

RESEARCH TITLE

Women leading in disadvantaged school communities: A case study of the Historical Schools Restoration Project

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Year of Award: 2017
Qualification: PhD

ABSTRACT

Whilst the education profession is dominated by women, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions. For South African women, the situation is aggravated by the metaphorical hangover of Apartheid and patriarchy. Disturbing traditional perceptions of leadership and drawing on critical feminist theory, this study explored the educational leadership practices of women in disadvantaged rural communities. The aim of the study was to analyse the lived experiences of female education leaders in rural disadvantaged communities through a critical feminist lens. The research sites were selected from schools in the first phase of the Historical Schools Restoration Project (HSRP). Moreover, the research sites hold both geographic and historical-political significance. Geographically, the sites are located in rural, disadvantaged communities. The historical-political significance of the research sites lies in the fact that these historic schools played host to many of the leaders of South Africa's liberation struggle. Indeed, Nelson Mandela is an alumnus of one of the schools in this study. This qualitative study adopted a case studies research design. Critiquing main stream educational leadership discourses and aligning with critical feminist research methodologies, motifs of social justice, difference, inequality and power imbalances were explored. In addition, this study drew on historical research methodology in order to describe past events and understand present day educational leadership contexts. Through purposive sampling, five historic schools and 13 female participants were included in this study. In-depth interviews, focus groups, dyads, observations and archival document analysis were used as the main instruments for data collection. Data were analysed by qualitative data analysis, critical discourse analysis and feminist critical discourse analysis techniques.

The findings of this study were derived from an analysis of female educational leadership through a critical feminist lens. These findings are presented in three parts. Part One presented an analysis of three historical eras experienced by the historic schools, namely, missionary education, Bantu education and post-Apartheid education. The findings highlight issues of power, gender inequality, patriarchy and ideological influences on educational leadership practices. It was found that the colonial ideologies of

missionary education and the racist ideologies of Bantu education were misaligned with the tenets of critical feminist leadership. Despite the rhetoric of the decolonisation of education in the post-Apartheid era, the study found that the schools have not necessarily transitioned to institutional and leadership maturity. An analysis of the HSRP found that notable progress had been made in the areas of infrastructure development, curriculum management and the establishment of partnerships. However, the social, political and educational emancipation of the African Child in disadvantaged rural communities is yet to be realised.

Part Two presented an analysis of educational leadership styles. It was found that there was no preferred leadership style among the female participants. Instead, an investigation into the complex influences of South Africa's colonial and Apartheid past unearthed complex contradictions, tensions and power binaries. The educational toil of three eras contributed to the current conceptualisation of educational leadership in rural disadvantaged communities. This analysis highlighted the positioning of power in leadership relationships and social justice leadership in the historic schools.

In Part Three, four educational leadership themes were identified. The analysis of relational leadership, servant leadership, spiritual leadership and instructional leadership highlighted power imbalances and hierarchical power structures, leadership for social justice, patriarchal and socio-economic issues, as well as alternative interpretations of innovative instructional leadership. This study concluded that critical feminist approaches are indeed significant enablers towards the ultimate decolonisation of education.

Keywords: disadvantaged rural school communities, critical feminist educational leadership, critical feminist research methodologies, critical feminist pedagogy, Historical School Restoration Project (HSRP), qualitative case study methodology

The full thesis can be found at <https://allalla.academia.edu/GraemeEdwards>