

# Women's Under-Representation In Educational Administration: Revisiting Two Solutions

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## **Abstract**

That women's position in society has not improved greatly in recent years has been established in the literature. The concern in this paper is to consider women's under-representation in educational administration in the light of two important liberal feminist solutions which have been put forward to alleviate women's discrimination in the workforce. These solutions include the legislative framework provided by Affirmative Action and anti-discrimination laws, and the notion of mentorship for women. The paper revisits these two well-known solutions, their contributions and limitations, and concludes by putting forward some implications for future thinking.

## **Introduction**

In recent years women's position in society has not improved greatly. Although there have been some obvious gains such as the introduction of the Federal Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) and the Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity for Women Act 1986 (Cth), plus minor improvements in the representation of women in fields such as politics and law, women continue to experience inequality in their public, social and private lives (The Law Reform Commission, 1994: 9).

In this paper, my concern is to revisit the situation of women's under-representation in school hierarchies with a view to identifying some of the barriers and some of the solutions that have been put forward in recent times. In particular, I examine two important solutions: aspects of the legislative framework (i.e. anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action/equal employment opportunity policies) and mentorship for redressing systemic discrimination experienced by women in employment and the specific setting of educational administration. While it is recognised that many solutions put forward in recent years have emerged from a range of feminist discourses, (not all of which have been in agreement), it is argued that it is *more important* for women in the workforce to have access to a range of strategies and avenues that can continue to assist them in achieving equitable outcomes, than to discount particular solutions because they are perceived as appropriate to a particular feminist discourse. The paper concludes by examining some implications raised from this paper.

## **Women's Under-representation in Education**

That women are under-represented in positions of management (Adler & Izraeli, 1988: 8) and educational management (Randall, 1994; Limerick, 1991) is a well known fact worldwide. Similarly, in university settings (Burton, 1998; QUT Affirmative Action Report, 1996; Wilson & Byrne, 1987) and TAFE colleges (Bearlin, 1981) there are very few women occupying high status positions. As an example, 1996 figures indicated that women academics at Queensland University of Technology were under-represented at all levels except associate lecturer where women made up 60% of staff. At the professorial level, women made up only 12% of total staff. Furthermore, women remained under-represented in tenured positions in most faculties and their presence was felt minimally in male dominated faculties such as Built Environment and Engineering, Information Technology, and Science (QUT Affirmative Action Report, 1996: 5).

In Australia, 8% of top executive management positions are occupied by women, with women in 15% of senior management positions; 24% in middle management; and 35% in junior management (Affirmative Action Report 1995 in Poiner, 1996: 71). In terms of executive positions in schools, women continue to be under-represented, although recent statistics show an improvement. For example, in 1990, females made up 20% of the total executive staff in government schools in Australia (ABS, 1990: 73). This figure had risen to 27% by 1996 (ABS, 1996a: 84). The profile of executive staff in Queensland government schools improved significantly over this period too, with females comprising 9% of total executive staff in 1990 (ABS, 1990: 73) and 31% in 1996 (ABS, 1996a: 84). Executive staff are described as those persons undertaking functions of a senior administrative nature broader than that of a secondary principal and whose salary exceeds that of a secondary principal (ABS, 1996b: 92). When an examination is done of the most senior members of executive staff, i.e. the Director-General, Deputy Director-General, Assistant Directors-General and District Directors in the Queensland government school structure, females comprise only 22% of the total grouping (Education Queensland Districts Profile, 1998). It appears that the attainment of senior management positions poses more difficulties for women. The well known expression, 'the glass ceiling' is often cited as a barrier preventing them from moving upward.

In the area of the principalship, figures from Chapman's extensive Australian study conducted over a decade ago found that only 23% of Australian school principals were women (Chapman, 1986: 13). She found that women were least likely to be principals in Government schools. A profile of women's under-representation in the principalship in Queensland Government schools over selective years (1870 to 1997) can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1: Principals of Schools by Sex: selected years 1870-1997 (All Queensland State Schools: preschool, primary, special and secondary)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total as % of Male</b>
1870	33	78	111	30%
1920	768	857	1625	47%
1950	168	1264	1432	12%
1970	37	1187	1224	3%
1980	64	1215	1279	5%
1986	133	1259	1392	10%
1990	219	1133	1352	16%
1992	256	1127	1383	19%
1994	308	1068	1376	22%
1996	373	978	1351	28%
1997	390	955	1345	29%

Sources:

Years 1870-1980 (Clarke, 1985: 78)

Years 1980-1990 (Education Office Gazette, 1980, 1986)

Years 1990-1997 (Department of Education, 1998a)

The figures reveal some interesting trends and fluctuations in numbers over the last 120 years. As can be seen in 1870, there were ten times more female principals as a percentage of the total (ie 30%) than a century later (ie 3%). The figures show that by the mid 1980s percentages began to increase, with a steady increase in the 1990s. It can be seen, too, that women principals made up 29% of the principalship in 1997. When this percentage is broken down into the three different schools over which principals preside, (ie primary schools, special schools and secondary schools), it reveals that the distribution of female principals as a percentage of the total, is greatest in primary schools (31%) and least in secondary schools (16%) (Department of Education, 1998b).

