



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF KNOWING EVENTS  
AMONG WOMEN HEADTEACHERS OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

**KHUAN WAI BING.**

**FPP 2005 3**

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**By**

**KHUAN WAI BING**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
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**October 2005**



**With love and gratitude**

**to my parents,  
brothers,  
sisters,**

**and**

**with admiration**

**to all women headteachers...  
brave and courageous ladies  
and a model for us all**

Abstract of this thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF KNOWING EVENTS  
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By

**KHUAN WAI BING**

**October 2005**

**Chairman: Associate Professor Asma Ahmad, PhD**

**Faculty: Educational Studies**

The main purpose of this study was to understand the nature of knowing for women headteachers in leadership and decision-making. The study was carried out through three research questions. They include: (1) what are the characteristics of knowing events for women headteachers as experienced by them? (2) what are the influences that shape women headteachers' knowing? (3) what are the specific ways of knowing that women headteachers engage in? These questions aimed to determine the characteristics, factors that influence, and structure of the knowing phenomenon among women headteachers in leadership and decision-making.

The phenomenological approach was selected since it was deemed the most appropriate for the study of a phenomenon of this nature. Data were gathered from nine women headteachers in primary and secondary government schools. The participants were selected from excellent and successful women headteachers through purposeful sampling. The data collection methods employed were mainly in-depth interviews with the participants. Each interview was taped recorded, transcribed



verbatim and analyzed. In addition, informal observation and review of accessible official documents were also carried out. The validity of the study was ensured through clarifying the researcher's biases at the outset of the study, triangulation, member checks, peer examination and rich, thick description of results. The reliability was furthered ensured through stating the researcher's position, triangulation and maintaining an audit trail.

The findings yielded characteristics of knowing events as experienced by the women headteachers, influences that shape their knowing, ways of knowing women headteachers engaged in. The knowing events represent the phases that every woman headteacher in the study had passed through from accession or entry into headship to refocusing of values in the securely established state. The influences that shape knowing began in the formation years and occur throughout headship. In addition it also represents the development of knowing from a dependency on authorities to autonomy of self, knowledge as abstract and objective to being relative and subjective, and the cognitive process of receiving knowledge to one of generating knowledge. The study concludes that the knowing practiced among the women headteachers in leadership and decision making is unique to the participants of this study. The findings are conceptualized into a thematic portrayal of knowing. Specific recommendations for further research are also suggested.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
Sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KAJIAN FENOMENOLOGIKAL MENGENAI BAGAIMANA SESEORANG  
PENTADBIR MENGETAHUI SESUATU PENGETAHUAN  
DI KALANGAN PENGETUA WANITA SEKOLAH KERAJAAN**

Oleh

**KHUAN WAI BING**

**Oktober 2005**

**Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Asma Ahmad, PhD**

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Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji fenomena bagaimana seseorang pengetua wanita mengetahui sesuatu pengetahuan dalam proses kepimpinan dan membuat keputusan. Kajian ini telah dijalankan melalui tiga soalan kajian iaitu: (1) apakah ciri-ciri cara mengetahui sesuatu pengetahuan seperti yang dialami oleh pengetua wanita? (2) apakah faktor-faktor yang membentuk pengetahuan pengetua wanita? dan (3) apakah cara menjana pengetahuan khusus yang digunakan oleh pengetua wanita? Soalan-soalan kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan atribut, faktor-faktor pembentukan, dan struktur fenomena bagaimana seseorang pengetua wanita mengetahui sesuatu pengetahuan dalam proses kepimpinan dan membuat keputusan.

Pendekatan fenomenologi telah dipilih memandangkan pendekatan ini paling sesuai diguna untuk mengkaji fenomena ini. Data telah dikumpul daripada sembilan orang pengetua wanita sekolah rendah dan menengah kerajaan. Partisipan telah dipilih daripada kelompok pengetua wanita cemerlang dan berjaya melalui persampelan bertujuan. Kaedah pengumpulan data yang utama merupakan temuduga secara

mendalam. Setiap temuduga telah dirakamkan, direkodkan secara verbatim, dan dianalisiskan. Selain itu, pemerhatian tidak formal dan kajian dokumen rasmi yang dibenarkan telah dijalankan. Keesahan kajian telah dikenalpasti melalui triangulasi, semakan oleh partisipan; pemeriksaan oleh rakan penyelidikan dan penghuraian dapatan kajian secara terperinci. Kebolehpercayaan kajian juga telah dikenalpasti melalui kenyataan tentang kedudukan pengkaji, triangulasi, dan rekod laluan audit.

