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Completing an Educational Leadership Picture: Feminine Essentials from an Australian Perspective

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Introduction

The position of women in Australian society, and other Westernized countries, has not improved greatly. Even so, there have been some obvious gains such as the introduction of the Federal Sex Discrimination Act (1984), the Affirmative Action/ Equal Employment Opportunity Act (1986), and State legislation such as the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act (1991). Women continue to experience inequality in their public, social, and private lives. For example, within the sphere of educational administration, women continue to be under-represented. In Queensland, Australia, two thirds of teaching staff in schools are women, yet women fill only one-third of the positions of either principal or executive staff member (Ehrich, 1998). Over the past two decades, a variety of feminist frameworks have been put forward to explain women's "almost absence" from leadership and to highlight the various barriers that have contributed to this situation. Of interest to us in this paper is the barrier which describes organizations, including schools, as "gendered" (Burton, 1987, 1988, 1998; Korac-Kakabadse & Kouzmin, 1997). Following this line of thinking, we argue that the dominant culture of educational institutions is "masculine." Thus, valued practices support competition, hierarchy, and individualism (Blackmore, 1989), while more "feminine" models of caring, concern, and consensus are devalued or ignored. Because of this incomplete picture of women in education, our paper focuses on outlining some important principles and relevant practices that create more "feminine" ways of leading educational organizations. In this chapter we review the construct of leadership, explore meanings of essential 'feminine' values, and then outline feminising principles and practices (Ehrich & McCrea, 1999) of educational leadership that are more supportive of and inclusive toward "feminine' values." We conclude our presentation of passionate beliefs with key leadership hopes that are situated within a moral learning paradigm.

Leadership as a Gendered Construct

Traditionally the construct of leadership, which includes educational leadership, has been described in the literature as masculinist (Blackmore, 1989, 1995). At its extreme, a masculinist view of leadership is authoritarian and hierarchical as well as competitive and unemotional

(Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Rogers, 1988). Thus, leaders have been depicted as male with efficient and technical competencies to solve problems and maintain compliance. Furthermore, such leaders seem to be blinded from values and gender (Marshall, 1995; Rogers, 1988). In more recent years, this traditional view of leadership has been questioned and critiqued (Blackmore, 1989; Ferguson, 1984; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1995) and a variety of alternative educational leadership models have defined more sensitive and humane leaders (Beck, 1992; Ehrich & Knight, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1992; Grundy, 1993).

Our position for this chapter supports the "feminine" view of leadership and therefore attributes great importance to "feminine values" with such related practices as concern for others (Beck, 1992), compassion, kindness, and collaboration. We argue that there is a need to balance the dominant masculine view of educational leadership by representing and reaffirming a feminine view. With this said, however, we appreciate the particular challenges this brings due to the inherited and embedded masculine practices, which are pervasive in organisations (Marshall & Rusch, 1995). As Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin (1997) state, organizations can be powerful places that send messages about appropriate values and practices for those who inhabit them. Indeed, dominant "masculinist" cultures in organizations can act as barriers that limit creative individuality and "feminine values."

From one view or picture, there is a body of literature which argues that women's styles of leadership are different from men's (Shakeshaft, 1987; Loden, 1987; Rosener, 1990; Neville, 1988) due to their different life experiences and socialization practices. In her extensive review of research-based articles and dissertations, Shakeshaft (1987) concluded that women administrators had a unique style of leadership characterized by collaboration, open relationships, and sharing with others. From another view, the literature provides a contrary perspective which maintains that gender played little or no role in determining a leader's behaviors (Day & Stogdill, 1972; Powell, 1990; Rizzo & Mendez, 1988; Weiner, 1995). For example, Powell argued that "there are likely to be excellent, average and poor managerial performers within each sex" (1990, p.72), thus it is problematic to create binary styles or characteristics based on gender. Similarly, Weiner (1995) contended that leadership style could not be attributed to gender alone as other factors such as the value position of the manager and the wider organizational context and ethos played a role in shaping one's style. Recently, post-modern thinking has challenged the essentialist perspective by recognizing the multiplicity of women's voices and the complexity of the nature of their differences from men (Lingard & Limerick, 1995). Post-modern thinking reminds us that there are many ways of being fe/male and assuming that all wo/men have had similar life experiences and socializing processes is not only limiting but unrealistic.

