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Advancing Women In Leadership

Exploring the Dilemmas of Leadership: Voices from the Field

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Although women comprise a majority of the nation's public school teaching force, most school administrators are white males, and at the highest level in public school administration, the superintendency, there seems to be a great deal of resistance to gender and minority integration.

School administrators generally come from the ranks of teachers. Therefore, a historical perspective of women and minorities in teaching provides a framework for understanding the role of women and minorities in administration.

White males did almost all formal teaching in this country until the late eighteenth century, and it was not until the end of the colonial period that women began to teach in elementary school. But by the end of the nineteenth century women outnumbered males in the teaching profession. This was due in part to the high demand for males in the private sector and the rapid growth of the elementary school (Shakeshaft, 1989).

Recent figures (Feistritzer, 1990) indicate that this trend is escalating; since 1985, 78% of new teachers hired were women, and 92% were white; only 5% of teachers hired since 1985 were African-American; 2% were Hispanic and 1% were Asian. The number of Native American teachers hired since 1985 is negligible (Feistritzer, 1990). So while the number of women in the teaching profession is increasing, the number of minority teachers is declining. In part this decline of minority teachers may be accounted for by circumstances that are similar to those in the African-American community as reported by Perkins(1989):

In the 1980's [B]lacks began in increasingly larger numbers to take advantage of the fact that professions other than teaching usually are more financially rewarding and prestigious. Black communities have always held educators in high esteem, but as communities have become more integrated, and teachers have moved their residences from the communities in which they teach, teacher status among blacks has dropped. As the number of black professionals grows in other fields, teachers lose significance. In addition, because society evaluates one's worth and status according to income, low salaries have

contributed to the decline in teacher status within the black community as it assimilates the values of the larger society (p.363).

Although the gender of students is fairly evenly distributed across educational levels, women teachers are concentrated at the elementary level and decrease in number in middle, secondary, and postsecondary institutions. Table 1 shows the gender stratification in teaching and administration for American K-12 public schools and both public and private postsecondary institutions (Bell & Chase, 1993).

Table 1
Gender Stratification: Proportion of Female Students/Faculty/Board Members/Leaders

	Students	Faculty	Board Members	Leaders
Postsecondary Level	54.4%	27.0%	20.0%	11.3%
Secondary Level	48.8%	52.0%	34.7%	5.6%(supts) 7.6%(prins)
Middle Level	48.6%	57.0%		23.0%
Elementary Level		87.0%		37.0%

Source: Bell & Chase, "The Underrepresentation of Women in School Leadership," in Catherine Marshall (ed.), The New Politics of Race and Gender, 1993.

The racial and ethnic stratification of faculty, leaders and board members in the education system in American schools is even more striking than the gender stratification. Table 2 shows that, particularly in K-12 public schools, faculty, educational leaders, and board members in the United States do not closely reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the student body. While 16.1% of elementary, middle, and secondary students are African-Americans, just 8.2% of the teachers are African-Americans; while 9.9% of the students are Hispanic, only 2.9% of the teachers are Hispanic. The middle school level has the highest representation of African-American principals (9.3%) and Hispanic principals (2.1%). But at the highest levels of K-12 administration and policy making, namely the high school principal, the superintendent and the school board, minorities are even more likely to be missing. Only 4.6% of the high school administrators are minorities, and among the nation's school board members, 3.4% of the members are minorities (Bell & Chase, 1993).

Similarly in private and public postsecondary institutions, the number of African-Americans, Hispanics and American Indians are smaller proportions of faculty, presidents, and board members than the students they represent. Asians who comprise 4% of students in postsecondary institutions and 4.7% of the faculty, are an exception to this pattern.

Although women comprise a majority of the nation's public school teaching force, most school administrators are White males, and at the highest level in public school administration, the superintendency, there seems to be a great deal of resistance to gender and minority integration (Bell & Chase, 1993). This is true despite the increased reservoir of highly and suitably qualified women.

