

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE BEHAVIOR
OF THREE FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

Lorraine W. Walker

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C. Vaught, Chair
M. G. Cline
K. Singh
C. W. Krill
D. Gordon

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(ABSTRACT)

For many decades, school leadership has been conceptualized in a variety of ways attempting to identify the critical elements necessary for effective school leadership. The expertise required for today's schools appears to be different from that required in the past, particularly as school leaders are expected to initiate change and "restructure" in order to obtain new and improved educational results.

Traditional managerial skills, once deemed appropriate and effective for school administration, are now being replaced by styles that focus on cooperation and consideration, community building, open communication, and involvement with others. These behaviors appear to be present in women as they demonstrate their effectiveness in leadership roles as principals and superintendents.

This descriptive study offers an in-depth look at the administrative behavior of three women. It documents their experiences and perspectives as high school principals. The purpose of the study is to contribute to the growing body of research on female leaders necessary to challenge the existing theories on school administration, which are based on traditional business management theory and formulated using an androcentric conceptual framework.

Naturalistic inquiry guided the present study, which employed qualitative research methodology. Participant observations, complemented by interviews and reflective conversations, provided the data for analysis using grounded theory. A computer software program Ethnograph (Qualis, 1998) facilitated the organization and analysis of data.

Case narratives, case reports, and a cross-case analysis report three women's behavior in their role as high school principals. Major conclusions include: (a) Each principal demonstrated a unique style of administrative behavior which seemed effectively matched to the needs of the school organization; (b) Each principal demonstrated a strong set of collegial or relational behaviors that focused on building community in order to support the school programs; and (c) Each principal demonstrated an ethic of care informed by a sense of fairness and loyalty to the policies and procedures associated with their bureaucratic organizational environment. The ethic of care that guided each principal's style suggests that these principals exercise a kind of power associated more with "effective agency" than with "command and control" power typically associated with traditional leadership.

Additional research is needed to document the female leadership experience in schools in order to challenge and transform current administrative theory; research is also needed to explore the notion of "effective agency" as power. Practitioners, researchers, and other interested educational professionals are invited to use the behaviors identified in this study to reflect upon their own styles, because changing our schools is inevitably bound up with changing ourselves.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Corky; to my parents, Lee and Doug Walker; and to my friend and confidante, Ellen Mason Luce, for their abundant care and steadfast support.

This work is also dedicated to Sophia: *She* who represents Wisdom. It is through the pursuit of knowledge and experience, applied to the common good, that we can move beyond the conventionality and dualities of life into the light of creative wholeness.

For wisdom is more precious than pearls,
And nothing else is so worthy of desire.

Proverbs 8:11

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Finally, I wish to thank all of those who have served as my teachers, formally through personal contact or informally through their research and writings. They provided not only the foundation upon which this work was accomplished but also the inspiration to move forward with my own hopes and dreams.

When the student is ready
the teacher appears

An Old Saying

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