

**WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION:  
PERSPECTIVES OF THE RURAL FEMALE ADMINISTRATOR**

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this project to my husband Perry for his unending encouragement and support.

## **Abstract**

The visibility of women in educational administration has increased only slowly in the last twenty years in rural Canada. The increase has not been commensurate with the percentage of women in the education profession. The movement of women into the highly coveted high school principalships and senior administrative positions is still relatively limited. This paper explores the historical perspectives and the conceptual frameworks of women in administration, the various barriers women face in the advancement up the educational administrative ladder, and ways to help eliminate the barriers. Furthermore, it examines the role that “feminine leadership” plays in current educational leadership theories. Much of the literature relative to this topic focuses primarily on the perspectives of urban administrators; there is a distinct lack of research on the female rural administrator. This paper outlines three case studies of three rural female administrators in Southwestern Saskatchewan, and analyzes their unique perspectives and insights. The study finds that there is an increasing proportion of women administrators in rural postings in the two school divisions researched and that female principals in these settings face a unique set of challenges that include professional isolation, heavy workloads and constant scrutiny. Although these administrators find their work very challenging, they find rewards in the personal relationships and contact with staff and students. It is hoped that an examination of this type can contribute to a critical look into the issue of the visibility of female administrators in contemporary education.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Women in administration . . . as I reflect on the gender distribution of teachers and administrators during my grade school years, I do not think there was much difference then in comparison to today's schools: men filled the administrative ranks, as they do today, despite the fact that teaching is primarily a female dominated profession. This disproportionate representation of women in educational administration is certainly not a new phenomenon, but it is one that has gained some recognition as a contemporary educational issue in the last decade. It is an issue I wish to examine in my culminating project.

Women in administration is a topic of special interest to me, as I am a female administrator in rural Saskatchewan, and I have often questioned the conspicuous lack of the female voice in administrative circles. In my four years as an administrator I have frequently asked: Why are there so few female administrators when the majority of the profession is female? How can this be changed? What motivates current female administrators? What are some special qualities that women have that might make them good administrators? How does "feminine" leadership fit in with current leadership theories? Furthermore, as a result of my own personal experience, I have a keen interest in determining if there are unique perspectives and experiences of female *rural* administrators. Accordingly, in my culminating project, I will explore the general topic of women in administration but with an added emphasis on the female *rural* administrator.

## Rationale

The lack of representation of women in the field of educational administration is shocking. This under-representation results in enormous underutilization of human potential, and of leadership potential. By examining the various barriers that stand in the way of potential women administrators, and by exploring ways of eliminating the barriers and finding the aspects of “feminine leadership” to applaud, perhaps educators can bring hope and encouragement to many young female teachers who may be uncertain of their career aspirations in administration. Through this project and similar research, it may be possible to prompt our school districts and boards of education to examine their own current policies and practices with regards to gender equity in administration. Perhaps then they could better utilize and celebrate the gifts and talents that women bring to educational administration. Perhaps they could help give voice to those who have held up half the sky.

The impetus for my focus on female educational leaders from the rural perspective was the glaring absence of literature and research on the unique perspectives of the female rural administrator. The literature was almost exclusively from the urban perspective, and I did not find a single article that tried to capture the rich and unique experiences of being a female administrator in a rural school district.

As a result, I believed investigating the topic of women in educational administration specifically from the perspective of the female rural administrator, was not only timely, but would shed light on an unexplored area of educational research. The question that guided my inquiry was, what are the unique experiences and perspectives of

female administrators in rural Saskatchewan?



## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

*“In the near future, we shall have more women than men in charge of the vast educational system. It is a woman’s natural field, and she is no longer satisfied to do the larger part of the work and yet be denied the leadership.”*

(Ella Flagg Young, 1909)

This lofty prediction made by the first female superintendent of Chicago public schools in 1909 was optimistic indeed. Ninety years later, males continue to dominate school administration and the predicted dominance, or even parity of females, appears as elusive and unattainable as it must have seemed to nearly everyone except Superintendent Young in the early part of the century. Continuing statistics and reports reveal that although women hold the largest proportion of teaching position in our school systems, women hold only a small fraction of available administrative posts. The reasons for this phenomenon are numerous, ranging from gender stereotyping and socialization factors, systemic barriers such as hiring practices, lack of female role models, to name a few. In order to reverse this underutilization of human potential, I think educators must actively seek to eliminate existing barriers and continue to question the conspicuous absence of women in educational leadership.

This paper will attempt to examine the historical perspectives and the conceptual frameworks of women in administration, the various barriers women face in the advancement up the educational administrative ladder, and ways to help eliminate the barriers. Furthermore, it will attempt to examine the role that “feminine leadership” plays in current educational leadership theories and, finally, suggest some implications for

future research. It is hoped that an examination of this type can contribute to a critical look into this perplexing issue in contemporary education.

### Historical Perspectives

Ella Flagg Young's vision has not materialized. However, there have not always been so few women in the ranks of public school administrators, as there are today. In the United States, the nationwide decline has been greatest in the elementary schools, where, in 1928, women held over half of all principal positions. Even in secondary schools, women constituted at least twice the percentage of principals in 1928 as they did in 1973 (Grady, 1992). Women held superintendencies in major cities, too, such as Chicago. These statistics suggest that women in the past have held high aspirations for positions in educational administration, and have had their aspirations honoured.

However, the balance changed following World War II, as many men returned from the armed services and sought employment in the school settings. From that point on, women steadily lost ground in the pursuit of administrative positions. In the 1940s in the United States (and the results are similar for Canada) approximately 41% of elementary principals were women; in the 1950s, 38%; in the 1960s, 22%. By 1980 the figure dropped to less than 20% (Paddock, as cited by Grady, 1992).

The teaching profession appears to have developed along sexually-segregated lines since women were first allowed into the profession. As Alison Prentice's research has illustrated, women were introduced into the profession as the school system expanded in the Nineteenth Century, primarily for two reasons. The first and foremost

was that women could be hired for less money than men. The second factor was that women were thought to be innately suited to teach young children. Teaching was considered an extension of mothering and became an acceptable occupation for women before marrying. Yet another influence was the growing liberal attitudes of such prominent social thinkers as Egerton Ryerson. As more and more people grudgingly accepted women into the public school system, they eventually became the teaching majority at the elementary levels, but remained without power in decision-making (Prentice, as cited by Haddad, 1987).

It was not until the last decade of the Nineteenth Century that there were teacher training facilities in the Western Prairie region. With the growing need and demand for teachers, people who were technically unqualified were frequently hired to enable schools to stay open. Often, it was women who were called upon in rural areas to fill the teaching position at cost-saving salaries (Haddad, 1987).

The history of the development of schools in North America set the foundation for the continuing inequality that women face in the teaching profession today (Arbus, as cited by Haddad, 1987). Differences in qualifications were commonplace. For example, in Eastern Canada, into the Twentieth Century, women were denied entry into the teacher training institutions (normal schools) and were, therefore, unable to obtain a first class certificate that became a precondition for promotion.

While representation by women in educational administration has made some gains since the low point in the 1980s, statistics developed a decade later reveal that Ella Flagg Young's prediction is far from reality. As one example, women constituted 64.2%

of the teaching force in Alberta in 1995, but only 5% of superintendents, 25% of assistant superintendents, 26% of principals, and 36% of assistant or associate principals were female (Alberta Education, 1995). While some progress has been made over the last ten years, it is still generally true that the higher the position in the public school hierarchy, the less likely that it will be occupied by a woman (Parker, 1994). Additional information from Alberta Education (1995) shows there were 785 female principals or vice principals out of a total of 18 733 female teachers in school positions in Alberta in 1995, a ratio of 1 to 24 (Albert Education, 1995). There were 1 883 male principals or vice principals out of a total population of 10 414 male teachers in Alberta schools, a ratio of 1 to 5.5.

An Alberta Teachers' Association survey of Alberta districts conducted in 1997 reveals some modest trends of increased participation in higher levels of education (Young & Ansara, 1998). Of 64 districts, 59 responded to a 1997 Employment Equity Questionnaire, which revealed that there were six female superintendents in the 1996-1997 school year. (An increase in the proportion of female superintendents from 5% to 10% can be partly accounted for by the reduction in the base figure; that is, the reduction in the number of school districts and superintendents from over 150 to 64). Over the past decade, the number of women superintendents has ranged between four and seven.

Further results from this survey reveal that the proportion of women at the associate/assistant superintendent level peaked in the early 1990s and has since declined dramatically. From 1988-89 to 1991-92, the proportion of women increased from 38% to 48% of the total number of administrators in these roles. By 1996-97, however, only 19% of the assistant/associate superintendents were women, a total of 20 out of 106. Overall,

the proportion of women administrators in this category dropped by 19% between the 1991-92 survey and the 1996-97 survey (Young & Ansara, 1998). This reduction seems to coincide with major restructuring of school districts during this time period.

There does seem to be a steady overall increase in the proportion of female principals, but women's increased participation has been mostly in the elementary schools. In 1988-89, 17% of the principals in Alberta public schools were women. By 1996-97, 32% of the principals were women-- 44% in the elementary, 18% in the junior high, and 18% in the high school (Young & Ansara, 1998).

In the role of vice/assistant principal, women have paralleled the trend of the principals, although the number of vice/assistant principal represented a larger base in 1988-89. That year, 24% of the assistant/vice principals were women- 61% in elementary, 39% in junior high, and 30% in senior high and 34% in multi-level schools. In contrast with all other formal administrative roles, women constitute more than half the assistant/vice principals in elementary schools (Young & Ansara, 1998).

Young and Ansara (1998), when looking at these numbers, do caution that there is considerable variability from district to district in the proportions of men and women who are participating in various administrative roles. However, in almost every school district in Alberta, the higher the level in the traditional hierarchy, the fewer the women. In other words, the patterns derived from traditional gender roles are evident as responsibility moves from very young children up to older children and to roles involving administration and policy-making.

Young and Ansara (1998) also suggest that it is important to note that

longitudinal data collected by the ATA over nearly a decade track women's and men's participation rates in administration during a time when Alberta's publicly-funded schools experienced severe financial cutbacks and restructuring. For example, the data demonstrate that there has been a severe drop in the number of women at the associate/assistant superintendent level and concurrent increases in numbers of women principals. This may be a ripple effect downward as "last-in" female associate/assistant superintendents are "first out" when senior central office positions are cut back. These "last-in" women may be reassigned at the school level, rather than the district-level, according to Young and Ansara.

There are potentially negative implications for gender equity in future superintendent positions, with the reduction in the number of women with assistant/associate superintendent titles. This reduced pool of female candidates, in positions which are widely accepted as a necessary qualification for advancement to superintendent, could result in fewer females being considered eligible for the superintendency.

Saskatchewan statistics do not vary much from those of Alberta. In Saskatchewan, during 1995-96, 14.6% of district-level administrators were women. This compares with 15.2% in 1994-95, 13.8% in 1993-94, 12.3% in 1992-93 and 12.5% in 1991-92. (Saskatchewan Education, 1997).

As can be seen from the following table, in 1995-96, females made up 16% of all superintendents, 11% of all directors, 25% of all assistant/associate/deputy superintendents/directors, 28.7% of all principals, and 36.5% of all vice-principals, yet

accounted for 62.2% of all classroom teachers in the province (Saskatchewan Education, 1997).

**Table 1**

**Full-Time Teaching Force By Assignment And Gender**  
**Saskatchewan, 1995-96**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Superintendent	26 83.9%	5 16.1%	31 100%
Director	88 88.9%	11 11.1%	99 100%
Associate/Deputy/Assistant Superintendent/Director	21 75%	7 25%	28 100%
Principal	594 71.3%	239 28.7%	833 100%
Vice-Principal	258 63.5%	148 36.5%	406 100%
Designated Department Head	112 73.2%	41 26.8%	153 100%
Other Supervisory or Administrative Assistant	5 62.5%	3 37.5%	8 100%
Classroom Teacher	3 091 37.8%	5 091 62.2%	8 182 100%
Other (Librarian, Resource etc)	187 22.6%	639 77.4%	826 100%

**Sources:**

1. "Teachers' Report on Qualifications, Salary, and Experience," 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94, 1994-95, 1995-96 STF Information Systems and unpublished tables, based on Saskatchewan Education data.
2. LEADS Directory, 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94, 1995-96, LEADS

With reference to the gender profile of Saskatchewan teachers, it is clear that female teachers are the majority in the elementary grades. For example, in 1995-96, 1 386 out of 1 542 (90%) Saskatchewan grade 2 teachers were female. The number of female and male teachers is approximately equal in Grades 7 and 8, while male teachers outnumber female in high schools. For example, in 1995-96 1 515 out of 2 559 (59%) Grade 11 teachers were male. (See Appendix-Figure 32)

A comparison of the percentage of female school administrators in elementary administrative positions and those in secondary principalships and vice-principalships in Saskatchewan, shows a trend similar to that in other parts of the country, with far more female representation in the former than the latter. (See Appendix- Figure 33) What might be the effect of the lack of representation of women in secondary principalships on women attaining higher administrative positions? It has been suggested that the secondary administrative position, rather than elementary administration, is the primary training ground for senior central office positions such as directorships and superintendencies. If this is the case, then the conspicuous lack of women in secondary principalships would probably have a negative impact on the candidate pool for superintendent positions (Young & Ansara, 1998).



