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Introduction

What follows on these pages is a proposed interpretive interview study with the intended purpose of identifying and describing the journey and experiences of female Superintendents throughout their careers. The title of the proposed study is, 'Pathways to success: A Study of Female Superintendents perceptions of their Career Journey in the Province of British Columbia'. The purpose of the study is to draw out common themes experienced during the careers of female superintendents who have aspired to and have achieved the role of superintendent in a public school district in British Columbia. The study is important because there is a lack of information regarding the experiences of female superintendents in British Columbia and Canada. In addition, the female representation at the Superintendent level is considerably lower than that of their male counterparts. Significant voices are underrepresented in this arena. This study will positively contribute to the literature and add to the knowledge base for females who aspire to achieving top leadership positions in education.-

Across the Province of British Columbia there are just over 1900 public schools. Canadian results from the OECD Pisa Study (2016) show that the education system currently ranks among the top ten to top three in international assessments of reading, science and math. Results from this same study (OECD 2016) explain that the education system is therefore considered a high performing system and the outcomes of the students in British Columbia on international assessment demonstrate a high level of equity among students. However, there is a noticeable lack of gender equity in top leadership positions in public education in British Columbia. Of the sixty public school districts in the Province of British Columbia, only sixteen women sit in the seat of the superintendent. The goal of this present study will be to interview a minimum of ten -of the

sixteen female superintendents to learn about their career paths. Specifically, the intent is to discover leadership skills or traits that female Superintendents possess that differentiate them from males in similar positions.

The superintendent is the CEO of schools. K-12 superintendents are not part of a collective bargaining unit. They are interviewed, appointed and evaluated by an appointed school board. As outlined in the recruitment information from the BC Public School Employers Association, the superintendent is responsible for the supervision of schools, implementation of programs, evaluation of senior staff, overseeing district budgets and reporting to the Board of Education. A key responsibility is to outline, revise, and refine the District achievement contract to ensure it meets the needs of the clientele it serves. The role is complex and multi layered.

According to *Teachers in British Columbia: A feminized workforce*, a published report from the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF), 78% of the educating population are women while only fewer than 30% hold leaderships positions in secondary schools and even fewer in the Superintendents role. The prevailing gender disparity in superintendency is particularly surprising in light of this fact. In addition to having greater representation in the educating population, more women than men graduate with master's and doctoral degrees in education. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) found that "women earned 78.7 percent of bachelors, 77.3 percent of master's, and 67.5 percent of doctoral degrees in education" (p.30). It appears women possess the knowledge and professional experience to lead school districts. With this information in mind, we wonder what factors explain this differential. I propose to explore the "why and how" regarding female superintendents in the Province of British Columbia. The key research questions this study seeks to answer are:

1. How do female Superintendents in the Province of British Columbia describe their experience of seeking and attaining their positions?
2. What methods, strategies and processes have female superintendents developed that has helped them achieve success throughout their career?
- ~~3.~~—What attributes do female superintendents perceive they possess that have helped them reach success in their careers?

3.

What difficulties or barriers have female superintendents faced and overcome in their careers?

- 4.
5. What role has gender played in their ascendancy to the position of superintendent?

The goal of seeking answers to these questions is to contribute to the educational leadership that is of interest to the Provincial Superintendent organization. By gathering accounts of female superintendents, we can learn from their successes, identify attributes that have led to success in their careers and understood the barriers that have hindered career development. Aspiring leaders will see that the road ahead is paved with good examples of networks of professionals they can connect with, learn from and be inspired by, and at the same time, they will be guided by the knowledge passed from female superintendents. In addition, the study will make clear that gender inequity exists in top educational leadership positions in the Province of British Columbia. In 2020, this may be an uncomfortable and perhaps embarrassing revelation. However, it is important to recognize and proactively plan to address the issue. My hope is that this research will help guide the path for women seeking to serve as superintendents in the Province of British Columbia.

