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Re-Educating a Generation of Teachers: A Conference Report

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RE-EDUCATING A GENERATION OF TEACHERS:  
A CONFERENCE REPORT

The Feminist Press national conference “Toward Nonsexist Schools: Re-educating a Generation of Teachers” took place November 21, 22 and 23, 1974 on the campus of SUNY/College at Old Westbury. The program of this working conference was intended to provide specific methods and materials for public school teachers and administrators who are organizing inservice courses on sex-role stereotyping. More than 25 different workshops and panels presented new research on socialization, history and literature, and models for organizing and administering a women’s studies inservice program.

At the opening session Thursday evening, the place of women’s studies in the broad socio-political framework was examined from different perspectives by Shirley McCune (Resource Center on Sex Roles and Education, Washington, D. C.) and Florence Howe (Feminist Press). Over the next two days, workshops explored such topics as teacher behavior and changing children’s aspirations, continuities and differences in sex-role socialization for Black and white females, women and work, using autobiography in the classroom, and sex equality in guidance. A packet of materials prepared especially for the conference treats the issues of the conference in greater detail and provides specific curricular and reference materials. (The packet is being enlarged and revised and will be available from The Feminist Press by summer 1975. You are invited to submit material.)

A conference evaluation form was circulated and many have been returned. Participants cited as most valuable “talking to people involved in change, exchanging information and addresses” and being “revitalized by the richness of workshops and speakers.” “I am awed by the scope and depth of your conference,” wrote one correspondent. “In addition, I am inspired and excited to do a program in my county.” Another called the conference one of the most smoothly run she had ever attended, “...but more importantly, there was the opportunity to meet many women who are doing exciting work, ...but who also see the political implications of the questions we are raising.”

Many participants suggested that the Press make the conference an annual event. While this is a possibility, a conference provides only a place for communication and inspiration for those carrying on the day-to-day work. It forms only a small part of the total picture, for without the committed efforts of those working in their own schools, there would be nothing to have a conference about. And while there is much excellent work being done, there is always more to do (Jo Jacobs’ letter which follows this article suggests several specific possibilities) if we are to re-educate not only a generation of teachers, but a generation of mothers, fathers, daughters, sons.

Ms. Florence Howe
THE FEMINIST PRESS
Box 334
Old Westbury, New York 11568
November 23, 1974

Dear Florence:

I first want to thank and congratulate you and your staff for an outstanding conference. To not only draw together a group of people so outstanding in every respect, but to make me and 299 others feel so warmly welcome as honored and respected guests is an admirable accomplishment! Thank you!

I thought that I would like to share with you my general reaction to the conference and to share some thoughts regarding needed follow up.

My general observation is that there are numbers of important things happening across the country at every level of education. This is both rewarding and frustrating; rewarding because of the significant impact any number of the on-going projects described at the conference could have to eliminate sex discrimination and sex-role stereotyping in education in this country, and frustrating because so few of the projects are being widely shared. I want you to understand that I do not fault any of those involved in such projects for I have nothing but admiration and gratitude for their work, and realize that most of the projects were done with either little or no money. (To that, I could give a personal testimonial!!!) In short, what I mostly got out of the conference was a reaffirmation of my thoughts about how outstanding our accomplishments are to date and what must now be done. Let me just list my “desperately needed follow up/where do we go from here” thoughts.

-A complete post-conference packet, which would include copies of all speeches, project presentations, and workshop summaries.

-Production for distribution of the projects, including AV projects, presented at the conference.

-More conferences and mini-conferences (subsidized) of varying sizes and lengths of time to concentrate on specific curriculum content areas. I also specifically request that the conference we have just completed be the first of “The Annual Westbury Conference.”

-Development, production, and distribution of complete inservice training for teachers kits. There could be any number of kits, e.g., kits for general awareness training, for teachers of elementary schools, for teachers of social studies, for teachers of English, for teachers of career education/vocational education, etc., etc.

-Development, production, and distribution of curricular materials for all areas.

-Short (one week at most), concentrated labs for training people who in turn could do inservice training. It should provide people with the skills and materials, the versatility and flexibility to meet the needs of school districts where they are at (or given what they are willing to do...).

I am sure there must be a couple dozen more things. However, these are some of the crucial needs as I see them. If even only one of these suggestions could be accomplished, it would make what we have started here in Kalamazoo move closer to the goal we all share—the opportunity for an equal education for all children.

I know that your major difficulty is no different from ours—lack of funds. It boggles the mind to think about what an incredible difference a small amount of money would make!

Once again, thank you and PRAISE! PRAISE!

Fondly,

Jo Jacobs
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Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008