In the percentage of female educational administrators in school division central office positions in Saskatchewan, as in the case in Alberta, there has been a modest increase in the last six years, but it remains far below the percentage of male administrators. In 1991-92, 14.4% of educational administrators at the school division level were female, whereas in 1996-97, 17% were female. (See Appendix- Figure 34)

Statistics indicate that principals and vice-principals in all types of schools in Saskatchewan continue to be predominantly male. There does not appear to be any perceptible trend toward an equitable gender balance in school leadership positions in either of the two neighboring provinces, or nationwide for that matter.

While the gradual and steady increases in representation of women in educational leadership may be a positive thing, given the difference in ratios, women still have a way to go if gender equity is to be achieved. Based on these statistics, it appears that the proverbial “glass ceiling” is in effect for women who try to move up the educational ladder. Some have gone so far as to say that the “glass ceiling” has given way to what is being called the “sunroof” phenomenon, where the sunroof is sliding back to allow small numbers of women through, but the danger that the “sunroof” could be closed at any time is always present.

The statistics speak for themselves. Women are under-represented in leadership positions, but it behooves those who would want to change that to identify why that is so. Women, though they have always been represented as educators, have rarely been well represented in positions of influence and control in education (Gaskell, 1992). Gaskell points out that from mid-nineteenth century struggles for women to be accepted in

academies and universities, to early twentieth century struggles for women to finally be accepted as teachers within the school system, there have been tremendous efforts by women and men for greater equity in education. Why have their efforts not succeeded? A number of researchers have offered various models in an attempt to explain why women in education do not move up the administrative hierarchy.

### Conceptual Models

Over the past two decades, several interrelated conceptual models have been adapted from the social sciences and used to explain the under-representation of women in educational administration. Grady (1992) cites Estler's models which include: 1) women's place model, 2) discrimination model, and 3) meritocracy model. The women's place model looks for explanations not in women as individuals nor in educational systems, per se, but in society as a whole. Schmuck (1980) refers to this as the "social perspective" (p. 243) and Shakeshaft (1989) as the "social structure of society as the root cause of inequities" (p. 83). This model "assumes women and men have been taught to perceive their roles as distinct and separate" and that institutional and societal practices reinforcing these differences account for the lack of women in leadership positions (Estler, 1975, p. 379). In this model there are different socialization patterns for young boys and girls that are institutionally reinforced well into adulthood. As Schmuck explains, "The folkways and norms of the society coincide with different socialization patterns and channel women and men into different areas of work, which are assigned differential pay and status" (p. 244). The assumption of this model is that the absence of women in leadership positions is due to the different socialization patterns of men and women (Grady). This model suggests that in order for women to move into positions of administrative leadership, they must first defy societal norms and values.

The second model, the discrimination model, or to use Schmuck's (1980) terminology, the "organizational perspective," explains men's and women's differential career aspirations and achievements not as a function of different psychological

predispositions but as an effect of the limited opportunities for women that accompany systemic gender bias (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). It turns attention away from the individual to the educational system itself, with its complex of institutional structures, policies, and practices. According to this argument, women do not advance because men are given preferential treatment in both promotional and administrative hiring practices; that there are structural and systemic barriers that work against the advancement of all candidates who are not White males. This model assumes that “people adjust their aspirations to that which is possible and that women in education do not aspire to leadership as a result of limited opportunity” (Estler, 1975, p. 379). Estler’s model was supported by an examination of the number of years it took women to achieve the rank of principal or superintendent (Lyman & Speizer, as cited by Grady, 1992). Estler’s analysis showed that almost the same number of female and male teachers held the credentials to become administrators. However, the median number of years in teaching before appointment to the elementary principalship was 5 years for males and 15 years for females (Estler, 1975, pp. 363-385). This model helps us not only to identify overt discrimination, but also to reveal more subtle discriminatory practices.

The third model, the meritocracy model, assumes people are promoted according to their ability; that competency is the basis for promotion; and that men occupy the most senior positions in educational administration because they hold the best qualifications. This model implies that men are more competent than women because men are chosen for administrative positions so often. In the literature, this model is also compared to Schmuck's, (1980) "individual perspective", Shakeshaft's "internal barriers", and Ortiz &

Marshall's, (1988) "person-centered explanations". Despite these multiple labels, all seek to explain the persistent and continuing gender segregation in the teaching profession from a psychological orientation. That is, they look to women themselves for "cause", exploring such things as personal traits, characteristics, abilities, or qualities. Individual attitudes such as motivation, self-image, confidence, and aspirations also fall into this area (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). However, as Schmuck (1980) explains, when the focus is on person-centered causation, individuals are "held responsible for their own problems, with the solutions to those problems found in terms of changing the defect or weakness in the individual" (p. 9). This belief is often reflected in statements such as "they're not assertive enough"; "they don't want power"; "they lack self-confidence"; "they don't apply for the jobs". Although these statements may be valid for some women, such emphasis on women's so-called internal barriers lends itself to what Shakeshaft describes as a "blame the victim" perspective (1989, p. 82).

These three ways of conceptualizing the under-representation of women in educational leadership reflect longstanding debate over the causes and meanings of inequalities in the education profession. An assumption underlying each model is that continued gender asymmetries must be more thoroughly understood to be remedied (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996).

What follows in this paper is a brief examination of some of the barriers, both internal and external, which may contribute to this imbalance.

## Barriers

Shakeshaft (1989) refers to internal or psychological barriers as “those that can be overcome by individual change whereas external barriers require social and institutional change” (p. 82).

Some of the internal barriers ascribed to women include the following: lack of confidence, motivation, and aspirations; deficiencies in credentials and experience; and socialization and gender stereotyping. Each one of these will be reviewed in greater depth.

Low self-esteem, lack of confidence, motivation or aspiration are often reasons given for women’s low representation in positions of public leadership. There is some evidence to indicate that women lack confidence in applying for promotion and that, in contrast to their male colleagues, they only apply for jobs for which they are fully qualified (Shakeshaft, 1989). Research reported by Shakeshaft (1987, 1993) supports the perception that females tend to receive less constructive criticism than males in carrying out their work. As a result, it is suggested that they are less able to deal with negative comments, in effect taking them too personally and allowing their confidence to be unnecessarily damaged. Some would suggest that these psychological, internal or intrinsic barriers, however, are seldom more prevalent for women than for men, and it is not usually the woman’s psyche at fault, but the social structure of society that is the root cause of the inequities (Shakeshaft, 1989). Women may be aspiring to leadership positions, but systemic barriers can prevent them from acting upon these aspirations.

Women being deficient in credentials and experience has often been cited as an

influencing factor in women's under-representation in educational leadership, even though, time and again, research illustrates what a fallacy this is. In the past, women's lack of credentials may have been a factor. However, recent trends show quite dramatic increases in the number of women taking graduate level work at the masters' and doctoral level (Shakeshaft, 1987). For example, in 1986, women earned 60% of all MEd degrees and 51% of all PhDs in education in Canada (Dotzler, 1996). In, 1998, it is quite certain that these levels are even higher. The number of women in graduate school implies an increase in confidence, motivation and credentials. More and more women are becoming better qualified for the job but, unfortunately, this is not necessarily securing them positions in the administrative field. Grady's (1992) article "Women and Educational Administration: Certified, But Not Employed", cites studies that indicate the number of women in graduate programs in educational administration approaches or exceeds the number of male graduate students. However, other data reveal that a corresponding number of women do not hold administrative positions. In investigating why women with administration certification were not employed in an administrative position, Grady discovered in her study that a major impediment was women's unwillingness to apply for administrative positions. Further reasons cited were that they preferred their current positions and were not interested in administrative work. It appears that some well-qualified women have psychologically accepted a secondary role in their profession because they are concerned about their family or because of lack of confidence (Lange, as cited by Grady, 1992). Grady (1992) cites Lyman Speizer as saying that few women have been socialized to have a clear sense of a career track to develop

their leadership skills. They have also been denied the support, opportunity, and experience given to men. The findings from Grady's study suggest that there remains a psychological barrier, a subconscious occupational ceiling, that prevents women from actively pursuing success in the non-traditional roles of school administration. Thus, proportionately fewer women than men seek administrative positions, tending to disguise their ability and eliminate them from competition in a larger occupational sphere (Johnston, Yeakey, & Moore, as cited by Grady, 1992).

Socialization and gender stereotyping have also been cited as additional internal barriers faced by women. Mahoney (1993) cites Witaker and Lane as saying women are limited by social expectations, parental guidance and self aspiration. Men are more often socialized to persevere and seek professional success while women are socialized to nurture and support others as they assume the traditional role of mother and caretaker of the home. An abundance of literature indicates that the socialization process of females perpetuates notions of the inferiority of the female gender. Mahoney also cites Slauenwhite and Skok who contend that women have been socialized not to pursue a higher education, since society tends to believe they do not require as high an education as men. They continue that textbooks, the nature of student-teacher interaction and the different treatment that girls receive in comparison to boys, are some of the things that condition a woman to be cooperative, nurturing and dependent. Women have typically been perceived as being weak, and generally not robust enough for the difficult, intensely political nature of educational administration. It is encouraging, if not ironic, to note that some of these very qualities once seen as deficiencies are now being espoused as



qualities of effective administrators of the 90s.

In addition to socialization, society seems to use a double standard in describing female characteristics. Men might be called absentminded, but women are scatterbrained; men might be described as intellectually curious, but women are nosy; men are planners, but women are schemers; men are sensitive, women are emotional; men are managerial, but women are manipulative. Faced with attitudes such as these, it is no wonder it has been difficult for women to break through the glass ceiling into higher educational administrative positions. It is of critical importance that women be allowed to nurture the strengths they have. Female principals cannot be clones of their male counterparts. It is time to look at the strengths of both and determine how those strengths can help both men and women become the instructional leaders our schools so desperately need.

Another barrier to women achieving administrative positions, is said to be lack of geographical mobility. Watkins, Herrin, McDonald and Winter (1998) in their discussion of women in higher educational organizational cultures, suggest that few women have the luxury of relocating in order to attain job advancement. Ninety percent of women reported they would relocate only if their husbands secured employment. Seventy-five percent of men would relocate for a better job with or without the spouse's employment. In fact, our society "discourages family change for the sake of a wife's career" (Ezrati, as cited by Watkins et al., 1998, p. 107). This limited mobility perpetuates the limiting of career options for women.

Shapiro (1987) states that, "By focusing on internal and psychological factors, the

tendency is to blame the individual woman teacher for her lack of career mobility, while the system in which she works remains unexamined” (p. 172). This implies a need to critically examine the external barriers to career advancement for women. The external barriers to career advancement for women are pervasive. Grady cites Timpano (1992) as maintaining that sex discrimination is practiced through “filtering methods” that filter out qualified women. Timpano’s filtering methods include: “Recruiting filters”-- limiting job opening announcements to “within the district” when few if any women are certified as administrators; “Application filters”-- downgrading an applicant for a top administrative position by suggesting that she apply for a lesser administrative or teaching position; “Selection criteria filters”-- applying dual selection criteria by allowing men to skip one or more rungs on the career ladder but requiring women to climb each step; “Interview filters”-- questions during an interview such as, “Aren’t you concerned about returning home alone late in the evenings from meetings?”; and lastly, “Selection decision filters”-- rejecting a woman because she is aggressive, but hiring a man for the same reason. Research and statistics indicate that sexual discrimination, whether covert or overt, does exist in hiring practices in educational administration (Grady, 1992).

In addition to these “filters”, women face selection criteria, overt discrimination, and dual-work role expectations (Cairns, 1975). Dopp and Sloan (1986) found lack of female role models, resistance from persons in the community, and lack of central office experience to be common external obstacles to women aspiring to superintendent status. Shapiro (1987) offers more insight into the topic by suggesting that low levels of

encouragement for women to enter administrative posts, a limited number of role models, lack of networks and discriminatory hiring and promoting are important barriers to women seeking administrative placement in our school systems. The sheer number of external barriers to aspiring women administrators is breath-taking. It really is a small wonder that there are any female administrators at all! One of the external barriers that continues to reinforce the status quo is the hiring practice that still tends to be highly subjective and directed at those who appear to fit into the “old boys” network. This “old boys network” has been used to recruit, train and replace men in administration (Pigford & Tonnsen, 1993). Women are not privy to these “locker room discussions” where these networks are developed and where informal decisions and important contacts are made. With this lack of networks, women often do not face the same kind of encouragement to apply for administrative posts.

