MAKING A DIFFERENCE: CHANGING THE GENDER BALANCE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT *It is a well established fact that women are not represented in positions of educational leadership in proportion to their representation in the teaching profession. New Zealand is no exception; the higher up the seniority ladder the fewer the women. In recent years, despite legislation and a requirement of schools to have in place equal employment opportunities (EEO) policies and programmes the situation has changed little. Why is this so and what is being done to change the situation? In this paper I will examine some of the reasons why the present situation has occurred and why there has been so little improvement despite EEO legislation and affirmative action. In particular, I will explore the impact of the New Right education context on equity and women's leadership. This will be followed by a description of an intervention strategy that was specifically designed to change the gender balance in educational leadership in a secondary school, through a professional and personal development programme specifically designed for women-only. I will also explore how the nature of educational leadership has changed under the new educational administration reforms and will comment on how this might impact on those practising feminist educational leadership.*

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND THE NEW RIGHT

Over the last five years New Zealand's education system has undergone dramatic and far reaching reforms in educational administration. They were implemented in response to what was seen as an inequitable and inefficient education system. The ideology of the New Right played a large part in shaping how the new streamlined education system was organised. Criticism of the education system came from both the right and the left and although the stances from both sides differed as to how education might be restructured both sides agreed that New Zealand's education system did not produce equitable educational outcomes. In particular, Māori students were failing badly and the labour market was not being provided with employees with "appropriate" marketable skills. The new reforms were based on choice, excellence, competition and accountability. Education was now to be viewed as a private good and responsibility rather than a public good. The New Right captured the rhetoric of equity to help in selling its new reforms. The reforms were implemented from 1989 and provided a radical new system of educational administration which used devolution as one of the vehicles of implementation.

Devolution in education has been characterised by giving control over school expenditure and decision-making to individual schools rather than to

either central or regional bureaucracies. Schools were, by and large, to be run by their communities which in return would get a greater say in their children's education (Gordon, 1992). It was argued that those at the local site were in the best position to make decisions that were most suitable for the local school including the appointment of all staff. The appointment of new staff was a new function for the boards of New Zealand's primary schools; secondary school authorities have always had this responsibility. However, training in appointment procedures, and the equity issues involved in appointments, was virtually non existent.

Under the new reforms Boards of Trustees were required to have a school charter. They were to be written in consultation with the principal, staff and school community. The function of the charter was to define the purposes of the school and the intended outcomes for students. Equity issues were required to be a major focus of the school charter and are encompassed in the strong rhetoric of the document *Tomorrow's Schools* which spelled out how the new reforms in educational administration were to be implemented. "Equity objectives will underpin all policy related to the reform of education administration" (Lange, 1988, p.25). Because one of the major concerns was the under-representation of women in senior positions, Boards of Trustees were required to address equal employment opportunities as well as other equity issues in their school charters. To ensure that schools met their equity obligations, thirteen EEO Review Officers were appointed nationwide to the Education Review Office. The office was established by the government to ensure that schools met their charter goals.

The commitment to providing a more equitable education system was not empty rhetoric. Under the Education Reform Act 1989 each school was required to have in place an EEO policy and programme. This was specifically meant to ensure that women were more fairly represented in positions of seniority and would therefore not only gain valuable administration and leadership experiences but would also be seen as positive role models by pupils. This was greeted very positively by many working in education. However, those responsible for writing the EEO policies and implementing the programmes that is, staff and board of trustee members, would need guidance and training. Although guidelines were produced by the Ministry of Education no systematic and formal EEO training was available. This was mainly left up to the private sector to provide and was delivered very much on an ad hoc basis with some regions being well serviced and others not so.

However, in 1990 there was a change of government and a National government was elected to office. Its education agenda was more conservative than the previous Labour government. The new Minister to Education, Dr Lockwood Smith, wanted to make the equity objectives of schools' charters voluntary. However, he was unable to do this without repealing the State Sector Amendment Act 1989 so the equity objectives were left as compulsory but what followed was a general downgrading of the commitment to equity issues in education. In 1991, the EEO Reviewers had a change in title to Personnel Reviewers with an associated reduction in focus on EEO, and in 1993 these positions were removed completely (Court, 1993). These were not the only cutbacks. Other committees and bodies specifically established to look after the

concerns of women and girls in education have either been disestablished or downgraded.

