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ABSTRACT
        This paper describes efforts to redesign a graduate
program of educational administration and leadership at Oakland
University in Rochester, Michigan, shaped by contributions of
researchers in contemporary management and leadership theory,
feminist pedagogy, action research, and educational reform. A culture
of collaboration, inclusion, and success for all was created through
faculty information-sharing and relationship-building meetings. The
program operated on a cohort model, by which approximately 15
students would be admitted once a year, to remain as a working team
over the entire 2 years of the program. Admissions criteria were
modified to deliberately recruit students with diverse backgrounds,
qualities, and experiences. Rites and rituals were created, teams
began to create their own meaning and identity by naming themselves,
models of collaborative teaching and learning were established,
collaborative action research projects were conducted, mentors were
identified for all students, and portfolio assessment was integrated
with reflective practice and cognitive coaching. The program has
demonstrated that the conscious redesign of structure and symbolism
can create a different learning environment, one which helps capable
women attain the levels of achievement and responsibility of which
they are capable. (Contains 24 references.) (JDD)

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THE POWER OF STRUCTURAL AND SYMBOLIC REDESIGN:

CREATING A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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THE POWER OF STRUCTURAL AND SYMBOLIC REDESIGN:
CREATING A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

"What shall we call you", they asked, "Dr. Geltner or Bev?" There it was: the defining moment. As I began my new career as a college professor and graduate program director, my students forced me to determine my new identity.
I hesitated just a few seconds before responding. An onlooker might have missed the pause completely, but to me, the question was crucial. In those seconds before my response, I sorted through the issues and made my decision.

Dr. Geltner was the familiar professional title. It had served me for over a decade, defining me in my former role as a member of the higher echelon, the upper bureaucracy of the school district which I had formerly helped to lead. Frankly, I enjoyed the title. It was a validation of the years of struggle—to finish the studies, to achieve the position, to rise in importance and esteem. It also was part of the mystique which embraced the superintendent and cabinet of the district, the *sina qua non* of official organizational leadership and authority.

Bev was another aspect of my identity, the personal appellation. Bev was the friend, the partner, the member of the family, the colleague, the collaborator. It was the term that helped remind me who I was and what my roots were--unadorned, direct, unfortified by certainty or externally awarded rank.

But the question was not just about me personally. At a deeper level, it spoke to the purpose, meaning and character of the program I would be leading at the university. Would it operate in accordance with the traditional norms of higher education, with the articulated distinctions in authority, knowledge and power, symbolized by differentiated titles, positions and degrees. . .or would it truly be something different? Would it be possible to come together with students in a new way, creating what might be called a learning community, dedicated to pooling all our experiences and all our understanding on behalf of a very worthy goal—the improvement of public education?

My answer was brief and seemingly casual. "Just call me Bev," I responded. "That'll be just fine." And so the die was cast. The challenge was to create a learning environment in a traditional higher education setting that would be quite unlike the norm in its structure and symbols.

What caused me to decide? Why was the decision so significant? It is an oft repeated truism in education that, "As they are taught, so shall they teach." Recent research has revealed the power and persistence of learned models of behavior that are internalized over time and that prove deeply resistant to change Fullan, 1991). It is one thing to present theoretical proof of the

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greater effectiveness of one option over another. T-tests and correlation coefficients may leave no doubt about the desired alternative and the importance of pursuing that path; one may even espouse commitment to the "preferred" path. Yet how frequently is the "espoused theory" abandoned, and replaced by a "theory in practice" (Argyris & Schon, 1974) that conflicts directly with the research, and with the views and beliefs so strongly proclaimed. True behavioral change requires long periods of time and reinforcement, not only to shape but to "lock in" the new behaviors and to overcome the power of the past.