Some of the explanations for the fluctuations over the past century can be found in the historical, social and political conditions which influenced the employment of female teachers and principals (Clarke, 1985). Historically, the employment of women educators in Queensland has been characterised by various discriminatory practices which have reinforced beliefs about male superiority in administration. Three examples of overt discrimination which occurred during different times during this period will be highlighted. Firstly, from 1902 to 1940, women teachers were required to resign on marriage. Secondly, from 1940 to 1969 married female teachers were re-employed only on a temporary basis. Thirdly, women teachers did not receive equal pay until 1971 (Clarke, 1985). As can be expected, these historical discriminatory practices had an adverse effect on female teachers' professional career development and career mobility.

From the statistics, one could argue that the advent of the federal and state anti-discrimination legislation and equal employment policies seem to have had a positive effect on improving the profile of women principals and women occupying executive staff positions in both Queensland and Australian government schools. While the figures demonstrate some improvements for women at these levels, the figures still reveal that women are under-represented. This fact becomes more apparent when one considers that women make up 67% of the teaching force in Government schools in Queensland (ABS, 1996c: 80) and all schools in Australia in 1995 (ABS, 1996d). Put another way, two-thirds of the teaching staff are women yet under one-third fill the position of either principal or executive staff member.

## **Barriers**

Clearly barriers to women's participation in educational administration have contributed to the current statistical profile of women. Several of the well-known arguments put forward for explaining women's under-representation in educational administration and management are as follows:

- Sexist and sex-role assumptions and attitudes regarding women administrators' ability and competence to perform the role (Shakeshaft, 1987; Funk, 1986; Chapman, 1986; Byrne, 1991; Marles, 1986; Patterson, 1994);
- The culture of educational institutions such as schools and universities and other organisations where masculinity is embedded (Blackmore, 1989; Burton, 1987, 1998; Limerick, 1991; Tancred-Sheriff in Randall, 1994);
- Women's reluctance to apply for promotions (Sampson, 1987; Chapman, 1986; Randall, 1994);
- Lack of adequate childcare as a barrier to women's full participation in the workplace (Scutt, 1990);
- Dual role of performing unpaid work in the home, rearing children and working in the workplace (Davies, 1994);

- Lack of traditional mentoring opportunities for women (Bryne, 1991; Randall, 1994; Sampson, 1987; Dodgson, 1986; Marshall, 1985);
- Lack of access to socialisation processes which limit women from aspiring to leadership positions (Sampson, 1987; Patterson, 1994; Jacobs, 1994; Nicoll, 1992);
- Teaching and educational administration are two distinct entities which manifest separate promotion routes. 'Structural intransigence' acts as a barrier against women's advancement (Nicoll, 1992; Patterson, 1994);
- Promotion by 'merit' is not a neutral concept but is based on values of the dominant group in the organisation (Wilenski 1985 in Randall, 1994: 17; Burton, 1987, 1988, 1998);
- 'The Glass Ceiling' described by Morrison, White and van Velsor (1987) includes a cluster of barriers (e.g. lack of role models and mentors; lack of support from senior executives; increased competition; and competing career and family roles) preventing women from attaining top management positions.

## **Solutions**

It is important to underscore the point that not all feminists have advocated similar solutions for redressing these and other barriers facing women in education and in other spheres of life. As Blackmore (1989: 96-97) reminds us, there is no one feminist theory; only a body of theories that adopt different political perspectives and orientations.

In recent years, feminists have used a variety of frameworks to guide their analyses. A simple categorisation of two main perspectives are those from liberal and more radical positions. For example, liberal feminist solutions to women's under-representation have focused on redressing discriminating practices through avenues such as affirmative action policies, greater mentoring and socialisation opportunities for women, and a range of training courses for women. In contrast, more radical feminists have used the argument of 'patriarchy' as '[t]he universal political structure which privileges men at the expense of women' (Tuttle, 1987: 242) to explain men's dominant and women's subordinate status in society. Radical feminists contend that more basic solutions are needed rather than reforming current political, legal and educational policies and practices. The work of Blackmore (1989) is relevant here as she argues that we need to re-examine the concept of leadership and transform its current 'masculinist' bias which prizes men and devalues women's experience. Blackmore suggests that women have been alienated by male dominant models of leadership which emphasise control, hierarchy and individualism (Blackmore 1989: 123). Her vision is one that reconceptualises leadership so that it incorporates gender as a dimension. A feminist alternative view of leadership would be one that focused on the relationship between individuals and a more egalitarian notion of community so that caring and concern for others would be given priority. Such a view would be committed to democratic participation (Blackmore, 1989: 120-121). Other writers (for example, see, Burton, 1987; Korac-Kakabadse &

Kouzman, 1997) have argued along similar lines and called for cultural change in organisational structures to prevent the further marginalisation of women.

