. 225).

Post-conquest context

To these three situations, I would add a fourth. It is an extension of the post-conflict context, but one recognizing that after a certain period it may be wrong to talk about a post-conflict environment even though people are still suffering from the after-effects of that conflict.

In the post-conquest context, the circumstances are such that a specific and identifiable group has been forced into exile, with no expectation of return in the foreseeable future. For example, there are

numerous long-term refugee populations all over the world, with one of the longest lasting situations being the 12 camps in Lebanon which opened in 1948 and host almost half a million Palestinian refugees (United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), 2014). In Kenya, the Da'daab refugee camp was established in 1991 with an expectation that it would host up to 90,000 people. Today, it is still operational with a population of over 350,000 refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2012). It is difficult to imagine the day when these populations will be able to return home. Furthermore, it is also difficult to imagine what they will experience should such a return take place, for their country will no doubt have changed immeasurably in the period they have been gone. Issues of right of return, and the concomitant focus on educational questions, such as what curriculum should be followed in the camps, what might be the language of instruction, and so forth, are different for this group than for those post-conflict populations with an expectation for an early return.

These four global contexts are usually treated independently in the literature. I would suggest that this is a mistake as it simply replicates the silos of contemporary political and organizational structures. In times of trauma, school leaders are expected to manage their schools using policies and procedures developed for 'normal' use within a perceived stable environment. The physical and resource environments of schools are damaged as much by earthquakes or floods as they are by bombs and gunfire. The goals and purposes of educational systems are impacted by all of these traumatic events in strikingly similar ways. Children and adults suffer psychosocial stress and must develop resilience in the face of any one of these experiences.

It is of little surprise, then, that major catastrophic events – no matter how caused – reveal the fault lines which exist within the apparently stable environment of our school systems. Such events remind us that "ethnically, racially, and socially different students have the right to be taught in ways that are culturally responsive to their identities, cultures, and experiences" (Gay, 2007, p. 60). We should remember this not only during periods of stability but also during those times when we are experiencing distress and disruption.

Conceptual framework

This section presents a conceptual framework informed by three definitional statements from Green and Petal (2008). First, all human communities are vulnerable to conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes that increase the susceptibility of the community to the impact of hazards. Second, a disaster represents a serious disruption to the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses, which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources. And third, resilience is the capacity of a system, community or society to adapt to the impact of a traumatic event by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure. These three definitions underlie the following discussion.

Relief to development

The relief-to-development reconstruction continuum is a widely reported and well-documented phenomenon. The focus of post-conflict aid efforts is to follow a sequential approach that ranges from the initial first response of disarmament, and the establishment of a relatively secure environment, to the longer term focus on re-development following the restoration of order and a civil society (Ryscavage, 2003, as cited in Bengtsson, 2011, p. 41). This approach relegates policy and institutional reforms to the end of the continuum, while prioritising the establishment of a secure social environment.

This continuum is theorized as passing through three stages. In the first phase, *relief,* the focus is on immediate and narrowly defined objectives related to physical survival. There is a rush to meet the WASH

standards (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), 2004) by providing safe *water, sanitation and health supplies*, and to place displaced people in temporary *accommodations* or shelters. The policy focus during this period is very short, often measured in weeks or months, and little or no attention is paid to any longer-term needs.

In the second phase, *rehabilitation,* there is a focus on rebuilding damaged infrastructure such as transportation links, hospitals, government buildings, and schools. Many displaced peoples begin to return, and strategies are developed to rehouse them in their homes, to reintegrate them into their communities, and to assist them to return to employment. In some contexts, this transitional period also includes political reform, economic stabilization, and the disarming of combatants.

It is in the third phase, *development*, where sustainable change occurs. The focus here returns to the communities disrupted by the traumatic event and their efforts to make sure the experience is never repeated. In some contexts, this may lead to an emphasis on human rights and the establishment of truth and reconciliation commissions. In others, the emphasis may be on protection of the environment and the introduction of appropriate building codes.

With respect to all of these indices, I would suggest two things. First, that this continuum is an effective way of considering development in any of the four contexts mentioned earlier, and that this should, therefore, be known as a post-event continuum. Second, I would suggest that early intervention is required, and that this must be built into all development processes.

Short term
It is in the period immediately following a traumatic event that many state institutions are in a condition of flux. Once the event has taken place, or the conflict has been resolved, there arises an opportunity to review the needs of the state. As governments grapple to re-establish the physical and communications infrastructure, an opportunity is there to also re-establish the social and educational infrastructures. In most situations, this opportunity is missed or, worse, ignored. It is vital that any consideration of educational initiatives in the context of post-traumatic development begins at the beginning, rather than the end, of the post-event continuum.