It has been said that men often act as "gatekeepers" to the profession, excluding women:

Through all the stages of preparation- from encouraging teachers to seek administrative positions to final selection of administrative candidates- the chances are that a man will be preferred to a woman. The exclusion of women is self-perpetuating, despite active effort to change institutional practices (Schmuck, as cited by Coleman 1994, p. 179).

Schmuck, as cited by Coleman (1996) refers to the “gender overlay” of American high schools that subtly favours young male teachers. For example, male principals interact more with young male than young female teachers, and young men tend to be given more opportunities to serve on committees and, therefore, begin to “exhibit those

qualities that will recommend them for further responsibility” (Coleman, 1994, p. 185). Coleman also observes that male teachers may also benefit more from an informal level of “mentoring” than their female equivalents. Male principals tend to sponsor male proteges.

Additionally, many school boards and selection teams are male-dominated.

Mahoney (1993) cites Kristjanson in pointing out that when such selection boards have to choose between a man and a woman, both equally competent, it is more likely the man will be chosen. If women are chosen it is usually for elementary principalships in small rural areas or for primarily junior administrative ranks. Thus the “glass ceiling” remains intact.

When women are relegated to administrative posts in small rural areas, what is the impact of administering in a rural setting? What are some of the unique challenges these women face? Are women more or less successful in rural versus urban schools? Due to the lack of information on the topic of women in rural principalships, it was difficult to find the answers to these intriguing questions. However, one article did shed some light on the topic by examining extant knowledge about the location and contexts of women’s and men’s superintendencies. Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) in their article, “Retaining Women in the Superintendency: The Location Matters”, suggests that there is a strong connection between district size and the nature of superintendents’ work. The data point to the problems of limited resources and opportunities for superintendents in very small, rural communities. These include low revenues because of rural economic pressures, expanded job demands because of limited administrative staff, the physical

remoteness of peers and formal support systems, and general feelings of “being behind the times” in terms of innovative instructional or organizational practices (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Furthermore, the data reveal that as district size increased, so did satisfaction levels. Glass, as cited by Tallerico and Burstyn, (1996) indicates “superintendents in smaller districts are generally less satisfied than those in larger districts” (p. 50) because superintendents in smaller districts “perform many tasks they believe are inappropriate to their positions, training and interests, and they have little or no support in doing them” (p. 51). Their disenchantment arose, also, from fatigue, caused by long hours at work, the need to “do it all” with scant assistance, coupled with the stress of coping with multiple roles as school superintendent, homemaker, wife, and mother.

While this study looked at the exiting and retention of superintendents, the same problems identified in this study could easily be experienced by female principals who are often placed in small rural schools. An assignment of women to these smaller postings, which were once thought to be the “perfect” training ground, may in fact hinder women’s chances of a successful principalship, as placements in unpromising leadership settings impede not only success but also retention. Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) suggest that there needs to be an examination of the kinds of positions to which women educational leaders have gained entry. Women need to be given opportunities in suburban, medium to large-sized, stable or increasing-enrollment districts, instead of the “small, starter districts” that are “good places” for women to begin their administrative careers, as the educational traditional lore would have us believe. Clearly, further

research into this whole area is necessary.

Researchers have also examined higher institutions of learning, and why advancement for women in this realm of education may be limited. Watkins, Herrin, McDonald and Winter (1998) points out that anti-nepotism policies are widespread in institutions of higher learning. These policies appear to be inordinately discriminatory to wives, usually due to the fact that husbands are employed first, and many institutions forbid the hiring of any relative.

In addition to discriminatory hiring practices, and lack of networks, the lack of role models has been cited as another impediment. Women do not have access to a large number of appropriate role models, and, as a result, women may not even give administrative posts consideration. As one superintendent mentions, “women’s paths into administration are often unplanned and serendipitous” (Restine, 1993). Having female role models would definitely help to encourage other young aspirants to follow suit.

Coleman (1996) helps explain the barriers to women's career progress as constraints experienced through socially defined roles outside the work situation. The constraints considered in this section arise from the socially defined expectations that women will take responsibility for domestic matters including childcare. For most women who might seek management responsibility in education, it is still likely that they are the partner who has most responsibility for domestic arrangements:

The increase of women's activity rates in the labour market has not been paralleled by a substantial increase in the domestic work done by men. Over the last ten years, men's daily contribution to domestic activities has increased by only 4 minutes (Ruus, as cited by Coleman,

1996).

The role conflict of motherhood and career has also been identified as an external barrier to women's entry into administrative positions. Family commitments and responsibilities seldom interrupt a career path for a man, enabling him to move up the ladder far quicker. By contrast, child-rearing and family responsibilities mean that a woman's preparatory stages for administration are condensed into a shorter period of time than her male counterpart (Mahoney, 1993). Demographics seem to support this, as women in administrative positions tend to be much older, often having delayed their entry into administration due to child-rearing. Research on career paths summarized by Schmuck shows that: "Women who were administrators tended to be older, had had more teaching experience, were less often married, less often had children or had older children than their male counterparts" (1986, p.177). Interestingly enough, Ryder (1994) in a small survey she conducted, found 42% of female administrators surveyed have had the responsibility of raising and caring for a family while being an administrator. One hundred percent of the female administrators surveyed who have children, conceived them before securing the position as an administrator. The dual responsibilities for many women of domestic duties and child-care while managing their career, and especially one that includes the complexity of an administrative position, may deter some women.

Lack of career planning has also been noted as a potential encumbrance to women pursuing administrative positions. Recent research of both male and female teachers has shown the career paths of women proceeding more slowly than for men,

whether or not they had children. This was despite the fact that generally the career experience of the women head teachers was wider than that of the men (Evetts, as cited by Coleman, 1996). There is also evidence to show that women in education, and in management generally, do not develop a career plan: such lack of forward planning might be considered detrimental to their potential progress (Davidson & Cooper, as cited by Coleman, 1996). It seems many female administrators develop their career plans as their careers progress, rather than aiming at administration from the start. Male teachers, in contrast, often enter the education field with the intention of going into administration.

Career breaks for childbirth and child-care are detrimental to the career development of women in education (Coleman, 1996). Career breaks may result from the decision to move to part-time work where promotion prospects are rare. Additionally, demotion may occur on re-entry to a career. Coleman illustrates this point with an Equal Opportunities Commission survey carried out in 1980 which found that demotion in a career pattern leading to headship was encountered by three times as many teaching mothers as male heads. Weindling and Earley, as cited by Coleman (1996) illustrate this in their findings:

Gatekeepers may have a perception of career breaks for child-care as having no value in terms of training or experience, whereas career breaks for reasons other than children are tolerated or valued: Men rarely experienced demotion after absence from teaching even when they had worked outside the educational system (p. 94).

Haddad (1987) also points out that more and more frequently, women attempt to



use part-time teaching as a device enabling them to combine family responsibilities with a career in teaching. In 1985-86, women made up 91.6% of part-time teachers in Saskatchewan. Haddad further illustrates that this has consequences for all aspects of the working lives of these teachers, especially their opportunities to move into administrative positions. One can only speculate on the consequences of part-time teaching on the “long-term economic welfare of women, such as the period of service required to receive benefits, income continuance, Canada Pension Plan, educational leave opportunities and so on” (Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, 1986).

Another fact that may inhibit or interfere with women advancing up the administrative ladder is heterosexuality and our unspoken beliefs about men and women working together. In a study of hiring practices of male superintendents, it was discovered that there was a lack of comfort in hiring an “attractive” women for reasons ranging from the fear of others perceiving the relationship as unseemly, to the worry of causing marital friction, to the uncertainty of what their own feelings would be toward the attractive female subordinate (Shakeshaft, 1989). Because of the lack of comfort men in school administration (and society as a whole) have with issues of sexuality, many male superintendents concluded that it was not worth the risks to hire an attractive woman (and for many that translated into any woman) into a position with which the superintendent worked closely. Issues of sexuality may also act as a constraint for women in certain circumstances.

Shakeshaft (1987) suggests yet another powerful barrier facing women is that of androcentrism.

Androcentrism is the practice of viewing the world and shaping reality from a male perspective. It is the elevation of the masculine to the level of the universal and the ideal and the honoring of men and the male principal above women and the female. This perception creates a belief in male superiority and a masculine value system in which female values, experiences and behaviour are viewed as inferior (p. 94).

This androcentric bias has resulted in a stereotypical view of leadership; leadership that espouses traditional male characteristics: high control, unemotional, analytical, competitive, tough, rational, and charismatic. This androcentric world view has fostered many barriers to women wanting to move up the administrative ladder, because the characteristics and qualities most often associated with women are not valued as highly as those of males. This view, however, is changing as modern leadership theories are now including a more “feminine element”.

### Overcoming the Barriers

To this point, this literature review has been focused quite extensively on both internal and external barriers that influence the representation of women in educational administration. Some of these barriers, while not completely removed, are beginning to crumble. A number of ways to overcome those barriers have been noted and one of these ways is for female aspirants to have a mentor. Holt (1981) suggests that mentors, both male and female, may be the single most important factor in an administrator's career development. "Mentors can suggest strategies for career mobility, open doors, initiate contact, and make recommendations" (p. 23). Despite the benefits of mentoring, research indicated that there seems to be a lack of available male or female mentors for women. When males do act as mentors, they tend to sponsor male proteges, or someone who is most like them (Ehrich, as cited by Coleman, 1996). One reason why mentoring may not be readily accessible to women may be that women don't "fit" into the comfort zone of male mentors (Fleming, 1991). Another reason may be that women are still the unknown quantity and are not perceived by some men as loyal or trustworthy and, therefore, may be seen as a great risk factor for the mentor. Fleming points out another problem of men choosing women as proteges is the sexual connotation that is attached to this relationship or the threat of actual sexual harassment in the form of sexual bribery. In addition, research does indicate that male teachers may benefit more from an informal level of "mentoring" than their female equivalents. Clearly, mentoring when it does happen is one way to break down the barriers that women face, but it is not such a simple matter.

Another way of overcoming barriers that is suggested in the literature is through

networking. Networks provide a widening circle of personal and professional references who can assist in the promotion of women as candidates for positions. Networks can provide information through newsletters or word of mouth on systems that have job openings and contacts, offer advice on benefits of positions, salary, history and background of school boards (Rees, 1992). Women need to actively seek out networks with men and other women to gain visibility, information, advice and receive moral support as they pursue their careers (Rees).

Various American networks such as Sex Equity in Education Leadership (SEEL) and Women in School Administration (WISA) have been established. In Canada, the Federation of Women Teachers' Association of Ontario (FWTAO) provides different types of networking opportunities ranging from courses to prepare for the different leadership positions, to conferences, resource booklets, and a regular newsletter. Additionally, The Canadian Teachers' Federation organizes an annual Status of Women conference. As Irby and Brown (1998) stated in their study of women's support organizations, "women need time to grow together professionally and to learn from other women". Schmuck as cited by Irby and Brown (1998) suggests that,

...there is something special and celebratory for same sex members of all races and ethnic groups to come together. Perhaps one of the most compelling and powerful experiences that women have in the conferences and workshops for women is the camaraderie, the shared unspoken assumptions, and the revelation of one's experience which is understood (p. 61).

It is critical that support organizations and groups for women administrators continue to

grow and flourish.

Technology affords another means by which women can network with one another. In the process of researching this paper, I found a particularly helpful website on the Internet, an international networking site for women in the workplace. This website entitled “Advancing Women in Leadership”, which has been in operation since May 1, 1996, provides electronic networking for women around the world. Networking via the Internet and electronic mail has far-reaching implications, especially for women facing the kind of isolation and alienation that is sometimes experienced in geographically remote locations.

Gaining academic credentials is another way for women to overcome barriers to moving up the administrative ladder. Evidence suggests that women are attending graduate school in record numbers. Preparing for the role of principal, especially in terms of university training, has been identified as a key in breaking down the barriers facing women. Hopefully, the trend of increased enrollment in graduate programs by women will begin to have an effect on the serious under-representation of women in leadership. It is important to remember, however, that to date the results have not been that encouraging.

A more formal way to decrease the barriers facing women seeking advancement in educational administration is through employment equity programs or affirmative action initiatives. Employment equity programs involve the systematic monitoring of who holds what jobs so that areas of concern, such as fair and representative work force and equality of treatment and outcome, become public (Dotzler, 1993). It is important to

note that although hiring can be mandated by institutions, acceptance cannot.

