

**An Inquiry into One Feminist Education Leader's Experience in an Alberta
Urban School District**

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A Research Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies,
Concordia University of Edmonton

in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

Master of Education in Educational Leadership

**Concordia University of Edmonton
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

Edmonton, Alberta

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I dedicate this to my mother, Christine Adamson, my children Aisha Nay and Aaron Nay, and my partner Ricardo Acuña. Thank you all for your love, humour, patience, encouragement and immense support over the past two years. I could not have done this without each of you.

I love you.

I would also like to thank Dr. Muna Saleh (Assistant Professor, Education) and Julia Dalman (B.Sc., M.Ed) two feminist leaders who inspire me to do better every day.

Abstract

Through(out) this narrative inquiry, I argue that leadership in public education in Alberta needs to change. I argue that it needs to better reflect the changes in the world. Our school divisions and schools are filled with a wonderful diversity of knowing and being that could easily fill our students and education staff with more educative knowledge and connection. This study highlights how hierarchical, patriarchal, and colonial traditions that undergird current education systems are increasingly being challenged because these systems have been and continue to be designed for the benefit of one group in society: White, male, able-bodied, and cisgendered people (Ahmed, 2017; Freire, 2017; hooks, 1994; Shields, 2018). These systems create barriers to equity and equal access to education.

Female, feminist education leaders have the knowledge and perspectives that are necessary to lead our education systems into its next, more sustainable and sustaining form (Ahmed, 2017; hooks, 1994). Their leadership is grounded in skills and knowledge that women with feminist perspectives as presented by Oxfam Canada (2018) bring to education: how to build community, how to see the group but acknowledge the individual, how to collaborate, how to include, how to hear the needs of others and respond to them. Through my narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) with one such female, feminist leader, I have learned that this is possible. Our research conversations underscore her ability to label the inherent violence in current education systems, her ideas of what education could (and sometimes does) look like, and her commitment to community. These ideas and skills are what make her a vital member of the school division she works in, yet her knowing and skills are not often recognized as being a vital form of leadership.

This research highlights my learning and belief that women leaders with feminist commitments need to be in positions of leadership throughout the education system. This is one way more people will feel empowered to embrace who they are and feel free to live lives of dignity and value within education systems and beyond.

Key words - educational leadership, feminism, feminist, Alberta, transformative

Research context and beginnings

I have been working in public education in Alberta in an urban setting for approximately thirty-two years. My entire career has centered around what has been labelled “special education” and, almost always, involved children and families who were considered to be on the margins of society. People who were perceived as different for any number of reasons and found “fitting in” difficult. They also found accessing education in the traditional way extremely difficult. As a teacher I learned to be an advocate for and with the students and families that I was fortunate to work with, and I had to use those advocacy skills often as I was certain that all children needed to be given the opportunity to learn in whatever way worked best for them. It was everyone's right to an education.

In the past ten years in the urban division I have worked in, there has been an ongoing shift to making sure that students have access to an education that helps them find dignity and value in their lives. Alongside that came the work about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and the reworking of the Teacher Quality Standard (TQS) (Alberta Education, 2018) and the Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) (Alberta Education, 2018) in January 2018.

In July of 2018, I found myself back in University, in graduate studies. I wanted to make sure that, as a school principal, I understood the best way to lead a school through the work that is essential when talking about making space and better supporting all students - particularly those who are marginalized by multiple social systems and dominant stories within education and beyond. As I read and talked and considered, I began to wonder about the power of feminist leadership, particularly because when done thoughtfully and with principle; it seems to me to be the best approach to a system steeped in White, patriarchal, colonialist, neo-liberal ideals and hierarchies (Ahmed, 2017; Harrison, 2000). After experiencing the upheaval of 2020, with social

movements like Black Lives Matter and the worldwide effects of COVID-19 shaping the news and everyday lives, I think I am on to something.

On January 6, 2021, much of the world witnessed the United States of America face an insurrection that saw the White House overcome by insurgents (The Associated Press, 2021). As I watched what was happening, what occurred to me was the insurrectionists were acting because they believed their country needed their help. It convinced me yet again that a strong public education system is a requirement for a healthy society, and it needs to be grounded in feminist principles. As Choge (2015) shared, “There is a saying that says, ‘if you educate a man you educate an individual and that if you educate a woman you educate the whole nation’” (p. 30). Our whole nation needs to be educated. This is evident in the learning that is happening with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in Canada, and the acknowledgement by the Canadian Prime Minister of genocide during the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) inquiry (Ballingall, 2019). This admission came because of the persistence of Indigenous women and communities, who would not be silenced in telling their stories, and the ongoing impact of their stories. This shows the importance of supporting Indigenous women, Black women and women of colour into positions of leadership¹. They have skills and knowledge that are invaluable to our communities and necessary for educative ways forward.

