CECILIA REYNOLDS: A MAJOR WRITER IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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Introduction

Dr. Cecilia Reynolds is the current Dean of the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. She is also a mother of two and has been married for 36 years. While her children were young, she taught and completed her undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Toronto. In the early 1980’s she was co-owner and editor of the Reynolds Publishing Company and for sixteen years prior, she had several non-university teaching appointments in Ontario. From 1986 to 1999, Dr. Reynolds was employed by Brock University in the Faculty of Education as a special lecturer, assistant professor, Director of Women’s Studies, and Acting Dean.

When hired to her current position, the acting provost and chair of the search committee Ken Coates at the University of Saskatchewan stated, “Dr. Reynolds has had a distinguished history in teaching and scholarship as well as excellent leadership skills.” In addition, he stated, “she would be a great asset to the College of Education and the University.” (Cecilia Reynolds Named New Dean, 2004).

Dr. Reynolds’ main research interests lie in the areas of equity and globalization in education, in addition to the role of women leaders in education. She has contributed to the field of educational administration through her journal, newspaper, and report writing and her teaching at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Furthermore, Dr. Reynolds has authored or coauthored four books primarily dealing with equity and women in leadership roles.

This description of Dr. Reynolds’ contributions to the field of education from the 1980s to the present, and in particular, her ideas related to gender equity will show how her focus went from having a local and Canadian perspective to being more international in focus as she became confident and knowledgeable in her understanding of women’s educational issues.

The 1980s

A brief perusal of Dr. Reynolds’ twenty-seven page curriculum vitae will convince even the most skeptical reader that she has contributed to the field of education. Much of her work in this decade has focused on the idea of equity for women in the field of educational administration. She has written two very impressive articles for Orbit and one for Women’s Education des femmes. Orbit is a magazine that is produced by the Ontario Institute for Studies
in Education (OISE) which is affiliated with the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto. Simultaneously, Dr. Reynolds was the Associate Dean of Academic Programs and an Associate Professor when she completed them. *Women’s Education des femmes* is a bilingual national quarterly journal published by the Canadian Congress Learning Opportunities for Women. The first article in *Orbit*, coauthored with L. Weintraub (Reynolds & Weintraub, 1986), was titled “Best People and Promotion: Cautions about Equity.” It was a very pointed article describing how school boards had developed formal equal opportunity employment statements due to the lobbying efforts of the Federation of Women Teachers’ Association of Ontario and the Women in Educational Administration (Ontario), but how actual change was not being generated. Their conclusions indicate how their thinking was starting to change from a narrow focus to a more global one. Reynolds and Weintraub state that,

until diversity is recognized and incorporated into planning and development, indeed into ways of being in schools, change is likely to remain cosmetic, measured by large percentage improvements that reflect small alterations. And, that this is a danger not only for (white) women’s experiences in school systems, but also for others, such as racial minority educators and non-teaching school board employees who remain, by and large, ghettoized. (p.4-5)

Dr. Reynolds’ second *Orbit* article, “Schoolmarm and Tokens” was published in 1988 (Reynolds, 1988). In it, she comments on the historical fact that more men than women have been school administrators. Based on the research obtained after interviewing twenty-four men and women (more than two generations of principals in elementary and secondary schools in the Toronto Board of Education), she contrasts the differences between men and women educators of the time period. She separated the men and women into two groups of twelve men and twelve women, based on the time period in which they taught. One group represented the 1950s and 1960s, the other, the 1970s and 1980s. (That is a substantial longitudinal type study.) This article provides a better picture of the commonalities and differences in the field of education across the generations. Whereas men were often encouraged *not* to pursue careers in teaching, women were. There were five consistent elements in both generations of women: that they were dutiful daughters; that they were good students; the social acceptance of the position; their sources of support; and finally, marginal appointments to administration. Reynolds’ argument that change needs to occur in the field of education in order to ensure equity is quite convincing.