Table 2
Race /Ethnic Stratification: Proportion of Leaders/Faculty/Students/Board Members

	Leaders	Faculty	Students	Board Members
Postsecondary Level	8% Min 92% Non-Min	4.5% AfrAmer 4.7% Asian 2% Hisp .3%NatAmer 88.5% White	8.9% AfrAmer 4% Asian 5.5% Hisp 8.9% NatAmer 77.8% White	6.3% AfrAmer .6% Hisp 90% White 3% Other Min
Secondary Level	Superintend'cy AfrAmer 2.5% Asian .3% Hisp .6% Native Amer .8% White 95.8% Principals AfrAmer 3.1% Hisp 1.5% 94.7% White			
Middle Level	9.3% AfrAmer 2.1% Hisp 88.1% White	8.2% AfrAmer 2.9% Hisp 88.8% White	16.1% AfrAmer 2.8% Asian 9.9% Hisp .9% NatAmer 70.4% White	2.2% AfrAmer .1% Asian .8% Hisp .3% NatAmer 96.5% White
Elementary Level	7.8% AfrAmer 1.5% Asian 1.5% Hisp NatAmer 8 1% 7.9% White			

Barriers Impeding Change

Kanter (1977) suggested that uncertainty in the organization makes homogeneity of the management group important to its members. Having studied corporate organizational structure, she concluded that the higher level of management in the organizational hierarchy, the more discretion the occupants have in performing their job responsibilities and the more unclear the criteria for determining their successes. Therefore, management seeks to fill its ranks, particularly at the highest level of management, with those persons that best fit the existing norm. Kanter showed that often those whose social characteristics are different from the management group are clustered in positions that have well-defined criteria for determining success or they served as experts rather than decision makers. Wheatley (1979) adapted Kanter's theory to public schools and postulated that this attempt by management to reduce uncertainty by requiring homogeneity in its management group placed constraints on all teachers and had definite negative implications for women and minorities. This theory helps explain the career patterns for minorities that has been identified by Valverde and Brown (1988). They noted that minority administrators are assigned to special programs and schools with large concentrations of minority students. Research on African-American superintendents has also shown that they are often appointed to systems with inadequate financial resources (Scott, 1980, 1990; Revere, 1987; Sizemore, 1986) or districts with a large concentration of minority students who are economically disadvantaged and have low achievement test scores (Moody, 1983; Townsel & Banks, 1975). Furthermore, research by Revere (1987) and Sizemore (1986) found that African-American superintendents who are women are found clustered in and around cities.

Hugh J. Scott (1980), the first African-American Superintendent of the Washington, DC school district, noted that when urban districts became fiscally over burdened and the students they serve are racial minorities, White superintendents are reluctant to take the positions. He predicted over a decade ago:

The expansion in the ranks of black superintendents will be related to whites not wanting to deal with the engrossing problems of cities. Black superintendents will inherit the effect of increased societal deterioration, unabated decline in academic achievement, deficient financial resources, higher percentages of black students and students from low-income families, a majority of black activists on the school board, a large number of blacks in the community and demands from vocal blacks in the community (p.188).

But in the South, these kinds of employment patterns did not begin until after the Supreme Court desegregation ruling in 1954. According to the research of Coffin (1972), during the 1960s the number of African-American high school principals in 13 southern and border states actually dropped over 90%, and the decline of elementary principals could have been even greater. This loss had an overwhelming effect on the African-American community, because the school principals were often the most prominent citizens in the community. The loss of these role models create a leadership vacuum in these communities that has not since been recovered.

Ortiz (1982) used the social science theories of socialization and role to provide a means for understanding the occupational and organization participation of women and minorities in school settings.

She defined socialization as those changes which occur in persons as they participate in an organization and concluded that minorities and women do not interface with the school organization in the same manner as white administrators. She explained this difference in part by the placement of women and minorities in special projects and schools with minority populations.

She noted the importance of principals and other key administrators in this socialization process. These educators are the gatekeepers and provide the socialization opportunities for aspiring administrators to progress. Valverde's research (1974) agreed with this, and also found that minorities are excluded from administrative positions mainly because they are not sponsored. It is evident that since only 4.6% of the secondary principals and 4.2% of the superintendents are Native Americans, Asian, African-American and Hispanic and only 7.6% of the secondary principals and 5.6% of superintendents are women, the numbers of women and minorities in the gatekeeping positions are simply not equal to the task of sponsoring and socializing women and minorities into educational administrative positions in any substantial way.