At the present time, although I will not be “defining” feminist leadership, I will borrow a working definition from Sara Ahmed (2017): “Feminism: how we hold each other up” (p. 1). This definition seems to be wide enough and yet succinct enough to orient my thinking as I re/conceptualize my understandings of what feminist leadership can and sometimes does look

¹ Although my research does not speak directly to Crenshaw's (1999) theory of intersectional I do not mean to imply that it is not important. My research acknowledges that women of colour, Indigenous women, and Black women, and all who experience marginalization by different systems (e.g. racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, ableist, etc.) need to be at the center of the work so that racism and feminism do not create unintentional barriers to success for everyone in the schools I will work in.

like, both through the literature and through my research alongside a participant who identifies as a feminist leader. I acknowledge that through this narrative inquiry research project the definition I am borrowing will shift and become part of my own story.

Coming to the research

One of the obstacles that I have continuously encountered throughout my teaching career is how to demonstrate the learning that students are doing in a way that honours their hard work. Their achievements and stories do not always fit on a bar graph or into a pie chart. Their stories, and the time needed to witness and share them, are always the most accurate and fair method of demonstrating their achievements. Even as a principal, students' stories are rarely considered valid assessments, but are rather viewed as incidental, nice to hear, and/or heartwarming. The hierarchical, competitive nature of education has traditionally depended on quantitative data (Greene, 1993).

One of the first things I did as a new principal was take a video of a blind child, who was reading a Braille book, to share with a Trustee and an Assistant Superintendent of my school district, at a results review meeting. It captured their attention. It was the child's story that helped them understand the accomplishment they were viewing. The rest of the child's story is that when he started school he only knew Kurdish, so when his parents dropped him off every day at school, he cried and screamed because he could not see or understand any of the people around him. The expertise of the staff as they worked to establish relationships with him, his parents, and siblings, built a program solely for him, and worked their magic alongside his for six years, led him to the day that he was reading out loud in English. His English even had a slight Spanish accent because his Education Assistant was a wonderful Spanish-speaking woman from Mexico. All of this information is hugely important when trying to understand the successes in a young

boy's school life and the work done by the staff; these achievements would never be reflected in the Provincial Achievement Tests, but were far more extensive and important.

The need for story has always been important to me as an educator, and the qualitative narrative inquiry methodology enables me to research in a way that allows for life and connection (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), both of which are very difficult to measure in a quantitative way, and both of which are essential to teaching and learning. This research will allow me to sit with and listen carefully to the stories of a young, woman feminist, leader in an urban public education setting. I would like to learn and share her story to understand where her feminism began, what her conceptualizations of feminist leadership are, and how her passion for public education came about? I wanted to better understand how or if she perceived herself as a leader? I am interested to hear if her feminist principles are shaping her work with children and families, and if so, in what ways?

Through this narrative inquiry, it is my hope that as I learn more from this young woman I will be able to apply what I learn directly to my work as a principal. I hope that I will be able to empower and enable other education staff, especially women, to connect, empower, and support each other toward a public education system that is socially just and equitable.

Exploring the literature

I have found myself in one of the most challenging, yet educational years of my life. This year has placed on display all of the systems and inequities that have been part of our education system for far too long (Ahmed, 2017; Freire, 2017; Gorski, 2019; Shields, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic forced people to be home, and gave them the opportunity to witness forces on the planet that were not witnessed so starkly before. With the pandemic, in North America, everyone had to slow down because of restrictions and lock downs. It provided a moment in

history for typically pre-occupied White people to witness moments of distress and inequity. These moments were tied to police, government, work, and educational systems. People were home, witnessing on their computers, T.V.'s, and phones reports from sources such as The New York Times (Hill et al, 2020), The Guardian (Aratani, 2020) and ABC News (Deliso, 2020) the manner in which George Floyd was murdered in May, 2020. This disgusting, shocking act was witnessed by millions because it was videotaped and shared. People were able to see it on social media platforms, as well as newscasts. It is proof of the inequity and racism that is occurring every day. It shook people. It shook me.

