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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a survey of educational-administration programs in Canada and their incentives to support women students. Data were collected from a survey of 15 Canadian department heads and the women students participating in their programs. Findings indicate that women now outnumber men in many educational-administration classes and that some universities have special "women's courses" or include women's issues as part of core programs. Some women students were encouraged by the presence of positive female role models (about 25 percent of educational administration faculty). They also appreciated the opportunity to study women's issues, qualitative research methods, and reflective learning processes. However, many were discouraged by incidents associated with a male-oriented competitive culture, an androcentric bias in materials and traditions, and unequal access to resources. Students called for further inclusion of the female perspective in course content, innovative adaptations in course delivery, continued increase in the number of female professors, and the reeducation of some male professors. It cannot be assumed that: (1) women's issues have been addressed; (2) these issues will automatically be addressed as new professors replace older professors; (3) gender is the only issue; (4) women are the only people who encounter domination; and (5) the school system and the public are unaffected by what happens at the university. Recommendations are also offered for instructors and for changing course content and educational-administration programs. (Contains six references.) (LMI)

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**Insidious Deterrents:
When Educational Administration Students are Women***

A Paper presented at the 1995 AERA (American Educational Research Association)
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**Gender Issues in Canadian Educational Leadership:
Fortifying the Status Quo or Creating Structural Change**

by

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Insidious Deterrents: When Educational Administration Students are Women

Abstract

In a survey of educational administration programs in Canada, department heads were asked about incentives to support women students and women students were invited to reflect on their experiences. Their perceptions suggest the following:

Women now outnumber men in many educational administration classes. To counter the historically male orientation of the discipline, some universities have special "women's courses" electives or include women's issues as a part of core programs. Some women students were encouraged by the presence of positive female role models (about 25% of educational administration faculty) and appreciated the opportunity to study women's issues and the exposure to qualitative research methods and reflective learning processes. However, many were discouraged by insidious deterrents - incidents associated with a male oriented competitive culture, androcentric bias in texts, materials and traditions, and unequal access to resources.

Students called for continued change: further inclusion of the female perspective in course content, innovative adaptations in course delivery, continued increase in the number of female professors, and the "re-education" of some male professors. They also reminded us of the need for continued vigilance. We cannot assume (a) that women's issues have been 'taken care of', (b) that these issues will automatically be addressed as new professors replace the old, (c) that gender balance is the only issue - unattended by concerns about teaching methods and research orientation (d) that women are the only ones who suffer when domination issues are unresolved and (e) the school system and the public at large are unaffected by what happens at the university.

Insidious Deterrents: When Educational Administration Students are Women

It would be unfair to give the impression that women enrolled in educational administration programs in Canadian universities experience nothing but grief. That is simply not the case. Most of the women whose experiences formed the basis of this report painted a very positive picture of the programs they were in or had just completed. However, it would be equally unfair to ignore the reported "insidious deterrents" which made the educational administration programs just a little more difficult for women than they were for men - even though the women outnumbered men (Government of Canada, 1992). Since I started reporting this research, many people have suggested that women are not alone in their perceptions of "insidious deterrents". Members of other groups, in particular, visible minorities, reported similar incidents but their experiences are not within the scope of this research.

The purpose of this study, conducted as a mail survey of department heads and female students across Canada in 1992 and 1993, was to see how educational institutions had adapted to the influx of female clientele. The responses suggested that the presence of women in educational administration programs had indeed challenged the discipline's male oriented roots but had failed to significantly alter program content or procedures. Women students recognized the situation and were eager to make recommendations for the future.

The survey was returned by 15 department heads. Some institutions were more responsive than others, but attempts were being made to make institutions more inclusive. A few reported that there were courses available to address women's issues and one reported a changed residency requirement.

The most important change was in the numbers of women professors in Educational Administration departments. In one small department it was as high as 50% - one of two. In other places the percentages ranged between 10% and 30%. Administrators

were assuring, they recognized that the numbers were still low, but pointed out that the ratios were much improved and the hiring of more female professors was anticipated. Students, on the other hand, complained that the numbers were not increasing quickly enough and that female professors were not always valued by the institution:

It was unfortunate that the one professor in my Ed. Admin. program who was superbly organized, stimulating and current remained in status a sessional lecturer (Respondent 86).

This paper, then, becomes a duet. On the one hand you will hear the voices of the assuring administrators and the women who had positive experiences; on the other will be the continuing frustrations associated with being a woman in a male oriented discipline.

