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# Stories of Resiliency: Successful Female Educational Leaders

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Anita M. Pankake  
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## Introduction

With increasing demands from a variety of sectors—both public and private—educational leaders at all levels are faced with conflicting elements that place them in positions of error even when they “do everything right.” Given the ever increasing and often conflicting demands for educational leaders in today’s climate of accountability and reform, learning to persist is essential. To stay the course in today’s educational context, individuals must be able to face adversity, overcome it, or come back from it. In others words, they must be resilient. According to Patterson (2001), “. . . resilience means using your energy productively to move ahead in the face of adversity” (p. 18). Resilience is “. . . a long-term, not a short-term, construct. Resilience doesn’t fluctuate daily, like the stock market. You’re not resilient today and non-resilient tomorrow. Resilience represents your capacity, your collective energy points, available to move ahead under adversity” (p. 18).

Resilience is developed. The literature on resilience in children is offering new insights on how resilience evolves and some of the significant developmental points in this process. Henderson (1998) noted that, “Longitudinal studies in psychology, psychiatry, and sociology show how children and adults are able to bounce back from stress, trauma, and risk in their lives, and suggest resiliency strategies for students and educators” (p. 15). In a similar vein, Bennis (1989) asserted that leaders invent themselves. The development of the self, voice, and mind is a process that begins at birth and ends with the last breath. How much development of the self, voice, and mind that occurs is determined by the individual, but is also influenced heavily by his or her background. To a large extent, we are all products of our environment. Leaders take the positive and negative circumstances and learning opportunities presented to them and construct a better product (Bennis, 1989).

Information about the experiences successful leaders perceive as vital to their development can be helpful to our understanding of resiliency. Such information can also offer insights into the ways successful leaders use

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positive and negative situations as learning opportunities and the strategies they implement in addressing adversity.

We examined the reported experiences of 12 successful female educational leaders as stories of resiliency development through overcoming or coming back from adversity. Specifically, the reported experiences of these women were examined to determine:

- When did adversity evidence itself in the lives of these leaders?
- Were any of the adversity experiences common among the women in terms of when they occurred and the contexts or settings in which they occurred?
- What strategies did these women use in overcoming or coming back from these adversity experiences?
- Do the reported experiences of these twelve successful female educational leaders align with the literature on resiliency in children, adversity and failure in leadership development, and barriers to success as gender issues?

In presenting this information, a brief overview of the literature on leadership and resiliency is offered to establish the perspectives that motivated this study. Next, a description of the methods used to gather and analyze the data for addressing the question posed is presented. A cameo sketch of each of the 12 women is provided; the sketches are followed by data displays that respond to the questions posed here. In closing, a summary of the findings and an interpretation of what they mean in terms of personal and professional development for educational leaders generally and for female educational leaders are posed.

### **Literature Perspectives**

Early experiences and developing ways of dealing with adverse situations appear to contribute strongly to the ability to constantly develop self and in turn lead others. According to Bennis (1989), leaders who take the positive and negative circumstances and learning opportunities presented to them and construct a better product are “twice-born leaders.”

Twice-borns generally suffer as they grow up, feel different, even isolated, and so develop an elaborate inner life. As they grow older, they become truly independent, relying wholly on their own beliefs and ideas. Leaders who are twice-born are inner directed, self-assured, and, as a result, truly charismatic. (p. 49)

McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988) found that executives learned the most about themselves as individuals and leaders “from their mistakes, confrontations with problem subordinates, traumatic events, and career setbacks” (p. 13). Literature suggests that it is the adversity or failure incidents that leaders endure that make them stronger. Leadership development “depends not just on raw talent but also on the experiences one has and what one does with them” (McCall et al., 1988, p. 5). The handling of a crisis or extreme stress can transform potential talent into actual talent by developing the ability to deal emotionally with tough situations, such as making decisions under risk and uncertainty, being responsible for the acts of others, and occasionally terminating employees (McCall et al., 1988). This risk-taking orientation was found to be a factor in promoting leaders to the top and keeping them there.

Bass (1990) found that providing leaders, and potential leaders, with opportunities to experience adverse situations in the workplace can actually enhance their performance by converting a potential stressful situation into a challenging one. Additionally, leaders who viewed situations as challenges rather than crises were found to be more open to ideas and suggestions from others, including subordinates. This in turn led to more effective decisions (Bass, 1990).