Even though there is a requirement on schools to report annually on the progress of the implementation of their EEO policies and programmes there is no censure if, in the opinion of the Educational Review Office, progress is unsatisfactory. So what originally was a strong commitment to redressing the employment inequities in education through the educational administration reforms has, because of lack of commitment by the government, become ineffective in making any real difference. For example, between 1987 and 1992 the there was only a 3% increase (from 16% to 19%) in the number of women holding secondary principalships, and most of these were principals of girl's schools. Similarly, in 1992 there were only 15 women principals in the 220 coeducational secondary schools (Slyfield, 1992) , and in 1995 there were 21 (Ministry of Education, 1995), hardly an increase to get excited about. At first glance the situation in the primary school sector appears to be more positive. There has been an 8% increase (from 19% to 27%) between 1987 and 1992 in the number of women holding principalships (Slyfield, 1993). However, on closer analysis, there has been an increasing percentage of women in primary teaching so since 1981 the proportion of women who hold principalships has increased very little (Slyfield, 1992).

Another factor that has been cited as contributing to the low number of women appointees has been the lack of training of board of trustees members in appointment procedures and the associated equity issues . So, even if the school's charter contained all the right rhetoric regarding EEO, entrenched sexist attitudes by board of trustee members, either conscious or unconscious, can serve to ensure that women are not appointed to principalships as often as their male colleagues. Gardiner (1990) comments that the slow increase in the number of principalships held by women can, in part, be attributed to employing authorities (board of trustees) perceiving the "normal" career path as one that more closely fits the male career path. Also their perception of how a principal should look and behave is masculine rather than feminine because it is most likely that in their own schooling they had a male rather than a female principal.

Prior to the reforms of 1989, the selection panels of employing authorities had access to professional educational expertise who acted in an advisory capacity. This expertise is no longer available. Gardiner (1990) comments that with the boards of trustees having few women role models as principals coupled with "little experienced educational expertise and input on the selection panel, this imbalance [in gender distribution in principalships] is difficult to redress " (p.23). (The brackets are my own). Gardiner recommends training be given to selection panels.

In explaining why there has been so little improvement in the representation of women in principals' positions since the introduction of the reforms, I have backgrounded two major contributing factors. First, the National government has de-emphasised EEO, and although legislation has been left in place the legislative "teeth" have been removed. Second, there has been a lack of on going systematic training of board of trustee members which has ensured that many "gatekeeper" attitudes remain in place and unchallenged.

It was in this chilly EEO climate that a number of initiatives were undertaken to:

- Increase women's awareness of the issues surrounding their under representation in educational leadership positions,
- Provide women with professional and personal experiences that would enhance their chances of obtaining principalships,
- Provide a strong women's support network,
- Provide appointment procedure training for board of trustee members that highlighted equity issues so that appointments were based on merit not gender,
- Provide women with leadership education that could be credited towards a university degree, and
- Validate alternative forms of leadership, including feminist leadership.

One initiative was a school-level professional and personal development programme for women teachers in a secondary school. Another was a series of leadership training programmes for particular schools which involved teachers and members of school boards. A third initiative was the development of a university degree course that focussed upon women's educational leadership, and particularly on factors involved in changing women's under representation in leadership positions.

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

In this paper the first initiative will be described and discussed. It was a school-level, personal and professional development programme for women-only.

A School-Level, Women-Only Programme

This programme involved ten women, all volunteers, from one co-educational secondary school in a large regional city. I was also a staff member (the guidance counsellor) of the school. Three years later, I implemented a similar programme in three other secondary schools as part of the centenary celebrations of women's suffrage in New Zealand. By this time I had left secondary education and was lecturing at the local university. I was the organiser of the programme and, at times, a facilitator. I also researched the programme as it was happening.

The programme's framework had its roots in other successful and well researched programmes that were specifically designed to increase women's participation in positions of educational leadership. However, this particular programme offered to these women differed from most other projects in that it was about change at the school level. The women were not removed from their own work setting because there is evidence to show that when women are removed from their schools for professional development they can experience isolation and lack of support when they return and try to implement changes (Shipton & Tatton, 1989).

The women were very involved in deciding the final shape of the programme. They made suggestions as to what training they wanted and

expressed their preferences as to how the programme might be altered so it was more workable given their busy personal and professional lives. The programme that finally evolved, after considerable discussion and negotiation, contained five main components.