This year, alongside those happenings and the research I have engaged in, demonstrated for me why it is important to continue to work on recreating myself as a feminist leader. As Sara Ahmed (2017) noted, "Feminism is a sensible reaction to the injustices of the world, which we might register at first through our own experiences" (p. 17). In my opinion, this is especially important in education. It is important to acknowledge that my "lived curriculum" (Aoki, 1993, p. 258), or lived experience, as a teacher is grounded in the challenges and strengths of being a woman in a system designed for men to be in positions of authority. In a paper written for one of my graduate courses, I was able to define more clearly for myself how my role of principal would become even more effective when guided by feminist leadership. For me, it is an opportunity to develop an appreciation for feminist leadership in a school community. An approach that works to be inclusive, and understands collaboration instead of competition as a means of approaching problems. A feminist approach that gives voice to the people impacted by decisions before they are made; that allows a safe place for women to accept leadership roles that use and build upon their strengths. A feminist approach that creates spaces where paying close attention to others is essential, and exploring new understandings and ideas is vital. A feminist

approach that is reflexive to the needs of the people in the community: staff, students, and caregivers/families. Someone who does not mind being the feminist “killjoy” (Ahmed, 2017) to allow for and understand “the resistance to their work. A strategy is what is developed in the effort to overcome this resistance” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 98) that can still be felt within an education system. This continued resistance is why it is so clear that social justice and equity must be part of education (Ahmed, 2017; Freire, 1997; Gorski, 2019; Greene, 1993; hooks, 1994; Shields, 2018).

It is also why, as a woman in a position of authority, it must be the way leadership is practiced everyday inside and outside the school building, even when it is difficult or goes against the grain. As Sara Ahmed (2017) stated, “We made a world out of the shattered pieces even when we shatter the pieces or even when we are the shattered pieces” (p. 261). These “shattered pieces” will become how I (re/co)construct my “world” (Lugones, 1987, p. 10) inside as well as outside of public education “so that the way we live, teach and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice, and our love of freedom” (hooks, 1994, p. 34).

Multiple and different forms of a “particular society” or “world” (Lugones, 1987, p. 10) are found in any school. They are built from the embodied knowledge and experiences of teachers and students. The stories that everyone comes to the building with, that we greet each other with, that can either make our days better or harder. These stories are the “lived curriculum” that Aoki (1993) stated are what make us see each other as humans deserving of each other's time, energy, patience, respect, a kind of love for all who are different, because we *are* all different.

Aoki (1993) talks about the daily “lived curriculum” (p. 258) that helps to build bridges to understanding by using it to “decenter the modernist-laden curricular landscape and to replace

it with the C&C [curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived] landscape that accommodates lived meanings, thereby legitimating thoughtful everyday narratives” (p. 263).

This becomes the important work of public education leaders and why feminist education leaders need to seek each other out to promote the work that is stated in the Leadership Quality

Standard:

WHEREAS the success of all members of the school community requires inclusive environments in which diversity is respected and members of the school community are welcomed, cared for, respected and safe. (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 2)

This is part of the work of the feminist leader, to “successfully accommodate the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of our world” (Shields, 2018, p. 5). To help hold and support understanding with the staff in the school so that they can learn about and work with each other, students, and families. This “lived curriculum” (Aoki, 1993) becomes how everyone learns and honours how everyone learns.

Sean Lessard (2015) pointed out “that curriculum making was not only situated in schools but was also situated in family and community place” (p. 3), and shows the importance of listening carefully to staff, students, and caregivers/families, and their lives. I believe that this careful listening, conversations to understand more, and thoughtful observations are the essential skills of a master teacher and leader. These essential skills show that

Teachers do make a difference. They do know their situations. They are not mere screens who translate others' intentions and ideologies into practice. Teachers' knowledge is an essential component in improving educational practice. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1997, p. 674)

These essential skills can be paired with the principles of woman feminist leadership formulated by both Oxfam Canada (2018), Sara Ahmed (2017), and the tenets of transformative leadership put forward by Carolyn Shields (2018) (Appendix A).

