2-1-2005

US Women Top Executive Leaders in Education: Building a Community of Learners

Margaret Grogan
Claremont Graduate University

Recommended Citation

Grogan, M. (February, 2005). US women top executive leaders in education: Building communities of learners. Proceedings of The 2004 Hong Kong/Shanghai Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management International Conference.

U.S. Women Top Executive Leaders In Education: Building Communities Of Learners

Margaret Grogan, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Abstract: American women have been known for their leadership throughout the history of the United States. Not always called leadership, their management activities have earned them the reputation of being strong, resilient women capable of great initiative. This translates into the current notion of a woman educational leader as evidenced in a recent study. Based on the AASA (2003) national survey of women superintendents and central office administrators, conducted by Margaret Grogan and Cryss Brunner, this paper focuses on what characterizes women educational leaders and how they are shaping the most powerful position in U.S. education.

Introduction

American women have a history of leading in ways that have not always been labeled "leadership." The women who were instrumental in managing their families and property while their menfolk went to war or while their husbands and fathers learned how to govern the country are excellent examples of this. So too, are the women who accompanied husbands and family members on their early expeditions out West, rebuilding a home life and finding the strength to keep going in times of great economic adversity. And the African-American women who fought to bring themselves and their families out of slavery showed that leadership was a private, domestic enterprise as well as a highly risky public one. The United States is founded on stories of white women and women of color whose work to manage a home and family affairs has never been described as leadership, though it was crucial to the survival and success of all.

As a prelude to the following discussion of contemporary women in the highest public position in education, it is appropriate to look back briefly at what American women have been known for in the distant past. While not being able to do justice to an extensive conversation on historical events and periods, a glimpse of how women managed the lives and affairs of those entrusted to them illuminates the modern notion of leadership and helps put the lives of current women superintendents into perspective. In so doing, I argue that American women have always been "leaders" in the sense that managing people and events is leadership just as it is leadership to navigate the unknown and often treacherous waters of settling in strange lands and dealing with conditions of war. A few stories of individual women in 18th and 19th century America will help to illustrate the point. First, from the upper classes, we hear of white Anglo women bred into the social ranks of those who should have been engaged in domestic duties, rearing families and entertaining men. But, in the early days of fighting for independence from England and carving out a new nation, they took on much more.

Cokie Roberts (2004) writes about the women who worked both behind the scenes and in public to support their husbands and fathers as they founded the country. Calling them the founding mothers, she tells of how Martha Washington, Abigail Adams, Dolley Madison, Sarah Livingston Jay, Eliza Pinckney and Deborah Read Franklin, among others, performed tasks that are certainly enfolded into the concept of modern day "leadership." Eliza Pinckney, for instance, when her father went back to England, "was left in charge of three plantations in South Carolina at the tender age of sixteen … . Among her many accomplishments was the successful cultivation of indigo in South Carolina, which provided a [significant] source of income to the Mother Country" (p. xvii). A similar example is Deborah Read Franklin. Ben Franklin left the United States for Europe for many periods of his public life including for stretches as long as sixteen years. During all this time, his wife was left to defend the property against mobs angry with Ben for his politics, manage the postal service, and supervise all of Franklin's real estate ventures. During eight years of war, Martha Washington went with George to camp. She nursed the troops, sewed clothes for them, and talked them out of deserting. At the same time, she kept up the Washington residence attending to the public there.

> [W]omen ventured into all kinds of spheres. They went with soldiers to camp. They served as spies. They organized boycotts of British goods. They raised money for the troops. They petitioned the

government. As the Daughters of Liberty, they formed a formidable force. They defended their homesteads alone as their husbands hid out, marked men with a price on their heads. … And all the while the women were bearing and burying and rearing children. Roberts, 2004, p. xix.

Not just a phenomenon associated with war though, women continued to live much less sheltered lives than their European counterparts in the newly formed United States. During the nineteenth century Western Expansion, white women (whether they chose to or not) often found themselves accompanying husbands, fathers, and brothers on journeys to unknown places where they were supposed to bring the necessary civilizing social structures. These women were privileged by race, class and regional association since they came from the sophisticated East Coast communities to the "vacant" west. Sadly, little attention was paid to the fact that the open spaces were, of course, once inhabited by others who were being dispossessed of land and rights as the white settlers moved forward.

Based on women's autobiographical journals and letters of that time, we get a vivid picture of their everyday experiences of setting up house sometimes over and over again as the men struggle to make a living. Rosemary Marangoly George, (1996) interprets the women's work as the practice of management. The writings reveal the successes and failures of the smooth running of the home. There were certainly opportunities for women as they ventured out of their traditional, East Coast cities and towns to engage in activities that brought them out of the house and into public arenas, but the work that demonstrates women's real leadership was conducted primarily in the domestic sphere. " 'Going out' to work is not precluded, but pioneer women's work is most characteristically pictured as a gargantuan domestic effort" (Floyd, 2002, p. 26). Most of the women's writing lists the amazing scope and intensity of the activities necessary to maintain the household. But it was not a "healthy and useful" domesticity that is associated with keeping women in their places. With the changes in economic fortunes and absence of any real social or family network to rely upon in times of need, these women managed homes and created communities in the face of constant flux and the need for continual adaptation.
Stories of another group of women also in the mid-to-late nineteenth century reinforce this image. These are tales of African-American women and women of mixed race who struggled to survive as freed women in the South. Historian Virginia Meacham Gould, (1998) describes the lives of two families in New Orleans and Natchez through the letters written by the women of the family.

