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INTERVENTION IN SEX-ROLE SOCIALIZATION

The teacher had assigned *Caddie Woodlawn* by Carol Ryrie Brink to a reading group in her fifth grade classroom. That evening an itrate parent, a local police officer, telephoned the teacher at home demanding to know why his son was reading a "girl's book." When he was assured that his son could substitute another book for the class assignment, the matter was smoothed over. Several days later, with his mother's encouragement, the boy had begun to read the story and confessed to the teacher that it really was a good story—even if Caddie was a girl! This incident, the only reported example of parental response to the program to be described in this article, comments on the unwitting bias of the literature to which the school has exposed students (and parents). The incident further suggests how an intervention program in sex-role socialization may accomplish its goals with the help of good materials.

During the spring of 1974, an experimental curricular intervention program in sex-role stereotyping occurred in the public schools of three greater Boston communities. The program was part of a social development research project at Harvard University, directed by Professor Marcia Guttentag and partly funded by the Ford Foundation. Preliminary preparation for the program had begun in 1973 with an extensive review of the research literature on the social and cognitive functioning of children with regard to sex-role socialization. Theoretical, descriptive and experimental research suggested three age levels that might be especially appropriate for purposes of curricular intervention: ages five, ten and fourteen or fifteen. Discussions with local school administrators and school committee members in the metropolitan area proved fruitful. Three public school systems agreed to provide teachers and classrooms for a part-time experimental intervention program in the language arts curriculum at the three grade levels proposed.

The project staff presented the following objectives to the teachers at the kindergarten level: (1) to encourage children in nonsexist play activities; (2) to encourage children to consider a variety of occupational roles; (3) to encourage children to see themselves and adults of both sexes in multiple family and personality roles. The kindergarten objectives were primarily positive in scope; they were intended to help make children aware of the real variations in the activities of children and adults they know. In many classrooms, teachers needed only to point out what was already within youngsters' actual experiences in order to broaden their intellectual awareness of the discrepancy between a social stereotype and reality.

At the fifth grade level (age ten), the objectives included those three formulated for the kindergarten level, but added a fourth to develop the critical capacities of fifth grade children in relation to their reading materials and their cultural environment: (4) to help develop some awareness of the sex-role stereotyping that exists in literature, the media and occupational roles. At this age children are developing some awareness of social inequalities. While materials presenting children and adults in nontraditional sex roles are still effective, one can also begin to introduce the concept of cultural bias and to discuss the prejudicial effects of sex-role socialization.

At the ninth grade level, one further objective was added to the four already stated: (5) to help students think critically about the limiting aspects of traditional socio-cultural sex-role stereotyping.

In summary, the objectives at all three grade levels attempted to provide a framework within which the teachers would be able to relate to each other the varied activities and resources used in the intervention program. Teachers were expected to use their professional judgment concerning the meaningfulness and feasibility of activities flowing from these general objectives in relation to the needs and previous experiences of their individual classes. The thrust of the intervention program was clearly in the direction of attitudinal and behavioral changes on the part of the participating students. The focus was not on enhancing academic skills. Therefore a curriculum had to be devised that could effect attitudinal and behavioral change through materials and activities that would blend in with on-going skill work in the regular language arts program. Materials and activities had to be flexible and adaptable in terms of both structure and duration. The motivation, cooperation and perceptiveness of the participating teachers loomed as significant factors of obvious short-term importance, as well as of potential long-term influence beyond the formal termination of the experiment. Their understanding of the purposes of the experiment was the crucial element in the intervention, even though the project's primary focus was on attitudinal changes in the students.

Given this perspective and background, a search began for appropriate curricular materials and ideas. Several hundred trade books, ranging from picture books to adult material, were purchased and screened by project staff members before being assigned to individual classrooms. The books were informally rated on such characteristics as interest, literary style and degree of stereotyping in plot development or character portrayal. All published curricular materials or information pertaining to such materials were ordered. These materials, recent journals and any unpublished material brought to the attention of staff members were carefully examined for curricular possibilities. Activity cards listing all ideas culled from these materials were compiled for all three grade levels. A number of criteria were used in the final selection of these activity cards for inclusion in the curriculum notebooks prepared for each grade level. The notebooks, completed several weeks before the program was initiated in the classrooms, contained four sections: (1) background information for the teacher; (2) suggested curricular materials or activities; (3) bibliographies of nonsexist children's and/or adults' literature; (4) curriculum evaluation forms for teacher use. Each notebook included a statement of the objectives for that grade level and an annotated table of contents. In addition to the trade books and the curriculum notebooks, fifth grade teachers received the record "Free To Be... You and Me" and kindergarten teachers received both the record and a number of plastic toys for role-playing activities.