It is not my intention to explore these theories as such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this paper. The two positions described above exemplify two different feminist solutions to the issue of women's absence in leadership domains. My intention for the rest of the paper is to revisit two liberal feminist solutions put forward in recent times.

### **Legislative Framework**

A number of statutes have been enacted over the last 15 years in Australia which deal with issues of discrimination on the grounds of sex. Examples include the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth), Anti-discrimination Act 1991 (Qld), Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986 (Cth) and Equal Employment in Public Employment Act 1992 (Qld).

In the following discussion, attention is directed firstly to anti-discrimination legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) and Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld), and, secondly, to Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) legislation as initiatives which have been designed to improve the status of women within the workplace.

### **Anti-Discrimination Legislation**

Anti-discrimination laws in the various States and Territories within Australia share a broadly similar legislative scheme with the Federal Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Hunter 1992: 31). A notable difference between the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act 1984 and the Qld Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 is that the former prohibits discrimination on the basis of the attributes of sex, marital status, and pregnancy, while the latter includes these plus other attributes such as parental status, breastfeeding, age, race, impairment, religion, political belief or activity, trade union activity, lawful sexual activity, and association with or relation to a person identified on the basis of any of the above attributes (Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld), ss6-7). As the two acts perform largely the same legal function, only a general description will be provided here.

It is important to note that the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) and the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld) were based upon the United Nations convention known as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Tahmindjis, 1993: 12-21; Anti-Discrimination Act, 1991 (Qld): 15). The CEDAW condemned all forms of discrimination against women as a violation of their basic human rights and freedoms (CEDAW in Office of the Status of Women, 1986). The thrust of anti-discrimination legislation is that sexual harassment and sex-based discrimination in employment, education and a number of other areas are prohibited.

Anti-discrimination legislation identify two types of discrimination which are prohibited and these are direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination is said to occur when a person is treated less favourably than another person because of his or her sex, or some other

attribute (Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld), s10). An example would be if an employer only offered promotional opportunities to males in the organisation.

Indirect discrimination occurs if a person imposes a term with which another person does not or cannot comply (Anti-Discrimination Act 1991, (Qld) s11). In other words, indirect discrimination covers apparently neutral practices which exclude one group from benefits or opportunities (Byrnes 1987: 16). An example of indirect discrimination would be if an employer required employees to wear a hat for appearance reasons and not for safety or hygiene reasons. While such a practice does not appear discriminatory, it may have a discriminatory effect on people who are required to wear particular headdresses due to cultural or religious beliefs (Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld), s11).

### **Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986 (Cth)**

The Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act (Cth) was introduced in 1986. At that time, it was felt that anti-discrimination legislation on its own was important but not sufficient to improve women's position. For this reason, affirmative action legislation was introduced to help women achieve equality or equal opportunity in the workplace. Two key aims of programs within Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for women) (AA/EEO) are firstly to eliminate discrimination against women, and secondly to promote equal opportunity for women in the workplace (s3 (1) in Hunter 1992: 84).

Previously the AA/EEO require private sector organisations, unions and higher education institutions with over 100 employees to examine their policies to ensure that they do not discriminate against persons on the basis of sex, race, religion or other attributes (Davis & Pratt, 1994, foreword). Under the Act, organisations are required to follow an eight step process to ensure that strategies are in place which facilitate opportunity in employment for women. Furthermore, they must submit equal opportunity management and affirmative action plans to a government agency (Korac-Kakabadse & Kouzmin, 1997: 184).

The Act recognises the importance of equal treatment and values the notion of 'merit'. In other words, the Act does *not* subscribe to the use of quotas. Quotas mean that a certain percentage of women or Aborigines or people with disabilities will be automatically employed *regardless* of qualifications (Kramer, 1993: 13). Thornton (1990: 228) suggests that the use of quotas within AA/EEO is a strong interventionist measure, while other measures, such as advertising in sex neutral language and including women within the labour pool, are more 'minimalist'. It seems that the stance adopted by Australia's AA/EEO legislation has been away from the extreme forms of intervention.

