

EAD 801

Exploration Project

Women in Educational Leadership

Jaime Adams

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Through examining the five principles of how women lead as presented by Grogan and Shakeshaft, I intend to examine the positive change that can be brought to school improvement planning through a stronger presence of women in leadership within education.

I have worked within the field of education for almost ten years now. I have fulfilled many different roles: teacher, technology coach, curriculum planner, team lead, and now project manager within an accreditation agency. Throughout each of these roles, school improvement planning has always been prevalent. Whether I was directly involved in writing goals or responsible for carrying out the activities for reaching those goals, I have always had school improvement involved in my tasks at some level or another. I wish I could say that through each of the roles within school improvement, I have seen schools completely turn around and make the vast changes that are so often needed in the failing schools with which I have been involved. Unfortunately, this is so rarely the case. What has impressed me throughout my career is the fact that everywhere I look I see strong women leaders making a difference in classrooms, however, when I look in the main offices I rarely see females in leadership roles. Why is this? Is there a correlation between the fact that women are predominantly running our classrooms but not our schools and that so many of our schools are failing? I have seen so many differences in how women lead in their classrooms from how men lead in the main office. In order to best understand if women can bring about a positive change to school improvement planning, I believe it is imperative to first understand how women lead within the educational setting. Margaret Grogan and Charol Shakeshaft characterize the way women lead in education into five ways: “relational leadership, leadership for social justice, spiritual leadership, leadership for learning, and balanced leadership” (2). I want to first explore each of the five ways in which women lead and then search for next steps to move forward the process of school improvement that will actually help start improving schools. Overall, I hope to find out: what are the positive benefits that could be brought to school improvement planning by having a stronger presence of women in leadership?

Relational leadership implies that women are less interested in a hierarchical role and more in horizontal relationships with those that they work with. Relational leadership calls us to “know yourself and others... be open to differences and value other perspectives [and]... practice listening skills, coalition building, interpersonal skills, and effective civil discourse” (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 76). Regardless of if the leader is a woman or a man, “leadership is not about the leader... it’s about the relationship between the leader and their constituents” (Kouzes & Posner, 63). It is repeated again and again through so many leadership texts that leadership is no longer the man sitting in the corner office barking out commands and having the followers carry them out. True leadership is about having relationships with followers. So how do women lead differently than men in this regard? According to Brunner:

“One of the most important ways in which the women superintendents "acted like women" was articulated by a woman superintendent in a discussion about relationships. She said "that a female . . . is responsible for the caring of all employees and students." Most of the women in the original study strongly emphasized the high priority they placed on caring relationships (see Beck 1994; Noddings 1984; Purpel 1989) with and among their employees, colleagues, parents, and students” (11).

In an interview with one of my colleagues, Vicki Denmark, a former superintendent of one of the largest districts in Greater Atlanta, she stated, “women are more prone to think about the collective and how they work together. They think about how each person fits into the organization and builds on those strengths. In my experience, they tend to care more about who you are and what you are going through because they understand that will impact the work that you produce.” I would like to think that both women and men can lead equally well in all

settings. However, I believe that in an educational setting, relational leadership is especially crucial in that it is an arena in which it is impossible to accomplish anything alone.

Next women in educational leadership lead for social justice. Social justice to me means leading to right a social wrong doing. “A major problem with contemporary civic life in America is that too few of our citizens are actively engaged in efforts to effect positive social change” (Astin & Astin, 2). Whether we work inside or outside education, we admire the people who work to change the world for the better. People like Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, and Eleanor Roosevelt are admired as leaders not because they were placed in the corner office nor had the wealth of the world. They are admired because they were leaders to change the society in which they lived. Both change leaders and transformational leaders often emerge in the causes for social justice. Change leaders “challenge the current leaders within the organization with facts and figured to the changing world and the need to accept their vision” (Bugay, 8). Even Kouzes and Posner state that “one of the most powerful motivators on the planet is a sense of meaning and purpose” (66). Great leaders crave to have deeper meaning for their work. It is interesting to me that when I first started asking colleagues about who would they say was a leader for social justice, seven of the eight of the people polled named Mother Theresa or Eleanor Roosevelt. Are women more likely to work for changing social justice? Or is it that they just become more famous for it? I think either way, the fact that social justice is either why women work or it is what they excel at is what often brings women to the field of education. According to Grogan and Shakeshaft, “women are likely to report that they entered the field of education because they wanted to “change” the status quo” (11). Education is appealing to those looking to make a change to society. Even if you can’t change the world, you can change the world of a child. Teachers are the leaders within their classroom, and the best teachers are

consistently challenging the social injustices that occur in their worlds of their school. I know from my own classroom experience, I never felt more like a leader than when I was charging the way against parent, policy, or situation that I felt was damaging the idea of the society that I so wanted my students to be a part of.

