

**Mentorship and Women in  
Educational Administration**

**Rita Scoretz Cattapan**

**B.Ed., University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, AB, 1984**

**A One-Course Credit Project  
Submitted to the Faculty of Education  
of the University of Lethbridge  
In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree**

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

**Lethbridge, AB  
March 1998**

## **Abstract**

This study explores the area of mentorship and women in educational administration. The literature review defines the process of mentorship, looks at the need for female mentorship and the role of the mentor, and describes the benefits of mentorship. The second section relates the results of an interview process in which four female administrators were interviewed at length. The presence or lack of mentors in their careers was discussed as well as other significant influences. The findings indicate that mentorship played an important role in the formation of their decision to enter administration and continued to be an important source of encouragement throughout their careers.

## Acknowledgements

### Dedication:

To my children, AJ and Alex. Without their patience and love, completion of this project would not have been possible.

### Thank You:

To my friends and colleagues, Jo-Ann, Janice, Sally, Angela and Marlene for their support and encouragement.

To Michael and Robin, for their guidance and enthusiasm.

To the women I interviewed, for their honesty and willingness to help me with this project.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
<b><u>Introduction</u></b> .....	1
<b><u>Part I:</u></b>	
Research Proposal .....	3
<b><u>Part II:</u></b>	
Literature Review .....	6
What is Mentorship .....	6
The Need for Female Mentorship .....	7
The Role of the Mentor .....	11
Benefits of Mentorship .....	13
<b><u>Part III:</u></b>	
Results of the Interview Process .....	16
<b><u>Conclusion</u></b> .....	32
Appendix I: Interview Questions	
Appendix II: Consent Form	
Appendix III: Participation Form	

## Introduction

“Only beings who can reflect upon the fact that they are determined; are capable of freeing themselves.”

Paulo Friere

When we first become aware that we are products of our culture we are given a critical consciousness that gives us a voice to talk about our frustrations. When we reflect upon our situations we gain a sense of how to be free of it all. We reassess the way we have been a “constructed” person. We realize that all knowledge is value-laden and this realization liberates us.

For me the realization of being a “constructed woman” in a “man’s” world, and then the consequent liberation was like discovering a wound in my body that I had no knowledge existed. Suddenly it began to hurt. I was uncomfortable in my world. I could not look at things or understand as I had before. I was irritated by situations and people who had previously not bothered me. With this critical consciousness I found a voice and began to talk about my frustrations. At first, I wanted my world to be different so that I could be comfortable in it again, but what I discovered was that I had to learn to be different in my world. I had to change in order to heal the wound I had discovered.

My journey through the graduate program has been very much a healing process. I have gained a greater understanding of myself. I have been given an opportunity in my studies to reconceptualize knowledge, paying careful attention to myself, my situation, my world. In this, my final project, I hope to inform myself about the experiences of other women who have encountered the challenge of reconceptualizing knowledge. I desire to

see myself as an integral part of this experience with the preference to be changed by it. I also hope to make a modest contribution to the written documentation of those experiences in a way that adds to our collective knowledge about women and the value of our viewpoints.

## **Part I**

### **Project Proposal**

My first “real” job as a teacher began ten years ago. I considered myself fortunate to land the position of grade three teacher at a brand new school. After having worked as a substitute teacher for two years, I was elated to finally have my “own” classroom and my “own” students.

Although the bulk of my training had been at the high school level and I had planned to be a high school Biology teacher, I was now a mother with two small children. A full-time, permanent job was a welcome rest to the erratic, stressful world of substitute teaching. Thus, my career had been launched.

During my first five years of teaching, I began to become interested in the decision-making happenings that affected teachers and students throughout the school. The administrator for whom I worked was extremely effective, personable, insightful and most importantly, supportive. As I watched him in his role, my interest in pursuing an administrative position grew. I decided that the first step in this new direction would be to go back to school. I applied to the Masters of Education Program and was accepted.

The first course I took was entitled “Gender Issues in Education”. Maybe it was a combination of factors influencing my life at that time, but I believe the knowledge I gained while taking that course changed my life. My eyes were opened to the inequalities between men and women that existed, not entirely, but most significantly in the work place.

Being interested in administrative roles in education I decided to explore the area

of women in administration. My first paper as a graduate student was “Barriers to Women in School Administration”. For the project I decided to interview ten women administrators in the field of education. Their positions ranged from vice-principal of a small elementary school to superintendent of a rural jurisdiction.

My understanding of the interview process equaled my understanding of qualitative research methods at that time--both were limited. However, I did manage to learn about the struggles and triumphs these women encountered. An intriguing discovery from my initial research suggested that the reason there are not more women in school administration is because women simply do not apply for the positions in similar proportions to men. Of course this begs the question, “Why not?”. A second uncovering from the interview process is related to and may answer the “why not”? question. This second uncovering was a theme that emerged from my conversations with the interviewees. That theme is going to be the basis for my final project in the Masters of Education program. The theme is “Mentorship”

The value of having a mentor administrator was talked about by all the ten women I interviewed. They viewed their “mentors” as essential components influencing their careers. Indeed, several mentioned that the mentors actually suggested and encouraged them to apply for their administrative positions. This could suggest that the reason so few women aspire to administrative positions is due to the lack of encouragement received by prospective mentors. As I continued through the courses in my Master’s Program, I sought out topics and courses related to gender issues. In my final course, the Research Course, I explored qualitative research methods and focused on the “Interview” process.