> Free women of color usually combined family and household responsibility with the necessity of work. Not every woman could depend on the financial support of men, and even if they could, few did. Therefore the majority of free women of color extended their domestic world into that of the public. [They] were recognized as highly skilled laundresses, seamstresses and cooks. Many of them inhabited the petty marketing trade within their communities. (p. xxiii).

An example is Ann Battles Johnson who was herself born into slavery. After she and her mother were freed, she married a free man of color and set up residence in Natchez. Though her husband William became quite prosperous with his barbershops, there was little legal protection for freed slaves and no social place for them in the strictly stratified Southern social system. Yet, while raising nine children, Ann became a manager of some note. By employing slaves, Ann engaged in marketing produce from her own garden and selling garments and accessories that she and her daughters sewed. After her husband was murdered, she found herself responsible for a large family and the family businesses. "[I]t appears that she managed the family's finances entirely on her own, even making decisions that William would have more than likely disapproved. … William might not have made much of a profit on the property, but Ann did" (Gould, 1998, p. xli).

Even more than other early American women, free women of color had few built- in networks of support and assistance. Their families were often scattered over distances that were not easy to traverse because of racism and prejudice. They survived largely by using their wits and their initiative. Some were lucky enough to be educated either at home or in the convents in the South. Gradually, after the Civil War, many free women of color began to work as teachers offering others like them the opportunity to begin to participate in the wider world of emancipation.

The kinds of activities mentioned briefly here as characterizing American women are not described as leadership activities in any of the historical accounts. There are other accounts of courageous women, white, African American, Latino, Asian American and Native American that deserve a place in the annals of leadership. But the women mentioned here were not particularly known for any typical acts of leadership. The founding mothers lived very much in the midst of male leaders who were energetically engaged in crafting a new nation. The women's work, by contrast, was valued more for its supporting role – for shielding men from domestic strife, which might have prevented them from attending to their public duties.

Nevertheless, I believe all these women were leaders in their own settings. Like the educational leaders of today, early American women managed human and material resources so that the family enterprise could be successful. Educational leadership is not about the white male hero who risks all in the name of some ideal. It is a much more down to earth, messy business that involves constantly changing circumstances and external forces over which individuals in leadership positions have little control. The brief glimpse of early American women above demonstrates that American women have long been capable of such endeavors – indeed they have been expected to carry them out.

Why then, has school leadership been so little associated with women throughout U.S history? In her seminal work on women in the superintendency, Jackie Blount, 1998, explains how teaching became women's work and school administration men's. From a feminist perspective, she shows that men took control of the more highly valued and highly paid work over time and that the social and political structures have combined to keep the gendered divisions ever since. As she points out, the superintendency is a key position to study because "[A]n important component of the effort to establish control of schools has occurred in contesting the definition of this position" (p. 2.) Blount writes of Ella Flagg Young, superintendent of Chicago's public schools in the early twentieth century who believed that women were destined to become superintendent in every district. Young thought that a gender shift would be possible if the relationships in schooling changed and if the purposes of schooling were reevaluated. A re-configuration of power was necessary. Not only should administrators give up some of their power but teachers should have more to begin with.

> This process was to be more than merely "giving input" or "having a voice," which are little more than symbolic gestures, but rather involved having real power. This was to be part of a holistic social system with students and other members of the school community also engaged in meaningful democratic process. (Blount, 1998, p. 168.)

How far have we come towards realizing Young's vision? The following section relates the current views of women in the superintendency and of women central office administrators. There are signs of progress, but when we juxtapose the results of the study against the stories of early American women leading and managing as a matter of course, we realize that there are still powerful forces at work maintaining a gendered notion of leadership.

The Study

The superintendency is the name given to the executive level position at the top of the educational hierarchy in the United States. Public school superintendents are typically appointed by a school board of five or more lay individuals who are the elected[1] representatives of the school community known as a school district. As a research topic, women in the U.S. superintendency has only been investigated for the past twenty years or so. Several fairly recent studies make up the body of information that researchers commonly draw upon (see Beekley, 1996, 1999; Bell, 1995; Blount, 1998, 1999; Brunner, 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Chase, 1995; Chase & Bell, 1990; Grogan, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Grogan & Smith, 1998; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999; Marietti & Stout, 1994; Mendez-Morse, 1999; Ortiz, 1999; Ortiz & Ortiz, 1995; Pavan, 1999; Scherr, 1995; Sherman & Repa, 1994: Skrla, Reyes, Scheurich, 2000; Tallerico, 2000; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Wesson & Grady, 1994; and others). However, most of this literature is based on qualitative studies and much of it is state oriented. We know little about women superintendents at the national level. Even the American

---

[1] There are some instances where the school board is appointed by the mayor or the county councillor.

