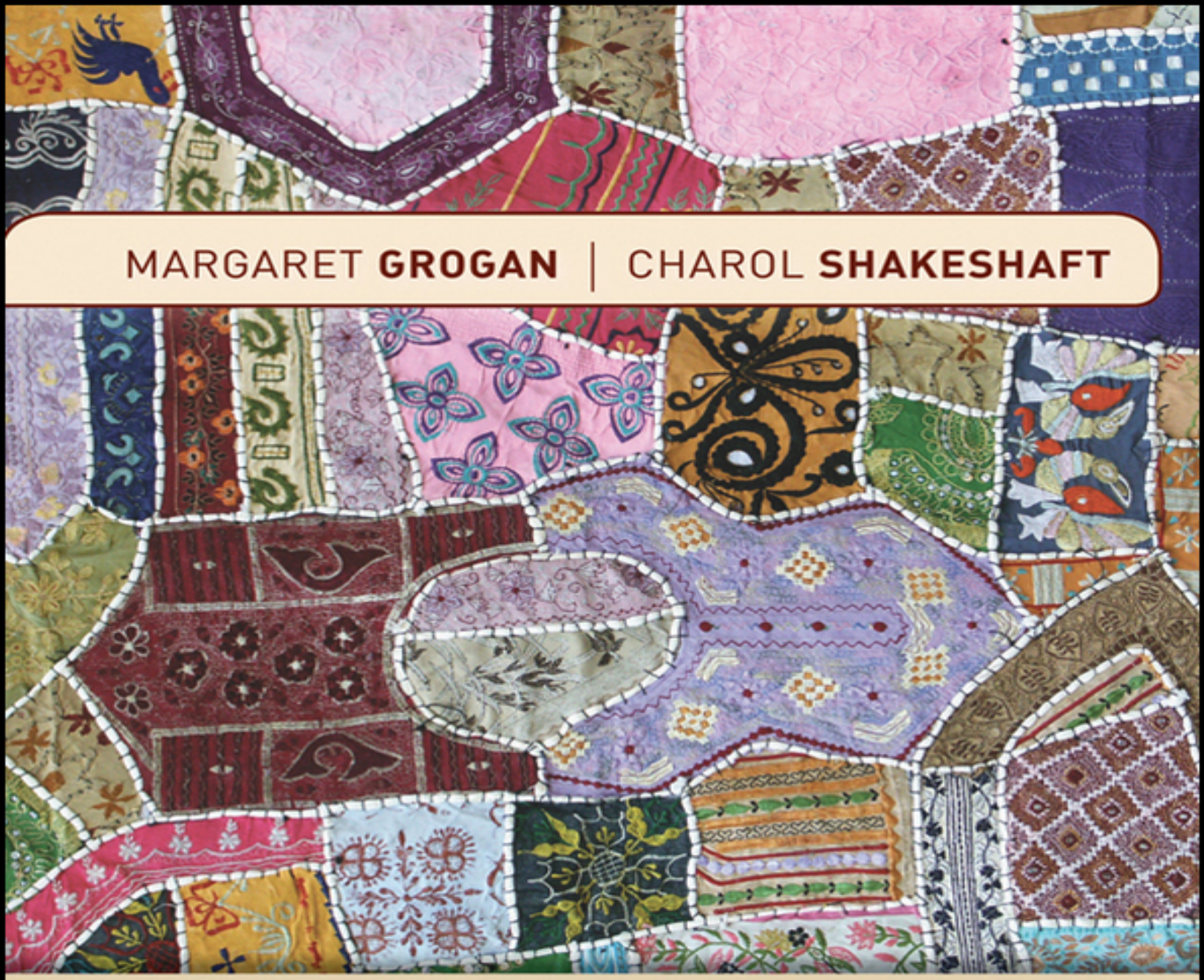

MARGARET **GROGAN** | CHAROL **SHAKESHAFT**

Women and EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

JOSSEY-BASS LEADERSHIP LIBRARY IN EDUCATION

Foreword

I am honored to have this opportunity to introduce *Women and Educational Leadership*. Finally, a work that acknowledges what I've known all along: when I think of myself and other women who are leading districts and schools that are making dramatic gains, I don't see effective educational leaders who happen to be women; I see leaders who are effective in part *because* we are women.