The more I researched, the more I became interested in the idea of redoing my initial project with my new understanding about gender issues and the interview process itself. I wanted to do it better. I decided to use the uncoverings from my original work, the idea of mentorship and the apparent lack of women aspiring to administrative positions, coupled with my new, hopefully improved, skill at interviewing to gain a much deeper understanding of women's' experiences in educational administration.

This then, was my proposal for my final project. I intended to interview in-depth four female administrators. One at the beginning of her administrative career, two in the middle and one with over twenty years experience. Not only would I be bringing my new understanding of gender issues, mentorships and the interview process to this project, but I would also be bringing myself. My thoughts, ideas and opinions would be an integral part of the research and I hoped to explore their effects.

## Part II

### Literature Review

#### **A. What is Mentorship?**

Most of the literature reviewed suggests that mentorship is an effective way to identify and promote talent within organizations.

The process of mentoring is about developing and preparing junior people for senior positions in organizations. Usually a senior executive will “adopt” a protégé and guide them along, teaching them the “rules of the game”. The protégé will be provided with opportunities to demonstrate her/his abilities and the senior executive will provide challenges, and offer critical feedback. Most often the senior executive will encourage the protégé to apply for higher level positions and sponsor them in networking situations. (Mertz, 1990).

Mentoring has been compared to coaching in that the mentor teaches the protégé the ropes and provides both positive and negative feedback. (Luna and Cullen, 1990).

The role of the mentor is to push the protégé to improve his/her performance and potential. The mentor supports the junior person in different situations and may even take responsibility for mistakes thus protecting the young protégé. Providing challenging assignments which allow the junior to show his/her knowledge and skills and also prepare him/her to advance is another way the mentor assists. In addition, the mentor introduces the protégé to the world of networking. The mentor may take the junior to important meetings or gatherings providing him or her with an opportunity to demonstrate competence and achievements. The mentor is opening doors for the young protégé by

exposing her/him to his connections which will ultimately support the protégé's career advancements.

Superimposed on these concrete roles of the mentor are several psychosocial functions provided by the mentor. The mentor models appropriate behaviors and attitudes which help the junior to establish a professional identity for himself/herself. Providing counseling, acceptance and confirmation are all psychosocial functions of a mentor. By developing a trust and a rapport the mentor provides ongoing support which strengthens the protégé's self-confidence. This positive relationship usually extends into a mutual caring and intimacy often characterized by a friendship outside the work setting. (Kram, 1986).

Stages of mentoring can be thought of as existing along a continuum. Each stage facilitates learning and provides the protégé with access to the organizations culture. In the early stages of a protégé's career development, information about the organization is shared and learning about the actual work experience occurs. In the final stages of mentoring the protégé has advanced and often is ready to become a mentor.

### **B. The Need for Female Mentorship**

“Women are the best helpers of one another. Let them think; let them act; till they know what they need . . .”

Margaret Fuller, 1845  
(cited in Luna and Cullen, 1990).

Research suggests that the process of mentorship has been, historically, a male experience. Male mentoring has been characterized by relationships such as Socrates and

Plato, Freud and Jung, and Hayden and Beethoven, (Luna and Cullen, 1990). When looking at psychosocial and career growth in the process of human development, mentoring has played a major role. Mentorship is the tool by which the individual is able to pass through the various transitional stages in a career path. The process is cyclical in nature whereby the individual who has received the benefits of mentorship in turn provides those services to a junior member of the organization.

Wright and Wright (cited in Patterson, 1994) discuss the advantages of female mentorship in areas pertaining to balancing family responsibilities and work. In areas such as this, women sharing experiences and knowledge with one another is a significant advantage to young women being mentored.

It is only in the last twenty years that the process of mentoring has been examined in relation to women and career development. (Patterson, 1994). According to Luna and Cullen, the lack of women role models in high administrative positions, both in the world of business and academe is well documented. It is suggested that the barrier to women's leadership in these areas is due to male-oriented organizational expectations. Patterson (1994) states that male mentors are not comfortable with and thus less likely to mentor anyone who is not like them. Through traditional networking such as this, bureaucratic systems nurture male leadership.

Evidence of this exists in the following statistics. Statistics released in the December 1993 issue of *Executive Educator* (cited in Tabin and Coleman, 1991) show that in the United States 89% of school superintendents and high school principals are men. Similar statistics are produced in Canada. In 1987, in Canada, 80% of all

principalships in elementary and secondary schools were occupied by men. In total, 15% of all male teachers in elementary and secondary schools were principals while only 3% of all female teachers in elementary and secondary schools were principals. Educational administrators are recruited from the professional ranks, within which women are the majority, yet still there are relatively few female administrators. (Tabin and Coleman, 1991).

