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Examining current issues in education that highlight the ongoing work of the faculty of the School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University.

Generating the Power of a Diverse Collective by Following Women's Approaches to Leadership

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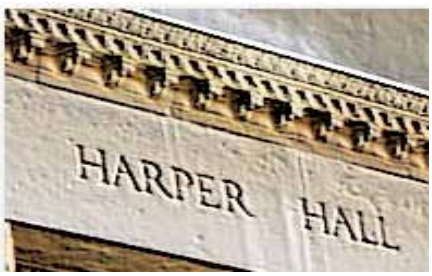
Dean and Professor

Charol Shakeshaft and I have just finished a book called *Women and Educational Leadership*[1] for a leadership series published by Jossey-Bass. For those engaged in the preparation and development of school leaders, women's leadership is thus recognized along with Distributed Leadership, Turnaround Leadership, Ethical Leadership, Teacher Leadership, Sustainable Leadership and so on. In other words, women's leadership has gained legitimacy in the PreK-12 educational sector. Professors and researchers of leadership now have an excellent body of research to draw upon, and in our view, have reason to rethink how leadership of schools and districts can be enacted. Policy implications of this include the need for collecting more accurate data at the state and local level to verify the numbers of women serving as principal and superintendent; despite the promise of new leadership approaches that is grounded in ours and others' research, women are still surprisingly underrepresented in these powerful positions.

In this essay for the *Claremont Letter*, I trace the development of the book as it grew out of our research and the research of others who have been studying women in PreK-12 leadership in education. I describe the context of this book to help those unfamiliar with women's leadership understand why it is still important, in 2010, to draw attention to women doing work that has traditionally been done by men. I also reflect upon why I think that such a book on women's leadership is timely.

For many reasons it is tempting to make light of the fact that women are taking more leadership roles than ever before in history. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, as many grapple with the worst global, economic recession experienced in their lifetimes, and millions of Americans stand helpless

[1]Grogan, M. & Shakeshaft, C. (in press). *Women and educational leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University

For more than 80 years, the School of Educational Studies (SES) at Claremont Graduate University (CGU) has been a leader in providing graduate education. Many of our more than 5,700 alumni have held positions as college presidents, superintendents, principals, award-winning teachers, and tenured professors at colleges and universities around the world.

in the face of the most damaging oil spill of all time, it seems less than important to point out that women are slowly gaining ground in leadership positions across all fields. However, as a marker of one of the most fundamental changes in social history, White women's fairly widespread presence in the principalship and superintendency in this country deserves comment. I wish I were talking about all women when I make the case for a widespread presence, but figures show that African-American women, Latinas, and Asian-American women comprise still only a tiny percentage of principalships and superintendencies. American Indians and women of other native groups are almost non-existent in educational leadership.[2] Still it is not uncommon any more for women to be in these positions. Young women teachers may note that they know very few women principals or superintendents, but most would know some – particularly at the elementary levels.

Context

That's a big change from a couple of decades ago when school boards thought that women could not handle a job as tough as superintendent of schools or as high school principal (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007). It wasn't that long ago that women school board members were a rarity, just as women serving in any local public office were few and far between. Indeed, as Gail Collins (2009) argues, women's participation in the workforce and in community leadership roles has undergone a dramatic change in the past 40 years.

Historian Jackie Blount (1998) recounts that in the early 20th century and during World War II, there were women in the superintendency just as women were in several male roles during that time. "With local, state and intermediate superintendencies combined, women held between 9 and 11 percent of all superintendencies from 1910-1950" (p. 180). However, by the time we reached the mid 1990s, women were superintendents of only five percent of school districts in the United States (Grogan, 1996). While the women's movement certainly contributed to the growing acceptance of women working outside the home and remaining employed after marriage and children, leadership positions were less available to them. "… [T]he nature of administrative work had undergone structural changes after the war to favor men even more than previously. For example, the longer hours and heavy responsibilities increasingly required that administrators have a helpmate at home" (Blount, 1998, p. 108). In the early nineties, even in the political realm, there were more women holding office than leading schools and districts. Collins (2009) reports that 20 percent of the total number of state lawmakers were women and that already 10 women had become governors.