That was my challenge. The task before me—one of helping to develop effective future school administrators—was framed within a decade-long context that had relentlessly criticized America's system of public education:

- Schools themselves were inefficient, rigid, bureaucratic structures, characterized by control and categorization, systems, rules and regulations
- Superintendents and principals were locked into ineffective models of top-down authority and control
- Teachers were isolated, infantilized, undervalued and deprofessionalized; viewed as receivers of curriculum developed by others to be "delivered" by them
- Students were receivers of pre-digested information, obedient regurgitators would be examined and held accountable for individual performance, and ranked against their classmates

It was not just the leaders of America's schools who were the targets of criticism. With the emergence of dazzlingly effective global competitors, American business and corporate leaders were also the subject of sharp rebuke. According to W. Edwards Deming, management was almost always to blame for poor organizational effectiveness and productivity (Deming, 1989). The fault was in the system—in its design, its premises, its treatment of all members of the organization, and its system of punishment and rewards. The Japanese had committed themselves to a comprehensive application of his principles, and were now showing the world their stunning results. What was critical was:

- to be clear about the central purpose, focus and mission of the organization;
- to design a responsive, flexible and flattened management structure;
- to engage all members of the organization as members of collaborative problem-solving teams;
- to create an organizational culture characterized totally by quality and service; and
- to empower subordinates through shared decision making and site-based management.

Thus, as the new program director, I had critical lessons to learn from both the public and private sectors--from the world of education and the world

of industry. The challenge was to apply this understanding in a traditional higher education context. On reflection, it became clear to me that defining myself as "Bev" was the first step in redesigning the program. What was at stake was not just my name, but the structure and symbolism which would define the entire program. What would shape my decisions and actions was my knowledge of contemporary management and leadership theory, and my roots in feminist pedagogy and research.

Feminist Pedagogy

Reflection on my personal and professional past revealed how deeply rooted were my beliefs, values and practices in feminist pedagogy. Whether as a family member, graduate student, teacher, counselor or administrator, I was drawn to the centrality of human needs and feelings as the focus of my concern, to the power of individual stories, experiences and emotion, and to the possibility of continuous human growth in life-enhancing, affirming environments.

This intuitive understanding and preference was informed by scholarly work related to feminist pedagogy. Schniedewind's description of feminist teaching incorporates priorities "appreciative of human needs and feelings" (1983, p.17-18) in formal content, pedagogy and process. It means teaching "progressively, democratically, and with feeling" (p. 271). Issues of sexism, racism and distribution of power are addressed both in the texts themselves, and in classroom relationships. "As feminists they make the gendered subjectivities of themselves and their students part of the texts they teach."

Shrewsbury (1987) also viewed feminist pedagogy as a liberatory theory about the teaching/learning process, in which both teacher and students act as subjects not objects, engaging in a continuing reflective process with self, with others and with the material "in a struggle to. . .work together to enhance our knowledge". She continued,

It begins with a vision of what education might be like, in which the classroom. . . is characterized as persons connected in a net of relationships with people who care about each other's learning as well as their own. . .One goal of the liberatory classroom is that members learn to respect each other's differences rather than fear them. Such a perspective is ecological and holistic. The classroom becomes an important place to connect to our roots, our past, and to envision the future. It is a place to utilize and develop all of our talents and abilities, to develop excellence that is not limited to the few. Such a classroom builds on the experiences of the participant. (p.6-7).

Freire's views on "liberating education" have deeply influenced feminist pedagogy. More than two decades ago (1973), he described the roles of teacher and student in such an environment. "The teacher," he wrote, "is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue

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with the students." Unlike traditional education, viewed as a "banking" paradigm, the teacher's role is not merely "to fill" the student by making deposits of information which the teacher considers to constitute true knowledge; nor is the student's job merely to "store the deposits". In his "problem-posing" model, the roles of teacher and students merge, as both engage in critical reflection and become "jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (p. 67). Students are encouraged to bring the raw material— their "tentative notions, incipient opinion, and experiences"--for constructing the educational process and is outcomes.

