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Neither Frogs, Nor Princes: Changing Models of Leadership in Academia.

Dr. Patricia Klinck, Ms Andrea Allard
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Institute of Education, University of Melbourne.

Abstract
This paper reports on a pilot program run for male academic staff at
the University of Melbourne which aimed to enable men to explore their
understandings of gender, power and models of leadership.

The program, reported on in this paper, was an initial attempt to
discuss with male academics their understandings concerning gender, the
ways in which power is exercised by them as teachers and as
administrators, and to consider alternative leadership models,
including those based on collegiality and collaboration.

The program was organised on the model of a collegial support group
which has been successful in leadership training in the US and Canada
as well as in Australia. One of the aims of this pilot project was to
investigate how male-only groups responded to such a model.

The pilot study met with mixed results and some surprising observations
and insights for the two (female) facilitators. In this paper, we
outline the program, discuss the barriers to change that emerged and
reflect on changes needed in order to better address the issues.

Introduction

Remember for a moment the fairy tale in which the beautiful princess
leans over and kisses the ugly frog. Due to the devotion and concern
offered freely by such a kind and loving princess, the object of her
affection, the ugly frog, is released from the evil spell and magically
turns into a handsome prince.   The ability of the princess to
transform ugliness and limitations into a thing of beauty, indeed the
transformative nature of love itself, is to be celebrated.   On the
other hand, the squat ugly frog can wait to be loved, hoped to be

transformed, but cannot (does not) bring about the needed
transformation, cannot (does not) address the possibilities of change
in any real way for himself.

"Neither Frogs, Nor Princes", for us is a humourous evocation of our
experiences of planning and implementing a male only pilot program on
gender, power and models of leadership. The program was offered in
March 1994 at the University of Melbourne and coordinated through the
Equal Opportunity Office of the University.

We came to the decision to offer this pilot program for a number of
reasons. First of all, it seemed to us that the Affirmative Action
Program for Women has resulted in a number of initiatives to encourage

and support women to succeed in academia.   Underpinning these
initiatives, however, is the often unexamined assumption that it is
women who need to change in order to achieve 'success', to fit into
academia.

 As Carol Bacchi (1993: 39) points out: "the existence of formal equal
opportunity rules serves...(to) convince many, particularly those who
themselves do not face discrimination, that all that needs to be done
is being done...."

She goes on to argue that there is a need to:

...contest and resignify the interpretations and conceptualizations
which surround these (equal opportunity) laws. The kind of
resignification which is needed emerges from the analysis...which
illustrates that existing understandings disguise the operation of
power in social relations....Ways must be found to draw attention to
that factor. One way may be to shift the focus from the recipients of
'assistance', the targets of 'equal opportunity', to the beneficiaries.

We were interested in 'shifting the focus' and wanted to consider ways
in which the 'beneficiaries' of power in social relations, those males
who hold powerful positions in academia, might be challenged to see the
need to examine, and perhaps begin to change, the masculinist culture
of the workplace.

Other recent work which has explored the 'masculinist culture', in
particular that of Blackmore (1993) informed our thinking. Blackmore
notes that in her study of an educational bureaucracy, the
participants:

...spoke of how embedded in this particular bureaucratic culture were
norms of behaviour, models of good management and images of leadership
which excluded most women because of their close association with

so-called masculine attributes, behaviours and images. These norms emphasised a particular form of bureaucratic rationality and logic of procedures characterised by unemotional arguments and an apparent capacity to make the 'hard' decision. Language, symbols, rituals and myths perpetuated this hegemonic masculinity which defined insiders and outsiders." (80).

This description did not seem dissimilar to the academic culture and the ideals of academic leadership experienced by many women.

Blackmore also goes on to argue the need for feminists to 'problematise masculinity' and suggests the need to 'focus on similarities and not differences by forming a dialogue across differences'. (p. 88)   The need for a collaborative approach to establish an environment where feminists and pro-feminist men are able to speak as equals seemed to us to be an important way forward.