But educational leadership is not the only arena that has remained surprisingly male dominated. Men have also held most power in the corporate and professional worlds. We learn that women for the first time, are equally well represented in managerial and professional jobs today at 51.4 percent (Rosin, 2010). Rosin adds that "about a third of America's physicians are now women, as are 45 percent of associates in law firms …" (p. 7). However, Rosin points out that "only 3 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are women and the number has never risen much above that" (p. 8). So positions that wield significant power and influence are still somewhat out of women's grasp. In education, this is particularly troubling because unlike the traditionally male-dominated corporate sector from which CEOs are drawn, PreK-12 education is populated largely by women. Quoting from the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey, Grogan and Shakeshaft (in press) report that 75.9 percent of all teachers are women. Similarly, Dychtwald and Larson (2010) claim that U. S. women hold an average of 18 percent of leadership positions in politics and business. Interestingly, they "note that in all these fields except the military, women make up half or more of the workers" (p. 162).

To understand this phenomenon better, we can now draw on more research than ever before. Over the past twenty years, there has been a fairly robust body of literature developed

[2] Grogan & Shakeshaft (in press) cite the Schools and Staffing Survey (2007-2008). At that time, 80.9 percent of all principals were white, 10.6 percent were Black, 6.5 were Hispanic, and 2.0 percent were other. Women accounted for 58.9 percent of elementary principals, 28.5 percent of secondary principals and 21.7 percent of superintendents. Brunner & Grogan (2007) report 18 percent women superintendents in the country with 7 percent of these identifying as African American and less than 1 percent identifying as Latina.

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From our vision statement

from empirical studies of women in educational leadership at the elementary and secondary levels. Shakeshaft et al. (2007) provide a very comprehensive review of that literature. Many obstacles and barriers have been identified that help explain what happens to women as they move up the educational career ladder from teacher to assistant principal to central office administrator and on to superintendent. Deterrents range from lack of women mentors to being place bound, to outright gender discrimination, and for many women, the double jeopardy of discrimination based on gender and race/ethnicity. Research shows that suburban schools and districts are more likely to be led by women than rural and urban, though recently the very tough urban superintendencies have been taken by women who are seen as strong reformers (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). One very good example of such a woman is Chancellor Michelle Rhee, Superintendent of Washington D.C. Public Schools. Despite some serious pushback from many of her constituents and the general public, she announced recently that for the third year in a row, district secondary students demonstrated improved math and reading test scores (District of Columbia Public Schools).

It's possible to argue that with each and every excellent example of women leading schools and districts, the issue becomes less one of gender and more one of finding the right leader for each organization. Brunner and Grogan's 2007 study found that women have a much better chance of being appointed superintendent in this era of high-stakes test scores and the No Child Left Behind Act. Women have most often moved into administrative positions from strong backgrounds in curriculum and instruction. Indeed, women have spent more time in the classroom learning effective teaching methods than men before they take on leadership positions. Therefore, if school boards are seeking educational expertise and experience, women could be said to have a slight advantage in the leadership stakes. But that has always been the case, and as the numbers above indicate, such arguments have not been persuasive.

Are times changing? Maddy Dychtwald and Christine Larson's (2010) book *Influence* suggests that an enormous change is underway. They make the case that globally, women's increasing economic power is going to transform the world as we know it. "The global financial meltdown threw into abrupt, stark relief huge failings of status quo leadership in the highest echelons of power in the United States. The meltdown also made the need for transparency at every level of U.S. companies and governing bodies entirely clear" (p. 163). The authors add that in 2008 and 2009, women became presidents of nine countries and prime ministers of seven more. And I am pleased to mention the most recent of these: Julia Gillard became the first woman prime minister in Australia in July 2010.

In addition to highlighting the failure of status quo leadership, Dychtwald and Larson (2010) and Rosin (2010) all argue that this economic shift has been going on for 30 years or more. Moreover,

> ***"…educational leadership is not heroic leadership, but hard work dedicated to providing the best learning environments for all students under very difficult economic, social and political conditions".***

"[t]he postindustrial economy is indifferent to men's size and strength" (p. 5). The modern economy seems better suited to women who have always been adept at stitching together part-time work to make a living. The areas that have been most deeply affected by the economic crisis are all male-dominated: construction, manufacturing and high finance. Rosin (2010) notes that men have an advantage in only two of the 15 job categories that are predicted to grow in the future (janitor and computer engineer). The other growth categories have more typically been work done by women (nursing, home health assistance, child care and food preparation.) And, since more women are also enrolled in and graduating from college than men, this educational gap will likely exacerbate the situation in the near future.

