

NO LONGER MISS MUFFETT:

FEMINISATION OF THE SCHOOL WORK PLACE

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Little Miss Muffet
Sat on a tuffet,

Eating her curds and whey;
There came a big spider,
Who sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffet away.

INTRODUCTION

In October 1992 as part of the evaluation of the National Schools Project, Lyndsay Connors visited a number of schools in western NSW. Her chauffeur on this occasion was Bob Meyenn. Discussions following the visit to one of the schools centred on what seemed to be the qualitative differences between this school, whose principal was a woman, and those of other schools visited. This conversation ranged over the relationship between the principal and her staff, between staff members, between the staff and pupils, the relationship between the pupils, the organisation and work practices in the school, and the commitment to issues of equity and social justice enacted in policy and practice.

On other visits to the same school, Judith Parker and Bob Meyenn were struck by what seemed to be the special features of the school, illustrated for us in the following vignette: As we were walking with the principal across the playground at recess, a 6th class boy whom she described as "inclined to be a bit of a bully" was helping a small, physically disabled boy kick a soccer ball. Perhaps not in itself a notable event. But the pleasure that he took in his protege's achievement is. And this pleasure was translated into his saying to us "look how far he can kick the ball".

This precipitated further "conversations" around the proposition that women principals make a qualitative difference to the teaching and learning environment of our primary schools. Such conversations should also be seen in the context of our continuing exploration of the relationship between education, equity and social justice (Meyenn and Parker, 1993) and the need to make the relationship a fundamental component of teacher education programs. Another vignette: As part of our secondary Diploma of Education program, students address the issues of sexism, racism, homophobia and violence. Discussion around these issues has always been lively and uncomfortable and in 1993 spilled over into violence between two male members of one tutorial group. We were called upon to investigate this incident and were, quite frankly, appalled by the lack of any real progress that had been made in students' understanding of these fundamental social issues. Our investigations proved to be exemplary of post-modernist multi positionings.

A third factor in the origins of this paper has been a long time concern with the necessity for determined and deliberate efforts to remove structural and organisational barriers and impediments to women's access to and participation in the decision making processes of educational organisations. Notwithstanding our recognition that this position is not unproblematic, we will tell a third vignette: In the planning for the visit of the Quality team to the university, a schedule had been developed which meant that of the 21 participants whom the audit team would meet in the three hours till lunch, 19 were male. When this was pointed out it was obvious that male dominance was seen as natural by the senior officers organising the visit.

TOWARDS THEORETICAL FRAMINGS.

In struggling towards a conceptual framework for our thinking we have found three writers particularly illuminating: Shirley Grundy (1993), Jill Blackmore (1989) and Bronwyn Davies (1989, 1993). Their ideas richly embedded in the discourses of social theory, gender construction, philosophy and organisational theory continue to provide intellectual jouissance.

In *Educational Leadership as Emancipatory Praxis* (1993), Grundy draws on Habermas's (1972) theory of knowledge and constitutive interests whereby interests which are technical, practical and emancipatory structure what we define as knowledge.

The task of the empirical analytic sciences incorporates a technical cognitive interest; that of the historical - hermeneutic sciences incorporates a practical interest; and the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporates the emancipatory cognitive interest. (Grundy, 1993: 165).

And the knowledge-constitutive interests theory leads to different kinds of action:

The technical interests generates rule - following action grounded in empirical laws. Interaction is both the source and consequence of knowledge informed by a practical interest, while autonomous action is the hallmark of emancipatory action. (Grundy, 1993: 167).