Another set of explanations for the underrepresentation of women and minorities in educational administration centers on public policy trends and their effect on equity. Clark and Astuto (cited in Bell & Chase, 1993) explained that after 1980 the attention paid to equity was replaced by a focus on excellence. This change is exemplified in the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk which focused on learner outcomes and the need for excellence while disregarding the issue of equity. The education reform debate, which began in the middle eighties, also ignores issues of equity. In fact, a content analysis of 138 articles on this educational reform movement shows that gender equity occupied less than 1% of the articles (Sadker, Sadker, & Steindam, 1989).

Ragins and Sundstrom's (1989) synthesis of the literature on power and gender in organizations provides a useful model for understanding the underrepresentation of women and minorities in administration. Ragins and Sundstrom define factors for analysis in terms of individual factors, interpersonal factors, organizational factors and societal factors. They also note while there can be a great deal of overlapping in these factors, the larger aggregations, (societal and organizational) have a stronger impact on the smaller aggregations (interpersonal and individual). This analysis is consistent with the work of Yeakey, Johnston, and Adkison (1986) who summarized the importance of these "larger aggregations:" The larger body of organizational literature suggests, irrespective of attitudes and training program, that no real change will occur until it is accompanied by broader societal change. That is, the basic problem of the exclusion of minorities and women from administrative positions is the subordinate role of women and minorities in all parts of society (p. 137).

It seems that while organizational theory may reveal implicit prejudices as well as informal rules and practices that exclude women and minorities from educational administration, the constraints external to the organization may have a more powerful effect on equity.

Recent Demographic and Educational Trends

This gender and racial stratification in public school administration is becoming more striking and disturbing as the demographics of this country change. Statistics (Feistritzer, 1990) show that the number of White teachers who will be teaching people who are racially or ethnically different from themselves will continue to rise dramatically. This is not only because of the changing demo-graphic picture in this country which forecasts that the minority population in United States will increase from 30% to 38% between 1990 and 2010 (Hodgkinson, 1991) but also because of the reduced number of people of color, who are entering teacher preparation programs (Feistritzer, 1990).

Corresponding to an anticipated student population increase is a projected need to hire more teachers and

administrators. The National Center for Education Statistics (1988) reports that the demand for new teachers is expected to increase by more than 35% before stabilizing in 1995, with most of the increase occurring at the secondary level where the increase is estimated at 80%. The demand for hiring new administrators is more difficult to estimate due to the scarcity of national survey data on administrator turnover, but a 1988 study by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) reported that 35% of current high school principals were 50 years of age or older, suggesting that a substantial number of high school principals will be eligible for retirement in the next 10 to 15 years. And the data indicate that the average age of high school principals is higher in larger school districts and communities; a fact that will have implications for the hiring of women and minorities, who have previously been more successful in being selected for these jobs (Pounder, 1990).

But filling numbers, quotas and targets with certain types of administrators is not the answer to the equity issues in educational administration. Einstein's maxim that we can't solve problems with the same intelligence we had when we created them certainly can be applied to this complex issue of equity in educational administration. Just as corporate America is using new paradigms to accomplish the enormous task of redefining the production and distribution of goods and services in a free-market global economy (Senge, 1991; Peters, 1988; Wheatley, 1992: Block, 1991), so educational leaders need to reach out to each other and free themselves of some of the constraints that traditional assumptions have imposed on the definition of educational leadership. A part of these traditional assumptions centers on the perceived need by those at the highest level of administration and policy-making to define leadership in terms of homogeneity and control.

The importance of educational leaders trained to value diversity and see the need to expand their view of reality should not be minimized. If this nation is to survive as a democratic society which is competitive in the international arena, the full participation of all its citizens is necessary. This participation is dependent to a large degree on the ability of educational leaders to create systems that celebrate the multifaceted possibilities existing within schools today and see differences as a "valuable resource for enriching the tradition of democratic pluralism" (Giroux, 1994). These are the kind of leaders who will have skills in "empowering students who typically struggle in schools (e.g., students of color, different ethnicities, students with disabilities, students of lower social classes)" (Capper & Jamison, 1993).