Program Aspects Valued By Female Students

Questionnaires were distributed to a sample of female students from every university in Canada which offers an M. Ed. program in Educational Administration. Some institutions were prevented by ethics policies from furnishing names and addresses but were able to distribute the survey directly. In order to ensure anonymity, students did not identify the institution they attended. I received 151 responses but do not know which institutions were represented.

For most students, experiences in educational administration programs were essentially positive - if marred by the occasional negative incident. The positive experiences were usually related to specific aspects of the programs such as course content which addressed women's issues, access to female professors and advisors, and/or opportunity to use qualitative research methods and reflective processes.

Course content addressing women's issues was provided in some places by core courses which included sections on women's issues, and in others by access to women's studies electives or special courses within educational administration departments. Students recognized the importance of these courses in their own development:

The Women's Studies course allowed me to see that I could approach things from a more qualitative angle and that this was "legitimate" within the teaching research community. Up until that point in time my critical thinking skills . . . were all very linear (Respondent 104).

Although one student reported that she had never had a female professor, advisor or committee member, (Respondent 145), others who did, appreciated the presence of female role models. They felt that their concerns were more likely to be addressed if instructors were women:

Having a professor that demonstrated genuine care and understanding was a real bonus. This female professor listened to our problems, shared similar incidents and provided encouragement (Respondent 142).

Often the female instructors were linked to qualitative research styles:

Having a woman as my advisor, and a woman who was interested in and had studied in qualitative research methods also added a certain dimension to my studies I may not have experienced otherwise (Respondent 102).

The best course I took was one on qualitative research. It recognized that women's experience is different. No other courses even paid lip-service to such an acknowledgment (Respondent 98).

Respondents also commented on the importance of reflective practice, adult learning styles and exposure to new ideas, all of which were, of course, not necessarily related to gender. Positive experiences, then, usually included some of the following: (a) an opportunity to take women's studies or women in educational administration courses as options, (b) an opportunity to study qualitative research methods (c) an exposure to reflective practice and/or (d) positive experiences with female professors. Women students who had exposure to some of these elements were affirmed in their own practices. However, there were other students who had not been so fortunate.

Insidious Deterrents

Insidious deterrents were the elements that made the “climate chilly” (Hall & Sandler, 1982). They were day to day comments or incidents which made female students feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. They usually centred around a male oriented competitive culture, gender bias in texts, materials or traditions, and unequal distribution of resources.

A male oriented competitive culture

Some of the respondents were disturbed by a “competitive culture in educational administration classes” (Respondent 116) where:

Instructors allowed the loudest and the first out of the gate to dominate. . . . Some females matched them and others were left to reflect (Respondent 132).

Two students used almost identical phrases to state that both “Chauvinism” and “the old boy’s club” were “alive and doing well” (Respondents 15, 141). For example, although most institutions had an inclusive language policy, its use was not necessarily the norm and the pronoun “he” was commonly used to refer to an administrator.

Unsupportive professors displayed their reluctance to have female students in several ways. The least problematic were those who were simply old fashioned:

The women’s perspective (was) excluded from many discussions, not by intention or overt bias but rather from lack of knowledge and understanding of the issues (Respondent 122).

Others were more attentive to male students (Respondent 105) or directed lectures to the males in the class (Respondent 15):

Two of the five professors I had made it very clear that women weren’t welcome in their classes (Respondent 90).

In another example, the professor knew the names of the eleven men in the class but had not bothered to learn the names of the three females (Respondent 137). Then there

were those who ridiculed or intimidated female students (Respondent 59), making them feel “humiliated and valueless” (Respondent 90):

Female students are unable to contribute as their opinions are dismissed, and at times ridiculed (Respondent 72).

The problems were sometimes worse for those women who chose to use feminist methodology or address women’s issues as a part of their research. One was told that “the research she cited was just a bunch of crack pot theories and not worthy of serious consideration” (Respondent 90).

Women students often saw the program as just another hoop to jump through, but the expectations of those holding the hoops were inconsistent. Some professors expected women to “behave more like men, to be more boisterous, more competitive” (Resp. 67):

He put me down for not being more vocal and aggressive. When I asked for assistance he told me you either “had it or didn’t” (Respondent 121).

Others were encouraged to remain silent, and to be more ladylike:

One professor is obviously uncomfortable with women in the program and puts down those who are assertive and do not share his personal viewpoint (Resp. 101).

I feel that when I question an idea I’m seen as challenging, nagging, nit-picking etc. When men challenge, their status increases and they’re seen as engaging in intellectual dialogue (Respondent 116).