Although more women are entering and progressing in the work force, they are still under-represented in high administrative or professional positions. Research on women and mentoring in the business world suggest that men and women's approach to mentoring differ. (Luna and Cullen, 1990). Males tend to use networking and sponsorship which attracts similar people to themselves, thus keeping the pool of human talent drawn upon, narrow and small. The system is based on friendships, persuasion, favors, promises and connections with people who already have influence. (Parcrazio, 1991). Parcrazio agrees that this type of activity is undesirable and inadequate. It does not promote the best and brightest and by its nature, excludes women. She proposed an alternative collegial model which reflects the research done by Carkhuff and Berensan (cited in Parcrazio, 1991) on the components of the helping relationship. The components capitalized on the positive feminine characteristics identified as; genuineness, empathy, respect or warmth, and concreteness. Parcrazio's model was based on the need for affiliation between women as opposed to competitiveness. The steps in the model outline a way of relating that would improve professions, women in general and individuals.

Briefly, the steps are:

- Seek out other women colleagues.
- Identify women colleagues who are at the hub of various networks.
- Share personal expertise.
- Learn to give criticism.
- Recommend women for jobs, committees, and task force assignments.
- Tolerate differences of opinion and style among women colleagues.
- Develop empathy for women who have succeeded but don't want other women to succeed.
- Communicate directly, honestly, and openly with professional women.
- Include men in the network.

For the '90's, Parcrazio believes women need to recognize that getting to the top is one thing but staying at the top is another. In order to keep higher level administrative positions women must learn how to handle labor/management issues as well as criticism related to negative emotions in a constructive way. It is essential for women in leadership positions to encourage younger colleagues to affiliate with more established professionals.

Mentoring, and aspects related to it such as networking and sponsorship, are viable strategies for women seeking to achieve high level administrative positions. They allow individuals to make necessary contacts, to gain job enhancing information and most importantly, provide the support and encouragement needed to advance through the ranks. The collegial model of networking suggested by Parcrazio offers a different view of mentoring strategies that takes into consideration the need for female mentorship. As

women advance professionally the relationship between employee - employer is apt to change. Women will be helping women and this may require a different kind of mentorship.

### **C. The Role of the Mentor: Points to Keep in Mind for Female Mentorships**

In a study done in 1991 in British Columbia, Tabin and Coleman interviewed female principals in two categories: recent appointees, and, those having served as principals for more than ten years. The former appointees reported that mentorship was not freely and openly provided and if they sought it, they could not obtain it. Over half of the recent appointees cited mentorship as a helpful and important tool to developing their leadership skills. This mentorship was usually provided by principals, all male. Mertz (1990) points out that:

“Any mentoring relationship will encounter problems, however, specific concerns are often raised when women are considered for mentoring.” (p. 29)

It is important to confront these concerns and resolve any uncertainties. The following is a shortened list of issues and strategies surrounding the topic of women and mentorship taken from Mertz, 1990. Although the original work included special considerations for minorities, only issues relating to women have been included here.

#### **Issues Concerning Mentoring of Women**

1. Often the motives of a male mentor and a female protégé are suspect and the relationship may be perceived to be other than professional in nature. An example of

this kind of thinking is the belief that the female protégé is using physical attributes to get ahead. Relationships may be perceived to be other than professional in nature.

2. Some male mentors may consider it risky to mentor a woman. They may feel their judgement will be “on the line”.
3. Giving critical feedback is often an uncomfortable task. Male mentors may feel it is even more difficult to be critical to a woman. There is a tendency to think that women are unduly sensitive about critical feedback.
4. Women tend to be dealt with as representatives of their gender rather than as individuals. There are few women in high level positions and as a result their performance and behavior often receive extra attention. They are often held to higher standards of performance. If they do not measure up it is often taken as a sign that all women will perform in similar ways.

How can these issues be confronted? Mertz offers a list of strategies which are important to apply when women are being mentored. Again the list has been condensed and kept specific to concerns about gender.

### **Strategies to Utilize in the Mentoring of Women**

1. The organization must embrace an attitude that women need to be considered for high level administrative positions. The organization should work at identifying women with talent and pay particular attention to potential women protégés. Otherwise, the tendency for them to be overlooked will continue.
2. To ensure that the individual is not judged as a representative of a group, the



organization should use the same criteria for judging the talents of women as it would for any other protégé.

3. Mentor and protégé should develop clear parameters for the relationship. Perceived problems and awkward issues should be discussed.
4. The mentor should establish a definite plan for legitimizing the female protégé.
5. A male mentor must not assume that women protégés will “know the rules” as he knows them or as other men would know them.
6. It is essential to provide critical feedback about the protégé’s performance and behavior.
7. Include women protégé’s in the “business” of socializing.
8. Mentors need to be sensitive to and deal firmly with slurs, offensive comments and jokes made at the expense of women.

For the time being at least, males will probably continue to be in the positions to provide the mentoring needed for women to achieve higher levels of administration. The fact that there are now more males willing to provide mentorship for women is a hopeful sign. The development of such strategies to offset the concerns surrounding the male/female mentoring relationship is another hopeful sign.

#### **D. Benefits of Mentorship**

The research suggests that Mentorship benefits the organization, the protégé and the mentor. Identifying and promoting talent within an organization ensures that the organization will always have a pool of talent ready to step into administrative positions

as needed. Mentorship programs, in this way, build employee morale. A culture or climate of success and productivity is maintained when an organization develops administrative potential through mentorships. (Mertz, 1990).