Association of School Administrators' national study, *The Study of the American School Superintendency* (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000)*,* a representative sample, only surveyed 294 women superintendents with a handful being women of color.

As for women central office administrators, much less is known—very few studies have been done of women in these positions. Further, little research has been conducted on women of color in both positions, and even when studies are done, because women of color in leadership positions are rare, very few voices are heard (see Alston, 1999, 2000; Brunner & Peyton-Claire, 2000; Enomoto, Gardiner, & Grogan, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000; Jackson 1999; Kalbus, 2000; Mendez-Morse, 2000; Nozaki, 2000; Ortiz, 1982, 2000; Ortiz & Ortiz, 1995; Simms, 2000).

The lack of research on women superintendents and central office administrators prompted the study upon which this paper is based. The 2003 American Association of School Administrators (AASA)'s Study of Women Superintendents and Central Office Administrators addresses this need. It is the first study in history to focus on *all* women superintendents [all 2,500 were sent surveys; returns n= 723]. In addition, it is the first large study of women central office administrators [3,000 were sent surveys; returns n=472] and the first study large enough to include a significant number of women superintendents of color [returns n=50]. In addition, there were 45 women of color central office administrators. For more methodological details see Brunner, Grogan, & Prince (2003).

This paper will discuss selected findings from reports of the survey (Brunner, Grogan, & Prince 2003) including comparisons between the 2003 survey and the 2000 survey of the general population of superintendents (Glass, Brunner & Björk, 2000). One important statistic to emerge from this survey is that women now lead 18 percent of all public school districts in the United States. Ten years ago a mere 7 percent of districts nationwide were headed by women superintendents (Montenegro, 1993). But it is important to consider that although the numbers of women in the superintendency have more than doubled over the past ten years, they are still woefully small in light of the facts that women comprise 51 percent of the general population, 52 percent of elementary principals, 83 percent of teachers in elementary settings (Shakeshaft, 1999), 57 percent of central office administrators and 33 percent of assistant/associate/deputy/area/superintendencies (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). The survey also reveals that 40 percent of women central office administrators aspire to the superintendency. Thus, 18 percent is a step in the right direction but "a step" is all it is.

What kind of women currently serve in this position? What are some of the descriptors that characterize the women? What kinds of paths have they followed to get there and what are some of their challenges and strengths? The next section of the paper draws on Brunner, Grogan, & Prince, 2003 to describe the female incumbents.

Profile Of Women In The Superintendency And Women In Central Office

The overwhelming majority of women leaders in the superintendency and central office are white. As already mentioned, only 6.8 percent of the superintendents and 9.5 percent of the women in central office identified themselves as women of color. Considering current demographic trends in the United States, the number of women of color identifying as Latina was extremely small – only 1 percent of the respondents.

Like men, women serve in districts ranging from fewer than 300 students to more than 100,000 students. The majority of women superintendents (63 percent) are in districts ranging between 1,000 students and 10,000 students. Central office respondents served in a variety of positions at the assistant/associate or deputy superintendent level. The majority of them (49 percent) were responsible for the district oversight of curriculum and instruction.

Women at these levels of educational leadership or management in the United States are usually in their 40s and 50s. This study shows the majority of them to be 41-60. Most women had gained a superintendency by the time they were 50 although 36 percent became superintendent before or by the time they were 45.

Despite the fact that these executive leadership positions are enormously time-consuming and physically and emotionally draining, 60 percent of women superintendents raised children under the age of 20 while they were in the position. 32 percent of those women raised children 15 or under. Therefore, like their early American

predecessors, women do find ways to combine the taxing responsibilities of both family and executive level leadership. Many women reported spouses or partners willing to take a more accommodating job and helping out with the household, and 30 percent reported waiting until their children were older, yet not too old since 36 percent of women superintendents had the job by the time they were 45. It was clear that women who remained in marriages were strongly supported by their partners in managing family responsibilities. However, one of the most detrimental side effects of trying to maintain a marriage along with executive level responsibilities is divorce. A significant number of women mentioned this as an "accommodation" they made to be able to serve as superintendent.

Commuter marriages have become common in these times of dual professional households and 20 percent of women superintendents report this change in their lifestyle. They also report having to relocate to take a superintendent's position although the necessity to relocate is still seen as one of the major barriers for women aspiring to the position. Perhaps it is slowly becoming less of an issue since moving to a larger district is the reason most often cited for leaving a superintendency in the 2003 study just as it was in the 2000 study. In addition, the average number of years women have been superintendents, whether in their first or subsequent positions, is 6.4, compared to 9.2 years for men.