Paul Gorski (2019) pointed out that this is difficult and tiring work, because doing it well will mean feminist education leaders will need to be intentional about how they (re)present equity, diversity, and social justice work every day. It needs to be the stated work of the people in education at all levels. This intentionality means that the work inside schools and school divisions needs to be (re)evaluated daily, knowing that there will be discomfort when the automatic assumption of privilege is discovered and they will find themselves “accused of being too ‘political’ simply for pointing out conditions that harm families of color” (p. 56). They also run the risk of being “labelled ‘militant’ or ‘angry’ for telling...the truth” (p. 56). This is where female feminist leaders in particular have a clear understanding. They have been labelled these things before when speaking up. However, as bell hooks (1994) reminds us,

To commit ourselves to the work of transforming the academy so that it will be a place where cultural diversity informs every aspect of our learning, we must embrace struggle and sacrifice. (p. 33)

Research strategies or methods

“As you enter positions of trust and power, dream a little before you think.”

~ Toni Morrison

This research project started because of my desire to make certain that I gave myself the opportunity to dream about what school could become to a community when led by a female, feminist principal. Someone who is already accustomed to being on the margins of a system because of gender, but who has privilege in the same system because I am White; I want to

understand how to use my position and privilege to create a space that is safe for everyone to be who they are. Safe to learn what they need to learn. Safe to take risks and fail. Safe to succeed. Safe to learn about stories and ideas that are foreign to them. I understand, after thirty-two years of experience and my own three-dimensional narrative inquiry which includes place, time (past and present), and experience that is personal as well as existential (Connelly & Clandinin (2000)), that systems (including educational systems) can be hostile to changes, and my dream is to change it. This particular research study has allowed me the opportunity to begin to continue to dream and think.

When I began this course of study, I was excited by the idea of the particular strengths I believe women feminist leaders can bring to education. I began reading related literature to continue building my knowledge of feminism. I read Sara Ahmed (2017), bell hooks (1994, 2015), and Lesser (2020). I also delved into readings that involved social justice, equity work, anti-racism, and diversity (Friere, 2017; Gorski, 2019; Greene, 2019; Horton, 1999; Shields, 2014, 2018). I listened to podcasts by Brené Brown (2020-present). I had informal conversations with and listened to educators from across the province of Alberta, as well as in my Master of Education in Educational Leadership cohort. All of this knowledge gathering was beneficial because it allowed me to learn about different perspectives and experiences. This knowledge gathering continued into the research project.

Following institutional ethics approval in November 2020, I began the research process by asking someone that I hold in high regard and saw as a young, female, feminist leader, if she would be interested in participating in this narrative inquiry. I knew of her through her work in an urban school division in Alberta, and although we have never worked together I have always been intrigued by her feminist knowledge, her compassion for people, and her stories about how

she sees and works with young people/students. She is not a certified teacher but she values public education and works in a division building connections between communities and schools.

Guided by the attached (Appendix B) outline of possible open-ended questions and potential use of artifacts to ground narrative research conversations (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I inquired into the perceptions, experiences, and learnings of this feminist education leader. I invited Corinne (pseudonym) to participate using the Information and Consent Letter (Appendix C), and as soon as I received her consent in January 2020, we tried to arrange to meet virtually through video conferencing. This proved to be more challenging than I originally expected due to the pandemic and the extra responsibilities that we each had. We were able to arrange our formal research discussion in mid-February 2021. For this reason, Corinne and I had one long research conversation rather than the 2-3 research conversations I had originally anticipated when imagining this research.

Before our virtual meeting was held, I shared a few example questions with Corinne (at her request) so that she could feel confident about the conversation. The questions were shared using Facebook Messenger in early February 2021. I provided four open-ended questions that could be used to guide our discussion, just to give some context for the conversation.

The session was conducted online through Google Meet. Field Texts (often referred to as "data") were gathered through one open-ended conversation session, using the shared open-ended question protocol as conversation starters only when I thought it necessary. The length of time for the session was an hour and a half. This was to make sure that there was sufficient time to gather enough data. The data was recorded by Google Meet and was also transcribed using speech-to-text software in Google documents, which was verified by Corinne. I

also made sure to listen to the recording while reading the transcript to make sure the transcription was accurate. These recordings helped me to keep the information gleaned from the conversations accurate. Corinne graciously volunteered to be available for any and all follow up if necessary. The recording, transcript, and a copy draft of this paper were shared with Corinne, as will the results of this study.

The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space will take into account this particular feminist leader's stories of experiences through(out) "temporal (past, present, and future), personal/existential, and place[s]" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 318), as I try to understand the significant stories that shape her stories of feminist leadership and how these stories shape her work within an education setting.

