Review Article

Women and Educational Leadership

Margaret Grogan and Charol Shakeshaft. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011, pp. 131. ISBN 978-0-470-47043-5

Women and Educational Leadership provides insight into five leadership approaches that women employ in the role of principal and superintendent and how these approaches inform the concept of diverse collective leadership. Grogan and Shakeshaft use their expertise in the field and over 20 years of research to examine the topic. The authors contend that an examination of how women lead can result in a deeper understanding of an educational leadership concept that reflects diverse perspectives and that involves a community as opposed to a single leader.

The increasing number of American women in educational leadership positions has offered up a rich opportunity for the exploration of the ways in which women lead. From this standpoint, Grogan and Shakeshaft's book, *Women and Educational Leadership* (2011), provides a fresh lens to use when examining how women have enacted the roles of principal and superintendent. Grogan and Shakeshaft share a wealth of experience and knowledge with regard to the study of women in educational leadership. Their book is a part of the Jossey-Bass Leadership Library in Education book series that supports educational leaders with the challenging issues they face. Grogan and Shakeshaft's addition to the series recognizes the important contribution that women leaders and researchers have made to the body educational leadership literature on. Using an overarching collective leadership framework, this book explores five leadership approaches rooted in women's experiences and explains how these approaches can inform a more accurate depiction of effective and sustainable educational leadership that shifts away from the traditional ideas of hierarchy and the lone leader. Essential to this shift is diverse collective leadership.

One of the many strengths of the book lies in its ability to connect personal leadership experiences with the theoretical in an accessible yet academic manner. The information is understandable by researchers and practitioners alike and is coupled with engaging vignettes to promote discussion and reflection. The authors' language mirrors the book's organization, which is clear, incisive and hopeful—hopeful for leadership that is conducted collectively and with diversity. This book creates new knowledge and establishes conditions for change in educational leadership.

In the Forward, Beverly Hall prepares the reader for an examination of educational leadership as enacted by women. Hall notes that, "all leaders should learn from women's distinctive leadership styles—not just how it is different to "lead like a women" but how it is advantageous to do so"(p. x). She addresses the social and political context of women leaders by recognizing the challenges that women continue to face in the form of under-representation and gender based

discrimination, while inspiring the possibilities that exist as a result of the changing political and educational contexts. Similarly, the final chapter of the book also presents optimism when exploring the context of women's history in the American school system. A clear inclusion of women of colour in the discussion at this point would have more fully represented the social and political context of women, in all its complexities in schools and districts.

Women and Educational Leadership is effectively organized into five parts. Initially, the book introduces the five leadership approaches that are further explored in chapter three. An overview of the status of women in school administration, the concept of diverse collective leadership, how to enact diverse collective leadership, and the implications for the future follow in chapters three to five. Although the book predominantly uses American research, the message is clearly for an international audience. With the increase in women in educational leader and a move toward more distributed models of leadership, this book situates itself well for North American and international leaders. That said, most women will see themselves reflected in the descriptions of leading within a diverse collective. Women will recognize the relational aspect of "working with and through others" and the importance of listening, critiquing options, and integrating opinions to encourage change (p. 3). However, men who also engage in a more relational approach to leadership, who work toward democratic processes, and who recognize the impact of diversity and collectivity will also relate to the presented leadership styles. This book addresses the current inadequacies presented in the educational leadership literature and suggests a different paradigm. According to Grogan and Shakeshaft, much of the research about leadership has been critiqued for the absence of women in educational leadership studies. Studies, conducted only with men, have been generalized to all leaders without identifying them as single gender studies (p. 6). This implies the research on educational leadership presents a biased interpretation, which leans strongly toward the views of men.

The statistical descriptions representing women educational leaders from chapter two are quite evocative. Despite the fact that women represent the majority of classroom teachers and the majority of educational administration students, the roles of principal and superintendent remain elusive (p.28). Additional insight into the statistical differences that exist for the number of women involved in leadership by region could also have added depth to this complex issue. After presenting this information, the authors could have effectively interjected how many women transition from teaching to administration while enacting teacher leadership, drawing on and connecting their leadership approaches to various contexts.

There are similarities between diverse collective leadership and some aspects of teacher leadership. Both focus on collaboration, school improvement and the development of strong professional communities. Additionally, many women journey to the principal's chair via informal and formal teacher leadership roles. Grogan and Shakeshaft note that the book is limited to the examination of women's leadership positions as principals and superintendents. However, there is room in this brief book to explore the diverse non-traditional leadership roles that women have had in schools. This addition to leadership

framework would have nestled this book effectively among the other books in the series.

The ideas in *Women and Educational Leadership* are presented with a sense of hope and opportunity for women leaders. A new definition of educational leadership, which conceptualizes leadership from a collective and diverse paradigm, is presented. This new concept represents a “shift away from conceiving of organizational leadership as residing primarily in an individual” (p. 3) to a diverse collective leadership style which presents a new avenue to explore. The effect of technology, the move toward facilitation as opposed to direction, and the decreasing need for women to explain their leadership style all present optimistic opportunities for women leaders. These shifts, wrapped with a new definition of leadership, in part due to women’s leadership practices, present a timely gift to all leaders looking for change.

Grogan and Shakeshift’s purpose is to catalyse discussion through the connections between theory, research, and the reader’s experiential frame (p. 4). An important contribution to the body of literature, *Women and Educational Leadership* will be well placed on every administrator or aspiring administrator’s shelf to illustrate a step forward in thinking about leading from a collectively diverse centre.

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