Our concern with the "feminine" is not at odds with other writers who stand for a "feminist framework for management" (i.e., see Ozga & Walker, 1995; Grundy, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989, 1995) because we advocate practices such as collaborating, sharing leadership roles among staff, and sharing knowledge and power. We see our contribution as one that not only supports collaborative and democratic processes but also is concerned with authentic nurturing via interpersonal relationships among educators and children alike.

The Essentials of Feminine Values

By feminine values we mean those culturally defined values which include concern for others, kindness, nurturance, and collaboration. We do not mean attributes designed to make women pleasing to men, nor do we mean certain types of behaviors designed to reinforce women's inferior positions across society. In recent times, a number of authors (see Chorn, 1995;

Loden, 1987; Rogers, 1988) have asserted the importance of feminine values in the leadership of settings such as schools and other organizations as a way of countering the dominant "masculinist" view of daily management. For example, Loden (1987) described a feminine leadership style as stressing cooperation over competition, team structures where power and influence are shared with the group, and interpersonal competence and participative decision making. She identified feminine qualities as "concern for people, interpersonal skills, intuitive management and creative problem solving" (pp. 60, 61). It is our contention that there is merit in focusing on feminine values such as those identified above. We are *not saying* that feminine values belong to, should belong to, or describe, all women (Ehrich & McCrea, 1999). Hence, our argument deviates from some of the supporters of "feminine/ feminist leadership" (i.e. Loden, 1987, Shakeshaft, 1987, 1995) who maintain that these values and behaviors are the exclusive domain of women. We *are saying* that these values, which have been *devalued* in the public sphere (Court, 1994), have been historically associated with women. Women have been socialized to be carers and nurturers (Shakeshaft, 1989) who place considerable importance upon relationships with others (Gilligan, 1982). Yet, women, and men for that matter, who have sought to exercise "feminine" values by deviating from the dominant or mainstream masculine models of leadership, have been identified as deficit leaders (McCrea & Ehrich, 1999). Our point is that feminine values are critical for educational settings and the adoption of such values by female and male leaders, will move us closer to more humane and caring work environments. Following Carl Jung's lead, we acknowledge that within all of us are masculine and feminine qualities (i.e. animus and anima) (Valle & Kruger, 1981), and recognition of both types of qualities can only contribute to well-balanced individuals and leaders. The care of educators and children is vital if we are to create open, welcoming, and responsive educational settings. Even so, we recognize that what constitutes "masculinity" and "femininity" varies according to social conditions, particular cultures (Court, 1994), and community settings.

Feminising Principles and Practices of Educational Leadership

Feminised leadership varies in many ways from well-established business management models, such as Mukhi, Hampton and Barnwell's (1988; known as PLOC: planning, leading, organizing and controlling) which seems devoid of a human face but saturated with a technical and masculinist approach (McCrea & Ehrich, 1999). We explore several important principles and relevant practices in light of essential "feminine values." The broad principles encompass sensitive leading, people resourcing, and active managing.

Sensitive Leading

A principle. Sensitive leading is acknowledging the dynamic interplay of all shareholders within an organization, serving others and serving concepts and realities (Sergiovanni, 1992), sharing more than delegating, capturing images of collective commitments, and advocating for ideals that are human-focused and humane.

Practices. A sampling of leading practices that demonstrate the more responsive and a "feminine" approach includes:

- Shaping a setting into a comfortable "way of life" rather than just "a place of work".
- Viewing others (both educators and students) as "whole people" in their own right who have needs, feelings and ideas.
- Being prepared to allow others to look better than oneself to produce a

desired outcome (Sinclair, 1998).