Dapatan kajian menghasilkan ciri-ciri bagaimana seseorang pengetua wanita mengetahui sesuatu pengetahuan; faktor yang membentuk pengetahuan; dan cara menjana pengetahuan khusus yang digunakan. Cara mengetahui sesuatu pengetahuan merupakan fasa yang dilalui setiap pengetua wanita dalam kajian dari detik menyandang jawatan pengetua ke pembentukan semula nilai-nilai peribadi dalam peringkat mantap yang stabil. Faktor pembentukan pengetahuan pengetua wanita berlaku dalam tahun-tahun awalan sebelum menyandang jawatan dan berkembang secara berterusan sepanjang memegang jawatan pengetua. Selain itu, cara yang digunakan oleh pengetua wanita untuk menjana pengetahuan juga menggambarkan perkembangan pengetahuan daripada peringkat kebergantungan kepada autoriti ke autonomi diri, pengetahuan sebagai suatu yang abstrak dan objektif ke suatu yang relatif dan subjektif, dan proses kognitif daripada penerimaan pengetahuan kepada penjanaan pengetahuan. Kajian merumuskan bahawa cara mengetahui pengetahuan yang diamalkan oleh pengetua wanita dalam kepimpinan dan membuat keputusan adalah unik kepada partisipan kajian sahaja. Dapatan mengenai cara mengetahui pengetahuan juga dikonsepsikan ke dalam satu gambaran bertema. Cadangan khusus untuk kajian seterusnya juga dirakamkan.





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I certify that an Examination Committee met on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2005 to conduct the final examination of Khuan Wai Bing on her Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled "A Phenomenological Investigation of Knowing Events among Women Headteachers of Government School" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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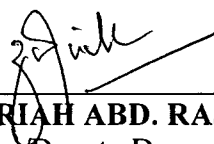
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Date: **07 FEB 2006**



## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

*KwBing*

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**KHUAN WAI BING**

Date: **10 JAN 2006**



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BM	Bahasa Melayu
CDC	Curriculum Development Centre
IAB	Institut Aminuddin Baki
EPRD	Educational Planning and Research Department
eTEMS	Teaching of Mathematics & Science in English
HEM	Hal Ehwal Murid (Student Affairs)
HM	Headmaster
HSC	Higher School Certificate
ISO	International Standard Organization
JPA	Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam
JPN	Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri (State Education Department)
KL	Kuala Lumpur
KPKS	Kursus Pengurusan dan Kepemimpinan Sekolah
KPPM	Ketua Pengarah Pendidikan Malaysia
LCE	Lower Certificate Examination
MC	Medical Chit
MoE	Ministry of Education
MUET	Malaysia University English Test
NUD*IST	Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing
PK	Penolong Kanan (Assistant Headteacher)
PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah
PPD	Pegawai Pendidikan Daerah



PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PTK	Penilaian Tahap Kecekapan
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
QIT	Quality Improvement Team
SPBT	Skim Pinjaman Buku Teks
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
SSB	Sistem Saraan Baru (New Remuneration System)
STPM	Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia
SWOT	Strength Weakness Opportunity Threats
TQM	Total Quality Management
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
UPSR	Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (Primary School Assessment Test)



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Problem and Its Context**

The words “to know” or “knowing” are prevalent throughout leadership literature. To know means to be well-informed; have the know-how in leadership decision making; can voice out opinions as well as exchange views with others; and can recognize right from wrong. There is consistent affirmation that knowing is of utmost importance to leaders and in fact, the very essence of leadership (Reinhartz & Beach, 2004). Even the very first study intelligence and dominance, and subsequently, vision was revered as essential traits and personality characteristics of leaders. Intelligence and dominance are also reflections of the intellectual power of the leader (Fennel, 2002). Despite the value placed on acquiring knowledge and intelligence, very little research has been done to substantiate what constitutes the essential structure of a knowing leader. This type of knowledge is referred to as tacit knowledge (Wassink, Slegers & Imants, 2003) what more knowledge from the gender perspective (Coleman, 2003; Rusch, 2004).