Weiler (1988) drew from Freire in asserting the primacy of the interaction and exchange between teacher and student as the critical concept in feminist pedagogy. Notions of teacher as functionary (neutral transmitter of knowledge as well as '"state functionary"), learner as "empty vessel" or passive respondent, and knowledge as immutable material to be imparted are rejected, in favor of shared production of new understanding.

In a classroom characterized by feminist pedagogy, compctition, individualism, external control and hierarchy are replaced with cooperation, collaboration and democratic interactions. Inclusivity is valued as a source of strength; diverse voices are respected and a multiplicity of views is valued. The rights of all to participate in decisions that affect their lives are protected. Thus, the norms regarding power relationships, roles and responsibilities in feminist classrooms differ from those found in traditional classrooms.

Lather (1984) clarified the possible outcome of :ne combination of feminist social and cultural theory with radical educational theory. Not only can traditional teacher-student power relationships be abandoned, but imposed knowledge and practices relating to existing social, gender and class relationships can be questioned, resisted and redefined. To Belenky and her colleagues (1986), feminist pedagogy welcomed exploratory discourse. It valued classroom conversation made up of "real talk", talk that included "questions, argument, speculation and sharing" in which "domination is absent, reciprocity and cooperation are prominent" (p.144-147).

Feminist Research/Action Research

Weiler (1988) defines feminist research as characterized by "a new definition of the relationship between woman researcher and woman subject" (p. 58-59). This approach emphasizes a rejection of abstract positivism and a new interest in phenomenological or social interactions. It examines grounded subjects in their everyday life settings, analyzing the gender and class issues operating beneath the surface, seeking the political in the personal. In feminist research, ideology can be made conscious; prejudice and social stereotypes can be addressed in ways that challenge both students and teachers to reflect on their own beliefs, to articulate them, and perhaps to change them.

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Feminist theory is thus linked to critical educational theory, emphasizing the need for individual empowerment and social change. Both link classroom learning and social activism, seeking through the development of critical consciousness in students a commitment to change society as it is presently arranged, (Weiler, p. 21).

This focus on naturalistic settings, social activism, empowerment and change is also found in action research. As described by Kurt Lewin in the early 1940s, action research describes research which unites the experimental approach of social science with programs of social action to address major social issues. Lewin believed that social problems should serve as the impulse for social inquiry, which could lead to necessary social change. Such research required the inclusion of practitioners, and merged science and action on behalf of social utility. Action research focused on problems which grew out of the community. Through the participation of practitioners, greater awareness could be brought to the need for the action program chosen, along with greater personal investment in the process of change. Two major outcomes could be actual change in the action research setting, and contribution of new knowledge and understanding. New knowledge could be attained through traditional methods of positivist inquiry, applying quantitative methods of data analysis, and through qualitative, naturalistic methods, seeking meaning in the details and emerging patterns of human interactions.

A key element of collaborative action research is the operation of group process and attention to adult development and learning stages. The power of group interaction helps produce commitment and change in attitude and behavior. Collaboration provides a support group within which members can risk change and experimentation, and makes available a greater range and variety of perceptions and competencies from which the group can draw. Action research prevents those involved from being manipulated or coerced. Instead of being subjects of an experiment, participants become the experimenters. Working together, they set common goals and mutually plan the research design, collect and analyze data, and report results. This mutual involvement allows for the connecting of theory and practice and gives both the opportunity for reflection and for unexpected insight into situational realities.

Oja and Smujlyan (1989) described the power of collaborative action research as a methodology which could engage practitioners in all aspects of the research process to identify and work on problems of practice. The application of a comprehensive cycle of problem identification, planning, action and reflection could lead to actual improvement and change--personal, institutional and social.

Thus, action research can serve as a powerful methodology for the application and development of feminist theory. With its emphasis on scholarship, action, change and improvement, allied with the importance in feminist theory of consciousness, experience, reflection and the subjective

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side of human relations, action research can build into formal course work opportunities for students to try their hands at altering structures and changing institutional as well as personal behavior.

