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Five Ways Women Lead

You hire people who have capacity; you help them build that capacity and you let them shine. And I get the residual effect of that all the time, but I no longer need to be in the limelight as … the person who made all of this happen because that's not what makes me feel successful. When I have other people who feel empowered, who have a feeling of purpose and desire and direction and want to make things happen with the direction we set as a team, then I feel I've done my job.

Lorraine Darnell (Grogan, 1996, p. 143)

How do women lead? And why do they take on sometimes onerous leadership roles? By now, we have a fairly rich body of literature that lets us step back and understand what women principals, women superintendents, and other women in education do, and why they do it. While we do not argue that all women lead in a particular way, we have understood that there are preferences[1] and approaches which characterize the leadership of many women. In the recently published *Handbook for Achieving Gender Equity Through Education*, edited by Sue Klein and colleagues (2007), two chapters review the research on women educational leaders P–16. From these comprehensive literature reviews and other research we have been able to identify five themes that illustrate what women

leaders in education pay attention to: *relational leadership*, *leadership for social justice*, *leadership for learning*, *spiritual leadership*, and *balanced leadership*.

The body of research that examines female administrative behavior suggests several components that are commonly associated with women. Documenting leadership behaviors that predominate among women is not the same as saying that women lead differently from men. In more than fifty studies that compare female and male approaches to leadership, the results are mixed: 100 percent of the qualitative studies versus 14 percent of the quantitative studies identify differences (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). The analysis of findings and methodology does not offer a clear explanation for these differences, but we note that quantitative studies tend to measure or describe leadership differently from qualitative studies. Instruments developed by traditional leadership scholars to examine male leadership often left out behaviors that both males and females use, but that were less valued by these researchers. However, we were able to sort out many interesting points of departure from the traditional male accounts in the literature on women leaders. Based on women's lived experiences of leading schools and districts, the following themes help us to understand what women pay attention to in this field of work. And, more important, they give us an opportunity to consider how educational leadership can be reconceived so that more students prosper.

Relational Leadership

Relational leadership suggests that leadership is about being in relationship with others in a horizontal rather than a hierarchical sense. When interviewed about their leadership, women often talk about accomplishing goals with and through others. Studies suggest that women conceptualize power differently and are likely to seek to expand everyone's power. This approach

has considerable impact on organizational behavior and change. Women school leaders historically have been ambivalent about their own power. Early studies of women's reactions to questions about power identified unease with stereotypically male notions of power. Formisano (1987), Carnevale (1994), and Smith (1996) in their studies of women assistant principals, principals, assistant superintendents, and superintendents noted women's discomfort with being described as powerful or as having power. Fennell (2002) reports that women leaders and feminist scholars "have often expressed discomfort with structuralist perspectives of power and sought alternative theories of power" (p. 100). Blackmore (1989) concurs, writing about women who are alienated by the "masculinist portrayal of power, leadership and organizational life which emphasizes control, individualism and hierarchy" (p. 123). Rather than conclude that women were not powerful, Hartsock (1983), Shakeshaft (1989), Kreisberg (1992), Hurty (1995), and many others began to move to redefine the concept as power *with* rather than power *over*. These observations are underscored in a variety of studies that ground power within relationships. Among others, Grogan (2000) and Brunner (2000) both identify relational approaches to power in the work of women educational administrators. Women often describe power as something that increases as it is shared. Therefore, it is not surprising that in order for many women to be comfortable with the notion of holding power, power needs to be conceptualized as something that is shared with others and that is not power over but, rather, power with.

Women's conceptions of power are closely tied to the importance they place on relationships. Power used to help others strengthens relationships, while power used to control damages relationships (Brunner, 2000). Thus, power through relationships is more likely to be how women confront change. Cryss Brunner's (1999b, 2000) work on the way women superintendents think

about power is a good example. Many of the participants in her studies talk about their leadership this way:

> In order to get things done through others you must be able to admire the human resources of your staff and build personal relationships with highly talented people who want to grow, and who want to do their very best. (2000, p. 144)

Similarly, in the quotation at the top of this chapter, assistant superintendent Lorraine Darnell in Grogan's (1996) study of women educational leaders talks about her ability to enable others to do their work well.