Literature Review

History of women seeking superintendent positions in Canada

Leadership

The role of the leader is key. Essentially, there are two functions of a leader: to “provide direction and exercise influence”. Each of these functions are carried out in different ways and depending on how these functions are carried out may determine the model of leadership a person employs. As Yuki (2002) notes,

Leadership influences the interpretation of events for followers, the choice objectives of the group or organization, the organization of work activities to accomplish objectives, the motivations of followers to achieve objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships, teamwork and collaborations and cooperation from people outside the group or organization. (p.3)

The leader is the key person that the employees look to when seeking insight, guidance, opportunities, purpose, direction, inspiration and help with problem solving. The leader works in conjunction with a team to create a culture of learning and engagement.

Historical view of women in leadership

Barriers for Female Superintendents

The Glass Ceiling

The definition of leadership might differ according to gender. In 1997, Nancy Adler, in the article, “Global Leadership: Women Leaders”, defines the term of leadership as,

To lead comes from the Latin verb “agree” meaning to set into motion. The Anglo Saxon origins of the word from “leadere” means, People on a journey”. Today’s meaning of the word leaders has the sense of an individual who sets ideas, people, organizations and societies into motion; someone who takes the worlds of ideas, people, organizations and societies on a journey. To lead such a journey requires vision, courage and influence.

Global leadership requires a different type of leadership.

The commentary well over twenty years ago was a call for leaders with a new way of thinking to lead this twenty first century struggles. But here we sit on the verge of 2020 and we still only have 25% of the seats in the educational leadership roles in the Province of British Columbia.

In the Province of British Columbia, there are 60 public school Districts. Each with a Superintendent at the helm. According to their own literature from the BCSSA website, the role of the superintendent is to “enable our members to be visionary leaders of public education by supporting their individual professional development and by representing their collective wisdom and interests”. Of the sixty districts, sixteen of those seats are presided by women. With just over 25% of the visionary leadership, culture and direction of districts being led by women, it begs the questions, “Where are the women?”

What prevents women from claiming a seat at the table? The term 'glass ceiling', has historically been used to explain the lack of women in senior leadership positions. Morrison (1987) defines the glass ceiling as, "unacknowledged upper limit in corporations and other organizations, above which it is difficult or even impossible for women to reach out to the highest ranks." The evidence suggests that a glass ceiling exists for female superintendents in the Province of British Columbia, particularly when the workforce has been described as feminized, yet a lack of senior female leadership continues to exist.

Other themes in the literature suggest that leadership styles may differ according to gender and this could explain the lack of female leadership in the higher echelons of business and education forums. Dobie & Hummel, (2006) suggest that successful women share traits such as resiliency skills, strong personal support systems and mentorship. However, this has come to be, finding common themes that will inform and support women as they work through their careers is valuable research.

What is the experience of female superintendents in the Province of British Columbia that has allowed them to reach career success? This paper will reflect on the sixteen women superintendents in the province of British Columbia and explore how the behaviours of female Superintendents in the Province of British Columbia found career success.

The manner in which males and females communicate can be a possible explanation of the inequity in position. Positive relationships are vital to the success of an organization, and positive relationships take work. And good relationships are the key to good results. Relationships are connections between leaders and followers, and in this scope worked together towards a common pursuit and done in a framework of listening, respect and trust.

The theoretical definition of a relationship is the bond established between people through encouragement, compassion, and open communication, which lead to feelings of respect, trust and acceptance (Bermack, 2014; Frankl, 1984; George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007; Henderson, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007; Liborius, 2014; Mautz, 2015; McKee et al., 2008; Reina & Reina, 2007; Seligman, 2011; D. M. Smith, 2011; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the definition of relationship is the mutual work that exists between a leader and follower with the purpose of working towards a common goal.

Communication is also a leadership trait that might occur differently according to gender. For example, Brunner (1998) tells us that women have a tendency to listen and not speak as much as their male counterparts. This is not because they have nothing to say, instead it is a factor of listening and not speaking for its own sake. Further, in this article based on strategies for success from women superintendents, advice includes communication styles that include speaking loud but not too loudly, assertive but not aggressive, speaking carefully and quietly and with confidence, and “develop the ability to remain “feminine” in the ways they communicate and at the same time be heard in a masculinized culture”.