Creating a Learning Community

> Feminism has helped me envision a workplace that depends upon cooperation and collaboration rather than individualistic competition. The rationale: cooperation nurtures human connection, our relatedness, while competition fosters isolation, separateness and alienation. Collaboration acknowledges interdependence and therefore encourages inclusivity; competition confirms independence and rests on exclusivity.
>
> Weiler, (p. 166).

By and large, at all levels of the educational process, students participate in classes as individuals, taking little responsibility for the class as a whole. Feminist scholars and others (Barth, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1994) have posited a re-imaging of the learning environment—a classroom transformed into a genuine learning community. The creation of an environment that is more cooperative and less competitive, more collaborative and less individualistic, more interdependent and less isolationist produces an ethos of participation, inclusion and power sharing rather than one which is hierarchical, controlled and authoritarian. Democracy is central to this model because ideally, it maintains the inclusivity and equality that cooperation and collaboration make possible. Hierarchies, in contrast, conflict with this view insofar as they foster exclusivity thereby limiting participation, control and power to a select few. Quite simply, a classroom that is a true community of learners provides a model of human interaction that looks more like a circle of equality than a pyramid of rank. Such a classroom can become a model of ways for people to work together to accomplish mutual or shared goals, and to help each other reach individual goals.

In Rich's view (1979), a university centered on feminist principles would conduct more of its coursework in the style of community, and less in the masculine adversary style of discourse, which has dominated much of Western education (p. 138). Participants would could to know each other, interacting as individuals with particular styles of thinking, rather than as representatives of positions or occupants of roles. In such an environment, both autonomy of self and mutuality with others would flourish. Such classrooms would be "connected" (Weiler, p. 222), constructing truth not through conflict but through consensus, bridging private and shared experience. Further, education constructed on this model would help women toward community, power and integrity, emphasizing connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate.

Such a learning environment would prepare students for their future work setting. In recent years, the mainstream of American workplace has

been changing in a very significant and far-reaching way. It is now characterized by teamwork, involving cooperation and collaboration, participative work groups. The individual specialist, working in solitude can no longer solve the problems facing us. Replacing the isolated worker is the team, composed of members with a variety of perspectives, experiences, skills and know-how.

Barth (1991) described learning communities as environments in which all learners participate in shared leadership, while the official leader operates as head learner as well as follower. The operating power structure is one of shared leadership, or roving leadership, with both leaders and followers subscribing to a morality based upon caring, concern and mutual responsibility.

Gilligan (1982) stressed that assuming responsibility and acting responsively are dimensions of caring. She honored a sense of responsibility as an "ideal" and as a "strength" (p. 149), noting that it inevitably leads to actions on behalf of the one cared for. Buber (1958) affirmed that a state of interrelatedness among people is natural and desirable. He declared, "All real living is meeting",(p. 11), and communal relationships are important to the very well-being of persons. Truly caring actions move people toward the creation of organic, nourishing community. Helgesen (1990) described a web-like management structure which created new connections and inter-relationships among participants, and documented their effectiveness in both the public and private sectors.

Thus, the creation of a collaborative learning environment can change the relationships between teachers and students, and among students themselves. It can increase the self-esteem, power and independence of students, helping them experience the responsibilities of both followership and leadership, providing a setting in which they can find and express their own voice. It can become a model of ways for people to work together to accomplish mutual or shared goals, and to help each other reach individual goals. Finally, it can afford both instructors and students an opportunity to practice behavior that is needed for the transformation of the workplace, the academy, and society as a whole.

Curriculum:

Feminist teachers attempt to achieve their goals through both careful selection of texts and design of classroom practices. First, content and materials are selected to expand the discourse, by directly addressing the forces that shape their student' lives and by making explicit curriculum which hitherto had been "invisible" or marginal. Topics for discussion and study are selected which present the stories of other women, and attempt to incorporate and legitimize students' own experiences and call for their own reflections and narratives.

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According to Weiler (1988), a feminist curriculum often includes an expanded discourse in which faculty discuss their own representation of themselves as gendered subjects with a personal perspective on issues of gender (p. 181). They are overtly political in their presentation and use personal anecdotes to enrich perspective and history, helping students to understand and evaluate their present historical, political and personal situations.