One problem with this argument is that it is difficult for rigid bureaucratic organizations to respond effectively to surprise, disruption and dis-continuity. They do not have the adaptability and flexibility needed to respond to uncertainty (Guarnacci, 2012). As a result, responses tend to focus on immediate needs, which are concrete, measurable, visible, and, therefore, easily prioritized. It is recognized that "post-disaster reconstruction is commonly a process requiring intense decision-making based on limited information about complex issues with long term impacts" (Guarnacci, 2012, p. 76) but existing systems do not facilitate long-term planning.

The hierarchies of power and control can result in "silos" of knowledge, with different agencies and individuals acting in isolation. What is required is the establishment of what Miller (2013) has called heterarchical relationship within organizations. These would facilitate "horizontal and vertical linkages among multiple players … [in order to] ensure the sharing of resources, information and outcomes" (Guarnacci, 2012, p. 81). I would suggest that it is imperative that such structural adjustments are made before a traumatic event occurs, and that we examine and critique existing systems during periods of relative stability rather than during the intensity of an aftermath.

Development and local realities
It is important that post-event development efforts recognize the local realities in a way that also meets the accountability needs of the government. Too often response initiatives are imported from other parts of the country, or from external donors, and reflect the priorities and expertize of the outsider. Although

monitoring and evaluation of reconstruction efforts are to be expected and welcomed, care must be taken to ensure that the actual work being undertaken is designed and implemented in full partnership with the local community. There are three compelling reasons to support such an approach.

First, Kretzmann and McKnight's (1988) work in Asset-Based Community Development is predicated on the notion that it is more effective to measure a community by its strengths rather than its weaknesses. All too often the negative aspects or *deficits* of a community are the focus of any assessment. In recognizing that such deficits exist in any community, however, it is both conceptually healthier and pragmatically more effective to focus on the *assets* of a place, and to build on those strengths when developing strategies for implementation.

Second, we must consider the totality of the environment within which people live. Individuals do not live in a contextual vacuum isolated from each other, but in a community where they are in constant interaction with other people. In her work with refugee students who relocate to Canada, Stewart (2011) notes that "three far-reaching categories of challenges – namely, racism and discrimination, psychosocial issues, and educational challenges – illustrate the numerous and often insurmountable barriers and obstacles for many of the students who have come from countries of conflict" (p. 108). Similar categories of challenge face students who emerge from traumatic events of all kinds, not just from post-conflict contexts.

Third, we should consider the notion of "prismatic" societies, "where post-colonial and indigenous values exist side-by-side in the same culture and in organizations" (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008, p. 72). Cautioning us not to stereotypically assume that all members of a community are the same, given that often pockets of relative wealth and privilege exist alongside pockets of poverty within the same community, they address the traditional/modern dichotomy which is found in many world communities. We should also remember that "institutions based on modern values (such as schools) exist throughout the developing world, but the values embedded in them do not simply replace long-standing traditional ones" (p.72). In the early decades of the 21st century, we are experiencing an unparalleled movement of people around the world. Many bring their 'old' ways to the new country and such beliefs and value systems become part of the ethno-cultural fabric of the schools their children attend.

Taken together, these three compelling reasons suggest a need for socially just leadership that responds to such events in a deliberative manner. Responses to immediate concerns are constructed within an understanding of the longer-term needs of the affected institutions and systems, and are grounded in the local realities of the community where the trauma was experienced.

Discussion

In this article, it is understood that socially just leadership requires the treatment of people with respect. It requires people in positions of power and authority to use these for the collective good, even if this requires them to put the needs of individuals ahead of the diktats of policy. With respect to the work of socially just school leaders, then, policy should be seen as having a guiding function rather than being directive and absolute.

In accepting that "the role of the school leader is paramount to the process of guiding change and for creating a socially just system" (Stewart, 2011, p. 281), it is implicit that the behaviour of school leaders must be responsive to external or contextual conditions. In the normally – and I would suggest, falsely – accepted state of organizational stability within which school leaders operate, various externally-generated laws, policies, regulations and procedures guide or direct the school leader in his or her interactions with a number of key stakeholder groups. Every educational jurisdiction has an Education or School Act of some sort, and schools are also subject to the local equivalencies of a Child Welfare Act, Workplace Health and Safety Regulations, Employment Standards, and so forth.