Essentially, affirmative action is about dismantling barriers which limit opportunities for women and other target groups in the workplace. Unlike the anti-discrimination legislation which prohibits employers from discriminating against women in certain circumstances (Hunter, 1992: 31), AA/EEO involves devising measures for organisations to use to eradicate discrimination. Anti-discrimination legislation, then, tends to be complaint based or *reactionary*, while AA/EEO

is more *proactive* as employers are required to devise appropriate strategies to improve women's opportunities (Ronalds, 1988).

### **Equal Employment in Public Employment Act 1992 (Qld)**

While AA/EEO is concerned with the private sector, the Public Service Reform Act 1984 (Cth) covers AA/EEO in the public service (Office of the Status of Women, 1986: 32). In Queensland, the Equal Employment in Public Employment Act 1992 (Qld) requires that all public sector organisations prepare and implement equal employment opportunity management plans, and report on these plans, every year to the Commissioner for Public Sector Equity. Two key objectives of the Act are that members of target groups (eg. women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) are able to compete for recruitment, selection and promotion, and pursue careers, as effectively as those not in target groups, and secondly, that unlawful discrimination is eliminated.

In 1992, the Queensland Department of Education produced its inaugural Equal Employment Opportunity Management Plan 1992-1993. Every year since 1992, it has been involved in the process of reviewing and evaluating its objectives and strategies, and setting new objectives and implementation plans for the following year. Two examples of future directions the Department of Education identified for the period 1997-1998 are:

increase EEO practices in schools and other workplaces to enhance opportunities for all staff; and

co-ordinate work-shadowing programs for women into senior executive service position.

(Department of Education Annual Report 1995-1996, 1996: 34)

The Equal Opportunity Management Plan is the responsibility of the Department's managers across all levels, such as principals, executive directors and directors and those involved in human resource management (Department of Education 1992, 1993: i). The plan is one of a number which the Department of Education prepares within its corporate plan. Individual schools must ensure that their school development plans are consistent with the corporate plan of the Department and, in effect, this means that principals in schools are required to translate priorities identified in the corporate plan into action.

### **How Effective Has the Legislative Framework for Women Been?**

In attempting to address this question, I will provide a fairly general discussion which alludes to the contributions and limitations of anti-discrimination and AA/EEO legislation. No attempt will be made to highlight significant judicial determinations which have challenged and then altered workplace culture and departmental policies for women.

### **Anti-Discrimination legislation**

Anti-Discrimination laws such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) and Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld) are recognised as significant pieces of legislation designed to protect women from discriminatory and exclusionary practices within employment and other spheres of life (Law Reform Commission, 1994: 33, 37). While conceding that anti-discrimination legislation has its limitations, Thornton (1990: 260-262) comments that the legislation has and continues to serve an important symbolic and educative function in our society. Three of these functions are:

1. it acknowledges the rights of women and minority groups to be treated fairly;
2. acknowledges the dignity and worth of women and minority groups; and
3. acknowledges that equal treatment is a matter of societal concern (p.261).

Thornton (1990: 262) adds that '[t]he very *idea* that subordinated peoples are equal to or as good as societal superordinates is subversive'.

With this said, however, anti-discrimination laws have had criticisms levelled at them from both legal and political quarters in recent times (see Lindsay, 1996a for a summary of the criticisms). It seems that some of the criticisms have indicated that the legislation has not been 'subversive' enough. Two important limitations which are discussed here are firstly, the narrow understanding of equality which is used in the legislation, and secondly, the problematic notion of indirect discrimination.

A number of authors (The Law Reform Commission, 1994; Leon, 1993 Thornton, 1990) have questioned the specific meaning of equality within the legislation. Thornton (1990: 14) argues that 'formal' not 'substantive' equality is characteristic of the Australian legal culture founded upon liberalism. Formal equality is concerned with equality of opportunity in regard to access and is not concerned with the end result. The assumption is that *all* people should be at equal starting points so that factors such as sex and race are not significant. In contrast, substantive equality is equality of result. Hence it is concerned with taking cognisance of factors beyond the point of access (Thornton, 1990: 16-17). For example, substantive equality would recognise the historical, social and structural barriers which continue to impact upon women's access and outcomes (Leon, 1993). It can be said, then, that affirmative action programs are an attempt to distort '... the ideal of substantive equality ...' (Thornton, 1990: 17) since they acknowledge that proactive steps need to be put in place to institute equal employment opportunity for women.

Another example which illustrates the limitations of anti-discrimination legislation is the issue of what constitutes indirect discrimination. According to Endicott (1996), Lindsay (1996a, 1996b) and Salidu (1994), providing evidence of indirect discrimination has proven difficult for women in Australia.

After a critical examination of a number of sex discrimination cases in Australian universities, Lindsay (1996b) makes the point that 'existing parameters of unlawful discrimination

as defined in statutes are inadequate to redress women's experience of inequality in the workplace' (p. 106).