Grundy carefully examines educational leadership practices which could flow from these different frames for knowledge and consequent action. Briefly, and without really indicating the progression of Grundy's argument, an educational leader whose knowledge frame was described as technical would, *inter alia*, be one who:

- * sets unambiguous short-term goals

- *pre-selects the strategies for the implementation of institutional objectives

- *structures and sequences implementation strategies clearly

- *anticipates problems and prepares alternative strategies

- * as far as possible supplies answers to staff questions

- *is well prepared for staff meetings

- * runs orderly, task-oriented staff meetings

- *enthuses practitioners through her charisma

- * defuses conflict and redirects dissatisfaction

- *identifies areas of staff weakness

- *arranges staff training opportunities for the development of skills

- * rewards staff success. (Grundy, 1993: 168)

Essentially, such a leader would circumscribe her/his actions by control rather than by interaction or participation. By contrast, an educational leader whose practices were underlined by a practical interest and consequent action would embrace processes and procedures

which were interactive and participatory. Characteristics of such a leader would be:

- *has an overriding concern for the welfare of staff and clients

- *encourages staff to pursue broad professional development options

- *assists staff to set broad, long-term goals

- *involves staff in decision-making

- *facilitates the use of deliberative processes for decision-making
- *shares leadership roles among staff

- *encourages staff to adopt an experimental approach to their work

- *recognizes a variety of evidence of achievement of goals

- *arranges for shared reflection on and analysis of the outcomes of action.
(Grundy, 1993: 169-170)

Whilst these characteristics are indeed laudable and make room for and encourage involvement, interaction and participation, it is Grundy's view that whilst they are necessary they are finally insufficient. Insufficient because there is not explicitly a space for critique from which other positions can emerge. Consensus can easily enshrine and naturalise rather than interrupt the discourse.

The education leader whose position emerges from an emancipatory cognitive interest will seek actions that are emancipatory through critiquing hegemonic discourses. The critique which opens up the possibility for emancipatory praxis is one which recognises that the way things are perceived to be may, in fact, be the way they are being made to appear so that some existing unequal relationships and unjust practices may not be recognised for what they are.

...Furthermore, emancipation means freedom from domination and such freedom is possible only when communities in which justice and equality are the fundamental determinants of action. (Grundy, 1993: 171)

Grundy notes that it is 'not so easy' to list the characteristics of an educational leader who would strive towards emancipatory practice. So many of our institutions are hierarchical and bureaucratic and enshrine leadership work practices which are patriarchal, exclusive and power riven. And, the very nature of emancipatory work practices are in the process of becoming...critical consciousness is not static. However, she does suggest that emancipatory practices will involve:

- 1 Providing access to critical theorems for participants in reflection.

The designated educational leader will have flexible working arrangements which provide the opportunity and obligation for reading and discussion not available to other member of the educational community. Such theoretical knowledge should not be hoarded to empower the leader, but should be used for the empowerment of the whole group.

2 Ensuring symmetrical communication. Emancipation is dependent upon the equalization of power relations within and between groups. Symmetrical communication between participants in a discourse is an essential component of equality. The group facilitator can work towards symmetrical communication on a number of levels:

- by assisting the group to develop a common language (this will not be jargon that only the group understands, and which, therefore, excludes potential participants; rather it will be a concern that meanings are common and understood by all);
- through the development of group processes (this will entail bringing to consciousness unequal interaction patterns in the group, particularly gender- and status-related patterns of talk, and generally encouraging reflection upon decision-making processes);
- redistributing power within the group (this will entail sharing responsibility for group organization among members of the group).

3 Providing an institutional and social context for the work of the group. This may involve the establishment of links with other institutional groups who have similar aspirations and keeping the group informed of wider institutional constraints and possibilities. (Grundy, 1993: 173)

Lyn Yates in *What Happens When Feminism is an Agenda of the State? Feminist Theory and the Case of Education Policy in Australia* (1993) sounds a cautionary note about the nature of the progress/changes in the education of girls in the past 20 years. What really happens when feminist agendas become incorporated into the state's agendas? There is the potential for solidifying the debate rather than interrupting the discourse through critique and challenge. Yates examines *Girls, School and Society* (1975) and *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* (1987) and whilst acknowledging that worthwhile changes have occurred in the education of girls because of the influence of feminisms on government attitudes and policies, she demonstrates that there are silences in the text that need voicing:

Certainly, in the context of an education system in which retention rates through school and tertiary studies have very dramatically increased, far more girls now obtain a tertiary qualification, and their representation in the key professional fields of medicine and law has improved. But there is still a very large difference in the pattern of the jobs girls take up as compared with those entered by boys; in the pattern of the unpaid work each assume responsibility for; and a significant differential in the average earnings of the two groups. (Yates, 1993: 26)

Interestingly we note that our theorising and research are situated in

a context where despite the efforts of state and federal governments in the country over the past fifteen years to enshrine affirmative action and equal opportunity for women in legislation and policy, the percentage of women in educational leadership positions has decreased.