In studying successful executives, McCall et al. (1988) found that it was during moments of adversity that leaders admitted to themselves—often for the first time—that they could no longer know every detail or control every action and that “sometimes leadership boiled down to stopping, asking questions, and listening to other points of view” (p. 35). They also found that a critical aspect of the successful leader was the ability to listen to criticism and construct it in a manner that would allow for growth and further development.

Instead of denying critical feedback that hurt, they swallowed their pride and took it to heart. Instead of blaming everything on an intolerant boss, they dug out messages about themselves. . . . They adopted the attitude that you can learn something from everyone. (McCall et al., 1988, p. 73)

Research regarding learning from mistakes and overcoming adversity is particularly important to gender issues in leadership development. Research about women’s career paths indicates a lack of persistence, low tolerance for failure, and low self-esteem (Leonard & Papalewis, 1987). In addition to the external barriers facing women entering administration, the barriers they set up themselves concerning their own abilities sometimes prove to be too difficult to overcome (Lad, 1998). The behavior of placing restrictions upon oneself is a pattern often developed during the formative years of an

individual's life. Rejecting the cultural norms has been difficult at best for women as well as men. Women often seem content to continue in the traditional roles created for them by societies past. After years of personal struggle and education, many eventually come to view their station and importance in society in a very different light. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) spoke of this development of self, voice, and mind in their book, *Women's Ways of Knowing*. They, along with researchers such as Gilligan (1982) and Weiler (1988), examined the unique ways in which women internalize knowledge and express themselves and the developmental patterns of this process. Through this developmental process, women become more confident in their own abilities, begin to listen to their inner-voice, and are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors.

Luthar and Zelazo (2003) reported that decades of accumulated research indicate that a major factor in resilient adaptation is good relationships. They pointed out that,

From the earliest pioneering studies of Norman Garmezy and Emmy Werner to more contemporaneous ones, investigators have consistently pointed to the critical importance of strong connections with at least one supportive adult: in many instances a primary caregiver, who is among the earliest, most proximal, and most enduring of socializing influences. Sound interpersonal relationships in the early years can engender the growth of effective coping skills and resources, which, in turn, can aid children in coping with sundry adversities subsequently in life. (p. 544)

Luthar and Zelazo (2003) noted that neighborhood networks or home-visit interventions can help parents cope with their own stressors and thus avoid transferring their personal stresses to their children. They also claimed that teachers and informal mentors in the community can be just as valuable as support systems as can family members. They asserted that, "With enough contact and continuity over time, these relationships can compensate greatly for difficult family situations" (p. 545). It appears that relationships with individuals outside the family can positively influence the development of resiliency.

The research on resilience has taken a variety of approaches but always with a common purpose: "to identify the factors associated with better adaptation among children at risk, and to understand whatever processes may underlie those correlates or predictors of good adaptations" (Mastern, 2001, Masten & Coatsworth, 1998, cited in Masten and Powell, 2003, p. 9).

Garmezy (1985) described three major categories of protective factors: *individual attributes*, such as good intellectual skills, positive temperament, and positive views of the self; *family qualities*, such as high warmth,

cohesion, expectations, and involvement; and *supportive systems outside the family*, such as strong social networks or good schools (Masten & Powell, 2003, pp. 12-13.). These findings have been confirmed again and again, creating a common set of findings regarding what influences the development of resilience (Masten, 1999, 2001, cited in Masten and Powell, 2003).

Masten and Powell (2003) used Garmezy's (1985) categories to develop a list of attributes of individuals and their contexts often associated with resilience. These examples add specificity to Garmezy's three categories:

**Individual Differences:**

- cognitive abilities (IQ scores, attention skills, executive functioning skills)
- self-perceptions of competence, worth, confidence (self-efficacy, self-esteem)
- temperament and personality (adaptability, sociability)
- self-regulations skills (impulse control, affect and arousal regulation)
- a positive outlook on life (hopefulness, beliefs that life has meaning, faith)

**Relationships:**

- parenting quality (including warmth, structure and monitoring, expectations)
- close relationships with competent adults (parents, relatives, mentors)
- connections to prosocial and rule-abiding peers (among older children)

**Community Resources and Opportunities:**

- good schools
- connections to prosocial organizations (such as clubs or religious groups)
- neighborhood quality (public safety, collective supervision, libraries, recreation centers)
- quality of social services and health care offered. (Masten & Powell, 2003, p. 13)

The literature on successful leaders facing adversity and that on the development of resiliency in children provide a perspective on which to investigate the resiliency of leaders. The anticipation would be that the stories of successful leaders' ability to bounce back from adversity have the characteristics identified in the literature regarding resiliency development in children. Collecting the stories of these successful female educational leaders allowed an analysis to identify what experiences, characteristics, relationships and supportive conditions contributed to their ability to be resilient in their professional roles.

