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## CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSION: PLACING WOMEN'S CAREERS IN THE FOREGROUND

We want women to speak up, talk back, laugh and make a difference. We know how easy it is to be shut up, shut out, and shunted aside. (Kirner & Rayner, 1999)

Reflecting on the Case Study Findings

My intention in conducting this case study was to bring an understanding of the gendered complexity of the career environment in Catholic education. By analysing the various organisational layers as I have defined these, associated with the career context of the Catholic education organisation that I examined, this complexity has been revealed. I also wanted to invite others to consider what it is like for a woman aspiring to a successful career whether in the classroom or in other roles in this religious system of schooling in Australia. In terms of the broader study of gender, career and organisation, the research demonstrates the impact of an organisation's career context and provides an understanding of the gendered cultural mosaic of a religious organisation. In particular, the research considers cultural expressions of masculinity and femininity associated with organisation and especially the emphasised femininity of the Catholic Church. The case study has illuminated the gendered reality of the Catholic education organisation and as an integral part of this reality, the notion of career has been analysed as this is portrayed within the organisation.

Women's careers in Catholic education are imbued with contradiction, ambiguity and paradox that is associated with the degree to which the integration of women's career needs and aspirations is accommodated within organisational arrangements. The religious identity of Catholic education and the established organisational response to women's careers create an ambiguous career outlook. The findings of the case study

indicate both the visibility and invisibility of gender within the organisational career context.

In returning to Joan Acker's (1991) theory of gendered organisations, the five interacting processes that she identified in which gendering occurs are present within the organisational arrangements of Catholic education and its sponsoring organisation, the Catholic Church. Firstly, the construction of division along lines of gender is evidenced in gendered jobs that perpetuate hierarchies and difference. The ecclesiastical structure of the Church is exclusively male. The symbolic impact of this exclusive clerical class and the imposed celibate lifestyle is a reminder of the Church's role in regulating sexuality which in turn subordinates women.

Within Catholic education, classroom teaching is heavily feminised whilst administration is more a male terrain with those women who have intruded being required to adapt to this masculine world. Women remain unequally distributed across the organisational hierarchy. Women are totally excluded from the clergy, as are married men. The notions of the 'person most suited to leadership' and 'the ideal Catholic school teacher' brings with them ascribed elements of masculinity and femininity. At another level of Catholic education, organisational practices maintain gender divisions such as the continuation of secretarial support roles that are poorly paid and dominated by women. Technology, which is a growing aspect of the organisation's structures and an important career designation, remains largely in men's control.

The second process identified by Acker, is the construction of gendered symbols and images. Within the symbolic level of the Catholic education organisation, this process is found in the exclusiveness of the imaging of God as a masculine pronoun. Whilst the papal encyclical, Mulieris Dignitatem assures women that feminine images

ascribed to God are appropriate (Leonard, 1995), the masculine image is predominant. Church documents are replete with exclusive language. Even after many years of supposed reform in textual conventions, women continue to be subsumed into 'man' and they therefore do not emerge in their own right.

The third gendered process relates to interactions of dominance and submission between women and men, women and women and men and men. Within the inflexible theological teachings of the Catholic Church, the voice of women continues to be denied. Women, therefore, are not involved in the leadership of the Catholic Church and the perspectives of women are excluded from Vatican documents, some of which are translated into educational policy in Catholic education. As a consequence, there is a perpetuation of men as the actors and women as the emotional support for men in the doing of organisational life. The fourth process identified by Acker, is the production of gendered components of individual identity. In Catholic organisations this is most closely associated with the presentation of self as a gendered member of the Catholic Church which has defined appropriate ways for women to be and to be seen to be.

Finally, Acker sees gender as a constitutive element in the underlying assumptions and practices that construct most contemporary organisations. Gender is implicated in ongoing processes of creating and conceptualising social structures. In the Catholic education organisation, the notion of 'career' remains locked into old systems of linear, hierarchical progression, titles and unrestrained commitment. This understanding is confirmed through the case study and remains current despite new understandings of transformation in organisations and the place of career in bringing individual expectations in line with organisational realities. Whilst workplace conditions have improved with the intervention of equal employment opportunity policies and enterprise bargaining, career development as an intentional response by the organisation to

professional development is non-existent. The religious ideology of the Catholic Church contributes to the paradoxical relationship between women and Catholic education. Women are increasingly relied upon to staff Catholic schools but their perspectives are excluded from the canon of the Catholic Church which gives these schools the mandate to exist. The case study has revealed a sense of constant tension for women as they live out two, often contradictory roles: the professional career woman and the role of 'woman' as defined within the parameters of the religious organisation with its set ideology, rules and policies. The process of conducting the research and engaging in dialogue with the participants revealed a sense of the paradox and ambiguity which has accompanied my own career in Catholic education.

