Athabasca University Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY:
PREPARATION FOR AN UNEQUAL WORLD

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Integrated Studies Project

submitted to Dr. Collette Oseen

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts – Integrated Studies

Athabasca, Alberta

May 2009
It is often considered one of the high points in an educator’s career when he or she has the opportunity to watch students proudly walk across the stage and receive their high school diplomas. Graduation represents the end product of twelve years of work by both teachers and students. It represents the completion of one part of a student’s life and entry into the next phase – the world beyond school. But always, there is a lingering doubt: Have I prepared this group of students for successful entry into the world beyond school? As Eleanor Roosevelt wrote in 1930, “the true purpose of education is to produce citizens” (Roosevelt, 1930). Ultimately, the success or failure of education is the organization’s ability to educate “Tomorrow’s Citizens Today” (CBE, 2009).

“We cannot picture to ourselves a world that is essentially different from the present one, and at the same time better” (Fournier, 295). Sadly, the world for which schools prepare students may not necessarily be the world which many hope they would be prepared for. For many decades, people have fought to make the world a better place by fighting injustice, poverty, starvation, and the multitude of other issues facing the planet. One of the major issues has been the struggle for gender equality. “Gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential and to contribute to national, political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results. Equality is essential for human development and peace” (CIDA). Schools should be in the forefront of the struggle to establish gender equality. As educators of future generations, schools should be preparing students for life in a world defined by equality. Educational organizations perpetuate “the perceptions that in today’s context, women have as much chance as men in succeeding in the world is widely shared…” (Stevenson, 2). To many “gender equality has become invisible” (Wallace, 2002, 90) – an issue that once was but now has disappeared from immediate concern. Yet it is essential to remind ourselves that gender equality is still an elusive goal – it has not been achieved. One cannot help but wonder where educational institutions stand relative to achieving gender equality. Are educational organizations as effective promoting gender equality as they would like society to believe or do educational organizations continue to perpetuate and legitimate gender inequality? Sadly, there is a great deal of evidence to
support the premise that educational organizations continue to function in ways that do not support gender equality and although organizational talk suggests a desire to work positively towards establishing gender equality, the formal and informal processes continue to support gender inequality and, as a result, educational organizations effectively prepare students, the product of those organizations, for life in an inequitable world.

“In 1970, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada recognized the importance of schooling as a location for addressing gender inequity...” (Wallace, 1). However, children’s understandings of gender and gender inequality are shaped long before entering the educational system. Socialization begins at home. “Through this socialization process, children internalize the rules for ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ and because they are learned at a very early age, the meanings attached to gender definitions seem natural, rather than socially constructed” (Watson, 733). Boys learn to be boys and girls learn to be girls reflecting the environments in which they are socialized. This “gender-differentiated socialization in childhood” (Hale, 418) means that school are not starting with ‘clean slates’ when students walk in the front door. They have already learned “the gender norms that more often than not contribute to gender inequity in the organization and society at large” (Sabelis, 424). As much as educational organizations state a belief in gender equality and that “[g]ender equity is an aim to be pursued so that there will be greater respect for human rights and more complete social justice” (Soucie, 9), “the socio-cultural model views current society, including its economic and political systems, as one in which males are dominant and roles, expectations, and values of its culture are designed to perpetuate this power differential” (Schein, 5). When examining the role educational organizations play in the perpetuation of gender inequality, it is essential to understand two significant factors. First, students who are educated in educational organizations enter with pre-established understandings of gender and gender relationships. Second, educational organizations as well as all other organizations are located within a wider socio-cultural context. This societal context “encourages men and women to ‘do gender’ nearly continuously, through displaying dress, action, demeanor, posture, hair
styles, interests, and so on consistent with their gender standpoint” (Martin, 588). As it is done in society, so it is done within organizations.