Knowledge is presented not as something static, fixed, given and created by others. Rather, it is understood to be a process that is continually under construction--a creative process into which students are invited. It may be reinvented and restructured, departing from traditional departmental and disciplinary divisions, characterized by fragmentation, specialization and disconnection, to holistic, integrated, interdisciplinary knowledge. Goldberger and Tarule (1986). Students may be presented with models of thinking, in which they can view their professors reflecting on critical problems, trying to define new solutions, sometimes succeeding--sometimes not. In brief, they can witness human and imperfect activities toward which they can similarly strive (Belenky,1986, p. 217).

Finally, the curriculum is designed to afford students multiple opportunities to develop their abilities to speak, to write and to lead. Personal experience and reflection play a key role in the course of instruction, and reflective writing and journals are often integrated as key assignments. Students' own experiences are central to their education, and serve as an instrument by which theory and practice can be connected.

Creating a Community of Learners in Higher Education

Initiating the Conversation

In 1989, the author was given the opportunity to apply the principles and pedagogies described above in a newly established graduate program of educational administration and leadership at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. The program had the authorization by the University to be "experimental", to create a new learning environment which sought to develop effective leaders for tomorrow's schools. With the door was opened to a unique opportunity and challenge, the first steps were taken.

Operating on the belief that the central task was to create a new culture of collaboration, inclusion and success for all, a meeting was called with the Dean and all program faculty. Research on critical dimensions related to the program's mission, goals and operations was presented--materials on organizational and school effectiveness; leadership; critical theory; feminist theory; and educational reform. Time was provided for extended conversation, processing, and most importantly, relationship building. Beliefs and values were shared; personal and professional histories were revealed.

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New understandings were collaboratively constructed of how this program might be different, might be based upon a different paradigm, implementing policies, principles and practices different from those traditionally found in the academy. Critical to the design was that the program was to operate on a cohort model, by which approximately 15 students would be admitted once a year, to remain as a working team over the entire two years of the program. Diverse issues from admissions, to curriculum and course design, to grading were considered. Guiding the discussion was the constant focus on our enunciated purpose, mission and goals, and our commitment to provide a new kind of graduate learning environment.

Admissions

The first challenge came with the actual process of admissions. The University's traditional policy had a minimum standardized score requirement (Miller Analogies Test). Additional components included past college transcripts, traditional letters of reference and a brief personal statement by the applicant.

Initial conversations among faculty had established the primacy of the values of diversity, equity and excellence. With this as a guiding principle, the inadequacies of the traditional admissions model became apparent. Accordingly, modifications were made which included the personal interviewing of all applicants by at least two faculty members, and the deliberate pursuit of students with diverse background, qualities and experiences. Such diversity, it was held, would deeply enrich the quality of the learning opportunities for all students, and would serve as an effective replication of the authentic environments into which students would enter upon graduation. No compromise would be paid to quality; however, the definition of quality would be expanded, and would be made inclusive of criteria and dimensions often ignored.

Accordingly, operating under the given guiding principles, students were recruited, identified and admitted who were able to contribute richly diverse experiences. From the first year of the program to the present, promising men and women have been selected. Ranging in age from their late twenties to early fifties, educators of students from pre-school to graduate school, in urban, rural and suburban settings, African-American, caucasion, Native-American, Jewish, Christian and Moslem, all have come together with the explicit understanding that they would be working as a team, as a kind of extended family, to develop their own skills on behalf of others.

Creating Rites and Rituals

The first coming together of all members of the team was held in the most prestigious building on the campus--the mansion in which the original founders and donors of the University had lived. Greeted by program faculty, students were welcomed and introduced to each other and to faculty in a formal evening reception held in this most elegant setting.