When the school leader is faced with a major disruptive event, the same relationships continue to exist. However, the rhythm of response may be impacted for the school leader has to deal with the reality of the disruption. As argued in the previous section, such actions must be conducted in a deliberative manner.

School leader behaviour

The major laws and regulations that guide and determine the behaviour of school leaders are enacted through filters which influence school leader interactions with key stakeholders. The response of the socially just school leader to disruptive circumstances is not driven by rote. It is a nuanced response taking into account two specific considerations. These are, first, a personal ethical understanding of the role (e.g., Starratt, 1995, 2004; Woods, 2004). Such an understanding conflates morals, values and beliefs into a code of conduct, which reflects an individually constructed understanding of the ethical self. This, in a sense, is the 'why' of behaviour. Second, the conceptual and experiential knowledge of the individual is codified into an understanding of 'how' certain interventions should and ought to work.

A major traumatic event throws the day-to-day operations of a school into turmoil. In such circumstances, it is important that the long-term psychosocial health of children and staff is considered when making such decisions. It may be that a rush to "return to normal" is not helpful in terms of building resilience to traumatic events. Such resilience can be either individual or collective in nature (Wilson, 2013). It is important for school leaders to try to move forward in both aspects when helping to facilitate resilience in their schools.

Organizational Post-Traumatic Disorder (OPTD)

A large-scale disruptive event has an adverse impact not only on the individual school leader but also on the system within which she or he is working. Such a major disruption at a system level can lead to what I have termed Organizational Post-Traumatic Disorder (OPTD) (Goddard, 2015), which emerges from the chaotic aftermath of a significant and traumatic event, and is reflected in relationships and behaviours amongst students, staff and community members. Contributing to OPTD may be one incident clearly bounded in time and space or, alternatively, a series of events cumulative over time.

This period is characterized by a lack of timely and accurate information about what is happening. Communication systems, such as telephones and the Internet, may be compromised (Hayes, 2011), and careful information management is required (Gilmore & Larson, 2011). Further, organizations are likely to be affected by staff related issues. Reflecting on the Christchurch earthquake, for example, Kuntz, Näswall and Bockett (2013) noted "a trend where employees were engaged with their work in the initial earthquake aftermath, but over time have become increasingly disengaged" (p. 57). Hayes (2011) reported from one post-secondary institution that materials were left locked in offices for extended periods as buildings remained closed due to safety concerns, and that "months after the quake, most lecturing staff do not have their own office to work from and many lecture blocks remain unusable" (p. 135). These circumstances place the institution itself in a state of OPTD.

Psychosocial analysis

Major traumatic events impact not only organizations but also individuals and communities. As such, they may appear overwhelming to educational systems and to school leaders. It is in such circumstances that the three-factor model for psychosocial analysis (Goddard & Martineau, 2014) provides a framework for examining the role of school leaders. The model is proposed as a means to analyse how school leaders might cope with contextual instability caused by OPTD in their schools.

The three factors considered in this model are motivation, academic achievement, and identity. Drawing on a wide range of literature (Goddard & Martineau, 2015), a number of indices are identified for

each factor. *Motivation* includes motivation to learn, self-regulation, work attitudes, and a consideration of the potential impacts of radical social and environmental change. *Academic achievement* in this context is a self-referential process, which focuses on personal growth rather than competitive achievement results. *Identity* refers to matters of social engagement, marginalization, racism and discrimination, and democratic (civic) engagement in one's society.

These factors must be considered in light of the damage to social networks and social capital, both individual and collective, which emerges from post-traumatic contexts. School leaders must include these factors in their planning for responding to traumatic events. Such actions help to build the collective and individual resiliency discussed by Wilson (2013) and will help the educational system recover more rapidly from a major event.

Potential actions

In this section, some possible strategic actions are presented and discussed. These are grouped into five categories and are placed in a roughly chronological sequence, although it is recognized that such conceptual clarity is not always achieved in practice. The categories presented reference the need for analysis, early intervention, leader action, systemic responses to the event, and caution. The article then concludes with a summary section and a reiteration of the need for socially just leadership at all times.

Analysis of education

When we consider the context of education in a post-traumatic event situation, whether it is emerging from conflict, colonialism, conquest or catastrophe, we can use in our analysis six criteria developed by Phillips and Schweisfurth (2008). Each criterion has a number of indicators, which, when taken together, help us to assess the health of the school and, by extension, of the community it serves.