Career Path

What do people want out of work? Adam Grant (2013) Wharton Business School suggests there are three strategies that leaders must keep in mind when it comes to creating meaningful work: 1) show your people how their work benefits others 2) share how others appreciate your peoples work 3) help develop a deeper understanding of customer’s problems and needs. People want to be part of something bigger than themselves, and they want to find significance in their work. People want to work hard, to be valued, to contribute, to be appreciated, grow, develop and excel. They want to have new experiences and relate to others whom they trust and respect. And most of all,

people want to make a difference. When we reflect on career theory, if 50% of the population in an organization is unable to find significance in their work, this is a potential lost opportunity for an organization. In, “Career Path Models for Women Superintendents”, McDada and Drake (1982) discuss the obstacles that exist for women who aspire to become superintendents. Women have a tendency to have an ‘interrupted family or other line’ to the superintendency. This can occur as a result of family responsibilities, return to school for additional education, as well as hiring from outside the district one currently works in as well as conflicts between spouses if the female in the relationship wishes to work towards the superintendency.

School Boards

Methodology and Research Design

According to the British Columbia School superintendents Association, the role of the superintendent is to meet the needs of students, teachers, administrators and the community at large, while being the driving force behind the implementation of new programs. As well, superintendents must do the work of supporting good working relationships throughout. In order to understand the experiences of female superintendents in the Province of British Columbia and how they have managed to find career success, -qualitative research will be used. -The goal is to identify common themes throughout our study. This will be valuable in paving the way towards greater equity in the leadership position of the superintendent.

Interviews with female leaders is key to understanding the role of the Superintendent and even more importantly, insight may be provided for future educators who aspire to the role of a

superintendent. The goal is to collect meaningful information from female Superintendents. The goal is to describe, understand and have insight into the leadership journey of female superintendents in the Province of British Columbia.

The study design is a qualitative design. Creswell (2014) states, “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4).

Understanding qualitative research involves using open-ended questions that can then be analyzed through a thematic lens (Creswell, 2014). Gaining insight to the journey and experiences of female educators, as they worked towards their role of becoming a superintendent, is best evaluated through open-ended questions. Sample semi-structured interview questions are outlined in Appendix A. Each interview is expected to take approximately one hour per person.

Creswell (2014) states that “phenomenological research comes from the philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon described by the participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon. The design has strong philosophical underpinnings and typically involves conducting interviews.”

Purposive Sample

Population is defined as “a group of elements or cases, whether individual, objects or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p.129). The population for research purposes in this study is female superintendents from both rural and urban districts in the province of British Columbia. The individuals chosen for this study are a non-random sample as there are only sixteen

to choose from for this study. The intent is to collect research from all sixteen female superintendents, however the researcher recognizes that there is a possibility that not all sixteen will be keen to engage with this study. The ultimate goal is to have at least ten female superintendents engage in this study. For the purpose of this study, on line Zoom sessions and phone interviews will be conducted.

Data Collection Process

All participants will be given structured interview questions as listed in the sample questions in appendix A. Open ended questions such as these listed below are designed to allow the researcher to draw insight and identify common themes from the sample group.

Each superintended will be contacted via e mail to introduce the intent and purpose of the research. After agreement is reached (to participate in the study) we will allow for a Zoom meeting session to carry out the face to face interview. If situation and time permits, the option for travel may present itself, however the chances of this being consistent are minimal. Due to the geographic expanse of the Province, however, it will not be the case that the researcher will be able to travel to all sites where female superintendents work. Creswell (2014) states that in qualitative interviews face-to-face interviews or telephone interviews are conducted, and the interviews involve unstructured and generally open ended questions that are few in number and with the intent to elicit views and opinions for the participants.

Data Analysis

The researcher will analyze the data that will be collected from the interviews. Creswell (2003) outlines the process of organizing, preparing, reading, reviewing then coding the data. The process will include careful note taking during the interview. Notes will include information

gathered from the interviews. Following the interviews and collating of responses, the responses of each interview will be shared with the specific participating superintendent to ensure accuracy, clarity and understanding of responses. This will allow for feedback from the participants in the study as accuracy in the transcription process is important to pull out common themes in the study. Following the transcription of the data the researcher will review the data and reflect on the general impressions and source common themes.