“Organizations and organizing are gendered both inside and outside the academic world” (Katila, 338). The struggle within any organization is the struggle for power. As Hale suggests, “power is important regardless of gender” (Hale, 413), however the issue is access to that power and the traditional advantage men have had accessing that power. “Gender and gendered power relations are major defining features of most, perhaps all, organizations” (Hearn, 2002, 4). As with society in which they are located, organizations have struggled with redefining the roles of both men and women within the organization and, as a result, use existing practices that re-confirm men and their access to power – often at the expense of women within the organizations. If organizations wish to “transform gender relations, and specifically men’s continued dominance of much social life, means not only changes in what women do and what women are but also that men have to change too” (Hearn, 2001, 5). Organizations must examine who has power and understand power has been traditionally dominated by men. Tradition and practice, honed over hundreds of years “form the social regularities that hold inequitable access to power in place” (Wallace, 2002, 86). Men have access to power, women less so. “Masculinity is, to a large extent, formed around the psychological investment men make in this system of unequal power, income and respect. So any challenge to the system, any attempt to limit the power or reduce the dividend is likely to be felt as an attack on masculinity” (Keamy, 276). Men in society define themselves in relation to their access to power, wealth and position and are “encouraged to demonstrate their physical strength and an aggression as they strive to be successful in all walks of life” (Hunte, 3). “Challenging men’s power necessarily thus involves changing men…” (Hearn, 2001, 4) and changing their relationship to both power and to women. Society is defined and shaped by the relationship between men and women in the context of power. As a result, “politics and networking are bound up with ‘power’ and unfortunately the power is still held predominantly by men” (Mann, 11). Also, it is understood that those with power will take steps to ensure they do not lose access to that power. Although it can be argued that women have made some inroads in accessing power
within organizations, it might be better suggested that power and access to it shifts as there is a perceived threat or challenge to that power. So as women attempt to access power within organizations, “men’s general power as a (the) dominant social category remains virtually unchanged and may even have become intensified in some respects, men’s power is constantly being challenged, fragmented, even transformed” (Hearn, 2001, 8). Perception plays a significant role in defining how power plays out in organizations and, as such, power is in ‘the eyes of the perceiver’. “The main issue in definition is how the behaviour is perceived and received by the individual” (Hearn, 2002, 18). If organizations desire true change, understanding the role gender plays in the inequitable distribution of power as well as understanding that both individual and organizational perceptions play a role in maintaining gender inequality, there is an opportunity for change. However, as long as there is unequal distribution of power within the organization based on gender then inequity will continue.

Organizations will often talk the language of gender equality, write policy to reflect gender equality but “organizational rhetoric” (Metcalfe, 106) does not equate to true gender equality. As part of larger society, organizations often feel it necessary to reflect in their organizational culture values with society acclaims as important. However, the ultimate goal of any organization is the product. Organizations that can efficiently and reliably produce an end product and are perceived as socially responsive increase their opportunities for success. As long as the goals of the organization are achieved, little attention needs to be paid to the equitable treatment of organizational members based on gender. Those organizations can be legitimately labeled ‘gender blind’. The consequence of gender blindness is “to suppress diversity by constructing it as irrelevant to organizational purposes” (Linstead, 298). As long as there is no impact on the ability of the organization to successfully create its end product, “there is a tendency of management to be blind to, tolerate, or even accept traditional forms of men’s sexuality” (Katila, 350) often at the cost of women within the organization. There is a tendency for ‘organizational will’ to be weak if the organization is successfully meeting its goals. The need for organizational change is often linked with the inability of an organization to successfully produce its product. So the
A question that arises is, ‘why change?’ and the answer to that often rests in “…a detailed and varied understanding of the different motivations of individuals and groups to transform dominant norms”(Thomas, 711). There must be an organizational purpose to support change whether in process, procedure or “the everyday practices of the organizations in which they are enacted”(Wallace, 2002, 86) to create a gender equal organizational environment.

