Power in the principalship: Four women’s experiences

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to explore four women principals’ experiences with power in the course of their daily leadership. The data used in this exploration was collected through in-depth interviews, conducted from a phenomenological perspective, during the second and third years of a three-year study on the leadership experiences of the four principals. The thematic findings which emerged from this data included empowerment, positive power, traditional power and negative power, and are discussed in relation to three lenses of power: dominance or ‘power over’, facilitation or ‘power through’, and as energy and competence or ‘power with’. The four principals’ experiences were remarkable in that they were extensively engaged in interpreting, experiencing and using power as ‘power through’ and ‘power with’ rather than as ‘power over’. The findings from this research serve as examples of ways in which power is enacted by women leaders within traditional organizational settings, and the potential of their actions to positively transform school organizations and the experiences of those who work within them.

Keywords
Gender  Leadership  Managerial power  Schools

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4. How do headteachers/principals adjust to their role? 5. How do new headteachers/principals become socialised into their role? 6. How does the culture of the school evolve with the arrival of a new headteacher/principal?