

The Role of Values in Defining School Leadership – A Jamaican Perspective

Mairette Newman

University of Technology, Jamaica

Abstract

The view that values play a crucial role in how principals conceptualise and interpret school leadership is not new. However, very little of the research underpinning this view has been conducted in developing countries. Drawing on qualitative case study research into how principals in Jamaica conceptualise school leadership, this paper explores the role of values in informing and guiding the leadership decisions and practices of four exemplary high school principals. It identifies care and respect, social justice and excellence as powerful influences on how they defined, interpreted and enacted school leadership and argues that these values superseded policy and accountability issues.

Introduction

In recent years those writing about educational leadership have highlighted the role of values in underpinning approaches to school leadership (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley, & Beresford, 2000; Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin & Collarbone, 2003; Law, Walker & Dimmock, 2003; Moos, Mahony & Reeves, 1998; National College for School Leadership, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1992). Debate about the nature and direction of these values revolves around tensions between what principals value and what policy-makers and others involved in the educational process value. Grace (1995) argues that among British principals, government's managerial, market-dominated values compete with principals' more humanistic, socially democratic values. Wright (2001, 2003) contests that in a climate where values are defined not at the local level by principals themselves but at the political level, principals are engaged in 'bastard leadership'. This paper discusses the extent to which values enter into conceptualisations of school leadership among selected high school principals in Jamaica.

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The original research, from which this paper is drawn, adopted a qualitative, collective case-study design and used grounded theory methods of data analysis to describe and analyse how four exemplary principals working in urban high schools in Jamaica, conceptualise and experience leadership. The findings reported in this paper focus on the personal and professional values that underpinned their conceptualisations of leadership. In particular, the paper focuses on two questions:

- What are the substantive values that inform the principals' understanding of school leadership?
- How do they affirm these values in their leadership practice?

Beginning with a description of the study's design and methodology, the paper explores the values of care and respect, social justice and excellence as the common, dominant values that gave meaning and order to school leadership for the selected principals. It argues that these values consistently superseded policy and accountability issues. In closing, the paper considers the extent to which these values will continue to act as powerful influences in a policy environment that increasingly elevates a managerial approach to school leadership that is predominantly 'performance-driven and results-oriented' (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1999, p.6).

Methodology

'Research questions are inevitably theoretically informed' (Silverman, 2000, p.76). The larger study from which this paper is drawn focussed on how Jamaican high school principals understand and engage in school leadership; this made symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 1998; Forte, 2001) an appropriate theoretical framework for informing the design and methodology. The overall focus of this paper on the underlying values that support the principals' meanings and practices is in keeping with the prominence that symbolic interaction gives to interpretation and the 'active part' that individuals take, 'in the cause of their own action' (Charon, 1998, p.28). Guided by the assumptions underpinning symbolic interaction the study adopted a qualitative, collective case-study design as defined by Merriam (1988, 1998) and Stake (1995).

Sampling

In order to identify 'information-rich cases' (Patton, 1990, p.169) and optimise selection of exemplary principals, a purposeful sampling strategy was used. Nomination of participants was based on consultation with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture's six regional directors. Selection criteria were negotiated and included: evidence of dramatic and sustained improvement within the school community; receptivity to recent reform initiatives; wide acknowledgement amongst professional peers of their effectiveness; a minimum of two years' experience as principal in a government-owned urban high school; and current appointment as principal in an urban high school. Four exemplary high school principals were selected such that gender, school location and organization were varied.

Participants

The final sample included one male and three females, with experience in the principalship ranging from two to twenty-four years. All, except one, were in their first post and had served as vice-principals at their current schools before being appointed principals. None had teaching responsibilities. Two principals worked in all-girls schools and two in co-educational schools in urban centres located in the western and south – central areas of the island as well as the Kingston metropolitan area. Although all principals in the study worked in the public system their schools' origins and histories were markedly different. One, a Trust school founded almost 275 years ago, became part of the public system from as early as 1920; two Roman Catholic Church schools, founded in 1925 and 1948, were incorporated into the public system in 1959 and 1958 respectively; and the fourth, a government institution established in 1979, gained high school status in 1988.