Through the case study, I was able to analyse the way career outlook is constructed by individual women and as an element of the organisation's response to career. From an organisational stance, the process of constructing career outlook has been shaped through the interweaving of competing and contradictory discourses. The power unleashed through these particular discourses allows the interests of particular groups to be furthered because of their capacity to impart legitimate meanings while subjugating the meanings of other groups. When placed under the feminist gaze, the policies and practices, which constitute the organisational career context, reveal the prioritisation and allocation of values in the production of new meanings within the organisation. These meanings are associated with notions such as leadership, ministry and equity.

A focus on career outlook within Catholic education allows the research to make several aspects visible:

1. Ideological influences shape the culture of the organisational;
2. Ministry is associated with masculine identity;

3. Career remains linked to the traditional linear, hierarchical notion based on male norms; and
4. Teaching and administration are defined oppositionally as feminine and masculine enterprises.

The meanings associated with career in Catholic education have not overcome historical forms of gender inequality and it is clear that women's career needs, aspirations and values remain marginal within any formal endeavour to shape the organisational career context. The intervention of equal opportunities rhetoric can work to mask specific and telling gender differences in the disposition of power in Catholic education. As an example, the role of information and communication technology is becoming increasingly important in education. Women have learned to master technology in the organisation but that does not alleviate the masculine closure of its expert culture. Furthermore, the documents of the Congregation for Catholic Education have an implied gender neutrality but present obstacles in the notable lack of awareness of the embodied women and men who work in Catholic education. And yet these interventionist policies and the organisational practices that have resulted provide the opportunity to exploit discursive gaps by bringing the Church discourse of social justice into an alliance with feminist theological and organisational thinking. As an important factor in the development of the organisation's structures, however, career outlook has been given limited attention in Catholic education. Against all of the above, many women in Catholic education continue to find teaching and their lives a reasonably good fit but this is not generally recognised as a true career.

The organisational context promotes what I see as a somewhat uncomfortable co-existence between competing discourses circulating about the teaching career. Defining the teaching career as ministry provides an opportunity to explore the spiritual

dimension (in the Catholic religious way) of work, and the compunction or otherwise of women to participate in the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church. This religious discourse privileges teaching as an expression of an individual's vocation over teaching as a form of work which is attuned to the secular notion of career. The contrast is strongest in recognising career as a process primarily designed to fulfil the secular definition of worldly success (albeit to a limited degree in teaching) in terms of providing an income and the possibility of continuing professional growth. The Catholic education sector participates in the industrial relations system that is common to other Australian education organisations and has responded to the recasting of the teaching career in recent years through the changing requirements of the industrial relations process. The reform agenda that has emerged places a strong emphasis on the skills and abilities of workers. Essentially the reform agenda has been concerned with a competency-based approach to teaching geared towards creating a workforce which will be capable of responding in the education marketplace driven by competitive individualism and reward systems. The contradiction between ministry and professional career is obvious (Treston, 1989).

Neither career nor ministry as presently defined in practice accommodates different women's career aspirations and needs very well. The organisational emphasis on teaching as ministry raises questions concerning the de-professionalisation of teaching and resistance from women who have for centuries been excluded from ministries within the Catholic Church. The marketplace discourse brings the potential of increasing casualisation of the labour market which offers only marginal career status and opportunities. Both discourses raise questions about the personal qualities and attributes of employees that are valued in the organisation, and hence that are rewarded in career terms. For the most part, pay scales for teachers are still attached to a

paradigm in which recognition and reward are given for length or continuity of service. Promotion was considered to be the most sought after career reward by the younger women in the research project. Women in the case study organisation saw limited opportunities for women to achieve promotion because of the autonomous nature of the diocesan arena of Catholic education. When you do seek more senior positions “you have to go out on a limb” by finding ways of accommodating the organisational requirements and personal life issues. Such views are exacerbated by the non-existent approach to developing career resilience as an element of any career management processes in the organisation.