According to the literature, women superintendents enact this relational leadership by using decision-making strategies that allow them to really hear the input from others. A participant in Brunner's (2000) study talks about a superintendent she admires who always brings her ideas to her administrative team for their input. "[I]t's not as if the decision has already been made, and she's simply going through the motions of asking for input and asking for involvement on the part of the other people" (p. 147). The superintendent actually folded others' ideas into her decision-making. Another participant in the same study makes the point that it is more important to do the project well than to worry about who gets the credit. She says,

> I think, as women, we have always known that we have to work with people to accomplish anything. A mother who runs a household doesn't always get the credit for what the children accomplish, but her preparing and planning helps these accomplishments to happen. (p. 144)

Leaders who build strong relationships are described as collaborative and caring as well as courageous and visionary

(Regan & Brooks, 1995). These authors stress the importance of listening from the heart. One of the principals in their study, Susan, talks of the four-year journey of creating a cultural awareness program in her school. She describes being prompted to do this by a curious conversation she had early in her principalship:

> "How do you like being the principal of the Hazard School?"
>
> "I like it very well," I said. "The community is so diverse—I find it very rich."
>
> "Rich?" said another woman, sounding perplexed. "I thought that some of the kids that go to that school are poor." (p. 51)

Susan was unfazed by the outsider's misunderstanding and narrow perception of the children. Rejecting the stereotypical deficit view, she identified with the students and saw them as offering each other wonderful opportunities to break out of the cycles of racism and classism that had plagued the school and community. She established a strong community within the school to celebrate their cultural roots and engaged the wider community in efforts to underscore the value of their diversity.

This horizontal leadership approach stresses the involvement of the many in the activities of the organization. It extends beyond the leadership team to teachers and the wider community. A principal in Grogan's (1996) study juxtaposes two views of leadership:

> Not everyone is comfortable with a collegial kind of approach…. I'm real tired of listening to people that are very directive and very top down. [They] talk about how they include everybody, and they don't mean that a bit. I mean they can spout it all, and I've watched them, and you give them an opportunity to demonstrate it, and no way in the world do they mean it. But with me, it's the only way I know how to operate. And it's based on the

> belief that I'm dealing with professionals and a sincere interest in having parents in the community directly involved in what goes on in the school. If [parents] weren't there, I'd go out and chase them in. They're not threatening; they belong there for crying out loud. (p. 144)

A final example of the relational approach to leadership found in many women's leadership stories comes from Grogan and Blackmon's (2001) study of a woman superintendent's efforts at coalition-building in her district. Superintendent Blackmon spent the first month on the job meeting with everyone she could in the district. She asked school board members to draw up a list of all the people who had complained about something the district was doing in the past, and she talked to those people. She had teachers draw up lists of parents and students she needed to talk to, and she sent an open invitation to the community at large to come and visit her. This was not only a beginning exercise; she became known as someone who was on the ground, and in the buildings. She invited diverse groups to come and talk to her and to one another, and she encouraged them to find common ground. Her deliberate attempts at coalition-building reflected the kind of networking approach that contrasts sharply with the idea of command and control.

Relational leadership is about facilitating the work of others who share the power and authority to collaboratively craft direction for the district. Perhaps the most important understanding that connects women leaders to others is the passion many women have for substantive change that addresses injustice in education.

Leadership for Social Justice

The history of women and work, as well as the social context of women's lives, provides a strong overlay to the motivation of women in education. Women are likely to report that they entered

the field of education because they wanted to "change" the status quo. Studies of teachers indicate that women, more than men, identify educational careers as social justice work, even if they don't use that explicit language. Women, more often than men, talk about having entered teaching to change the lives of children, to make the world a fairer place, and to change institutions so that all children have a chance.