The article in *Women’s Education des femmes* is titled “Man’s World/Woman’s World: Women’s Roles in Schools” (Reynolds, 1989). This article served to support previous findings that, in the past, women have been predominantly teachers whereas men have been given the
opportunity to take the role of administrators and that there is a need to review women’s work in schools in order to effect change.

The 1990’s

This period brought with it a deeper interest in further exploring her ideas related to gender equity in schools. In addition to being a visiting summer scholar at St. Mary’s University (Halifax, Nova Scotia), the Director of Women’s Studies, and the Acting Dean in the Faculty of Education at Brock University and the Associate Dean of OISE at the University of Toronto, Dr. Reynolds wrote or coauthored fourteen refereed and non-refereed journal articles and one book and conducted several workshops in Ontario dealing with equity in education. Her focus had shifted from principally dealing with women’s equity issues to exploring equity issues in general and showing how historical studies have indicated that women were in fact taught to perform for the roles they currently play in the education system. In her work during the 1990s she has also concluded that changes need to be made in the educational system so that this field is no longer a male world versus a female world.

In 1993, Dr. Reynolds published a study in the Journal of Education Administration and Foundations coauthored by Demsey called “A Comparison of How Men and Women Supervisory Officers in Ontario Spend Their Time” (Dempsey & Reynolds, 1993). Their findings were quite surprising. One might expect, based on Dr. Reynolds’ research results from the 1980s study, that women might feel less able to perform their duties in their profession, but just the opposite was seen. Women were able to hold high-level administrative positions in addition to their roles in the family. They debunk a popular myth that women are not capable of assuming supervisor officer roles due to the personal demands of the home. They conclude that more research needs to be carried out in this area due to differences in the position of supervisory officer (Dempsey & Reynolds, 1993).

In 1995, Women and Leadership in Canadian Education was coedited by Dr. Cecilia Reynolds and Dr. Beth Young (Reynolds & Young, 1995). It is a very insightful book that compiles Canadian research on gender and equity in educational administration. The book effectively described the struggles women have faced and continue to face in the fight for equity. It is not a series of complaints aimed to convince the reader that nothing can be done, but in fact the opposite, that women are optimistic that change, as little as it may be, will come and make a difference to the lives of many.

Dr. Ben Levin, a University of Manitoba professor, completed a review of the book Women and Leadership in Canadian Education. His review illuminates the disconnection that currently exists in the work of Canadian colleagues. It also indicates that very few of the authors who have written for the book have cited each other’s work. Dr. Levin found that there was considerable commonality between the articles and that much of the research was anecdotal and
Dr. Levin’s complimentary review of the book stated, “There is a necessity to continue work in this area however, as the many efforts which have been used to change the system have not been successful” (p. 117).

It is quite surprising reading a 1998 article called “Squeeze Plays and Double Binds: Women Walking the Leadership Tightrope in Education,” only to see that very little has changed internationally in the area of equity (Reynolds, 1998). In this article Dr. Reynolds conducted an email conference with educators from India, Scotland, Canada, Botswana, and the Czech Republic to determine the leadership roles of female educators and girls in these countries. What she found was that girls from these countries were experiencing similar forms of “harassment” from their male counterparts. Some of this is definitely cultural in nature and will take “overall societal” changes to move the gender issue forward. She also noted that female teachers were working toward positive and long-lasting change in the area of leadership. Dr. Reynolds concluded that

There are six linked steps for women walking the leadership tightrope: awareness; the formation of groups; the movement from rhetoric towards doing things differently; supporting the efforts of men and women working towards gender equity; recognition of positions of privilege; and finally, to question the nature of organizations that women (or men) lead. (p.38)

It is likely that as a result of her research in the area of international equity, she was prompted to edit her second book, Women and School Leadership: International Perspectives (Reynolds, 2002b). An extension of her first book, this book is a compilation of work by leading feminist scholars (Jill Blackmore, Valerie Hall, Sandra Hollingsworth, Jane Kenway, Dianna Langmead, Robyn Lock, Deborah Mindorff, Patricia Schmuck, Jane Strachan, and Beth Young) in educational administration. The contributors focus on the need for critical reflections which reveal hidden aspects of leadership phenomena and advocate diverse forms of positive action to improve the condition for women in school settings. This book challenges its readers to consider equity from all perspectives in leadership.