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More than mere words, the treatment of participants confirmed that they were special indeed, and that the journey they had begun would be unique. Toasts were made to the new members, and to their future success. Brief personal stories were told by all—students and faculty—creating a sense of past individual histories and emerging shared history. We were active partners, charged with the opportunity and the responsibility to come together in a new shared learning venture.

The Naming Process

While all participants had, of course, their individual names, as members of the team they were now no longer isolated; rather, they were part of a new group, and were acquiring a new identity. It would not be adequate so define themselves as, "The Class of 1989, 1990, etc." Since words and names have meaning, one of the first challenges faced by each new team was to name themselves collectively, to find an appellation which spoke to their new identity, their dreams, their aspirations.

And so became established the second tradition—that by the end of the first semester, after working together for 15 weeks, each team named itself according to its own shared beliefs and values. The names chosen were unique: the first team named itself *Beta Gamma I*, seeking to identify itself as the first team of the new program director; the second took the title *Alpha Omega,,* bringing together the two Greek words for servant and leader; the third team named itself *Tapestry*, as it sew itself as a coming together of individual strands which created a new whole, but which retained in every strand its singularity and uniqueness.

Both the process and the product of this experience were significant. Much reflection and conversation surrounded the task: who were they as a team; what were their goals; what was important to them; how did they wish to be known, now and forever? Formal and informal work in class helped lead the thinking. Particularly valuable was the administration of the *Myers Briggs Type Inventory* to all students and the subsequent discussion and analysis. As the differences in ways of processing information and making decisions became known, the value of diversity was made explicit. There was in fact *no one right to perceive,* and *no one right way to decide.* Each type had both strengths and weaknesses, offering valuable contributions to the group or the organization, along with potential blindnesses and gaps. What was needed—for the highest effectiveness of the total group—was the coming together of all types to ensure the most comprehensive and wisest decisions. Thus, both as leaders in schools and as team members in their graduate program, students gained new understanding of the richness and value of diversity.

Enlightened by new knowledge and understanding, the students addressed the challenge of naming themselves. Moreover, this was *their* challenge, *their* work. The professor would deliberately absent herself from the process, and empower the class to create their own meaning, their own

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identity. Thus, from the beginning, students began to experience that they authority to name, to label, and to shape meaning.

An additional aspect of the naming process was referred to at the beginning of this paper. From the first day, the norm was established that this would indeed be a community of learners in a democratic, non-hierarchical environment. Even though the professor remained the one officially empowered by the institution--authorized to reward and/or punish with grades, etc., the titles among participants were equal. We were "Bev", or "Jean, Bill, Sue. . ." We were beginning to build a relationship as caring, committed adults, united in an important collaborative effort.

Collaborative Teaching and Learning

Within the first few weeks of the program, new models of teaching and learning were established. Implementing Freire's problem-probing approach, lectures were largely abandoned in favor of case studies and simulations. Some case studies were developed by faculty or obtained from outside texts; many were provided by students themselves, drawn from their own settings and lived experiences. Case analyses and resolutions were conducted both individually and in small groups, and were accompanied by discussion of the differences in experiences and outcomes when done individually and collectively. Room was provided for both modalities--for the student to engage privately, in solitude, alone (as one would ultimately be, especially in a leadership role), and to join with others in sharing perspective and knowledge.

Faculty also joined periodically, calling on each other to access individual areas of expertise, modelling that no one individual knew all, and that usually, there was no one right answer or one way of viewing an issue.

Time was provided for major work to be done individually in the form of narrative and reflective writing. Operating according to the principles of constructivist learning, seeking to help students create personal meaning and to understand the implications of new knowledge for their practice and behavior, multiple opportunities were provided for students to reflect on their work and their learning. The explication by Argyris and Schon (1974) on the contrast between espoused theory and theory in practice, and on the work involved increasing reflective practitioners, led to the infusion of this practice as a core component of the program. In this way, students learned to identify and hear their own voice, to put it to writing, to verbalize it to others. Many were the moments of awareness by students that at last *their* opinions and beliefs--*their* voices--were being called upon and valued. Through this process, not only did students construct new understanding of external knowledge; in addition, they gained a new sense of their power, integrity and esteem. They were no longer merely passive receivers of others' knowledge, but active agents engaged in creating new learning for themselves and for others.