Inspired by some recent research and writings in the areas of gender, (eg., Weedon, 1987; Connell, 1987; Davies, 1989; Mac an Ghaill, 1994), educational leadership (eg., Herr Van Nostrand, 1993; Luke and Gore, 1992) and through our own knowledge and experience of current educational initiatives in the area of women and leadership (eg., Klinck, 1994; Shakeshaft, 1989), we decided to work collaboratively to develop a pilot program.

Models of Leadership, Power and Gender was a three session program which aimed to make explicit the often taken-for-granted assumptions

concerning being a male academic with leadership responsibilities.

For planning purposes, we started from the following premises.

●Traditional and current models of leadership are patriarchal and based on hierarchical structures.

●Emerging leadership envisages ways to transform the context in order to identify, acknowledge and value those who are excluded, eg., women.

●'Gender' is a cultural/social construct; beliefs about 'appropriate' masculine, feminine behaviours are learned, can be changed, challenged and resisted, over time and in different contexts.

●Understandings of masculinities, femininities are negotiated, challenged, resisted, re-constructed, endorsed on an individual and collective basis. Change is possible and necessary.

●Leadership ability can be honed through education, experience and reflection.

●Naming the issues is a prerequisite to action.

●Organisational change is based on a shared vision of how the world can be better and relies upon courageous, collaborative action on the part of leaders.

●Teaching, as well as administration, is a leadership activity which needs to be supported by 'positional' leadership while the hierarchy continues to operate.

The Program and the Process

The purpose of the program was to provide participants with opportunities to develop a better understanding of how effective leaders work to recognise and enhance diverse perspectives within the university context. As noted above, we defined the term 'leader' as both teacher and administrator and endeavoured to move the definition beyond the traditional and masculinist understanding.

The program was organised into a series of three late afternoon seminars of two and one half hours each. In order to do justice to the complexity of the issues, we chose to offer these seminars, not as one-offs, but as a sequential program. All male academics were invited to participate through a notice that was sent through the Equal Opportunity Unit.

The notice went to approximately 1200 male staff initially and was readvertised later to male academics in administrative positions. While the program created a great deal of interest among female academics, the enrolment of male academics was extremely low: eg., for the first session, only eight males signed up. However, despite this low number, we decided to go ahead with the program as we viewed it as a pilot project.

For the first session, however, only five of the potential eight

participants came.   Of these, a senior administrator arrived announcing he could only stay for one hour; a second senior administrator arrived, announcing he could only come to the first session.

Thus in the second session only three of the original participants returned. A new participant also arrived but could only stay for an

hour.

For the final seminar, only one participant came although we did receive apologies from the other two, one who became ill and one because he was attending a department meeting.

Program

In preparation for the first session, we sent out pre-reading. We chose the article by Magda Lewis and Roger Simon, 'A Discourse Not Intended for Her: Learning and Teaching Within the Patriarchy'. This article is written from a dual perspective, that of a female graduate student and a male professor. The article demonstrates the role of dominant discourse, gender and power in academic classrooms.

In the first session , we aimed to focussed specifically on the relationship between teaching as a leadership activity, and the ways in which power relations and understandings concerning gender influenced the processes of leadership.

To inform the discussion for the second seminar, the participants were asked to complete a task. During the week, they were asked to observe one formal (eg., a committee meeting) and one informal (eg., family dinner) situation in order to analyse the group dynamics. They were asked to consider the relationships in both situations, in terms of gender, power and leadership and to note their observations for the next session.

Additionally, an excerpt from Blackmore's (1993) "Towards a 'postmasculinist' institutional politics'?" was distributed for reading.

The second session focussed on the interrelationship between models of leadership, language and culture. During this session, there was time to report back on the task and to discuss the reading. In response to queries raised in session one, data on the status and number of women academics at the University of Melbourne was also distributed for discussion.

As a task for the following week, we asked the participants to examine and reflect upon the strategies which they used to establish and promote inclusive participation within their individual academic contexts. They were also asked to identify factors which work for and against change in their own context.

