

The University of Cyprus and CEAS hosted a Conference on 5th-6th April 2002 with the theme: 'Women in Educational Leadership'. The Conference was partly funded from a Commonwealth Foundation Activity Grant.

CONFERENCE REPORT

A two – day conference took place on the 5th and 6th of April 2002 at the University of Cyprus. The theme of the conference was “Women in Educational Leadership”. The conference was co-organized by the Cyprus Educational Administration Society (C.E.A.S.) and the Department of Education of the University of Cyprus and was mainly funded by the Commonwealth Foundation.

It is an undisputed fact that, although female teachers consist the majority within the profession, especially at the elementary level, male teachers are the ones who mainly hold administrative positions. Social stereotypes, maternity and family responsibilities are the major barriers constraining women from pursuing an administrative career.

Based on the above assumption, the objectives of the conference included (a) the development of awareness on gender issues within Cyprus;

- (b) the encouragement of greater involvement by women in educational leadership and in the CEAS and CCEAM leadership;
- (c) the sharing of ideas with women from developed and developing countries for advancing women in educational leadership; and
- (d) the development of CCEAM policy on equal opportunities.

Among the approximately 150 participants in the conference were women delegates involved in the development of CEAS policy on equal opportunities, and delegates who hold positions in educational management as university professors, inspectors and head teachers.

Four major speakers from Britain, Greece, India and South Africa were the foreign delegates of the conference. The first major speech was given by Dr. Kholeka Constance Moloi from South Africa, titled “I’m a woman! I’m black! I’m a leader: A case study”.

Dr. Moloi presented the processes of transformation and change within the South African educational system since the end of Apartheid through her own eyes as a researcher, and a woman in this country, analyzing the contribution of women leaders. Rosalind Morton from the U.K. spoke about “A walking phenomenon? Women in educational leadership in England within a performance culture”. She provided an analysis of the role that women play in the English education system and presented some gender issues related to administration.

Other presentations came from Koula Koursarou, a pre-primary education inspector in Cyprus, and Francesca Emmanuel, an elementary school head teacher again from Cyprus, who elaborated on the themes “The involvement of women in educational leadership in Cyprus: A myth or a reality?” and “Women in educational leadership in Cyprus: From classroom organisation to school management. A personal account”, respectively. Both reports derived from the presenters’ personal experiences, following their careers in the male- dominated area of educational administration in Cyprus.

In her presentation, Kalia Panayidou, a secondary school head teacher, combined the experience from her current position with a pilot research she conducted in order to highlight the perceptions of secondary teachers regarding (a) their preferences of their head teacher's gender and (b) the profile of the ideal head teacher. She also offered a historical review of the role of female teachers in the 20th century Cyprus and an outline of the global efforts for women rights.

Professor Hemlata Talesra offered the Indian experience with a speech on "Status and experience of women in educational leadership". Dr. Talesra's report, from one of the most populous countries in the world, revolved around issues of women's emancipation and how they can be empowered through adequate preparation programmes in order to play leadership roles in the education system.

Dr. Anastasia Athanasoula-Reppa explored the issue of "Equal opportunities in the Greek educational leadership. Problems, tensions and prospects". She made an attempt to map the Greek reality on issues related to equal opportunities in the area of Educational Leadership. As she reported, despite the fact that research in the area is scarce, there is an attempt to present reality as accurately as possible through a theoretical approach and statistical data.

Finally, Kakia Aggelidou, Maria Georgiou, Maria Papaioannou and Maria Xenophontos, postgraduate students of Educational Administration at the University of Cyprus, presented the results of their research titled "The investigation of the perspective "VERSUS" vs ANDROGYNOUS". They reported evidence, which suggests that the situation in Cyprus regarding gender issues in educational leadership does not differ from that of other European countries. Specifically, although women consist the vast majority of educators, only 20-25% of them are in leadership posts.

All the presentations were published in a conference volume, edited by Petros Pashiardis, Associate Professor of Educational Administration and Yiannis Savvides, doctoral candidate of Educational Administration at the University of Cyprus. The conference volume can be regarded as a valuable resource for the students of educational leadership and gender issues. Beyond the academic aspect of the conference, there was an opportunity for the participants to meet socially at the end of the first day. During a reception, over drinks and canaps, delegates had a pleasant evening.