Promoting gender equity in the classroom is another way to help remove barriers for women. Girls are under-represented in compensatory educational programs and extra curricular programs. They are misrepresented and under-represented in curriculum, texts, pictures and other displays (Dotzler, 1993). Female students' limited participation in mathematics, science and technology restricts their opportunities in areas which dominate change and drive social and economic trends (Robertson, 1988). Furthermore, our boys and girls need to see women in positions of authority in our schools. The Economic Council of Canada, in the 1992 document A Lot to Learn points out: "The lack of women in positions of authority in our education system presents an unbalanced view of the possibilities available to women in the eyes of children, young women and young men" (p. 20).

Moreover, educators must be cognizant of the "hidden curriculum" and the devastating effects that gender inequality in school can have on girls. Flynn and Chambers (1996) outline various steps to a bias-free classroom. Some of them include: set and enforce rules about speaking in turn so boys do not monopolize attention and dominate class discussions; assign seating to mix boys and girls; integrate assigned classroom tasks so that boys are not the only ones to move, lift and do other physical chores; use cooperative learning to foster cross-sex grouping and noncompetitive interaction; be aware of gender stereotyping in textbooks and materials and discuss it; use gender-inclusive language; try to balance curriculum materials and displays to provide role models for both sexes; and invite guest speakers who have nontraditional

occupations. By doing some of the simple steps outlined above, educators can ensure our girls and boys are benefitting from a gender inclusive atmosphere in our classrooms and schools.

What can individual aspirants do to increase their chances of securing an administrative position? In the literature, many authors have suggestions for equal access and treatment in educational administration. Wesson (1998) outlines the following nine useful tips:

1. **Know Yourself.** Be honest and objectively evaluate your strengths, abilities and aspirations.
2. **Be Prepared.** Credentials and work experience are important.
3. **Analyze and Strategize.** Analyze your career situations and strategize your career moves so that each move will maximize the potential for achieving your goals.
4. **Negative Work Experiences.** Work at turning negative experiences into positive factors to be utilized in reaching your goals.
5. **Critical Factors Affecting Advancement.** Be aware of three critical factors that affect advancement: structural barriers, role compatibility and organizational fit.
6. **Affiliate.** Do not be trapped by historical divisions between races and genders; join state and national professional groups (i.e. National Association of Secondary School Principals-NASSP).
7. **Share Goals.** No one can be successful in a vacuum. It takes support from others as well as support to others to be successful.
8. **Find a Mentor and Be a Mentor.**
9. **Network.** Networking is an information giving and receiving system. It is the process of developing and using contact for information advice and support.

Assuming it is not the sole responsibility of the female aspirants in the

educational system to change perceptions of female suitability, the institution itself, school and board, have an important role to play in the support, preparation and promotion of women (and any other under-represented group). Rees (1991) has synthesized suggestions from the employment equity literature and summarized them into the following list of suggestions for the institution:

1. The chief executive officer must have both responsibility and accountability for employment equity.
2. Identify job categories revealing disproportionate representation target goals and strategies to rectify the gender imbalance.
3. There should be consciousness-raising for the school board hiring officials.
4. Positions and requisite qualifications for those positions must be described accurately.
5. The entire staff should be involved in consciousness-raising about employment equity.
6. Education officers must encourage women to apply for line positions.
7. As women gain the necessary qualifications, their names should be incorporated into the pool of qualified candidates for positions of added responsibility.
8. Employers should consider giving preferential treatment to women in hiring and promoting female candidates for positions of added responsibility.
9. Principals and supervisory officers must give women the opportunity to be in roles where they can begin to demonstrate their expertise, stretch their leadership ability, gain relevant experience, and gain visibility within the educational system.
10. Incorporate decentralized school decision-making, so that ad hoc teams solve problems to accomplish specific projects.
11. Support systems for women should be established within school districts.



12. Women should be supported, not only with words, but with concrete examples--financial assistance to attend courses, consideration of child-care responsibilities, adequate release time etc.

13. Tasks associated with line positions should be appraised, and the constraints imposed by care giving and family life should be taken into consideration.

14. Educational jurisdictions should develop and institute an induction process for new school administrators.

Although it would be unreasonable for a school board to undertake all of these suggestions, it is a comprehensive list of ideas that educational institutions can use to incorporate into their structure where appropriate.

An understanding of the barriers and strategies for overcoming barriers to gender equity assumes an understanding of what exactly constitutes “gender equity”. In an occupational sector where the overwhelming majority of workers are female, as in the case of teaching, should equal representation in management positions be the goal, or should women become administrators in the same proportion as they are teachers (Riehl & Byrd, 1997)? Depending on the definition that is used, one’s view of whether gender balance is achieved or not will be so influenced.

### Women's Qualities

The research and literature cited to this point in this review confirm that women have long been denied their rightful place in administrative positions. If women *should* in fact be in leadership positions, is it fair to ask, “*Do they have what it takes?*” “*Do they have qualities that contribute to success as a principal?*” I believe it is and I believe the answer is women not only have what it takes to be in leadership positions, they have what it takes to do such jobs well.

Characteristics that have been traditionally viewed as being “female” have long been regarded as being less valued than those characteristics traditionally associated with males. Terms such as nurturing, sensitive, empathetic, intuitive, compromising, caring, cooperative, and accommodative are often used when referring to women. Rather than seeing these qualities as being “weak”, however, some current leadership theories celebrate this “feminine” model of leadership.

Mahoney (1993) cites Shakeshaft as saying that school environments led by females tend to have a teaching and learning focus, are less concerned with standardized achievement, and tend to be close communities where individuals feel cared about. Kristjanson, as cited by Mahoney (1993), mentions that empowerment is the main goal of feminist style leadership. Women seem to be used to empowering people, talking to people and allowing them to decide. Many women do not tend to lead by the once favoured autocratic “bossing” style, but rather by inspiring and empowering people to find solutions to problems.

Helgesen (1990) in her insightful book, The Female Advantage: Women's Ways

of Leading, studied the strategies and organization theories of four successful female leaders. Helgesen proposes that there are several differences in the ways men and women typically approach management. Women see themselves at the center of a network, or “web of inclusion”, where communication, or the flow of information throughout the organization, is so vital. They are concerned with keeping relationships in good standing, and are able to pace themselves and integrate their work and home life. Women exhibit strengths in planning and communication, human relations and skills, and the ability to focus on ends as well as means. Women’s experiences and expectations as women and mothers, in addition to their acquired management and human relations skills, often make them better managers (Helgesen).

Helgesen (1990) also discusses how women use the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development. She concludes that women’s ways of leading emphasize the role of voice over that of vision. A vision may exist alone in the mind of person and can be a vision without being communicated to anyone else. But a voice cannot be a voice unless someone is there to hear it; it finds its form in the process of interaction. This suggests that women engage in two-way processes of communication by listening and speaking; a process in interaction and interconnectedness, rather than the quest for authority and autonomy.

Shakeshaft (1989) documents the strengths that women offer educational systems: “Women enter education with clear educational goals, supported by a value system that stresses service, caring, and relationships” (p.197). Women are seen to spend more time interacting with students and staff, more time in discussion about programming, viewing

their job from the perspective of master-teacher or educational leader as opposed to a managerial-industrial perspective. Their democratic, participatory style of communicating and decision making leads to a greater sense of community and inclusiveness.

Shakeshaft (1989) further explains that women's commitment to education is evidenced by their academic preparation and increased membership in professional associations; their greater knowledge of teaching methods and techniques, and their focus on teaching and learning, methods, techniques, programs and progress that stress achievement within a supportive atmosphere. Because women enter administration later than men, and have generally taught longer than men, female administrators not only have more experience in the classrooms, but they also have more knowledge of curriculum, qualities that are vital for an administrator.

Ortiz and Marshall (1988) summarize extensive research documenting female leaders' strengths in management and teaching and their emphasis on instructional leadership. In a study of 142 female educators aspiring to positions of leadership, the authors note "an overriding concern for children's welfare propels the women in this study to become school leaders." Similarly, Gaskell's (1992) work shows women tend to be more nurturing, less hierarchical and more consultative as administrators.

Women are capable in the areas needed to strengthen our educational organizations. Research in the United States has shown that in schools and districts with female administrators, achievement scores in reading and math are higher, there is less violence, and staff morale is higher (Mahoney, 1993). Schuster (1989), in a national

study in the U.S., reported data from 183 superintendents in 1986 and compared data from a survey of 762 superintendents in 1984. Female superintendents scored significantly higher than their male counterparts on every measure: better academic preparation, more knowledge of literature, more hours spent on the job, and more teaching experience. Sergiovanni summarizes this nicely when he states, “that while women are under-represented in principalships, they are over-represented in successful principalships” (Brandt, 1992, p. 48).

## Perspectives on Leadership Theory & Current Research

Women definitely have what it takes, and they have much to offer in educational leadership. How does feminine leadership fit into current theories of educational leadership?

Much of what we have come to know about leadership has been from a patriarchal, hierarchical, and androcentric perspective. These past biases can be seen in Weber's early theories of power and authority, whereby a person was seen to have power when that individual was able to get others to obey unwillingly; authority was seen to be at work when orders were obeyed voluntarily. For Weber, living in a period from 1864 to 1920, gender was not a consideration in power and authority.

Fiedler's theories emerging in the 1960s were concerned with effective work groups. He identified two styles of leadership: task-motivated and relationship-motivated. He concluded that both leadership styles can be effective, contingent upon the situation and the task to be completed. Hence his theory became known as the contingency approach to leadership (Rossler, 1992). Shakeshaft (1989) criticizes Fiedler's lack of attention to gender in that the groups that he studied were primarily male-dominated (airforce combat crews, basketball teams and boards of directors).

Blake and Mouton in the late 1970s developed a managerial grid that provided a framework for understanding and applying effective management (Rossler, 1992). The grid accounted for two managerial behaviours— concern for production and concern for people. Although the managerial grid has been implemented successfully in North America, Asia and Europe, the emphasis has been on business. Barrett and Yoder pointed

out a lack of effective research on school leader effectiveness (Rossler, 1992).

Since that time, there has been a flood of research on effective schools and effective leadership. One may ask, “What does gender have to do with leadership?” Until the last ten years, research has been dominated by the male experience (Shakeshaft, 1989). That experience was beneficial to the male perspective, but left out half the picture: the female view. Current literature now focuses on a new emerging leadership known as collaborative leadership. Collaborative leadership involves staff involvement and development, greater equality through a more equitable distribution of power among staff members, vision building, collegiality, role-modeling by the principal, and an atmosphere conducive to risk-taking. Shantz (1993) cites Fullan and Hargreaves’ concept of collaborative leadership as educators working together to critically examine current practices, searching for better alternatives to improve these practices while constantly assessing their worth, and developing implementation plans to ensure use of the new practice. The characteristics of female administrators that were referred to earlier in the paper have a striking similarity to those of the ideal collaborative leader.

Hargreaves (1992) synthesizes it best when he says:

Collaborative cultures have deeply “feminine” characteristics to them. They are spontaneous, evolutionary, and unpredictable. They intermix the private and public, openly placing teachers’ work in the context of their wider lives, biographies, and purposes. Such cultures do not mesh well with the control-centered, accountability-inclined, and efficiency-oriented interests of (mainly male) administrators (p. 235).

This mesh between female leadership traits and the collaborative culture is demonstrated

through numerous studies. A literature review by Ortiz and Marshall (1988) spanning twenty years of investigation, reported that women exerted their leadership interacting with members who bear primary responsibility for the conduct of the organization (i.e. teachers). They indicated that women are oriented towards caring rather than rights.

Shantz (1993) cites Porat in characterizing female school administrators as bright, highly competent, intense, and committed to continuing their personal growth. She indicated that they tend to be direct, practical, able to deal with detail, sensitive to personality clashes, intuitive about possible problems, willing to work hard at maintaining relationships within the organization and tend to be people-oriented. Again this highlights a caring, nurturing style of leadership that focuses on people.

Shantz (1993) also cites Marshall and Mitchell who state that female administrators have a greater preference for activities related to instructional leadership and communication. Female administrators frequently avoid authoritarian solutions, and use a problem solving process instead. As mentioned earlier, women are seen to encourage empowerment of teachers, involve teachers in decision making and provide immediate feedback on performance.

Gips, as cited by Shantz (1993), indicated that women's emphasis on human relationships, care for individuals, responsibility, equity, fairness, inclusion, interdependence, and cooperation provided a democratic atmosphere. Democratic cultures are the very places where collaborative leadership flourishes.

Who is best able to take on the challenge of creating collaborative cultures in schools? It will be done by leaders who are concerned about people and willing to



empower others, who are intuitive about possible problems, and who are willing to problem solve. Furthermore, it will be done by leaders who implement staff development programs to meet teachers' needs, and emphasize good instructional practices. In other words, it will be done by individuals who are collaborative and promote collaborative cultures. For too long, women's abilities to do these very things have been overlooked. Only recently, has there been an enhanced awareness that the characteristics of female administrators have a remarkable similarity to the characteristics of the ideal collaborative leader.