Our third and final session aimed to bring together strategies, set an agenda for change and provide ongoing networking for the group. We proposed to review the leadership model used at Edith Cowan University. This model was central to the 'Women in Leadership Program' and has been used successfully for both women-only and mixed groups of

academics and general staff.

At the close of the final session, an excerpt from Catherine Herr van Nostrand's book Gender Responsible Leadership was provided as a means of highlighting a few of the strategies possible for change.

We also distributed an evaluation which reinterated the purposes of the program. It was mailed to all who had attended.

The above was the outline of the intended program. What follows is a description of what we experienced as the program unfolded.

Discussion

In the phases of program planning we discussed and deliberated on the processes and the readings to be used. The program components looked well integrated and we anticipated a challenging but focussed discussion.

However, from the start of the initial session, the male participants appeared to us to be jockeying for position; power was being negotiated. The negotiation established a pecking order. Talk became ordered, with some of the males appearing to have more rights than others to challenge and to offer opinions and to talk at length. In the case of one exchange, power was conferred on a participant by the most senior academic present, who singled him out from the group with a compliment. The compliment recognised and lauded his (informal) power to influence the outcomes of meetings. Despite our continual attempts to refocus the group on the intended program, for the first 45 minutes, it was a struggle over who had control, and until the senior administrator left, we didn't.

When he left, we regrouped, became more focussed and brought forward the article for discussion. There was no agreement on the relevance of the article. Some felt it was dated. Others felt that in their faculty, gender was not a problem because they dealt with 'the top one per cent of the student population'. Others felt that they too had experienced marginalisation just as the female graduate student had in the article. In short, from their perspective, we were dealing with a non-issue.

Shortly before the end of the first session, one of the participants asked, 'Do you find this discussion intimidating?' We have debated why this question was asked and each of us has a different perpective. However, his question took us both by surprise and also enabled us to respond explicitly that we found the discussion both hopeful and encouraging. This gave us the opportunity to ask the fundamental question: why were we as a group, unable to discuss the topic of

gender? In our opinion for the first two hours of the session, it had
been deftly side stepped.   The stunned silence on the part of the
participants was followed by a more honest discussion and the first
session ended on a positive note.

In our debriefing after session one, we recognised that much of the
power available in an academic teaching institution is based on
'expert' knowledge. The claim to 'right' answers is central to
academia and is exemplified through the use of the lecture as a common
mode of information delivery.   One of the initial challenges thrown at
us by a participant during the first session was to 'define
leadership'. In our role as facilitators, and in keeping with our
commitment to collaborative learning, we had assumed that the group
would be in charge of defining the key terms in their own words. We
deferred to the group's participation in meaningful dialogue. We did
not meet the challenge as one would (should?) in a lecture. In short,
we did not follow the rules of the academic game.   In hindsight, we
perceived that this left us in a less powerful position. We refused to
give the 'right' answer, preferring to negotiate understandings which

would reflect all participants' perspectives. Seemingly this was not
an acceptable strategy, certainly not one that the participants were
prepared to enter into.

Thus, in session two, we decided to address participation at the
beginning of the session. We designed a process to give time for each
participant to speak from a personal perspective. By naming and
claiming issues in personal and professional experiences, the ways in
which gender and power relations are constituted became clearer to the
participants. Taken away from the abstractions of academic talk, they
spoke as fathers, as partners, and as colleagues who walked along side
their female colleagues, conscious of the women's anger and the
injustices, conscious of what the future might hold for their own
daughters and partners. They understood the problem as a lived daily
experience. They expressed an urgency about the change needed and the
challenge it presented.

From our perspective, urgency, challenge and a desire for better
working relationships are a mandate to lead, to bring change. We
became aware that this urgency and challenge was not translated into
action. As administrators the participants did not see themselves as
agents of change nor in need of change. Their view was that,
sympathetic and supportive though they were, the change was 'out there'
somewhere, to be done by and/or for women. From their comments, it
appeared that the power to change seemed to reside either higher up in
the academic hierarchy or in women themselves.