To me, the relational leadership and leadership for social change both feed into spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership may not necessarily be that a leader is preaching to their followers, but instead spirituality can be seen “as a source of personal strength as well as a way to understand connectedness to others and to the greater world” (Grogan & Shakeshaft 14). Connectedness to others and the world: isn’t that exactly what comes to mind with relational leadership and leadership for social change? Therefore doesn’t it follow that spiritual leadership is crucial to piece these items together? Spiritual leadership may not be any one particular religion, but it certainly suggests a need for a certain level of integrity. In order to have relational leadership, you must first have trust. “Trust is the framework that supports all relationships” (Kouzes & Posner, 79), and “if you don’t exercise complete integrity in your interactions, no one can trust you” (George, 32). Trust in the integrity and the character of a leader is the foundation for creating a relationship. Trust is what causes followers to get behind the social change cause that the leader is spearheading. Leadership without trust is nonexistent. To go further, I believe that a leader that can demonstrate spiritual caring can bring her followers to a place of realized potential that would not be possible without this component. “A place of realized potential heals people with trust and with caring and with forgetfulness” (DePree, 16). Isn’t that what we want for our future generations? For them to come to realized potential through caring and passion for what we do? All my life I’ve heard the stereotypes that women are overly emotional when it comes to... well, pretty much everything. I think that as a society

we are starting to realize that “authentic communication is not always easy, but it is the basis for... real effectiveness at work” (Sandberg, 77). Women are often viewed as their communication is overly passionate rather than “authentic.” However, Grogan and Shakeshaft once again point out that women [do] not allow themselves to be silenced, instead using passion as a motivator both for themselves and for those with whom they worked” (16). Bolman and Deal state that “traditional sources of meaning, energy and achievement are increasingly endangered in a world of fleeting virtual relationships... it is no surprise that signs of spiritual hunger and restlessness are everywhere” (8). We are living in a world craving for spiritual leadership. Passion, trust, caring, authenticity: all of these are crucial for successful leadership, and all wrap up into spiritual leadership.

Leadership for learning: this seems like a no-brainer when it comes to leadership within education. However leadership for learning is so much more than simply within the field of education. “Leaders are no longer “men on horseback” who shape up organizations through the force of their personalities. Leaders are supposed to learn along with their followers” (Mutsak, 1). Even Kouzes and Posner have that one of their fundamental truths of leadership is that “the best leaders are the best learners” (120). They go on to say about learning that

“To master leadership you have to have a strong desire to excel, you have to believe strongly that you can learn new skills and abilities, and you have to be willing to devote yourself to continuous learning and deliberate practice. No matter how good you are, you can always get better” (120-121).

Consistently throughout most every piece of leadership literature I have read, the theme of learning consistently and constantly is prevalent. “Leaders and followers, jointly challenged by

the demands of change, must learn together in the moment, exposing their ignorance and building on their collective competence” (Hollander & Offerman, 1997) in order to meaningfully impact change. Learning is life. It is on-going, never-ending. If the majority of writing on leadership focus on learning as crucial to successfully leading, what difference is there in women in leadership when it comes to this aspect? According to Grogan and Shakeshaft, “women educational leaders often make decisions based on the priorities of student learning. They acknowledge that the school must be managed well, but their hearts are motivated by watching students grow and develop” (19). To me this shows that the difference between women in educational leadership and anyone else in leadership is that while most leaders recognize the importance of learning, women in educational leadership do not just think it is important, it is their motivator and reason for accomplishing their goals. Leadership for learning is not just a principle that they should work on when they have time; it is their reason for all of their work.

The final aspect of women’s leadership in education is balanced leadership. I almost giggle while writing that sentence as I am also helping my son play Stratego against my husband and listening to my daughter practice her singing. “Like men, women experience the day-to-day activities of leading as all-consuming, but unlike many men, many women leaders go home to another “day’s work” taking care of family and home” (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 21). This is my “day’s work,” it includes everything I do in the office and it also includes helping clean up messes, kissing boo-boos, listening to stories about days, helping with homework. And though it is a lot, it is my joy. As Sheryl Sandberg says “having it all... perhaps the greatest trap ever set for women was the coining of this phrase” (120). According to my own experience, in the world my grandmother grew up in, women were *supposed to* stay home with their children. In the world my mother grew up in, women were *supposed to* be working outside the home, and yet

women were still expected to be the home makers at the same time. I believe that I must have been blessed beyond belief to live in the era that is beginning to come to a happy middle ground. Kouzes and Posner tell us that “studies of top performers strongly suggest that you have to have a supportive environment in order to develop expertise. A supportive family environment is very common in stories of world-class performers” (131). Family, work, friends, these are all needed in order to be a successful leader. None of us can do it alone, and we can’t do it all. The powerful piece about this to me is that I believe that while we may have come from generations of contradictions of where women should lead and focus our attentions “women in the twenty first century are clearly free to choose to concentrate on work in the same way a man does. Many prefer to attain a balance between their work lives and their family lives” (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 23). What is even more amazing to me is not just that women in leadership are choosing to find a balance but even further that “women are better able to perform their educational responsibilities if they have found ways to manage their home duties as well” (23).