## Methods

Data from two separate studies regarding experiences vital to the success of female educational leaders were combined and reanalyzed. A total of twelve (12) women (6 superintendents and 6 high school principals) were involved in personal interviews seeking information about the vital experiences that contributed to their success. The six superintendents were those studied by Pankake, Schroth and Funk (2000). The six high school principals were from a study completed by Beaty (2001). In both studies, particular emphasis was given to information related to overcoming adversity and dealing with mistakes or setbacks they had experienced in their professional and personal lives.

Interview protocols were used in each study; both protocols asked the women specifically about vital experiences in their development, about turning points in their lives, and about what role failure or adversity had played in their lives. Interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes each; they were audio-taped and later transcribed for ease of analysis.

Content analysis techniques were used. Key words and common themes were sought among the women's stories. Information was sought to determine if the experiences reported as vital to their development offered any common themes regarding situational contexts, age at which the experiences occurred, whether they were personal or professional, if the reported impact on the individual was positive or negative, and what strategies were used to address the adversities.

- When did adversity evidence itself in the lives of these leaders?
- Were any of the adversity experiences common among the women in terms of when they occurred and the contexts or settings in which they occurred?
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## Cameos of the Twelve Women

The complete stories of these women cannot be shared in the limited space of this article; a cameo or sketch of each is possible. A few lines can perhaps convey the sense of these women as leaders. The cameos are presented here in alphabetical order. All names are pseudonyms to protect the



confidentiality promised to each of these women when she agreed to share her story.

**Gwen Bishop**

Gwen is an attractive woman in her late fifties. Impeccably dressed, she has a presence about her that is both professional and stylish. On the day of the interview she is wearing a black and white tailored dress with minimal jewelry and her blonde hair is worn in a smooth shoulder length cut. She is well spoken and appears comfortable with herself as a leader and figure of authority, yet she creates an atmosphere that welcomes input and places others at ease. At the time of the interview, Gwen was the high school principal of a school that served over 3000 students in a large metropolitan area of Southeast Texas. She is now retired.

**Mary Dell Costello**

Mary Dell Costello's tall, slender build commands attention at first sight. Though her voice is soft and welcoming, her words convey experience and convictions regarding life generally and education, specifically. Mary Dell grew up in a small rural farming community. Her father was a farmer and she swore she would never marry a farmer nor would she ever be in education! After graduating from college she returned home and married a farmer in her home community. Her college work was focused on international law; she had no intentions of going into teaching and, of course, has had a stellar career as an educator. Her education career included teaching, the high school principalship, and central office positions and the superintendency. Her personal life included a happy marriage with three children. At the time of this interview, Mary Dell was entering her third year as superintendent in the current district.

**Marie Hubbard**

Marie Hubbard's upbringing was in a modest home, her father a skilled tradesman in the oil business and her mother a housewife. She was one of three children. She did very well in her elementary and secondary schooling. A favorite teacher in her junior high school years told her that he thought she would make a good teacher; from that point on that's what she knew she wanted to do. During her second year of college, she met a young man; they married; had their first child 11 months after marrying; and had her sixth child before her oldest child was five! She stayed at home to care for the children and cared for others' children as a way to earn money. She returned to school; finished her degree and started teaching when her youngest child entered kindergarten. Early in her work career she was identified as a leader

and invited to assume administrative positions. Her entrance into administration was delayed because of some family issues; even so, she eventually became a principal, a diagnostician, held positions in the central office, intermediate agencies and ultimately the superintendency.

### **Grace Kingsley**

When in the presence of Grace Kingsley, one feels privileged to be given the opportunity. The name Grace is truly descriptive of her manner in all respects. Kingsley is considered by many to be a pioneer in the area of women in the superintendency. She was among the few women to occupy administrative positions at any level and one of the first to be a superintendent. She reported her mother and grandmother as the great influences in her early development. She managed to have a successful career in school administration (including being a bus driver as needed), while she and her husband raised five children.

