Summer 1974

Seattle Schools Clean House

Deirdre O'Neill

Follow this and additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/wsq

Part of the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

https://academicworks.cuny.edu/wsq/104
National Conference on In-Service Education

The Feminist Press has announced it will sponsor the nation's first Conference on In-Service Education to be conducted November 21-23 on the campus of SUNY/College at Old Westbury. The focus of the conference will be sex-role stereotyping and the teaching of history and literature. Delegates from the school systems of nine major cities are expected to participate.

The cities include Seattle; Minneapolis; Dallas; Boulder, Colo.; Kalamazoo, Mich.; Baltimore; Teaneck, N.J.; and Hanover, N.H. New York will be represented by Manhasset and Glen Cove, as well as by BOCES in Westbury.

Funding for the conference has been provided by the Rockefeller Family Fund.

The idea for the conference has grown out of a several-years correspondence with individuals throughout the country who have requested materials useful in planning and teaching in-service courses. The growing number of school systems which have begun to teach such courses have shown considerable interest in sharing materials and methods. Seattle, for example, will offer teachers and counselors seven courses: a miniature women's studies program.

ANY CHANGE IN SEXIST TEXTS?

Feminist Press Staff Survey Education Publishers

Are American publishers planning to do anything about the sexist bias found in their textbooks?

In order to answer this question, two Feminist Press staff members—Merle Frosch and Phyllis Arlow—conducted interviews this spring with 37 representatives of 15 New York educational publishers encompassing (with their subsidiaries and divisions) more than 200 educational publishers.

The study followed a more comprehensive investigation by Feminist Press staff of the state of sexism in the high school English and social studies curriculum. This larger study, initiated in September 1973, was conducted with the help of a generous planning grant from the Rockefeller Family Fund.

One product of this Feminist Press curriculum evaluation was a detailed critique of the textbooks most widely used in high school (continued on page 8)
Seattle Schools Clean House (continued)

paid to any woman coach was $121 lower than the lowest stipend paid to any male coach. All women coaches of girls’ track and volleyball will receive two years back-pay to equalize stipends with those given male coaches.

For the next five years the Seattle School District must provide at least two staff development (in-service) courses per year oriented specifically to the needs of women p.e. and health instructors and coaches. Not only must the district assume responsibility for training women coaches, but it has been ordered to recruit and hire qualified women to coach girls’ sports programs, rather than assigning teachers with secondary interests in sports. For the first time, two women have been appointed to direct women’s athletic, p.e., and health education programs at the district administrative level.

In the past, the apportionment of athletic funds by athletic coordinators (all but one male) and student body officers has been overwhelmingly biased in favor of males. Over $80,000 in Student Activity Fees was allotted each year to boys’ football, basketball, baseball, athletic promotion, and athletic insurance, while $15,000 went to girls’ athletic programs. Due to minimal budgets, girls have had to settle for worn hand-me-down equipment from boys, and less than adequate gym, playground, and shower-room facilities. The conciliation forced the Seattle School District to add $10,000 to the girls’ sports allotment, bringing it to approximately a third of the budget allotted for boys. In addition, the agreement states that “adequate” facilities are to be made available to conduct the programs “at all seasons of the year.”

More generally, the HRC study exposed sex bias in all elements of district recruitment, hiring, training, and promotion of women. Under the new agreement the district will establish and implement an affirmative action plan directed at rectifying the lack of women and minorities in administrative positions. In addition, such sex-differentiated job titles as “matron” and “custodian” were desexed and corresponding unequal salary scales were abolished.

While HRC was investigating the Seattle School District, a group of citizens began organizing around another point of concern: the curriculum, in which women and girls were either completely ignored or crippled by narrow stereotypic roles. After eight months of careful study, Citizens for the Elimination of Sex-Stereotyping presented to the school board a slide show and an accompanying seventy-page information packet documenting sexism in Seattle schools’ elementary texts.

Under pressure from HRC and the possible threat of loss of federal funds, Superintendent J. Loren Troxel appointed a Committee to Eliminate Sex-Stereotyping (CESS) to examine sex bias and make recommendations for its elimination. In January 1974, after four months of investigation, CESS presented the Superintendent with a five-page list of recommendations for immediate implementation.