For years, Margaret Grogan and Charol Shakeshaft have been studying and documenting women's ways of leading; how women's leadership styles tend to differ from the traditional “command and control” paradigm; and how gender plays out in educational leadership. In this important book, they team up to lay out the lessons that all leaders should learn from women's distinctive leadership styles—not just how it is different to “lead like a woman” but also how it is advantageous to do so.

Page after page of this book ring so true to my experience. I have felt the impact of women's historical status as “outsiders” in leadership circles. When I delivered my first “vision for education” speech before an audience of Atlanta's CEO-level leaders, there was only *one* other woman in the room. As a superintendent, I've had to do without much peer-to-peer mentoring because not many other female superintendents serving large urban districts have existed—particularly women of color. I spend a great deal of my time mentoring new and aspiring superintendents now, in hopes that I can make it a little easier for women who come after me.

My personal drive to do what is best for children and to prove without a doubt that *all* children, regardless of who their parents are or where they grow up, can achieve at high levels is absolutely tied up with my history as a young girl in Jamaica. I grew up in a time before, as then-Senator Hillary Clinton put it in 2008, the glass ceiling “got about 18 million cracks in it.” But my personal ambitions have also always been balanced, as they are for so many women, by a deep commitment to my family. I chose not to step into a superintendency until my son was in high school, and I did not move to Atlanta until he was out of college.

Grogan and Shakeshaft capture not just these common experiences of women leaders, which shape our worldview —growing up female; motherhood; leaving our female peers behind as we move up through the ranks—but also how women lead with new methods and in new directions as a result.

The authors' concept of collaborative leadership is not just what comes naturally to me; collective decision making produces superior results. It's the only way to turn a large, dysfunctional bureaucracy into one that works for our children. Top-down mandates will move the organization only so far. We must get everyone “on the bus” to transform a static institution into one that is more dynamic.

One of the qualities that drew me to Atlanta in the first place was the public engagement of a coalition of corporate and community leaders in creating a vision for public education in Atlanta. Getting these leaders on the bus with total district reform was simple compared with the monumental task of changing the culture of the system, all the way down to the classroom teacher, where the real power lies in the education system. I knew I couldn't accomplish this alone, so I focused on human capital, building a highly competent team of individuals—some

recruited from outside and some developed from within. I had confidence in my own judgment, yes, but I also worked hard to empower my team members to have confidence in their own judgment and in their abilities to be collaborative leaders as well.

I think the most important thing that Grogan and Shakeshaft's work can teach is that my own situation need not be seen as unique. It doesn't take magic, or some God-given birthright, to be an effective leader in education. What it takes is a sense of perspective, a belief that all children can achieve at high levels, a focus on team building, dedicated hard work to follow through, and a commitment to keeping oneself sane. These are lessons drawn from women's ways of leading, as presented in *Women and Educational Leadership*, lessons that all leaders—male and female—should take to heart in reaching toward our common goal of providing an excellent education for every child.

Beverly Hall
Superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools
2009 National Superintendent of the Year

Introduction

Women Leaders Redefine Leadership

Two years ago we accepted an invitation from Jossey-Bass to write a new book about women's leadership. We were asked to contribute to the Leadership Library in Education series, so we challenged ourselves to think about a new approach to leadership. The series editor, Andy Hargreaves, wanted a work that would draw upon our knowledge of the ways women lead and that would enrich the general understanding of educational leadership. The series takes a broad, eclectic view of leadership. Other titles in the series have included *Teacher Leadership, Sustainable Leadership, Ethical Leadership, Inclusive Leadership,* and *Distributed Leadership*.