Therefore, the context for the book, *Women and Educational Leadership*, is multi-layered. On the one hand, women have never before participated to the same extent in paid labor and in once male-exclusive domains like leadership. But, on the other hand, the seismic social and economic shifts we are experiencing might render the terrain less hospitable to women down the road. It is conceivable that as women find themselves the major income earners, men's attention will remain fixed on shaping the next set of opportunities. If the trends of women being employed more than men continue (Dychtwald & Larson, 2010), women might again be relegated to doing the work, while men plan, organize and control it, which is precisely the traditional relationship between teaching and administration. So it seems prudent to argue that women's approaches to leadership might help redefine the practice of leadership itself.

Why Write *Women and Educational Leadership* Now?

We wrote the book to change the focus of much of the literature on women in educational leadership. In the past, research tried to compare men and women principals or superintendents to see which were more successful. But these studies were never very satisfactory because, in the early days, women were such anomalies that they had to prove they were more like men than men. They ran into trouble when what may have been described as assertive behavior in a man was labeled "bitchiness" or some other derogatory term. A second common theme in the literature was to identify barriers or obstacles that women had or had not overcome in their roles as principals and superintendents. And while it was very important for researchers to investigate the conditions under which women were leading, by the end of the 20th century, we had good knowledge of the situation at least here in the United States. To be sure, there is room for more work to be done on understanding better how African-American women, Asian-American women, Latinas and American-Indian women are faring – even in their small numbers. Instead of reporting on the experiences of "women of color," as if it were a homogenous group, researchers interested in further changes to the concept of leadership need to probe deeply for a more nuanced understanding.

Nevertheless, we felt that it was time to consider redefining leadership by looking at how women led schools and superintendencies when they had a choice to be themselves. We believed it was time to consider how gender has shaped leadership in education. First, we analyzed the research for themes that recurred. We found that women ascribed importance to the following: relational leadership, leadership for social justice, spiritual leadership, leadership for learning, and balanced leadership (between home and work responsibilities). These themes are in contrast to the traditional literature on leadership that was developed around men's lived experiences as principals and superintendents. No doubt many educational leaders resonate with the themes today, but the textbooks still emphasize command and control even if tempered by collaborative practices aimed at distributing leadership across the organization. So then, we considered how these gendered approaches could help us rethink how we enact leadership.

Conventional, individually-focused, approaches have not been widely successful in education. A glance at the statistics across the country that indicate how few students actually thrive in our traditional schools and districts makes the matter even more urgent. Despite best intentions, for a long time educators have been painfully aware that students are dropping out or being pushed out of school without hope of employment, graduating without being able to read and write or needing remedial math and English in college, and struggling to uphold the principles of democracy.

Clearly, status quo leadership of schools and districts has failed many – often the most vulnerable students whose low socio-economic status, limited English skills and non-dominant ethnicity already make it hard for them to flourish here in the U.S. Faith in top-down, organizational control has been eroded. Leadership theorists have sought new ways to conceive of leadership. Most recently, the notion of leadership distributed throughout the organization has helped us understand better what kinds of activities contribute to meeting an organization's goals. Distributing some forms of leadership across organizational members has also encouraged wider participation in organizational decision-making. But there is no suggestion that distributed leadership challenges the status quo. There has been little attention paid to the idea that a diverse collective is more likely to frame problems and solutions very differently from the traditional approach. *Women and Educational Leadership* develops this idea by acknowledging that because women have been mainly on the outside looking in at formal leadership, they do not necessarily subscribe to "the way things have always been done." Moreover, women have learned to work in relationship with others collaboratively so they are less likely to think they have all the answers themselves. In addition, as mentioned above, women often bring a social justice orientation to their work, especially if they have borne the brunt of being discriminated against for any of the social markers such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality, disability, etc.

