Gender in Schools: 
A Qualitative Study of Students in Educational Administration

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ABSTRACT  Students who aspire to become school principals and superintendents must be prepared to lead schools committed to serving boys and girls equitably. In this qualitative study, 122 graduate students in a cultural diversity course maintained journals of their experiences. The authors kept records of teaching the course and of selected written assignments given to the students, according to Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards, which drive reform in school leadership. From analysis of all written materials, themes emerged showing that students (a) grew more aware of gender stereotyping and its limiting effects, (b) sometimes changed their professional practice toward gender fairness, (c) became aware of gender discrimination and power differences on the basis of gender, and (d) developed heightened sensitivities to gender-biased language.

Key words: diversity of learners, educational administration students, gender-awareness training

We examined gender-awareness training as part of a school administrator preparation program and its effects on students preparing to become school leaders. The question guiding the study was, “What is the impact of an educational administration graduate class in diversity on students’ awareness of how gender may play a role in school culture and climate?”

The preparation of school leaders demands a standard of fairness and equity, and those who are destined to become school leaders must be aware of the influence of gender (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995). Furthermore, according to Gosetti and Rusch (1995),

Despite the increasing number of women and minorities in school leadership positions, feminist theoretical perspectives, multi-ethnic viewpoints, and gender standpoints were rarely included in our preparation and professional development as school administrators. Discussions of gender, race, and class, as applied to the act of leading, were seldom deliberately addressed in our formal education and certification of school leaders. (p. 20)

There is not only an academic need to broaden educational administration preparation to include gender awareness but also a public policy demand for it. For example, Ohio changed its requirements for teacher and administrator licenses, and preparing leaders to effectively serve a “diversity of learners” has become an important emphasis in new standards (Ohio Department of Education, 1996, p. 5). The change suggested the development of new curricula for the institutional site of this study.

The Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Dayton strengthened its emphasis on diversity, including gender awareness, by developing two new courses in the mid-1990s to provide knowledge and deal with issues of diversity. One course, EDA 552 Issues in Diversity, which was required for students earning a master’s degree, focused on schools as learning organizations within a diverse society. A second course, EDA 653 Leadership in Diverse Communities, was developed for inclusion in the curriculum of post-master’s degree students in the principal licensure program. That course focused on promoting an understanding of differences in race, gender, social class, religious affiliation, ethnic origin, language exceptionalities, sexual orientation, and the implications of these differences for school leadership.

However, because of the institution’s change from quarter hours to semester hours, which resulted in a lower course requirement for a master’s degree and a principal’s license, EDA 552 and 653 were combined into one course, EDA 556 Leadership in Diverse Communities. That course promoted understanding of, and managing toward, social justice in increasingly diverse schools. Course topics included strategies for improving curricula, instruction, and staff development. We investigated the impacts of that intervention in this study.

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

We developed the rationale for this study from three sources: (a) a theoretical conceptualization of developmental
stages toward socially just perspectives on diversity that people experience over time, (b) data suggesting that gender fairness has not yet been achieved in schools, and (c) the need to prepare men and women for leadership positions in schools.

A developmental perspective on diversity indicates that people can change. That theoretical framework indicates that individuals can move along a continuum toward heightened awareness and toward socially just and fair professional practices (Helms, 1992; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999). Helms posited that by developing White racial identity, individuals progress through several developmental stages: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, immersion, and autonomy. It is not unreasonable for one to expect that, during students’ educational administration-preparation programs, they move through similar phases when they develop cultural awareness beyond race to other characteristics such as gender. Similarly, Lindsey and colleagues suggested a theoretical continuum of cultural proficiency. One can move on a developmental continuum from cultural destructiveness to cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural precompetence, cultural competence, and finally, to cultural proficiency.