Narrative Threads

After listening and learning from Corinne I am left with a lovely sense of hope. This hope is grounded in the strength that women have when creating community, especially for marginalized people with women at the centre. I continue to believe that community should be the primary work of education, and how to connect people to each other as they learn about themselves. This conversation also solidified my notion that this sort of work needs women feminist leaders, especially in education. This is because they have a clear understanding of the oppression and violence in our systems - because they often experience and/or witness it in different ways. They are ready to change it.

When I replayed our conversation, three main narrative threads (Clandinin, 2013) that resonated across our conversation became obvious to me. The first thread is *being a feminist is hard, worthy work*. Corinne spoke powerfully about oppression and violence and how learning to be feminist actually saved her life. The second thread was *the education system is hostile to*

many especially to the people who are not white, male, able-bodied, and cisgendered. The third thread is that *inclusive community is important*. Students and teachers who know they are valued and safe, feel love, and learn.

Thread 1 - Being a feminist is hard, worthy work

When our conversation began, I explained that I was in the process of reconceptualizing feminism for myself. I asked Corinne where she had developed her strong sense of feminism from. She smiled gently and said:

It's a journey, it's a process ... my own version of feminism is also being reworked, especially as I start diving into what it means to be in solidarity with a kind of borderless feminism. I am also asking myself, what does it mean to be working in a co-conspirator relationship with Indigenous feminists? How do we look at this in our education system? That changes my world every time I dive into it.

I knew at that moment I had more work to do. That is because the process or journey of being a feminist is personal and yet connected to others. It has to be.

Corinne also told a story of her grandmother, Dorothy (Dottie) Martin, who had lived and was raised on the family farm by her father. Her only hope was to graduate as the class valedictorian so that her education could continue. She did. Corinne's grandmother, Dottie, then went on to lead an adventurous life, which led her to Jamaica where she started the first museum of natural history there as a young female biologist. She was a brilliant biologist who had to give up her studies when she married and had children. She was only allowed to volunteer for her husband, who was also a biologist. Corinne explained:

So even though she had out-ranked him in every way, she had to now volunteer under him ... she was not allowed to work any more ... a brilliant woman who then just kept meticulous lists of things.

Women have been oppressed and made to fit into roles and situations that have harmed them both mentally and physically. This oppression shapes the way a person will look at the world and interact in it. This oppression is intimately known by many who do not fit into the “norms” of society: i.e., anyone who is not male, White, able-bodied, and cisgendered. Corinne further explained how she came to her feminism:

Feminism legitimately saved my life ... It wasn't until I started volunteering at the sexual assault centre, that I truly understood how my own experiences of sexual assault were connected to the oppression of women on a societal level. It was there that I found my connection with feminism, and just became kind of a fierce advocate for women because once you have that lens, you more accurately understand how systems of power operate, and it is really hard to unsee this once you do.

Women are part of a societal system that is violent towards them. This is understood and lived by women of all backgrounds throughout generations and in many countries throughout the world. This is why I believe that feminism is the way that women can build community and solidarity. Even the word solidarity has at its root *solid*, the perfect way to keep each other connected, supported, empowered, and safe. This *solidarity* is what makes all the work worthwhile. This is also what female feminism can offer to all the children, youth, and caregivers/families coming to us in education systems.

Thread 2 - The education system is hostile to many

In the conversation I was mentioning to Corinne that I have worked with teams that were all women. There were some women who were still hesitant to engage with some of the more needed conversations around racism, especially when the much-needed work about Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, and histories became our focus. This is one way where the system stays hostile towards those who have been, and continue to be, marginalized by the system: when staff, who are working with different students, hold on to ideas that cause harm. How do we make education available to all, especially when I see teaching staff being hesitant to engage? It makes them feel uncomfortable. Corinne, in her non-judgmental way, understood their discomfort and asserted that we need to overcome this discomfort because not doing so is perpetuating violence:

I think as women we all experience the violence of the system in ways that we are held back or we are oppressed, right? But I don't think you necessarily have to, because of the ways society expects you to just get along, just be happy, be the sort of the person that makes everything okay. There is pressure to not express anger and you need to not express these sort of, I guess they are emotions that are more associated with masculinity. Once you experience violence and can name it as violence, it's easy to see the violence in all of these actions. So for somebody that you know, hasn't necessarily been able to name the violence in how they are socialized, and how they are able to, I guess, live about their world. They're also not able to see how that's violent towards other people. They are not able to see that that sort of upholding of a system is violent to people of colour and violent in a colonial nature.