Equally as teachers, the participants, during the second session, did
not seem to make the connection between how their pedagogical practices

could change the culture of the university to empower women. This discussion evolved out of the two readings they had done concerning teaching as a leadership endeavour and the masculinist culture of academia.   For example, one participant discussed how he organised his students into small groups for research projects as well as classroom learning, as a more inclusive practice. He expressed surprise at the diversity of strengths and experiences which students brought to projects and how this improved the quality. Yet, inspite of an extensive discussion, this participant seemed unable to make the connection between how such a change strategy in the learning context could also be used to produce change in the organisational context. For example, collaborative learning affirms the personal knowledge as a basis for acquiring new knowledge. As a pedagogy, it sets up a new environment where learners are empowered. Rather than the 'expert' professor and the 'deficient' student who is required to listen and to reproduce the 'right' answers, collaborative learning builds on the strengths and experiences of all who are involved. The culture of an organisation reflects the underlying values and assumptions of the legitimated (privileged) pedagogy. Thus to change the pedagogy is to change the culture of the organisation.

Yet, despite the fact that the participants did not see the connections between teaching, leadership and gender, the topics of the program carried beyond the seminars.   One participant told how he had spent an entire dinner party discussing the issues of gender and power with his guests. While for many, this may not seem remarkable, he presented the discussion as unique and unusual.

In the third session, one of the men discussed strategies which he had trialed and how they failed. For example, he recounted his stand to encourage female students to enrol in a mathematics program and the lengths taken to ensure that female professors were hired as well. He lamented that this initiative had not been successful because the few

women whom he had managed to employ were unable to take the jeers and the exclusion of their male colleagues. His support for employing the women seemed to him sufficient. He did not see any need in his administrative role to influence the culture of the department which remained traditionally masculinist.

Our frustration rose as we listened to what we perceived to be a lack of commitment and follow through and to the sound of disenchantment in the voice of the participant. We offered follow through strategies and the perspective which we felt the women may have experienced. He professed the desire to try again and to enlist the help of others.

After the three sessions were completed, the three participants were asked to complete an evaluation consisting of open ended statements. In their evaluations, they expressed their pleasure at having the

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opportunity to discuss these issues with other male colleagues. They
stated that the discussions had given them a greater focus on the
issues and a better understanding. One commented that he had found the
opportunity to 'hear from women' particularly enjoyable. All commented
on being disappointed by how few male colleagues had chosen to
participate.

Although they acknowledged that ours was a 'courageous endeavour', one
thought that a team of facilitators - a man and woman - would enhance
the program.

Reflections on the Pilot Program, Models of Leadership, Gender and
Power.

During the program and in the ensuing weeks we have discussed our
impressions and reactions to this program. What worked? What would we
do differently if we did it again? Would we do it again? We have also
reviewed the evaluation comments of the participants to ascertain how
much impact the initiative had from their perspective.

From our perspective, the pilot project had its successes. We learned
a lot about power and leadership. We took a risk, broke a norm and set
a precedent. As academics and professionals we often talk about the
need for a change in the cultural context of organisations. Various
professional development activities aim to make change in the working
relationships between men and women; others, as already mentioned, aim
to change women's knowledge and skill levels for career promotion. To
our knowledge, none have directly approached men to make problematic
gender, power and their assumptions concerning leadership. Nor have
any addressed the need male leaders might have to talk to other men
about strategies used to include women fully as equals, as colleagues.

Reflecting on the readings which we chose for their relevance to the
university context we were surprised that they proved foreign to the
participants. They found them a 'hard read' and could not make
connections with their work. They expressed no desire for further
readings which they might pursue on their own time.