As an occupation, teaching was seen as undervalued and quite often denigrated as a career choice in Catholic schools as it is in other school systems. The professional standing of the teacher is not often acknowledged and in many instances, there is a view that parents believe their own experience of going to school, decades ago in some instances, makes them eminently eligible to tell the teacher what needs to be done. Whilst the discourse on teaching as a ministry raises its status as an integral part of the mission of the Catholic Church, this has little bearing on how teaching as a career choice is perceived and would not make a good marketing tool to attract people to teaching. This position was exemplified in a statement made by a case study participant: “I don’t think the idea of ministry is understood and certainly younger women wouldn’t see ministry as a career term” (IT7).

The increasing feminisation of teaching as an occupation is considered to be detrimental to the status of the profession. According to Miller (1996), “(w)hatever it is that women do when they teach children could be better done by men, the story seems to go. If only people were prepared to pay the going rate to do it” (p.xii). For women in all roles within the organisation, the ability to successfully integrate career and personal



life can be difficult, making a lie of the view that 'teaching is a good job for a woman'. The intensity of the work of educators, the need for ongoing credentialling, poor remuneration for the level of responsibility and qualifications, limited approaches to family-friendly work policies and the long hours required for particular roles, are issues that negatively impact the way some women view career outlook.

For many of the women in this research, participation in the case study provided the first opportunity for them to articulate their views of their paid working lives in terms of a career. There was both a sense of discomfort and a sense urgency in the focus groups which I have linked to ongoing problems of communication within the organisation concerning the needs of women. These problems are associated with women not knowing how to respond to the organisational agenda and choosing to stay silent as a result. Women in Catholic education are subject to enduring problems that Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) consider are built into the structures, culture and processes of many workplaces and organisations and institutions.

Taking account of the picture of career outlook illustrated within the case study, an important and continuing challenge remains for Catholic education. The organisation must find ways of addressing the career needs of teachers as they experience various career stages. These stages include establishment, mid-career and late-career, with the assumption that, for women more than men, there is the likelihood of career breaks. The potential for a leadership vacuum in Catholic education is a reality without a serious attempt by the organisation to address career issues in an effective and contemporary manner. A process of planning for leadership succession requires urgent attention and within such a process, the needs and aspirations of women must be given full consideration. Economic factors will continue to impact on the ability of the case study diocese to provide adequate support services and professional development. The

autonomous nature of each diocese limits the capacity to aggregate a greater level of resources than has currently been achieved through the combined efforts of the individual dioceses. An attempt to share the expertise available between dioceses is a way of promoting the common good over self-interest. This situation, however, does not excuse an individual diocese from its duty to provide conditions of service comparable with those in other diocese and in the government school systems. In practice, any career development approach relies on initiatives taken by an individual Catholic Education Office within the boundaries defined by the changing industrial relations processes as well as the choices made by the Bishops Conference to redistribute resources more equitably across all diocese.

The changes that have shaped the contemporary Catholic education organisation have not just been structural. Rather, the process of change has led to the redefining and contesting of the sorts of personal identities and qualities which are seen as desirable or undesirable for people in particular roles in Catholic education. Women themselves have contributed to this contested reality by bringing the notion of the embodied woman to the organisational agenda. This embodiment, however, is not acknowledged within organisational discourse.

#### Foregrounding Women's Perspectives on the Career Context of Catholic Education

In conducting this research, I wanted to foreground the perspectives provided by a range of women in Catholic education in order to produce a picture of what it is like for women to aspire to a successful career in a patriarchal organisation. The development of such a view has the potential to counter what I believe is a distorted understanding within feminist circles of women and careers when located within the Catholic Church. Career is a notion that is determined by women for themselves and their individual circumstances and highlights the relationship between agency and context as

inseparable. Such an understanding accommodates notions of variations in career commitment at different times as women deal with competing priorities in their lives. In addition, the idea that staying in the classroom is a valuable career choice or moving out of teaching to try other options is equally valid in career terms. Furthermore, women who aspire to senior positions, within which masculine assumptions predominate, are not to be seen as honorary males or token females. Rather, women are often seeking ways of disrupting the discourses within which they are constituted in an effort to “invent, invert and break old structures and patterns and discourses and thus speak/write into existence other ways of being” (Davies, 1994, p.xviii). I have offered interpretations of the ways in which women are subjectified by institutional discourses but at the same time operate within the possibility of finding points of resistance to such discourses and creating the possibility of transforming current practices. Women operate out of a range of subject positions.