We were very excited about this opportunity, believing that we could offer something distinctive to the conversation about leadership from ours and others' considerable research on women leaders over the past twenty years. We had already worked together with several coauthors on a comprehensive review of the literature on women principals and superintendents for the second edition of the *Handbook for Achieving Gender Equity Through Education*, edited by Sue Klein and colleagues (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). The breadth and depth of research that we all collected for that chapter made us realize how much U.S. women in educational leadership have been studied—qualitatively and quantitatively.

We felt very strongly that Andy's invitation was our opportunity to move away from what had become the major focus of research on women leaders in education—the barriers or obstacles women faced when aspiring to the

principalship or the superintendency. A fairly robust body of literature documents these concerns, and many hurdles are disappearing as more women enter the field. Despite the fact that the numbers of women in the secondary principalship and the superintendency are still surprisingly low, the problems are quite well articulated if not alleviated. So we did not want to write at length about these problems.

Instead, encouraged by research findings about ways many women lead when given the chance, and by the conviction that these ways held promise for a redefinition of educational leadership, we decided to document the positive and to imagine the value of everyone leading like women. Our premise that traditional approaches to leadership have left millions of children behind in our schools leads to the conclusion that a new definition of leadership is urgently needed. Simply put, far too many young people have not been served well by conventional organizational structures and educational practices.

First we reviewed the literature to identify recurring themes that described women's leadership. Then we read widely for an understanding of current social science theories to see whether women's approaches to leadership could capitalize on some of the newer social trends. According to the literature, women lead schools and districts purposefully. Five approaches characterize women's educational leadership: *leadership for learning, leadership for social justice, relational leadership, spiritual leadership,* and *balanced leadership*. Not all women value these approaches. But enough women draw upon some or all of them to make us comfortable in identifying them as the five most common approaches among women to date. Of course, many men value them as well; as yet, though, educational leadership textbooks rarely discuss these approaches and values. The closest we get are references

to shared decision-making and collaborative decision-making.

After further study, we concluded that these approaches and values, generally speaking, represented a shift away from conceiving of organizational leadership as residing primarily in an individual. Most of the women leaders emphasized the ways they worked with and through others —teachers, staff, community members, and so on. Few thought of leadership as a top-down endeavor. Many accepted the responsibilities of leadership in order to make a difference in the opportunities for student learning, to reform the system, or at least to change the practices in a particular school. By attending to the ways women leaders get things done, we saw the power of collective leadership. Further, since women are essentially outsiders in the realm of leadership, and women of color are even more powerless than white women, we realized that this approach to leadership was embedded primarily in the value of diverse perspectives.

Thus, women's leadership of schools and districts in the United States suggested a new leadership emphasis that relies on diverse perspectives to craft new solutions to problems. This is more than merely asking for advice or widening the inner circle. The new work of organizational leadership is *to form a diverse collective*. This includes hearing ideas from across the globe. The more diverse the ideas, the more likely innovative approaches will result— and usually from cognitive shifts. We facilitate a cognitive shift in how issues are framed and addressed by deliberately tapping into diverse perspectives and assumptions that have not been included in the past. A shift results from the critical appraisal of norms and practices now deemed legitimate. Principals and superintendents who grasp the value of working this way learn to listen carefully, critique options, and meaningfully integrate the

variety of opinions to encourage change. New directions emerge as outsiders—voices from the margins—make decisions.

How to Use This Book

Our intention is that this work will catalyze discussions of the ways in which readers, both women and men, lead. To encourage reflective discussion, we have included vignettes of administrators talking about their work, and questions for readers to ponder. The purpose of both devices is to compare our theoretical and research frame to the reader's experiential frame. We encourage critique of the two ways of knowing with the expectation that a close reading of our work alongside deep descriptions of practice will move the field forward to an understanding of collective leadership grounded in diversity.