Limitations of the study

Time and interest

Superintendents have a time consuming job, and may not always have the time that is necessary to participate in a study such as this. It may be that the number of participants is fewer than ten to sixteen participants. This will affect the opportunity to draw generalizations from this study for other female educators who aspire to become a superintendent. In addition, I am making the assumption that women superintendents are willing, available, reflective and interested in participating in the interview.

Geography

The Province of British Columbia covers a vast geographical landscape. There is an excellent chance that the researcher will meet some of the participants in person to complete their interviews. Because the bias of the interviewer may change when completing a face-to-face

interview rather than one via Zoom or through e mail, there may be issues with reliability of the information.

Positionality on behalf of the researcher

The researcher has been working in the public, private, independent and international education systems in four different countries over the past twenty-five years. The researcher has held positions as teacher, counselor, administrator and International District Principal. Aside from moving to China to work as a Principal of a British Columbia Offshore School, the researcher has found it difficult to even have the chance to be interviewed for higher-level administrative positions within public schools in the Province of British Columbia. The researcher has watched male counterparts with less education and experience land positions seemingly easily. The researcher must be cautious throughout the research process to be aware of and articulate her bias and how this might be influencing the interpretations of the research data.

Appendix A

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself (demographic information such as age marital status, family, number of years in education, current position, education).
- ~~2. How would you describe your path to the superintendency both personally and professionally?~~
2. ~~What words would you use to describe yourself when you first began your career in education?~~ Please describe your path to achieve the position of superintendent.
3. What is the source of your motivation to pursue a leadership position in education?
4. How would you describe personal and professional success for yourself?
5. When you began in education, did you have a desire to move into administration?
6. Have you met the career goals you set for yourself?
7. What barriers to success have you faced throughout your career?
8. In terms of career attainment, looking back would you have made any choices differently?
9. What personal sacrifices have you made in order to be a superintendent?
10. What advice and information can you share with female educators who aspire to become a superintendent?

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Final Project Description

Pick a topic (could be your future dissertation or could be a work-related project). The paper must take the form of a research proposal and answer the following questions. Although you can use the following questions as headers to structure the document, the paper should be a coherent narrative that is internally consistent—the description of method should answer the questions posed in the answer to number 1, for example. Length: 20 pages + reference list (12-point font). Be sure to use in-text citations in APA format and include a reference list, also in correct APA format.

The paper must be submitted no later than 11:59 pm (BC time) on December 8. Submit the assignment with the attached rubric on Blackboard. Late assignments will not be accepted.

1. A proposed title
2. What: What is the proposed purpose of your study? What dilemma, conundrum, or problem of practice is addressed by your study? What do you want to learn from it? What practical goals do you hope to achieve? What key research questions does your study seek to answer?
3. Why: Why is it important to learn the answers to your questions? How will your workplace be better or different if you do the proposed study? This is the “so what” part of the prospectus. Explain to your reader why this study will make a contribution to your workplace or the field.

4. Identify the major ideas and major strengths and weakness of existing literature you have read to date relevant to your topic. How does this literature inform your study? This does not have to be a comprehensive literature review at this point. At a minimum, you should have identified and read at least 10 substantive sources on the topic. What more will you need to read to round out your literature review?

5. How: Describe the method you propose to answer the questions your study seeks to address. Why is this an appropriate method? It is insufficient to simply say “I will construct a questionnaire or conduct a survey.” You need to provide more detail on the types of questions a questionnaire would contain. You do not need a detailed set of survey items. The same is true if you select a qualitative method – I need to know more than that you will interview people. I need to know what you would ask, in a general sense, and of whom. What I really want to know is how do you propose to answer your research questions.

6. Who: Describe the proposed sample or data source will you use? Again, simply saying that you will interview 10 students is not sufficient. Be as specific as you can be at this point.