Commitment to social justice is documented in a number of studies that isolate social justice as an initial motivator as well as a continuing mission (Sanders-Lawson, 2001; Shapiro, 2004; Smith-Campbell, 2002; Strachan, 1999, 2002). These studies describe behaviors that are compatible with moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992), servant leadership (Schlosberg, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1999), value-added leadership (Covey, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1994), and synergistic leadership theory (Brown & Irby, 2006). In the research, women leaders often talk about why they seek and accept leadership positions. Many women of color and many white women are motivated by a strong desire to transform the learning conditions and opportunities for those who have been least well served by current educational policies and practices.

Jane Strachan (2002) and Valerie Hall (2002) describe women principals and head-teachers in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, respectively, who are grounded in an ethical approach to leadership that strives to create more equitable learning conditions for students. These women "[s]ought to achieve equity through personal, political, societal and institutional transformation" (Strachan, 2002, p. 117). Strachan paints a vivid portrait of one of the participants in her study, a principal named Jill, who was fully devoted to improving the lives of at-risk students in her building. Jill's staff comment that she would never become principal of a school of privileged students because she has "a social mission in teaching … and [is] passionate about things that are important to her, for example, the struggle of low income families and the consequences of that for their education" (p. 119).

Similarly strong examples of this kind of leadership are found in narratives of black women talking about their leadership in Sanders-Lawson and colleagues' (2006) study. These authors argue that the life experiences of black women leaders in education in the United States have prompted them to be focused on justice. They also believe that instead of it being an individual leader's responsibility, the power of making a difference lies in the collective approach—of family, church, neighborhood, or race. One of the authors, Renee Sanders-Lawson, uses the metaphor of the difficult jump-rope game "Double Dutch" to describe how it feels to be an African American woman superintendent. "This feat requires numerous skills, which can be likened to the skills that Black women superintendents must possess or acquire in order to create socially just schools" (Sanders-Lawson et al., 2006, p. 40).

With the same emphasis on acting and not just talking about the need to act, Catherine, a Cuban American woman, talks about her work as a principal in a gang-ridden neighborhood plagued with drugs and prostitution. She describes how she created a community-school coalition to offer a full set of services to the families and students in the school:

> There is now a neighborhood police officer stationed at the school, afterschool and summer sports, and recreation activities, academic programs for all ages (K–12), early childhood care and parenting classes, adult community education classes, medical services offered at the school once a week, and an office space that is used by a variety of social service departments…. The community-school coalition has written grants to support the programs, her teachers have rescheduled their days … and she and her administrative team have had to learn "creative budgeting!" (AhNee-Benham & Cooper, 1998, p. 51)

What these women mean by social justice is a passion for doing work that involves making a difference in the lives of students who have not been well served by the current systems. In addition, many of these women describe this work occurring in partnership with other teachers and leaders or in a collaborative relationship with various community and other stakeholder groups.

If change to bring about greater social justice is the end product for many women, then hope, spirituality, and belief in God is the motor that propels many of them to change the system. Being spiritual does not necessarily predict an interest in social change, nor is a social justice advocate required to be spiritual. However, many women administrators are both focused on social justice and reliant on what they describe as a higher power to help them in their fight. Several studies document an additional dimension that some women add to their social justice, moral, or servant leadership approach. For instance, studies of women of African descent who are principals and superintendents describe leaders who extend the ministerial aspect of their leadership and combine a spiritual dimension with a belief in social justice (Bloom, 2001; Collins, 2002; Jones, 2003; Logan, 1989; Sanders-Lawson, 2001; Sanders-Lawson et al., 2006). Donaldson (2000), Stiernberg (2003), and Millar (2000) note as well the spiritual dimensions of white women administrators.

Spiritual Leadership

The idea of leadership grounded in spirituality is a strong theme found in research on women leaders—particularly in the comments of women of color. Bailey and colleagues (2008) capture the idea in this quote from an interviewee in their study:

> Pulling women together to discuss spirituality, sustenance and breath has been a dream from way back … pulling together women who are dealing with the same issues and who have developed strategies that are not written about in textbooks … I always talk about spirit

> when I discuss leadership. People are starting to get it. (p. 20)