We imagine this book will be read by school administrators and others who lead or study leadership. We see it as a text for preparation programs in leadership and as a resource for thinking about leadership.

We would like to give sincere thanks to Jossey-Bass editor, Kate Gagnon, for her patience and encouragement throughout the project.

Margaret Grogan
Charol Shakeshaft
August 2010

Chapter 1
Five Ways Women Lead

> You hire people who have capacity; you help them build that capacity and you let them shine. And I get the residual effect of that all the time, but I no longer need to be in the limelight as … the person who made all of this happen because that's not what makes me feel successful. When I have other people who feel empowered, who have a feeling of purpose and desire and direction and want to make things happen with the direction we set as a team, then I feel I've done my job.
>
> *Lorraine Darnell (Grogan, 1996, p. 143)*

How do women lead? And why do they take on sometimes onerous leadership roles? By now, we have a fairly rich body of literature that lets us step back and understand what women principals, women superintendents, and other women in education do, and why they do it. While we do not argue that all women lead in a particular way, we have understood that there are preferences[1] and approaches which characterize the leadership of many women. In the recently published *Handbook for Achieving Gender Equity Through Education,* edited by Sue Klein and colleagues (2007), two chapters review the research on women educational leaders P–16. From these comprehensive literature reviews and other research we have been able to identify five themes that illustrate what women leaders in education pay attention to: *relational leadership, leadership for social justice, leadership for learning, spiritual leadership,* and *balanced leadership*.

The body of research that examines female administrative behavior suggests several components that are commonly

associated with women. Documenting leadership behaviors that predominate among women is not the same as saying that women lead differently from men. In more than fifty studies that compare female and male approaches to leadership, the results are mixed: 100 percent of the qualitative studies versus 14 percent of the quantitative studies identify differences (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). The analysis of findings and methodology does not offer a clear explanation for these differences, but we note that quantitative studies tend to measure or describe leadership differently from qualitative studies. Instruments developed by traditional leadership scholars to examine male leadership often left out behaviors that both males and females use, but that were less valued by these researchers. However, we were able to sort out many interesting points of departure from the traditional male accounts in the literature on women leaders. Based on women's lived experiences of leading schools and districts, the following themes help us to understand what women pay attention to in this field of work. And, more important, they give us an opportunity to consider how educational leadership can be reconceived so that more students prosper.

Relational Leadership

Relational leadership suggests that leadership is about being in relationship with others in a horizontal rather than a hierarchical sense. When interviewed about their leadership, women often talk about accomplishing goals with and through others. Studies suggest that women conceptualize power differently and are likely to seek to expand everyone's power. This approach has considerable impact on organizational behavior and change. Women school leaders historically have been ambivalent about

their own power. Early studies of women's reactions to questions about power identified unease with stereotypically male notions of power. Formisano (1987), Carnevale (1994), and Smith (1996) in their studies of women assistant principals, principals, assistant superintendents, and superintendents noted women's discomfort with being described as powerful or as having power. Fennell (2002) reports that women leaders and feminist scholars “have often expressed discomfort with structuralist perspectives of power and sought alternative theories of power” (p. 100). Blackmore (1989) concurs, writing about women who are alienated by the “masculinist portrayal of power, leadership and organizational life which emphasizes control, individualism and hierarchy” (p. 123). Rather than conclude that women were not powerful, Hartsock (1983), Shakeshaft (1989), Kreisberg (1992), Hurty (1995), and many others began to move to redefine the concept as power *with* rather than power *over*. These observations are underscored in a variety of studies that ground power within relationships. Among others, Grogan (2000) and Brunner (2000) both identify relational approaches to power in the work of women educational administrators. Women often describe power as something that increases as it is shared. Therefore, it is not surprising that in order for many women to be comfortable with the notion of holding power, power needs to be conceptualized as something that is shared with others and that is not power over but, rather, power with.