To be this kind of leader and have access to the leadership roles in educational administration in the twenty-first century will be an exciting venture. Here are some tips for equal access and treatment in educational administration.

Tips for Success

Know Yourself. The most important ingredient for success is honest and objective evaluation of your strengths and abilities as well as your aspirations. This self-assessment is a continual process which helps you understand your strengths and abilities so that you can put your energies where your talents and interests are.

Be Prepared. Credentials and work experiences are an important part of success in educational administration. Be selective about the preparation program you chose; enroll in a preparation program that will best help prepare you for the job of an educational administrator. As you are working on your credentials, set realistic goals for yourself and seek work experiences that will enable you to be a qualified candidate for leadership positions.

Analyze and Strategize. Analyze your career situations and strategize your career moves so that each move will maximize the potential for achieving your goals. Don't lower your own expectation for yourself; make career decisions based on the vision that you have for yourself.

Negative Work Experiences. Work at turning negative experiences into positive factors to be utilized in reaching your goals. Negative experiences give you information that can be useful to you and to others; these kinds of experiences have been used by many as a modus operandum for high motivation, determination and a set of survival behaviors that dispel illusions and help elicit change.

Critical Factors Affecting Advancement. Be aware of three critical factors that affect advancement: structural barriers, role compatibility and organizational fit. In order to be the right person at the right place at the right time and to get the job you want, critically analyze how structural barriers (those barriers that are in place in the organization), role compatibility (the fit of your talents and the needs of the organization) and organizational fit (how well you fit into the structure of the organization) will impact your advancement.

Affiliate. Don't be trapped by historic divisions between races and genders; join state and national professional groups (i.e. National Association of Secondary School Principals, NASSP; American Association of School Administrators, AASA; Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, ASCD) that include people from various groups, classes, and races.

Share Goals. No one can be successful in a vacuum. It takes support from others as well as support to others to be successful. Establish "win-win" relationships; that is, relationships that are supportive for both parties. These are the kinds of relationships in which you can share goals, be a mentor and establish networking ties.

Find a Mentor and Be a Mentor. A mentor is a person who you want to emulate; it is someone you respect not only for the position they hold but because of the skills they use to successfully execute their responsibilities in that position. As you learn from a mentor, you also learn by being a mentor; your personal growth will be enhanced if you also become a mentor to someone else.

Network. Networking is an information giving and receiving system. It is the process of developing and using contacts for information, advice and support (Duvall, 1980). These kinds of contacts are very useful in accomplishing your goals.

Table 3
Mentoring Functions

Career Functions	Psychosocial Functions
sponsorshop/promote/recommend exposure/viability coaching protection set challenging task/performance standard share expertise provide needed information chance to observe/learn by association arrange administrative experience advise on salary negotiations	role modeling support and encouragement counseling friendship encourage risk taking enhance self-confidence help formulate career plan act as sounding board facilitate move from classroom arrange access to other administrators provide feedback on progress

There is a fairly close relationship among sharing goals, mentoring and networking. Mentoring and networking can form a comfortable overlap. The sharing of information, the benefits of mutual support,

the potential for tutelage and guidance are all features common to sharing goals, mentoring and networking (Swoboda & Millar, 1986).

Pavan (1987) lists mentoring functions that show the importance of mentoring and the ways in which mentoring can be effective. Table 3 shows these mentoring functions which are divided into career functions and psychosocial functions. The career functions of a mentor deal with how mentors can help advance your career; the psychosocial functions deal with how mentors can give social and psychological support to you as you develop career plans and move from the classroom to roles in administration.

Summary

As educators reach out to each other in these kinds of ways, they will be better prepared to meet the challenge of leadership in tomorrow's schools not with fear, anxiety, frustration or discussion only of standards in the traditional way, but with the expectation of a celebration as they work together to improve education to meet the needs of a pluralistic population.

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