The Community Classroom (continued)

As an “hourly,” I enjoy complete academic freedom and autonomy, but no tenure or medical benefits. The AFT and other teachers’ groups are working on this problem locally.

Community based teaching offers a challenge to the professional who wants to break out of academic strictures. Although we often suffer isolation from our colleagues, we draw support directly from the community. Our resources are neighborhood agencies, extension services, and alternative institutions. We must be energetic and imaginative in our efforts to utilize them, to initiate more classes, and to insure their success.

Toni Mester

The recommendations centered around the establishment of an Office for Equality of the Sexes which would focus on the re-education of curriculum specialists, counsellors, department heads, and teachers in order to encourage and assist in the development of appropriate new courses and materials. In addition, the Office would plan and implement staff development courses, oversee affirmative action hiring and promotion for women, and act upon other problems relating to sexism in the schools. In general the Office would initiate and perform the wide range of activities needed to implement a policy of equal opportunity for both sexes.

Administrative response to the recommendations was for the most part negative. Superintendent Troxel rejected outright the establishment of the Office, proposing instead that changes occur through “existing channels.” Similarly, he sidestepped the recommendation that specific screening for sex and ethnic bias in texts be done before materials are tested in the classroom. The Superintendent claimed that “screening for exclusion of materials should not be the purpose of the criteria.” This policy nullifies the effect of a detailed “Screening for Sex Bias” evaluation form drafted by CESS and distributed to textbook selection committees. Sally Mackle, CESS member, feels that the district was “jogged out of its apathy, made a few token noises to improve its public image, and fell back asleep again.”

One recommendation which has been implemented is the establishment of a district financed staff development (in-service) course taught by CESS members. While such a step is to be applauded as a beginning, CESS members are quick to criticize the minimal effectiveness of a volunteer course attended primarily by those who are aware of the problem, and avoided by those who are the root of the problem.

Currently the district is in the process of setting up an administrative-level commission to make efforts to end sex bias. Representatives from nine areas of educational concern are involved, including curriculum, counselling, library resources, affirmative action, research, and administration. While some confusion exists about the actual function of the commission being set up by the Superintendent’s office, local feminists are cautiously hopeful that an “in-house” commission with widespread representation will have the necessary leverage for change.

Despite the skepticism expressed by CESS members and concerned teachers, students, and parents, much has happened in Seattle. Local feminism has taken many forms: a Women in History course, Women’s Awareness Week, district-wide celebration of Susan B. Anthony Day, mini-grants for nonsexist material, and even the consciousness-raising suggestion (no takers yet) of organizing male “guardian angels” to bake cookies for girl athletes. The original staff development course on sex stereotyping has spawned eight new courses to be offered this coming year, ranging in topic from “Social History of Women” to “Sex Bias in Health, Family Living, and Home Economics.”

In order to foment a stronger rebellion, local women are now critically assessing past strategies. It seems clear that the success of the women coaches and p.e. teachers was a function of their organization and especially their representation in every school. In addition, their specific actions on legal violations brought vast changes within the district. While there is little promise of Title IX for eradicating sexist curricular materials, the possibility has been raised of a suit based on Washington’s Equal Rights Amendment.

Some CESS members feel that the recent months of foot-dragging on the part of the administration reflect a true lack of concern for

(continued on page 8)
Feminism at a Rural University (continued)

Stephanie is not only preparing herself for a career in forestry, but is investigating the U.S. Forest Service, to prepare it for an influx of women.

The problem of transience, of course, afflicts all universities, but it is compounded in Moscow by other factors, not the least of which is the phenomenal drop-out rate. Once a student drops out, there is nothing for her to do in Moscow. Unlike Berkeley or Hyde Park in Chicago, Moscow has no community of hangers-on. The University is primarily an undergraduate institution, so few students stay more than four years. There is an annual influx of disenchanted urbanites seeking culture-in-the-mountains—a new, less crowded Boulder, Colorado. The picture books of Idaho don’t prepare them for the treeless wheat and lentil fields and the dry, dusty summers. Many of them move on. The faculty is also transient, since the younger ones are generally looking for better jobs elsewhere. Of the five people who taught women’s studies courses in 1973-74, three have left to take new jobs (myself included).