7. What thoughts do you have at this point about how you will analyze your data?

Criteria by which prospectus will be evaluated:

- Prospectus has a clearly stated purpose that is understandable to others.
- A coherent case is made for the importance of doing the study: the author establishes a problem, dilemma, conundrum, or gap in knowledge in or about the workplace that needs to be filled. You make a convincing case about why the answers to your study are important.
- The author has identified at least 10 substantive sources of literature related to the problem (the gap in knowledge or workplace problem).
- The author has identified the major ideas in the literature reviewed to date and describes how they inform the study.
 - Strengths and weaknesses of literature are identified.
 - Author identifies additional literature that needs to be reviewed.

- Author identifies and describes a method for fulfilling the purpose of the study.
 - Author identifies and describes an appropriate source(s) of data.
 - Author identifies and describes reasonable ways of analyzing the data.
- In-text citations are provided and are correct. A reference list in correct APA format is attached.
- The prospectus is internally consistent: the purpose, problem, literature, method, and data sources fit together.
- The prospectus is well-written, clearly organized and presents a coherent summary of the proposed study.

Research Literacy for Administrators in Higher Education

Rubric: Final Project

WRITTEN REPORT (_____ /30 pts)

Content (_____ /20 points)

- Rationale and purpose of the study (1-5 pts) _____
 - Introduces the purpose of the study and research questions to be asked
- Describes the context or workplace environment, including both practical and political considerations in which the study will take place
- Identifies the potential benefits of conducting the research – the “importance of the study”
 - Contextualization for the study (1-5 pts)
- Situates the study in some contemporary research literature (minimum of 10 sources)
 - Explains how prior literature or theory informs the study
 - Identifies the “buckets” of literature that will inform the study
 - Research Design (1-5 pts) _____
- Provides an overview of the type of study to be conducted (the method)
 - Describes the population and sample
- Describes the data that will be used to answer the research questions
 - If quantitative – explain operationalization of key DV and IV’s
 - If qualitative – provides some sample interview questions to be used
 - Describes and justifies the data analysis to be used
 - Limitations/Critique of the study (1-5 pts) _____
- Identifies the limitations or concerns you have about the proposed study
- Elaborates on some of the potential unintended consequences of the study

Clarity (1-5 points) _____

- Thoughtful, well-expressed paper that is clearly organized and includes a map and introduction
 - Evidence of careful proofreading/editing throughout

Sources (1-5 points) _____

- Uses correct APA citation format in text and in reference list
- Includes at least 10 sources (8 of which need to be research studies)

PRESENTATION (_____ /10 pts)

- Interesting, well-expressed and well-organized presentation
 - Clearly presents the topic
 - Explains the rationale for the study
 - Describes the research design
 - Uses time effectively
- Media use is appropriate and complements the presentation
 - Responds to questions appropriately and thoroughly
 - Presentation is consistent with written report

Total: _____ / 40 pts.

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions:

1. How would you describe your path to the superintendency both personally and professionally?
2. What words would you use to describe yourself when you first began your career in education?
3. As you have moved through the various stages in your career, what words would you use to describe yourself now in the role of superintendent?
 4. What is the source of your motivation?
 5. How would you describe personal and professional success?
6. When you look back over your career, can you describe a pivotal moment that led to you pursuing other areas of education?
7. When you began in education, did you have a desire to move into administration?
 12. Have you met the goals you set for yourself in terms of career attainment?
 13. What goals do you have for yourself in the future?
14. In terms of career attainment, looking back would you have made any choices differently?
 15. What personal sacrifices have you made in order to be a superintendent?
17. When you were moving throughout your career, did you have a vision of taking a leading role as a superintendent?
18. Share with me how you think vision relationships, character, inspiration and wisdom have come into play throughout your career? Please feel free to refer to specific circumstances and events.
19. Have you been inspired by a leader with these same characteristics? If so, who were they and how did they inspire you?
20. Here are the five leadership behaviours that research suggest are necessary in an exemplary leader. Looking at these, would you agree that these are all important?
 - a. Realizing that they are all important, do any jump out as being absolutely essential?

20. Of all the things we have spoken of today, vision relationships, character, inspiration and wisdom, are there any absolutes that you believe are essential for a leader to employ in their daily work within their organization?