Women's conceptions of power are closely tied to the importance they place on relationships. Power used to help others strengthens relationships, while power used to control damages relationships (Brunner, 2000). Thus, power through relationships is more likely to be how women confront change. Cryss Brunner's (1999b, 2000) work on the way women superintendents think about

power is a good example. Many of the participants in her studies talk about their leadership this way:

> In order to get things done through others you must be able to admire the human resources of your staff and build personal relationships with highly talented people who want to grow, and who want to do their very best. (2000, p. 144)

Similarly, in the quotation at the top of this chapter, assistant superintendent Lorraine Darnell in Grogan's (1996) study of women educational leaders talks about her ability to enable others to do their work well.

According to the literature, women superintendents enact this relational leadership by using decision-making strategies that allow them to really hear the input from others. A participant in Brunner's (2000) study talks about a superintendent she admires who always brings her ideas to her administrative team for their input. “[I]t's not as if the decision has already been made, and she's simply going through the motions of asking for input and asking for involvement on the part of the other people” (p. 147). The superintendent actually folded others' ideas into her decision-making. Another participant in the same study makes the point that it is more important to do the project well than to worry about who gets the credit. She says,

> I think, as women, we have always known that we have to work with people to accomplish anything. A mother who runs a household doesn't always get the credit for what the children accomplish, but her preparing and planning helps these accomplishments to happen. (p. 144)

Leaders who build strong relationships are described as collaborative and caring as well as courageous and visionary (Regan & Brooks, 1995). These authors stress the

importance of listening from the heart. One of the principals in their study, Susan, talks of the four-year journey of creating a cultural awareness program in her school. She describes being prompted to do this by a curious conversation she had early in her principalship:

> “How do you like being the principal of the Hazard School?”
>
> “I like it very well,” I said. “The community is so diverse—I find it very rich.”
>
> “Rich?” said another woman, sounding perplexed. “I thought that some of the kids that go to that school are poor.” (p. 51)

Susan was unfazed by the outsider's misunderstanding and narrow perception of the children. Rejecting the stereotypical deficit view, she identified with the students and saw them as offering each other wonderful opportunities to break out of the cycles of racism and classism that had plagued the school and community. She established a strong community within the school to celebrate their cultural roots and engaged the wider community in efforts to underscore the value of their diversity.

This horizontal leadership approach stresses the involvement of the many in the activities of the organization. It extends beyond the leadership team to teachers and the wider community. A principal in Grogan's (1996) study juxtaposes two views of leadership:

> Not everyone is comfortable with a collegial kind of approach.... I'm real tired of listening to people that are very directive and very top down. [They] talk about how they include everybody, and they don't mean that a bit. I mean they can spout it all, and I've watched them, and you give them an opportunity to demonstrate it, and no way in the world do they mean it. But with me, it's the only way I know how to operate. And it's based on the belief that I'm dealing with professionals and a sincere interest in having parents in the community directly involved in what goes on in the school. If [parents] weren't there, I'd go out and chase them in. They're not threatening; they belong there for crying out loud. (p. 144)

A final example of the relational approach to leadership found in many women's leadership stories comes from Grogan and Blackmon's (2001) study of a woman superintendent's efforts at coalition-building in her district. Superintendent Blackmon spent the first month on the job meeting with everyone she could in the district. She asked school board members to draw up a list of all the people who had complained about something the district was doing in the past, and she talked to those people. She had teachers draw up lists of parents and students she needed to talk to, and she sent an open invitation to the community at large to come and visit her. This was not only a beginning exercise; she became known as someone who was on the ground, and in the buildings. She invited diverse groups to come and talk to her and to one another, and she encouraged them to find common ground. Her deliberate attempts at coalition-building reflected the kind of networking approach that contrasts sharply with the idea of command and control.

Relational leadership is about facilitating the work of others who share the power and authority to collaboratively

craft direction for the district. Perhaps the most important understanding that connects women leaders to others is the passion many women have for substantive change that addresses injustice in education.