This is where Corinne, as a woman feminist leader, can engage with others to explain how the system is perpetuating a way of working with others that would be perceived as hostile.

She is able to place herself in each group and develop a view of the system that comes from being a woman and understanding that the oppression and violence is real and felt:

So I would say experiencing oppression, experiencing sexual assault, for as long as I did, also really informed my understanding of the importance of feminism and the importance of having different perspectives in leadership and how we approach the world. Because you know as a woman I have experienced oppression but I acknowledge that I have a lot of privilege too. In terms of, I am a white, cisgendered person, but I do have this particular lens of how oppression has impacted me in my life and how it then shapes my way of looking at the world.

This open connecting with many different understandings of the world is why I believe female feminist leaders are so important to education. It can help validate all the people who cannot fit into the system that the dominant group perpetuates.

As we continued our conversation Corinne was able to name what she believes is missing from public education:

I think I have a pretty clear sense of what our system lacks. I don't think our public education system does a good job of any kind of instillment of community and belonging inside of the school walls. I think we have really been infected with that individualistic, competitive nature.

Corrine admitted to having only experienced educating in Junior High and High School settings so she was aware that she may have a bias that leads her to believe that the only form of school spirit that is developed happens around competitive sports teams. A very specific dedicated type of school culture that does not usually include the community around them, and is inherently competitive:

I see all these students that don't have a positive or meaningful connection to the city that they are living in or, I should say, opportunities that can facilitate relationships and belonging beyond the four walls of the school as part of their schooling experience. They don't have an experience in their education where community is more broadly defined, in which students have access to opportunities that really nurture who they are as people.

If a group of students are not part of the dominant group (for example, a sports team), they are often left out; their understandings of the world, their passions, their ideas are not typically recognized as contributing to the school. They are the ones that appear to flounder because they have no place to build *solidarity* with(in) the dominant school community.

Thread 3 - Inclusive community is important

During our conversation I asked Corinne about how she pictures public education.

Almost immediately Corinne had an answer that talked about community:

I have a really specific idea of community, I guess you could say, and education's purpose in fostering community and helping students to find that and to thrive. So that, I would say, is the bent that I have. In terms of what education should be though, I think it's always in the process of becoming. I don't know that I have a specific vision that I would be comfortable stating as the path forward, as I am still on my own learning journey I think the question is how can we as people come together and live in a good way with each other? How can we be contributing to the creative renewal of our planet and the creative renewal of the world, right? Those are the kinds of the exciting things and questions I like to work with students on and really dive into.

When we continued to talk, I made a connection between what are considered “soft skills” (i.e., the skills usually attributed to women): the skills that build connection, that show caring, that show love. And how they are not typically thought of as developed skills. I suggested that they should become labelled as “essential skills.” These skills, however, are not thought of as important yet. We discussed how the competitive, individualistic nature of the education system can seem hostile. Corinne noted:

For me the system is hostile and built to look like exactly what you just said.

It is not rewarding necessarily of those soft skills or any of the kind of ideas we are having in this conversation, but it's hostile like that to everybody right?

And I think that's the piece I try to keep in mind, that teachers are feeling this way too.

The belief that both Corinne and I hold is that public education could be the place that students develop their sense of belonging to the greater community, and actively work towards building connections between themselves and all of those around them. To be given the chance to learn in ways that make sense to *them*. To have leaders around them that are not confined by standardized test results, which only serve to point out how students that do not fit an arbitrary standard, yet again do not fit. Leaders who are “humanist educator[s]” (Freire, 2017, p. 67) interested in working alongside others for the betterment of everyone. To be active, creative learners and thinkers. Corinne spoke to this idea when she stressed:

When you have these moments where people are vulnerable together, you can do something pretty impactful in terms of community ... the students are at the table with their peers, teachers, administrators, and community members and driving their learning it's what happens to them as a result. And often what I see is this increase in their confidence and ability to be loving and caring towards their fellow students and peers. I

hear students who have these unique experiences talk about how the [education] system needs to make more space for these types of opportunities because it's like earth-shattering for them when they experience it for the first time. They thought, up until that point, that it was impossible to have this kind of vulnerability and voice as a part of their education, yet it was some of the richest learning that they experienced. And so for me it keeps me there.

This is how public education could be for all the learners involved: students, parents, teachers, administrators, caregivers/families, and the larger community. As Corinne so powerfully stated, this can be:

How can we as people come together and live in a good way with each other? How can we be contributing to the creative renewal of our planet and the creative renewal of the world?