The case study has allowed me to bring to the fore the career interests and views of a cross-section of the community of women who choose to work in Catholic education. The case study participants were in many instances able to receive much needed confirmation that the pressures they feel are real and that the decisions they are forced to make are indeed confusing and difficult. At the same time, these women found assurance from each other that obstacles are conquerable and this applies to the obstacles, which arise as members of the Catholic Church. It is interesting to note that one of the non-Catholic participants seeking promotion chose to become a Catholic and is now in a senior administration position whilst the another maintained her non-Catholic religious affiliation and has also been successful in seeking a more senior position. My interviews with two males in senior policy positions revealed their genuine concern for equity but also their limited understanding of the complexities

associated with implementing such policies. The need to have women in similar positions to these senior men in all the organisational arenas, is essential, but not the only necessity in developing an inclusive organisation. The development of structures and processes that allow for the genuine participation of women, wherever they are located within Catholic education, is needed. The structures of Catholic education, although limited by autonomous diocesan arrangements, make such an approach possible. The principles for organising based on subsidiarity, pluriformity and complementarity, which are the hallmark of Catholic organisations, have the potential to allow organisational structures to be created in which the individual can have a voice. What is needed, however, is a stronger focus on collegiality across the organisation.

The cultural ideologies of the Catholic Church which shape Catholic education, and the gender issues which are deeply rooted in the broader social institutions of families and communities, provide the tapestry against which the representations of women have been asserted. Careers in Catholic education are closely regulated but the presence of women contests the idea that one set of symbols, derived from elite men's control of the Church and the State, serves the multiple experiences of women and men. Women continue to express their indignation with the ways in which they come to participate in a system that does not fully include them. This applies in equal measure to women in the Catholic Church as it does to women in the teaching profession. As Miller (1996) explains, in their efforts to gain a career profile that has credibility, women teachers have a long legacy of contempt to overcome:

It is hard to explain the contempt directed at women teachers, hard to explain and hard to characterise. It is useful to do so, because it is irrational and ill-informed and linked irrevocably to the low esteem in which teaching is held generally . . . The contempt has been capacious, inescapable, but always contradictory. For instance, teachers have been thought sexually repressed and sexually repressive at precisely those moments when they were also being prevented from marrying by

the exercise of the 'marriage bar'. They have been found perilously pretty and culpably ugly. Fault has been found as easily with those thought winsomely permissive as with those thought grimly disciplinarian. They may be imagined as meek and biddable, or as battleaxes. There has also been a consistent tradition of thinking teachers stupid and anti-intellectual, mouthpieces of prevailing dogma or, on the contrary, hopelessly outdated in their ill-considered adherences. Their commitment to their work may be read as evidence of a narrow, unworldly and ignorant enthusiasm, but their inability to do any other kind of work leads also to their being cynical and lazy. (pp.12-13)

Along with the devalued position of women in teaching, there exists an incompatibility between women and the traditional organisational approach to career. Practices expected of women within parenting, caring and partnering discourses clash with the demands of a 'full-blown career'. Part-time roles have no formal attachment to a career structure. Women's single status in Catholic education is limited by Church teaching which regulates women's sexuality. Through the case study, however, I have attempted to show how women are capable of producing new narratives which make it possible for them to counter male-determined discourses. Feminist research reveals how such discourses control and restrain women but also how women negotiate and contest them. Women exploit the discursive gaps and in doing so, reveal the simplification and etiolation of key issues for women which the domination of men in the production and theorising of careers and organisations has achieved. As Biklen (1995) indicates, feminists insist that gender is a central issue rather than a peripheral one and they force the examination of gender at work. The intersections of race and class with gender are also significant to the feminist agenda. Race and class, however, are not the focus of my research.

What has become significant from the women's narratives in this study, is the view that a career within Catholic education is much more an individual's responsibility and

experience than something that the organisation assists, celebrates or encourages. The organisation establishes career positions as ways of meeting the requirements of running schools but not necessarily as something that an individual might covet, desire or strive for. This situation is accepted by some women, acknowledged as a problem by others and strenuously resisted by others. The structural elements of career which consists of career positions, tenure arrangements, credentials and the vagaries of the labour market, means that teachers face a structure of opportunities outside their own control. Their chances of achieving the rewards offered by these structures, should they want them, are significantly altered at different times in history and depending on the political decisions of the day. Opportunity structures vary for those differently situated in what Connell (1985) calls “a kind of institutional grid within which teachers locate themselves” (p.64). All the patterns associated with differential career chances (age, location) within the institutional grid are bifurcated by gender.