Protégés gain a better understanding of how the organization works when they receive mentoring. They get access to formal and informal means of communication that provides them with valuable professional information. Protégés also receive help clarifying their career goals and get encouragement to reach those goals when involved with a mentor (Luna and Cullen, 1990). Roche (cited in Luna and Cullen, 1990) pointed out that women who have experienced mentoring feel they can succeed and thus choose careers instead of jobs. In a study of women educational administrators done by Pavan and Robinson (1991) it was brought forth that few women have an awareness of the possibility of career advancement when they enter the teaching profession. Mentoring serves as a means to this awareness. It often serves as a vehicle to administrative positions. In the study, the women mentioned that it was their mentors who encouraged and convinced them that they were capable of administrative responsibilities. As Shakeshaft (in Pavan and Robinson, 1991) affirms “a mentor is much more important to the individual woman than is a role model because it is a mentor who advises the woman, supports her for jobs, and promotes and helps her.” (p.15)

There are benefits to the mentor as well. The mentor benefits by the relationship developed with the protégé. Protégé’s often credit their mentors, quote them, write about them and invite them to speak at various functions. In this way mentoring enhances the mentor’s career. (Halcomb cited in Kram, 1986). Mentors gain a satisfaction from

knowing that they assisted a junior colleague in the advancement of their career. Also, the mentor receives the benefit of new ideas and enthusiasm brought forth by bright and creative junior colleagues. (Reich cited in Kram, 1986).

### **Part III**

#### **Mentorship and Women in Education**

##### **Administration - The Results of the Interview Process**

###### **Nature of the Interview**

In this section, the results of an interview process will be described to better understand the significance of mentorship, as well as other important influences in the experience of women in educational administration. I interviewed four female administrators. Two of the women interviewed had under four years experience in administration. One had approximately ten years experience and the fourth had been in administration for over twenty years. I chose women at various stages of experience to get a broader viewpoint of mentorship and influences on their careers. The interviews took an average of one hour each and were done either before the school day or after hours. The interview questions were chosen from previous studies and also resulted from the research done prior to the interview process. The interviews were analyzed by transcribing the responses to each question and grouping those responses. Common elements or themes emerged from this process. The following section is divided into topics related to the questions asked in the interview process. Within each topic, themes or common elements are discussed and supported by actual interview transcripts.

###### **Career Path**

In talking about career paths two themes emerged which were consistent for all

four interviewees. The first, less significant, theme had to do with entering the teaching profession. Not one of the four administrators interviewed set out to become a teacher. All had entered other faculties at university or had other intentions or desires when they first set out in their post secondary careers.

This commonality may be no more than a coincidence or it may help explain how each of them were open to the idea of leaving the classroom for a job as an administrator. The careers that each originally sought or considered were Nursing, Veterinary Medicine, Marine Biology and Home Economics. Each interviewee had someone or several people who encouraged them to try teaching and then later, in their teaching careers, had someone who encouraged them to try leadership roles.

“My principal stretched teachers. He recognized strengths and he told me he thought I’d be good at the consulting job.”

“I had a vice-principal who encouraged me to pursue my strength in working with children and their writing. I put together and ran a Young Writer’s Conference for three years at our school. She gave me credit for the work I did and encouraged me to do more.”

“My vice-principal was going on leave and approached me. She told me that she thought I’d be very good at this job.”

The second more significant theme, had to do with their decision to aspire to administrative positions. All of the interviewees stated that they never thought of administration as a career goal.

“I would not have thought of it. I did not want administration. I had a

preconceived idea of what administration would be like. What got me into it was other people looking at what I was doing and saying, you should give administration a try.”

“I had absolutely no thought of being an administrator. None at all, but my principal came up to me and said, ‘Are you going to apply for this position? You should. You’d do a good job!’ And so I thought, “. . . Oh - Oh Okay - why not.”

“As far as administration, I don’t think I really thought about it until my superintendent approached me and said there was an opening and maybe I should consider applying. He told me he thought I had some great skills.”

This theme is consistent with the research which suggests female administrators did not have a preset plan to get into administration. Most females viewed teaching to be their career, whereas, more males viewed teaching as a stepping stone to future administrative positions (Pavan and Robinson, 1991). Even after the interviewees were launched into their first leadership roles they stated that they had no intention of venturing past their initial advancement. Only upon the suggestion of colleagues or superiors did they decide to advance further up the ladder of administration.

“The suggestions of colleagues spurred me on to apply for the position. When I got the position, I only intended to stay for the duration of the medical leave and then expected to return to the classroom.”

“As each new position came up, I would think I can’t do that, and then someone would say, ‘You can do that’ and so I thought I could give it a try.”

In these ways the interviewee’s colleagues and supervisors were acting as mentors. Mentors encourage and support protégé’s as well as exposing them to

challenging jobs and positions. (Luna and Cullen, 1990).

“The vice-principal gave me the reins and let me go ahead with the project.”

“She (vice-principal) put me in lots of positions where I was front and center, I met with the press, with parents and with other groups.”

### **Impact of Non-Professional Life**

When questioned about their non-professional lives the interviewees had very similar responses. A common element in all their lives was the support and encouragement each received from their family.

“My husband has been the key factor in terms of encouragement and support. He has always felt that I could handle these kinds of things.”

“My kids are older and when I wanted to try this job, they said ‘what does it take?’ They have been really supportive and it took a lot of adjustment for them. Speaking about it is one thing, but then actually coping with it - like doing the housework and extra things - we had to get through that.”