The authors go on to talk about spirituality as a source of personal strength as well as a way to understand connectedness to others, and to the greater world. By embracing this concept, "[we] are better able to recognize that we have a responsibility to respond to others and to use our gifts in the greater context of our interconnected life, rather than simply for our own pleasure or advancement" (p. 22). Similarly, in listening to the narratives of diverse leaders, AhNee-Benham and Cooper (1998) realized that these women derived power from a sense of connectedness "webbing their schools with people, institutions, ideas and the larger environment" (p. 146). Yvonne, a principal in their study who described herself as Latina, Algonquin, and Italian, said,

> I don't see myself as being central to other individuals' lives. I mean, I might be a piece, but I'm not central … I understand my responsibility to [the school] and with it. It is a very collaborative, mutual vision and effort. It is dynamic not static. I know that's a very different way to look at it. It's the Anglo worldview that you can freeze-frame life. (p. 147)

Some women leaders draw on their religious beliefs to understand the effects of spirituality in their lives as leaders. For many, spirituality is akin to consciousness-raising (Curry, 2000; Dillard, 2006; Ngunjiri, 2010). For others, spirituality means a search for ongoing peace and self-understanding. A black woman school leader interviewed for Sanders-Lawson and colleagues' (2006) study described her leadership as fundamentally about a spiritual journey:

> I've learned to become a leader through reflective thought and thinking, spending time alone, retreating,

> and spending lots of time on the inside. Knowing who you are, what you stand for, how you're wired, and what you are all about and then celebrating it. (p. 43)

A sense of the spiritual is also found in the underpinnings of some feminist leadership research. In her quest to understand leadership and the preparation of leaders, Julie Laible (2003) talks of a loving epistemology, which encouraged her to delve deeply into others' worlds. "Knowing other's 'worlds' is part of knowing them and knowing them is part of loving them" (p. 189). She encourages us "[t]o travel knowing that you are responsible for others—they are a part of you—you do not exist without them" (p. 190). Maenette AhNee-Benham (2003) extends this idea of knowing others' worlds to include the worlds of our ancestors. The stories of leadership that she collected were rich in the attention paid to "native spiritual wisdom, which is guided by the hearts of our grandmothers and grandfathers" (p. 231).

Both women of color and white women administrators discuss the relationship between spirituality and the ways they model behavior and inspire others. Further, these women acknowledge the importance of their spirituality to their success and ability to push forward, often in conflictual and difficult situations. Many women educational administrators report that it is their spirituality that gives them hope, increasing their resilience so that they can keep working for change. Simmons and Johnson (2008), in their study of superintendents of African descent in the United States, document themes of hope that ran through the ways these women approached their jobs. Their lives and work were not just directed toward changing the social context in which children grow and learn: their lives—all by themselves—represented change. In other words, the women *were* the change. For a black woman, becoming a superintendent challenged the status quo and disrupted the accepted institutional culture and mission. The combination of being the representation of change and the struggle that it took

to make that happen were dual achievements for these women. Their strength to lead has both a spiritual source and a strong sense of self-identity.

In the same study, one superintendent voiced the motivator that kept her going: "I can't stop because too many have suffered for me to get here. This door would be shut forever…. I have tried to make race and gender somebody else's problem because race and gender is my reality" (Simmons & Johnson, 2008, p. 234). However, while these women truly became the change they wanted to happen, their positions sometimes constrained them. Knowing that as black women they were not likely to get a second chance at the superintendency added urgency to their work. Many felt they had just one chance to use the position to achieve their goals:

> I have this huge responsibility to be productive and be a very positive representative of them because they certainly gave more than I'm giving to get me here…. Those of us who are in these positions, it is imperative that we give it our all and we do everything, just so that they can never say that we didn't try. Or, that she didn't work out, so we don't have to try for another hundred years. I'm totally committed to that. That they will never have a reason not to select another African-American female for this position. (p. 237)

Relatedly, these women use what Simmons and Johnson (2008) specifically refer to as "passionate language" in their leadership. Contrary to admonitions to present a "professional," measured image, these women did not allow themselves to be silenced, instead using passion as a motivator both for themselves and for those with whom they worked. Simmons and Johnson define passion in language as daily conversations that "vocalized from a deep commitment to justice, and articulated with emotional imagery of tone, diction, and context that conveys one's convictions for

hope" (p. 239). This language usually serves as an "anti-oppressive gesture" that contests the cultural and political postures typically associated with white paternalistic norms. The difference in these organizations is the way language is used to compel "emotion for a cause" (p. 239).