Recent studies do show that where once the leadership abilities of women were scorned, they are now celebrated. Recent school reform efforts which include transformational leadership, site-based management, empowerment of teachers, and other forms of decentralized decision-making now celebrate the stereotypical characteristics of women school administrators. In fact, contemporary theories and studies of leadership indicate that the leadership style used by most women is becoming the dominant model of leadership (Hudson & Rea, 1998). Hudson and Rea conducted a study which asked the question: if collaborative, participatory leadership styles are valued, has the attitude toward women elementary and secondary school administrators changed to the positive?

The results of their study show that female and male teachers want the same qualities in a principal, regardless of the principal's gender. Teachers want administrators who are good communicators, good listeners, knowledgeable of curriculum and instruction, personable, problem solvers who share power and credit as

well as seek variety of input. An interesting question asked in the study was whether or not female or male principals had legitimate authority. A majority of the participants felt that males do have legitimate authority, but female principals do not. Female and male teachers equally say that women have to work to earn their authority. These results suggest that female principals in the 90s still have to prove themselves.

Shepard (1998) states that perception is reality to the person who is doing the perceiving. A particular perception may not be the truth but that is not of primary concern to the person making the decision. Perception is what an individual understands or believes to be true. In looking at the whole area of perception, Shepard cites a study that addressed the perception of superintendents and school board presidents regarding the employment characteristics of women who are seeking positions of educational administration. The question was asked: "Were there still perceptions held by superintendents and school board presidents that are influencing the hiring of women?" (Shepard, 1998). The results of this research indicates that the differences in perceived employment characteristics of men and women have changed since 1978. The change has been a positive change toward women. However, the change, although significant in many areas, has not been significant in all areas. Overall, the change has been greater for superintendents than for school board presidents in the four different areas of characteristics being surveyed: work attitudes and habits, interest and motivation, temperament and aptitudes, knowledge and skills. Superintendents will continue to be key participants in efforts to improve women's representation in administration, as the study results indicate, because of their more positive perception of women.

Superintendents need to be encouraged to support women and to educate school board members as to the capabilities of women as educational administrators.

Kruger (1996) in a study of heads in Europe, found that the gender variable has significant effects on leadership performance. Some of Kruger's findings are contradictory to previous literature on the differences between male and female administrators. The study found that many assumptions and prejudices have to be rejected or questioned. For instance, they found that female heads do not rate the "consideration" dimension more highly than men, and they do not seem to be more democratic in their leadership style. Moreover, they do not feel more isolated as a leader, they do not feel more powerless, and they have more confidence in themselves as a leader than men. Clearly, these findings are in sharp contrast to what much of the literature indicates. However, there were some similarities to previous research as in the case of female heads being more strongly oriented towards pedagogical leadership than men. Men, on the other hand, tended to have a more administrative focus in this study. If indeed pedagogical leadership is one of the characteristics of effective schools, then it is imperative that the people tending to demonstrate these traits be given not only the opportunity but the encouragement to apply for school administrative positions.

Kruger (1996), in a comparison between data on secondary and adult education, found that it is the combination of gender and school culture that determines differences in leadership between men and women. Kruger researched adult education, which was deemed as a "female culture" and vocational education, which was deemed as a "male culture", and generally found that managers in "gender-own cultures", female or male,

were able to produce better quality than managers in “gender-opposite cultures”. It may be said that stereotypes about good leadership are different in “female” and “male” cultures and evoke gender differences. Kruger emphasizes that we should be transforming schools into “female-male” cultures; we need to remold our schools into organizations where both women and men can feel at home.

Kruger (1996) also points out that decentralization which is being applied in many European countries may accompany an emphasis on administrative rather than pedagogical leadership. One might speculate on the effect of such educational reforms as site-based management in Alberta schools. While many educators and policy-makers espouse this trend as being empowering and collaborative in nature, it is possible that this kind of restructuring could lead to women not being able to use their leadership qualities. Does site-based management encourage school boards to emphasize financial, administrative skills in a prospective administrator? If so, plainly, women with their strength in pedagogical matters may be overlooked.

In a meta-analytic review of 50 studies that compared the leadership styles of principals (Eagly, Karau, Johnson, 1992) the researchers discovered, as had Kruger, that while female principals scored somewhat higher than male principals on task-oriented style, there was less evidence for a sex difference on measures of interpersonally-oriented style. However, they did find that the tendency to lead democratically or autocratically produced the largest sex difference, with female principals adopting a more democratic or participative style and a less autocratic or directive style than male principals. In fact, the researchers go on to point out that it is not even known whether

female principals' relatively democratic style is either an advantage or disadvantage. "Whether the typical school environment makes a particular type of leadership style optimal is another unknown, despite some authors' claims that female-stereotypic leadership styles are especially effective in educational administration" (p. 94). They do caution that perhaps people's expectations that women would administer schools differently from men may account in part for women's relatively sparse representation in the principal role. People's beliefs that a female principal would proceed differently from a male principal may cause hiring officials to hesitate to choose a woman, perhaps because of uncertainty about how a school would fare with a principal who uses a less familiar style. Eagly et al. (1992) conclude by cautioning those who select principals against assuming that candidates' sex has any bearing on their potential to be an effective principal.

With all the discussion of the effect of gender on leadership, Rossler (1992) suggests that perhaps what is needed is an androgynous style of leadership. Androgyny is "a neutral state in which an individual combines the culturally valued character of males and females. An androgynous person exhibits both masculine and feminine traits as the situation demands" (Doyle, as cited by Rossler, 1992, p. 357). We might say then that there is value in both the masculine and feminine styles of leadership. The leaders of tomorrow need to balance these styles to promote more effective work relationships. Women have something to contribute to leadership. Males can learn from the female experience just as females learned from males all these years. Leaders need to have balance: the traditional skills of planning, organizing, and directing, as well as the

interpersonal competencies (Sargeant, as cited by Rossler, 1992).

It seems fair to conclude that despite the fact that males and females do equally competent jobs, women are under-represented in educational administration. If today's educators continue to do only what has been done in the past, education will not be much further ahead years from now when daughters and sons will be in the same position as men and women today. Perhaps the first challenge is to make sure that the best people are hired for leadership, but through equitable methods.

### CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology that was used in the research for this culminating project was the case study approach. The case study approach allows a qualitative researcher to gather a large amount of information on a few cases, delve into greater depth, and extract more details on the cases being examined (Neuman, 1997). I chose this method of research in order to immerse myself in a few selected cases. The intent was to gather an in-depth perspective of the life of female rural administrators as seen through their eyes. I felt that other data collecting techniques such as the mail-out survey would not have generated such rich description and insight.

With any methodology there are certain limitations. While the size of my sample could be viewed as a limitation because it would prevent many overall generalizations to the larger context, I do believe that various readers can make connections to many portions of the data. Another limitation of the study may be the lack of triangulation, the viewing of something from different angles or viewpoints to get a fix on its true position (Newman, 1997). Because each administrator was self-reporting, I had no way of verifying or confirming the information that each administrator gave me. However, I do feel that my personal background experience was beneficial in assessing the data.

For my subjects, I selected three female rural administrators with fairly diverse backgrounds from southwestern Saskatchewan. All three are principals of small rural schools with student enrollments of between 120 and 174. To ensure anonymity, I will be referring to the three subjects in my case study as Principal A, Principal B, and Principal

C. Two of the three women (Principals A and B) are administrators of K-12 schools, and the other (Principal C) is a principal of a K-9 school as well as being responsible for a satellite school for behaviourally challenged students. The schools are located in primarily agricultural communities of populations ranging from 400-750. All but one of the administrators lives in the school community. The other administrator (Principal C) lives in a neighbouring city.

All three of the administrators are at various stages in their career. Principal A is in her nineteenth year of teaching and her second year of administration, Principal B is in her thirty-third year of teaching and in her thirteenth year of administration, and, finally, Principal C is in her fifteenth year of teaching and, of those, she has spent eight in administration. Principal A is single, Principal B has grown children, and Principal C has a young family.

I collected the data for the three case studies using an interview method. I tape-recorded the interviews to eliminate copious note-taking, and at their completion, the interviews were later transcribed. The interview schedule consisted of fifteen questions with an opportunity at the end of the interview for further general discussion. The questions were initially descriptive in nature followed by structural and contrast questions.

Upon completion of the interviews, I analyzed the data for common themes or threads. I also looked for discrepant information, the sort of unique experiences that are revealed in only one set of data. Once the themes were identified for the individual case studies, I completed a comparative analysis of all three cases to determine commonalities



and differences.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

In the initial question of the interview, I attempted to ascertain facts regarding each participant's professional background. I inquired about such things as their duties, how long they had been teaching, and how long they had been in administration and other general background information.

The second question of the interview focused on how the three respective women came to be in administration. All three of the subjects responded that they "kind of fell into it". They had never really pursued the idea of going into administration, until certain life experiences prompted them to do so. Principal A explained how a former male principal had suggested she apply for a principalship that had just opened up, while Principal B revealed that she had been applying for a regular teaching job when the director suggested she should consider the principalship. Principal C applied for a job opening for an administration/special education position. Because of her training, she felt she could do the special education portion and thought she would give administration an attempt. This particular woman did indicate because her mother was a strong role model, "the gender thing was never an issue with me, because I was brought up understanding that women could fit into these types of roles. So I never really thought administration was not something befitting a female."

Next, I attempted to determine what strong qualities these three female rural administrators felt they possessed. Principal A mentioned that organizational abilities, her ability to get along with others and her graduate level courses were what she

considered strengths. She went on to mention that she used her business background and her business education training extensively. She concluded that another skill she utilized was her assertiveness. Principal B said that she was tremendously organized and punctual, and that her background in commerce assisted her a great deal in budgeting and finance. Finally, Principal C mentioned that her relationships with staff and students were her strongest qualities. She felt that she was trustworthy, reliable, approachable and fair.

The fourth question in the interview attempted to ascertain what the three administrators felt were important qualities for women leaders in education. One of the administrators, Principal A, replied, "Why would this be any different from men?" She further elaborated on this particular point and said that she felt treated fairly and equally, and was accepted for who she was. Principal B also questioned whether these important qualities would be any different for anyone else, and did not really feel that it would be any different for a woman or a man. She then went on to say that she felt she encountered more of an, "I disagree with you because you're a woman" attitude than a man ever would. However, she felt that as the years have gone by, she had not experienced that nearly as often as when she first started. She recalled in her first year as an administrator, an elderly man said to her when her husband took a different job out of town, "How are you going to make all those decisions with your husband gone?" She felt this sentiment, however, had subsided over the years as people in her community had become accustomed to her.

To this particular interview question, Principal C answered that she felt women

leaders in education definitely had to be hard workers. “By that I mean we have to work harder than the average male in order to be half as good, just because that perception is out there.” Hand in hand with being hard working, this woman felt that women leaders needed to be highly dedicated. She also mentioned the challenge of balancing her domestic responsibilities with her professional responsibilities. Because women tend to be the primary care-givers of their children, she sensed that people around her monitored her very closely; she felt sensitive to being judged in that area. She described it as, “You’re really put in a double-bind: if you spend too much time with your family, you’re not as dutiful to your job, but if you don’t spend enough time with your child, you’re not a good mother. I feel very scrutinized. I feel that everyone is watching me.” She felt that managing her domestic responsibilities was not a huge challenge for her personally, as she had a very supportive spouse who shared the domestic workload, but felt it could be a large deterrent for some women.

The fifth question also dealt with personal qualities. I attempted to determine what the three women felt was the strongest personal quality that had helped them most in their leadership position. All three of the administrators answered differently. Principal A thought it was her outgoing personality. She commented that she had high self-esteem, confidence, and had the ability to laugh easily, which she felt made her more approachable. She seemed to feel that her people skills were her greatest asset. Principal B answered that it was determination or perseverance. While she did not elaborate on that particular point, I do know personally that this particular principal has withstood some challenging situations in recent years, which may account for her choice of

adjectives. For example, her school moved from one school division to join an adjacent division, and such an emotionally-charged change of this magnitude profoundly affected staff, parents, students and community. Furthermore, her choice of perseverance or determination as an important quality could also stem from her having had to endure some negative media exposure directed toward her school in the past year. It is important to note that these reasons are only suppositions on my part, as she did not elaborate the reasons for her choice of words. Principal C answered that fairness was the quality that helped her the most in her position of educational leadership. She did not elaborate on why she chose “fairness” to answer this particular question; however, she mentioned the word “fairness” a number of times over the course of the interview, and it seemed to pertain specifically to staff relations, mediating staff disagreements, and, perhaps, this was partially the reasoning behind her choice of words.