One of the most interesting articles was titled “Mothers, Daughters and Education: Struggles between Conformity and Resistance” (Castle, Abbey, & Reynolds, 1998). It is an article written by three women, all of whom considered themselves feminist mothers, describing the struggles in bringing up their daughters. The expected outcome for this type of mothering was to be that their daughters were enabled to take learning risks. In fact, each mother tried to protect her daughter during her university years and had in fact sheltered her from the learning risk mentioned above. This sheltering (perhaps a natural feminine nurturing instinct) is quite puzzling but understandable coming from mothers who had completed copious research on the roles of women in education and society. They wanted to protect and
encourage their daughters so that the past would not repeat itself. The feminist mothers learned that their daughters had exerted their own control over their lives and, in so doing, became independent thinkers themselves rather than compliant people.

The 2000s

In the last four years, Dr. Reynolds has been her most productive with respect to her writing in the field of education and gender equity. Despite not publishing many articles in refereed or non-refereed journals, Dr. Reynolds has written three books, several newspaper articles, given radio and television interviews, and conducted several workshops for school divisions across Ontario. In doing so, it would appear that she has gone beyond the academy to the greater society.

Her newspaper articles have tended to focus on teacher preparation, partly because her career is now specifically related to teacher education. In one article written for the National Post, dealing with accountability of teachers in Ontario, she was quoted as saying, “The scheme adopted by Ontario is potentially a step in the right direction. It makes teachers accountable.” (Smyth, 2001, p. E6). Although the Ontario government of Mike Harris indicated that teacher testing is the right path to take, it gave the impression that it does not trust the high degree of professionalism teachers display in their classrooms every day. It is more concerned with demonstrating accountability to taxpayers and proving its massive political agenda which is quality assurance.

An article written for the Toronto Star dealt with the controversial issue of brain research (Swainson, 2002). Dr. Reynolds challenged a professional development session presented by Michael Gurian’s about his concept of bridge brains. In his controversial presentation, Gurian claimed that, “Girl’s brains are hard-wired very differently than boys, meaning no more than 20 percent can ever aspire to become engineers or architects, no matter how hard educators or girls try.” (p. B2). Dr. Reynolds responded to his claim by stating that, “His theories wrongly simplify an extremely complex issue and that if an educator promoted similar theories about race in his or her class there would see a huge outcry” (p. B2). Research supports Michael Gurian’s findings on the differences in girls’ and boys’ brains. The National Association of Elementary School Principals also agrees with the findings, and a school in East Harlem opened in 1996 with an all-girl classroom as a result. Eight years have elapsed since the classroom first began, and officials are recognizing that single-sex classrooms are acceptable educational innovations (Stabiner, 2002). There needs to be more research done in this area to substantiate this one study group.

Dr. Reynolds reported in an article Toronto Star newspaper (Tracy, 2002) that she did not support the findings of Dr. Mark Holmes, a fellow colleague and retired professor from
OISE. He believed it was important for teacher candidates to spend the entire day in a mentoring situation, taking the evening to discuss theories and teaching methods. Dr. Reynolds correctly contested that this “would be a large blow to the professionalism of teachers and that the faculties offer ongoing support for grads, including follow-up professional development courses, which would be lost if the faculties were abandoned.” (p. Z16). A discussion with three teacher candidates currently doing teaching practicum at Garden Valley Collegiate in Winkler, Manitoba did not confirm either Dr. Holmes or Dr. Reynolds theories. On the contrary, the teacher candidates felt that the experience they gain while being mentored in the school by a veteran teacher is invaluable and should serve to compliment the theory taught in their courses (personal communication, November 16, 2004).