“I knew I had to have that support from home. We talked about it a lot. I have total, total support, but there were tough times getting to that point.”

“My husband has always encouraged me to do what I want to do. When I feel down or worried about things at work, he gives me credit. He knows because he is an administrator.”

“I know my kids are proud of me, too, because they tell me.”

Another common element in the responses about their non-professional lives was

the struggle to find a balance given the overwhelming time commitment demanded by the administrative role.

“I’ve had to give up my other life from Monday to Friday. I have to be totally focused on this job in order to get everything done that I need to get done.”

“I think sometimes he (husband) wished I hadn’t gotten into administration because I had times of being so tired and it affected our family life to a certain degree.”

One interviewee jokingly stated: “. . . Because of the time commitment I have no friends left! I have managed to get things together and now I do things I enjoy, but I’ve found that really hard because by the time I get home it’s really late. You want to spend time with your family; so what do you give up? Well, you give up your friends. You know you can’t go out and when you say ‘No’ to your friends a lot they stop calling. I have found a bit of a balance with friends lately, but it has taken me a few years to figure it out. I call it the balancing act.”

In the area of their non-professional lives the interviewees found the necessary balance on their own. The balance they found was individual and different in nature from one to the other. None of them spoke of receiving any guidance or suggestions from other female administrators who obviously would have travelled this road before them. So it seems that mentoring in the non-professional aspects of their lives was absent.

### **Significance of Gender on Career**

Although the responses were quite varied the main idea of having to work very hard to prove they are worthy of the positions they hold did come through.



“We feel the extra pressure (because both administrators are women) to show people that we run a pretty tight ship and we consider ourselves to be leaders in our district. We are oftentimes the first school to get going on something. We initiate a lot. We don’t sit back and wait to see what’s going to happen or wait to see what the next school’s going to do. We’re in there.”

“Women have to prove, time and time again, that they can do the job and that they are worthy of it.”

Another interviewee gave a more personal response to this question and her response relates to research which suggests that males are more career oriented and see teaching as a stepping stone to administration.

“I would have moved faster if I were a man. Maybe I would have had more confidence earlier - a belief in myself. For me, I never quite had a clear vision of where I wanted to be by age forty. I was always holding back because I didn’t think I was ready, but other people would say ‘Yea, you are - do it!’ The drive - the vision has to come from within and maybe because of the way males are brought up it is clearer to them.”

Collaboration was seen as a significant, female strength which the interviewees felt helped them in their roles as administrators.

“The collaborative nature of administration these days is easier for a woman. It is more a part of our characteristic and make up.”

“I’m not afraid to give up power. I let people go with things. I place confidence in people.”

“I find support with other administrators in our region. There is no competition.

We share ideas and solve problems together.”

### **What is Your Individual Sense of Your Job?**

The answers to this question were varied. It was difficult to detect any strong themes but I would say that in general the interviewees saw their role as a support for staff and also to provide educational leadership.

“You are the educational leader for teachers and for support staff.”

“I try to support my staff.”

“You try to create an atmosphere.”

“Overall, you work with your staff but they come to you for support and leadership.”

“You are the ‘head honcho’, the leader. You are in charge of everything and you have to know about everything, whether you want to or not.”

“You have to let people know that they can come to you anytime.”

“You have to listen to people and hear what they have to say.”

“If you support staff and you know what they are doing and you begin to implement new things with their input, then you can do what’s good for everybody and the kids are the winners. It’s not as easy as it sounds.”

### **Frustrations and Satisfactions**

Asking for this information in the same question may have influenced the interviewees’ responses or it could just be that many of the frustrations for these women

administrators were also the source of their satisfaction. There were many commonalities in the responses. Overall, the biggest frustration was trying to find the time to do all that needed to be done. The biggest satisfaction for the women was knowing themselves that they did it and receiving positive feedback from parents, staff and students for a job well done. As the interviewees were so apt at coupling their frustrations to corresponding satisfactions, I have chosen to share their responses in a similar fashion.

“A frustration is having a full agenda and having to deal with a myriad of other things. Situations come up on a day to day basis that need your attention right now that you have to look after. Other people’s agendas have to take priority to keep the school running and my agendas have to be dealt with on my own time, usually after hours. This is a frustration because I’m a bit sequential in how I like to get things done. I have to fight that feeling of being a bit short or bad-tempered when I can’t get things done.

Satisfactions for me, are being able to manage all that and then having a job, setting a plan, working with people, getting it all done and seeing it run the way you want it to. That process is tremendously satisfying. It’s not as easy as it sounds. You often have a vision of where you want to go with something and you want to work through it step by step. Then, you have all these other people saying no, I see it this way and it has to go this way. You have to pull everybody together. It’s hard to know when to step in and say we need a plan and when to sit back and just let go. It comes with experience.”

“Frustrations have been time-wise. You are here a lot at night. There is a whole realm of night activities that go with the school that infringe upon your own individual time. People have to realize that you are on five other committees which require extra

time at night. It's a frustration trying to do a good job with my teaching because that's first for me. I'm a teacher first. I'm an administrator by choice. I love the job of teaching and so I ask myself when can I get better at the job of teaching because I don't have any extra time. It's frustrating because you are expected to do more and more. The government is putting on all these mandates. You have to do this report. You have to set goals and then you have to prove these goals. There are these big reports and you have to do them. The budget has to balance and sometimes you have to cut staff and you have no choice. It's frustrating to deal with all of that plus, perhaps, angry parents or behavior problems. Those are the little things that add up.