50 percent of women superintendents report that their route to the superintendency included the traditional teacher, principal and central office roles. However it is important to note, like their male counterparts, some women moved from teacher to principal to superintendent (16 percent). And, another 17 percent took the position after going from teaching to central office. Very few men have taken this path to the position. School boards are obviously prepared to open the aperture of possible qualifications for the superintendency if the candidate presents the right expertise for the district.

This expertise is demonstrated in a variety of ways. Significantly more women superintendents than men majored in education in their undergraduate degrees (58 percent of women compared to 24 percent of men). In addition, women spend several more years in the classroom before moving into administration than men. Nearly 40 percent of men have fewer than five years experience in the classroom. All superintendents are more likely to be appointed from the outside than from the inside although men are twice as likely as women to be appointed from the outside. 55 percent of women were appointed from the outside – interestingly, the bigger the district the better the chance of being hired from inside. Women also have a better chance of being hired through professional search firms – 23 percent compared to 17 percent of men.

Women are more up-to-date in their academic preparation for the position (36 percent of men earned their highest degree in the last 10 years compared to 47 percent of women, and 42 percent of men earned their highest degree 15 or more years ago). Women superintendents also report more professional development activities in the curriculum and instruction area. 73 percent of women compared to 39 percent of men participated in curriculum related activities sponsored by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). 10 percent more women superintendents than men rate educational research as highly useful or usually useful.

Both men and women superintendents believe that the major strengths women bring to the superintendency are expertise in curriculum and instruction and in relationship building. Such strengths give many women entry points into the superintendency in the current era of high stakes-testing and accountability. Women superintendents prioritized testing, assessment and changing emphases in the curriculum as areas needing attention in both pre-service education and in-service education.

The value of mentoring individuals has been documented in much literature investigating career paths of men and women. (See Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000). Women receive less mentoring in general than men. The vast majority of respondents in the 2003 study mentored others into administration. However it is clear that central office administrators in this study received less mentoring than superintendents did (60 percent compared to 72 percent). Thus, to become superintendent, a woman needs mentoring more than she needs it to become a central office administrator. Despite the fact that the majority of women in the study were mentored, it is important to note that nearly a third of women superintendents report that they were not mentored. A related point is that only 30 percent of the total population of women had ever worked in a district headed by a woman

superintendent. The literature asserts that role models are powerful factors that help to shape aspirations. Thus, it is less likely that women will consider the superintendency as a viable career goal if they have never seen women in the position.

Some of the literature suggests that it takes considerable time for women to gain their first superintendency. Somewhat surprisingly, however, half the women in this study gained their first superintendency less than one year after they were certified and began to seek a position. 73 percent accepted a superintendency in one year or less. But, African-American women do not obtain superintendencies as quickly as their white counterparts. 56 percent of Black women were hired within the first year of actively seeking a superintendency compared with over 70 percent of white aspirants. Moreover, 25 percent of African-American women report waiting five or more years to obtain a superintendency compared to only 8 percent of white women and 9 percent of white men. Women leaders of color in both populations describe themselves as more politically liberal than their white counterparts. And, a strong majority of women leaders of color consider themselves to be democrats compared to white women – 78 percent compared to 53 percent. Interestingly, even white women superintendents describe themselves as liberal nearly three times as often as white men serving in the role.

Another difference between the white population and the superintendents of color can be found by noting the number of board members of color serving in districts. African-American women have the best chance of being hired if school boards are relatively diverse. 69 percent of African-American women superintendents report two or more board members of color, but only 12 percent of white women superintendents, and 11 percent of the general non-minority population serve under similar boards.

Like white women, most women of color believe their boards hired them to be instructional leaders. However, many more African-American women superintendents than white women were hired to be community leaders (36 percent compared to 23 percent). And African-American women superintendents were twice as likely to be hired as school reformers than white women, and twice as likely to be brought in to lead reform efforts as the general population of minority superintendents.

An important aspect of any position is compensation. In the 2003 study, women superintendents' annual salaries ranged from $25,000 all the way up to $250,000 plus. The majority were in the $75,000 -$125,000 ranges. There are no comparative figures from the previous study. This is an important issue particularly for central office administrators who aspire to the superintendency. According to the 2003 study, aspirants were between 46 and 55, and were already earning between $75,000 and $125,000. Depending on size of district and location, ascending to a superintendency may not be accompanied by a sufficiently attractive increase in salary and benefits.

On the whole though, women enjoy serving in these leadership positions. The majority of both women and men say that if they were to do it over again, they would still become superintendents – in fact, more women than men say so (74 percent compared to 67 percent). And significantly more women superintendents than men describe their jobs as providing considerable self-fulfillment (74 percent compared to 56 percent). This is good news for those who aspire to the position because, despite the tolls such highly stressful positions take on the individual, there are important professional and personal gains.
The next section discusses some of the possible reasons for women's aspiring to and remaining in the position of superintendent. Drawing on Grogan & Brunner, in press, a comparison of the ways women viewed the role of superintendent in the 2003 study with the way the general population of superintendents viewed the role in the earlier 2000 study, upon which the former was based, allows us to surmise what women find intriguing about the position.

