The majority of the literature dealing with improving university preparation programs fails to address how women develop as leaders and what kind of structures foster and encourage their development. The women students in our classes create a new vision of leadership, through their use of language, their actions, and their growing understandings of the unique ways in which they develop a leadership identity. Our response to this new vision is critical.

Patterns in Women's Emerging Leadership

Deborah T. Walker

Introduction

When I entered a school leadership and certification program seventeen years ago, few of my fellow classmates were women. All of the professors, with the exception of one adjunct instructor, were men. The practitioners who interviewed our class as potential school administrators were also men. There was nothing about the program to encourage me to believe that school administration was a field hospitable to women or that leadership preparation took seriously my perceptions and views of schooling.

Five years ago I joined the faculty of California State University at Hayward, a sister institution to where I had earned my administrative degree and credential. In contrast, nearly all of the leadership students were women. An average class of thirty graduate students had twenty-five women and five men. Class composition differed from my own experience in that a number of the students represented racial and ethnic minorities. The result was a setting where different voices were heard, and where the experiences and perceptions of the students significantly influenced the conduct of the courses.

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From my experiences as a university faculty member preparing potential and novice school administrators, I found that leadership develops in women according to definable patterns which capture the unique perspectives women bring to their studies, professional endeavors and personal lives. These patterns are supported in the research literature and are given life through the sharing of anecdotes and direct observations. The patterns to be explored through this article, and documented through references to research and personal observation, include: 1) collaboration as a work style; 2) concern for relationships with others; 3) the need to construct personal meaning and participate in sense making; and 4) the interplay between the emotions and the intellect as a way of developing a personal sense of leadership. While discussed separately, these patterns appear to be interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

Collaboration as a Work Style

For many years school leadership remained a male-dominated field, in part because women considering leadership roles were uncomfortable with existing authoritarian and hierarchical models of school administration. The emergence of shared leadership in the literature and in practice opened the door for many women to assume leadership roles and to continue their often preferred work style of seeking input, making joint decisions and sharing authority with colleagues.[1]

In the university classes I taught, women students readily adapted to the team learning structure that formed an integral part of coursework, and to the use of quarter-long support groups as a way of sharing ideas and reacting to written work in progress. I observed men and women students giving thoughtful feedback to each other, because a new norm was at work, supported by a new majority. Women students in my classes discussed at length their lack of comfort in imagining themselves as the sole authority on campus. They also expressed their desire to adapt some of our classroom practices as a way of including teachers in school governance. They rarely saw themselves as experts, although of course they possessed expertise in many areas, and were concerned with how to draw upon the expertise of their colleagues once they assumed a school leadership role. Did the principal need to be all-knowing? How could the principal enlist the creativity and imagination of teachers to improve instruction and solve persistent school problems? What were the expectations of the central office as related to individual or shared leadership?

In role play and simulation activities and in class discussions, women students most often used collaborative language as a way of talking about leadership. They infrequently used the pronoun "I" to talk about a project or effort they had initiated, but instead used "we" to discuss both successes and difficulties. They often phrased desired behavior in the form of questions, or used the "let's" construction to suggest a course of action. A caveat is necessary here: While I observed this use of language on the part of women students, I also modeled collaborative forms of language in talking about leadership, so I cannot separate out their preference for this language format and my influence in this regard.

Concern for Relationships with Others

An interesting dichotomy exists in the literature on leadership between the importance of achieving organizational goals and the importance of fostering collegial relationships. In regard to the former, Paul Hershey and Kenneth Blanchard's work on situational leadership differentiates between task and relational behavior, with high task behavior considered more efficient and effective in accomplishing organizational goals.[2] Lawrence Kohlberg's stage theory for moral development places concern for justice as the highest stage of development

rather than concern for relationships with others.[3] And the literature on instructional leadership paints a picture of a single leader promoting improvement in the school.[4]

In regard to the latter, fostering collegial relationships, Nel Noddings' research and writing on the ethic of caring suggests that schools can foster concern for students and for the world beyond by emphasizing mutual caring and nurturance.[5] Lynn Beck's recent book, *Reclaiming Educational Administration as a Caring Profession*, approaches leadership through language and concepts grounded in the formal study of ethics, philosophy and religion, to underscore the critical nature of caring in school leadership.[6] Carol Gilligan's reworking of Kohlberg's theory, placing relationship as the highest stage of moral development for women, focuses attention on how women integrate relationships from their personal and professional life to achieve meaning and satisfaction.[7]

Women students, in discussing their aspirations, typically portrayed themselves in relation to others: their colleagues, supervisors and families. Many talked of the trust they had built with colleagues while assuming teacher leadership roles as department chairs or mentors, and their fear that elevation to a traditional position of authority such as the principalship would jeopardize that trust. In the stories they told in class, they demonstrated patience in giving their colleagues time to understand new practices and also a willingness to support initial efforts at change. Implementing a new curriculum, experimenting with grouping strategies, and developing portfolio assessment were innovations for which they had provided leadership and support, and for which they recognized and reinforced the efforts of their colleagues to change established practice.

An interesting phenomenon I observed among the women in my classes is the way they viewed their personal and professional lives, not as separate or compartmentalized, but as part of a continuum of increasing responsibility and complexity. The quality of their interactions and the time they could devote to colleagues and to their families were ongoing topics of discussion. This does not mean the men in class did not share their concerns; several of them were new fathers, trying to juggle school responsibilities with night feedings and transportation to day care. It was clear, however, that as women added leadership tasks to their traditional roles of homemaker and caretaker, there was an effort to integrate these various roles, to maintain close relationships, and to craft a coherent whole from many disparate pieces.