Data Collection and Analysis

To gain insight into how principals conceptualise and experience leadership this study collected data from four sources: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation sessions, integrative diagrams; and school, principal and official Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture documents. Consistent with its symbolic interaction framework, the study adopted a constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis. Data were analysed using Strauss and Corbin's (1990)

grounded theory modes of analysis, specifically the systematic processes referred to as open and axial coding. Mindful of Merriam's (1998) position that collective case study research demands analysis at two levels, the study engaged in both within-and cross-case analyses. This analytic process led to findings being presented at two levels: description and interpretation of individual cases followed by abstraction and interpretation across cases. In the first instance, data were presented as four individual cases. Each case provided a portrait of the principal's understanding and practice of leadership and was organised around the major categories and concepts that were generated from data analysis. In addition to analysing the data for each case, cross-case analysis was used to identify patterns that extended beyond the individual cases. The themes and categories between and among cases were compared and contrasted to discover how the principals' perspectives were similar, how they were different and why.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

The validity of qualitative data is addressed by establishing trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Several verification procedures as identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1988), Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) featured in this study: triangulation, member checking, and detailed records of data collection and analysis procedures. Interview responses were compared with data from concept maps, observations and documents. Member checking was employed when transcribed interviews and drafts of cases were returned to the respective principals for validation. To enhance 'dependability and confirmability' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.14) of the findings, NUD*IST 5 (non-numerical unstructured data indexing, searching and theorising; Richards and Richards, 2000) was used to assist with the maintenance of accurate, detailed, comprehensive records. These records constituted an audit trail providing detailed, accurate records of methodological decisions as well as data collection and analysis procedures.

Findings and Discussion

As the role of values in the conceptualization of school leadership among the participants in this study is considered, one participant's comment that, 'School is about life and life doesn't go on without values' serves to contextualise the theme of values-driven leadership. All principals

articulated personal and professional values that informed their understanding of leadership and were observed weaving them into their interactions and leadership practices. The nature of these values, their origins and the ways in which the principals affirmed them, emerged as they described their experiences and discussed their views on education, the role of schools and the purpose of school leadership. The following sections highlight three insights into the relationship between values and leadership among the principals in this study. These insights are as follows:

- The principals' constructions of leadership were defined and driven by values of care, social justice and excellence;
- Although the principals shared common values that influenced the direction for their leadership, these values did not particularise decisions, interactions and practices;
- Their values acted as standards for guiding decisions especially when faced with competing policy demands.

Principals' Dominant Values

The principals' individual conceptualisations of leadership sprung from a blend of personal and professional values. In particular, care, social justice and excellence emerged as dominant values that guided their understanding and practice of leadership. The following table presents the principals' dominant values and displays exemplar quotes drawn from the interview data that encapsulate their value commitments.

Table 1
Principals' Value Commitments

	Norma Wilson	Sr. Margaret Russell	Kenton Edwards	Audrey Grant
Care and Respect	<i>Is raw diamonds I have; I just have to polish them . I have no doubt in my mind that they like me and they know I love them.</i>	<i>Unless you respect persons you're not valuing their opinions ... so you will not get very far with growth as a school. Respect is important. I don't know if it's a belief or a value but I still say that every child is teachable. I hate to hear teachers write off children or focus on one because she's bright.</i>	<i>Love is important. When I mention love here I mean love for people, for your staff, for your students. I think if we take a more caring approach we can get good results.</i>	<i>This job means loving people ... you've got to love people, to be close to them. It is important while working with your plan, you have to have a compassionate heart .</i>
Social Justice	<i>I figure this is my work for the country - these children have good minds but they have poor circumstances. We must educate people in the ghetto from the parents right up. If this was a school for rich people's children I would have left long ago.</i>	<i>There's a sense of helplessness - that's one of the things I don't like. Because you know that it is difficult for a child to perform academically and grow and mature in a healthy way in a particular home environment. Sometimes we can help, but sometimes things are just too complex for us.</i>	<i>It [leadership] has to do with a love for people and education because education involves people. You love education because of what it can do for people and because of also your concern for people, poor people in your society.</i>	<i>It's a service we are rendering that we hope ... will change their lives eventually We give scholarships to those who cannot afford to pay for lessons because as educators we know that education is the answer.</i>
Excellence	<i>I tell the girls all the time - we don't aim for mediocrity; we have to aim for excellence so you need to do more than the average. I just want the girls to be the very best they can in everything they do</i>	<i>We don't get the top, top, top students but at the same time there should be more girls getting Grade 1's. I don't like mediocrity in anything at all so excellence is a must.</i>	<i>I am not satisfied with the number of students in a class who are getting below 50. We have been talking about how to improve that. We need to see more classes where all students are getting above 50. Our focus is on chemistry and what can be done to improve the passes and to increase the numbers of students taking it.</i>	<i>'The subject is not just Maths but success. We want you to be successful students and successful citizens'. This is an institution of learning and if students come here and leave as the way they came there would be no purpose for their coming here.</i>

