Educational Leadership: The Discrepancy of Gender Representation in Top Educational Leadership Positions

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Abstract
A discrepancy exists between women and men in educational leadership roles. Presently desired leadership traits, stereotypes of women in leadership and mentoring specific to women in leadership are explored. Current research indicates that desired leadership traits are non-gender specific such as honesty, innovation, creativity, empathy, and collaboration. As well, that today’s effective educational leaders will need to focus on leadership that values practices of Mindfulness, Growth Mindset, participation in Professional Learning Communities, and awareness of Radical Inclusion. Stereotypes of women’s abilities to lead are investigated through a systems thinking lens. By using this lens, changes to the complex problems that have caused the discrepancy between men and women in educational leadership can begin to materialize.

Background
Women have been historically limited in opportunities for educational leadership roles. Stereotypes about women as leaders tend to be contrasted with qualities of male leaders, and portray women leaders as deficient or negative. As men dominate the educational leadership roles in our culture, women face very different problems than men due to different expectations based on gender. Throughout my 27 years working in education, I have seen a limited representation of women in educational leadership roles. In 2011, Feistritzer, found that eighty-four per cent of the teaching workforce were women; however, only twenty-four per cent of superintendents were women.

Nonetheless, the lack of representation of women does not mean that women are less effective leaders. What was once seen as effective leadership may be biased in favour of traditional male roles, and increasing opportunities for women leaders may depend upon different, more gender-inclusive mentorship. In this paper, I will explore common leadership traits, stereotypes about women leaders, and explore mentorship programs developed for women and how these can better support women as leaders.

Systems Approach
“Systems thinking is a way of approaching problems that asks how various elements within a system influence one another.” (Northwest Earth Institute. 2018) The Systems Thinking framework such as the Iceberg model below has the potential to explain complex problems and is useful when examining the human system that has caused a discrepancy between men and women in educational leadership roles. It is important to look at the aspects of what causes the behaviours in human systems, how to change the system behaviour, and who is responsible for the system’s behaviour. (Sustainable Learning Suites, 2012). By asking the question to the problem, why is there a discrepancy between men and women in educational leadership roles, then implementing Systems Thinking to investigate, causes to the problem and solutions may become clear.

Future Directions
Investigating and bringing awareness to the system structures policies, habitual behaviours, and organizational structures that have supported inequity between men and women in educational leadership roles may provide insights into how to sustain opportunities to reduce this discrepancy in the future. Interviews with women and men in past and current leadership roles and investigating and analyzing educational policies with regards to supporting women in leadership will need to be explored.

References
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