Women Leaders Shaping The Role

Given the recent reform movement in the United States prompted largely by the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), there is a much greater emphasis on curriculum and testing issues, even at the level of superintendent of schools, than there has been in the past. The superintendent's role has not always been thought of as being directly involved in instruction. (See Brunner, Grogan & Björk, 2002, for a fuller discussion of the evolution of

the role of the superintendent.) Indicators of how women perceive themselves as superintendent in this study are found in responses to questions dealing with the school board and the community.

Several questions asked respondents about policy and decision making that suggest ways in which superintendents work with the board and the community. When the 2003 study of women superintendents' perception of their board's primary expectations is compared with the perceptions of male and female superintendents reported in the 2000 study, some revealing differences are found. Both groups chose educational leader as their top choice, but significantly more women in both studies felt it to be the primary expectation.

Significantly fewer of the 2003 respondents chose managerial leader as a role that they perceive their boards want them to fill, which suggests that the notion of superintendent as managerial leader may be more strongly associated with male norms for the superintendency. However, with more than a quarter of women superintendents in both studies reporting high managerial expectations, the role conceptualization of superintendent as manager is certainly important for both men and women superintendents. It is interesting to note an increase in women reporting primary expectations of political leadership in the 2003 study. This could indicate that more women in 2003 served in diverse, pluralistic communities where boards of education expected them to use their political skills to garner support for district initiatives.

Another figure worth noting is that 9.9 percent of the women superintendents felt their board expected them to be leaders of reform initiatives. This is in contrast to only 2.8 percent of all superintendents in the earlier study. In the intervening three years since the earlier study was conducted, there has been a nationwide push for school reform, which is reflected in corresponding state initiatives. Thus, on the one hand, the educational climate change in the country may account for this difference. On the other hand, it may reflect the responses of women of color who seem to be more associated with reform efforts than white women as mentioned above.

A comparison of responses to the question of who primarily develops policy and policy options in the district indicates women superintendents have a slightly different idea of the role. Male superintendents in 2000 saw themselves more often in this role than did the women in either of the studies (44 percent of men compared to 35 percent of women). At the same time, the current respondents reported depending more on the school board and board chair for policy direction than was reported by male superintendents in the 2000 study (13 percent of women compared to 8 percent of men). However, more than a third of both groups saw policymaking as a shared responsibility between the board and superintendent. Overall, the differences point to a preference for sharing this task on the part of women superintendents. When all the responses were examined, the women were somewhat more likely to view others as sources of policymaking than were the male superintendents.

Superintendent decision making is another area that seems to be approached somewhat differently by women and men superintendents. Seventy-three percent of the women sought citizen participation very frequently, compared to 68 percent of the men. All superintendents valued participation in decision-making; however, more women than men reported being more likely to solicit input regularly.

All superintendents highly regarded information from district administrators, school board members, fellow superintendents and teachers. However, 69 percent of women reported placing great or considerable weight on information from parents compared to 59 percent of the general population of superintendents, and 83 percent of women valued input from teachers compared to 72 percent of the general population. Less than 40 percent of the general population of superintendents placed any weight on community groups, students or others, whereas 50 percent of the women valued information from students, 42 percent from community groups, and 65 percent from others. This appears consistent with the idea that women superintendents are defining the position as being centered more firmly around children and families, and more concerned with community building (Brunner 2000; Grogan, 1999; Grogan & Sherman, 2003).

Coupled with the emphasis on community that characterizes the women superintendents is a belief in the instructional expertise they bring to the position. There is significant agreement amongst all of the groups of women that improving curriculum and instruction, knowledge of teaching and learning, and knowledge of curriculum are considered to be strengths for women. In addition, these are viewed as factors helpful in

advancing women's career opportunities. Considering male responses to several related questions, men superintendents appear to differ more amongst each other than women superintendents do about their main responsibilities in the position, and while the reform efforts have prioritized instructional issues for all superintendents, it is not clear that male superintendents view themselves as needing expertise in the area.

Most interesting in this comparison is that women seemed to have gained confidence in the value of three items in the intervening years between the surveys. It seems reasonable to assume that strong interpersonal skills, the ability to maintain organizational relationships, and responsiveness to parents and community groups are all qualities that assist superintendents to achieve the goals of improved student learning and development. Thus, in addition to the desirability of being seen as competent in the curriculum and instruction related areas of improving instruction, the teaching and learning process, and building curriculum, collaborative skills and community building expertise are also highly valued. It is interesting to note that with the exception of interpersonal skills, the group of women aspiring to the superintendency is slightly more confident that all these skills and knowledge will help advance their careers than the non-aspirant group. This may help to explain why some women central office administrators aspire to the superintendency at the present time, and others do not.

It is too early to tell whether or not the current context of heightened attention to student academic achievement is responsible for the surge in the numbers of women in the superintendency. To be sure, women have been socialized into administrative positions associated with curriculum and instruction, and women have been encouraged to build communities of support for themselves from earlier times of being isolated and on the margins of leadership. In teaching longer and remaining in the arena of children and families, women view educational leadership as an extension of classroom work. Thus, at the risk of essentializing women, these are some explanations for why more women are obtaining these jobs now than in the past and for why many women currently express interest in serving in the role.