The first criterion is the *demographic* context. Indicators here include cultural and racial diversity; birth and mortality rates; teen pregnancy rates; numbers of immigrants to the community, whether these are intra-national (i.e., inter-provincial, rural-urban migration) or international in nature; and school enrolment, retention and graduation rates.

Second, the analysis should include indices of the *economic* context. For example, the income levels within the community, the amount of funding available to spend on schools and staff, and the ability to offer extra-curricular activities to all students in the school. A related third context is the *resources* of the system. This includes the availability of funds to pay teachers, the level of qualification of staff attracted to the area, the pupil to teacher ratio, and the degree to which teachers and/or staff members need to hold second jobs in order to maintain their lifestyle.

A fourth area for analysis is the context of *health*. Here a school leader ought to know the extent to which illness, hunger, HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, and an overall inability to learn are impacted by adverse health conditions in the community served by the school. A related fifth context is that of *violence*, where absences due to court appearances can have a negative impact on the continuity of schooling. Similarly, the education of students who have to miss school due to persistent bullying, periods of hospitalization or dislocation from the community also suffers.

The sixth dimension is the *cultural* context. This includes such indices as traditional (indigenous) versus modern (imported) values, family attitudes towards the education of girls, and required absences from school due to the need for the student to attend initiation rites, hunting camps, and so forth.

Of course, we must be cautious in our analysis. We must not stereotypically assume that all members of a particular community are the same, for pockets of relative wealth and privilege can coexist in the same community alongside pockets of poverty. It is important that any community analysis examines all aspects

of that community, for the socially just school leader "must make choices and in so doing they must look to be guided by the necessity to protect the disadvantaged, the minorities who will never have a powerful voice in the instrumental democratic system" (Lumby & Coleman, 2007, p. 82).

Need for early intervention

Once the analysis is completed, action should be taken in a prompt manner. In a post-traumatic event context, four areas where early intervention would lead to a more robust and sustainable program of educational reform are: programme (curriculum); people (human resources); physical infrastructure (buildings); and policy (governance).

Programme: The contestation of curriculum is a common outcome of conflict. An early intervention to review the taught curriculum and to revise this on factual grounds, particularly with respect to history and religion, is crucial. The curriculum can also be expanded to include a focus on post-conflict living, teaching those skills not learned in a home at war. Interventions, including conflict resolution strategies, 'how to play' workshops, and the importance of resilience, are all useful here.

People: An investment in human resources should be a second priority for early intervention. Many teachers are forced to flee during a conflict and are replaced by local volunteers, most of whom lack formal credentials. Once the region enters the post-conflict phase, such individuals are considered by the state to be "unqualified" or "under-qualified" teachers. The number of qualified teachers is a metric often cited by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and imposed as part of a wider quest to raise educational standards. Rather than just investing in new teachers, a focus on the professional development and rapid credentialing of the 'unqualified' teachers would help allay this situation.

Physical infrastructure: The third area of intervention, physical infrastructure, is often given a higher priority than the others. Donor organizations appear to prefer the clearly achievable metric of construction – new buildings are erected, classrooms suffering war damage are repaired, and so forth. It is easier to count and report these structural renovations than it is to navigate the nuances of a contested curriculum, or determine the needs of an unqualified but experienced teacher.

Policy: The governance of education in a post-conflict society is an area mired in political, economic and regulatory difficulty. Although educational policies and regulations exist, there is usually a need to revise these to reflect the new regime. For political reasons, this adjustment process is required to show immediate effect, but for these changes to be sustainable they must be carefully considered and strategically developed.

I contend that such efforts should take place at the *beginning* of the post-event continuum rather than at the end, as is so often now the case. However, readers must also recognize that these are priorities I have identified and, as such, these must be seen in the light of all my biases, beliefs, and understandings of what constitutes effective educational development. Sadly, this self-awareness is not always present.

Actions of school leaders

Santos (2014) has argued that there are five important things to consider when working in fragile states. These are to recognize the kind of fragility which is being experienced, to understand the local context, to consult and engage with the community, to ensure that all participant individuals and organizations share a common sense of purpose, and to develop local frameworks for action which integrate international best practices and strategies. I would suggest that these same five considerations must undergird the actions of school leaders in any post-traumatic event context.