1. *Skill building* was done at the after school meetings and during the weekends or vacations. The women requested training in a wide variety of areas including conflict resolution, managing a department, writing a curriculum vitae, communication skills, motivating others, interviewing for a job, dealing with sexual harassment, time management and giving high quality feedback. "Apprenticeship" experiences were arranged within the school. The women identified people on the staff who had particular skills that they would like to learn. These people were then approached to see if they were prepared to help and if they were a mutually convenient time was organised for training. This, at times, meant that both the participant and the staff member who was willing to do the training had to be released from their classes, which were taken by other women on the programme.

2. *The support component* also occurred during the after school meetings and at the weekend and vacation training days when the women shared their experiences. As just mentioned, the women took each other's classes so they could be released for training In this way they showed their support in a very real and tangible way. When the women attempted new ventures or took risks by challenging the status quo they were given support and encouragement by the other women in the group.

3. *Career exploration visits* were arranged to other educational organisations such as the local university as well as to local industry so that other career options could be investigated. These visits occurred during the normal teaching day and once again the other women took the classes of those doing the visiting.

4. *Issues* relating to women and educational leadership were explored and examined through discussion at the after-school meetings and through reading a selection of relevant articles. Lively debate often ensued which alerted the women to the barriers and constraints in women's personal and professional lives that have impeded their access to positions of educational leadership.

5. Finally, *organisational impact* was designed to occur through negotiating with the senior management team for permission for the programme to go ahead, release time for the women to leave the school, and at times their classes, to investigate other career options, do further training of their choice and to carry out their "apprenticeships". Impact occurred when the women challenged some of the organisational practices and, as a result, changes were made.

The programme was researched as it was in progress. One of the main aims of the research was to investigate the process and dynamics of change in the women and the system in which they all worked. In other words, did the programme

achieve what it set out to do? Information was gathered by informal "interviewing" with the women.

The research findings

The women really enjoyed the women-only context of the programme. They felt able to take greater risks and to share personal information than would have been possible if men had been in the group. They enjoyed the support they gave one another and the friendships that developed. The support gave them greater confidence to try new skills and to take action on both the home and work fronts. A number of women commented that their involvement in the programme had energised them and was the catalyst they needed to make changes. Mary comments that, "It (being involved in the programme) made me get off my backside and do something!"

Some of the women took public forms of action by challenging some of the inequitable practices within their school. Something they would have been reluctant to have done before their involvement in the programme. With the support of the other women and the chance to work through beforehand how they would challenge, they took action and in some cases achieved the changes they sought. For example, at a full staff meeting one woman requested that internal promotions be advertised to all staff so that anybody could register their candidacy. This had been previously agreed to but the principal had made a unilateral decision and changed the practice to one where he offered the position to his preferred candidate without first advertising it. Her request was agreed to.

Others had their vision of what was possible in their own careers expanded and for one young woman it reinforced that it was all right to be ambitious. Clare commented, "One thing that really came through for me was that "yes" I can go for promotion." This sentiment was also echoed by Cynthia whose attitude towards what was possible changed. She found that being part of the programme had helped her to see that she had other choices: "There were a couple of things I hadn't thought of doing until I did this course. It has opened up new ideas."

Of the seven women who applied for promotion, five were shortlisted and two appointed. Fiona, who made a written case to the principal about internal promotion, was promoted six months later. Mary was also promoted some time later after having given birth to twins! The programme did impact on both the women's personal and professional lives which was indicated in the way they took action and challenged people's attitudes and organisational practices; the way they applied new skills and experiences, and the way they shared details of their personal and professional lives with one another.

The programme run in the three other secondary schools, as part of the New Zealand women's suffrage centenary celebrations, was similar in many respects to the original programme, yet in some ways different in character. Although I still acted as organiser and facilitator, the same bond of closeness did not eventuate between the women and myself. I believe this occurred because firstly, I was not a staff member of any of these schools so I did not know many of the women before the programme started as I had in the original programme. Secondly, because I was not on the staff I came in and out of each school

specifically for the programme so there was not the same level of intimate contact between the women and myself between the sessions. However, it is now almost two years on and the women of one of those schools continue to meet regularly to support one another. Also, according to a number of individual women, as a direct result of the programme they have gone on to further university study, some in the area of educational leadership.