In both developmental models, the ideal to which one aspires is the endpoint of the model—to engage in knowing oneself and one’s heritage well and to engage eagerly with others, those like and unlike oneself. Lindsey and colleagues stated that culturally proficient educators must understand the “cacophony of diverse cultures each person experiences in the school setting” (p. 31). Those individuals, although not knowing each culture in depth, know that they need to continually learn about others. The two examples of growth and development in awareness suggest that perhaps patterns of growth and development also exist in gender awareness. We conducted our research to explore that possibility.

Aspirations toward social justice have moved educators from a paradigm of cultural deprivation and cultural deficiencies to a model of diversity in which difference requires all individuals, including those in the dominant culture, to adapt to diversity. Cultural diversity does not mean awareness and mere tolerance of difference by the dominant culture. In other words, the goal is not simply that women adopt men’s ways. Cultural diversity in this framework means the celebration of the richness provided by persons from multiple and diverse cultures (Lindsey et al., 1999). In terms of gender, tolerance is not sufficient; the paradigm suggests that men and women aspire to celebrate the diversity of experiences that each brings to the school, and it requires that educators serve the learning needs of girls and boys fairly.

Public schools are challenged increasingly by policymakers to (a) improve student academic achievement, (b) enhance students’ preparedness to enter the workforce, (c) account for schoolwide success, (d) effectively compete with alternative forms of school governance (e.g., charter schools, private schools), and (e) face the myriad social forces of popular culture that draw some students’ attention away from school (Gupton & Slick, 1995). Effectiveness by school administrators has never been demanded more than at the present time. The heightened visibility of student performance outcomes and public demands for accountability have prioritized the academic achievement of both genders in every school. Evidence suggests that gender fairness in student achievement and career aspirations is a dream not yet realized. Although women outnumber men as undergraduate students in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002), men continue to outscore women on standardized tests (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002) and outnumber them in higher paying jobs (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). When education levels are equal for men and women, women are more likely to have low economic status than are men (National Organization for Women Legal Defense and Education Fund, 2002).

Historically, administrative-preparation programs have prepared men for school administration positions (Blackmore, 1993). The programs were developed to not only meet the needs of men but also enhance their leadership styles. Such programs almost exclusively included experiences of men, relegating the role of women in administrative positions as uncertain and confusing (Blackmore). In other words, women would have almost no reference points to the knowledge base of leadership preparation if their life experiences based on being female were omitted. The growing proportion of women in the ranks of public school administrators is a trend that will continue. Public attitudes toward women in leadership roles in all professions are changing, opening the way for women to more easily assume leadership positions (Hill & Ragland, 1995).

New paradigms of leadership reflect gender-role stereotypes, at least for women. That is, women tend to “put themselves at the centers of their organizations rather than at the top, thus emphasizing both accessibility and equality,” and labor “constantly to include people in their decision-making” (Helgesen, 1995, p. 10). That leadership style associated with women includes team building, interconnectedness, group problem solving, and shared decision making (Gupton & Slick, 1995). Regarding women in leadership roles, Hill and Ragland (1995) maintained that,

Women are proving to be more organized and harder workers than most men. Women have managed households, including budgets, while also doing a good job of teaching, a position that also requires multiple levels of skill in managing a multiplicity of tasks and personalities. (p. 33)

Is this more female-oriented leadership style being incorporated into the preparation of school leaders? Are leadership-preparation programs taking women’s experiences into consideration, given that predominant leadership theories were based historically on men’s experiences, and power in schools has been structured along gendered lines? (Blount, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1987). Specifically, our question was,
“How can a gender-awareness training intervention at one university influence the gender awareness of aspiring school administrators?”

The numbers of women enrolling in graduate programs in educational administration across the country are growing. Increasing numbers of women hold certification and degrees qualifying them for administrative positions (Gupton & Slick, 1995). In 1972, 11% of recipients of doctoral degrees in educational administration were women, whereas in 1990, 51% of doctoral degree recipients were women (Gupton & Slick). Although the culture of educational administration is still dominated by White men and their orientations, growing numbers of women are succeeding as school administrators (Shakeshaft, 1987).