As outlined, the five main principles that set women apart within educational leadership are relational leadership, leadership for social justice, spiritual leadership, leadership for learning, and balanced leadership. However, what does any of this have to do with school improvement planning? In my experience, the process of school improvement planning will consist of two facets: the review of the current status and the setting of goals and measurable objectives to improve the current status. What type of change would be seen in schools if more attention was paid to changing relationships, social justices, spirituality, learning, and balance over where state stood on standardized tests and how to improve scores and scores alone?

“The truth is that leadership is an affair of the heart. Leaders put their hearts in their business and the business in their hearts. They love what they’re doing and they stay in

love with leading, with the people who do the work, with what their organizations produce, and with what those who honor them by using their products and services. They show they care by paying attention to people, sharing success stories, and making people feel important and special. Exemplary leaders are positive and upbeat, generating emotional energy that enable others to flourish” (Kouzes and Posner, 152).

To me this embodies the principles set forth by Grogan and Shakeshaft in the ways that women lead. Nowhere in these principles or truths about leadership was there a mention of data and setting checklists for students. To me this suggests that school improvement planning needs a makeover from the way it is being led now. Yes, data points have their place and should be included in improvement planning. However I think if the only thing that is focused upon for improvement planning is the data, institutions miss the point. Improvement planning is meant to lead schools out of the trouble areas that they currently find themselves and help them grow to the areas of realized potential that are so needed. “By putting instruction and learning at the center of their leadership mission, women are likely to push for instructional change that improves learning. As student populations change and as content requirements shift, instructional change is a constant within schools” (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 18). Data changes, tests change, content changes. What does not seem to change is the importance of instruction and learning to be central no matter what. It certainly seems from the texts that women could offer a new and powerful voice in the improvement planning process then if they are truly focused on the principles provided here.

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Appendix A

Interview Information:

Five, five to ten minute interviews and three thirty minute interviews were held with various educational leaders within both my personal and professional life. The thirty minute interviews were recorded and notes were taken while in the five minute interviews, notes were taken only. Participants in the interview process:

30 Minute Formal Interviews:

Vinice Davis: Experience: 10+ years of experience in education, served as education director for local charter organization, currently serves as VP of Improvement Services at AdvancED.
Education: MBA

Vicki Denmark: Experience: 30+ years of experience in education, served as superintendent within Fulton County School District, currently serves as VP of Innovation in Learning Environments at AdvancED. Education: PhD in Education leadership.

Veronica Harts: Experience: 25+ years of experience in education, served as Principal in New Orleans area schools, currently serves as VP of Innovative Learning at AdvancED. Education: EDD in Education leadership.

5-10 Minute Informal Interviews:

Diane Adams: Experience: Owner of home business and 15+ years serving as PTA president at various institutions. Education: Bachelor of Science in Engineering.

Melissa Adelman: Experience: >1 year managing improvement services, currently improvement services project manager at AdvancED. Education: Master's in Forensic Science.

Florence Cheruiyot: Experience: 5+ years developing and testing educational technology, currently technology project manager at AdvancED. Education: MBA

Manisha Ramakrishnan: 15+ years developing and testing educational technology, currently technology project manager at AdvancED. Education: MBA

Beth Seitz: Experience: Homeschool parent, currently homemaker. Education: Bachelors in Elementary Education.

Each interview included a variety of the following questions in no particular order:

1. What do you see as differences in the way that women lead?
2. How do you define school improvement planning?
3. What is the process for developing a school improvement plan?
4. What do you see as the main difference that women bring to a leadership role?
5. What are the strengths of your leadership style?
6. What are the weaknesses?
7. What impact do these strengths or weaknesses have on the process of school improvement?
8. Who would you classify as a leader for social change?
9. Do you believe that differences in how women lead are gender related or gender specific?
e.g. Can men and women lead in the same way, or are we always predetermined to lead as defined by our genders?
10. As a female leader, what roadblock have you encountered because of either your leadership style or gender?
11. What advice do you have for the next generation of women in leadership?
12. What do you believe has been your most impactful change on school improvement processes to date?
13. Do you believe it is possible to “have it all” as women in leadership?