0605

Gendered Patterns in School Leadership

Olwen McNamara[1], Helen Gunter[1], John Howson[2], Andrew Fryers[1]
[1]University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom, [2]Education Data Surveys, Oxford, United Kingdom

Background

DCSF data relating to 2008 show women are still disproportionately represented in Senior Leadership posts: in the secondary phase women constituted 58% of classroom teachers but only 38% of heads; in primary the figures were 85% and 69%, respectively (DCSF, 2009).

A literature review concluded that a range of methodologies was being used to study gender and education, notably interviews (e.g. Fuller 2007) and questionnaires (e.g. Coleman 2004). Most of the recent work was taking place in Australia (e.g. Blackmore and Sachs 2007, Collard and Reynolds 2005) with only a few articles focused directly on gender and leadership in UK (e.g. Fuller 2009, Moreau et al. 2008). Knowledge of gender in senior leadership teams (SLTs) was both limited and dated, most having been undertaken in the 1990s (Wallace and Hall 1994, Wallace and Huckman 1999) where gender was examined but not the prime focus. The literatures about leadership fell into two main approaches: first, functional, where the rationale was about technical operations with narratives around effectiveness and efficiency with a language of planning, standards, and delivery; and second, socially critical where the rationale was about both challenging and replacing functionalism with narratives around equity, fairness, recognition and opportunities (Raffo and Gunter, 2008). The former have come to dominate the field (see Leithwood et al. 2006).

Research Questions

The aims of the study were to investigate gendered patterns in (1) career progression, (2) career aspirations and (3) the structure of SLTs; and (4) to examine the barriers and enablers to career progression.

Methods

The research was conducted on behalf of the NASUWT. The research was undertaken primarily by a questionnaire survey and included a mixture of structured and open-response questions. Senior leaders (heads, deputy and assistant heads) and middle leaders (teachers with responsibility posts) were sampled using two databases: the first of NASUWT members and the second of schools that had recently made senior leadership appointments (to garner current appointment data and ensure geographic coverage). The data was analysed by gender, phase of education and career stage. 1156 teachers responded to the survey (25% headteachers, 20% deputy heads, 17% assistant heads and 30% middle leaders). Respondents were representative of the teacher workforce in terms of sex, both overall and within phases.

Frame

The following conceptual frame was developed from the literature and is used to present detailed findings.

Endurance of social barriers

The findings indicated that overall women leaders' careers still carried less status than the equivalent post when occupied by a man. First, male leaders' careers took clear precedence over their partner's more than was the case for women. Second, in terms of caring and family responsibilities and

decisions to plan a family, women's careers were affected significantly more than men. Third, male leaders were more prepared to relocate regionally and nationally for a new post than their female counterparts.

Endurance of organisational barriers

Organisationally related factors included career breaks, which disproportionately affected women's career trajectories, as measured in terms of the increased time it took to achieve promoted posts. There were also significant differences, depending on when women took their career break: women who took a break within the first five years of teaching seemed particularly disadvantaged, it was more advantageous to take a break after establishing a secure footing on the career ladder. A second set of factors that affected women disproportionately related to workload and work-life balance. Finally, women had less experience of different schools, were less willing to apply externally for promotion and were more commonly promoted internally.

Endurance of gendered cultures

Significantly fewer women than men aspired to be a headteacher, particularly in the primary phase; albeit, women identified themselves slightly more strongly than men with being ambitious. Gendered cultures also extended to leadership styles, men and women were thought to lead schools in different ways, and both sexes thought men were perceived to make better leaders than women. Gender of leaders also impacted upon the way they perceived their male / female headteachers' leadership styles. Women and men had different experiences of senior leadership: women undertook significantly more pastoral roles and men more curriculum responsibilities.

Endurance of power structures

The perception that male leadership models were privileged was compelling. Ten times as many male primary headteachers thought their sex had impacted positively on their career opportunities, as did their female counterparts. Nearly half of respondents thought men were advantaged in the appointment to secondary headships compared to only 2% who thought women were. One fifth of leaders reported experiencing discrimination of some nature in the application process, half of these were in respect of sex, and overwhelming reported by women.

Research findings

The factors that emerge from this study show a complex nexus of individual, social and institutional practices that significantly militate against women's career progression. For the profession to be considered equitable it is vital to address the barriers to progression in respect of gender. To do this: there should be more comprehensive and detailed tracking of teachers progression through the leadership scale in respect of, in particular, sex and ethnicity; strategic planning based on a national workforce model at a time of unprecedented multifactorial change should reflect upon increasing proportions of female and/or more mature entrants; detailed data should be kept on leaders who complete the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers and completers should be tracked into headship, and the characteristics of the schools to which they are appointed reported to enable monitoring by gender and ethnicity; LAs and governing bodies should raise awareness of the differing leadership styles and dispositions of men and women; and Secondary heads, in particular, should be advised to consider carefully the responsibilities and quality of leadership experiences that men and women members of the SLT are allocated, in the light of the possible impact this may have on future career progression.

References

Coleman, M. (2004) Gender and Headship in the Twenty-First Century. Nottingham: NCSL.

Collard, J. and Reynolds, C. (eds) (2005) Leadership, Gender & Culture in Education. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Blackmore, J. and Sachs, J. (2007) Performing and Reforming Leaders. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

DCSF (2009) Statistics of Education: School Workforce in England, [online] http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/

Fuller, K. (2009) Women secondary headteachers. Alive and well in Birmingham at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Management in Education. 23 (1), 19-31.

Fuller, K. (2007) Birmingham Secondary School Headteachers: what are the similarities and differences between men and women? Unpublished EdD Thesis, School of Education, University of Birmingham.

Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A. and Hopkins, D. (2006) Seven Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership. Nottingham: NCSL.

Moreau, M-P, Osgood, J. and Halsall, A. (2008) Equal Opportunities Policies in English Schools: towards greater gender equality. Gender, Work & Organization. 15 (6), 553-578.

Raffo, C. and Gunter, H.M. (2008) Leading schools to promote social inclusion: developing a conceptual framework for analysing research, policy and practice, Journal of Education Policy. 23 (4), 363-380.

Wallace, M. and Hall, V. (1994) Inside the SMT: Teamwork in Secondary School Management. London: PCP.

Wallace, M. and Huckham, L. (1999) Senior Management Teams in Primary Schools. London: Routledge.