Since the second wave of feminism that began in the late 1960s, women increasingly perceive themselves in leadership positions. That statistical and social fact belies the possibility that the preparation of women for school leadership positions may not adequately prepare them for the roles that they will assume. Furthermore, men who are in educational administration programs may not be learning about gender dynamics in the schools, nor are their dispositions toward women in leadership being affected. Curricula of university programs continue to be based on the professional experiences of men and on the theoretical models of leadership developed solely on the basis of men’s experiences (Glazer, 1990).

Smulyan (2000) stressed the importance of gender to the administrative role, as follows:

Gender influences the principal’s life and work within every context. It affects her personal experience and entry into the profession, her interactions with the school community, the institutional framework within which she works, and her negotiation of historically and socially constructed norms and expectations. (p. 203)

Stereotypes of women in leadership roles can produce obstacles for women, evidenced by gender differences in expectations, job prestige and salary, and opportunities in schools (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). Raising gender awareness through education is necessary so that women can overcome those obstacles according to Burke and MacDermid (1996), who proposed several reasons for gender-awareness education. For example, men and women must be more cognizant of the similarities and differences between genders. In a leadership-preparation program, personal learning experiences can enlighten preservice graduate students aspiring to be administrators about how gender might affect their leadership roles, as painful as that exposure might be. Ridenour (2004) examined the reactions of students in a gender-awareness activity in a graduate class. She recorded the reactions of the graduate students, observing that

A predominant theme of confusion, ambivalence, fear, and uncertainty about issues of diversity may, in fact, be an outgrowth of students’ first experience in addressing these issues head on. What had been private for students could not help but be made public in some class activities. (p. 14)

Method
We examined the experiences and meaning of several groups of graduate students as they moved through a cultural diversity class that had a major focus on gender dynamics in schools.

Setting
We conducted our study at the University of Dayton, a private, coeducational school. Although founded and directed in 1850 by the Society of Mary (the Marianists), a Roman Catholic teaching order, many faiths are represented among the faculty and students. The mission statement of the university affirms that it is a comprehensive Catholic institution, a diverse community committed, in the Marianist tradition, to educating the whole person and to linking learning and scholarship with leadership and service. Characteristics of the Marianist tradition include (a) educating students through a learning community of challenge and support, (b) connecting learning to leadership and service, and (c) collaborating for adaptation and change.

Research Design
We used a qualitative design (Berger, Brizuela, Stewart, & Carillo, 2000; Lancy, 1993; Newman & Benz, 1998), specifically participant observation with field notes and documents analysis. Thus, we examined holistically the changing levels of students’ attitudes toward gender issues. Among graduate students enrolled in educational leadership studies, this perspective allowed us to capture the ways in which such students naturally express their attitudes, values, and beliefs about gender. Within the regular classroom activities, the instructor (first author) reflected on and recorded the manner in which students (a) interacted with each other and with her, (b) approached the learning activities, and (c) related, over time, to the education program designed to raise their awareness. Our purpose was similar to several of those that Marshall and Rossmann (1989) suggested are appropriate for qualitative strategies; that is, research that delves

In depth into complexities and processes; research for which relevant variables have yet to be identified; research that seeks to explore where and why policy, folk wisdom, and practice do not work; research on innovative systems; research on informal and unstructured linkages and processes in organizations. (p. 47)

Furthermore, qualitative research is intended to build, rather than test, understanding and theory (Newman & Benz, 1998). To implement such research, the first author immersed herself in a setting without preconceived hypotheses. She acted as the evidence-collection instrument. Qualitative research required her to use her subjective interpretation of the phenomena that she observed and recorded. She had many experiences as a former
teacher of elementary school students from second to eighth grades in rural Appalachian schools, as well in schools in urban districts in several states and in Australia.