The authors go on to say, "Further, the case for these women clearly demonstrates their ability to communicate their hope through language—passion, in hope of stimulating others to help act in a manner that moves the organization toward transformation" (p. 241). By using passionate language, the women in this study changed the expectations of institutional behavior. Although when they talked about race or gender they risked being interpreted negatively, in many cases they upended these stereotypes by modeling a "different" professional language that portrayed them as "skilled in leadership communication… appropriately employing emotional appeal in order to gain support for their hopes" (p. 239). While leading with passion and hope does not necessarily mobilize action, it prevented these women from becoming "paralyzed by their life's realities and circumstances," feeding their resilience as they pushed change agendas.

An additional perspective on the social justice and change motivations that drive women is found in the Oplatka and Mimon (2008) study of female principals. These principals identified improvement and change as necessary for job satisfaction. The administrators in the study went so far as to say that "every educator, whether teacher or principal should be constantly involved in improving the educational service and be on the alert lest their pupils be damaged and stunted" (p. 143). For most women principals, this focus on children is grounded in the instructional side of leadership. It is well known that women leaders in education spend much more time in the classroom than their male counterparts (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). For this reason, they are often highly motivated to make changes to provide better learning opportunities for students.

Leadership for Learning

Similar to learning-focused leadership recommended by Beck and Murphy (1996), a number of studies note that instruction is central to women. Women administrators are likely to introduce and support strong programs in staff development, to encourage innovation, and to experiment with instructional approaches. Women are likely to stress the importance of instructional competence in teachers and to be attentive to task completion within instructional programs. The importance of instruction overlaps with the social justice agenda of many women administrators. Both men and women superintendents believe that women are advantaged by their instructional and interpersonal strengths (Grogan & Brunner, 2005b). 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.

The changes that women introduce in their organizations most often relate to the improvement of learning. Women have been associated with instructional leadership or learning-centered leadership in education because they have spent more time in the classroom than men before they take formal leadership positions such as principal or superintendent (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). An elementary school principal in Gardiner and colleagues' 2000 study said,

> It's not just that somebody has to be the principal of the school and make sure that it all runs smoothly but that children learn. And I think the bottom line is that …. [I]t gets back to classroom instruction. I feel a very strong sense of obligation to the parents who entrust their children to us everyday to provide them the best that this school can provide. (p. 152)

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 moved by watching students grow and develop. Indeed, many women learn leadership from serving as curriculum coaches or in curriculum and instruction positions, and all draw on their knowledge of teaching. Regan and Brooks (1995) write of attending a "Conversers Conference" where women were asked to consider what impact they believed their feminist approaches to leadership had on their schools. One of the leaders felt that women educators' emphases on collaborative learning and on valuing the child's experiences were particularly powerful. "I hope … that these children are growing up differently because of the different pedagogical strategies they are meeting in school. I see an alignment between these new strategies for teaching and the feminist attributes of leadership" (p. 99).

Highlighting a similar interest in student learning, Marian Court (2005) writes of two women sharing the principalship in a small urban school in New Zealand. In an effort to remain focused on teaching and learning and the progress of the students, these women resisted the push from education authorities to maintain a top-down hierarchical approach to leadership that paid more attention to instrumental issues and separated principals from teachers. The collaborative approach ensured a strong focus on teaching and learning.