Women’s studies has not yet caught on at the University of Idaho, but I think its time is coming. In September 1973, in connection with a moderately successful Women’s Week, I tried to launch a campaign for women’s studies. The few people interested were the same ones who show up for everything, and women’s studies was not their priority. I redirected my enthusiasm to the regular programming in the Women’s Center. We ran at least two lecture-discussions a week, many of which drew wall-to-wall crowds. Other groups offer free kegs of beer to get such audiences! I also got the English Department to hire me to teach a full, three-credit “Women and Literature” course which was very successful. Unfortunately, it won’t continue. I also team-taught a two-credit course cryptically titled “Women’s and Men’s Roles in Society.” It was a dismal example of how not to team teach. Jolene Ramaker, a teaching assistant who has since moved away, taught a one-credit satellite course on sexism in education. Nancy Mendoza offered a short speech course called “The Rhetoric of the Feminist Movement” which she plans to repeat. My hope is that the pressure for women’s studies at Idaho will come from the students whose appetites have been whetted by these few courses and the Women’s Center programs.

Just as I pulled out of town, a new project got underway. Several of the Women’s Center volunteers were working on a grant proposal for a study of the rural feminist tradition. Anyone curious about the project or willing to help define “rural feminism” should write to Corky Bush, c/o Women’s Center, Administration Building, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho 83843.

Moscow feminists need to find a place within the larger feminist movement, and communication with sisters elsewhere is essential. What is needed, though, is realistic advice and support, not condescension. I am sure that the new coordinator, Celia Banks, will relish hearing from you as much as I have.

Cheri Register

Any Change in Sexist Texts? (continued)

English and social studies classes. The study showed the quality of textbooks to be impaired consistently by repeated patterns of sex-role stereotyping.

Given this conclusion, what were the prospects for improving American textbooks during this decade? Specifically, how were publishers planning to ameliorate the biases in their texts? Were there any new plans to produce supplementary materials about women’s achievements?

Education publishers were approached directly with these questions, in an attempt to assess the current climate of the industry in relation to the prospects for nonsexist education.

Prior to the study, it was anticipated that some publishers might be threatened by the feminist labels of the interviewers. However, all the publishing representatives were cordial, though not necessarily sympathetic to their point of view. Occasionally, Mrs. Frosch and Arlow met with hostile remarks: “Feminists want to put books through a sterilization process and come out with something anti­-septic.” At other times they were challenged: “What do you want to do, get rid of Hemingway?” and, “Isn’t this book-burning?”

Whatever its motivation, each group spent a great deal of time with the Feminist Press representatives who took part in large and small meetings, formal discussions with management, and moving personal talks with feminist editors. In a few cases, they later learned that their appearance may have helped stimulate feminists to organize committees or establish guidelines to begin eliminating sex bias from texts.

Generally, the editors and publishers exhibited some awareness of feminist issues and some sensitivity to sexism in texts. Early pressures on the marketplace—generated by test cases in Michigan and Texas and a new law in California—have apparently begun to make publishers listen to feminists and others in a position to select or reject textbooks. It may no longer be possible for publishers to deny that textbooks contain sex bias. On the other hand, they apparently do not consider it to be in their interest (financially) to take a strong initiative in the job of eliminating that bias from their books.

Although every company claimed that feminist issues were a top priority, the interviewers found many levels of consciousness, and these attitudes apparently dictated the house reaction to criticisms of its books.

Despite the sympathies of even the most enlightened editors interviewed, few plans were reported for new texts based on original research, and none for supplementary materials about women. (Explanations offered were economic: all publishers’ backlists represent large investments; textbooks take at least ten years to produce, etc.)

Evidently, the publishing industry as a whole is not yet committed to fundamental change. At present, most publishers appear to be satisfied with little reforms: the shift in pronoun usage, for example,

Seattle Schools Clean House (continued)

the rapid elimination of sex bias. But in the Seattle schools, with or without administrative support, a momentum of change has been firmly initiated. Inevitably that movement will force the reluctant male-dominated systems to clean house.

The author is a member of CESS and a graduate student in curriculum at U. of Washington. This past year she initiated and co-taught the Seattle Public School staff development course, “Sexism in Society and Schools.”