Qualitative evidence collection included the following:

1. Definitions of diversity written on the first day of class by students describing "What diversity means to me." Students described their work position with respect to gender, race, and ethnicity, including the make-up of the administration, students, and teachers. The instructor asked the students whether they saw the need for changes to be made regarding race, gender, and ethnicity and how these changes should be addressed. The students also stated their perceptions of current major issues regarding diversity in schools or in available education.

2. Individual student journal entries over 14 weeks (This part of the design was consistent with studies using fieldwork). The ideal behind the journal writing was that “The lifeworld, the world of lived experience, is both the source and the object of phenomenological research” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 53).

3. A personal essay written at the conclusion of the intervention when students reflected on school-related gender issues.


5. A field notes journal that the first author kept to examine narratives. During regular peer debriefing sessions, the first and second authors discussed the emerging meaning from the field notes.

We used various strategies to strengthen the validity (i.e., trustworthiness) of qualitative research throughout the evidence collection and analysis. Prolonged engagement (Newman & Benz, 1998) refers to the situation in which the researcher spends an extended amount of time in the setting to capture repeated patterns. A variation of prolonged engagement existed because evidence collection and analysis took place in multiple settings over five academic terms. Triangulation is another strategy that strengthens qualitative validity (Newman & Benz). We triangulated the evidence (i.e., we compared patterns of meaning from the journals with patterns of meaning in the written assignments). Those multiple data sources allowed more confidence in the interpretations. For example, the students wrote about gender-based stereotypes in their reflective papers on the basis of interviews with counselors; similar stereotypes also emerged in their reflective journals.

Educational Program Intervention

The intervention program included readings from the following texts: Making Meaning of Whiteness by Alice McIntyre, Gender Tales by Judith Kleinfeld and Suzanne Yerian, Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society by Donna Gollnick and Philip Chinn, and The Web of Inclusion by Sally Helgesen. Supplemental readings included Cultural Proficiency by Randall Lindsey, Kikanza Robins, and Raymond Terrell and The Color of Water by James McBride. Instructional strategies employed among the students during class included (a) lecture, (b) group discussions, and problem-solving case studies in which students role played administrator decision making, (c) videos, (d) reflective discussions on tests and other written materials, and (e) guest presentations on special topics.

The instructor directed the students to make 12 entries in individual journals spread over the duration of the course, which included writing their thoughts and reflections and probing their insights and interpretations about issues of diversity in schools. Suggestions for the journal included, “What happened at work during the last couple of days that was related to cultural diversity?” “What applications were there for my teaching (managing, coaching, etc.) from what I am reading and what we are discussing in class?” and “What have I thought about my own racial, gender, ethnic heritage that I haven’t thought about before?”

Students completed six activities and produced written reflection papers based on the ISLLC standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). Many institutions of higher education that house school administration departments adopted the ISLLC standards.

The students wrote their definitions of diversity on the first day of class and described their professional positions as educators with respect to gender, race, and ethnicity, including profiles of the administration, students, and teachers in their schools.

The first of the six activities was a review of the school’s vision statement for references to issues relating to gender, ethnicity, and race. The second assignment was a description of the school’s culture. The instructor gave students specific qualities to look for in the culture across dimensions of values, expectations, diversity, and social interaction. The third assignment focused on an effective learning environment. Students walked around their schools to evaluate the physical environment and to respond to the question, “How does this environment promote a safe, efficient, and effective learning climate?” Family and community collaboration was the focus of the fourth assignment. Students interviewed at least two guidance counselors from different grade levels concerning problems faced by female and male students. For the fifth assignment, the instructor asked all students to observe student interactions in a mathematics class and to write a detailed description of the setting and the ways in which students interacted with one another and with the teacher. The instructor asked the students to notice specifically the behaviors of boys and girls and how they differed.

The sixth assignment required that students write about their commitment to the success of all pupils by responding to the question, “What is your philosophy of the purpose of schools? What will you do in the future to ensure the success of all pupils?”
On the final day of class, the instructor directed the students to write a personal essay reflecting on school-related gender issues. Students reviewed their definitions of diversity written on the first day of class, reflected on their experiences in the class, and rewrote their definitions by explaining how they currently conceptualized diversity while focusing on the statement, “What diversity means to me as a future school administrator.”