Interestingly, other examples of women coleaders take the same approach. Dr. Rhonda Key and Dr. Natalie Thomas, who were cosuperintendents at the Riverview Gardens School District in Missouri from 2007 to 2010, used their combined strength to make instruction their highest priority. Believing that together, rather than alone, they could lead more effectively, they battled skepticism and disapproval to share the superintendency during that time (personal communication). Dealing well with a crisis, they managed to restore public confidence in a district seriously troubled by previous financial mismanagement, and to see the

achievement gap narrow.[2] Cosuperintendent Thomas commented on their success:

> We've now focused our professional development money into schools instead of sending people away. That has helped us. We've also focused on site-based leadership so that the principal isn't doing the job alone. Teachers are working with principals about instructional decisions. (Joiner, 2009, p. 1)

Both examples of coleadership emphasize the collaborative planning and collective vision-making that women leaders enjoy, according to Court (2005). She argues that sharing the administrative position sends a strong signal to the teachers that "validates a collaborative school culture…and results in high quality learning and teaching" (p. 8).

An interesting finding in the Brunner and Grogan (2007) study reinforces the notion that women leaders embrace leadership for learning and that finally more attention is being paid to its value. Women superintendents, who often served as district leaders for curriculum and instruction before they reached the superintendency, were twice as likely as men superintendents to participate in professional development activities conducted by the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (73 percent versus 38 percent) (p. 89). Expertise in instruction and pedagogy appears to have served women well since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 came into being. As one of the participants in the study put it, "The increased focus on academics and accountability should make the job more attractive to more women who tend to have more focus on curriculum, teaching and learning" (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 88).

This emphasis on leadership for learning that is found in many women leaders' narratives emerges from women's lived experiences in the classroom. Similarly tied to lived experiences is the final strong theme emerging from the literature on women's leadership

in education. This is balanced leadership. Many women leaders essentially live two lives: one managing a household, and one managing a school or district (Grogan, 1996).

Balanced Leadership

Women leaders strive for balance between responsibilities at work and at home. 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. Many studies of women leaders in education have interrogated how these women balance their lives (Brunner, 2000; Coleman, 2002; Curry, 2000; Dillard, 2006; Grogan, 1996; Gupton & Slick, 1996; Hill & Ragland,1995; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Mendez-Morse, 1997, 2004; Smulyan, 2000; Smith-Campbell, 2002; Tonnsen & Pigford, 1998). A superintendent in Brunner's (2000) study discussed her role at home. "I am not married to someone who sees his role as taking over the household piece or the child care piece just because I have a job as a superintendent" (p. 125). Similarly, several school and district leaders in Gupton and Slick's (1996) study talked of their struggles to manage family, work, and also graduate study:

> My husband and I have been married for 20 years and have one 13-yr-old son. I have stayed up late to do chores and study or gotten up early to avoid letting my career requirements encroach on family time…I've balanced for many years. (p. 37)

Some women leaders do have supportive husbands (or partners) and family who help with the household duties, but their desire to manage both work and home is a theme in the literature:

> [Women] think they've got to do it all. They've got to be all…. I did feel like that for a long time…. I gave a little talk at a [women's] conference several months

> before I was given notice that a divorce was on its way, and at this conference the point of it was, yes, you can be it all, you can have it all. You know, you freeze dinners weeks in advance, and you plan these meals, and you do all this kind of stuff…. And then, I got notice of these divorce papers, and I thought, oh well maybe not. (Grogan, 1996, p. 125)

When women talk about the female role models in their lives—often their own mothers—they mention proudly how much these women had to handle. Such mothers were strong figures who inspired their daughters to assume leadership positions. Barbara Curry (2000) writes of an African American college president called Anna who modeled herself after her mother in many ways:

> Mother worked full-time, raised a bunch of kids, and took care of an entire household. She taught English. She always had time for whatever it was that was happening…. [She] made things happen. She decided…that Black children are going to be getting the real short end of the stick. She already had a full-time job teaching, but decided that she would run a special after-school program from a church in the city for children…. I think I do a lot of things the way my mother did. I do organize the troops. (pp. 35–36)

And an assistant superintendent in Grogan's (1996) study expressed a similar sentiment of living up to her mother's standards:

> [W]hen my kids would go to preschool or kindergarten or whatever and they had to bring treats, I mean I wanted homemade cookies…. See my mother worked, but she worked as a telephone operator at night, so I

> don't know when she slept…. [S]o you grow up with these images. (p. 131)

Although women leaders 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. Balanced leadership includes the notion that women are better able to perform their educational responsibilities if they have found ways to manage their home duties as well. After struggling with personal commitments, a principal in Smulyan's (2000) study learned an important lesson that kept her in the principalship:

> I always felt, number one, that I could only do this job in extraordinary amounts of time, and I felt that if I did it in less time, the effects would be disastrous…. I think 'cause of my personal circumstances I absolutely spend much less time doing schoolwork…but in my estimation, to tell you the truth, I don't know that it's made that much of a difference. And I think I've learned a really good personal lesson: that you can walk out the door at four o'clock and things go on without you. (p. 165)

Managing households and caring for family members, often seen as the work of women, have brought a dimension to women's leadership that can enhance their performance. Coleman (2002) writes of women head-teachers who feel that their status as mothers helps when dealing with parents. "As a mum… , I can see issues from a parental viewpoint. [Headship involves] similar skills to running a busy household with five in the family" (p. 84). From studying early nineteenth century women's writings in North America, we see a strong parallel between, on the one hand, women's capacities to keep their families intact and economically viable as they

move from place to place, often under circumstances of duress, and on the other, the responsibilities of managing educational organizations—especially in times of severe budget cuts (Grogan, 2005). But, above all, women seem to be able to lead well when their responsibilities at home and in the office are in some kind of balance. Achieving such a balance allows women leaders to channel their energies effectively in both spheres. Many women argue that it is very important for women to be themselves and to figure out what leadership approaches they will need to embrace so that they can negotiate the competing demands of family and profession.

These various ways of leading have served many women leaders well in settings ranging from kindergarten to college, particularly since the latter half of the twentieth century. A few textbooks and seminars are gradually recommending such leadership approaches as effective ways to bring about much needed change in education. The greatest pity is that women are still significantly underrepresented in formal leadership positions. Chapter Two will illustrate this problem.

A Day in the Lives of Two Secondary Principals

Angie, about to be a first-year high school principal, is having coffee with her good friend Liz, a fourth-year high school principal in a different district. Angie and Liz were graduate students in the same leadership cohort at the state university a few years ago.

''Liz, I know I have to show the staff that I'm in charge, but I don't want to just tell them what to do. You know? I want to make sure we share the responsibility for good decisions that benefit all the kids.''

''I know what you mean, but you better not make it look like you don't know what you are doing. They'll eat you alive! Remember that nice guy Rob who graduated with us? He was a middle school principal in our district for a couple of years. Too wishy-washy — they got rid of him fast.''

''So what's the deal? Did you just lay down the law and say this is the way we are going to do things around here?''

''Nooo… Well, a little bit. You've got to play it by ear. But as a woman, if you don't make a few decision-making rules, and let them know some things are not going to be tolerated, you'll get no respect. Be available. You've got to let everyone get to know you really well so that they know you stand for equity and diversity.''

''Right. I don't want to come across like that [expletive] principal I worked under. He made all the decisions with his coach buddies. It was miserable for all of us. Only the bright, middle-class kids did well under him. How do you do it so that you collaborate with teachers and parents — I really want to be that kind of leader.''

''If you care about working with others, you'll figure it out. You don't have to be like anybody else — man or woman. The key is, be yourself and stick to a good process for decision-making. Develop strong relationships with your staff. Start out by listening; listen and keep listening.''

Discussion Questions

In what ways do you practice relational leadership?

Are you and others you know motivated by principles of fairness, equity, and diversity to make changes in your school or district? What have you done? What have they done?

How do you figure out which kids and adults in your school or district benefit most from the way things are done?

Are you or others you know grounded spiritually? If so, how does it help you or others lead?

What does leadership for learning mean?

Talk about how you maintain balance in your life. What makes it difficult, or easy, to maintain balance?

Do you have a good support system like Liz and Angie's to talk over professional experiences? If not, how might you build such relationships?

Notes

1. Some debate whether women actually prefer to lead in these ways or whether they have had no choice but to use collaborative or shared approaches because their relative lack of power prevented them from behaving like conventional male leaders.
2. www.stlbeacon.org/education/making_the_grade_kirkwood_and_riverview_gardens_narrow_achievement_gap_between_blacks_and_whites.