For example, in NSW between 1971 and 1983, the percentage of women primary principals decreased from 28% to 19%. Figures for Great Britain and the USA reflect similar trends (Blackmore 1989: 95). Figures for Great Britain between 1988 and 1991 show that in primary schools just under one-third of male teachers are heads, compared to one if 14 women teachers. (Ouston, 1993: 3)

Jenny Ozga concludes:

Women form the majority of the workforce in education; they are under-represented in its management. This is the case in all sectors, and in all developed countries. Women are more visible in the management of education offered to younger pupils: as the age of the pupils increases, the proportion of women diminishes. (Ozga 1993: 4)

Jill Blackmore in *Educational Leadership: A Feminist Critique and Deconstruction* explores the inadequacies of prevailing gendered and hierarchical theories of organisational and educational administration which assume that masculinist models, postulated as they are on positivist views of knowledge and methodologies, are indicative of all experience.

Hierarchical relationships are considered to be the 'givens' of 'rational' organisational life. Leaders display attributes and behaviours, possess moral virtues and principles, which are generally associated with 'Masculinity' (Blackmore, 1989: 94).

Such a position displaces and marginalises women from the domain of educational administration thought and practice. Blackmore argues for a different view: one that reconstructs the dominant view and foregrounds, in particular, a concept of power that is, as she says, 'multi-dimensional and multi-directional' where leadership is about empowerment and communitarian and collective practices and principles.

We are alerted to the limitations of constraining views of leadership and invited to encompass leadership as an emancipatory practice, a practice that includes women's experiences and histories although not necessarily oppositional to those of men. (See also Coombe et al, 1992)

Which brings us to Bronwyn Davies' (1989, 1993) challenge to deconstruct the male/female dualities. Drawing on the work of Julia Kristeva she argues that a position transcending the oppositional has the potential to change the social order in the interests of authentic identity and equality (Davies, 1989). This is not to say that Davies

any more than Kristeva rejects the liberal feminist position of demanding access to the male symbolic order (educational administration and leadership) nor the position of the radical feminists who extol the essentialist difference. Indeed all three positions must have a parallel existence...in the same historical time, or even interwoven one with the other. (Kristeva in Davies, 1989: 71)

Instructively, for our purposes, Davies through her study of pre and primary school children, explores how female gendered identity is established early and that such a gendered identity is uncomfortable with power. Access to the male symbolic order is necessary if the discourse and the practice are to be changed but for many women power remains fundamentally contradictory to the ordinary type and the idealisation of the idea of being female. (Davies, 1989: 71)

So why these theorists? Because it seemed to us that the positions they were arguing were complex, rich and empowering of woman, were encompassing of denser concepts of educational leadership and were sensitive to the potential for education to vanguard issues of social justice and equity.

We did, however, search the literature for empirical studies on gender and educational leadership styles. But in the end it was not a particularly exciting trail to follow:. There really was no fright there. But the study of Eagly, Karau and Johnson (1992) is interesting nonetheless. Using meta-analytic methods to review fifty

studies comparing the leadership styles of principals of public schools, they concluded that female principals adopted a more democratic or participative style and a less autocratic and directive style than their male counterparts.