### **Ellen Little**

Ellen is a pretty woman in her late fifties. Her delicate features and pale blue eyes are accentuated by her fair skin and blond hair, which softly frames her face. On the day of the interview she is wearing a dress of gray silk crepe. Her jewelry and make-up both represent her seemingly simplistic style. Ellen is a warm and inviting individual to talk with who maintains a refreshingly positive perspective even when discussing adverse, and sometimes painful, situations. A former high school principal, at the time of the interview she was serving as a college professor at a private religious institution.

### **Grace Martinez**

Grace is an attractive woman in her mid fifties. Very articulate and bright, she exudes confidence and enthusiasm. On the day of the interview she is wearing a lavender linen sheath dress. Her black hair is stylishly short and accentuates her large brown eyes, which snap as she relates her experiences of leadership and life. Grace is invigorating to speak with and puts her listeners at ease with her forthcoming and straightforward style of communication. She speaks with pride of her Mexican heritage and the important role her parent's history had in her own education. A first generation Mexican American, Grace was also the first in her family to graduate high school and go on to college. At the time of the interview, Grace was serving as Assistant Superintendent in the same district.

**Katherine Patton**

Katherine Patton, a woman in her early seventies, suffered no foolishness from anyone. Early in our interview with her she announced. "I'm seventy-one and I'll retire when I get damn ready! I just signed a five-year contract!" Her early years were spent in economic conditions that ranged from boom to bust; but she was generally well cared for by her parents. She dropped out of high school to marry. Her father's concern about what would happen to her if she lost her husband motivated him to pay for her to get a college degree in teaching. Her husband was in the military which afforded Katherine the opportunity to travel around the world. As a teacher, she exercised leadership in the state association for teachers and in her negotiations with the district. She held central office positions related to special education and curriculum and was finishing a decade of being superintendent. Perhaps because of the loss of two of her own children, she was passionately committed to the children in her district.

**Anna Beth Pierce**

Anna Beth is a striking woman in her early fifties. She is bright, energetic and very self-assured. Her speech, her stylishly cut black hair and carefully selected jewelry project an image of a well paid, well groomed professional who is socially secure in her position. At the time of the interview, Anna Beth was in her 11th year as the high school principal in a community in Central Texas known for art and cultural flair.

**Alejandra Ramirez**

Alejandra is a plain spoken woman in her mid forties. Attractive and intelligent, she is confident in herself as an individual and as a leader—unafraid of challenging the established norms. Born and raised in this South Texas border town, Alejandra has had the advantages of a supportive family and firsthand knowledge of the cultural aspects of the community so vital to the success of the school. At the time of the interview, Alejandra was serving as the high school principal of a high achieving campus that had a student population that was 98% minority.

**Wendy Shaker**

Wendy Shaker was in her fifth year as superintendent at the time we interviewed. She had served as superintendent in one other district prior to coming to her current position. The current district was just at the beginning of a period of rapid growth that was demanding a variety of changes for both the schools and the community. Her career path was fairly traditional including classroom teaching, principalship, central office, some work at the

state agency level and finally the superintendency. She has been married to the same man for nearly 30 years and has two children. Her manner is comfortable for interactions including laughter; although her office was not spacious, it accommodated all of us comfortably and was decorated nicely but included few personal items.

**Pat Singleton**

Pat Singleton is superintendent of a large suburban district. She is a single woman in her early sixties with a tailored appearance in her dress and a pleasant, but business-like manner in her interactions. Her entire career has been spent in one district—from teacher to superintendent. She has an earned doctorate in education. Though she never married, she did have guardianship and general responsibility for the upbringing of a relative's child. The addition of this responsibility was perceived by Pat as a significant turning point for her both personally and professionally. At the time of her interview with us, she was planning for retirement within the next two years; she has since retired from the superintendency but has remained active in educational leadership development through a variety of agencies.

**Pam Smith**

Pam is a soft-spoken woman in her mid forties. She is tall and her dress is somewhat reserved. Pam is very thoughtful before responding to questions, emphasizing her belief in the importance of carefully representing oneself. Dedicated to her profession, Pam has chosen not to marry. She firmly believes that the demands of the job are not supportive of a spouse and children. Pam has been in education for 26 years. She was a teacher for four years and has been in administration for 22 years. Up until the last year, Pam spent her entire career in the West Texas border community where she was born and raised. Although she does not have a family of her own, Pam is very dedicated to her mother and siblings. She grew up on a military base where her father, retired military, worked as a Civil Engineer. Her senior year in high school Pam's father passed away leaving Pam—the oldest child at home at the time—with the great responsibility of helping her mother and younger sister through the difficult period of grief and transition. At the time of the interview, Pam was serving as high school principal in a large school district in Central Texas.