Satisfactions - well, when I sit back and reflect and think that I'm doing a good job or when staff come and say thank you for things or say that they think you're doing a great job - or you've made time to come and teach a class. That's important. That's satisfying."

"Some of my biggest frustrations have been with parents not accepting that their child is a behavior problem or they won't acknowledge that their child needs to get some help. We offer that help and they won't accept it.

It is also frustrating to deal with teachers who are struggling. There are doers on staff and there are the people who don't do anything. People that just do, do, do get burnt out. It's frustrating because you know you're burning out your really good people.

Some of the same frustrations are the same satisfactions. Parents can be your strongest advocates. It's satisfying to see parents stick-up for your school. It's satisfying to see kids that you have really worked hard with become survivors.

Our school has been recognized for different things that we've done and that is satisfying too.

It's satisfying when a student comes up and gives you a big hug.

It's satisfying to walk into a classroom and see some of the really neat things that are happening.”

### **How Do You Feel About the Work You are Doing Within Your School**

As with so many of us, it is difficult to talk about what we do well and to give ourselves credit. The brevity of the responses to this question indicated that it was a difficult question for the interviewees. The fact that they have advanced into various administrative roles and held them for certain lengths of time speaks of the hard work and success they have achieved. However, when asked to say if they thought they were doing a good job, they hesitated and then responded with only a few short comments.

“I often feel that I could be doing more. (Pause) . . . I like what I do.”

“Most days I feel really good about the work I'm doing. Sometimes, I worry if someone had to step into my job, would I have things in order enough so someone could just pick-up and go.”

“I feel good, especially about my work on committees where everyone feels they have a voice. It's important to me that they are a part of the decision-making process.”

“You wish you had more tangible evidence of how you were doing. I feel mostly good, but there are times when you need more feedback.”

## **Regrets**

None of the interviewees felt they had any regrets. There were some aspects of their teaching careers that they missed. Being in the classroom and building relationships with students that are only possible when you are their classroom teacher was cited as a possible regret. One interviewee said she did not have any regrets but if asked would she stay with her administrative role for five more years, she would have to think about it. The workload is always increasing and she feels it gets heavy at times. Overall, the interviewees would not want to change the path that their careers have taken and feel no regrets about taking on administration.

## **How Has the Job Changed You?**

All of the interviewees agreed that the changes they have been through are overwhelmingly positive in nature. The most common theme emerging from their responses was an added awareness of who they were and a defining of boundaries that has helped them achieve success in their positions.

“I’m stronger. I can cope with absolutely anything now. All those crisis situations that I used to worry about handling, I don’t worry about.”

“I don’t take things personally, even when it is related to, or directed at me. I’m able to handle criticism.”

“I have a stronger opinion -- a stronger value system. I am more able to voice that now.”

“It gave me a lot more self-confidence.”

“It has made me thicker-skinned than I used to be because sometimes you have to say, ‘This is how it is going to be.’ And you learn to take criticism and not take it personally.”

“As an administrator you are responsible for so many things and so many people and you have to deal with that. You get criticism from your superintendent, school board members, from parents, from colleagues, from staff and even kids. Having to deal with that has certainly changed me. You just know that you can’t be all things to all people.”

### **Advice**

The women administrators were asked if they could offer any advice to prospective women administrators. An interesting split developed in the responses to this question. The administrators with the longest amount of experience advised that prospective women administrators need to be very clear in their own minds why they want the position and also where they intend to go with it. The administrators with the lesser amount of experience advised that prospective women administrators need to be aware of the time commitment and hard work necessary to be successful in the position.

### **Responses from More Experienced Administrators:**

“Make sure you know why you’d want to be doing this. Why are you there - for the kids - because you want the best for kids. You have to be careful. Don’t get mired in what’s out there. You have to have a firm gestalt about where it is you want to be going and why. If you’re going into administration for the power, I don’t think you’ll feel successful because the job is not about power.”

“I’d tell them to go for it. I think that a woman definitely has a different style of administration than a man and I think, particularly in an elementary school, a female administrator is a very positive thing. Women bring a real balance to administration that needs to be there. For so many years administration has been a male dominated profession. Women bring a balance. They bring a different perspective about how to do things in a school.

Also, you have to be a people person. You can’t possibly be a good administrator if you think you’re going to do it all by yourself. You’ll hate your job and you’ll burn out. You need to have the people skills. You need to develop diplomacy and you need to be able to be perceptive and read situations. You need to know, too, what you’re willing to go to the wall for. Some things you need to ask yourself, ‘In the whole scheme of things is this worth it?’ Sometimes you look at the situation and say, ‘no’, or there are some things you look at and you say, ‘Yes, I’m sticking to my guns. This is the way it has to be.’ So you need to know where your beliefs are. That’s very important. You need to know where you’re headed and where you want your staff to go.”

**Responses from More Recently Appointed Administrators:**

“I would warn, women especially, I think, that there is a huge, huge time commitment. When you are learning the job there is a huge time commitment. You have to be able to have support and balance, both personally, and professionally.”