- Showing genuine interest in and concern for others.
- Setting an example of inclusive philosophies and practices for children and adults of difference.
- Encouraging students / children to have voices and speak about the running of a school or program.

People Resourcing

A principle. People or human resourcing is supporting all shareholders within an educational setting, developing educators with a focus on generic professional development with images of individual, collective and career understanding and growth as a journey, and a collegial and supportive work culture and climate (McCrea & Ehrich, 1996).

Practices. A sampling of human resourcing practices includes:

- Being sensitive to educators' personal challenges and life circumstances.
- Encouraging women and people from other minority groups within the setting to try new responsibilities and seek promotion.
- Providing apprenticeship opportunities for women and people from other minority groups which will assist them with developing skills and experiences necessary for promotion.
- Enlisting teachers' involvement in critically reflecting upon their teaching and learning practices.
- Working collectively within supportive and professional relationships . Providing professional development opportunities for staff, parents, and the wider community.
- Identifying lifelong learning goals for all people within the educational community.
- Establishing a supportive supervision process for staff (Walker, 1990).

Active Managing

A principle. Active managing is "doing" educational planning, organizing and monitoring as one continuous, looping process. It is also about bringing shareholders together through collaborative involvement, developing trust with guided ethics, helping organize educators' roles and responsibilities in ways that fully support teaching as their main work, providing opportunities for teachers to work together and learn from each other, and instituting educational monitoring in various accountability forms that encompass children, educators, leaders, settings, and systems.

Practices. A sampling of active managing includes reasoned planning, organizing, and monitoring.

Responsive planning:

- Creating collaborative opportunities for all members of the school community (i.e. staff, students, parents, community members) to plan new directions for relevant learning and teaching.
- Using democratic principles to develop idealistic visions and realistic plans.
- Establishing ways for small groups of staff to research important issues pertaining to educational practice.

Sensible organizing:

- Establishing and supporting peer coaching teams of teachers.
- Setting up interpersonal structures (e.g., mentoring, meetings, memos, agendas) and

physical structures (e.g., spaces, time, furnishings, supports) which encourage professional development of educators.

- Challenging and supporting teachers to experiment with innovations in their classrooms.
- Encouraging staff to read and think about, share and reflect on their understandings in partnerships.
- Seeking advice from parents and integrating them into the everyday life of the setting.
- Building networks with others beyond the organization.

Accountable monitoring:

- Urging involvement of parents and community representatives in the annual review cycle of educational processes and practices.
- Inviting parents and community members to attend focus group interviews designed to gauge their perceptions (negative and positive) of the school and then to set new directions.
- Encouraging staff to use a variety of assessment and evaluation processes for documenting children's progress.
- Recognizing, celebrating and publicizing individual, collective, and school based achievements.

In summary, it seems appropriate to refocus or reframe a picture of educational leadership with a gendered lens that is sensitive to values and principles, as well as attentive to daily practices. In the context of a changing and dynamic world, such taking stock can be matched with others' personal stories and reflections and hopefully lead to stronger but also flexible feminine "essentials" at the core of educational leadership.

Epilogue

It is our hope that this discourse helps complete a picture of women as educational leaders and of educational leaders who are feminine. Our hopefulness extends beyond all leaders to the children of education and the betterment of learning and teaching, so that children are not viewed as objects or empty vessels but as individuals with human and learning requirements. Thus, schools ought to respect and respond to them in pedagogically and morally responsible ways. Monitoring children's work ought to reflect their uniquenesses in terms of family interests and cultural experiences. This means that the complete picture of educational leadership includes the leaders and the led. Sharing and giving, acting and learning are essential aspects of "complete-picture leaders." Several hopes for the future may well be seen in our positional discourse that constructs a leadership which is firmly based on essential feminine values and focused by important principles and relevant practices. People are the most important aspect of all educational settings, and enhancing their spiritual health helps complete the picture of valuable learning and teaching.

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