Beyond the policies and procedures which govern the life of an organization, there is a set of less formal but equally significant informal rules that impact the day to day functions of the organization. “There are several sets of rules in motion in one and the same social situation, such as the rules of organizational behaviour, rules of friendship and the rules of gender relations in public places”(Katila, 336). Success within the organization is often determined by the ability to navigate through not just the formal rules but also the informal. In many cases, the informal rules and relationships have a more lasting and significant impact on behaviour within the organization than do the written rules found in policy and procedure. This is particularly true when defining gender relationships and the status of gender equality within organizations. This informal structure usually favours those with significant access to power within the organization at a cost to those who don’t. “An informal network that excludes women, … , remains one of the most important sources of power over women”(Mann, 11). Many researchers have found that women can’t “escape the negative effects of fusing formal work with informal masculinity dynamics”(Martin, 609) simply because they do not have a complete understanding of the power structures, both formal and informal, within their organization. Researchers, such as Mann, Martin and Hale, believe that“…an inability to read between the lines of the informal organizational chart or an unwillingness to become organizationally literate will leave women at a disadvantage when trying to mobilize resources”(Mann, 12). As much as women may “see professional and organizational entities as systems with power-related properties beyond the formal, hierarchical ones”(Schein, 7), they have less access to the power associated with the informal rules as, for the most part, those rules are “associated with maleness”(Hale, 417) and for male success. “Men’s discussions about trust included
concerns of confidence, the intertwining of trust and power, and the enforcement of their distrust of women by creating unwritten rules”(Hale, 416). As these rules, both formal and informal, exist to maintain the power positions of men within the organization, women may not completely understand the intertwining of the “more formal organizational rules and the informal rules of friendship”(Katila, 345) in the day to day functioning of that organization. As a result, they are not as effective players in the power structure as the men and, thus, gender equality remains an elusive goal for women in those organizations.

Educational organizations share the values and traits of organizations in general. Like all other organizations, education also reflects the shared values and beliefs of the society in which they are located. However what is said in society is not matched by what is done in society and the same is true in educational organizations. Both may speak the language of equality but the truth is far from it. The societal relationship between men and women “stems from deeply ingrained discrimination against women and their value in society, a discrimination that is reinforced and constituted within the schooling system”(Robinson, 88). Education becomes a gendered paradox – rather than prepare students for a gender equal world, as it claims to do it, in fact, prepares students for entry into a gendered society. As in the society in which the educational organization is situated, men and women act in ways that are gendered. Whether intentional or not, gendered behaviour is observed and copied by the clients of the organization – students. They learn not only that men and women are different biologically but are also differentiated by role, and access to power, position and authority. Students also learn that what is written is not necessarily what organizations do.

Like other organizations, education is governed by rules and regulations, policies and procedures. Indeed, in large school boards such rules and regulations can fill hundreds of pages. From an organizational perspective, policies are the ‘how’ of doing business and provide direction and guidance to those working within the organization as they strive to meet the goals of the organization. “These organizational processes also encompass the forms of their own reproduction, and practices of naming and managing, such as policy
documentation, grievance procedures and implementation”(Hearn, 2002, 48). However, to assume that what is written is what is done within the organization is to hold naive perspectives of organizational realities. Policies are followed “if the policy is perceived to be legitimate”(Wallace, 2002, 94). This is particularly true as it relates to gender equality. In response to societal demands to bring about change, school boards introduced policies which, on the surface were designed to ‘level the playing field’ for women within education. “Remedial policy response in education included equal pay for equal work, the opening up of principals’ courses to women, and even the hiring of some women to administrative positions”(Wallace, 2002, 91). The momentum to create policy to address gender equality concerns “shows how norms and shared values created momentum for policy activity for gender equity in education”(Marshall, 709) but doesn’t necessarily spill over into enforcement and maintenance of the policies developed. Often times, these policies might be more accurately as objectives or goals rather than policy – “…is opposed to discrimination on the grounds of gender since such discrimination undermines our determination to provide equality of opportunity for our pupils and to ensure that all pupils achieve their full potential”(Moreau, 563). Though a desirable vision, such statements could better “be described as declarations of intent, rather than precise action plans. They do not either include any precise information on how monitoring would take place or on how they intend to assess the policies”(Moreau, 565). As visionary statements, such policies lacked the necessary ‘teeth’ that would ensure that such gender equality policies were more than merely words or that they would lead to real change. Sadly, gender equality policies were often written in ways to ensure “maleness is the universal standard against which women are measured, result in policies and practices that act to conserve a gendered status quo which holds women in a position of otherness – a reified ‘thou’.”(Wallace, 2002, 89).

