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Voices of Women in the Field

Lessons From the Land of Administrative Oz

Carol Renner

We're off to explore the Land of Administrative Oz. On this adventure, Dorothy is a female teacher searching for her ideal educational path. Her passion is to make a difference for student learning. She is wondering if she should try her leadership in an administrative capacity. She contemplates taking the road to administrative endorsement, just as our protagonist, Dorothy, traveled the Yellow Brick Road, not knowing what was ahead. Our teacher starts her journey. Where does the road lead? Observe as our aspiring administrator follows the Career Brick Road. Are her experiences reminiscent of your educational career route?

Prior to her journey, our aspiring administrator has a satisfied educational life as a teacher in the Midwest (maybe Kansas) with good support from her school supervisor, and her school family of instructional peers. She is a teacher who has made a difference for students in her classroom. Yet her inner mental turmoil causes her to speculate, 'Can I be a better leader?' 'Can I affect more students?' 'How can my career be more fulfilling?' These queries soon thrust our teacher onto the path of the Career Brick Road, just as Dorothy's thoughts of a better place propelled her to a new land. Our teacher takes the administrative study route. Initially, the quest is somewhat daunting, but she soon finds the Land of Administrative Oz clearly directing her at each turn. The path to success is marked.

Along the way, Dorothy meets three significant mentors, each with a different point of view and life story to share. A lesson for aspiring female administrators is to seek mentors to support the journey down the Career Brick Road. New relationships help one to identify personal strengths as observed by Dorothy's personal growth. The colleagues encounter both good and bad escapades on the journey, but they continue, united in support of one another. They learn that there is no magical trick to make their destiny easier. They must simply walk the talk all the way through the Land of Administrative Oz. Conversations give way to questions regarding the appropriateness of the journey:

About the Author

Carol Renner has been Associate Superintendent for Kearney Public Schools, Nebraska, for 12 years. She has served many educational needs as classroom teacher, resource teacher, and substitute teacher, Director of Special Education and Director of Curriculum and Staff Development in districts in the states of California, Missouri, Hawaii, and Nebraska. Carol has a Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum, Administration, and Instruction from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a Masters of Education in Learning Disabilities from the University of Missouri-Columbia, and a Bachelor of Education from Fontbonne College, St. Louis. She has served many state and local boards, and participated in international committee work for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Carol has been named Business Woman of the Year in two communities—Kearney, Nebraska, and Fairbury, Nebraska. She has always worked to promote women in educational leadership roles. Her dissertation was a study of women in the school superintendency. Carol.renner@kearneypublic.org

- Am I smart enough to succeed in the Land of Administrative Oz? Do I have the knowledge to lead others in student learning accomplishments? (A brain)
- Do I have the courage to boldly speak from my core values and educational beliefs in the face of loud, challenging, internal and external opposition? (courage)
- Do I have enough heart to address educational decisions with flexibility, rather than rigid responses and lack of compromise? Can I see each educational situation for the unique care and consideration that it requires? (A heart)

The path to educational gain is challenging and the prize, at times, seems unreachable. Threatening obstacles are encountered along the way (as frightening as lions and tigers and bears). But the ultimate ambition, to achieve a personal goal and to serve all munchkins well, is a source of strength for Dorothy and our teacher.

On arriving at the end of her journey, our aspiring administrator expects that the Wizard of Administrative Oz will be able to mysteriously grant her the educational skills and hopes she desires; but the Wizard can only provide encouragement and support. The Wizard can be a mentor to our aspiring administrator, as he was to Dorothy, pointing out that she had the capacity to

reach her destiny all along. He can give our teacher advice on how to strengthen leadership skills, and counsel her that success is just a matter of looking deep inside and believing in oneself. She has already proven herself by traveling the difficult Administrative path, and completing all the directives along the way. She is now in charge of her own destiny. The Wizard supports her with a diploma and a promise of a continued relationship. The trip through Administrative Oz was successful for our teacher and taught her many new things about relationships and inner strength. She is now ready for a place where she can make a difference for all district munchkins through an administrative position.

The classic fairy tale, the *Wizard of Oz*, may have some lessons for female teachers considering school administration. Just as Dorothy, female educators experience the same perplexing emotions, questioning the right career destiny, experiencing stormy situations that thrust them into career paths, exploring the unpredictable path to their destiny, meeting mentors who help them through the journey of challenging obstacles, always completing yet one more life requirement before the goal is met, and ultimately, learning to believe in themselves as the source of personal success. Dorothy showed us the importance of mentors along the path of life. Mentors who can honestly share their experiences, hopes, strengths, and weaknesses are important to new administrators. Relationship building with mentors makes one reflect on personal strengths and supports one in a successful administrative career.

The characters in the *Wizard of Oz* show females some of the traits to apply in successful administrative careers. Women in pursuit of administration roles sometimes question their own knowledge or capacity to lead (like the scarecrow's quest for a 'brain'). This is overcome by believing in self and just doing the leadership job. Sometimes a community may question a female administrator's ability to show courage in the face of adversity. As displayed by the lion, taking charge of one's self-perceptions and making the hard decisions is the demonstration of courage. This stereotypic female 'weakness' does not play out in modern society. Females, at home as single moms, as career professionals, or political officials are making the tough decisions and standing up for what is right. As a school administrator, there is ongoing opportunity to demonstrate ethical behavior and show courage. Unlike the tin-man's quest for heart, female administrators typically apply 'heart' in the decisions made on behalf of students. Let your care and support of others show. Make decisions on behalf of each family's needs.

Our schools need strong administrators who pursue goals with persistent determination, yet use their intelligence, confidence, and care to get results.

Dorothy's journey in the Land of Oz provides a good model for female teachers in quest of administrative jobs. If you are willing to take the long learning path, and address challenges with heart, smarts, and courage, you are ready for school administration. Oh! And wear your ruby slippers! You'll look awesome!