The next question tried to probe the administrators’ perceptions of their own authority. Do male and female administrators experience authority in the same way? All three had similar perceptions with respect to authority. Principal A said that she felt that at the beginning of her job posting, they (staff, students, parents) perceived male and female authority to be different until they had some experience with a female administrator. At the outset they may have viewed women as being weaker or maybe a threat to the same or opposite sex, but she felt that threat soon disappeared. An example she gave of this, occurred at the first staff meeting when she was explaining to the staff that the grade 12 students were expected to take seven classes as outlined in the division policy. A male staff member challenged her outright, by saying adamantly that there was

no such policy. She recalls, “He was almost like a bad-tempered, surly child.” She responded to his outburst with a calm answer of, “I will bring the policy in to show you tomorrow,” and then she promptly photocopied the policy and distributed it to that particular staff member and others. Principal A said, “ I think he was just testing me because now he has come to be very supportive.” I probed a little deeper into this particular anecdote, and asked Principal A as to whether she felt she needed to “over-prepare” or “over-arm” herself with documentation to prove things to the staff, because they questioned her authority more. She replied that she was the kind of person who would be thoroughly prepared and planned anyway, and did not feel that because she was a woman she needed to go out of her way to have proof when questioned by a staff member. Principal A further elaborated that she has become more comfortable and at ease with her own authority as time has gone on, and is more secure in other people accepting her authority also. She no longer feels the propensity to please everyone, and is now more comfortable with, and accepts the fact, that certain decisions will not please everyone.

Principal B indicated that in the first year or two she had to prove herself more than a male probably would, and mentioned that she had needed to gain more confidence during those first few years. Principal C mentioned that from the student perspective, perhaps students had more of an instilled “fear” of a male principal, simply because they had been conditioned to this, and she felt that maybe students challenged female principals at the outset. However, she herself did not feel that she was perceived as having any less authority than a male.

The eighth question attempted to ascertain what difficulties or challenges the principals experienced as women administrators. Principal A revealed that she really could not think of any challenges just because she was female, so I encouraged her to share some challenges from just an administrator's perspective. She went on to say that her biggest challenge was working with such an established staff, many of whom were in the latter part of their careers. She said that she learned at a course she attended that on any given staff, people are at various stages in their career. There are "trail blazers", "settlers", "plodders" and so on. She felt that a majority of her staff were in the "settling" stage of their career. Although it was a challenge to motivate these staff members, she said she learned through experience that the easiest way to bring about change was to simply mention something and then leave it. People would often go away with the seed planted and it would slowly germinate. As a result of this technique, she has helped bring about some significant changes in her school. Principal B answered that her biggest challenge was three or four difficult parents. She felt that this would probably not be different for any other administrator. Principal C answered that the biggest challenge or shock going into administration, was having to supervise or mediate between staff members. I probed a little deeper and asked her if she felt that the number of staff issues in which she was having to intervene was higher because she was female. She responded that she felt, and in fact her director concurred, that this was the case. She thought perhaps the staff perceived that because she was female she would have more empathy, and be willing to work through these sorts of issues.

The next question in the interview dealt with the women's perceptions of the

ways men and women administrators do their work. Principal A felt that female administrators tend to deal more at an emotional level. She has observed that she probably worries a little more about how people are feeling. She tends to be concerned with their emotions and whether they are upset or not. Principal B replied that she did not really observe any real difference between the way men and women administrators go about their work. Principal C, like Principal A, mentioned in her observations that women seem more emotionally attached to, or driven by, what they are doing. The women tend to have more of a passion for what they do whereas, to her, the male administrators she has encountered seem to be more matter-of-fact, or business-like. She also felt that women tend to feel more and tend to lead with their hearts.

The ninth question delved into the area of approaches to problem-solving and decision-making. Principal A stated that, "Because I know team work is important and people have to "buy-in" if ideas are going to work, one thing I have discovered that works, is I'll mention something and leave it alone, so people can think, mull it over and come back to it later-- that seems to really work." Additionally, she mentioned that she likes to discuss things at staff meetings, or go around to each person and discuss it individually with her staff. She arrives early in the morning, so she often bounces ideas off another staff member who is already there. She stated, "Generally speaking my approach is more collaborative; however, there are times when decisions just have to be made and I can be authoritative if necessary." Principal B responded that administration is far more collaborative than it ever used to be. She sees her role more as a facilitator; however, there are times requiring her sole input on decisions. She also mentioned that in



this day and age, she has come to see the necessity of good documentation, both in terms of discussions with staff and with parents. Principal C, like Principal A, answered that she manages the school as a team. “Now that I know the staff better, I don’t take absolutely everything to them now. But initially, I wanted them to trust me when I first walked into the building, so we discussed absolutely everything. The staff got to know me better, and the staff got empowered to solve their own problems.” She went on to say that she likes to work collaboratively. However, she did see that because she uses this approach the staff may tend to rely on her more heavily. At the beginning of her administrative days Principal C said that occasionally decisions were made based on what the majority of the staff wanted, and sometimes they “never felt quite right”. She has since come to realize that there is a time and a place for decisions to be made autocratically, and she is far more comfortable in making those decisions.

The next question in the interview, which is of particular interest to me and a focal point of this paper, asked what it was like to be a female administrator in a rural school district. Principal A answered that it had been fairly easy up to this point. She felt the reason for this was the very supportive director, who is always available and is very team-oriented. She also pointed out the local board was very open and helpful. She did mention that the parents were particularly difficult during her first year as an administrator, as they seemed to drag up old wounds from the past and make an issue of almost everything. (The previous principal had been asked to resign.) She elaborated that she did not feel this was a function of her being female, but rather because she was a new administrator. However difficult that first year was, she did feel that this year was going

much smoother. Principal B, although never having been an administrator in an urban setting, felt that it would be considerably different. She indicated that she is privy to a lot of information about students, their background, and their family situation because she is in a rural setting. She noted that, this extra information may help explain a particular student's behaviour, and as a result, may have an impact on decisions she makes. Urban administrators she felt, might not have as much access to information about their students. Principal C had a unique perspective on this question, because although she was an administrator in a small rural setting, she did not reside in the town, but in a small city about twenty kilometers away. She realized that she did not have the same social pressures as principals residing in the town in which they worked, but because she worked in the community she felt she needed to spend her money in the community and, as a result, she is involved in the local curling club, attends fowl suppers, and participates in other community functions. In the small amount of time she does spend in the community, she did say that she constantly felt watched, scrutinized, and on duty twenty-four hours a day. She reiterated once again her thankfulness for not having to endure the "fish-bowl" effect to quite the same degree as her own staff, or other administrators in rural settings. Another thing she responded to in this question was that principals in small rural settings often have to become "everything to everyone", or a "jack-of-all- trades". This can be particularly trying when one has to be the expert on a whole range of things that one may not feel all that trained or knowledgeable about, such as the water, air, bells, and boiler systems. Rural administrators really do face a wide range of challenges, for all of which they may not be trained.

Question number eleven in the interview addressed some of the challenges these principals faced as rural administrators that they might not have faced in an urban setting. The biggest challenge that Principal A faced as an administrator in a small rural setting was the isolation and aloneness. She felt that in urban settings, emotional support bases were more available and more accessible. She felt highly isolated, with a lack of companionship and emotional support. She went on to describe the frustration at being “on duty” twenty-four hours a day. For example, she would frequently have people call her at home to ask if she could open up the gymnasium for them to use. Apparently in previous years, it was common practice for community members to get a key and go and use the gymnasium facility on a regular basis. She did not feel particularly comfortable with this practice, and she was constantly being telephoned with these requests at home. She did mention that while a call-display telephone helped in this situation, it did not eliminate this problem completely, because people would then just come over to her house. Another illustration she used was the fact that people would often want to engage her in a parent-teacher interview at the local grocery store. Principal A often left town on the week-ends to get away from the steady scrutiny. Additionally, being curious as to whether marital status was ever an issue with women in administration, I asked Principal A if her unmarried status had ever become an issue. She said, “I don’t really think so, but I think that is because I am older, and I don’t think I pose a threat. However, if I was younger, I think it would be much more difficult for a young unmarried woman.” She went on to say that being single, she is still cognizant of the stereotypes out there and she is mindful of that when she interacts with males.

The challenge that Principal B faced was not isolation, but rather the problem of the interconnectedness of families. She elaborated that so often in small communities the families are related, so if you happen to make an unpopular decision with one family, this information circulates to the entire extended family and this circulation of gossip rarely benefits the already inflammatory situation. Principal C, felt that with the proximity of her small school to a larger urban center, her greatest challenge was to keep it viable, to offer programming and extra curricular programs comparable to their urban counterparts. The constant scrutiny and comparison to the city school was always present. In addition, because her school was such a small school, the threat of closure was always looming.

Along with challenges come benefits. Question twelve in the interview invited the administrators to talk about some of the benefits of being a female rural administrator. Principal A stated unhesitatingly that the greatest benefit was the fact that she was gaining invaluable experience. While the lack of a fellow administrator on staff could certainly be a disadvantage, it could also be an advantage in that it required her to make a lot more tough decisions on her own. "This is good practice," she said. Another benefit she saw to being a rural administrator was that she gets to know the students and they get to know her on a much more personal level. She said it was very rewarding to see students "turn it around" and to know that maybe she had something to do with that. She cited a particular student whom she was certain would have dropped out of school had she not taken a great deal of personal interest in him. This one-on-one connection is definitely more feasible in a small setting, and she appreciated that opportunity.

Principal B responded that one of the benefits to being a rural administrator was that she was treated well in the community. Community members listen to her ideas and, while parents may disagree with her decisions, they still know she cares about their children. Because of the size of the school, she and her staff were more visible and the community was more aware of the time that teachers put in. When asked whether there were other benefits to being a female administrator, she felt that women's capacity for caring was an advantage, and that perhaps female administrators have the ability to view all the students more. "For example, I don't just see athletics, I see academics as a main focus." Principal C, like Principal A, indicated that female rural administrators learn a lot of different "trades". Women administrators, with their extreme work load, learn to balance a whole lot of things at the same time. She did mention there was no real advantage to being a female administrator, but that the qualities of a good administrator were really human qualities "as opposed to a female-male issue".

The next question sought to discover if the three women had aspirations for advancement and, if so, what they were. Both Principal A and Principal C responded that they were giving the role of director (superintendent) serious consideration. They both indicated that this would not be for some time, as they needed to gain more experience. Principal B, on the other hand, responded that as she had been in education for 33 years, she had no real aspirations for advancement.

Question number fourteen asked what kinds of successes and achievements they had celebrated as administrators. Principal A felt that many of her successes were with students. She said she felt that one of her successes were that students who may have quit

school are still in attendance. She was also proud of how a bullying problem had been addressed at the school, so that now, students who were previously afraid to come to school because of bullying were no longer frightened. Principal A also pointed out that she had some successes with a few parents. She said that those parents who “fought absolutely everything that was going on, have backed off and are actually feeling good about a few things.” She related how one angry parent had stormed into her office and “vented”. She listened calmly and empathetically and the next day there was a flower arrangement sitting on her desk and the parent later telephoned and apologized profusely for her outburst. “I was touched that she cared enough to let me know she was sorry. I don’t think she would have done that earlier in the year.” Principal B mentioned that her greatest success was the academic standard at her school exemplified by the number of students who go on to university and receive scholarships. She went on to explain the ratio of students in her school who went on to post-secondary training, and was quite proud of the high percentage. She also mentioned how pleased she was of some of her former students who had done well in their respective careers. Principal C indicated that she was most proud of the networking she had done with the staff. She was gratified to hear from her staff that she was consistent, approachable and fair. “People have said that I deal with situations right away, find solutions, and work together through problems.” She was also proud of some projects undertaken such as goal setting, and building an extracurricular program. Prior to her arrival on staff there was very little in the way of extracurricular athletic programs, and now their school is quite competitive with other schools. She was especially proud too, of the discipline cycle her school developed under

her direction, which is now the model used for the entire division.

The final question that I asked of the three administrators was, “Could you try to describe for me a typical day?” Both Principals A and B said they began their day at 7:30 in the morning. Both indicated that this was the only time in the day when they could do their administrative tasks uninterrupted. Principal C, because she also oversees a satellite school, leaves home at 8:00 a.m., after she puts her child on the bus. She seemed almost apologetic when she said, “I just feel that as a mother, this is something I should really do.” She went on to say that if it wasn’t for that particular task, she would begin her day earlier. All three administrators had sizable work loads. Principal A taught middle years and senior English, and had administration time of a mere 30%. Principal B taught most of the business education courses and had administration time of 43%. Because of her extra commitment to the satellite school, Principal C often left the satellite school late morning, ate her lunch in the car so that her noon hour was free for her regular school staff. She then taught resource from 1:00-3:30 p.m. each day. Administration time was approximately 60%. After a full day, Principal A usually went home around 6:00 p.m., Principal B usually went home at approximately 4:00 and Principal C indicated that she tried to leave by 5:00 or 5:30 p.m., so she was home to have dinner with her family. All three women were highly involved in the extracurricular activities at their respective schools. Principal A was the teacher representative for the senior boys volleyball team, so most of her weekends were taken up with tournament play. She was also heavily involved in the various committees around the school. Principal B was heavily involved with coaching curling. Principal C coached junior volleyball in the first term of the year

and then coached curling in the second term.



## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

While it is difficult to make any sweeping generalizations about the findings of these three case studies, it is possible to make various connections between the research and the field. One general impression I formed from the three women principals that I interviewed is that all three appeared to me to be very composed, self-assured, and confident. They answered the questions articulately and with ease. They presented an image of competence and self-assurance both in their demeanor and in the content of their answers.

A further observation drawn from the data is that all three women never did have an initial plan to become an administrator; they kind of “fell into it”. This concurs with my own experience and that of others, that many women (and probably some men) do not have a clear sense of a career path in administration, and instead fall into administration quite serendipitously. Often it is at the suggestion of someone else that women even give administration any serious consideration. This was the case for all three of the administrators I interviewed. There seemed to have been a key person in their lives who made the suggestion at the right time in their career, that gently nudged them in the direction of educational administration.

The three administrators all claim to be strongly supported by the various stakeholders in their schools and communities. In particular, all three women cited their current directors (all male) as people who were highly supportive of their efforts. This is somewhat surprising considering some research indicates that many women

administrators experience a chilly, almost hostile atmosphere in relations with senior, male administrators.

However, all three women did say that they were notably “tested” in the first year of their principalship. While this “trial” period may occur for any first year principal, male or female, the consensus amongst the three administrators was that they felt they were challenged somewhat more because they were female. This certainly supports the research that women sometimes lack legitimate authority and often women feel they have to work harder to be considered as equal to their male counterparts. It would appear then, that female administrators face two main hurdles in securing and maintaining an administrative position in our educational system. First, as research points out, there are various barriers women must overcome and secondly, an initial “testing” period where the female principal must “prove” herself worthy. Once these two hurdles are overcome, it would appear the woman principal has a better chance to succeed in her position.

Another finding in the research was that there seems to be an unusually high proportion of female administrators in the two school divisions in which these women worked. In the division of Principal B and C, over half the administrators are women. In Principal A’s division, 4 out of 7 are female. This goes against the general trend, especially in western Canada, which indicates the lack of representation of women in educational administration. For example in Saskatchewan in 1997 under 20% of the secondary principals were female. (See Figure 33 in Appendix). One theory that may explain this unusually high percentage of female administrators in these two divisions is that, especially in Saskatchewan, principalships in the more rural areas are becoming

more difficult to fill, for a host of reasons, such as isolation, lack of financial incentive, work load, and “the fish-bowl factor” to name a few. Urban areas are the more “desired job postings” for many aspiring administrators, so perhaps most of those jobs are still being held by males. Because the rural postings are sometimes not so appealing, women are applying and being accepted for these positions, in essence, because no one else is applying. In one division in this study, one female principal was the only candidate who applied for the principalship, and Principal A, in the same division, was chosen after the school board’s first choice (a male) did not pass the security clearance. There is not much concrete evidence to support this theory and it is only a supposition on my part that goes beyond the boundaries of this paper.

Some may argue that it is a step forward for women to attain these rural positions in that they provide valuable training, and, indeed, one of the women administrators mentioned this very point. However, other literature also points out that placements in unpromising leadership settings may impede not only success but also retention (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Tallerico and Burstyn, in a study of female rural superintendents reveal that as district size increased, so did satisfaction levels. In smaller jurisdictions, many educational leaders “perform many tasks they believe are inappropriate to their positions, training and interests, and they have little or no support in doing them” (p. 51). Their disenchantment arose, also, from fatigue, caused by long hours at work, the need to “do it all” with scant assistance, coupled with the stress of coping with multiple roles as school superintendent, homemaker, wife, and mother. While their study looked at the loss and retention of superintendents, these same

problems they identified in this study could easily be experienced by female principals who are often placed in small rural schools. Assigning women to these smaller postings, sometimes thought to be the “perfect” training ground, may in fact hinder women’s chances of experiencing a successful principalship. Women need to be given other opportunities in suburban, medium to large-sized, stable or increasing-enrollment districts, instead of the “small, starter districts” that are “good places” for women to begin their careers.

The literature suggests more and more women are obtaining certification and pursuing higher education, and there is an influx of women taking graduate level work at the masters’ and doctoral level (Shakeshaft, 1987). The research I conducted seemed to verify that women are becoming more highly trained as two out of the three women I interviewed had their masters’ degree. It appears that women are putting themselves in better positions to obtain administrative positions by undertaking postgraduate work.

One of the barriers to women attaining educational administration positions is said to be lack of geographic mobility. Watkins, Herrin, McDonald and Winter (1998) found that ninety percent of women reported they would relocate only if their husbands secured employment. Seventy-five percent of men would relocate for a better job with or without the spouse’s employment. In fact, our society “discourages family change for the sake of a wife’s career” (Ezrati, as cited by Watkins et al., 1998, p. 107). This limited mobility perpetuates the limiting of career options for women. In fact, in two of the three cases I researched, both women mentioned that their spouses had taken jobs that required them to move around a great deal. It was because their spouses were getting jobs in the

area, that they felt more encouraged to apply for their principalships. I do not know if these two women would have applied regardless of their husband's employment, but their experiences do add emphasis to the important roles that geographic mobility and spousal employment play on women's careers.

Current literature points to a female's domestic and family responsibilities as being another possible barrier to women pursuing careers in educational administration. My research does seem to support the literature. I found that only one of the three women had children at home, while one was childless, and the other had grown children when they obtained the principalship. The principal who had a small child did concur that the dual responsibilities women faced were very challenging, not only in terms of workload, but also in terms of the perceived scrutiny of her mothering skills by community members. She noted that when female administrators do have children, having a supportive spouse to help share some of the domestic responsibilities is critical. Since research does support the notion that women are still bearing the brunt of the domestic responsibilities and are the primary care-givers, it is clear that these dual responsibilities of career and home may be a deterrent to many women striving for an administrative position.

In attempting to ascertain whether marital status is an issue or not for women in administration, it was quite difficult to draw any sort of broad conclusions from my research sample. However, it appeared that although being unmarried was not an issue for the particular principal I interviewed, she did have the perception that being unmarried could potentially be difficult for aspiring female administrators. We can draw

some parallels between this perception and the research where, in a study of hiring practices of male superintendents, it was discovered that there was a lack of comfort in hiring an “attractive” women for reasons ranging from the fear of others perceiving the relationship as unseemly, to the worry of causing marital friction, to the uncertainty of what their own feelings would be toward the attractive female subordinate (Shakeshaft, 1989). While the discussion of marital status is somewhat different than Shakeshaft’s work on physical attractiveness, similar themes do emerge here in terms of society’s lack of comfort with issues of sexuality and our unspoken beliefs about men and women working together. These factors could certainly inhibit or interfere with some women advancing up the administrative ladder.

The powerful influence of gender socialization has been thoroughly documented. Mahoney (1993) cites Witaker and Lane in saying women are limited by social expectations, parental guidance and self aspiration. Men are more often socialized to persevere and seek professional success while women are socialized to nurture and support others as they assume the traditional role of mother and caretaker of the home. It is difficult to say how much influence gender socialization has had on these three women. However, it is apparent that for two of the three women, negative socialization did not appear to have hindered their ambition. One of the principals for quite some time has been in the process of obtaining her license to drive a semi-trailer truck. Certainly no traditional stereotyping there! One of the other principals had indicated that she had a very powerful role model, her mother, who was an influential, professional career-woman and, as a result, never really doubted her own, or any other woman’s ability to be

an educational administrator.

The literature often points out that women tend to lead in more collaborative, democratic ways. While the scope of my research could not determine in detail the actual leadership styles of these three administrators, all three women indicated during the interview process that connecting with staff, collaborating for staff input, and working as a team were important to them. There were strong indications that these women administrators prefer non-confrontational, democratic ways of working with their teachers and their communities.

I have often wondered if this “collaborative movement” in educational leadership has been brought about in part by the increasing number of women in leadership. Is the increased presence of women, with their tendency to be more democratic and inclusive, helping to influence the new direction for current educational theory? Or is it the converse, where more women are seeking administrative positions because current leadership theory is more in line with their talents and style? Perhaps there is yet another possibility--the collaborative style of leadership has emerged because, with the increasing numbers of women in administration, people, especially males, are less inclined to respond positively to female administrators who are more directive and autocratic, and may respond more favorably to an approach that appears less hierarchical and more equitable?

In exploring with them the kinds of difficulties and challenges the three women faced as women administrators, I observed, frequently, the personal and emotional dimensions of their responses. Whether they were talking about motivating staff,

problem parents, or mediating staff conflicts, they rarely made reference to the management side of administration. I believe that these women tend to see their greatest challenges first in the interpersonal aspects of their work. In this sense they may well be contributing to the trend in educational leadership that places increasing value on the human and emotional aspects of administration.

In looking specifically at the challenges of being a rural female administrator, none of the three women suggested that “being female” was a challenge. However they noted a number of challenges to being a rural administrator. The strain of being on duty twenty-four hours a day and the “fish-bowl factor” seemed to be responsible for a high degree of frustration. Moreover, the isolation and aloneness that can often accompany the “fish-bowl factor” can contribute to the problem. These are not new phenomena for women in educational administration, but they seem to be exacerbated by geographical remoteness. This points once again to the need for networking and mentoring support for female administrators.

The lack of networks for female administrators is cited often in the literature. My findings show that the three female administrators did not enjoy the benefits of well-developed, professional networks. In fact, other than monthly administrator meetings, there did not appear to be any formal or informal networking processes in place. Principal A did mention that the one opportunity she has to network is at the *Counselor/Administrator breakfast at teachers’ convention every year*, where she can dialogue and meet with new administrators from two provinces and various divisions. However, with this event occurring only once a year, it can hardly provide the needed support.



Networking is critical in helping diminish feelings of alienation and isolation, by providing access to job information, and by furnishing support and advice to fellow administrators and aspiring administrators. Clearly, this is an area of considerable need.

It is somewhat of a paradox that, at times, the very challenges with which rural administrators must contend can also be benefits. For example, all of the administrators mentioned that being constantly watched and scrutinized (the “fish-bowl factor”) was a challenge; but, on the other hand, the close personal knowledge these rural administrators had about their parents, students and staff, often gave them deeper insight into thought processes and behaviour of others. This knowledge was seen to be invaluable in terms of dealing with and interacting with people in the school community.

The percentage of females at the highest levels of the educational hierarchy in Saskatchewan is very low. It was encouraging that two out of the three women administrators I interviewed had given the role of director (superintendent) serious consideration for their future plans. In a sense, their response to the challenge of too few women in senior administration may be to move towards such positions themselves.

From the information the three administrators provided about their typical day, it became apparent that they worked very hard at their positions. They spent a great deal of extra time not only in their administrative duties, but in extra curricular responsibilities as well. The very little administration time they have, combined with heavy teaching loads, makes for a very long work day. I concluded that these women administrators are extremely dedicated and hard-working individuals. They face the challenge of their jobs in ways that ensure they are successful for their communities and derive satisfaction for

themselves.

### Concluding Thoughts

The topic of women in administration is particularly dear to my heart. I am one of those women who grew up wanting to be a teacher and yet, partly due to socialization factors and lack of female role models, I never imagined myself as an administrator. My move into the vice-principalship, as in the case of many women entering administration, including my research subjects, happened quite serendipitously. However, planned or serendipitous, there is a glaring lack of representation of women in educational leadership positions, especially the higher up the educational hierarchy one goes.

In looking specifically at my area of focus, women in rural administrative positions, it is safe to say that this area is a rather unexplored topic and does require more extensive research. It was the absence of literature on this topic, and partially my own personal position as a female rural administrator, that was the impetus behind my research into the unique perspectives and insights of rural female administrators.

Interesting results were generated from the case studies. While not completely generalizable to the wider context, the results do shed some light on the life of a female administrator in rural Saskatchewan. Some of the major findings have been summarized as follows: Firstly, the high proportion of female administrators (over half) in the two school divisions researched was surprising considering the current statistics which show the number of female secondary principals in 1997 to be under 20%. The reasons for these unusually high numbers could be many, but quite possibly with these rural positions being more difficult to fill, women are being given the opportunity to fill these positions. Clearly, research that examined the rural/urban distribution of males and

females and the reasons behind it would be enlightening.