“It quickly became apparent that the informal structures of the school, or the social norms and values, exerted the most powerful influence over teachers’ behaviours. The three most prevalent themes were: a) perceptions of administration; b) interpersonal relationships; and c) community values”(Meyer, 561). Like those informal structures within other
organizations, they play a significant role in defining the relationship between genders. The “formal aspects of the school interacted with the informal aspects of the school culture to shape teachers’ experiences…” (Meyer, 559) including their understanding of gender and gender relationships within the schools. Men and women quickly learn how things are. They learn “…the fact that in most schools, the traditional roles continue to be played out: men are the leaders and women the subordinates” (Slamet, 1). The power of the informal power structures with educational organizations make it easy to understand that “equal opportunities statements are perceived as merely an administrative procedure by the schools” (Moreau, 562). Informal structures within educational organizations often ensure that the traditional power relationship between men and women is maintained and that those who challenge that traditional relationship are ostracized or pressured to accept the status quo. When pressure to adapt more gender equitable policies increases, the informal structures may bend but not break. “The remedial response in policy and practice to a prescriptive consciousness was to open the door to women in some male enclaves within educational organizations with the understanding – either formal or informal – that the women who gained admittance would conform, sometimes with assistance, to the male scripts which ordered organizational relations” (Wallace, 2002, 91). Women could enter traditional male power roles in education – as long as they responded to those roles as would men. Though the formal policies of educational organizations promote gender equality, it is the informal structures and relationships which men and women bring to ‘living with each other’ in organizational settings” (Wallace, 2002, 84) that determine the true relationships between genders in not only educational organizations but all organizations. It would be realistic to suggest that informal structures within education create the “organizational reality” (Katila, 341) which defines the relationship between men and women, teachers and students, and the distribution of power within the organization.

If education, as an organization, is not teaching and promoting gender equality through its policies and practices, both formal and informal, then it, in fact, intentionally or unintentionally continues to promote the status quo – gender inequality. It is a paradox that the institution that educates future generations in fact continues, in a variety of ways, to
legitimate gender inequality. As a society, we count on our educational institutions to not only teach ‘subject matter’ but also the values and mores determined to be important. One of these values is gender equality. “To accomplish this, the school must not only bring down barriers to equal opportunities for all, but it must also foster change in everything which constitutes a disadvantage for women within the school culture itself, whether overt or covert, and whether discrimination is spoken or silent. At present, the school is problem rather than remedy: the education system’s very structure, despite official pronouncements, contributes to the promotion of inequality between women and men” (Soucie, 9-10). There is a great deal of truth in the catchphrase ‘talking the talk, walking the walk’. Within organizational contexts, it is relatively easy to write a policy and proclaim that it represents the way the organization does business. It is another to not only convince the members of the organization to commit to the new policy but to have the organization ‘live’ the policy. “In an era described as exhibiting a high degree of postmodern malaise we might be forgiven in thinking that the failure of gender equality policies simply provides further evidence of the persistence of inequality at work”(Hughes, 478). Despite some mediating changes in staffing and policy, the reality of most educational organizations is the continuation of behaviour which is both gendered and defining of male and female roles - “dominant male norms act as an inhibitor for both men and women seeking nontraditional organizational roles”(Wallace, 3).

Like all other organizations, education is not simply an entity; it is staffed by men and women in diverse and varied roles. These men and women bring with them their individual cultures, education, and socialization with them to work each and everyday. These men and women bring with them the beliefs and attitudes that they have grown up with and their personal understanding of the culture and society of which they are members. In educational organizations, the most readily identified role is that of teacher. It is teachers who have the significant contact with students on a daily basis and, in many cases, with whom students establish significant relationships. Teachers become role models, whether they are aware of it or not including role modeling gender and gender relationships. This role modeling reflects the understanding which individual has of gender
relationships. Teachers will sincerely proclaim their commitment to gender equality and to “equitable learning opportunities for all students”(Wallace, 4). Like they organizations they belong to, educators believe themselves to be acting in ways which promote gender equality but “a growing body of research shows that men and women do gender in social interaction even as they claim and believe that they act in gender-free ways”(Martin, 587). Intentionally or unintentionally, men and women in educational organizations act in ways that model inequity. “Instances of gender bias are so subtle in American classrooms that teachers are often unaware they exist”(Gauthier, 1). What students see, they may copy. More accurately, if what they see affirms an existing belief about gender, their belief is confirmed by the behaviour of the educator. So if students believe “women have learnt that in order to compete with men and be given credit for their efforts, in a man’s world, they must be as good as or better than their male counterparts”(Hunte, 5) and that belief is affirmed by observing the verbal and nonverbal behaviour of teachers, then that belief becomes the student’s reality. Student perception and interpretation are shaded by pre-existing belief sets and “the nuances of how small things shape our perspectives on gender experiences in the workplace”(Hale, 418) and often go unnoticed or unacknowledged by the educator in the busy classroom or crowded hallway. Likewise, the educators themselves don’t see or interpret how others see what they are doing as gendered. “To say that men are liminally aware of mobilizing masculinity/ies means they engage in an activity without full awareness that their actions are being viewed as masculine…”(Martin, 606). But, in truth, both men and women contribute to the gendered world in which they live. “Men are just as gendered as women, and men are clearly implicated in the maintenance of gender inequality”(Hearn, 2001, 3). This implication is significant in both educational organizations and society.