There was also a less significant tendency for female principals to be more task oriented where task oriented leadership might involve inducing teachers to other school personnel to follow rules and procedures, maintaining high standards for performance, and making principals and teacher roles explicit. (Eagly, et al, 1992: 91)

We found the researchers discussion of this tendency noteworthy. The role of principal especially in the elementary school, is seen by the wider community as an appropriate role for women. Therefore, the article argues, women are more likely to see themselves as competent to perform such a role. Perhaps this speculation fits with Carolyn Steedman's ideas in *The Mother Made Conscious* (1985) where she argues that the traditional "feminine virtues are confirmed within the practice of primary schooling" (Steedman, 1985: 92) and being a leader within such a site is only an extension of the confirmation.

PRELIMINARY FORAYS: THE STUDY.

To begin to push further some of our observations, discussion, experiences and readings, we decided to conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with women primary school principals who were considered to be successful by their colleagues and senior departmental officers.

The interviews focussed on the principal's perceptions of a range of issues which might begin to explain what we had seen as the qualitative differences of the school we had visited. The interview schedule (Attachment A) sought their explanation of how and why they became a principal; the characteristics of their leadership and administration of the school; the impact of their leadership on the teaching and learning environment of the school and the impact of their leadership on issues of equity and social justice.

The interview schedule was trialed and minor adjustments made and the interviews were conducted either face-to-face or by telephone and recorded with the consent of the principals. The tapes were analysed and themes and apparent contradictions identified. Interestingly, for all 5 women, their present position was their first as principal.

THEMES AND CONTRADICTIONS.

On Becoming a Principal

Apart from one principal, none saw herself as a likely candidate for an administrative leadership position in a primary school. The women emphasised instead, their interest in, and professional satisfaction, and indeed pleasure from their role as teachers:

"[Being a principal] it was never a plan, never a goal of mine. I come from a working class background where the aspirations weren't even to reach as high as a classroom teacher. So once I'd become a teacher, I'd reached my life goal. So it was really through a series of circumstances...so it's never been a long term goal..." (Principal A)

Or as another explained:

"...people said why don't you? Now I'll put that in the context of me not having any ambition whatsoever or didn't think that I did. They used to say why don't you go for the list and I'd say 'no I don't really think I could'. They'd say go on have a go!" (Principal B)

Pleasure in teaching as an explanation for reluctance to leave the classroom is evidenced in the following comment:

"First of all I was a very reluctant principal because I loved teaching and I'm first and foremost an educationalist and coming out of the classroom wasn't seeing far enough down the track how I could still do a lot of teaching if I was a principal - teacher of teachers - I was reluctant to become a non-teaching - out of a class principal..."
(Principal C)

One principal, however, saw herself as always having been ambitious and stated that no matter what job she had chosen she would have wanted to go as far as she could.

"This is a very difficult question for me to answer. I don't know what factors influenced me in becoming a principal. I only knew that I always was a reasonably ambitious person and it wouldn't have mattered which particular profession I'd gone into I would have aspired to get as far up the tree as I could." (Principal D)

A number of the principals commented that the fact that many women teachers don't aspire to becoming principals is often gender related.

"...it could be endemic to all us females where we do not necessarily value our own skills in this regard and we need reinforcement or validation from other people..." (Principal B)

"...there is a gender relation component in it...I think more males aspire to leadership and power largely because of the role modelling in that there are just more men in powerful positions than there are women so they...it's a different culture for men..." (Principal D)

In all cases, the women pointed to the importance of mentors or significant others in changing their view of themselves and their potential for becoming a principal. For some, this was one person, and for others it was several who encouraged and persuaded.

"...I'd been happily working as a classroom teacher but very involved in the disadvantaged schools program ...the deputy principal called me

to talk to me about going for a first list. She spent 6 months talking me into it." (Principal A)

"I didn't realise she was being supportive...I was still very reluctant, very, very reluctant...she would push me to have a go at things...I had to be brought to recognise my potential, I couldn't do it myself." (Principal E)

In particular, they pointed to the importance of their mentors in providing them with opportunities "for showing what they [were] capable of" and encouraging them to "take risks" in trying "new things".