Key Learnings

At the end of our research conversation, which seemed to end far too quickly, we decided that we would most definitely continue to be in conversation with each other. The ideas and awareness that we shared underscored for me that the education system needs to change. It needs to become more responsive to the community, and female feminist leaders have a perspective that is helpful and healing. They are leaders who understand the need for social justice, for equity, for the celebration of diversity, and for needed connection to the larger community. Many feminist education leaders, very much like Corinne, do not need to be certified teachers, but can be people who have an understanding of the larger community and the impact that public education has on it in both positive and negative ways.

I believe that feminist leadership led by women is exactly what Alberta public education systems need, especially because our schools are so magnificently full of diverse and interesting learners. This type of leadership is very different and it will always be challenged as being “too political,” especially when the woman leader needs to speak up so that the system can do and be better.

Dreaming Forward

As I began this work, I was looking for a way to become a better leader. Someone who could help all people access public education and live lives that are filled with dignity and value within education systems, so that as they learn and grow they have a sense of fulfillment. I am excited by my research because I have discovered that women with a feminist point of view are well situated to make the sort of changes to education that I believe are sorely needed. This need has become even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. The obvious inequities and the need for supporting each other through something entirely new have underscored the need to live in different ways alongside each other within and beyond education systems. It has also underscored the ability of women to lean in towards each other and others in *solidarity* to build stability and community. It has underscored the importance of education and education systems in society and the way schools should be of service to their communities.

During my research, the ideas of social justice, equity, anti-racism, and diversity, with women being situated in the centre of the work have been shown to be wonderful ways to lead. The strengths of collaboration, inclusion, and supporting other women that lead to transforming how a school can engage in a community are strengths that can be learned and shared.

I am excited to continue learning about feminist leadership led by women, to be in community with wise women like Corinne, and to continue building more spaces for others to be

in community within and across education systems. This research has provided me with knowledge and a sense of confidence in leading as a woman, feminist, education leader; a way that is different than has traditionally been used in education. A way that I continue to believe is needed.

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Appendix A

Oxfam Canada (2018)	Sara Ahmed (2017)	Carolyn M. Shields (2018)
Support transformative change	I am willing to participate in a killjoy movement (p. 267).	Tenet 2: The Necessity of New Knowledge Frameworks (p. 39)
Recognize power and privilege	I am not willing to make happiness my cause (p. 257).	Tenet 3: Address the Inequitable Distribution of Power (p. 47)
Put women’s rights actors at the centre of our work	I am willing to support others who are willing to cause unhappiness (p.259).	
Honour context and complexity	I am willing to snap any bonds, however precious, when those bonds are damaging to myself or to others (p. 266).	Tenet 7: the necessity of balancing critique with promise (p. 107)
Celebrate diversity and challenge discrimination through an intersectional approach	I am willing to cause unhappiness (p. 258).	Tenet Four: Balancing Private and Public Good (p. 63)
‘Nothing about me without me’	I am willing to live a life that is deemed by others as unhappy and I am willing to reject or to widen the scripts available for what counts as a good life (p. 264).	
Do no harm	I am not willing to laugh at jokes designed to cause offense (p. 261).	Tenet Five: A Focus on Emancipation, Democracy, Equity and Justice (p. 89)
Balance learning with accountability	I am willing to put the hap back into happiness (p. 265).	Tenet Six: An Emphasis on Interdependence, Interconnectedness and Global Awareness (p. 96)
Support knowledge for transformative change	I am not willing to get over histories that are not over. (p. 262)	Tenet 8: the call to exhibit moral courage (p. 107)
Commit to organizational transformation	I am not willing to be included if inclusion means being included in a system that is unjust, violent, and unequal. (p. 263)	Tenet One: Deep and Equitable Change (p.29)

Appendix B

Open Ended Conversation with Guiding Questions

Norma Nay

An Inquiry into One Feminist Education Leader's Experience in an Alberta Urban School District

Central Question: What is one feminist educator's experiences in an urban Albertan public school context?

Pre-Conversation text with questions sent on February 6, 2021:

The sort of questions I have are about how you discovered your feminism?

When did you begin to understand it?

How do you view feminist leadership?

Where your passion for public education comes from?

Background of participant:

What does the word feminism mean to you?

I am wondering about your earliest memory of feminism?

Can you bring an artifact to help you share some of your stories?

When did you know you were a feminist?

How did it situate you in your life?

What helped to ground you in your journey? Does it still?

