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IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY- THE WOODWARD SCHOOL

In the spring of 1970, feminism was introduced into a small, private school in Brooklyn, New York. Woodward School students, 60% white, 40% black, primarily middle-class but with many on scholarship, range from nursery school age

ON THE CAMPUS

We can now count upwards of 1,000 women's studies courses, the major bulk still in literature, sociology, and history departments. New course titles continue to appear: Asian Women (CUNY/City College); Sexism and Schools (U. Massachusetts); Rhetoric of Women (U. Denver); Biology of Women (Portland State U.); Women in Spanish Culture (U. Washington); Men and Masculinity (U. Wisconsin). Courses continue to appear in law schools and schools of education, and in a sprinkling of other professional or graduate schools. But the big news is the development of women's studies programs.

Two years ago, when letters and syllabi began to find their way to our desks, there were two women's studies programs at Cornell and at San Diego. There are now, as of yesterday's mail, 46 programs, most of which are located up and down the west coast; in New Mexico and Arizona; north of Maryland on the east coast and as far west as Buffalo and Pittsburgh.

The main point of organizing a women's studies program, thus far, has not been to offer degrees to students. There are still only three programs that grant the M.A. (Cambridge-Goddard, U. California at San Francisco, and Sarah Lawrence); six that grant the B.A. (Douglass College; U. California at San Francisco; SUNY/College at Old Westbury; CUNY/Richmond College; Roger Williams College and University Without Walls; and U. Washington). Three California colleges (Fresno, Sacramento and Long Beach) offer minors in women's studies. All other programs offer either an organized roster of elective courses or a list of those women's studies courses taught on a particular campus or group of campuses.

Degree-granting or not, the main purpose of women's studies programs is to offer compensatory education to women (and men), since the "regular" curriculum has traditionally ignored the history, literature, lives, and concerns of half the human population. In some few places, women's studies programs have been granted "lines" and can appoint some of their own faculty. At Sacramento, for example, the program has appointed six part-time teachers of women's studies courses on funds sufficient to hire one full-time and one half-time person. In addition, this year they were granted funds with which to invite two Distinguished Visiting Professors to the campus. Betty Chmaj (formerly of Wayne State and editor of AMERICAN STUDIES AND WOMEN'S STUDIES) has accepted such an appointment for the year 1972-73; and Kate Millett, for the spring semester. On the other hand, a new program at CUNY/City College has "no regular budget and no staff hired specifically to teach or administer Women's Studies."

A woman at the University of Pittsburgh called today to inquire about sources of funding for women's studies programs--and we have had similar requests from many of the other programs in existence or formation. I am interested in a dialogue on this subject, but I do have a point of view I should like to present here. Colleges do not go to the federal government or to foundations in order to teach English, Swahili, swimming, or biochemistry. And when colleges want funds to plan new curricular programs, administrators are assigned to the task. Why, then, should women's studies programs, staffed typically by "volunteers," be forced to spend their time seeking funds so that courses may be taught? Colleges that admit women are responsible for their curricular needs. The funding of women's studies is the responsibility of colleges and universities throughout the country.

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through eighth grade. The school is progressive, relying on open classroom teaching in lower grades and on individual attention to older students.

Feminist change at Woodward was begun by a few women who had been in consciousness-raising groups. Through informal communication, a group of at first ten, then as many as thirty women began to meet to discuss what was happening to their daughters at school and to define their goals: an end to sex-role stereotyping and the beginning of real freedom of choice for boys and girls.

The first priority was to raise the consciousness of the staff and administration, since it was not possible to request educational change of teachers unaware of their own attitudes and behavior. A general meeting was held, first with the director, and then with the entire staff. For the next six months, the group held small consciousness-raising meetings focussed on educational topics for staff members individually invited. The Feminist Book Collective presented a tape and slide show on stereotypes in children's literature for the staff and the P.T.A. At the end of the first school year, an afternoon workshop with staff offered papers and videotapes on such topics as cultural and societal stereotyping, female psychological development, women in literature, and women in history.

Some immediate changes in the school were quite concrete. Several teachers joined their own consciousness-raising groups. There was more communication among the staff about sex-role attitudes. Parents were no longer listed on class lists as Mr. and Mrs. John Jones: it was now Mary and John Jones. And the proverbial "class mother" became truly the "class parent" (one third men).

Changes in classroom practices were more slow and groping, but real. Teachers organized consciousness-raising with children (in the form of classroom discussions) when appropriate matters arose such as boys wanting to exclude girls from activities or social groupings, boys feeling ashamed to play with dolls, girls feeling afraid to build with blocks, older boys bringing in Playboy, older girls being reluctant to go swimming. Teachers began examining and even altering their classroom reading choices, selecting more books about girls and commenting on blatant sexist biases in otherwise good books. A feminist studies shelf was planned for the library and the librarian began trying to combat ingrained attitudes of boys and girls towards book choices. An elective karate class was introduced, half the students were girls. Staff members consciously refrained from exclaiming to little girls, "How pretty you look today." Girls were pushed, urged, and cajoled into extending themselves into areas of activity previously neglected. They were also given specific concentrated help both to build confidence and to teach them how to perform those tasks for which they had been unprepared.

Most of the changes came about relatively easily in the lower grades, in part because young children seemed more teachable or reachable than older ones, in part because of the flexibility of the lower school curriculum. We have, therefore, devoted the second year of the group's activity primarily to exploring ways of reaching older students. The Feminist Book Collective has presented their tape and slide show to the sixth through eighth graders with a follow-up discussion. The group and the staff decided together that female studies should be an integrated part of all classroom teaching rather than separate units or courses. A female studies project elective, however, for those older girls particularly interested will be planned for next year in the hope that those students will carry their raised consciousness and new knowledge back to the classrooms to generate further change. We plan to organize field trips and invite women speakers to the school in order to introduce students to a broad range of women's roles. We plan also to collect a library of oral taped histories of women. By now, we have succeeded in raising the consciousness of administrators, teachers, and parents, but the translation of this new awareness into new educational practice has been more difficult. There is no model to follow. We are working to change ancient patterns and, of course, we have just begun.

Andrea E. Ostrum