Not only do women appear to be gaining a stronger grasp on the highest educational position in the United States, but they also appear to be finding ways to bring to the position skills and expertise more typically associated with women – keeping instruction at the forefront and developing relationships with school and wider community members that can help foster the academic and social growth of the student. It is evident from the foregoing discussion, that women and men superintendents are different enough in their responses to questions surrounding the role that we might expect women educational leaders to evolve further in the future.

However, it would be premature to predict the kind of impact on the superintendency that will be made by the growing presence of women in the position. At present, the weight of the discourse of educational leadership is much stronger than the influence of the relatively few women shaping the role in ways indicated by the survey. What is important though, is the value of the presence of women in and of itself. Even if women cannot immediately change the way superintending has been done in the past, their public declaration of interest in the position, and their increasing success in gaining the position will have a powerful effect on the next generation of women educators. Once it becomes commonplace to see women as executive leaders in education, they can settle into the job and determine priorities for themselves.

There are indications that Ella Flagg Young's vision resonates with modern American women educators. The results of the 2003 study certainly suggest that the superintendency is more closely associated with learning and teaching than it has been since the very early conception of the position as teacher-scholar (Callahan, 1966). Increasingly, superintendents are being described as instructional leaders (Petersen & Barnett, 2003). In addition, there is an emphasis on the need for more democratic processes (Kowalski, 2003) allowing superintendents to manage the politics of serving diverse communities. These trends echo Young's hope for more integration of administration with the business of the classroom.

Still unaddressed though, in this study or anywhere else in current research on the superintendency, is the issue of power. Until there is a more equitable distribution of women in the highest levels of school leadership, we are sending a message that says women's leadership is not valued. Power resides in the school structures and practices that have gone unquestioned for too long. Researching and writing about women in leadership helps to draw attention to the power imbalance, but it is doubtful that it has much impact on the discourse of educational leadership. Change will only come about if the battle is fought on many fronts.

My eight recommendations for action are as follows: (1) state and federal agencies and foundations must fund more research on the topic; (2) women and men researchers need to take the topic more seriously and bring renewed critical perspectives and energy to it; (3) women in positions of leadership must talk about the joy they derive from their work; (4) women and men in positions of power in educational systems must deliberately mentor more women and especially more women of color; (5) pre-service women teachers must be directed towards leadership as a way to remain close to teaching and learning; (6)women leaders must talk about and think creatively with other women of ways to couple family responsibilities with administration; (7) compensation for superintendents must increase to attract the highly qualified women central office administrators who are already relatively well paid; and (8) gender power differentials in educational administration must be acknowledged.

In the interests of the next generation of young women, daughters, nieces and cousins of the men who remain in control of educational leadership we must make this concerted effort, men and women together, white and of color around the globe.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL READINGS

Ah Nee-Benham, M. & Cooper, J. (1998). *Let my spirit soar! Narratives of diverse women in leadership.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Alston, J. A. (1999). Climbing hills and mountains: Black females making it to the superintendency. In C. C. Brunner (Ed.), *Sacred dreams: Women and the superintendency.* New York: State University of New York Press.

Alston, J. A. (2000). Missing from action: Where are the Black female school superintendents? *Urban Education, 35 (5),* 525-531.

Beekley, C. (1996). *Gender, expectations and job satisfaction: Why women exit the public school superintendency.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York.

Beekley, C. (1999). Dancing in red shoes: Why women leave the superintendency. In C. C. Brunner (Ed.), *Sacred dreams: Women and the superintendency.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Bell, C. S. (1995). "If I weren't involved in schools, I might be radical": Gender consciousness in context. In M. Dunlap & P. A. Schmuck (Eds.), *Women leading in education,* (pp. 288-312). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Björk, L., Keedy, J., & Gurley, G. K. *Careers patterns of American superintendents.* Unpublished manuscript.

Blount, J. (1998). *Destined to rule the world: Women and the superintendency, 1873-1995.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Blount, J. (1999). "Turning out the ladies": Elected women superintendents and the push for the appointive system, 1900-1935. In C. C. Brunner (Ed.), *Sacred dreams: Women and the superintendency,* (pp. 9-28). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Brunner, C. C. (1998a). Can power support an ethic of care? An examination of the professional practices of women superintendents. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education, 4 (2),* 142-175.

Brunner, C. C. (1998b). Women superintendents: Strategies for success. *The Journal of Educational Administration, 36 (2),* 160-182.

Brunner, C. C. (1999). *Sacred dreams: Women and the superintendency*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Brunner, C. C. (2000a). *Principles of power: Women superintendents and the riddle of the heart*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Brunner, C. C. (2000b). Unsettled moments in settled discourse: Women superintendents' experiences of inequality. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 36 (1),* 76-116.