Unlike many organizations which are perceived as being ‘male’ in orientation, education has been seen within society as more ‘feminine’ and, as a result, males within educational organizations believe it necessary to assert their maleness in whatever ways possible. “Teaching is very different to law and management in that it has long been recognized as a feminine or caring profession, which is reflected in its lesser autonomy, status and rewards.
Teaching is an interesting group to use in a comparative analysis of feminization as it provides an indication of how gendered occupational projects are not necessarily supported by numerical representation but that feminization may fuel patterns of gender exclusion, stratification and segmentation which is clearly highlighted by teaching’s male-dominated senior hierarchy and its enduring status as a semi-profession”(Bolton, 283). Throughout the history of educational organizations, one can see the clear dividing line as to what was male and what was female – often reflecting roles as society saw them. “Historically there have always been two distinct teaching functions: the first an extension of mothering, and reserved for women; the second an extension of power and authority, reserved for men, who have guarded it well. This division – while no longer explicit – is still implicit throughout the education system”(Wallace, 2007, 184). In such a feminine environment, men found that they had to act out their masculinity in ways that would ensure their maleness would not be questioned. Male teachers “adapted their teacher identities in line with changing work practices by relinquishing ‘naturalized’ feminine images and taking on the attributes of ‘hard’ masculinity”(Smith, 191). In order to protect their maleness in what was perceived of as a feminine organization; male teachers often went to the extreme end of masculine identity to protect themselves from any real or perceived attack on their manliness. What was created was “a gender order that encourages boys to pursue the shared enterprise of hyper-masculinity making characterized by physical domination, aggression and a competitive ‘macho’ bravado that denigrates females and anything considered ‘feminine’”(Smith, 184).