Care and Respect

As the Table 1 indicates, care and respect for individuals emerged as a core value in the principals' conceptualisation of school leadership; as stated by Mrs. Grant, 'If you didn't care about people, you wouldn't stay'. Indeed, it is clear from the exemplar quotes that care and respect for students featured most prominently. Mr. Edwards stated, 'I like to know students are taken care of', Sr. Margaret declared, 'I hate to hear teachers write off children' and embedded in Mrs. Wilson's repeated reference to students as 'raw diamonds', was a commitment to caring and respecting them. Moreover, care for students extended beyond their academic needs to concern for their total development. Norma Wilson dreamt of a boarding school to increase students' exposure to 'proper training, proper values, take them to church'; Audrey Grant wanted to develop students' 'dignity ... refinement and culture'; and Kenton Edwards focused on strengthening students' identity and building their social capital. Similarly, Sr. Margaret advocated that attention to the development of the whole person was crucial because, 'There is nothing more pathetic than a person who is academically brilliant who is not coping socially or emotionally ... not able to self-guide'. These are a few examples of how caring was manifested through practices that addressed students' total development. In this respect, these principals come close to Mayeroff's (1990) description of the purpose of caring as facilitating growth, self-actualisation and development in others.

Moreover, these principals' understandings of care were not confined to students but included their staff and their communities whom they treated with respect and dignity. Sr. Margaret's emphasis on 'shared vision', 'dialogue' and 'collaboration' and her insistence that, 'Unless you respect persons you're not valuing their opinions and dialogue will not take place' were grounded in her belief that respect for others through ensuring they have a voice, is fundamental to care. Similarly, Audrey Grant's belief in shared leadership and her attitude of giving teachers 'a free reign so they can use their initiative', stem from a care-based perspective. During fieldwork, as I walked with each principal through the school, academic, administrative and ancillary staff members were acknowledged; many were introduced and their special services and contributions to school life were affirmed. Norma Wilson was particularly eager for me to meet the canteen staff and introduced each one by name, singling out Miss Campbell, 'who at 84 has been with us for 50 years'; Kenton Edwards greeted one of his groundsman who had been ill and absent for a period, enquired about his health and added,

'This is a hard worker'. These principals also displayed an intimate knowledge of their colleagues' personal lives, enquiring into family and domestic matters and supporting and encouraging them. Norma Wilson stopped by one teacher's desk to ask if she had succeeded in completing the readings for an assignment she had been trying to write as part of her Masters programme. Both Norma Wilson and Audrey Grant prioritized their attendance at funerals to support staff members who had lost family, over administrative duties. When Audrey Grant invited one of the school's retired teachers to work part-time with the school choir reasoning, 'Some people when they're old if you don't give them something to do they just die. They need to feel useful', she was using an ethic of care to guide her decisions and actions. Like Noddings (1984, 1992) and Lyman (2000) these principals understood caring as a way of relating to people.

The importance the principals attached to treating people with respect and dignity echoes Beck's (1994) position that caring is grounded in a belief that all individuals are worthy of respect. Analysis of the cases also revealed that these four principals subscribed to a protective, nurturing type of caring geared towards helping poor or disadvantaged students and their families to develop their potential and improve their life chances. This perspective aligns with Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1983) conclusion that an important aspect of caring relates to having regard for and treating with respect 'the weakest members' of a community (p.349) and Lyman's (2000) observation that caring leaders cater to individual needs.

Social Justice

Analysis of the cases revealed that as an extension to caring, social justice was also deemed an important value. The collective work of scholars such as Larson and Murtadha (2002), Murphy (2003), Nussbaum (2000), Shields (2003), Strachan (1999) and Thew (2002) suggest four imperatives that characterise a social justice perspective: a caring approach; a view of education as crucial to human growth and development; a belief in students' capacity to succeed in spite of obstacles; and a commitment to reducing inequities.