“Expect to work twice as hard and get about half the credit. If you expect that, you’ll be OK.”



### **Acting as a Mentor**

The lack of response to this question probably says more than the few responses I did receive. Within the district I work for, there are no formal mentorship programs. Leadership programs or courses have been offered from time to time but there has been no on-going formal program in place which develops teachers for administrative roles. From talking with the interviewees, it would seem that similar programs or courses have been offered by other districts, but again no formal mentorship program has ever been set in place. Therefore, the only mentoring these women have done has been very informal.

“In a very informal way, when I was principal, I encouraged a particular teacher to pursue administration. Now that she is an administrator we network back and forth. She’ll call me and say, ‘I just need your advice. What do you think about this? Do you think I did the right thing?’ ”

“In the last five years or so, I’ve not come across people who are wanting to take on that leadership role. People seem to be struggling with their role where they are at. I haven’t found anyone who seems interested in the leadership role. Maybe they are working on other things that are taking their attention away from interest in the leadership role.”

Further to this comment the above interviewee described a general lack of interest in administration noted by her district. She described a potential shortage of available talent and interest in this role. Given the fact that so many administrators in her district are approaching retirement, the forecast is somewhat frightening. Other interviewees also

cited a lack of interest from teachers in pursuing administration jobs within their districts.

### **Mentorship as a Tool to Develop Women Professionally and Personally**

All interviewees agreed that mentorship, whether it occurs formally or informally or whether it comes from a man or a women, is important to the professional and personal development of women.

“You need to have that support and encouragement. You need to go and seek out people who will give you the support you need. I know that women do that. They seek out their mentors and they have that relationship going on.”

“When you do something well, they are there to say you’re on the right track. When you don’t do something well or you’re worried about it, you know you can go and talk with someone who will, not necessarily give you the answers, but will support you. It’s important for mentors to be up front and open. They need to be real and not worry that someone can’t take criticism.”

“For women especially, I think we need to have that confidence built into us by a few words of positive praise. You need to have that built up otherwise you might think you can’t do the job and will not even bother applying for it.”

“Perhaps mentorship could help identify those people early in their careers and encourage them; tell them where their strengths are and encourage them to give leadership roles a try.

I also think there has to be more training set up to help people who show an interest in administration. I think that would catch more people. You have to build your

people.”

### **Future Career Goals and Aspirations**

Generally, the interviewees were satisfied in the positions they are currently holding. Most aspirations were different from their present role as educational administrator.

“I guess it’s more of a personal goal. I’d like to get my Master’s degree for my own personal satisfaction. To improve my teaching.”

“At one point in time I wanted to do a curriculum; to work in Edmonton and do a Special Education Curriculum.”

“At one time I did aspire toward Central Office, but that was before the change in education that has been happening in the last three or four years. I can honestly say that I did think I would be interested in a central office job. Not necessarily a Superintendent but maybe an Assistant Superintendent. I did think about that at one time, but now, no.”

“I don’t know. It’s interesting because I think I need a few more colleagues telling me I’m doing a good job. I know I’d like to continue in administration.”

“It depends on how I’m feeling and that can vary from week to week. Sometimes I’ve had it and want to go back to the classroom. Other times I feel I’m doing alright and things are on the right track. After I retire, I may try something else completely different or I may work as a consultant for the district. Maybe creating programs like the one we talked about--a structured mentorship program.”

### Conclusion

In concluding, it's important to go back to the initial reasons for wanting to do this study. In the introduction I talked about being a 'constructed person' and being liberated by reconceptualizing my world and the 'given' knowledge in it. In a study entitled Out of Women's Experience: School Leadership for Women and Men. Regan and Brooks (1993) explore the new understandings of the female experience in administering schools. They discuss the need to question who we are and where our knowledge comes from.

One does not question the given until one sees that it has been given. The body of knowledge which we learned in our graduate school education in school administration and which you learned too, derives essentially and exclusively from male-based experience because the overall experience and knowledge of women, as a gender, is devalued and hidden in our culture, and because, in particular, women have been excluded from positions of school leadership so their experience is not available as a source of knowledge. (p.15)

Ultimately, this was my purpose. By interviewing women who hold administrative positions I hoped to contribute to that source of knowledge.

The literature is clear about the benefits of mentorship and the need for female mentorship programs. The interviewees also support a belief in the need for mentorship, especially for women, and a recognition for the part it has played in their own careers. In an article entitled Shattering the Glass Ceiling: Women in School Administration, Patterson (1994) addresses the need for female mentorship in particular and suggests why the encouragement and support given by a mentor is a necessary facet to advancement for women.

The insidiousness of hegemony has created a society in which we believe this to be the natural order with white men merely assuming their rightful roles. White males determine what has value and what does not. Those groups on the margins of society have not only been taught to believe they are inferior, they contribute to their own subjugation by believing in their own inferiority. (p.7)

In Pavan and Robinson's study (1991) they found mentoring served as a vehicle providing the 'push' to educational administration.

"Mentors played a significant role in that they served to encourage and convince the women in this study that they were capable of handling administrative responsibilities." (p.16)

It appears that mentorship, whether informal or formal, may be a key aspect in order for women to advance in educational administration.