Lindsay (1996a) also questions whether notions of equality and anti-discrimination are such that they can ensure substantive justice. Her suggestion is that we need to '... explore new models for human rights protection in a broad and inclusive context ...' (p.129). Other writers, too, have suggested reassessing definitions of what constitutes discrimination and equality. Leon (1993: 101) argues that what is needed is 'a purposive gender-sensitive interpretation of the legislation either by a rewrite of the legislation or a strategy for case interpretation before the courts and tribunal'. Earnshaw (1993) sees the solution in a call for greater awareness of more subtle forms of sex discrimination and an increased sensitivity on the part of tribunals in these cases.

This brief discussion of the literature has shown that there appears to be ubiquitous support for the place of anti-discrimination legislation, although it has some conceptual and practical weaknesses (Leon, 1993). As a number of the authors (e.g. Lindsay, 1996a; Earnshaw, 1993; Hunter, 1992; Thornton, 1990) have demonstrated, there are many ways that existing legislation can be challenged and adapted so that substantive notions of justice and equality can be embraced more fully. Some of the ways in which women, themselves, can continue to challenge current practices and discourse are discussed later in the paper.

### **Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity for Women**

As with anti-discrimination legislation, there is some consensus that Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity (AA/EEO) legislation has made gains at a number of levels since its implementation (Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, 1992; Poiner, 1996). Two obvious examples of gains made from the legislation have been the introduction of childcare and increased participation of women in the workplace.

The extent to which AA/EEO legislation has improved the position of women, however, is more difficult to determine for many reasons. For example, are the gains due to legislation or can we attribute them to women themselves or to other measures outside workplace policies? Moreover, can we argue that the steady increase of women in the principalship since the mid 1980s in Queensland Government schools has been due to the Equal Employment Opportunity Management Plan, implemented yearly since 1992 or have there been a host of other factors affecting women's lives and experiences?

A difficulty inherent in determining the effectiveness of AA/EEO policies is the heavy reliance that is made of statistical data to measure outcomes. Yet women in small business, non-Government schools, community organisations and unions employing under 100 employees are *not* represented in the statistical data (Poiner, 1996: 72). At best, then, only a patchy picture of women is presented. Furthermore, while statistical data can provide interesting and informative trends, they are limited in that they do not tell us *why* or *how* only *that* (Poiner, 1996: 66, my italics).

Along with Poiner (1996), Sheridan (1995) argues that we need to be cautious about how statistics are interpreted. For example, she cites the Affirmative Action Agency Annual Report of 1992-1993 which found that 99% of companies presented a report. On the surface it appears that companies are being responsive in this area, but Sheridan (1995) points out that the extent to which the policies are meeting requirements and introducing initiatives to assist women is not evident in the statistics alone. As an illustration she cites the work of Braithwaite (1993) whose study of the public reports of 153 companies found that the majority of them were ‘... less committed to implementing policies to improve women’s employment opportunities’ (Sheridan, 1995: 28). Braithwaite (in Sheridan, 1995) came to this conclusion after she evaluated the legislation against four key categories of ‘substantive compliance’ (Sheridan, 1995: 28-29). The important point she makes is that there are clear difficulties in asserting ‘a cause and effect relationship to trends in aggregate employment statistics and the affirmative action legislation’ (Sheridan, 1995: 29).

Indeed Braithwaite’s comprehensive approach to measuring compliance in the legislation (in Sheridan, 1995) would be useful to consider in relation to the Department of Education’s Equal Opportunity Management Plan 1997-1998. For example, would the Department’s plan show that it was ‘doing the minimum without demonstrating commitment to EEO’ (category 1) (Braithwaite in Sheridan, 1995: 29) or ‘meeting requirements of legislation and introducing initiatives to improve women’s position in workplace’ (category 4) (Braithwaite in Sheridan, 1995: 29). And even if ‘substantive compliance’ (category 4) were evident in the overall plan, what of individual schools which are now responsible for translating centralised policies into their corporate plan and school development plans? It becomes very difficult to argue firstly that increased numbers of women in the principalship are due to the AA/EEO plan and secondly that AA/EEO plans and other school based plans are committed to the ‘spirit’ of improving women’s position in the workplace. As Sheridan (1995) and others (e.g. Poiner, 1996) contend, qualitative measures which could tell us about women’s perceptions, expectations and experiences of their employment opportunities would contribute significantly to the picture.