Leaders who embrace social justice ideals tend to promote care and compassion (Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Lyman, 2000). As illustrated under the secondary theme 'care and respect', all four principals in this study were concerned about the manner in which people were treated.

In addition, they demonstrated an understanding of, compassion for, and commitment to the individuals and groups they served. As a Roman Catholic nun and member of an order whose goal in founding the school is 'education of the economically poor', Sr. Margaret's sensitivity to social justice issues is understandable. Furthermore, her remark that she would not be tempted to relinquish her post at Holy Spirit High where she worked with 'poor working-class parents and their children' to assume a position in a middle-class school community, underscores her commitment to the poor. Similarly, Mrs. Wilson's assertion, 'If this was a school for rich people's children, I would have left long ago' and Mrs. Grant's remark, 'We are here to serve' make clear their dedication to their students, families and communities. Although Kenton Edwards was quick to tell his students that poverty does not justify poor behaviour or indiscipline, he took students' circumstances into account, reminding himself and his teachers, 'This is a poor child, living in poor conditions therefore, we need to understand why he or she is behaving like this'. Taken together, these principals subscribed to a belief in the 'intrinsic worth and value of all individuals and the communities to which they belong' (Furman & Shields, 2003, p.13).

According to Larson and Murtadha (2002) a social justice perspective understands education as key to human growth and development and recognises schools as 'institutions that exist to serve the public good' (p.135). The principals in this study believed education was vital to national development and that as school leaders they had a responsibility to redress social and economic disparities. In particular, they described education as key in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Table 1 shows that three of the four principals explicitly linked social justice and education: Norma Wilson insisted, 'We must educate people in the ghetto from the parents right up'; Kenton Edwards declared, 'You love education because of what it can do for ... poor people in your society' and Audrey Grant asserted, 'Education is the answer'. Two of the principals had offered their schools as resource centres not just to enrolled students but also to poor and disadvantaged groups in the community. At Audrey Grant's school, residents from nearby communities accessed reduced-cost and free tuition on the evening school programme while Sr. Margaret's school accommodated teenage mothers from the local Women's Centre who wished to continue their formal education.

A third characteristic of those who value social justice ideals is an optimistic outlook even in the face of hardship. The principals in this

study communicated an unwavering belief in their students' ability to overcome difficulties and succeed. Norma Wilson expressed her abiding faith in the students' ability to achieve thus: 'The girls are poor but they are bright, they have sharp minds and in spite of their circumstances ... they can achieve'. Although Sr. Margaret admitted to sometimes feeling, 'a sense of helplessness', she believed that being 'passionate about the vision' kept her positive. Even in the face of an increasing 'paralysis' arising from 'a pervasive element of hopelessness ... that questioned the purpose of achieving', Norma Wilson was resolute – 'We can move forward'. Likewise, Kenton Edwards refused to accept a culture of despair, impressing on his staff and students the importance of self-belief: 'I keep on telling my students that they are as good as... they can do as much as'.

Finally, a focus on reducing inequities and attention to issues that limit the individual's capacity to achieve are evidence of an understanding and practice of leadership aligned to social justice theory (Furman & Shields, 2003; Nussbaum, 2000). These case studies revealed that the principals felt morally obliged to reduce social and economic disparities and they actively addressed problems that interfered with or undermined students' potential to succeed. Believing that all students deserve an equal right to stay in school and conscious of the barriers and inequities that limit their capacity to achieve, all four principals in this study introduced special measures for poor or disadvantaged students. These special measures were not restricted to school welfare programmes designed to address material inequities but also included measures to address academic disadvantage and social inequities. For example, at her co-educational school, Audrey Grant introduced the Boys' Day programme and the pilot project with same sex classes in an effort to address low achievement levels among boys – a problem which has led to a serious gender imbalance in Jamaica, particularly at the tertiary level. Margaret Russell and Kenton Edwards also challenged attitudes and responses that reinforced disparities between groups. Sr. Margaret's statement, 'I hate to hear teachers write off children or focus on one because she's bright.' makes clear her belief in the equality of all students and her concern for equal access to knowledge. Similarly, Mr. Edwards' declaration that, 'It all boils down to how our students see themselves. ... the attitudes, the prejudices, how we perceive non-traditional high schools in our society can destroy students' confidence', illustrates his concern for students who are devalued by society because of the type of school they attend. Mrs. Grant's concern about how her school could address the needs of students whose parents or relatives

had been incarcerated and those who had lost relatives and friends violently was also aimed at addressing social disparities.