In the past thirty years, the social, cultural, political and economic landmarks, which have traditionally been the indicators for defining Australian life, have shifted or disappeared completely. Organisations have also changed with some ‘greedy organisations’ adopting an instrumental view of the employee and potential employee. This view means that people are to be used by the organisation in the pursuit of the organisational enterprise. As a stanchion against such changes, the role of the Catholic Church and Catholic education is to interrogate the social, political and cultural environment in response to the Gospel imperative of the Catholic religious tradition. In some cases there remains a need to move the rhetoric to reality. Women in Catholic education live with the paradox of a Church which both exalts and denies women. Women have the choice of leaving the Church, accepting their place in the Church, or

‘defecting in place’ (Winter, Lummis & Stokes, 1995). To choose to work in Catholic education limits the choice to the latter two.

There remains a sense of ‘unfinished business’ between women and the Church and a career in Catholic education may highlight a range of tensions for some women associated with their position in the Church. The gender order of secular society and the infiltration of secular organisational arrangements within Catholic education multiply these tensions. Subjecting the organisational career context to scrutiny has revealed that the Catholic education organisation still has some issues to consider in response to its social justice rhetoric and women’s careers. Paradoxically, the depth and beauty of the overt spiritual life, which is an integral part of life in Catholic education, can ameliorate some of these tensions. O’Murchu (1986) highlights how religion connects people with a basic quest for meaning in describing religion as:

The spiritual thirst of humanity for an integrated and coherent comprehension of life; it expresses a profound human need to hold together in some type of creative synthesis the polarities and contradictions of human experience. (p.42)

Women want to be members of the Catholic Church (and increasingly the ecumenical version of this) not just as members of an institution with legalistic rules and clerical attitudes that are exclusive, alienating and isolating. Women want to be recognised and encouraged for their abilities and not their gender, their humanity not their sexuality. At the same time, women do not want to deny that they are women. This is also true of their membership of Catholic education where it may be marginally easier for women to achieve success.

Notwithstanding the ambiguity and contradiction that surrounds the careers of women in Catholic education, there is hopefulness among women in this case study. This was notable in the lively interactions, the laughter and the sense of connectedness that I felt in each of the focus group activities and individual interviews. I believe

women in Catholic education adhere to the view that “(W)omen’s role in the Church is to use their God-given talents wherever these may lie, and the role of educators is to develop actual gifts and not assumed ‘femininity’ according to a male-defined Tertullian perception of female inferiority” (Byrne, 1986, p.27). The organisation is very much aligned to what Limerick, Cunnington and Crowther (1998) refer to as the new Fourth Blueprint organisation. Such an organisation is value-driven and “stresses interdependence as implacably as autonomy, and recognises that at the heart of interdependence lie not only shared interests, but shared, transcendental values and meanings” (p.252). Such an organisation should constantly critique its structures, processes and practices against its values and beliefs. A Catholic institution must be openly, consciously and unabashedly Catholic and Christian in every aspect of its operation. There is, however, a pressing need for the incorporation of a feminist perspective on the meanings of Catholic and Christian.

#### The Insights Offered by Feminist Research

Feminist research has allowed me to focus on gender as a central tenet of feminist theory. I have adapted theory on gendering organisations which has allowed me to elaborate on some of the many complex and contradictory ways in which gender is at work within the Catholic organisational context and how gender impacts on the construction of career outlook for women. Catholic religious ideology highlights particular constructions of masculinity which includes paternalism and rationality, whilst femininity, which includes the maternal ethos of teaching is narrowly prescribed within traditional Catholic ideology.

The organisation is responsible for establishing the structural and management issues of the career context and managing the internal labour market. Because women’s career experiences differ from those of men, the basic concepts that underpin career



structures must be subject to scrutiny. The basic concepts are defined by Acker (1989) as:

First, political and economic features of a given historical era provide the context within which careers occur. Additionally each occupation offers a typical sequence of positions, together with rules or conventions for their allocation. These rules or conventions appear to facilitate career progression for some and impede it for others. (p.168)

Whilst public policy intervention has created some awareness that gender has an effect on the structuring of opportunity within an organisation, little if any attention has been given to the gendering of the concept of career, including an awareness of the diversity of career strategies used by women and men within the organisation. What is very notable in the case study is the total absence of any formal career planning on the part of women or in career development sponsored by the organisation. A career planning process can establish career anchors for the individual in the organisation by supporting the development of knowledge in religious, technical and managerial areas, and promoting creativity and challenge as a function of service. There was a lack of awareness by some research participants of opportunities within the organisation and what is expected in terms of criteria for different positions. Other women exhibited a conditioning that tempers any sense of ambition with humility.