In the book, we build on the idea that educational leadership is not heroic leadership, but hard work dedicated to providing the best learning environments for all students under very difficult economic, social and political conditions. To address such a complex set of circumstances, we make the case that deliberately forging a diverse collective of stakeholders within and outside the walls of the school would serve this need best. Just as Jean Lipman-Blumen (1996) has long argued, working with and through others ethically, leaders are much more able to guide their organizations in an increasingly interdependent world. We argue that in today's digital environment where information is not only dispersed swiftly, but also much more widely than ever before, the top-down notion of a controlled organization is antiquated. Instead, schools and districts continually interface with the community in a much more politically-charged atmosphere than ever before. Principals and superintendents need to build alliances across all stakeholders to move the organization forward. Most important is the understanding that the goals and the objectives of the organization must emerge from the deliberations of the diverse collective that has been invited into the decision-making arena. The more diverse the perspectives drawn upon, the more likely the approaches will help address persistent, intractable problems. Since teachers alone cannot "educate" students, the more the whole community is engaged in the process the better. Moreover, fully engaging the diverse collective increases the likelihood of a more sustainable leadership model than the traditional model that relies entirely on the power of the charismatic leader.

Smith (2009) reminds us that "[o]ne of the most compelling arguments for the importance of diversity has framed it as an educational opportunity for groups from different backgrounds to learn from and with one another" (p. 178). But she points out that simply bringing diverse groups together will not necessarily result in a rich learning opportunity. The power and privilege differential that has effectively kept such groups apart must be dealt with openly and respectfully. If educational leaders want the benefits of tapping into the collective, work must be done to erase the confrontational structures embedded in traditional schools. *Women and Educational Leadership* offers some practical suggestions for school leaders to encourage collective work. Key insights into integrating diverse ideas come from Mary Parker Follett's work in the early nineteen hundreds. Once thought interesting only as a historical curiosity, it is encouraging to find that Parker Follett's appreciation of diversity is now finding its way into corporate classrooms.

Using theories of collective leadership, grounded in diversity, we argue for cognitive shifts in the ways educational problems and solutions are framed and prioritized. One example is to consider schools as social movements. This metaphor forces us to harness the power of connecting with diverse others to bring about a more just education for all children. It also reflects the urgency that underlies the problem. Instead of focusing too narrowly on the teaching that takes place within the four walls of a bricks and mortar establishment called school, the metaphor allows us to focus on learning – and on how and where to engage learners in their own learning. If we accept that leadership shaped by gender and diversity has the potential to transform the way we educate people, we can crack the whole enterprise wide open. *Women and Educational Leadership* challenges educators to reinvent PreK-12 education in the name of equity and social justice.

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School of Educational Studies