Another interesting result from the research, was that despite being “tested” initially in their postings, (which they felt was due to their being female) the three principals seem to have become fairly well-established and comfortable in their positions. Contrary to the “chilly atmosphere” noted in much of the research, these three principals appear to be well-supported by the various stakeholders, especially their directors, in their respective schools and communities.

Many of the challenges faced by female rural administrators are not unique to their being female, but are related to being in a rural setting. Some of the challenges mentioned by the three principals were the feeling of isolation, the “fish-bowl factor”, the strain of being under constant scrutiny, difficult parents and hard-to-motivate staff members, and domestic and child-care responsibilities. Most of these are the same for most principals, regardless of gender.

The three principals in the study tended to favour a more collaborative style of leadership in that they sought input into decision making, and operating as a team seemed to be important to them. This appears to be congruent with the literature which indicates that women tend to run more democratic organizations. The collaborative style of leadership certainly blends into current leadership theory and practices.

It was apparent from the interviews, that these are highly competent and outgoing individuals. They are deeply committed to their schools and spend extensive amounts of extra time and effort to bring about significant changes in their school. They are highly dedicated not only to their teaching, but to their administrative duties. This

too, has been cited in the literature; women administrators are highly dedicated to their positions.

What does all this tell us? Female rural administrators do have experiences different to those of their urban counterparts. They are forced to be innovative with fewer resources, with fewer staff, and often dwindling enrollments and the looming threat of school closures. They are “forced” to work extra hours as their position often requires them to be the plumber, the electrician, in addition to being a master teacher and visionary leader. With shrinking central office staff they are often required to be the curriculum consultant, the special education consultant, and the resident expert on so many different topics that ordinarily would be handled by central office personnel. While all of this is valuable experience, it can come at quite a price. For this experience rural female administrators often must endure personal sacrifices such as lack of privacy and anonymity, a limited social life, and cope with feelings of isolation and alienation. Despite the costs and personal sacrifices, these women and many similar to them, face these challenges with dignity and fortitude. They strive to make their “little corner of the world”, their school, the best that it can be. They strive to become quality educational leaders whose influence will be profound on not only their fellow colleagues, but on the many young lives they touch.

It is not enough to say that there is a lack of women in educational administration. We need to critically examine the reasons why and seek to address these reasons. Barriers and obstacles to women do exist. They exist in the form of attitudes and perceptions of the image of an effective school administrator; they exist in the form of

societal expectations of women's domestic responsibilities; they exist in the form of discriminatory hiring practices; and they exist because of sex role stereotyping and gender socialization that begins at birth. I firmly believe there is a need for action to break down the barriers facing women, through such things as promoting gender-inclusive classrooms, role modeling, mentoring, networking, examining current hiring practices, and questioning the conspicuous absence of women in leadership positions. Perhaps then, it will be possible to mobilize and give voice to those who have privately "held up half the sky".

To use the old cliché, "times are a' changing"-- albeit slowly. Current leadership theories such as collaborative leadership celebrate some of the very characteristics that women possess, which were once questioned as deficiencies. This study has reaffirmed for me that women do have what it takes to be effective administrators. Yet, due in part to many internal and external barriers, I see there are not as many aspiring women administrators as there should be coming forward to share their expertise, knowledge and unique talents.

Women must be valued for the skills they bring to administration. Women must be allowed to attain leadership roles without having to assume masculine behaviours (Mahoney, 1993). Women must be given the freedom to be women. Women must be allowed to capitalize on their feminine traits, and to learn to use their strengths to enhance their effectiveness, rather than striving to be like men. Until school administration is seen as a woman's rightful place, the sunroof will only slide back to admit a few and the glass ceiling will not be broken (Gill, as cited by Reynolds & Young,

1995).

Women do possess the attributes required to serve as transformational, futuristic leaders needed for the reform and restructuring of our schools (Murray & Simmons, 1994). Tomorrow's schools can only benefit from having women as leaders. Who knows, perhaps, Ella Flagg Young's famous prediction will become a reality.

### Implications for Future Research

Upon completion of my research on women in administration, I do see some gaps in the literature, where future research would be feasible. One area that appears to be relatively unexamined is the whole area of male-female administration teams. Do male-female principals-vice principals create a blend of both styles of leadership, or do they take on the characteristics of the principal? What are staff perceptions of a blended gender team, versus a same sex administration team?

A second possibility for research is in the area of retaining administrators. Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) discuss not just attracting women to administration, or removing barriers to women's access to leadership roles, but the crucial importance of *retaining* the women, especially in superintendencies. While there has been some research into the exiting and retention of superintendents, there has been very little research on the exiting or retention of female principals, and it therefore, would be a timely topic.

Another potential topic to investigate may be how recent educational reforms such as site-based management are affecting hiring practices. Are school boards looking for leaders with more financial, and managerial skills? Has this negatively impacted the hiring of women? Furthermore, has the impact of financial cutbacks changed the character of the candidate pools of women seeking advancement up the administrative hierarchy?

Finally, a concern that emerged from my research, focuses on the distribution of male/female administrators in urban compared to rural settings. Are more women being



given rural postings because it is becoming increasingly difficult for school boards to fill positions in these “less desirable” locations, and women are being chosen by default?

The topic of women in educational administration will continue to be analyzed and discussed for many years to come. This study has confirmed a lot of what current research might have predicted, but, although it has used only a small sample, it has identified some areas where a lack of purposeful research may be hindering decision-making and progress. Educational leaders have a responsibility to ensure that the best-qualified and the most effective candidates are given every chance to compete for, and fill, administrative positions. Increasingly, they may have to do more to create the kinds of conditions that will make it more likely that more women can enter the ranks of the “best-qualified” and the “most effective”.

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**APPENDIX**

Distribution of Administrators in Saskatchewan in 1997

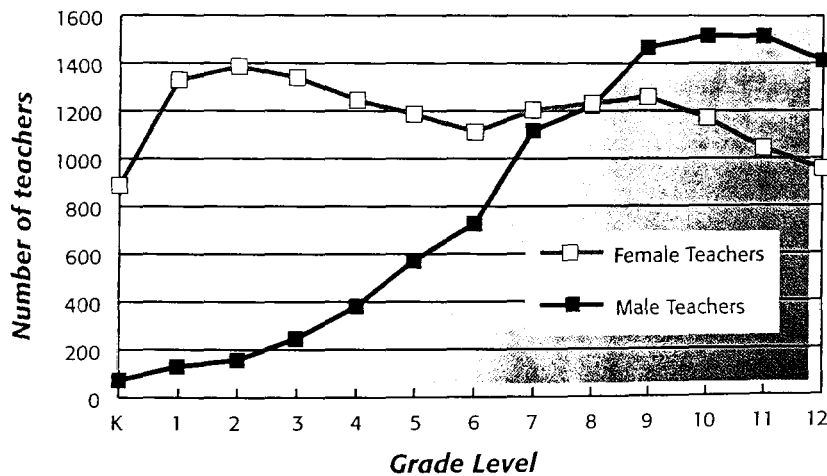
**Figure 31: Provincial Profile of Aboriginal Students and Teachers in Saskatchewan School Divisions with Education Equity Programs, 1989-1996**

Year	Total Students in Participating Divisions	Aboriginal Students	% of Total	Total Teachers in Participating Divisions	Aboriginal Teachers	% of Total	Student/Aboriginal Teacher Ratio
1989	74,780	12,419	16.6	4,069.6	170.1	4.2	440:1
1990	74,291	12,834	17.3	4,029.5	173.8	4.3	428:1
1991	74,865	13,519	18.1	4,145.0	186.3	4.5	402:1
1992	75,266	13,709	18.2	4,071.7	201.3	4.9	374:1
1993	67,298	13,095	19.5	4,008.9	213.3	5.3	316:1
1994	77,457	14,804	19.1	5,407.3	271.6	5.0	285:1
1995	75,379	14,326	19.0	5,460.7	265.2	4.9	284:1
1996	76,421	15,565	20.4	5,453.4	291.7	5.3	262:1

**What is the Gender Profile of Saskatchewan Teachers?**

Female teachers are in the majority in the elementary grades. For example, in 1995-96, 1,386 out of 1,542 Saskatchewan Grade 2 teachers were female. The number of female and male teachers is approximately equal in Grades 7 and 8, while male teachers outnumber female in high school. For example, in 1995-96, 1,515 out of 2,559 (59%) Grade 11 teachers were male.

**Figure 32: Teachers by Gender and by Grade, 1995-96**



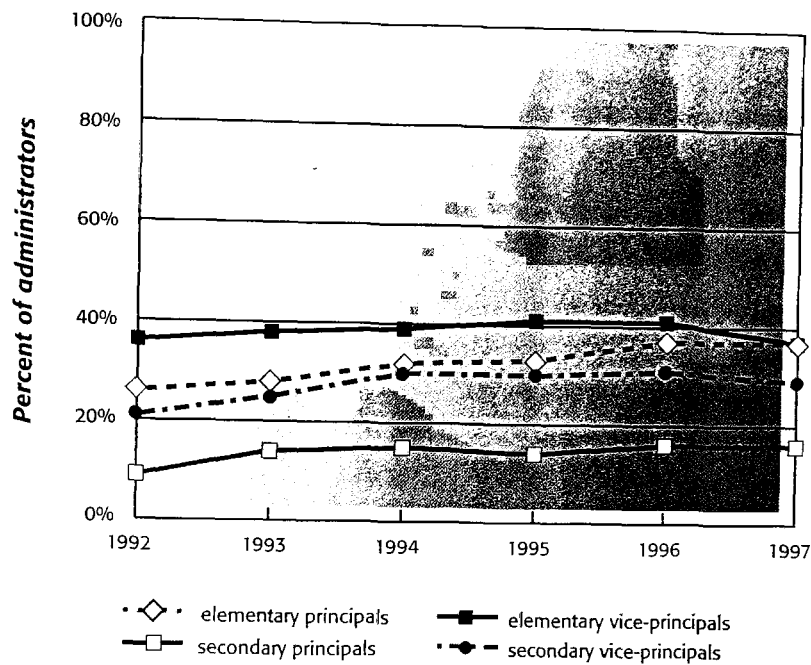
Source: Saskatchewan Education. (1997). *Teacher Records data*. Regina, SK.

This disparate gender distribution means that young children (both girls and boys) have fewer male role models during their first six years of schooling. The situation is reversed at the high school level where students have fewer female role models. Because students learn through example as well as through instruction, having positive role models of both genders is important.

**What is the Gender Ratio in School Administration?**

Principals and vice-principals in all types of schools in Saskatchewan continue to be predominantly male. There is no perceptible trend toward an equitable gender balance in school leadership positions.

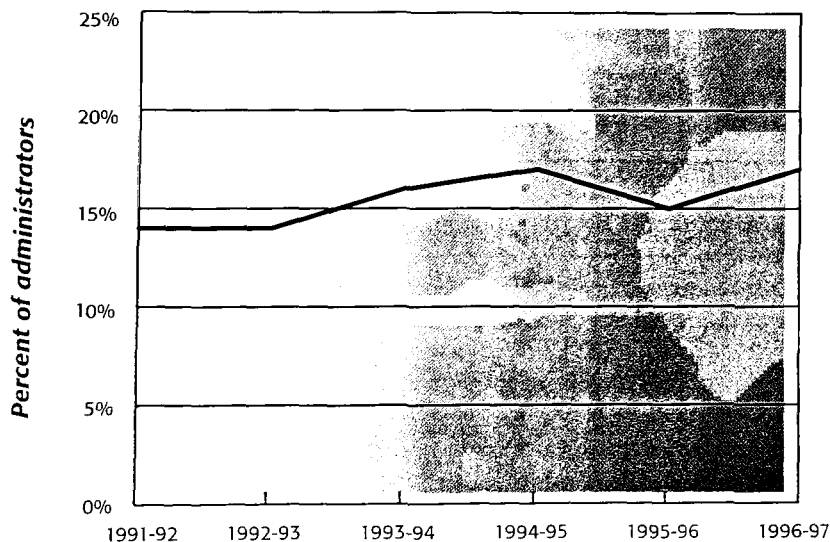
**Figure 33: Female School Administrators, 1992-1997**



Source: Saskatchewan Education (1997). Teacher Records data. Regina, SK.

The percentage of female educational administrators in school division central offices is gradually increasing, but it remains far below the percentage of male administrators. In 1991-92, 14.4% of educational administrators at the school division level were female, whereas in 1996-97, 17% were female.

**Figure 34: Female Educational Administrators (Division Level), 1991-92 to 1996-97**



Note: This graph reflects membership in the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents. All directors of education, assistant, deputy and associate directors of education, superintendents assistant superintendents, coordinators, regional directors and supervisors are required by law to belong to L.E.A.D.S. School principals are not members of L.E.A.D.S.

Source: L.E.A.D.S. membership data.