The competitive male oriented culture was not solely the responsibility of the professor. Respondents felt that male students “dominated discussion” (Respondent 101) and that there was too much “male puffery which was artificial and counter-productive” (Respondent 116). They noted that “Men talk(ed) more often, at greater lengths, in large groups with louder voices” (116) and interrupt(ed) women when speaking (Resp. 59):

I found latent prejudice coming from fellow male students. In such cases, the young men found my views “female” and did not always attend to them (Respondent 35).

Gender rifts were sometimes associated with affirmative action policies which were being implemented in the school systems. Male students felt that affirmative action "limited their opportunities" (Respondent 122):

Offhand comments about my (or other women) being in the courses because we were going to be hired or promoted were frequent and (professors) commiserating with the male students took place (Respondent 55).

The perception that females had the advantage was not necessarily directed at female classmates but at women in general. As one student pointed out: "we trust women we know very well and treat them like 'exceptions', but we don't trust women in general" (Respondent 23). Another expressed it this way:

There was an anti-affirmative action atmosphere, though women in the course were accorded respect in discussion and during their presentations. So the difference was between women as an anonymous group and women as individuals (Respondent 122).

The women knew that the perception of a female advantage was only that - a perception. They did not find job hunting any easier because of their gender and they resented comments which implied that they had the advantage. Statistical examinations of appointments show that they were right in their perceptions (Rees, 1991; Epp, 1993).

The competitive culture of educational administration classes became more than an annoyance when women felt that marks were being affected by gender:

The presentations of males (were) far poorer than those of females, yet males (got) higher marks (Respondent 7).

One gave lower marks to young women because, as he stated, "They hadn't paid their dues" and so didn't deserve the same mark that an older male administrator would get (Respondent 90).

Although they were angered by these practices, women students seldom complained because the pervasive acceptance of the traditional thinking discouraged it. As

one woman stated: "I'm tired and discouraged and frustrated by the inequities I view and experience. There is a need for sweeping changes in order to rectify the present situation" (Respondent 1). Others were similarly frustrated:

The atmosphere that permeates the entire faculty of education is one of sexism and the power of the "old boys network". The problem goes beyond the Ed Admin program to the entire faculty and the entire university (Respondent 90).

These women felt that they could not formally express their concerns since complaints may have jeopardized the goals which had sent them to the institution in the first place:

This is not what I expected higher education to be about. I have not filed a complaint because I fear reprisal (Respondent 60).

The sense of not belonging and needing to fit a pattern was not the experience of all women, but for some, lack of support from male professors was compounded by the fact that women's experiences were rarely recognized or legitimized, as was evident in the gender bias in texts and materials.

Gender bias in texts, materials and traditions.

In spite of special courses addressing women's issues and efforts to include women's experiences in existing courses, androcentric bias in texts and materials persisted. For example, by the 1980's, nearly one-third of the articles in the Educational Administration Quarterly (EAQ) were written by women and gender exclusive language was rare. However, other, more subtle, areas of bias remained. The theories and instruments of research continued to be based on male experiences and the inclusive language used in reporting sometimes served to mask androcentric bias to make it appear less prevalent (Epp, Sackney & Kustaski, 1994, Shakeshaft & Hanson, 1986).

Although recent texts were likely to include chapters on women and their contributions, this did not necessarily insure that these issues would be dealt with in class:

In our theories of Educational Administration course, the two male professors deliberately excluded the text chapter on "Women in Educational Administration". They denied that women have different experiences from men in their careers and adamantly refuted the "white male privilege" concept (Respondent 60).

When women's issues were discussed it was often brought to the class by the women themselves through their comments or presentations:

In the courses taught by men, the professors make no special effort to study women as educational leaders. They are, however, very receptive when women students introduce theories and reports by women. The seeds are there but we still have a way to go (Respondent 10).

When women's issues did surface, there were both positive and negative reactions. Although many male professors and students made positive comments about how the women's presence "created a better dimension" to the course (Respondent 94), there were ugly experiences as well. In several instances "experiences and perspectives of female style of leadership were not legitimated" (Respondent 56) and sometimes the content about women focused on the negative (Respondent 43). For example:

Male students groaned or verbally expressed their lack of patience about hearing women's issues expressed. In all cases, when this feeling was given by males in the class, discussion ceased in favour of their feeling. One professor "blamed" the woes of education on women's ways of doing things - saying (women) "had a lot to answer for" (Respondent 55).

The possibility of differences between male and female leadership styles were sometimes discussed but most students felt that their courses had not been modified to reflect the experiences of female students. One respondent mourned: "I sometimes longed for a female perspective on theories" (Respondent 39).