Analysis of Evidence

We began to analyze the evidence by reading and re-reading each assignment for references to gender. We developed a grid to record data to facilitate our analysis and to show how often students referred to gender issues and at what point during the semester they became aware of these issues. We used the grid to code the researcher's notes for each student, which could then be extracted and applied. We noted on the grid each time a student referred to gender in the essays and journal entries. We analyzed the journal entries to determine how often the student reflected on a topic regarding gender and at what points in the intervention they recorded awareness of gender issues (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). We then extracted themes from the grids. We performed the analysis over several months. We read and re-read narratives from students from earlier classes while later classes were being held. We held debriefing discussions periodically, and at least twice with other faculty colleagues.

Results

Profile of Study Participants

Participants were 122 graduate students in five classes who were simultaneously employed as full-time educators. Table 1 shows the profile of participating classes and students. Of the 122 students, 58 (47.5%) were men and 64 (52.4%) were women; 115 (96%) were White and 7 (4%) were African American. The sites of the five classes ranged from rural south central Ohio to urban Dayton to the larger urban area of Columbus, the state capital.

Phase 1

The first diversity course, EDA 552 Issues in Diversity, was taught during winter 2001, at Southern State Community College, an off-campus site where the university offers regular courses in educational administration. Twelve students participated in this class, which was divided equally by gender, 6 men and 6 women. All the students were White. With the exception of 1 woman and 1 man, all students were between the ages of 25 and 34 years and had taught between 2 and 12 years. Most students had taught in rural schools; they had a predominantly Appalachian heritage. Two students had taught in small town schools, and all reported that most of the schools in which they had taught had little or no ethnic diversity in the student population. Several schools enrolled either two or three African American students.

Phase 2

The second class consisted of 25 graduate students at Capital University, Columbus, another off-campus site. Thirteen men and 12 women were enrolled in EDA 552 Issues in Diversity. The class was conducted for 6 weeks in spring 2001. Five of the 25 students were African American and the remainder were White. The teaching experience of the participants covered a wide range of teaching fields that included foreign language, special education, physical education, mathematics, language arts, and elementary grades. Some students had taught for only a few years, whereas others had taught for as long as 25 years.

Phase 3

The third phase of the study occurred in a graduate class, EDA 552 Issues in Diversity, on the University of Dayton’s main campus during the second summer term, 2001. The

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class met for 2 hr and 30 min, 5 days a week, from July 16 to August 3. Because the schedule was concentrated into 3 weeks for this class, the time for potential change in awareness was attenuated compared with the groups that participated during the regular fall and winter academic terms. The group included 35 participants, most of who lived within driving distance of Dayton. The participants were divided evenly by gender; most of them were White. However, their teaching fields and school settings represented a wide diversity of students.

Of the 35 participants, 20 were men and 15 were women; 2 were African American and 33 were White. The participants taught in a variety of school subject areas—special education, music education, elementary education, physical education, religion, high school content areas, and middle school grades. They also taught at rural schools, urban schools, career technical centers, suburban schools, and parochial schools. All but six of the participants received their teaching certificates in the 1990s. The majority of participants had taught approximately the same length of time, between three and 10 years.

Phase 4

The fourth phase of this study took place in a graduate class, EDA 556 Leadership in Diverse Communities, at the Southern State Community College site of the educational administration program during fall 2001. The class met once a week for 15 sessions from August 23 to December 6, 2001. The 33 participants, most of who lived and worked in rural areas within driving distance of Fincastle, were White; 12 (36%) of the participants were men and 21 (64%) were women. Twenty-five of the participants received their teaching certificates within the last 6 years. Two participants received their teaching certificates in the 1980s, and 3 participants acquired their certificates in the early 1990s. Several of the male participants were elementary teachers. Two pairs of husbands and wives were enrolled in the class. The participants taught a variety of subjects—special education, elementary education, high school subjects, middle school grades, and physical education. All participants taught at either rural schools or schools in small towns and cities.