Brunner, C. C. (in press). Invisible, limited, and emerging discourse: Research practices that restrict and/or increase access for women and persons of color to the superintendency. *Journal of School Leadership.*

Brunner, C. C., & Peyton-Claire, L. (2000). Seeking representation: Supporting Black female graduate students who aspire to the superintendency. *Urban Education, 35 (5),* 532-548.

Brunner, C. Grogan, M. & Björk, L. (2002). Shifts in the discourse defining the superintendency: Historical and current foundations of the position. In Murphy, J. (Ed.), *The educational leadership challenge: Redefining leadership for the 21st century* (pp. 211-238). Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education.

Brunner, C.C., Grogan, M. & Prince, C. (2003, April). *AASA National Survey of Women in the Superintendency and Central Office: Preliminary Results.* Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Callahan, R. E. (1966). *The superintendent of schools: A historical analysis*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED0104 410)

Cambron-McCabe, N. H. (1999). Confronting fundamental transformation of leadership preparation. In J. Murphy & P. B. Forsyth (Eds.), *Educational administration: A decade of reform* (pp 217-227). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Capasso, R. L., & Daresh, J. C. (2001). *The school administration handbook: Leading, mentoring, and participating in the internship program.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Chase, S., & Bell, C. (1990). Ideology, discourse, and gender: How gatekeepers talk about women school superintendents. *Social Problems, 37 (2),* 163-177.

Chase, S., (1995). *Ambiguous empowerment: The work narratives of women school superintendents*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

Collins, P. (1991). *Black feminist thought*. Routledge, New York, NY.

Crow, G. M., & Matthews, L. J. (1998). *Finding one's way: How mentoring can lead to dynamic leadership*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.

Dillard, C. (1995). Leading with her life: An African-American feminist for an urban high school principal. *Educational Administration Quarterley, 31*(4), 539-563.

Enomoto, E. K., Gardiner, M. E., & Grogan, M. (2000). Notes to Athene: Mentoring relationships for women of color. *Urban Education, 35 (5),* 567-583.

Floyd, J. (2002). *The pioneer woman*. Columbia, MO: The University of Missouri Press.

Gardiner, M., Enomoto, E., & Grogan, M. (2000). *Coloring outside the lines, Mentoring women into educational leadership*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Gardiner, M., Enomoto, E., & Grogan, M. (2000). *Coloring outside the lines, Mentoring women into educational leadership*. Albany, NY: Suny Press.

George, R. Marangoly, (1996). *The politics of home: Postcolonial relocations and twentieth century fiction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Glass, T. E. (2003, April). The superintendency: A managerial imperative? Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Glass, T. E., Bjork, L. & Brunner, C. C. (2000). *The study of the American school superintendency, 2000*. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Gould, V. Meacham, (1998). *Chained to the rock of adversity: To be free, black and female in the old south*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press.

Grogan, M. & Andrews, R. (2002). Defining preparation and professional development for the future. *Educational Administration Quarterly 38*(2), 233-256.

Grogan, M. & Blackmon, M. (2001). A superintendent's approach to coalition building: Working with diversity to garner support for educational initiatives. Brunner C. & Bjork, L. (Eds.), *The new superintendency* (pp. 95-113). Amsterdam: JAI Press

Grogan, M. & Brunner, C. C. (in press). Women superintendents and role conceptions: (Un)Troubling the norms. In L. Björk, & T. J. Kowalski (Eds.), *School District Superintendents: Role Expectations, Professional Preparation, Development and Licensing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press

Grogan, M. & Sherman, W. (2003). Superintendents in Virginia dealing with issues surrounding the black-white test-score gap. In D. Duke, M. Grogan, P. Tucker, & W. Heinecke, (Eds.) *Educational leadership in an age of accountability*. Albany NY: SUNY Press.

Grogan, M. & Smith, F. (1998). A feminist perspective of women superintendents' approaches to moral dilemmas. *Just and Caring Education 4*, *(2)*,176-192. (Reprinted in *Values and educational leadership*, pp. 273-288, by P. Begley, Ed., 1999, Albany, NY: SUNY Press)

Grogan, M. (1996). *Voices of women aspiring to the superintendency*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Grogan, M. (1999). A feminist poststructuralist account of collaboration: A model for the superintendency. In C. C. Brunner (Ed.), *Sacred dreams: Women and the superintendency*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Grogan, M. (2000a). The short tenure of a woman superintendent: A clash of gender and politics. *Journal of School Leadership, 10, (2)*, 104-130.

Grogan, M. (2000b). A Black woman superintendent tells. *Urban Education, 35 (5),* 597-602.

Grogan, M. (2000c). Laying the groundwork for a reconception of the superintendency from feminist/postmodern perspectives. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 36 (1) 117-142. (Reprinted in *Reconsidering feminist research in educational leadership*, pp. 9-34, by Michelle Young and Linda Skrla, Eds., 2003, Albany, NY: SUNY Press).

Hill, L A. (2003). *Becoming a manager.* (2ed.) Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Hodgkinson, H. & Montenegro, X (1999). *The U.S. School Superintendent: The invisible CEO*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership.