"...early in my teaching career he encouraged me to go for promotion...provided me with experiences at school level which are absolutely essential if you are going to succeed." (Principal D)

"...he gave me opportunities that enabled me to be a viable candidate...many women apply for jobs and they aren't successful because they haven't had the experience or the opportunities...thats where your sponsor or mentor is so important." (Principal D)

Interestingly, another reason that the women used to explain changing view of their readiness to become a principal was the negative experiences they had of some leaders. Somewhat hesitantly, one woman said: "I looked around and saw that most of them were jerks and thought 'I can do at least as well as that'." (Principal B)

"I had the opposite role model. She was so appalling, the worst kind of leader, authoritarian, devisive, negative. This spurred me on. She was the anthesis of any other female role models." (Principal A)

How they saw themselves as principal

All the women saw themselves as having very clear ideas of what they wanted to achieve. This was expressed in a number of ways:

"I do have very strong views about things... I guess I am very opinionated... I feel very passionate about certain things in education and I really go all out to achieve these in a variety of ways... lots and lots of strategies... I am basically passionate about...making things better for kids...like having them learn to value their own strengths..." (Principal B)

AND

"I've developed my beliefs and my philosophy and I like people to know what they are...I don't mind if they disagree..." (Principal D)

The principals did not see themselves as aggressive or authoritarian but saw themselves as being very determined.

"I can't be aggressive or very forceful with people I work with but I am very determined." (Principal E)

They also acknowledged that this determination was sometimes seen differently by others. One woman described herself as "mellowed authoritarian" while another said that some people claimed that she was to the "right of Gengis Kahn". This clearly focussed determined approach is consistent with the U.S. survey, Eagly et.al (1992), of school principals which showed women to be more task oriented than

their male counterparts.

In describing the way they tried to operate as principal words such as collaborative, co-operative, democratic, consultative, supportive and team approach were used.

"I try to be co-operative, collaborative, decisive, modelling, encouraging, that's how I would now describe my leadership style...sense of humour and celebrating talent." (Principal C)

in the words of another principal.

"I think my style is a team builder - I like to build a group focus - have everybody working together as part of a team so there is very much sharing, nobody is seen as in total control, everyone has responsibility for areas and needs to contribute to the whole program moving forward - would see myself as a facilitator..." (Principal A)

Another emphasises that she is not dictatorial in her running of the school.

"I'm conscious that I have the final responsibility in all cases anyway... I'm not dictatorial in any way... I use collaboration, consultative practice and I feel that delegation is something that I am very keen on, I try to delegate a lot...however I don't think the debate should go on forever, you have to capture the debate...there has to be a bottom line...so you say bottom line by three o'clock this afternoon. (Principal D)

The principal who commented that she couldn't be aggressive felt that she should be more assertive particularly at meetings outside the school at, for example, principals' conferences and other regional meetings.

"It wouldn't come natural to me to be assertive you know I just don't feel comfortable with that... I've seen other people be assertive...and they are the people who seem to be going places...and I think maybe that's the way I should be if I want to go any further." (Principal E)

All principals demonstrated an impressive concern for the welfare, both personal and professional of their staff. They liked to operate a supportive, open door policy so that staff felt that they could come and discuss issues with them whenever it was necessary. This support was exemplified in a number of ways but particularly in giving staff opportunities for professional development and indeed sharing power.

"...the significant woman principal in my life gave me confidence in

myself - she let me take risks - and thats the thing I am always after people - if they say 'I'd like to try something' I say 'give it a go'...with others who may need to step off the edge. I'll say 'heres something, why don't you have a go at this'...I'm constantly encouraging people to leap off the edge...and I'll provide the bungy rope..." (Principal B)

"and I definitely look to other people - so if I see any talent or potential in somebody...I make sure they get a lot of opportunity to do that. (Principal A)

In trying to describe "leadership style the woman in varying degrees contrasted their leadership with what they saw as typical male leadership.