A major review of literature conducted by Ng and Sim (2015) found that the provision of social support is associated with psychosocial health and often offers a buffer in times of stress. Social support enhances self-efficacy and this, in turn, improves an individual's ability to cope with stress. The role of

the school leader is multifaceted in such circumstances. Johnson and Ronan (2014) found that "responsive curricular activities could provide elements of psychosocial mediation after disasters. Providing accurate information and knowledge about a traumatic event has been found to reduce anxiety and distress in both children and adults" (p. 1077). School leaders can also use their social and political capital to press for curriculum change, as researchers such as Green and Petal (2008) have stressed the need to infuse "risk awareness and risk reduction education into curricula" (p. 249) through such initiatives as textbook revision, pre-service teacher training materials, in-service activities, and professional development programmes.

Systemic responses

It is in the period following a major traumatic event that systemic responses are often found lacking. The major problem here, perhaps, is that in periods of assumed organizational stability little or no focus is given to pre-catastrophe planning. Ng (2011) notes that it is the "so-called software aspect of reconstruction that is more difficult to resolve, as professional training and education require a lengthy period of preparation and supervision" (p. 22). Such training is seldom offered in a proactive, rather than reactive, manner.

Concerned that the effects of a major traumatic event can lead to "psychoemotional conditions [which] are not conducive to successful social adjustment and academic achievement", Gay (2007) observes that there is a "need for educational interventions that deal simultaneously with the social, psychological, emotional, intellectual, academic, cultural, and interpersonal competencies of both the displaced students and their peers and teachers in the receiving schools" (p. 56). Again, these interventions must take place in a planned and deliberative manner, which requires pre-event consideration.

In a review of the educational system following the Christchurch earthquake, Johnson and Ronan (2014) concluded that, "communities would benefit from teachers being better equipped to provide emotional support and responsive disaster education to children after disasters" (p. 1087). Such interventions, however, require cross-sector collaboration, which includes the "public, private, education and civic sectors through platforms such as disaster risk reduction task forces" (Green & Petal, 2008, p. 264). Such collaborations cannot take place in a contextual vacuum. They must be part of a systemic approach that includes planning, implementation and evaluation of risk identification and risk mitigation strategies.

A word of caution

The stresses felt by those who experience a traumatic event have been described in detail here. It must also be remembered that those who are called to assist the recovery process from such events often experience stressors of their own. Campo-Flores (2006, as cited in Gay, 2007) has noted the danger of 'compassion fatigue', which is that "emotional overload or exhaustion suffered by helpers in tragic events and, being traumatized by their own efforts to emphasize [sic.] with the victims" (Gay, 2007, p. 55). Those who have leadership positions in a post-traumatic event context must maintain vigilance to ensure that the needs of helpers are met as compassionately and effectively as are the needs of victims.

Summary and conclusions

The actions of socially just school leaders take place under the influence of, and desire for, what Escobar (2012) calls 'collective wellbeing' or *buen vivir*. Escobar argues that there are social, economic, political and ecological dimensions to social justice as practiced at the community level. This understanding permeates the situations presented here.

Many authors have warned about the dangers of trying to explain similar events in different countries as being the same, and have stressed the importance of context. That said, I believe that the four specific traumatizing contexts presented here result in a degree of similarity such that some conformities of effect between them can be postulated.

It is crucial that planning for recovery from traumatic events takes place during periods of perceived organizational stability. It is in moving from a "relief-centric response to disaster risk reduction and prevention" (Green & Petal, 2008, p. 225) that this planning will help alleviate the degree to which organizational post-traumatic disorder impacts schools. The planning process must proactively engage multiple elements of the community, so that "emergency-affected community members actively participate in assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the education programme" (INEE, 2004, p. 15). The development of heterarchical relationships (Miller, 2013) will ensure that "local community resources are identified, mobilized and used to implement education programmes and other learning opportunities" (INEE, 2004, p. 18).

Further, it must be recognized that the impact of these events will affect different sub-populations differently, and that some are more susceptible to post-traumatic stress disorder than others. In considering this diversity of populations, it must be remembered that sometimes 'diversity' is "a shorthand phrase concealing highly contested understandings" (Lumby & Coleman, 2007, p. 19) where "people are not only perceived as 'different'; some of them are seen as lesser than others" (p. 21). Socially just school leaders must work diligently to ensure that each population served by the school is treated with equity and respect.

Catastrophic events can occur at any time and at any place. There is no country totally immune from having to cope with the after-effects of colonialism, conquest, conflict or catastrophe. In this article, I have argued that the work of socially just school leaders is mediated by the influence and guidance of their personal belief and value systems. Examples of ways in which these personal value systems influence and interact with the appropriate and diligent responsibilities of a school leader or other educational leader following a traumatic event have been presented. Through the identification and examination of how such events might be defined, possible strategies for implementation by a socially just school leader have been presented for consideration.

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