Constructing Meaning and Making Sense

Constructivism as an educational theory has gained credence in recent years, although its roots can be found in the work of Dewey, Piaget and others.[8] When applied to how adults learn, constructivism suggests that learning takes place when learners share ideas, inquire and problem solve together. Adults, in this case leadership students, need opportunities to make sense of new knowledge and create meaning for themselves based upon individual and shared experiences. Moreover, new learning is mediated by prior experience, values and beliefs.[9]

Women students in my classes did not approach school leadership as a body of technical knowledge or set of skills to be mastered. They constantly questioned what they saw as the practice of school leadership, and the discrepancy between their experiences and the vision of "bold, socially responsible leadership" we promoted in class. They sought ethical frameworks for working with their colleagues in ways that were not controlling or manipulative. They struggled with reconciling their own emerging vision of schooling with what might be the conflicting visions of their faculty. They wanted to know how to be inclusive, collaborative, and how to honor and value others. Most of all, they wanted to develop a sense of themselves as

leaders that was congruent with their values and beliefs. They sought to construct models of leadership that were either non-existent or at the least did not represent the norm.

Because our society encourages boys to be aggressive and in charge, while it encourages girls to be agreeable and compliant, the women students in my classes had farther to go in developing a leadership identity than the men. This is not to diminish the men's journey toward leadership, especially the men who were ethnic minorities and who also felt disenfranchised from existing authority structures. But for the women, seeing themselves as leaders took time, support, and most importantly, opportunities to create meaning for themselves from the literature we read, from an analysis of existing practice, from conducting action research, and from their own experiences as teachers and novice administrators.

The Interplay Between the Emotions and Intellect

The literature on story and narrative, especially in teacher education, offers many lessons on how teachers' experiences and their interpretations of these experiences can help them to develop as professionals.[10] The use of personal story can summon powerful images of people and events that help to shape individual identity, and that provide a bridge between emotional and intellectual ways of knowing. Having students tell their own leadership stories, develop metaphors for their style of leadership, and do reflective writing can help them to make sense of the field of school administration and fit it to their own developing view of leadership.[11] Moreover, forging a leadership identity does not depend on intellectual development alone but rather involves the emotional life, dreams and beliefs of teachers and aspiring administrators.

The women students in my classes shared successes and failures they experienced as they assumed leadership roles. They discussed how they wanted to be perceived, their own insecurities, and the images and symbols that had meaning for them. For example, one student related what was for her a defining leadership story. In attempting to mediate some racial conflicts among students and between students and faculty, she was perceived as being racist. This was particularly troublesome for her, not only because equity and fair treatment were such important values to her, but also because she was from South Africa and experienced a sense of guilt over her country's policy of apartheid. She shared with the class her struggle to make her values known, to have faculty see her as a real person rather than equating her with her role. She found that in describing her values and her background to the faculty, using language from both the intellect and the emotions, she was able to clarify for them and herself what she stood for as a leader.

Another student shared with the class her efforts to empower other teachers at her school, by working with them to become knowledgeable about the research on change and to use that knowledge to influence school improvement efforts. She talked about how most teachers experienced school change as something that was done to them and how infrequently they were asked to help shape the process and outcomes. For her, involving teachers in this way enabled her to bring together the intellectual and emotional facets of herself. She provided intellectual leadership for the seminar process she engaged in with her colleagues; and she functioned in a caring and nurturing way to help them develop professional expertise and confidence in guiding the course of school improvement.

In both instances, the women students related their stories and experiences within the context of their feelings. These were not objective discussions of case studies, but rather personal accounts of their own journeys toward developing a leadership identity. They talked about personal struggles, about

replacing fears with a new sense of personal and professional courage, and about how their emerging leadership meshed with the other roles they played in their lives.

Conclusions and Implications

Reviewing my four years of preparing leadership candidates at the university level, I recognize the gap that exists between traditional views of educational administration as a profession, and how women leadership candidates develop a sense of themselves as leaders. The majority of the literature dealing with improving university preparation programs fails to address how women develop as leaders and what kind of structures foster and encourage their development.

The patterns I observed through my teaching and advisement of women students—collaboration as a work style, concern for relationships with others, constructing meaning and making sense, and the interplay between the emotions and the intellect—suggest that leadership preparation be reconceptualized in new ways. Each pattern gives clues as to how program content and structures can be designed to meet the developmental needs of women leadership candidates. These clues include:

- Creating opportunities for leadership students to form both work groups and support teams, to enhance learning and to model and provide experience with the kind of work style they are most likely to implement on the job.
- Shifting from a technical approach to administration to one that emphasizes ethics and caring, and that develops in leadership candidates the ability to create caring school climates where students and teachers are nurtured and valued.
- Using the experiences, values and beliefs that leadership students bring with them as the basis for creating new professional knowledge; and moving from a teacher-centered approach to one in which students have responsibility for constructing and making sense of new learning.
- Expanding the context for leadership development to recognize the importance of the emotions, particularly the interaction between the intellect and the emotions, to forging a leadership identity; recognizing the multiple and sometimes conflicting roles women play as they assume positions of school leadership.

Even as we "teach" leadership candidates, we learn valuable lessons that can inform our educational practice. The women students in our classes create a new vision of leadership, through their use of language, their actions, and their growing understandings of the unique ways in which they develop a leadership identity. Our response to this new vision is critical, if we are to fulfill our role of preparing leaders for our schools.

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