One commented that "I don't know, I'm not sure if I'm different but...I don't believe in bossing,...I believe in team work, I've got a strong commitment to collaborate learning at all levels of the school. I believe in team work which means there are a lot more responsibilities thrust on people...everyone has to take personal responsibility within the group...this is misconstrued sometimes, by some people, as not being the boss, who should be the boss." (Principal B)

Another points out, what is for her, a very significant difference and that is the patriarchal and often patronising leadership style of males.

"I would describe my leadership style as different from a male one."

JP: How?

"The principal who was a male that was here before me I think had a style that was typical of male principals...it is a style of patriarchal leadership...I know what's best for you I'm the father figure, I know what's best for you because I'm doing it with your best interests at heart...this type of leadership doesn't really allow anybody to participate in the decisions or to make critical comments or to have any ownership. One of my colleagues - who is only a young male, and a recent principal, still does this - he describes himself as a benevolent dictator...which is really patriarchal leadership." (Principal D)

The next quotation makes very clear the point that we must be wary of making generalisations, or setting up binary oppositions between male and female identities.

"...it differs from some male styles that I've seen, its not as

assertive as a lot of male styles that I've seen but then I've worked

with some men who are very similar to the way I worked...but I would have to say that I have seen more males operate in the authoritarian style than any other style but certainly not exclusively...and the same with women, more women operate in a vaguely similar way to the way I operate but certainly not all women...". (Principal A)

One of the principals when discussing the difference between male and female leadership makes a very interesting observation.

"I think women have more freedom to express warmth and appreciation in giving hugs and that sort of thing and if a man does that then he can be up for harassment but it doesn't seem to happen the other way round..." (Principal C)

MAYBE QUALITATIVE DIFFERENCES

All principals saw the way they ran the school as having a decided impact on: the work practices of the staff; staff-principal relationships; relationships between staff; and on the organisation of the learning in the school. All saw their emphasis on team work and on the collaborative, co-operative organisation of learning as key features of their schools. As indicated earlier, there was an emphasis on trying to identify teachers strengths and thence capitalising on them.

"I work on people's strengths...if they come to me with an idea, an initiative they wanted to take, I give them support...by celebrating their strengths they then want to do something about their weakness, I didn't have to point out to them..." (Principal C)

In one of the schools the principal stressed the informal, supportive relationship that she had developed with the staff. She describes this relationship as:

"...very informal, we have an open agenda staff meeting that everyone can contribute to it on a white board...the staff rotate in taking minutes and chairing these meetings. My role is definitely facilitator, I might have the departmental knowledge or can link people to one another with what's going on or I can suggest where things are available..." (Principal A)

She goes on to argue that the supportive co-operative style of the staff flows on to the teaching learning environment in the classroom.

"I think showing that you are human and you realise we all need a bit of recharging flows on to the classes because things are very steady in the classes, we don't have as many children with behaviour problems...

The climate of the school is more caring and more calm. I'm attributing that to the fact that the style I have with the staff and the way we are fairly supportive of each other is flowing on to the

classroom." (Principal A)

Another principal comments:

"There is certainly a considerable amount of co-operative work that goes on now. "

B.M.: Is this gender related?

"I do think that it is gender related but the thing is that there aren't that many men in the school...so they are bashed into submission by sheer numbers..." (Principal D)

By encouraging staff to take risks and developing an environment that

allows people to make mistakes an atmosphere of trust develops in the school.

"I don't jump on people who stuff up." (Principal D)

This is then translated into the classroom where a similar atmosphere is created allowing children to take risks and to make mistakes.

One principal argues that by involving staff in decision making they become more informed and aware of the range of issues affecting schools and education generally.

"Staff now have a raised awareness of promotional opportunities, an increased awareness of how a school operates and what the work of the principal is...there has been an increased interest from the executive staff in how I do what I do..." Additionally, "I think the females feel more confident in volunteering themselves for responsibility and administration than they would if it was a male principal".
(Principal D)

One principal suggests that because she doesn't claim to know everything and hence will ask staff for their advice staff have become more willing to experiment in the classrooms.