**Data Presentation**

- *When did adversity evidence itself in the lives of these leaders?*

Three major age and stage of life periods were identified within the stories shared: pre-school through high school, early career choice and work

experiences, and early leadership experiences. It appeared that the minority women experienced adversity earlier in their lives than did the majority women. The minority women had two types of discriminations to overcome in their personal lives and careers.

All but two of the women interviewed faced challenges in their early leadership experiences; there were some common themes among them regarding the sources of the challenges. Three major sources of challenges were identified—rejection for a leadership position, community conflict, and undermining superiors. Although the source categories are similar, the stories often differed—both negative and positive—for different individuals.

Only three women in the study had reached the age/life stage of retirement. Adversity experiences, however, were still being reported. The source of the adversity had changed to personal health issues and loss of family members.

- *Were any of the adversity experiences common among the women in terms of when they occurred and the contexts or settings in which they occurred?*

Within each of these age and stage periods, some common elements of influence were found to exist. Four common elements of influence categories have been identified—family (both origin and marriage), teachers (elementary and secondary), mentors (personal and professional), and spiritual or religious beliefs. Although the elements of influence were common in category, they were not consistently positive or negative in their content or influence on the individuals involved. For example, some stories about the influence of a teacher were uplifting regarding the positive actions and influence of the teacher or teachers involved; others were about the actions and influences of a teacher that were extremely negative, even embarrassing to the profession. However, the women reported both the positive and negative experiences as vital in their development.

- *What strategies did these women use in overcoming or coming back from these adversity experiences?*

Along with having some commonalities regarding both when and how adversity experiences entered the lives of these women, they also used similar strategies in addressing the adversity experiences and bouncing back. Five strategies were identified by four or more women as actions they used in addressing and overcoming adversity in their lives. The five strategies common to the group were:

- Having or readying themselves to be of particular value to the organization by having a unique area of expertise that most often occurred through returning to school.
- Looking to mentors for guidance and even for direction in terms of career goals. This often resulted in a return to school to continue the development of a unique expertise and/or to secure a credential necessary for a career move into or higher in the leadership ranks.
- Support through family members via their willingness to relocate, sacrifice family time, not involve themselves in organizational issues—especially those of conflict.
- Seeking answers through reflection and prayer.
- Refocusing on the reason for entering education; when the job became distracted with management concerns, many of these women shared that it was then that they refocused on the children, reminding themselves of why they went into and remain in education.

Table 1 (p. 14) displays the strategies used by each of the women and which strategies were used by more than one of the women.

- *Do the reported experiences of these twelve successful female educational leaders align with the literature on resiliency in children, adversity and failure in leadership development, and barriers to success as gender issues?*

Though not perfect, elements within the stories of these women echo many of the elements regarding leadership and resiliency found in the literature. For example, the categories identified by Garmezy (1985) and expanded by Masten and Powell (2003) as protective factors were evidenced by the women in this study.

*Individual Differences:* All of these women possessed strong cognitive abilities. Each achieved at least two, and some three, academic degrees. They attained and succeeded in multiple executive positions in education and some in other fields as well. The majority also demonstrated executive functional skills in balancing home and work, especially those with children.

Eventually, all of these women came to self-perceptions of competence, worth and confidence, though not all developed these at the same life stage. The minority women, especially, had doubts about themselves and their abilities; these doubts often came from external environmental influences such as school, rather than home and family. Generally, strong reinforcement for competence and self-worth was present in the families of all of these women. However, many had to be alerted and encouraged by those outside the family to see their potential as educational leaders.

Table 1

*Strategies Women Used for Overcoming Adversity*

	Support of Husband	Support of Family	Divorced First Husband	Return to School	Find a New Job	Find a Unique Area for Expertise	Support of Male Mentor	Support of Female Mentor	Spirituality
<b>Leader</b>									
Gwen Bishop	X				X				
Mary Dell Costello	X								
Marie Hubbard	X					X			
Grace Kingsley	X					X			X
Ellen Little		X	X	X	X			X	X
Grace Martinez	X	X	X				X		X
Katherine Patton	X					X			
Anna Beth Pierce	X	X		X			X		
Alejandra Ramirez	X	X	X	X			X		X
Wendy Shaker	X								
Pat Singleton									
Pam Smith		X		X	X		X		

For each of these women, their leadership surfaced in all aspects of their lives—family, community, work, education. The stories of these women have the twists and turns of fictional plots; the women were constantly adapting to new situations in both their personal and professional lives—deaths, divorce, community crises, securing a job, not being hired for a desired job, returning to school later in life, and addition of children.