“Finding the Music: Art in University Leadership” is the final article to be discussed here. The purpose of the article was to respond to an article on the role artistry might play in the work of those who undertake research in the social sciences by using the form of a story of one of Dr. Reynolds’ days (Reynolds, 2002a). Dr. Reynolds describes a typical day in her life as Associate Dean of OISE. It is an interesting account of how leadership in a university setting can be compared to music when tone, timbre, rhythm, volume, and tempo are taken into consideration. While formulating her response to the manuscript, Dr. Reynolds delves into her past experience and makes an excellent comparison to the harmony as opposed to cacophony.

Another interesting point from the article is that she makes mention of “servant leadership,” (p.175) and surprisingly, how several people she has interviewed on leadership talk about it in lieu of the traditional male leader. To make mention of this form of leadership in the article is an eye-opener in itself coming from a feminist educator. It suggests that Dr. Reynolds is aware of a new concept that may someday change the thinking of authoritarian leaders.

Sources of Influence

In my discussion with Dr. Reynolds, it became quite clear that the major influence in her life was Dr. Alison Prentice, her thesis advisor. Dr. Prentice was a teacher with OISE from 1975 to 1998 when she became an adjunct professor at the University of Victoria. Dr. Prentice is currently very active in the Canadian Historical Association and the Canadian Committee on Women’s History. I also feel that Dr. Reynolds completed her thesis for her Master’s degree under Dr. Prentice because she felt drawn to her and shared a common interest in the areas of women’s history and gender equity. Dr. Prentice continues to be a role model for Dr. Reynolds, and they keep in touch on a regular basis. Dr. Reynolds also believes that she was strongly influenced by her peers in school, in the university settings where she had studied, and then later worked in as a professor and administrator (C. Reynolds, personal communication, September 21, 2004).
Continuing international travel and networking has also had an impact on Dr. Reynolds and her writing. She tends now to consider women leaders in a more global context based on her past life experience rather than just in Canadian context, and this clearly is maturity as an academic.

**Status in the Field of Education**

It is not surprising that very little information has been found to dispute the findings of Dr. Reynolds with respect to gender equity. In the 1980’s, after having completed her Bachelor of Education, a Master’s Degree in Educational Administration, and a Doctorate in Educational Administration in the span of six years, Dr. Reynolds completed significant work on the equity of women in leadership roles. It is most certain that her findings have influenced the decision makers in the field of education in Toronto to rethink whether equity is really equitable. Her research has found that, although many school boards and large universities have the policies in place dictating that everyone is to be treated equally, this is not occurring (Reynolds, & Weintraub, 1986). Few, if any, will dispute the legitimacy of the argument, and so feminist educators will continue their relentless fight. Dr. Reynolds is one whose continued research in this area will benefit future generations. She has become a Canadian pioneer in women’s educational administration and issues.

**Conclusion**

Learning about Dr. Cecilia Reynolds and her research into the topic of gender equity in education has been an eye-opening experience. She has certainly established to her critics that gender equity is an issue in education and something that cannot disappear overnight with mere legislation. It is change that really needs to occur here, and it is something much greater than words on paper. For more than twenty years, Dr. Reynolds has asserted that change is necessary and her continuing fight in this area is indication alone that not enough is being done to ensure equity. Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (Merriam Webster Online, 2004) defines change as:

- to give a different position, course, or direction to
- to make different in some particular
- to make radically different
- to replace with another
- to make a shift from one to another
- to exchange for an equivalent sum or comparable item
All of these definitions really mean one thing. That in order for change to occur something new has to happen.

Spencer Johnson (1998), author of *Who Moved My Cheese?* sums this essay up by advising readers to see the handwriting on the wall with respect to change:

- Change happens
- Anticipate change
- Monitor change
- Adapt to change quickly
- Change
- Enjoy change!
- Be ready to quickly change again and again (p.74).

Dr. Cecilia Reynolds understands that change needs to occur, and she can be seen as a change agent, a transformational leader whose ideas have set the groundwork for future work to be done in this area.
References


