

Abstract

Female secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago: career paths and management practice

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This dissertation examines the career paths and management practice of a group of female secondary school principals from a variety of school types in Trinidad and Tobago. Historically educational management has been a male-dominated enterprise and theories of educational management have been based on male experiences. This study documents the experiences of women educational managers from their own perspective. It examines how their gender, class and race affected their career paths and their management practice.

All principals and vice-principals from secondary schools were surveyed in order to obtain a demographic picture of educational managers in Trinidad and Tobago. From the population twelve women principals were chosen to be interviewed using a career history approach. Two additional respondents from a different educational environment were

added to provide greater insight into the role of context in determining career paths and management practice.

The data were analysed to identify basic themes and constant comparative analysis was used to arrive at core concepts and theoretical linkages which described and explained the patterns coming out of the data.

The most common career path for these women, the majority of whom were married, was the deferred career. They gave first priority to raising a family, putting their career aspirations on hold until their children were grown. A few tried to balance career and family, but only the single women were able to build a career from the start.

These women brought to the task of management relational strengths gained from their experience as mothers, wives and daughters. Their practice was informed by an ethic of care and an emphasis on collaboration and connectedness. In many ways they approached the task of managing their schools in ways similar to their male counterparts but with the additional emphasis on relationships, they provide a model for a more humane and transformative model of schooling accessible to all principals regardless of gender.