This research has implications for theorising gender, careers and organisations. Neither career nor organisation is a gender-neutral concept. The position of women in terms of their careers remains problematic. The rising number of women in the workforce has not affected a total acceptance of women as 'careerists' in Australian society. McMaster and Randall (1995) report on women's participation in management in Australia stating that "(d)espite media reports of female careerists elbowing their way into management elites, statistics show that women's participation is still

discouragingly low” (p.57). The shift in gender relations that appears to be occurring does not necessarily involve a concomitant dissolution of relative power between women and men, but rather a change in the form of that power. Jurisdictions for men and women in the public and private spheres are yet to be made equitable. Men must be prepared to relinquish power in the public realm in addition to taking greater responsibility in the private realm. Whilst it is plain that not all women are mothers whose first priority is the family, women’s lives have much in common when it comes to their careers. They are generally subject to the power and privilege of particular men who dominate in positions from which decisions are made. This does not mean that feminist research should focus on ‘nasty men and innocent women’ but rather on pursuing questions about women’s position relative to men and other women in order to imagine alternate realities that might improve the lives of all.

The question for women of how to live life to the full as a woman, “as an active desiring subject” (MacKinnon, 1997, p.xiii ), remains central to the feminist agenda. Understanding how organisations work and how their gendered character is maintained is an important focus for this agenda. Inequalities of power are still embedded within organisations and careers. It is important therefore, to continue testing the limits of men’s power and expanding the boundaries of women’s power.

In considering the teaching career as a cultural artefact of the organisation, research can examine new and emerging social, political and economic constraints that control and limit teachers’ careers, and how these constraints have changed over time (Acker, 1999). This case study has indicated the influence of organisational strategies designed to order the workplace and the influence of organisational discourses on women’s subjectivities. The case study has also demonstrated the need for contextualisation in

order to understand behaviour with context (Burgess-Limerick, 1995). Such contextualisation may better reflect the realities of women's lives.

Through this case study I have demonstrated a willingness to confront competing claims within feminist theorising. A multiplicity as well as a unity exists within feminism. I have honoured the commitment to giving voice to those who are the subjects of the research and to be mindful of my own subjectivity, particularly as an 'insider'. The case study allowed me to recognise the circumscribed nature of the participant's perspectives, whilst capturing the complexities that help move us from a contingent to a more qualified position. In the end, the research provides a perspective that is self-consciously partial, yet generalisable. It is possible through the fine detail of this case study, to consider the impact of discontinuous change and to imagine how things could be different for women in Catholic education and women in other organisations as well. This research study, however, was limited in that it addressed career outlook from the perspective of women educators and ignored career outlook for the many non-educators who work in Catholic education. Neither did the research address the role of women in the maintenance of patriarchal structures within Catholic education.

Recommendations for further research include in-depth studies of women in a range of career positions in different educational organisations to determine their strategies within the particular organisational career context. The obvious divisions that are currently being stirred up in the Australian media between public and private providers of education presents possible case studies. The policy context in particular organisations are also of interest in determining the implications of such policies in supporting teachers' negotiation of a satisfying career. Research, which demonstrates the accomplishment of careers through alternative organisational arrangements and,

which may allow for different ways of leading the educational organisation, should also, be explored.

Feminist theory must engage in developing more fluid and situated approaches to studying gender in organisations. The feminist stance I have taken in the case study allows me to document the very existence of this group of women which has the potential “to challenge feminists’ blindness about particular settings” (Reinharz, 1992, p.171). In terms of gender, there is a continuing need for research on gender and careers, which challenges the privileging of the economy over life. Such research leads to questions about the rationality of such things as organisational and work commitment as well as the legitimacy of the organisation’s claims for priority of its goals over the individual’s goals.

The need for continuing feminist research on organisations is essential in order that structures can be set up that, in contrast to bureaucratic structures, are supportive and therapeutic to women’s careers. Feminist influences can ensure that organisational structures and processes are participative, allowing women as well as men to exercise authority within them. They can also be collaborative, where members share in the decision making in the context of dialogue. Issues of hierarchy and difference cannot be ignored. In line with the principles of feminist research, women must be treated as knowledgeable agents (Giddens, 1984) by making their perspectives central to the particular research project. This has been my intention in this case study.