A one-day, teacher-training workshop was held a week before the intervention program began. Conduct of the program and use of curricular materials were discussed and clarified; weekly meetings were arranged between the curriculum director and teachers in each of the participating schools.

The intervention program lasted for well over a month, with many teachers continuing to use suggested materials after the formal termination of the program. The teachers were remarkably diverse in terms of age, years of teaching experience and ethnic background. On the basis of this particular experiment, it would not be possible to consider any one of these factors as relevant to the degree of success in implementing such a program at any grade level. It was our judgment that most teachers implemented the program with enthusiasm and interest. According to teachers' (continued on page 7)
showed a new belief in a greater equalization of the relative social power of the sexes. In contrast, ninth grade boys became more stereotypical. The girls, however, became convinced they expressed traditional opinions more freely.

At the ninth grade level, there were wide variations by classroom and sharply different reactions from boys and girls. After the intervention, on most measures, the boys stayed the same or became more stereotypical. The girls, however, became convinced that males and females could both hold many of the same jobs. In regard to personality, kindergarteners maintained pre-intervention, sex-role stereotypes of others, yet demonstrated a non-stereotyped perspective of their own personality.

At the fifth grade level, students did not show dramatic changes through the intervention; but when attitudes were changed or strengthened, it was likely to be a girl who moved toward non-stereotyped beliefs. Little change was evidenced for occupational stereotyping, especially by the boys. Girls did increase the proportion of jobs they believed could be held by both men and women. Even more important, there was a significant increase in their belief that men and women could hold many of the same jobs. In regard to personality, kindergartners were more receptive than boys to the intervention ideas.

At the ninth grade level, there were wide variations by classroom and sharply different reactions from boys and girls. After the intervention, on most measures, the boys stayed the same or became more stereotypical. The girls, however, became convinced of non-stereotyped occupational perspectives. They altered their opinions about stereotypical personality characteristics and admitted that they enjoyed traditionally masculine activities. The girls showed a new belief in a greater equalization of the relative social power of the sexes. In contrast, ninth grade boys became more serious about defining proper limitations of women's roles, i.e., they expressed traditional opinions more freely.

An important exception to the above generalizations about the ninth graders occurred in one class taught by an enthusiastic, effective teacher. Both boys and girls showed significant attitude changes. Students in this class became more positive about alternative sex roles. They believed women could enjoy both occupational and family roles. Often, in their stories, they portrayed men in family roles. On the pre-measures, this class was in no way different from any other ninth grade class. Thus, this exception suggests that even in a period as short as six weeks, a concerned and able teacher, provided with sufficient materials can help students, even at this age, to re-evaluate and modify their attitudes about sex-role stereotyping.

Findings from this intervention study suggest several implications for educators. Because pre-adolescent students seem to be the most open to change and the least rigid about stereotypes, particularly for their own sex, nonsexist curricular materials may be most effective in the elementary grades. Moreover, girls can probably be influenced to develop nonsexist attitudes about occupational and social roles more easily than boys. However, the need to reduce the effects of traditional sex-role stereotyping seems to be greatest at adolescence. While the social/psychological pressures of same sex peer groups appear to exert an even more powerful influence at the high school level, there is some indication that active and highly motivated teachers can, with the aid of carefully chosen material, counteract this influence.

RESEARCHING BLACK WOMEN (continued)

Most of the references above have been to novels, autobiographies or other works of nonfiction. The following are contemporary black women poets, chosen on no other basis than personal preference: Gwendolyn Brooks (Annie Allen, The Bean Eaters, Bronzeville Boys and Girls, Family Pictures, In the Mecca, Riot, Selected Poems, A Street in Bronzeville, The World of Gwendolyn Brooks, Report from Part One); Lucille Clifton (Good Times, Good News about the Earth, An Ordinary Woman); Mari Evans (Where Is All the Music, I Am a Black Woman); Sarah Fabio (A Mirror; A Soul); Julie Fields (East of Moonlight); June Jordan (Some Changes, Who Look at Me); Audre Lorde (The First Cities, Cables to Rage, From a Land Where Other People Live, New York Head Shop and Museum); Pat Parker (Pit Stop, Child of Myself); Sonia Sanchez (Homecoming, We a BaddDDD People, A Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women); Alice Walker (Once, Revolutionary Petunias); Margaret Walker (For My People, October Journey).

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

The following works provide excellent basic materials for researching black women and black women writers.


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