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Collaborative Action Research

Integrated into the program was the assignment of a major research project to be conducted by all members of the class—in collaboration. Since action research was a new topic to virtually all staff members, instruction was provided early in the program on all aspects of this methodology--its purpose, its approach, its place as a research alternative, and its potential impact on the researchers, on the action site, and on the knowledge base.

For teachers, used to operating as isolated receivers of orders from superiors, orders about what to teach, and how to teach, and when to teach, the possibility of identifying a real problem of practice for intervention, for action and possible improvement, was at first frightening. For the most part, they had little experience in being called upon to actually identify concerns, to raise their voices, to collaborate with others in systematic planning for change. While the term "empowerment" was frequently used as a desired goal for all members of an organization, in both private and public settings, in reality teachers were rarely called upon or trusted to engage in actions beyond the prescribed limits of their curriculum or their classroom.

Engaging in their collaborative action research projects prepared students to act as change agents in partnership with others in real work settings. They were forced to identify colleagues with whom they could undertake an important challenge, colleagues who might be administrators, teachers or fellow-professionals, parents, or outside community members. They experienced the complexities of the change process, encountering resistance, political conflict, limited resources, divergent belief systems—in short, all the realities they would encounter in actual schools. In addition, they also experienced the value of collegial support, the benefit of having other(s) to plan with, to share, to revise and recover. Throughout the entire experience, they documented their journey, reflecting on their own struggles and growth, and the significance of the experience for their future roles.

In the four years the program has been in operation, all four collaborative action research projects have been disseminated nationally via the ERIC Clearinghouse, and one won a national award from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) as the best dissertation on the subject of curriculum for 1991.

Perhaps more valuable than any of the external recognition has been the direct worth of the experience for the students themselves. Geltner (1993) identified five major results of the collaborative action research process on student growth and development:

1. Students experienced a *transformation of self* by which they moved from being receivers of the research, writing and actions of others, to the new role of generators and creators of new knowledge, action and change. They acquired an experiential confirmation of their own potential power as change agents in schools.

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2. Students experienced *the positive impact of collaboration with others*–with fellow students in the classes, sharing the pains, problems and joys of seeking to act as change agents; and with colleagues in their action research projects, learning how diverse perspectives and oackgrounds of individuals from diverse constituencies and organizations can expand understanding and maximize the possibilities for success.

3. Students experienced *the multi-dimensional dynamic complexities of the change process*, learning from their own action research projects and hearing the narratives of their student colleagues. They developed a broadened understanding of critical issues including context, political forces, resistance, resource allocation and long-term commitment.

4. Students experienced a *deepened motivation to their studies and their research*, learning through their own actions the connection between theory, resea`  ` and improvement of practice, and the excitement and joy of applying new knowledge in pursuit of new solutions.

5. Students experienced *the feel of the leader as facilitator and supporter rather than coercer*, living the new roles and responsibilities of leaders in restructured environments of professional partnerships and shared decision making.

Mentoring, Modeling and Cognitive Coaching

For many students, envisioning themselves as actual school administrators was something far removed from their past experiences and present realities. For the female students in particular, virtually all past models of administrators and professors had been males. They, on the other hand, had traditionally been "the receivers", the recipients of others' knowledge, or others.

This reality posed a particular challenge for program faculty, namely, to overcome past defeating messages, from others and from within, by helping to construct a new reality for students with the help of powerful female mentors and models. The program director supported this goal directly by virtue of her own past experience, position, accomplishments and status. She had reached the highest levels of a major school district, and reaped the concomitant rewards of compensation and influence.