"...also I go and talk to them, if I've got things I'm not sure of, come through the fax, ...hey what do you make of this?" (Principal E)

All principals saw issues of equity as fundamental to education and determining the way they organised their school. Further, issues of equity were judged to be an integral part of teaching and learning and the work practices. Issues of gender, ethnicity, disability and class were foregrounded so that every child had the opportunity for the most appropriate learning experiences. These principals saw themselves as instituting practices which minimised the barriers to full participation in schooling.

"When I first went there there was a boys stamp collecting group and a

girls stamp collecting group...I couldn't believe it - and never the twain shall meet. We now have one stamp collecting group."
(Principal E)

The principals gave examples relating to the organisation of the playground, participation in school concerts, the wearing of school uniforms, and access to computers, amongst others.

"I make a conscious effort to check the playground to ensure that the whole playground is not taken up by boys with the girls sitting around the peripheries. On the other hand, I do recognise that the girls do like to have a quiet place, so do some boys. So I've established two quiet areas, one in the infants, one in the primary, so that the children who don't want to be roudy can sit there quietly. Although its not specifically a gender thing, generally, the pupils in the quiet areas are girls." (Principal D)

Another principal pointed out that issues of equity not only apply to the students and the organisation of their learning but is also an important factor in the principal's interaction with her staff.

"Equity generally has always been a priority for me...Equity in terms of giving everybody an equal opportunity...so if I think somebody might have an opinion and they're not a very confident speaker in the staff room and don't have a lot of self confidence generally, I'll talk to

them first so that when it comes up in the staff meeting, I'll say look, I've talked to a few people and so in that sense equity is not just male and female, its also people who are confident or not so confident to speak and its the same with the children..." (Principal A)

All principals cited examples of their focus in encouraging teachers to consider equity issues within the classroom. For example,

"...in the encouragement of girls to participate, the raising of consciousness of staff like you don't put a boy and a girl on a computer together...just small things that their learning style is co-operative, that they like to talk and share and thats how they get the best out of their work. I certainly hope I've enhanced the learning opportunities for all children in the school." (Principal D)

SPECULATION ABOUT QUALITATIVE DIFFERENCE

In varying degrees these principals are moving towards emancipatory practices particularly in their espousal of symmetrical communication. They appreciate the potential for moving outside the safe and the

known through encouraging their staff to take risks...with the support of a bungy rope. Maybe that's real sharing of power and it seems that their policies and practices are firmly embedded in a commitment to issues of social justice and equity. Grundy says:

...emancipation means freedom from domination, and such freedom is possible only within communities in which justice and equality are the fundamental determinants of action. (Grundy, 1993: 171)

We have cause to wonder whether supporting an environment where teachers who 'stuff up are not jumped on' translates itself into attitudes towards children and their learning which break the more usual frame of teacher-pupil interaction. Perhaps that is qualitative difference also.

And all of this suggests a view of leadership that moves towards reconstructing the masculinist perspective: there is less emphasis on individualism and hierarchical relationships for instance. And maybe this is why the Ms. Muffet's are no longer frightened of the big spider because it is possible to see power differently and to use it for non-bossy purposes. Furthermore, 'sat' has been turned into 'act'.

There is a sense in which the principals are attempting to interrupt the prevailing discourses: not only about leadership but about gender construction. There seemed to be a recognition that insistence on dualities was not always productive in understanding relationships or creating educational environments.

Maybe a tangent, but an important observation nonetheless: the principals were 'delighted' to talk with us about their schools, policies, practices, interests and passions. If we position ourselves as teacher educators working with teachers in partnerships that uphold reciprocity, then, particularly because of our experience with these five principals, we can be positioned by teachers as interpreters of context and action that lead to the form of critique Shirley Grundy suggests and perhaps even provide the contextualised guidance Jennifer Gore (1992) proffers.

Now to our vignettes: we think we can identify some qualitative difference; we continue to advocate the need for women to be properly represented at all levels of education and we think there are possibilities for disturbing our students' positions on issues of gender construction especially when we can draw on the real experiences of the principals of our exploratory study.

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