EEO AND THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN IN THE SECONDARY EDUCATION SECTOR: LEGISLATING FOR CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ways in which two co-educational secondary schools in Aotearoa-New Zealand responded to the requirement under the State Sector Amendment Act (1989) to develop and implement an equal employment opportunities (EEO) policy that would enable women to move into senior administrative positions. The period covered is the May 1989-July 1992 term of office of the new Boards of Trustees established under the Tomorrow's Schools reforms. The study presents, examines and theorises the social, political and educational contexts in which the policy evolved. In the attempt to locate significant sites of struggle in the EEO debate and assess their implications for the promotion of women teachers to senior positions in educational administration, a political model of policy is employed based on a theory of discourse inherent in feminist post-structuralist perspectives.

The focus of the research study is on the EEO policy implementation process as it was occurring in two historically specific settings. That process consisted of ongoing struggles between contenders of rival and competing interests. These interests construed in and through discourses specific identities, roles and attributes which were seen to compose our subjectivities, shape decisions and affect appointment practices and outcomes.

Interviews were held during 1992 with eighteen personnel in a range of teaching and administrative positions in the two schools. The transcripts were then used to produce a view of the discursive constructions within the field of EEO and place these alongside existing written reports and records, official policy documents and literature analyses.

The study found evidence of an internal struggle between competing models of EEO. As well, EEO was discursively constructed as a unified concept through a discourse which competed for allegiances against other discourses within the power networks. Specifically, attention was paid to mapping the links between “teachers, gender and careers” (Acker, 1989) and to the complex positioning of multiple discourses within merit as an ideological construct. This thesis opens up to scrutiny particular discursive constructions and uses, and argues the need to recognise and assume responsibility for each of our own discursive practices and positionings. This necessitates working towards coherence between the discourses of EEO and the discourses of secondary education sector employers' personal and broader professional lives.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research study results largely from the goodwill, co-operation and participation of many people, from its inception through to its final production in 1995. I wish to thank my colleagues Andrew, Lynnaire and Geraldine for their help in enabling me to practise and develop my interview procedures; the participating personnel in the two schools selected for case-study research; the contacts in agencies for the way they responded so promptly and willingly to my requests for assistance and information; my teaching colleagues who suffered for so long my vacant stare, weird ramblings and near exhaustion; Sandy Anderson for her thoughtful and careful typing when I lost my battle with the computer; and not least Richard Spence, my husband, whose impatience with my hesitations and generosity of spirit provoked and gave me strength to complete. I am deeply grateful.

I also acknowledge my indebtedness to the Massey University Master of Educational Administration programme and to my supervisors: Marian Court, whose unfailing support and sensitive yet challenging care spurred me on through some very difficult times, and Wayne Edwards, who watched carefully over my form of presentation. As a part-time student for over five years I have pursued a course of study that has both reshaped and revitalised my thinking. Completing this thesis, with its focus on Equal Employment Opportunities, has played a major part in that “reshaping”, in that as a woman, and a teacher in the secondary system holding a position of responsibility, my own participation was inevitable. I found I had my own feelings to contend with through each phase of the research study. It has been for me a difficult, anxiety-producing and often painful process. The nature of the topic proved sensitive to me, in ways that I never anticipated. The angry feelings which spawned this study remain with me still, though in more powerful, energetic and focused form.

Whaia te iti kahurangi, ki tuohuu koe, me maunga teitei

Pursue excellence, and if you must bow down your head, let it only be to the highest mountain.
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