Phase 5

The fifth and final study took place during the graduate class, EDA 556 Leadership in Diverse Communities, on the University of Dayton's main campus during winter 2002. The class met once a week for 17 weeks from January 8 to April 30. That phase included 17 participants; 7 of the participants were men and 10 were women. All of the participants were White; the majority were teachers. A wide diversity existed in their professional roles and in the sites in which they worked. The participants taught in a variety of subject areas—special education, elementary education, high school content areas, middle school grades, and physical education. They taught in rural and urban schools, as well as in alternative, suburban, and parochial schools. The participants' teaching experience varied from no experience to 27 years of experience. The date of entry into the profession ranged from the 1970s through the 1990s.

Analysis and Interpretation of Student Journals

In all five phases of the study, each student was required to keep a written journal throughout the course. The students included their thoughts and reflections in the journals by probing their insights and interpretations about issues of diversity in schools. To help guide their thoughts, students reflected on (a) recent happenings at work related to cultural diversity; (b) applications available for teaching (managing, coaching) from reading and class discussions; (c) new thoughts about their racial, gender, and ethnic heritage; (d) education they might need about issues of diversity; (e) lack of knowledge that puzzled them; (f) evidences of fear, stereotyping, or celebration of diversity in their schools; and (g) their experiences and observations that they could relate to power.

We analyzed evidence of gender issue awareness in the journals. We assumed that the weekly reflective entries would provide some student-generated empirical evidence of the impact of the course. For example, many participants commented that the class had influenced their awareness of gender issues and that they would be more conscious of their own behavior toward male and female students. Some participants questioned their relationships with the male and female students. One participant felt empowered to question the behavior of male staff members in her school. Many participants focused on gender-biased language and their new awareness of its use. Although, in general, participants became more aware of gender-biased language, several of the male and female participating graduate students continued to use stereotypical descriptions of female colleagues and administrators in their journals.

Those examples are just several of the rich narratives captured in the students’ private writing. The first author kept notes intended to capture the key dimensions of meaning in each student's journal. After we read and reread all student journals (N = 122) and analyzed researcher notes through an iterative process of categorization, four themes emerged as most closely representing the dominant meanings extrapolated in the journals:

1. Gender stereotypes became blatantly obvious.
2. Two distinct changes in behavior occurred: (a) Students reflected on their professional practice and (b) sometimes changed their practice in the classroom and elsewhere toward more gender fairness.
3. Students showed greater awareness of gender discrimination and power differences based on gender.
4. Students exhibited heightened sensitivities concerning the importance of gender-biased language.
Blatant Gender Stereotypes

The graduate students recognized gender stereotypes as they became more obvious in their daily work life. In some cases, students described policies that were based on gender stereotypes. The diversity course seemed to trigger the students to open their consciousness to gender stereotypes. That males are athletes and females are not and that women are gossips and men are not are examples of gender-based stereotypes that can invisibly but pervasively structure the daily personal interactions of individuals in schools. “Girls are not good at math” and “Boys are not good at reading” may be adopted as beliefs in this approach to gender stereotypes. Those sets of assumptions can blind educators to the potential of each student as well as to the talents of teachers and administrators. Unmasking the stereotypes as unwarranted assumptions may help educators maximize the academic talent of all students, fostering higher learning gains that might be reflected in improved test scores. The students provided ample evidence of shattering stereotypes; several examples are given in the following paragraphs.

A female participant described the girls in her fifth-grade class as being unhappy that a boy and a girl would no longer be chosen to represent the school in the spelling bee because the principal decided that the top two spellers would be the representatives. The girls believed that the boys were the better spellers. This participant also noticed a stereotypical statement made by a boy about girls being “bossy”; she wrote that the class had made her aware of gender influences on how students perceive one another.