Other women of success and achievement were identified and linked to the program, either as faculty or mentors. Instruction in the Educational Law course was provided by the corporate attorney of a major intermediate school district in the area--an African-American woman, responsible for all legal issues relating to all operations of the district. Curriculum, Staff Development and Instructional Supervision, Leadership and Organizational Theory were

taught by female visiting professors who were Associate Superintendents and/or Superintendents, and by the Program Director.

In addition, mentors were identified for all students in the program, and selected according to their individual needs and preferences. Such individuals would serve as supporters, coaches, professional friends--and mentors--to the students during their entire two years in the program.

When the first Annual Mentor Dinner was held during Thanksgiving Week in Meadowbrook Hall, the exclamations were audible. "Where did all these women come from? Who were they?" One by one they introduced themselves: Sarah's mentor, a director of personnel; June's mentor, a high school principal; Barbara's mentor, an assistant superintendent. . . Their very presence affirmed that women could reach high positions, that there was a growing network, and that those who had already achieved some positions of importance and influence were present and available to help guide the next generation of aspiring educational leaders.

The Mentor Dinner became yet another of the treasured rituals of the program, a highlight not to be forgotten. In the elegance of the evening, in the context of acknowledging our gratitude for new opportunities and new friends, students, faculty, administration and mentors assembled to pledge their commitment to educational and social transformation.

Cognitive Coaching

An additional component introduced into the program consisted of the integration of formative portfolio assessment with reflective practice and cognitive coaching (Geltner, 1993). Starting with the second semester, students were guided in a process by which they collected evidence of their professional growth and development as educational leaders, and prepared pieces of reflective writing on each document/artifact. Once each semester thereafter, they would meet with the program director who also served as their advisor, to review the contents of their portfolio.

Using the portfolio contents as the focus of discussion, the advisor would initiate a process of cognitive coaching, a process by which the hidden is made explicit, and the thinking of the expert practitioner is elucidated and explicated. This approach is problem-based, and engages the instructor/advisor as coach to students, focusing on the process of thinking about problem-definition and problem-solving. It permits the novice to access the breadth and depth of the expert/coach/ practitioner, gaining information and understanding about the problem-solving and decision-making process.

In addition, in consort with the approach of a feminist pedagogy, the advisor drew upon her own past experiences, revealing the subjective content of her struggles and successes. Not only were there generic challenges pertaining to positions of leadership and responsibility; there were also unique issues relating to gender, that had been experienced and dealt with, sometimes successfully, sometimes

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not. This shared reality became an additional dimension of the coaching, drawing on the personal experiences of both student and advisor.

Feedback from students revealed that this was one of the most powerful components of the program. It permitted them the opportunity to engage in focused discussion, one-on-one, related to their experiences as emerging leaders. Further, it served to open up new avenues of discussion, intimate consideration of their fears, their aspirations, and their growing confidence and sense of power. Many reported that when they found themselves, later in their careers, applying for jobs or in critical situations when they had to think clearly and quickly, they remembered their coaching experiences, and could draw upon the voice of their advisor and their own voice. It was as if there was a "direct pipeline" back to that lived experience, confirming that they were capable and that they had the knowledge and strength to act, to shape their own future.

Conclusion

At the end of the twentieth century, higher education finds itself at a particularly critical juncture. It possesses new knowledge and understanding about the critical variables that can ensure success for all students, and for female students in particular. The decades of research by scholars around the world, in various and related fields, have yielded a knowledge base which, if applied, could transform the effectiveness of higher education. Women now outnumber their male counterparts in almost all levels of higher education, and especially in graduate degree programs. Fields that were, in earlier periods, restricted--by policy or practice--to only males have opened. National figures that almost 50% of students in graduate programs of business administration, medicine and law are now female, as are more than half of all students in graduate programs in educational administration.

This paper has described the contributions of researchers in feminist pedagogy, management and leadership, action research and educational reform to the development of an innovative professional program for the development of future school leaders. While still in its infancy, the program has yielded important findings, demonstrating that the conscious redesign of structure and symbolism can create a different learning environment, one which helps capable women achieve the levels of achievement and responsibility of which they are most evidently capable.

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