The discussion has attempted to highlight some of the important shortcomings of AA/EEO and anti-discrimination legislation. The second part of this discussion is concerned with another solution that has been recommended strongly in the literature since the 1970s as a means of assisting women in their career development and mobility. Unlike AA/EEO and anti-discrimination legislation which were established to eliminate discrimination against women via a legislative framework, mentorship has not become a policy mechanism formalised across a wide cross-section of workplace environments. To date, traditional mentorship remains the dominant type of mentorship found in the workplace, including educational settings such as schools. It is to mentorship that we now turn.

## **Mentorship for Women**

Over the last twenty years a considerable body of literature has revealed that access to a mentor, an older and experienced career professional, is a pre-requisite for both men's and women's success in organisations (Ehrich, 1995). Indeed in the biographies of famous men and women artists and scientists we find that mentors (e.g. important others) have played a role in shaping and influencing their proteges' artistic and/or intellectual development.

### **Traditional Mentorship**

Traditional mentorship, as a source of patronage, has been around for thousands of years. Byrne (1991) explains that 'traditional mentorship' is based on a self-selecting, invisible and idiosyncratic process which has been historically male dominated. It is self-selecting because selection depends on the personal choice of the mentor who has willingly and actively chosen to develop a protege's career path. In a workplace context, it is usually a senior member in the organisation who elects to initiate a mentoring relationship with a younger or newer member. It is through the mentoring relationship that a protege is able to acquire professional competencies and other critical skills necessary to function effectively in his or her chosen career.

Exactly how mentors choose their proteges has not been fully investigated by the research. According to Odiorne (1985) mentors have strong biases towards people of their own religion or cultural backgrounds. This process of 'self' selection is sometimes referred to as 'homosocial reproduction'. While Byrne (1989) asserts that it is legitimate for mentors to select hard working and gifted proteges, traditional mentorship becomes discriminatory when mentors select male proteges only. The research seems to indicate that gender is a key determinant in who gets mentored. Some of the reasons women tend to get overlooked by male mentors have been summarised under the rubric of 'sexual risks' and include: sexual attraction, sexual tension and jealousy, marital disruption and sexual innuendoes suspected by outsiders (Clawson & Kram, 1984). For these and other reasons, the literature has demonstrated that females have greater difficulty than males in acquiring mentors in a variety of settings such as academe (Bogat & Redner, 1985; Byrne, 1989), managerial settings (Kanter, 1977) and educational administration (Sampson, 1987; Marshall, 1985; Clarke, 1985; Chapman, 1986). It seems that men who make up the 'critical mass' or majority of those available to mentor women in these settings tend to sponsor other men.

Research by Byrne (1989) supports this view. She investigated women's experiences in science faculties in higher educational institutions and found that women were excluded from explicit and implicit mentoring experiences. Explicit experiences referred to scholarships, awards and opportunities to publish, while implicit experiences were those which occurred when male academics shared their knowledge with male students and not with female students in informal settings.

Within the schooling system, too, it appears that women educational administrators and those aspiring to the principalship, are excluded also from explicit and implicit mentoring opportunities. For example, in Schmuck's (1975) American study, women administrators felt they

had been denied crucial informal processes of socialisation because of their sex. Clarke (1985) made a similar comment in relation to women teachers in Queensland Government schools who had been filtered out of knowledge sharing sessions in informal settings such as clubs, pubs and old-boy associations. While these examples pertain to implicit mentorship, Sampson's (1987) research noted that women teachers interested in promotion were not asked to perform administrative tasks to the same extent as male teachers. Principals in those schools tended to allocate female teachers work related to children and teaching while male teachers in her study were selected to perform administrative tasks such as timetabling and chairing committees. The implication of this example of sex-role stereotyping is that women are not receiving the same social messages as men regarding apprenticeship tasks necessary for promotion.

### **Professional and Formal Mentorship**

Since the early 1970s, private and public organisations in the United States recognised the benefits of traditional mentorship and began to incorporate mentorship into their staff development programmes. As part of the organisations' human resource development strategies, senior members in those organisation mentored young or new employees within the organisation to assist them in their career development and to teach them new skills. In Australia, the notion of formalising mentorship came into being in the 1980s (Cameron & Jesser 1990). For example, some banking corporations and some sections within public service departments began to professionalise and formalise mentorship. According to Byrne (1991) 'professional mentorship' differs from 'formal mentorship' because it is a process encouraged by top leadership but not a compulsory part of an organisation's staff development. In a professional mentorship programme, participants would be allowed the choice to participate and also the choice of the person with whom they would like to work, unlike 'formal mentorship' which means that mentorship would become applicable to most or all of the senior staff and new or junior members of the organisation.