A male administrator wrote that he noticed that certain issues that he believed were insignificant would be very significant to female teachers. He felt that regardless of the situation, he had to pay attention to those issues to make the female teachers believe that he was at least making an attempt to consider their concerns. In another entry, the administrator described his feeling that women are more likely to gossip than are men and that, as a leader, he needed to intervene. A male elementary teacher commented that because there are not many male teachers in the elementary schools, he felt special in that role.

A variety of the journal entries focused on the issue of boys and girls participating in activities, including athletics. A female participant related that during hunting season a young girl told her that she had bagged two rabbits. The participant reacted with surprise but then wrote that she realized that she was stereotyping hunting as male behavior. A male student discussed the attention given to the losing boys’ basketball team, whereas the girls’ volleyball team won the league title and received little attention. Another male class member discussed the number of parents and others who attended the boys’ junior high ball games, compared with only the few parents who attended the girls’ games.

One of the class members referred to the school having a pep rally for the boys’ first basketball game. She wrote about her anger that the girls’ team had no such pep rally. She speculated that the girls on the team might feel diminished by this.

We observed an artifact of earlier school days in a journal entry. A female class member and elementary teacher wrote that they noticed the way that the girls’ and boys’ restrooms were labeled. The girls’ restroom had a cheerleader on the door, whereas the boys’ restroom had a basketball player. She described her changed feelings about these symbols—from earlier acceptance to more recent feelings that they might be sexist, implying that girls were not athletes.

Several of the journal entries focused on gender issues in the school setting, including stereotypes of women as being difficult leaders. At least two participants cited personal incidents in which educators based workplace problems on the fact that a woman was in charge. In another stereotype cited, a participant related that he was talking with some friends, and one of them mentioned cooking. He described how his friends stereotyped domestic roles as those usually handled by women.

Increased Reflection on and Change in Professional Practice

Students wrote that they had thought about their teaching through a lens of gender, and, in some cases, they described changes in their professional practice, which may be evidence of growth toward cultural proficiency (Lindsey et al., 1999). Lindsey and colleagues and Helms (1992) claimed that individuals move through a phase of disintegration of their own attitudes about cultural constructs such as race and gender, issues they usually take for granted. The evidence accumulated from Lindsey and colleagues and Helms suggests that perhaps new understandings of gender issues had initiated a breakdown in their past practices. That disintegration may be a prerequisite for healthy growth toward equity in professional practices related to gender, just as Helms proposed that it operates toward healthy racial identity. Following are several examples from the evidence that portray those theoretical links.

A female mathematics teacher discussed a discrepancy between mathematics grades for girls and boys, stating that she was beginning to realize that she worked in different ways with each group. Another student wrote that the class had made her more cognizant of how she interacted differently with boys and girls, especially calling on them to answer questions.

We discussed gender issues in the classroom in several class discussions. After that series of classes, several students wrote in their journals in ways that might indicate changed awareness and behaviors, from targeting only boys for physical tasks in the classroom to different expectations in mathematics on the basis of gender.

Discrimination became more visible to some participants. After noting the achievement difference between male and female students, a participant described her feelings that girls work harder than boys and that they care
more about school than boys do. And, as a result, she may even further the advantage of boys by calling on them more. Finally, several participants expressed the need to continue to monitor their interactions with students that are gender based.

**Awareness of Gender Discrimination and Power Differences**

Clear evidence of students’ raised awareness of discrimination in schools and society was evident in their journals. In many cases, students used language suggesting that they were thinking increasingly about power differences among various groups in schools. Researchers, including Gupton and Slick (1995) and Blackmore (1993), have documented gender inequity in models of effective school leadership, that is, men have dominated the field. Participants in this study demonstrated growing suspicion of that systemic dominance. If women and men are to be prepared to be effective school leaders, the existing power differential must be made transparent. Evidence from the graduate students in this course suggested that the cultural-diversity course did pierce that system.