Leadership for Social Justice

The history of women and work, as well as the social context of women's lives, provides a strong overlay to the motivation of women in education. Women are likely to report that they entered the field of education because they wanted to “change” the status quo. Studies of teachers indicate that women, more than men, identify educational careers as social justice work, even if they don't use that explicit language. Women, more often than men, talk about having entered teaching to change the lives of children, to make the world a fairer place, and to change institutions so that all children have a chance.

Commitment to social justice is documented in a number of studies that isolate social justice as an initial motivator as well as a continuing mission (Sanders-Lawson, 2001; Shapiro, 2004; Smith-Campbell, 2002; Strachan, 1999, 2002). These studies describe behaviors that are compatible with moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992), servant leadership (Schlosberg, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1999), value-added leadership (Covey, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1994), and synergistic leadership theory (Brown & Irby, 2006). In the research, women leaders often talk about why they seek and accept leadership positions. Many women of color and many white women are motivated by a strong desire to transform the learning conditions and opportunities for those who have been least well served by current educational policies and practices.

Jane Strachan (2002) and Valerie Hall (2002) describe women principals and head-teachers in New Zealand and

the United Kingdom, respectively, who are grounded in an ethical approach to leadership that strives to create more equitable learning conditions for students. These women “[s]ought to achieve equity through personal, political, societal and institutional transformation” (Strachan, 2002, p. 117). Strachan paints a vivid portrait of one of the participants in her study, a principal named Jill, who was fully devoted to improving the lives of at-risk students in her building. Jill's staff comment that she would never become principal of a school of privileged students because she has “a social mission in teaching…and [is] passionate about things that are important to her, for example, the struggle of low income families and the consequences of that for their education” (p. 119).

Similarly strong examples of this kind of leadership are found in narratives of black women talking about their leadership in Sanders-Lawson and colleagues' (2006) study. These authors argue that the life experiences of black women leaders in education in the United States have prompted them to be focused on justice. They also believe that instead of it being an individual leader's responsibility, the power of making a difference lies in the collective approach—of family, church, neighborhood, or race. One of the authors, Renee Sanders-Lawson, uses the metaphor of the difficult jump-rope game “Double Dutch” to describe how it feels to be an African American woman superintendent. “This feat requires numerous skills, which can be likened to the skills that Black women superintendents must possess or acquire in order to create socially just schools” (Sanders-Lawson et al., 2006, p. 40).

With the same emphasis on acting and not just talking about the need to act, Catherine, a Cuban American woman, talks about her work as a principal in a gang-ridden neighborhood plagued with drugs and prostitution. She describes how she created a community-school

coalition to offer a full set of services to the families and students in the school:

> There is now a neighborhood police officer stationed at the school, afterschool and summer sports, and recreation activities, academic programs for all ages (K–12), early childhood care and parenting classes, adult community education classes, medical services offered at the school once a week, and an office space that is used by a variety of social service departments…. The community-school coalition has written grants to support the programs, her teachers have rescheduled their days… and she and her administrative team have had to learn "creative budgeting!" (AhNee-Benham & Cooper, 1998, p. 51)

What these women mean by social justice is a passion for doing work that involves making a difference in the lives of students who have not been well served by the current systems. In addition, many of these women describe this work occurring in partnership with other teachers and leaders or in a collaborative relationship with various community and other stakeholder groups.

If change to bring about greater social justice is the end product for many women, then hope, spirituality, and belief in God is the motor that propels many of them to change the system. Being spiritual does not necessarily predict an interest in social change, nor is a social justice advocate required to be spiritual. However, many women administrators are both focused on social justice and reliant on what they describe as a higher power to help them in their fight. Several studies document an additional dimension that some women add to their social justice, moral, or servant leadership approach. For instance, studies of women of African descent who are principals and superintendents describe leaders who extend the