The results of the interview process show that the women administrators would not have aspired to their present positions had it not been for the encouragement, support and often direct suggestion of someone (usually a mentor) that they could handle the role of administration. How unfortunate that we live in a society where career advancement for women is not inherent in the socialization process. Discovering this construct to be an obvious block for the intelligent, successful, dedicated women administrators I interviewed, has served to strengthen my conviction and purpose in doing this research. We need more academic evidence of the experience of women pursuing career advancement.

Knowing women need mentorship to provide them with the necessary encouragement to pursue leadership roles opens the door for designing formal mentorship

programs.

These programs can provide what has been missing for women capable of leadership; the belief in themselves that they can do it.

For me, the study has helped heal the wound I discovered at the beginning of this journey, and for that I am grateful. I am grateful that the experience took me from a naive state through frustration, irritation, reconceptualization and finally brought me to a place of understanding. With this new understanding, I feel liberated to make choices and to take actions which will push me further along in my journey and possibly help me to assist others in theirs.

## References

- Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Seabury Press.
- Luna, G.; & Cullen, Deborah. An Ethnographic Comparison of Mentoring Functions for Women in Academe and Business. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Meeting (April 1990).
- Mertz, N.T.; & McNeely, S.R. Theoretical and Methodological Problems in Research on Females in Educational Administration: Focusing on "The Numbers." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (November 1990).
- Mertz, N.; and Others. (1990). Executive Mentoring: Myths, Issues, Strategies. Washington, DC; Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED).
- Pancrazio, S. Alternate Collegial Model-Based Forms of Networking Among Women or Networking in the Nineties for the Professional Women. Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (April 1991).
- Patterson, J.A. Shattering the Glass Ceiling: Women in School Administration. Paper presented at the Women's Studies Graduate Symposium (March 1994).
- Pavan, B. & D'Angelo, J. Gender Differences in the Career Paths of Aspiring and Incumbent Educational Administrators. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (April 1990).
- Regan, H.B., & Brooks, G.H. Out of Women's Experience: School Leadership for Women and Men. Paper presented at the Meeting of the American Educational Research Association's Special Interest Group: Research on Women in Education (November 1992).
- Tabin, Y. & Coleman, P. Joining the Old Boys Club? Women's Careers as School Principals in British Columbia, Canada, 1980 to 1990. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (April 1991).

## **Appendices**



**Appendix I**  
**Interview Questions**

1. Describe your career path: the nature of your elementary, high school and university education; the types of teaching, leadership and administrative experiences; the formation of your decision to aspire to administration.
2. Describe the impact of your non-professional life on your career and on your appointment to administration. What support did you receive? What influences did you have? How did you allocate time between various responsibilities?
3. Do you believe that fact that you are a women in any way had significance on your career? Did it influence your ability to gain support through forces such mentoring and networking?
4. What is your individual sense of what a principal's (vice-principal) job entails?
5. Describe any frustrations and satisfactions with your job.
6. Tell me how you feel about the work you are doing within your school.
7. Do you have any regrets about your career?
8. Has your role as principal (or vice-principal) changed you in any way?
9. Can you offer any advice to prospective women principals (or vice-principals)?
10. In what ways have you acted as a mentor?
11. How can mentoring assist in the personal and professional development of women?
12. What are your future career goals and aspirations?

**Appendix 2**  
**Permission Letters**

March 5, 1998

Dear Interviewee:

I am conducting a study of mentorship and women in educational administration. The purpose of the study is to gain knowledge and understanding of women's experiences in this area. I anticipate your responses will contribute to this understanding. I would like your permission to interview you for this study.

The attached questions are the ones I will be asking during our interview. Please note that all information will be handled in a confidential and professional manner. When responses are released, they will be reported in summary and/or quote form. Further, all names, locations and any other identifying information will not be included in any discussion of the results. You also have the right to withdraw from the study without prejudice at any time.

If you choose to do so, please indicate your willingness to participate by signing this letter in the space provided below.

I very much appreciate your assistance in this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 381-2211. Also, feel free to contact the supervisor of my study, Dr. Michael Pollard and/or any member of the Faculty of Education Human Research Committee if you wish additional information. The chairperson of the committee is Craig Loewen.

Yours sincerely,

Rita Cattapan  
University of Lethbridge (Student)  
Mike Mountain Horse School (Teacher - 381-2211)

RC/mc

\*\*\*\*\*

**Mentorship and Women in Educational Administration**

I agree to participate in this study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

March 5, 1998

Dear Interviewee:

Thank you for your participation in the study "Mentorship and Women in Educational Administration". Please find enclosed a copy of the summaries and/or quotes I plan to use in my completed study. You have the right to ask me to change, clarify or delete any information you find inaccurate or misleading.

If you consent, please indicate your willingness to allow the summaries and/or quotes to be used as they appear in the enclosed copy of the study by signing this letter in the space provided below.

Once again, thank you for your assistance in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Rita Cattapan  
University of Lethbridge (Student)  
Mike Mountain Horse School, Teacher - 381-2211

\*\*\*\*\*

**Mentorship and Women in Educational Administration**

I have read and give my permission for the summaries and/or quotes in the study of Mentorship and Women in Educational Administration to be used in the final draft and realize that a copy of the final draft will be provided to me upon completion.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date