In these ways the principals in this study attempted to reduce inequities and solve problems that limited their students' 'freedoms and capabilities to achieve' (Larson & Murtadha, 2002, p.152). Working in a context where economic and social inequities abound and in a sharply stratified secondary schooling system, it is hardly surprising that these principals connect their leadership to social justice issues.

Excellence

Another frequently mentioned value was excellence as illustrated by Mrs. Wilson's exhortation to her students, '... we have to aim for excellence so you need to do more than the average' and Sr. Margaret's comment, 'I don't like mediocrity in anything at all so excellence is a must'. The high value placed on academic performance as an aspect of excellence stemmed from their social justice perspective – the belief that eradication of poverty depends on education and that academic success is a passport to social mobility – and to this extent it was an internally determined value.

However, there is a sense in which the value that the principals placed on academic performance was also externally imposed. Formal examination results ('A' levels, 'O' levels, *CXC Caribbean Examinations Council* and more recently *CAPE Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations*) have always determined the status and desirability of schools in Jamaica. Furthermore, with the trend in recent years to publicly analyse and debate CXC results by subject and school, the school has become the unit of accountability, thereby increasing the pressure to raise achievement levels as measured through high pass rates in formal examinations. Added to this, the accountability rhetoric of the White Paper (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2001) with phrases such as 'annual targets', 'performance-related contracts' (p.6) and 'national standards' (p.7) has elevated the importance attached to students' academic performance as measures of principals' effectiveness and accountability. That the four principals in this study attached importance to students' academic achievement, articulated high expectations, encouraged their students to excel and their teachers to improve teaching/learning methods was therefore no surprise.

Although these principals valued student academic performance as an important aspect of excellence, other meanings of the concept surfaced.

Mrs. Wilson's desire for the students, 'to be the very best they can in everything they do' suggests that for her, excellence is broader than academic achievement. Indeed, all the principals understood student learning as more than measurable achievement; they promoted development of the whole student, stressing social, psychological, cultural as well as academic aspects of learning as important educational goals. Like the principals in Strachan's (1999) study into the impact of New Zealand's neo-liberal education reforms on feminist leadership, both the academic and social well-being of students was central to their leadership. Sr. Margaret argued that equipping students with academic skills while ignoring emotional and social development was a disservice: 'We have misconstrued what is really important in life. There's no point in turning out girls who have seven subjects at CXC but who get zero for social skills'. Incorporated into their understanding of excellence were concepts related to the ability of students to live peacefully with others, solve problems and give of their best to society. Audrey Grant's comment, 'We want you to be successful students and successful citizens', offers insight into the value attached to both academic achievement and citizenship. Gold *et al.* (2003) also report that while the outstanding school leaders in their case studies were conscious of managerialist perspectives that highlight student outcomes and performance, they were also committed to 'the wider educational, social and personal development of all pupils ...' (p.136). Such a broad definition of excellence is in keeping with their commitment to the other two dominant values – care and respect and social justice.

Collectively, the principals' values of care, social justice and excellence interacted with their leadership in much the same way as Day *et al.* (2000) describe in reporting values that underpinned the work of principals in their research. They wrote:

The vision and practices of these heads were organized around a number of core personal values concerning the modeling and promotion of respect (for individuals), fairness and equality, caring for the well-being and whole development of students and staff, integrity and honesty. (p.39)

Values and Context

While all four principals were informed by and respected this set of common values, they applied them in different ways. They fashioned their own individual leadership approaches and modified their emphases

in response to their personal circumstances as well as the contextual purposes and special needs of the schools in which they worked. In this respect the values of care, social justice and excellence acted as a compass, setting the direction for their leadership but not particularizing or prescribing their practices.

Although the principals' understandings of care as a value shared many features, their enactment of caring varied. Beck and Newman's assertion that 'caring takes many forms and has many faces' (1996, p.172) and Lyman's view that, 'Caring is always a personal path, crowded by complexity' (2000, p.152) are true of these principals as each one channelled his or her caring through different emphases and practices as dictated by their contexts. For Norma Wilson and Kenton Edwards caring meant addressing circumstances that impeded academic success; for Sr. Margaret it has meant facilitating growth and continuous learning while for Audrey Grant it was about building community. Although they demonstrated care in ways unique to them as individuals and to their schools, all their practices embodied respect and appreciation for the worth of all in the school community; an emphasis on increasing individuals' worth through formal learning or other opportunities for growth and self-development; and cultivating an ethic of care through visioning, goal setting and modeling.