PRINCIPALSHIP AND SCHOOLS

When women like those in the above study reach the level of principal, what can they expect? Devolution and the reform of educational administration have changed the nature of the principal's work in a number of major ways. Codd (1993) comments that the effect has been twofold. First, a managerialist ideology including bulk funding, individual employment contracts and merit pay has been imposed. Second, school leaders are being forced to change from a commitment to social justice to a commitment to pursuing goals of individualism and competition. Codd goes on to comment that school leaders and educational administrators need to ask themselves where this managerialism is leading. Is it indeed leading towards greater efficiency and equity in our education system? Managerialism, Codd (1993) claims, produces schools that are hierarchical in nature and wasteful of human resources.

The effects of radical decentralisation can actually run counter to the intended outcomes, and may actually intensify existing inequalities (McCulloch, 1990). There is empirical research evidence to show that there is a widening gap between "rich" and "poor" schools in New Zealand (Gordon, 1993). Gordon comments that in the findings of her study, those schools that are categorised as "rich" or successful schools are those that have a combination of both cultural and economic capital. That is, "there is a very high relationship between the social make-up of the schools and their viability" (Gordon, 1993, p.13). The latest Ministry of Education statistics show that passes in School Certificate are directly related to the socio-economic status of the school community, that is the lower the socio-economic status the lower the pass rate (*Education Gazette*, 1994). In an attempt to rectify this situation, the Ministry of Education has retargetted funding so that schools with high levels of educationally disadvantaged students will receive a fairer share of resourcing. The previous system of funding was considered inadequate in providing quality education for the educationally disadvantaged. A number of schools have found it necessary to hire professional fundraisers because of inadequate funding. In a recent item in the *New Zealand Herald* the board chairperson of Wanganui Girls' College commented that the school needed to hire a professional fundraiser because, "We need about $750,000 for several projects we can't get funding for...the funding we get under Tomorrow's Schools is barely adequate" (*New Zealand Herald*, 1994).

An empirical analysis of a New Zealand secondary school market found that it was mainly students from professional and managerial backgrounds who were likely to travel the distances necessary to attend schools with a high socio-economic mix (Lauder, Hughes, Waslander, Thrupp, McGlinn, Newton & Dupuis, 1994). Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those from minority ethnic groups, such as Māori, were not exercising choice to the same

extent. One school with a high proportion of Māori students had been particularly affected by the movement of students away from their school to other schools with a higher socio-economic mix. This school had entered a "spiral of decline" (Lauder et al, 1994, p.58). Both the socio-economic and ethnic mix had been altered by this movement making it difficult for the school to provide the resources necessary to deliver the national curriculum. The researchers comment that the market system allows some schools to fail because in the climate of competition other schools will offer a better product and parents will choose to send their children away from the failing schools to the successful schools. However, "the problem is that in allowing some schools to fail policy makers are open to allowing the students in failing schools to fail also" (Lauder et al, 1994, p.58). This is hardly a climate in which all students will be able to improve their life chances; that is reserved for those with either cultural or economic capital (Cusack, 1994). Choice is the prerogative of the rich.

This draws into serious question the success of devolution and the marketisation of education in enabling schools to provide equitable learning outcomes. After all, providing equity has been one of the cornerstones on which the education policies of the New Right have been justified. Equity has been a very seductive message in selling the New Right's education agenda. As Gordon (1993) points out, one of the reasons for the huge support for "self-managing" schools is because they have been seen to be more efficient. "Poor" schools that do not have the cultural and economic capital of the "rich" schools are open to charges of inefficient management rather than questions about the viability of the system itself.

If Codd (1993) is correct then school principals who identify as feminists may well find a contradiction between how they would prefer to lead, for example, developing schooling processes based on social justice, empowerment, equity, collegiality and community, and that which is being asked of them, for example, developing school processes based on individual competition, success and measurable outcomes. Given the present climate in educational administration with its focus on managerialism, what opportunities are there for principals to practice alternative forms of leadership such as feminist leadership? Feminist leadership is beginning to move from the margins of what is considered to be acceptable and legitimate practice to a more central position of acceptance. So how can feminist educational leadership be described?

FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

Quite clearly, all women who identify as feminists do not lead in the same way. This "essence talk" masks the differences in feminist leadership philosophy and practice. This masking can be destructive (Martin, 1994, p.636) in that it hides much of the rich tapestry of how leadership is practised in different contexts by different feminists.

However, feminist practice rests on emancipatory politics which emerge from women's experiences and beliefs. They also voice women's beliefs, values and attitudes (Glazer, 1991) but should not be exclusively concerned with these. Rather they should encompass a wider emancipatory agenda. There are some underlying principles that underpin but are not exclusive to feminist leadership

practice. These include, firstly a commitment to emancipation, social justice and equity, and secondly a commitment to contest and struggle against injustice.