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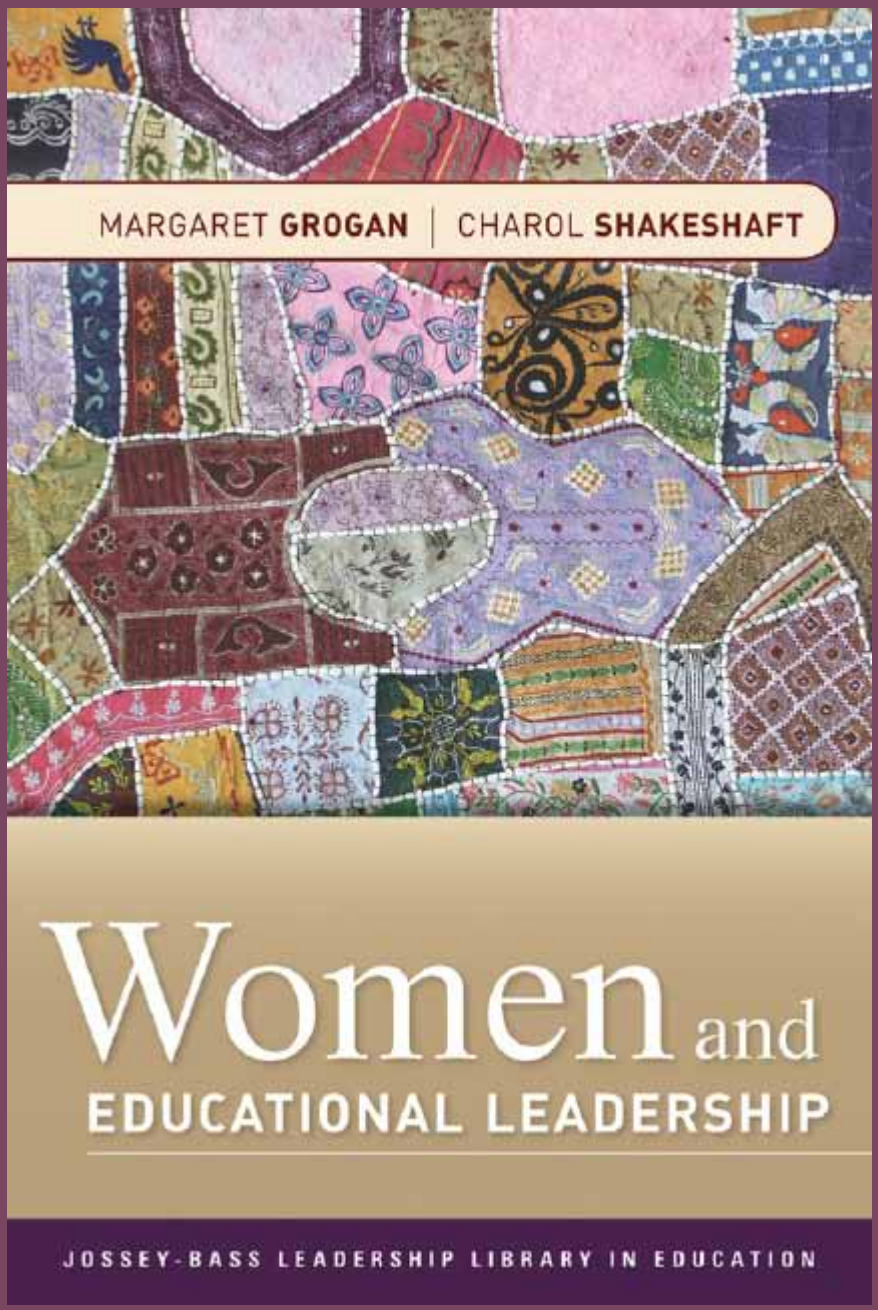
Featured Publication



"Margaret Grogan and Charol Shakeshaft bring together over two decades of diverse practice and research crafted by and about women in educational leadership. Grounded in the century-old wisdom and philosophy of Mary Parker Follett, the authors write so that we may create a collective group idea that is larger than each individual contribution." - C. Cryss Brunner, associate professor, Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, University of Minnesota

"The notion of collective leadership introduced in this book eloquently recognizes and validates the successful leadership approaches used by women educational leaders. Margaret Grogan and Charol Shakeshaft's research, vignettes, and discussion points will prompt important and robust conversations amongst educational leaders interested in improving student learning." - Sandra V. Buendía, principal, Jackson Elementary, Salt Lake City School District

"In *Women and Educational Leadership,* Margaret Grogan and Charol Shakeshaft eloquently and scientifically state what ought to be obvious. If we expect to powerfully impact learning we must form and work with/within diverse groups. Anthropologist Margaret Mead said it years ago, 'Never underestimate the power of a small group of people to change the world.' My valued colleagues tell us how. You must read this and do it!" - Helen Sobehart, editor, *Women Leading Education Across the Continents: Sharing the Spirit, Fanning the Flame*

"This book provides a framework for redefining the joys and challenges all leaders face as they confront current economic and educational issues." - Mary Ann Hardebeck, assistant superintendent for Personnel Services, Loudoun County Public Schools, Virginia

Margaret Grogan and Charol Shakeshaft have written an extremely enlightening and encouraging book. It is enlightening because it brings to bear their prodigious scholarship, as well as their theoretical creativity, on a serious issue confronting education today: women in educational leadership. *Women in Educational Leadership* is also an encouraging book because it reframes the issues, making it clear that women educators have just the skills that are needed for this new era. - Jean Lipman-Blumen, author of *Connective Leadership: Managing in a Changing World*