Although all four principals articulated a shared approach with respect to social justice, they selected diverse emphases and practices in response to the needs of their school communities. For example measures to address academic disadvantage varied. Audrey Grant initiated the Boys' Day programme and the pilot project with same sex classes; Kenton Edwards introduced an extended and upgraded reading programme for all grades; and Norma Wilson developed the Preparation for Life programme in conjunction with HEART (Human Enterprise and Resource Training) – Jamaica's agency responsible for vocational training.

Measures to address social disparities also varied. Because almost 80 per cent of Norma Wilson's students are from underprivileged and depressed areas, her concept of social justice incorporated providing students with access to resources and social experiences that carry them beyond the limitations imposed by the deprivation and violence in their normal lives. Special measures included provision of a wide range of extra-curricular activities, opportunities to attend local cultural events and to visit points of interest. Because several of her students '... don't really live with anybody, they are ATM children'² and they have no

emotional support outside of the school community, she established a network of relationships with successful past students who act as role models and mentors. Through these means she sought to expose students from deprived backgrounds to experiences that their middle-class counterparts benefit from as a matter of course. Kenton Edwards was also intent on addressing social disparities; however, he focused on reducing the impact of negative stereotyping and deficit thinking associated with non-traditional high schools and therefore invested a great deal of energy in activities and practices designed to build his students' self-esteem and morale. Audrey Grant too, singled out reduction of social disparities as a defining influence on her leadership; yet her practices and initiatives were not those of any of the other principals. Surrounded by several depressed, volatile communities, she acknowledged the impact of these conditions on her leadership at Springfield: 'The thing that has had the greatest impact on me as a principal here is the community itself, the depressed community'. As a result, she attached special significance to building a spirit of community within and outside the school. Her attention was focused on making her school a social, educational and recreational patron for the surrounding communities. One way in which this was achieved was by openly sharing the school's facilities and accommodating community activities on the school grounds and in the buildings. Other ways included: scholarships and free tuition on the evening school programme; staff outreach programmes in neighbouring basic schools; a parenting programme; the community service programme for Grades 12 and 13 students and the grief counselling programme. At the time of data collection, the school was in the process of designing a programme to assist students whose parents had migrated or were imprisoned. Under Audrey Grant's leadership, this focus on service and social responsibility through working with the external community was to a great extent a response to community development needs.

Similarly, there were subtle differences in how the value the principals attached to excellence, especially as it related to academic performance, was implicated in their leadership. In Kenton Edwards' case, academic excellence related to increasing the number of students deemed qualified by their teachers to sit the CXC examinations as well as increasing the number of passes. As a result, he focused his efforts on setting academic targets as part of the school development plan, using assessment data to inform teaching, acquiring additional learning resources and promoting a reading programme aimed at improving students' general academic performance. In contrast, Sr. Margaret's

concern was not so much with the number of examination passes, as with improving the levels of those passes. In her first interview she lamented, '... there should be more girls getting Grade 1's'; later, referring to performance in a specific subject, she repeated the need for higher standards: 'With our CXC results we got a high percentage of passes – two Grade Ones and forty Twos – so there is something that just needs an extra ...'. She turned her attention to teachers' professional development, student-centred teaching practices and the use of technology in classrooms as means of facilitating higher standards. For Mrs. Wilson as for Mr. Edwards, improved grades were an integral part of the school development plan but like Sr. Margaret, she was concerned about quality of grades: 'We embarked on the final year of our three year plan (1999-2002) with a determination to improve performance and the quality of our grades'. Her new management information system facilitated her using assessment data to monitor student progress and compare the performance of classes and individuals in specific subjects, all with a view to improving teaching and ultimately student performance. Her enthusiasm for the school's Preparation for Life programme (a programme specially developed to meet the needs of students for whom the traditional school leaving examination has been deemed inappropriate) was evidence that for her, academic success was measured not only in terms of performance on external examinations leading to post-secondary and tertiary education, but also in terms of success on alternative or internally examined programmes. At her school, all students were held to high standards irrespective of the nature of the programme they were engaged in.