Emancipation, social justice and equity

Reflection and action go hand in hand (Blackmore, 1995). For example, critical reflection may expose injustices within a school such as the lack of teaching resources written in Māori, which limits and restricts the amount of exposure to the language and thus disadvantages those in total immersion language classes. The emancipatory practice might involve including those affected by this (students, parents, teachers) in the decision-making process on how the situation might be rectified. In what ways does this relate to feminist educational leadership practice? Participatory decision-making informed by practical interests is one of the hallmarks of educational leadership as emancipatory practice. However, practices based on practical interests must be seen within a framework of critical social theory (Grundy, 1993). Critical reflection exposes injustices and inequalities for what they really are and challenges the "taken for granted". Injustices are not just seen in the light of the particular situation (not enough resources in Māori) but also for the wider school and political context. Having exposed poor resourcing. weaknesses may also be exposed in "goals and institutional purposes" (Grundy, 1993, p.172) which will also need addressing. Once again, in addressing those issues all the stakeholders need to be involved in the process. Building justice and equality will be central to that process.

Support for colleagues is also at the heart of emancipatory practice. The feminist leader will view her leadership practice as enabling, empowering and validating the work of her colleagues (Regan, 1990). Regan likens the relationship between administration and teaching to that of a broken pyramid with administrators being above the fault line and teachers below it. She comments that emancipatory leadership enables teachers to move up and administrators to move down across the fault line. To do this teachers need to end their silence and speak up and administrators (leaders) need to stop talking and learn to listen (Regan, 1990).

> Feminism in educational administration has sought to dissolve the gendered division of labour, redefine leadership, develop an ethic of care, seek cultural inclusivity, advocates and emancipatory politics, recognises difference, democratise educational practice, and review the role of the state (Blackmore, 1995, p.9).

Therefore, emancipatory practice involves taking action to bring about improved social justice and equity for both the teaching staff and the students.

Contesting, Struggling, Conforming

Problems can arise when leaders choose to work with an emancipatory focus. As has been commented on earlier, managerialism rather than emancipatory leadership is most often viewed, by the new order in education administration, as the most effective way of achieving efficiency and equity. Those who chose to

practice alternative methods of leadership may well find themselves in conflict with supporters of managerialism, for example some Boards of Trustees, and with those staff who believe that emancipatory leadership is an excuse for the leader to duck their decision-making responsibility (Grundy, 1993). Challenging a hierarchical bureaucracy can be both a struggle and stressful and can "limit their initiative, dictate acceptable values, define the boundaries of work, and teach them how to conform their thinking and behaviour to the particular realities of the local site" (Marshall, 1993, p.169). Some will find the struggle too great and find it easier to either resign or conform rather than to contest (Glazer, 1991). For example, a study by Young (1993, p.447) found that female principals who wished to work collaboratively were "reined in - by the top down hierarchical educational system". Young comments that the problem is one of reconciling professionalism and bureaucracy and that as the hierarchical model is not likely to disappear then the solution may lie in the development of new working relationships. This is a rather gloomy forecast for feminists wishing to introduce new and alternative forms of leadership. The message is work differently within the existing systems and structures rather than dismantle the old and build new ones that are based on emancipatory practice.

CONCLUSION

The intervention strategy described in this article was implemented with the intended outcome of improving women's representation in positions of educational leadership. However, careful thought needs to be given to what type of leadership climate and culture they will be expected to work in. With radical decentralisation there has been a shift in the principal's practice which has changed the very nature of principals' work, and which empirical research is beginning to reveal exacerbates rather than improves the inequities within our education system. It would appear that managerialism and the delivery of social justice are inequitable. Those who wish to practice alternative forms of leadership to managerialism, including feminist leadership, may well find their leadership agenda compromised and their position untenable. So it is not just a matter of changing the gender balance in educational leadership if the existing educational climate means that those in principalships are forced to practice their principalship in ways that are less efficient and less equitable and compromise their own value systems. Nothing will have been achieved. If managerialism is not producing more efficient and equitable schools then it needs challenging and support needs to be given to those wishing to practice alternative forms of leadership. Managerialism and equity may be incompatible but that does not necessarily mean that schools that are equitable are necessarily inefficient. Any intervention strategy that aims to change the gender balance in educational leadership must also address these issues.

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