This silence made us aware of gaps in our planning. First, we had not
anticipated the extent to which the literature on gender issues was
unknown. We had assumed a higher level of awareness and knowledge on
the part of these academics than was evident.   Second, over the course
of two sessions, it became clear that their interest in the aim of the
seminar was one of 'benign curiosity' rather than an urgent need to
pursue topics, concerns and leadership strategies. From our
perspective, we saw that the privilege of entitlement to a position

within the hierarchy of power protects them from the experience of

marginalisation and therefore of the need to understand it as Bacchi, (1993) suggests.   While at least one of them recognised his less powerful position in the hierarchy, nevertheless he was still part of it. As male academics they were privileged through the dominant discourses in operation. Because they were already there, they found it hard to see what it looked like from an outside perspective.

At different times in the pilot we were acutely aware of our deficits: both of us were in academic positions of no great importance in the hierarchy of the University; both of us could be seen as 'outsiders' since we both spoke with North American accents, (although Andrea had been in Australia for over twenty years and Pat for two); both of us had prior knowledge of marginalisation which made us feel vulnerable, and perhaps overly cautious. We vacillated between confidence in our approach, certainty that our risk was worthy and deep concern about how the participants viewed the endeavour and how they were progressing.

Would we do it again? We have often debated that question. Over time we have come to the conclusion that we would but we would make strategic changes. We remain committed to our belief that there is a need to take action, to problematise the issues of gender and power in the leadership of men - from a male perspective.

We would have more confidence in the relevance of our assumptions (see above) and would make them explicit far earlier. We are also more aware now of the challenges such assumptions present for facilitator and participants alike.
These challenges are not new nor are they hidden. However, it is worthwhile to indicate them here. First, a facilitated group is not the norm at the university. Experiences with and expectations for the experiential learning model (on which facilitated groups are established) need to be surfaced in the first session - and made explicit in following sessions.

This shift in emphasis would change the outcomes of the program. Explicit reflection on their experiences within the group could potentially assist the participants in several ways.   It could give them the opportunity to understand the relationship between power and organisational context.   Understanding how to empower others, that is, to set the conditions which enable others to take control of their actions too would drive home the link between their experiences and the mandate of leadership in the university community.   It would assist them as well to see the connection between a change in their teaching and therefore the learning of their students.

Regarding the issues of power: we need to explore participants' own sense of agency, authority based on their positions and on the ways in which the 'gender regime' operates (Connell, 1987). We, as facilitators and feminists, need to be much more explicit and assertive about the gains that male academics already have within the university.

Additionally, we need to recognise more openly the challenge they
will experience when endeavouring to explore this issue.

As facilitators, we also need to develop practical knowledge of how to
deal with resistance. We need to move away from seeing this as 'a
lack' in our own facilitating skills but instead as something to be
expected and dealt with as part of the learning process.   Finally, on
reflection we learned that risk taking needs to continue throughout the
sessions--not just as a starting point for setting them up. If we were
to do this again, we would insist on using our personal power. For
example, we would not let go of it so easily when the males started

jockeying amongst themselves for position.   This again was perhaps a
measure of our own lack of confidence and sense of vulnerability, a
not uncommon experience, we believe, of many women in academia.

We would want to work closely with a male colleague/facilitator as per
our initial planning.   The team approach would allow for close process
observation and also for divergent perspectives both within the
discussions and in the debriefing.

To return to our title: Neither fFogs nor Princes seems to summarise
our understandings about the experience of planning and implementing
this pilot project. The male academics who participated were certainly
not 'ugly frogs'. They came because they had personal knowledge, based
on their relationships as husband, father, colleague, of the
difficulties and discrimination experienced by women working within
patriarchal social systems. They came with the best of intentions and
with a willingness to consider the issues. For the most part, they
seemed to care genuinely and want to understand. We enjoyed our
interactions with them.

However, in our opinion, participation in this project was not
sufficient to develop the necessary understandings or commitment to
begin the process of changing the culture in which they are privileged.
 Nor did it provide them with a sense of agency to transform their own
leadership practices into more inclusive and collaborative ones. From
our perspective, we saw little evidence that they were able to
challenge the masculinist culture in which they were located.

For us, in many ways, we learned, and relearned how difficult it is to
challenge hegemonic discourses of leadership, power and gender.
Clearly, much work remains to be done.

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