Within- and cross-case analyses revealed that the principals' leadership emphases were informed by the personal and professional values they espoused; their decisions and practices were organized around their value commitments; and the changes they embarked on arose out of their values. However, their values did not specifically explicate their practices; rather their individual school and community contexts determined how they translated these values into action.

Values and Policy

Analysis of the four cases revealed that although policy influenced the principals' understanding of leadership and was implicated in their practice, it did not compromise their value commitments. Their values acted as standards for guiding decisions especially when faced with competing policy demands. In this respect, the relationship between the

values and leadership of principals' in this study reflects Law *et al.*'s (2003) proposition that 'values act as powerful motivators or filters that predispose principals towards seeing situations in certain ways and taking certain courses of action' (p.505). This finding is reflected in several ways.

Firstly, the managerial emphases of the national policy context did not shift their attention away from instructional and social justice concerns as some writers maintain (Angus, 1993; Grace, 1995; Walker & Quong, 1998). Indeed, these principals viewed accountability as a useful strategy for promoting instructional excellence and subscribed to the idea that accountability practices complemented their commitment to caring and social justice. Norma Wilson saw the rhetoric of management as supporting her goal to create a culture of excellence. She welcomed the Ministry requirement for school development plans in the belief that plans presented in a language and a format that the private sector recognized and understood would win their confidence, support and ultimately their sponsorship. Kenton Edwards also perceived school development planning as a means of pursuing improvement and used his plan to request funds from donor agencies. Although each of the principals in this study attended to management and accountability issues, this was not driven by policy mandates or bureaucratic expectations, rather it emanated from an internal assumption about the facilitative role that such management practices could play in the quest to improve teaching and learning.

Secondly, the principals adapted policy so that it was congruent with their values. Norma Wilson's response to the Reform of Secondary Education (ROSE) national curriculum for Grades 7-9, serves as one example. Although she applauded the methodology associated with ROSE, she questioned the quality of the content. She responded by integrating ROSE with the school's existing curriculum, thereby extending the content and developing what she referred to as a 'hybrid ROSE'. She adhered to policy but filtered her response through the value of excellence. She did not allow the school to be confined by policy and risk sacrificing the school vision focused on creating a culture of excellence. Kenton Edwards provided another example of how these principals filtered their interpretation of policy through their value perspectives and in this case, through care and respect. He described how his habit of reflection had led him to understand certain policy features related to cost sharing, the textbook rental scheme and student re-admissions as insensitive to student needs. In particular, he identified

defects that excluded needy students and discovered that some students who qualified, did not access financial assistance because the adults who were responsible for them were neglectful, uninformed or too ashamed to seek assistance. As a result, he used the power of his office to adapt policy in its application to the school so that it was congruent with his social justice perspective. The principals' willingness to step outside bureaucratic arrangements and their flexible interpretation of policy were manifestations of a capacity to uphold their value commitments. Strachan (1999) observed a similar disposition among principals in New Zealand who preserved their value systems by remaining student-focused and resisting the pressure to adopt the managerial imperatives favoured by neo-liberal reforms.

Thirdly, because their practices were organised around value commitments and not externally imposed mandates they rejected practices that they considered to be incongruent with their values. For example, when Sr. Margaret decided to delay formal implementation of teacher appraisal as mandated by the Ministry, care and respect superseded efficiency and accountability. Similarly, she resisted staff cuts because as an economically driven directive, it contradicted her commitment to care and excellence. Likewise, the primacy of care and social justice values overrode any concerns about accountability when Norma Wilson implemented the Preparation for Life (PFL) curriculum without official authorisation from the Ministry. Sr. Margaret made it clear that she was prepared to resist policy under circumstances where it compromised her values. In relating an incident in which adherence to the policy and legalities surrounding dismissal of a teacher would have compromised the values she attached to care and social justice, she recalled: 'It wasn't a dilemma at all. That was a clear case where what they [the Ministry] suggested, on principle, I couldn't agree to that'.