What is meant to be female and what is meant to be male and the relationship between the two has had a significant impact on the culture and environment in educational organizations. It often plays out in the school environment where it is witnessed by others, including students. Such observations serve to confirm or shatter previously held beliefs about gender roles. “Stereotyped perceptions of gender and authority were not just common among students but were also prevalent among teachers”(Robinson, 79) and are acted upon within educational organizations. “These perceptions included beliefs that males were stronger, louder, more in control, more intimidating and thus had greater
authority than females” (Robinson, 79). Such perceptions lead to actions which perpetuate gender roles. “The discourse of gendered authority has contributed to women within the teaching profession being viewed as poor disciplinarians, lacking the ‘commitment’ to the job or the necessary ‘masculine attributes’ to control older children” (Robinson, 78). Such myths are not held by males alone and often females within education contributed to their perpetuation intentionally or not. Suggestions that male teachers are more effective dealing with behaviour issues or sending students to be dealt with by male staff diminish perceptions of feminine power or authority within the organization and are commonly heard in the staffrooms and hallways of educational organizations. If women hold such opinions then it explains why men feel free to walk “into the classes of female teachers without consent, when they perceived a discipline problem occurring, with the aim of establishing order” (Robinson, 78). Such demonstrations of male power being exerted certainly are seen by both male and female students. Such demonstrations also serve to reinforce the perception that women have insufficient power or authority to maintain control within their own classrooms or teaching spaces. Male teachers acting out masculinity and masculine power model such behaviour for male students seeking to learn what it means to be male. Like male teachers, male students will use “space, deportment and voice to articulate embodied demonstrations of dominant masculinity” (Smith, 183-184). Not only male staff exert power over female staff in some situations but some male students will also recognize that they, too, may have sufficient power to exert themselves in situations where it is assumes that they occupy a subordinate position to female staff. “In the case of boys exerting power over female teachers, they are accessing and managing gendered resources and rules available in the schooling system and the broader society which make it possible to transgress the established and institutionalised power relations between student/teacher and adult/child” (Robinson, 82). Men do, boys see, boys do. Such is the nature of modeled behaviour. In the extreme such modeling may lead to “the prevalence within school-based cultures of masculinity of homophobia, misogyny, racism, physical violence and the disparagement of that which is perceived to be ‘effeminate’, suggest profound levels of unconscious anxiety and confusion and, in consequence, a desperate attempt to split off and locate inside others that which feels too
There are certain expectations placed on staff within educational organizations which call for the display of emotions and behaviours which wider society labels as feminine. Such expectations challenge men’s perspectives on what it means to be male. This challenge has led to some male teachers “transmitting vehemently heterosexist performances that ‘fleshed out’ the contours of acceptable masculinity by demonstrating in heavily comedic terms how humorous possible alternatives could be”(Smith, 190) or by “perpetuating heterosexist and homophobic discourses”(Smith, 188). Such behaviour is observed by others and, because it is not addressed or labeled as inappropriate, it is often perceived to be acceptable. As Ron Keamy suggests, “A fear of feminism and/or feminists as well as a fear of losing masculinity may be at the heart of the matter because of the uncertainties that a shift in power and privilege might mean”(Keamy, 276). However, it is not just men who feel that their gender identity may be threatened in educational organizations. As stated previously, women are over-represented in the lower echelons of education. As a result, they can be called on to assume roles which are more traditionally male. “While gender issues in relation to the workforce were ignored, teachers were in some cases asked to provide non-stereotypical gender role models for children. In one case, the policy may even have been deemed discriminatory since what could be described as traditional, stereotypical male activities were required to be undertaken by women teachers”(Moreau, 565). The need for men to strongly assert their masculinity in the face of “the ‘feminization’ of teaching”(Moreau, 556) and the demands that women staff act in ways that are more traditionally masculine are observed and integrated in the belief systems and practices of the observers. Despite what students may be told about equality and the relationship between genders, the message that is conveyed by the actions of the players within the educational organizations is both more powerful and influential. ‘Do what I say, not what I do’ is rarely an effective method of teaching.

“As organizations grow older, traditional ways of doing things become entrenched. The strong roots of existing routines legitimize their continuation. Change, especially episodic
change, is thus more disruptive to an old organization than it is to a young organization that is in a state of flux”(Tsang, 1446). This is true no matter what organization and education is no exception. Whether it be how teachers manage their classrooms, how the timetables are set, rules and classroom expectations, or defining professional relationships, many of the day to day activities in educational organizations are firmly rooted in tradition. Despite recognizing that there are gender inequities and that education has a role to play in changing both attitudes and behaviour towards gender; it can be extremely difficult to make true changes within organizational behaviours. History and tradition challenge the ability of organizations to achieve true gender equality. In educational organizations, “what is seen as the ‘normal’ behaviour of certain men and boys, as fathers, teachers, workmates, school mates and so on…”(Hearn, 2001, 17) has been defined over time. This behaviour is both gendered and entrenched. As a result, “the equality of opportunities does not necessarily leads to equality of outcomes”(Moreau, 560) and educational organizations revert back to old practices that are often in conflict with stated organizational goals and objectives. These organizations may declare themselves promoters of gender equality, state that in their policies but the “tendency to revert to these old routines made institutionalization of the new ones difficult”(Tsang, 1446). The continuing practice of old behaviours within the organization make true establishment of new ways of acting impossible. Eric Tsang and Shaker Zahra suggest that unless old or traditional methods of behaviour are ‘unlearned’, new and more gender equitable ways of organizational behaving are difficult to implement. “Unlearning at the individual level refers to the case where a person becomes aware that certain items of knowledge he or she possesses are no longer valid or useful”(Tsang, 1444). In the case of gender equality, individuals, both men and women, may not perceive differentiation on the basis of gender as to be discarded. Even if it were determined that gender equality was a goal to strive for, the ‘unlearning’ of past ways of relating may be seen as “a cumbersome and energy-consuming process”(Tsang, 1445).