Traditional mentorship tends to be dominant within schooling settings in Australia, although more formalised programmes of mentorship have begun to be introduced for men and women leaders in other parts of the world. For example, Stott and Walker's (1992) research examined the experiences of a mentoring programme implemented in Singapore since the 1980s for preparing school principals. Similarly, Daresh and Playko's (1992) work reviewed mentoring schemes for beginning principals and future leaders in some states in the United States. Apart from these examples, there does not appear to be any similar type of formal or professional mentoring programme available for either beginning or interested leaders in education in Australia (Ehrich, 1994a).

### **Professional Mentorship for Women Educators**

I have argued elsewhere that a professional mentorship programme should be available at the pre-service level for women aspiring to the principalship in Australian schools (see Ehrich, 1991, 1994a, 1995). An alternative to traditional mentorship, which tends to be elitist and discriminate

against women, is required if women are to have access to important knowledge, apprenticeship experiences and a range of learning opportunities deemed necessary for promotion. Although formal programmes have the advantage of ensuring that mentorship is extended to all women interested in the process, I have argued for professional mentorship for the reasons that it is less likely to develop problems of lack of compatibility and lack of commitment since it is more flexible, voluntary and partly self-selecting. Furthermore, a visible and conscious process which is part of staff development policy would eliminate cross-gender issues. This was seen as important as it continues to be part of social mores in Australia that men and women do not socialise as equals to discuss work-related matters or other things unless they are romantically attached.

It is still my belief that professional mentorship rather than traditional mentorship has greater potential for assisting women interested in pursuing leadership positions. With this said, however, it is recognised that professional mentorship alone is unlikely to solve the problems women may confront when they aspire to promotion. Mentorship conceived as a policy tool to enhance women's job prospects in the specific area of educational administration has some merit but it is only one of a cluster of factors identified in the literature for moving women ahead.

### **Where to Now?**

The previous discussion identified and discussed two important solutions put forward in recent years for redressing women's under-representation in the workforce. While the first referred to legislation designed to eliminate inequality in women's experience in the workplace, the second referred to the notion of women accessing mentors who could assist them in attaining apprenticeship experiences and ultimately career advancement. Because of the limitations of traditional mentorship (i.e. it is elitist, selective and tends to favour male-male dyads), a more formalised type of mentorship (i.e. professional mentorship) was suggested.

The outcome of the discussion was that no definitive conclusion could be reached about the extent to which the legislative framework and/or traditional mentorship has enhanced women's position within educational administration. While the statistical profile of women in leadership has increased since the mid 1980s, and one could speculate that either or both of the solutions outlined in this paper may have had some impact, it appears more likely that a cluster of factors contributed to the increasing numbers of women entering the principalship in Queensland. As was maintained at the outset of this paper, a key to improving women's position lies in utilising a range of strategies and avenues. It is to these strategies that attention is now turned.

### **Implications for the Future**

The final part of the paper raises some implications for future thinking about improving women's position in educational administration. The implications have been grouped into seven key areas.

#### **1. Organisational structures**

Educational systems have been restructured nationally and internationally over the last decade. This has been evident by the shift from centralised policies to decentralised ones where principals in concert with staffs and the community are now more responsible for the day to day operations of schools. Such a decentralised model of school leadership has considerable potential for developing democratic processes for decision making, and for encouraging facilitative and shared leadership.

An important implication of the shift to school-based management for women who are already in the principalship, is that they could examine their own position and practices and determine the ways in which they could be more inclusive and democratic in their interactions with staff, students and community members (Blackmore, 1995). More inclusive and democratic practices are in keeping with a 'feminist' view of leadership since such a view is concerned with egalitarian notions of community and social justice (Blackmore, 1989; Grundy 1993).

## **2. Educating the school community**

Progress cannot and will not be made until there is greater awareness and understanding of the barriers impeding women's progress to the principalship and beyond. For this reason, it is important that affirmative action/equal employment opportunity initiatives are put firmly on the agenda with educational systems and schools. Principals and school staffs have a responsibility to ensure that a range of initiatives which promote women's access to a variety of strategies are incorporated into the various school development and operational plans. Of importance is that all of the strategies employed should be implemented in the true spirit in which they are intended.

## **3. A culture that support women's experiences**

A number of writers have commented on the 'gendered' nature of organisations (Burton 1987, 1988, 1998; Korac-Kakabadse & Kouzmin, 1997) including schools (Limerick 1991; Blackmore 1995). In short, these writers maintain that organisations have inherited 'masculinist' assumptions and practices from history and these continue to act as barriers against women. Marshall and Rusch (1995) refer to these masculinist assumptions as 'gender filters' that operate within the professional culture and function to maintain the privilege of the dominant white culture.

According to Marshall and Rusch (1995) when feminist deputy principals find themselves being socialised into 'masculinist' organisations, this creates many dilemmas and challenges for them. They recommend that women construct new assumptive worlds and their suggestions to 'remake policy democratically' and 'build team trust around shared values' are in line with the suggestions proposed by Blackmore (1989) and Grundy (1993).