The people who “longed for the female perspective” were those who were most aware of feminist pedagogy and were disappointed when they were treated like “outsiders” (Respondent 56):

(I) basically felt like a “fish out of water”. The female perspective is not considered worthy of consideration (Respondent 72).

As a woman in educational administration you often feel “schizophrenic”. Your feminine “sense of being” is constantly “at war” with the functionalist, objectivist, quantification of what educational administration is. The values of “humanness” are swept under the carpet as “status quo” values of maleness are held high (Respondent 67).

Male orientation in texts and materials did not surprise the women who had already experienced it in the workplace. Some of these women had returned to university in the hopes of using the additional qualifications to overcome barriers to their advancement in the school systems. They felt that the changes should have begun in the schools, to be followed up in the universities:

If school districts/teachers associations were pushing for these changes, perhaps universities would be more responsive (Respondent 101).

Others found the university more accepting than the school system. It offered a sense of equality which not duplicated in the world in which they were seeking work:

I don't find that (this university) holds me back, rather it's the reality of our non-accepting, male dominated society that I am weary of (Respondent 33).

For them, the courses served as a haven in which the realities of the world could be examined and discussed - if not corrected. Although they felt supported and protected this did not always translate into support in the “real world”. Some students felt doubly betrayed when the positive reinforcements of the good marks and academic encouragement did not translate into continued support in getting an administrative position:

No-one told me that I shouldn't be in the M. Ed. program, but again, not a soul encouraged me. I almost had the sense that they thought I would never get an administrative position (Respondent 1).

Awareness has increased . . . However, reality still seems to support the old boys network and pseudo males in the workplace (Respondent 52).

In order to become administrators women needed the support of both the university and the school system. Earning a place in one did not necessarily mean the automatic support of the other.

Unequal distribution of resources

Female students felt that they had fewer financial resources than the men in their classes. There was also an unequal distribution of household chores and child care duties. Women students were often working full-time, caring for a home and family, and taking educational administration classes at the same time. They also lacked institutional and professional resources. The men were more likely to have secretarial help, were in a better position to pay a typist or research assistant, and had more time to spend on the research itself:

We tend to perceive our environment from different experiences because we do not have the privileges (personal, social and professional) that are automatically granted to men (Respondent 38).

The burden of family care still seems to fall on women . . . Conversely, many of the men comment(ed) on how fortunate they were that their wives were "holding down the fort" and driving their children to various activities while they were occupied at class (Respondent 76).

The males in the classes never faced the same obstacles as I did. They had wives to look after their children, help them with homework etc. to perform all the endless

household tasks etc. These responsibilities fell squarely on my shoulders. I did my own typing and research too! (Respondent 1)

Graduate school is yet another undertaking for women who are probably already responsible for more activities than their male counterparts, yet they are expected to perform on par with them.

For most women these insidious deterrents were little more than a nuisance. They could overcome negative treatment by male professors, ignore their classmates' remarks and try not to let their perceptions of injustice affect their experiences. When deterrents were isolated occurrences, they were of little consequence.

You learn to live with the system. You cannot change it, and it will not accommodate you (Respondent 131).

However, in some cases, deterrents were repeated often enough to damage the students' sense of purpose and belonging and to destroy the self-confidence and determination necessary for the women to succeed:

I took only two courses and then discontinued the program because of irrelevance of the courses to anything I would be doing. One professor wasted my time with personal anecdotes "ad nauseam" and very little or no content and (the other) allowed for no deviation from the "right way" (Respondent 5).

Women were not quitting administration programs because individual professors made inappropriate comments. They were not falling apart each time a fellow student made an unkind remark, but sometimes they did find themselves in a washroom dissolved in tears for no apparent reason. They sometimes didn't recognize their own dissatisfaction. As one student commented:

As I was responding to this I came to the realization that my experience in this program has been in many ways a very negative one (Respondent 117).

In spite of the insidious deterrents, there was evidence of growth and change and students were eager to recommend ways in which the female experience in educational administration could be made more positive.

What do women educational administration students want?