Indeed, these principals were not uncomfortable with responses that did not conform to Ministry policy. Referring to the fact that she had not sought Ministry approval before implementing the PFL programme, Norma Wilson commented that, 'They [the Ministry] can always quarrel but it is already done and my Board knows about it'. Sr. Margaret too, was confident that the Ministry could tolerate her interpretation of policy: 'The conflict is there sometimes but for the most part, on both sides, I think we are saying the same thing and that is to produce quality education'. Unlike the Barbadian principals in Newton's (1993) study, these principals did not experience 'feelings of powerlessness and ambiguity as a result of being controlled by policies

and rules from a central body' (p.22); rather they were confident and comfortable with reinterpreting policy, aligning it with their values and their local conditions.

Implications

Among the four principals in this study, understandings and practices of school leadership were defined and driven by the values of care, social justice and excellence. This finding has practical and research implications.

In view of the centrality of values to principals' conceptualisation of leadership, professional education and training should encourage principals and prospective principals to examine their personal and professional values and how these relate to their personal constructions of leadership. Jamaica's White Paper on education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2001) expresses the valued ends of schooling generally: 'Education and training ... must seek to create a literate, skilled, democratic and patriotic society. It must also create a productive workforce and functional and caring communities' (p.1). Such a statement is open to various interpretations by individual principals and their school boards. In the absence of an explicit policy statement on the goals of secondary schooling, it would seem important that principals and aspiring principals articulate and reflect on the nature of their personal and professional values. If principals are to translate their values into practice and resolve competing tensions with 'moral confidence' (West-Burnham, 1997, p.231) they must be given opportunities to examine their values in relation to policy and be encouraged to predict how they will resolve competing values that emerge in the course of their work. Currently, the induction programme offered by the Ministry in Jamaica for new principals and vice-principals concentrates on management functions. The findings of this study and previous studies (for example, Daresh & Male, 2000; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Law *et al.*, 2003; Norris, Barnett, Basom & Yerkes, 2002) suggest that values clarification and application should play an integral part in leadership preparation and development programmes and such programmes should integrate discussion of issues related to moral purpose, educational values and ethical ramifications alongside technical and managerial realities (Cascadden, 1998). As Beck and Murphy (1993) urge: 'Persons and programs concerned with equipping principals must discover and implement strategies that enable school leaders to function comfortably and effectively in both worlds' (p.199-200).

The findings of this study present values as the compass that guides the selected principals' decisions and actions. There is a need therefore, to investigate the values Jamaican principals hold and the extent to which care and respect, social justice and excellence are generally dominant. Linked to this observation are questions about the appropriateness and relevance of an ethic of care and social justice theory for understanding how principals practising in Jamaica conceptualise school leadership.

Follow-up studies that look at a more varied sample of principals and include those from the recently upgraded high schools would complement this research. Gathering more evidence from principals who are not necessarily considered exemplary as the participants in this study were deemed to be, would also be useful. Do best practice principals hold different constructions of leadership from others? A study dedicated to exploring this question would be valuable.

It would be enlightening to undertake similar studies with high school principals in other Caribbean territories, to explore similarities and differences with a view to generating a Caribbean perspective. Just as scholars such as Bajunid (1996), Cheng (1998), Hallinger and Kantamara (2000), Walker and Dimmock (2000) and Wong (1998) in the East Asian and Pacific developing countries are developing local knowledge about school leadership for their environments, scholars are also exploring school leadership among Caribbean principals (Brown, 2004; Joseph, 2000; Morris, 2000). These studies, together with this study of Jamaican principals, provide a basis for contemporary analysis of school leadership in the Caribbean by providing insights into the perspectives of principals practising outside the standard North American, European or developed world research setting, whose circumstances and experiences are Caribbean.

Conclusion

This paper has identified care, social justice and excellence as dominant values that guided the four principals' understanding and practice of leadership. It has demonstrated that that while values formed the scaffolding on which they interpreted their leadership, aspects of their individual school-community contexts influenced how they enacted these values. Furthermore, the paper has argued that because the principals filtered their interactions and decisions through care, social justice and excellence, these values consistently superseded policy and

accountability issues. It is clear that values emerged as powerful influences on how these four exemplary principals understood leadership. What is not altogether clear, however, is the extent to which social justice and care will continue to be powerful influences if policy and reforms relegate as insignificant those issues that are not directly linked to accountability, achievement and management processes. Gold *et al.* (2003) raise a similar question regarding the survival of educational values in the British education system under conditions that reify performance and school outcomes.

NOTES

1. The names of principals and schools are pseudonyms.
2. Automatic Teller Machine: she is referring to those students whose parents have migrated and send funds for their support through banking or remittance services.

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