“If dominance or hierarchical position requires masculine behaviours, women can supposedly achieve this dominance or hierarchical position by becoming more like
men” (Cullen, 553). Such thinking must be ‘unlearned’ – as “we reflect upon or try to put aside conventional ways of knowing” (Hughes, 473). Unless such unlearning can take place within educational organizations, they will still function as instruments dedicated to the maintenance of the status quo. That status quo “is represented by the gender location woman within the gender institution that posits woman and the feminine in opposition to the gender location of man and masculine” (Martin, 592). If educational organizations are unable to move beyond such a position then, formally and informally, it will continue to educate its clients to ‘do gender’ and, as a result, reinforce “attitudes toward power relationships in the organization” (Brunner, 3) and in the wider society.

Society is gendered. Organizations, in general, are gendered. Education is gendered. The end result of the gendered experience is the gendered product – the student educated to live and work in a gendered society. They have heard the talk of gender equality but they have also been exposed to the power of gendered action both within and outside education. If gender equality is truly a desired societal outcome and educational organizations are expected to contribute significantly to its reality, both educational organizations and society as a whole have to make radical changes in how members of society are socialized and educated about gender, gender relationships, and gender equality. All members of society need “to be educated and socialized in an entirely different way before we can achieve equity” (Matusak, 8).

“The education system is sexist to its core and there’s very little chance that things are going to change in the foreseeable future because the people who are charged with taking responsibility for equity are teachers” (Chalmers, 2). Educational organizations can create policies and procedures but “…school policies and practices can offer only a limited contribution to gender equality” (Moreau, 553). Educational organizations may talk the rhetoric of gender equality; they may even believe it but, too often, the behaviour of the organization suggests otherwise. “Most teachers were committed to equal opportunities in principle, although they showed decreasing enthusiasm for practical implementation…” (Stevenson, 26). In the busy and often hectic days at school, teachers
often have little time to reflect on how their words and actions are interpreted by students and, as a result, messages condoning gender inequality may be passed, whether intentionally or not. “The challenge for educators is to recognize that gender does have significant effects – both positive and negative – on the learning opportunities of our students” (Wallace, 6). The challenge for education as an organization, is to ensure, as much as organizationally possible, that students are educated in ways which reduce messages of gender inequality and effectively promote true gender equality. Can the old methods by which men assured their positions of power be unlearned and replaced by practices which give women the same opportunities as men without the need to become more ‘male’? Unless they can, educational organizations, no matter what their intentions, will continue to promote inequitable treatment based on gender.

“Imagining what is ‘not yet’ – an equitable organization – is imagining a place which recognizes that there may be a need to lose some of the privilege and power and prestige based on one’s gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on, in order for society to achieve social justice” (Wallace, 2002, 97). It is recognizing that “the subtle, unintentional, but damaging gender bias that still characterizes classrooms” (Sadker) contributes to gender inequality in wider society. It is recognizing that schools, educational organizations, may be called to lead by example, to fight against pre-existing belief structures that contribute to gender inequality, and to be cognizant of and act against behaviours within the organizations themselves that continue to, intentionally or unintentionally, promote and sustain gender inequality. It is the “ability to imagine the future as different from the present” (Fournier, 298) and to intentionally commit the organization and the people in it to change. This is not an easy path to walk but if education, as an organization, is to truly have an impact on achieving societal gender equality, then it is a path that must be followed. “Knowledge grows, and simultaneously it becomes obsolete as reality changes. Understanding involves both learning new knowledge and discarding obsolete and misleading knowledge” (Tsang, 1436). Educational organizations must not only teach new ways but they must also ‘un-teach’ those beliefs and actions which continue to contribute to gender inequality. “Equality strategies in education
have emphasized the need to develop the potential of all pupils…”(Moreau, 557) the question remains, ‘Are educational organizations able to do so successfully’?

A Select Bibliography


Calgary Board of Education (CBE) Organizational motto.