Then:

We will work towards a conversation about public education and how she got involved?

What does it mean to her?

Where did she go to school?

Earliest memory of her feminism in relation to a school system?

Next:

How does her feminism affect the way she navigates through this particular public education system in Alberta?

What has helped her hang on to her way of knowing and allowed her to share it with others?

What would have helped her early on in her work?

What is her work now?

What would help now to support her work?

Finally:

As a feminist leader in education what would the perfect world of public education look like?

How does being a feminist in a public education system help the work? What are the most obvious benefits that you see? What are some of the negatives? If you were not involved in public education what do you think you would be doing?

If you could sit with a room full of young teachers and you knew that what you said would actually be embodied by all of those that hear you, what would you say to them?

These questions and ideas may be used to begin or prompt the conversation. They are not intended to drive the conversation. I am eager to see where this goes.

Appendix C

October 2, 2020

Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent Form

Study Title: An Inquiry into One Feminist Education Leader's Experience in an Alberta Urban School District

Researcher: Norma Nay, B.Ed.

My name is Norma Nay and I am a Principal Teacher at Beacon Heights School in Edmonton, Alberta. I am presently completing a Masters in Education in Educational Leadership at Concordia University of Edmonton. As part of my program requirements I am conducting a research study. My research study focuses on the thoughts, experiences, and learnings of a feminist leader in education in an urban setting in Alberta. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Before agreeing to participate in this research, I strongly encourage you to read the following explanation of this study. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study. Also described is your right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of Concordia University of Edmonton.

Explanation of Procedures

I am engaging in this research to learn about the perceptions, experiences and learnings that one feminist leader in an urban education setting in Alberta has had. I hope to gain insight into your experiences regarding what shaped your definition of feminism and how it impacts the way you lead. Research informed by narrative inquiry, the methodology I will be using to help me engage in this study, involves telling stories of your experiences and may involve the sharing of personal artifacts, photography and creative work, and/or the creation of life timelines. This study will involve meeting with you three times over the next four months to learn about and reflect upon your thoughts and experiences related to being a feminist leader. Each one-hour, one-on-one conversation will be held at a time and location that you choose, which may also include online meetings. Our conversations will be recorded and transcribed.

Potential Risks

While I will conduct this research in ways that minimize any potential risks, possible risks to your participation in this research may include feelings of frustration or sadness when discussing your experiences. If this should occur, I encourage you to let me know so that I may support you through this process.

Benefits

The anticipated benefit of your participation in this study is the opportunity to discuss your thoughts, experiences, and perceptions of the value of feminist leadership in public education in Alberta. The research will benefit you as a leader by better understanding your perceptions and experiences related to feminism and how it impacts you as a leader. It will also inform my leadership practice and potentially the practice of other educators who read publications or attend presentations related to this research.

Confidentiality

Your privacy and confidentiality is extremely important to me and I will protect it at all times throughout the research. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. Study data, including personal information about you, will be securely stored in my home office for 5 months after the study is over, at which time it will be destroyed. Only I will have access to the study data and information. There will not be any identifying names on any of my research texts, notes, or interview transcripts. Your name and any other identifying details will never be revealed in any publication of the results of this study. The results of the research will be published in the form of a research paper and may be published in a professional journal or presented at professional meetings.

Withdrawal without Prejudice

Participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty. You are also free to refuse to answer any question I might ask you.

Further Questions and Follow-Up

You are welcome to ask me any questions that occur to you during the research. If you have further questions once the research is completed, you are encouraged to contact me using the contact information given below. If, as a result of participating in this study you feel the need for further, longer-term support, please contact me at any time using my contact information at the bottom of this page. If you have other questions or concerns about the study please contact the chair of Concordia University of Edmonton's Research Ethics Board at reb@concordia.ab.ca.

I, _____ (name; please print clearly), have read the above information. I freely agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that my responses will be kept anonymous.

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

If:

(a) you would like a copy of your research conversation transcripts once they are available

(b) you are interested in information about the study results

as a whole and/or

(c) if you would be willing to be contacted again in the future for possible follow-up research conversations, please provide contact information below:

Check those that apply:

- I would like copies of my research conversation transcripts
- I would like information about the study results
- I would be willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up interview

Write your address clearly below. Please also provide an email address if you have one.

Mailing address: _____

Email address: _____

Researcher Contact Information:

Norma Nay

School: [redacted]

Cell: [redacted]

Email: [redacted]