For example, a female participant who worked in a male-dominated environment became aware of discrimination during the semester in which she studied cultural diversity; she wrote about her commitment to respond to even the subtleties of sexist treatment.

Others wrote about noticing matters that they had been blind to before the class, such as a male interrupting a female while talking and the fact that mothers and grandmothers (as opposed to fathers and grandfathers) seem to show up for children’s performances.

Most participants wrote about the gender of those in both administrative and teaching roles. Examples in their journals included the general overrepresentation of women in the teaching ranks and their underrepresentation in administration, the firmer treatment of misbehaving students by men when compared to women, and the important role of women role models in areas typically held by men (such as mathematics and science.) In addition, one participant described how a male professor inappropriately intruded on a female student’s personal space, another putative example of what this participant interpreted as gender-based power.

Furthermore, several participants expressed new insights into graduate professors’ behavior and language. Several students wrote about an instructor who they described as inappropriately stereotyping female students as talkative and servile, while another wrote about teachers who fail to use gender-inclusive pronouns when referring to top-level leaders. A student mentioned that he probably would not have noticed the stereotyping if he were not part of a diversity class, and he wondered whether others also noticed the instructor’s behavior. The superintendent the last year had been a woman.

Participants in this study provided rich and detailed descriptions of gender-based incidents in their professional lives as well as their new awareness of the need to manage those with fairness and equity. In addition to specific incidents, many participants reported on the demographic profiles of their schools—many of which were unbalanced by gender at the administrative level. Several explicitly cited the cultural diversity class experience as the source of their new awareness.

**Impact of Gender-Biased Language**

Students showed heightened awareness of gender biases in the language that people use in schools; they cited the language of teachers, administrators, students, and parents as reflective of limiting gender constructs. That evidence suggests that hearing-biased language played a role in heightening the educators’ levels of awareness. When one is no longer deaf to the words that he or she uses, then one can more easily refuse to comply with these potentially harmful practices. The participants demonstrated this awareness, which may foster changed professional practices toward gender equity, as well as growth toward cultural competence (Lindsey et al., 1999). The following examples from the evidence reflect this theme.

Gender-biased language was discussed frequently in class, a concept that was new to many students. Examples included not only such patterns as the generic use of the male pronoun to refer to “all” people, but also derogatory terms applied to both genders. The ways in which language can appropriately sexualize interpersonal interactions in schools was included in the journals.

**Summary**

In this first decade of the 21st century, accountability dominates the education establishment. Schools are held accountable for their students’ learning as never before. The political landscape is one of increasing pressures on school administrators—pressures that are particularly visible and daunting in schools serving children from diverse backgrounds and those serving large proportions of minority children. School administrators must have a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and gender discrimination if all children are to be served at the levels of excellence required by accountability standards. Of greater importance than standards-based accountability is the moral obligation for equity that school administrators must not only accept but also effectively implement. The insights from this study suggest that educational administration programs can promote the growth of aspiring administrators in gender equity and social justice.

A qualitative study, such as this one, can serve as the basis of a quantitative study. Often, themes that result from qualitative studies can be used effectively as hypotheses that researchers can test in a quantitative study (Newman & Benz, 1998). Quantitative evidence almost exclusively drives political pressures for accountability. Among mea-
surable outcomes of schooling, value-added evidence in K–12 settings is assuming a greater currency as a source of school and teacher effectiveness. Demonstrating the value-added evidence of university programs that prepare teachers and administrators is likely to appear soon on the political landscape.

Our results suggest that the important dimensions of gender equity can be influenced by the educational administration curriculum, and, specifically, by a course in cultural diversity. Emergent themes from the experiences of study participants suggest that there is an impact on students’ understanding of stereotypes, their awareness of gender discrimination, and the limitations of gender-biased language use. These qualitative themes should be used as the basis of new quantitative or mixed-methods studies. Translating these themes into measurable variables would be a promising next step for researchers to design assessment instruments that educational administrators could use to explain the progress that students make to lead and manage schools that benefit boys and girls equally.

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