In Malaysia, the headteacher is generally considered to be the single most important element in achieving school effectiveness (Mortimore, 1993; 1995). Since headteachers are pivotal players in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools, any significant contribution towards improvement would require that headteachers exercise their intellectual power. Furthermore, school leader’s lives are marked by frequent and a myriad changes in responsibilities and expectations (Day,



2003; Dorman & D'Arbon, 2003). All these directions require alert, active knowing and continued learning. Broadening and deepening perspectives, understanding staff, making sense of work problems and solving them are inextricably tied to thinking and knowing. On a daily basis, headteachers often have to struggle with moral and ethical dilemmas when dealing with the great diversity of people, cultures, beliefs, and behaviors daily encountered in the school environment. The ability to make sound decisions in respecting human differences and to deal effectively with different individuals has become integral to the mission of the school headteacher (Newton, Giesen, Freeman, Bishop & Zeitoun, 2003). Sound judgment, reasoning and wise decisions are the hallmarks of a knowing person and the characteristics that the Government hopes to develop in its headteachers. In such challenging decision tasks, who then fits such a role?

Although there is no formal distinction made between the headteacher job in terms of intellectual power required for men and women, there is a fairly clear segmentation of the headteacher post in Malaysia. A report by the Educational Planning and Research Division (2003) indicated that at present, roughly 75% of the headteacher and headmasters positions in Malaysia go to men and only 25% to women. Evidence concerning the number of women at the top illustrated that women have not made a significant impact on top positions. Out of the 1612 headteachers in secondary schools, only 607 of them are women whereas in the primary school setting, only 1570 out of 7065 head teachers are women (EPRD, 2003). This scenario is not reflective of the huge number of women teachers (169,837 as compared to 97,921 male teachers) the Ministry of Education Malaysia has in its service. There is an



imbalance between the number of women and men as headteachers. There is a need to address this imbalance in order to promote the most capable men and women as headteachers for greater school efficiency and effectiveness.

Teaching is one of the few professions which girls are expected to follow. Female teachers far outnumber male teachers at all educational levels in schools but female educational administrators are very few. Since women appear to dominate the teaching profession, viewing them as thinkers, inquirers and as people who possess a vast store of knowledge makes them valued members of the educational team within the school organization (Reinhartz & Beach, 2004). As such they are then suitable 'material' to be made leaders as encouraged and stipulated in the 8<sup>th</sup> Malaysian Plan (EPU, 2001; MoE, 2001). On 26 August 2004, the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that the Government is committed to seeing 30% women participating in policy and decision making processes in the public sector in future (The Malay Mail, 2004). Although no time frame was set, the Government believes that the inclusion of qualified and capable women in the decision-making process is of utmost importance in view of the development and advancement of women in various fields at a rapid pace. There is no doubt of their capability.

Unfortunately, there is still a low level of participation by females in management and leadership. Women account for about 12.4 million of the country's population, a sizeable number that they should not be overlooked as a major source of human capital, yet only less than 15% are involved in decision-making (The Malay Mail, 2004). To achieve progress, the country must pool its resources and to make women





development a success, there is a need to increase the number of women in both the public and private sectors. Women should not be regarded as not being able to do the job.

Indeed, the literature relating to how women, in general, perceive and often view their world, differently from men is increasing (Gilligan, 1982; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Brunner, 1998). In addition, they also represent a different voice than men (Barrett, 1995; Kaplan, 1995; Fitzgerald, 2003), one which is generated from different experiences and alternative ways of thinking (Gilligan, 1982; Belenky et al., 1986; Haring-Hidore & Freeman, 1990). Knowing took on new dimensions when women entered traditionally male domains for instance learning and careers. Research focused on women in leadership provides evidence that women are equally capable as men although they employ different leadership styles (Coleman, 2001; McLay & Brown, 2001; Van Engen & Van der Leeden, 2001). Unfortunately, most existing research still assumes that the headteacher positions are filled by men (Ozga, 1993; Enomoto, 2000; Coleman, 2001) or does not directly address issues of gender (McLay & Brown, 2001).

Women can be viewed as mothers, sisters, secretary and assistant headteachers but are less likely to be viewed as leaders (Morriss, Low & Coleman, 1999; Hogue, Yoder & Ludwig, 2002). Although the social, political and national contexts have changed, the issue of gender is still very much considered a non issue. Women were generally considered suitable to fulfill their biological function rather than be motivated to achieve any intellectual or professional career or leadership role (Richardson & King,