A way in which we can begin to build cultures that value women's experience is through whole school policies which support the elimination of sexual harassment, sexist language and sexist assumptions from practices and policies. Whole school policies which are more inclusive and tolerant of diversity and difference are those which send important messages to women and

minority groups within the school. Within these new cultures, the development of productive working relationships amongst men and women and girls and boys will no doubt help to create open, caring and respectful interchanges amongst all members of the school community

#### **4. Mentorship programmes within school-based management**

Professional mentorship has been recommended as a career enhancement strategy to assist women. The evidence provided by the research (Daresh & Playko, 1992; Klauss, 1981; Stott & Walker, 1992) has shown that more formalised or professional mentorship schemes have considerable scope to assist those beginning or interested in beginning careers in a variety of contexts. If more formalised mentoring schemes were deemed relevant either by the decision makers in the Department of Education or particular clusters of schools within local communities, a programme could be developed and implemented.

With the movement to school-based decision making, perhaps the best chance of implementing a professional mentorship program lies in the hands of principals and other educational administrators within schools. Such a programme could develop through the involvement of a cluster of schools within a local area that could work together to plan, develop and implement a mentoring programme for women. Zey's (1985) seven stage approach to implementing a formal mentoring programme provides an important starting point for those interested in this strategy. A model of professional mentorship for women educators has also been proposed (Ehrich, 1995). Support could be provided by university personnel and representatives from the Department of Education during the planning, implementing and evaluating stages of the programme.

#### **5. Networking strategies**

In the 1970s women used consciousness-raising circles/groups as an important strategy in helping them identify their common experiences and understandings about being women (Tuttle, 1987). In recent times, women-only occasions where women identify and share issues of concern have become widely accepted and practised across the public sector, trade union movement and various educational settings (Ramsay, 1995: 182). Women's networks, too, have been identified as useful arenas for women to share information and discuss important issues, as well as a means of indirectly assisting with their career development (Ehrich, 1994b).

Ramsay (1995: 182-183) maintains that women at senior levels within their organisation have much to gain by establishing small groups/networks where they can communicate with each other and come to some shared understandings about their experiences. She cautions, however, that these groups should not be a type of personal therapy, but an opportunity for 'collective theorising'. She envisages that collective theorising would empower women with a range of strategies to challenge and change discriminatory practices at an individual and/or organisational level. It seems that women interested in a career in educational administration or those who are in such positions can benefit by belonging to women-only groups or networks within and outside

their organisations, and also more mainstream networks within their local communities (Ehrich, 1994b).

## **6. Alliances between women and other groups**

Anti-discrimination laws have played an important educative role in the community and this has been demonstrated in the way social attitudes have changed towards women and other groups. Thornton (1990) argues that the laws as they stand have considerable propensity to bring out further change and provide space for women and others ‘... to give substance to that framework’ (p.262). She envisages that if long-term strategic coalitions were formed amongst women, radical activists and others, then the power of superordinates to influence societal norms could be challenged and addressed. Such a political force could bring about wide-scale changes.

This idea goes back to my original thoughts in this paper when I stated that it is counter-productive to discount certain solutions because they are ‘liberal’ or ‘radical’. There is much to be gained from collective action. We need to employ many strategies for women at all levels, whether they are teachers, administrative support staff, cleaners, heads of departments, parents or principals. Alliances between women and pro-feminist men (Lingard & Limerick, 1995: 4) can also be a powerful force for challenging current practices of systemic discrimination.

## **7. More extensive research is required**

If we are to continue to use a range of strategies to assist women in overcoming the barriers they face as they move in leadership and management positions, then we need to call upon a variety of data-gathering techniques. As was discussed earlier in the paper, we need to call upon more qualitative data gathering methods to shed light upon the effectiveness of AA/EEO policies. Relying primarily upon statistical data will not present a rich and descriptive analysis of women’s lived experiences in organisations. While some qualitative research is emerging which reveals the challenges facing women principals (see Marshall & Rusch, 1995), more research is required which examines women’s experiences, their challenges and potentialities. Similarly research which begins to document patterns of traditional mentorship for men and women in education may be useful so that this phenomenon can be understood to a greater extent.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I revisited two well-known liberal feminist strategies for improving the status of women within the workforce. As was demonstrated, both of these strategies have potentialities but also limitations in redressing women’s under-representation in the specific domain of educational administration.

As was suggested previously, it is my belief that we require many and varied types of strategies for improving the status of women. The seven implications which emerged from this paper provide a starting point for thinking about ways in which we can keep the momentum going.

## Keywords

women  
affirmative action

anti-discrimination legislation  
mentorship

under-representation  
principalship

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