Women students valued the opportunity to take courses of special interest to women, the inclusion of women's issues in regular course work, the exposure to qualitative research and the opportunity to work with women professors. Their suggestions for improvement included changes to courses and in quality of instruction:

Recommendations concerning course content and program.

a. Incorporate women's issues as a component of existing courses so that all students, male and female, can be exposed to them. Include more research about and by women and about contributions made by women's ways of administering:

The entire educational system needs to be re-conceptualized to incorporate the lives and experiences of women. Education consists of an initiation into an existing body of knowledge. This existing body of knowledge is (currently) defined by males (Respondent 1).

b. Make special courses on women's issues available.

c. Use alternate methods of teaching: role playing of conflict management, case studies, visiting female administrators, special seminars, panel discussions, and/or speaker series would augment course content.

d. Provide for networking and mentoring. Encourage a network of contacts in the school systems for beginning administrators and encourage formal and informal mentorships. Students could "shadow" practicing administrators or go through the program with a cohort of other students and/or be matched with senior graduate students who could provide information about classes and job opportunities.

e. Use innovative scheduling to improve access for people with children. There could be more flexible deadlines, relaxed residency requirements, or arrangements made with school systems to allow time off work to attend classes. Alternate delivery methods such as teleconferences and off campus courses would reduce the need to commute.

f. Provide daycare and financial aid to encourage women to take the full-time programs.

Recommendations concerning instructors.

a. Employ more female professors to provide more role models, and “demonstrate equality” (Respondent 97). Female professors should be “women-affirmative, but not necessarily aggressive” (39) or “career women - mothers and teachers who can appreciate how difficult it is to juggle both a career and a family” (7), not “consultants” (54) or those who have “bought into the traditional way of being and doing” (116).

b. Provide “awareness opportunities” (Respondent 38) for male instructors such as “seminars, similar to cross cultural training” (133). Professors could also be trained in teaching adult learners.

Implications

Women educational administration students showed great ability and initiative. They had already overcome societal expectations and impressed their school boards before they came into the university programs. Once there, the lucky ones were encouraged by female role models, felt included in course content and were exposed to reflective practicing and qualitative research. However, some encountered hostility from professors and others students, were exposed to a competitive, sometimes unfair grading system and felt marginalized throughout the experience. I would suspect that a survey of visible minorities would produce similar results.

There would be little value in trying to identify “good” places for women to take educational administration programs as most institutions have made serious attempts at

inclusion. Progressive admission policies, flexible hours and inclusive policies cannot prevent insidious deterrents from being handed out by individuals. Policies cannot prevent professors from marginalizing female students, from omitting the "female content" or from placing higher value on traditional androcentric structures. This is not to say that inclusive policies are not important. Difficult as they are to implement and impossible as they are to enforce, they are a necessary foundation for change. However, the existence of such policies sometimes leads to defeating assumptions.

1. We cannot assume that the existence of policy will automatically lead to a warmer climate for female students. These "70's issues" (Respondent 53) have not gone away.

2. We cannot assume that, as our current professors age and retire, they will be replaced by more sensitive people. Age, experience and gender have little to do with enlightenment. Our future professors are being trained in the educational administration programs of today. Without exposure to the issues and discussion of the implications, there will be little difference between the professors of today and their replacements of tomorrow. It is essential that race and gender issues be addressed in current educational administration classes.

3. It would be defeating to conclude that a balanced gender ratio would address the issues. Professors of either gender could do qualitative research, use adult learning practices and provide students with the opportunity to learn reflective processes, just as professors of either gender could chose not to do these things. It is these practices, regardless of gender and race, which are important. Exposure to these processes affects the way our students think, teach and respond and could eventually have a strong impact on schools and school practices. Issues of inclusivity are not limited to a few people having a bad experience in an educational administration program. The way we teach in our educational administration programs will have a profound affect on the way schools are run and the way children learn.

4. We must not assume that what we are doing does not matter. We are in a position to make a difference. Although on the individual level, we may feel that we are not in a position to intervene in school systems, what we teach and how we teach it can have a profound effect on school personnel decisions. The women students in this survey spoke of an entrenched anti-female attitude which discouraged teachers from seeking administrative training and kept those who did out of administrative positions. Not every educational administration student will become an administrator but most of them will become leaders in educational communities. To neglect to expose them to notions of equality and to deprive them of the opportunity to reflect on those issues is to further discourage those willing to seek change and to put our stamp of approval on the status quo. There are successes. One of my former students is now a director in a large schools system in which all of the principals are required to attend a five day "androgenous leadership" workshop. Universities do exert influence on the school system and we have the potential to be catalysts in the change process.

It is a fact that women and minorities not always treated with the same respect afforded to white males, but this is changing and we can help it to change. The things we are demanding are not requests for special treatment, but demands for equal treatment. If universities could honour those demands with a just and equitable environment for all people, they could set the tone for a just and equitable society in our future.

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