Some highlights of the stories the women shared were often in those situations when they were upset, disappointed and even angry. To a person, the women controlled their impulses to lash out at others. Several spoke of taking time to reflect; others entered into prayer; a few sought advice from mentors. All delayed their public responses until they had sorted through their own emotions and had an opportunity to analyze both the situations and possible reactions.

Though many of the women had moments of darkness in their personal and professional lives, they maintained a hopefulness regarding their contributions to the profession. They were also optimistic about the future of education generally. Four of the women spoke about their faith and how their beliefs carried them through difficult times and helped them to have confidence in the future.

*Relationships:* Wonderful stories were shared regarding growing up in loving families. One of the superintendents had a difficult childhood with an alcoholic father; but even this provided a context for challenge to success rather than reason to despair. A strong caring adult was mentioned in almost every story regarding the environment in which each woman grew up; sometimes the adult was a parent or grandparent, in other instances, the adult was a teacher or minister. Whatever the status, each of the women spoke of being cared for and nurtured.

The women spoke of a mentor in their professional lives. These were close relationships and helped the women see themselves as capable and competent and many times provided the nudge to pursue a position that otherwise would have been allowed to pass.

*Community Resources and Opportunities:* School certainly emerged as an influence on all of the women. Sadly, the minority women reported school experiences that were not necessarily positive and often included racial discrimination. Even so, school was important to all of the women and not just in their early years but throughout their careers.

Religion and spirituality played a strong role in these women's lives as community supports. Additionally, they often became involved in church work, community service and government and professional association work. Each of these experiences provided personal and professional growth, an opportunity to network and visibility as a leader. Masten and Powell's (2003)



neighborhood quality was an area for which little information emerged in the interviews. There were, however, stories of love for school, for reading, for travel and other endeavors that increased the quality of life for the women.

Masten and Powell's (2003) descriptions of characteristics found within each of Gamezy's protective factors provided a lens for seeing some of the life events—early on and continuing in to adulthood—of these women as assisting them in becoming resilient.

In several of the stories shared, these women seem to align with the gender literature in which women often place restrictions upon themselves. Fortunately, those in the study reported that there were circumstances and mentors that moved them out of that thinking. Like the executives studied by McCall et al. (1988), these women handled crises in both their personal and professional lives. Given their pursuit of careers in educational leadership via the superintendency and secondary principalship, they are by default risk-takers. These positions are saturated with problems, crises, and stress. They also are positions that have only a small percentage of women occupying them. According to McCall et al. (1988), to succeed in executive roles, individuals must be willing and able to overcome failure by learning from mistakes and using them as growth opportunities—that most certainly described the women who participated in this study.

### Summary

The development of resiliency for the women in this study began long before they were in educational leadership positions. Experiences early in their lives appear to have offered them opportunities to deal with adversity. This evidence of overcoming events in their early development and schooling years seems to fit well with the literature on resilient children and how they develop this capacity (Bushweller, 1995; Henderson, 1998; Luthar & Zelazo, 2003; Werner & Smith, 1989). Additionally, the experiences of childhood and those presented later in their lives through work liken these women to Bennis' (1989) "twice-born leaders." Many of these women suffered in their growing years, often feeling different and isolated. Through their stories, they present themselves as individuals who have strongly developed beliefs and ideas. All can be described as inner directed, self-assured, and to some degree, charismatic.

Although adversity situations did not decrease for these women, their understanding of adversity and the capacity for dealing with it increased. According to Satran (1998), "Just as there are few pointers for women on how to get to the top, there are fewer still on responding to adversity" (p. 31). Information gleaned from the women's stories address Satran's concern. The common themes identified in the stories of these 12 successful female

educational leaders offer some insights on how women specifically, but educational leaders generally, might respond to and overcome adversity. The credit these women gave to these experiences as being 'vital' to their development seems to echo, not only the literature on developing resiliency in children, but also the importance of experiencing and overcoming mistakes and failures as a part of leadership development. Additionally, the women's stories offer verification of the importance of experiencing and overcoming mistakes and failures as a component for leadership development; and they identify some actions and attitudes that can help others.

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