Jackson, B. L. (1999). Getting inside history—against all odds: African American women school superintendents. In C. C. Brunner (Ed.), *Sacred dreams: Women and the superintendency*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Kalbus, J. C. (2000). Path to the superintendency. *Urban Education, 35 (5),* 549-556.

Kamler, E., & Shakeshaft, C. (1999). The role of the search consultant in the career paths of women superintendents. In C. C. Brunner (Ed.), Sacred dreams: Women and the superintendency, (pp. 51-62). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Kowalski, T. J. (2003, April). *The superintendent as communicator*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Kowalski, T. J. (2005). Evolution of the school district superintendent position. In L. Björk, & T. J. Kowalski (Eds.), *School District Superintendents: Role Expectations, Professional Preparation, Development and Licensing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Marietti, M., & Stout, R. (1994). School boards that hire female superintendents. *Urban Education, 8 (4),* 383-397.

Méndez-Morse, S. E. (1999). Re-definition of self: Mexican American women becoming superintendents. In C. C. Brunner (Ed.), *Sacred dreams: Women and the superintendency*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Méndez-Morse, S. E. (2000). Claiming forgotten leadership. *Urban Education, 35 (5),* 584-595.

Méndez-Morse, S. E. (in press). Constructing mentors: Latina educational leaders role models and mentors. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 39.*

Montenegro, X. (1993). *Women and racial minority representation in school administration.* Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Murtadha-Watts, K. (2000). Cleaning up and maintenance in the wake of an urban school administration tempest. *Urban Education, 35 (5),* 603-615.

Nozaki, Y. (2000). Feminist theory and the media representation of a woman-of-color superintendent: Is the world ready for *Cyborgs*? *Urban Education, 35 (5),* 616-629.

Ortiz, F. I. (1982). *Career patterns in education: Women, men and minorities in public school administration.* New York: Prager.

Ortiz, F. I. (1999). Seeking and selecting Hispanic female superintendents. In C. C. Brunner (Ed.), *Sacred dreams: Women and the superintendency*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Ortiz, F. I. (2000). Who controls succession in the superintendency: A minority perspective. *Urban Education, 35 (5),* 557-566.

Ortiz, F. I., & Ortiz, D. J. (1995). How gender and ethnicity interact in the practice of educational administration: The case of Hispanic female superintendents. In R. Donmoyer, M. Imber, ad J. Scheurich (Eds.), *The knowledge base in educational administration: Multiple perspectives*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Pavan, B. N. (1999). The first years: What should a female superintendent know beforehand? In C. C. Brunner (Ed.), *Sacred dreams: Women and the superintendency,* (pp. 105-124). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Petersen, G. & Barnett, B. (2003, April). *The superintendent as instructional leader: Evolution, future conceptualizations and implications for practice and preparation.* Paper presented the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Roberts, C. (2004). *Founding mothers*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.

Scherr, M. W. (1995). The glass ceiling reconsidered: Views from below. In M. Dunlap & P. A. Schmuck (Eds.), *Women leading in education,* (pp. 313-323). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Shakeshaft, C. (1999). The struggle to create a more gender-inclusive profession. In J. Murphy & K. Seashore-Louis (Eds.), *Handbook of research on educational administration, 2ⁿᵈ ed.,* (pp. 99-118). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sherman, D., & Repa, T. (1994). Women at the top: The experiences of two superintendents. *Equity and Choice, 10 (2),* 59-64.

Simmons, J. (2005). Superintendents of Color: Perspectives on Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Implications for Professional Preparation and Practice. In L. Björk, & T. J. Kowalski (Eds.), *School District Superintendents: Role Expectations, Professional Preparation, Development and Licensing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Simms, M. (2000). Impressions of leadership through a Native woman's eyes. *Urban Education, 35 (5),* 637-644.

Skrla, L., Reyes, P., & Scheurich, J. J. (2000). Sexism, silence, and solutions: Women superintendents speak up and speak out. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 36 (1),* 19-43.

Tallerico, M. (2000). Gaining access to the superintendency: Headhunting, gender, and color. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 36 (1),* 18-43.

Tallerico, M., & Burstyn, J. N. (1996). Retaining women in the superintendency: The location matters. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 32,* 642-664.

Tallerico, M., Burstyn, J. N., & Poole, W. (1993). *Gender and politics at work: Why women exit the superintendency*. Fairfax, VA: National Policy Board for Educational Administration.

Tyack, D. B., & Hansot, E. (1982). *Managers of virtue: Public school leadership in America, 1820-1980*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Wesson, L., & Grady, M. (1994). An analysis of women urban superintendents: A national study. *Urban Education, 8 (4),* 412-24.

Young, M. D. Petersen, G. J. & Short, P, M. (2002). The complexity of substantive reform: A call for interdependence among key stakeholders. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 3*8(2) 137-175.

AUTHOR

Margaret Grogan
Email: groganm@missouri.edu
University of Missouri-Columbia,
202 Hill Hall,
Columbia, MO 65211-2190