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Susan Groves, Phyllis Koppelman, and Lyn Reese

The Berkeley School System: Women's Studies Program in Jeopardy

The Women's Studies Program of the Berkeley Unified School District was created in 1972. It all began when pressure was placed on the Berkeley Board of Education in 1970 by the Education Committee of the Berkeley chapter of NOW. The committee, which included University of California women, made a strong case for examining sexism in the schools. The Board responded by creating a Women's Task Force whose purpose it was:
- to study the role of women in the Berkeley Unified School District;
- to bring to the attention of the Board both positive and negative aspects of the District in its responsibility to women;
- to make recommendations to help the Board make educational decisions which reflect a commitment to the elimination of sex stereotyping in this institution.

Based on the recommendation of the 1971-72 Women's Task Force Report, the Board created the Women's Studies Program. In response to community pressure a Black Studies Program had been set up by the Board several years before, followed by an Asian Studies Program. The Chicano Studies Program was developed later in 1972.

Susan Groves was appointed the coordinator and given a small budget with which to tackle the problem of sexism. Since there were virtually no other feminist model programs to follow, our program was really in the forefront of the effort to deliver educational equity by working to eliminate segregation and discrimination by sex and race.

The immediate task at hand was to create curriculum materials that would counteract or supplement the existing instructional program by providing information on and activities for girls and boys, men and women, which were nonstereotypical in terms of sex and race. In order to accomplish this task, it has been essential to coordinate our efforts closely with those of the Ethnic Studies Programs. This effort to coordinate our work has been most productive in the last two years.

Thus the uniqueness of the materials we have developed lies in the fact that they are both feminist and multiethnic; our focus has been on introducing into the classroom the experiences of women across ethnic groups and social classes. Our time is spent working closely with students and teachers at all grade levels to assess needs, developing and field-testing materials, and conducting teacher and administrator inservice training both to increase awareness and to provide assistance in the utilization of materials. As a result of our work, we now have a wealth of experience in teacher training and curriculum development as well as one of the most impressive collections of instructional materials developed in the country by any one source.

Programs Singled Out for Demolition

Despite our accomplishments and our long-term commitments, the Berkeley Board of Education recently voted to eliminate the Women's Studies Program and the Ethnic Studies Programs. The administration, furthermore, has made a series of recent decisions regarding course offerings at Berkeley High School for next year which would result ultimately in eliminating the only women's studies course taught at the secondary level in Berkeley. This amounts to a grand sweep in which the programs for which we have fought so hard are not just cut back, but eliminated. Other positions in the district were eliminated as a result of cutbacks. However, the Women's and Ethnic Studies Programs were the only programs singled out for demolition.

The Board of Education cited financial problems as the reason for these decisions. The financial saving is hardly great. Taken together, the total personnel allotted for coordination of the Women's and Ethnic Studies Programs is a bare 2.3 people! This year's budget allotted each of our programs is $4,000. Given the three Ethnic Studies Programs, this adds up to $16,000. Furthermore, the Women's Studies Program received $55,000 this year in federal funding (WEFA) from which the District benefits.

We feel the explanation lies elsewhere. We submit these facts:
1. In spite of the existence since 1974 of an Ethnic Studies/Women's Studies Council, it has really been only in the last two
years that our efforts in developing curriculum and teacher inservice workshops have become collaborative. Last year we began the project of developing lessons for the 4th-6th grades on Black, Asian, and Chicanas for integration into the district Ethnic Studies/Social Studies instructional program. This year we are continuing this project, focusing on working with teachers to ensure use of the materials. Politically as well, we have just begun to present a united front. We agree that our program goals are similar, as is our resistance to administrative efforts to coopt or to circumvent our programs. Previously we were divided. In lean years we suffered program cutbacks. Now that we are together, we are dismantled!

2. The administration is saying that the job is done, at least to the degree that Ethnic and Women's Studies Programs are merited. We have no first-hand knowledge of the administration's strategy for picking up after these programs are eliminated, and continuing to improve the instructional program so that the Board’s goals can be addressed, e.g., “to support ... a program that serves the needs of students with varying interests and from varying ethnic and cultural backgrounds; ... that emphasizes the elimination of racial and sexual prejudice and the stereotyping of people.”

At a recent Board meeting (prior to the cutback meeting), the Ethnic and Women's Studies coordinators recommended that two requirements be added to existing English and history requirements: all students would take a single semester of Women's History and a single semester of Ethnic Studies (to be chosen from Asian American, African American, or Chicano Studies); all students would take a single semester of Women in Literature and a single semester of literature from the perspective of either Asian American, African American, or Chicano Studies.

The administration acted on this recommendation. Its decision is to require of all 10th-grade students a semester’s course on Ethnic History. Included would be Asian, African American, and Chicano Studies (six weeks apiece?). Excluded was Women’s Studies. It is our understanding that the rationale for the omission is the administration’s belief that the job in Women’s Studies is complete because materials on women are being developed by the Women's Studies Program this year for inclusion in the existing required American History curriculum. Apparently, this fills the bill.

Second-hand sources indicate that when the programs are dismantled, the instructional materials we have developed will be culled into a multiethnic curriculum bank, shepherded by a librarian whose efforts will increase the availability of the materials to the district’s classrooms. The administration expects this effort to be funded through an Ethnic Heritage proposal. The Ethnic and Women's Studies coordinators have spoken out against the proposal, describing it as fraudulent. Nevertheless, the résumés of several coordinators are included in the proposal, and one coordinator is quoted at length in the rationale for the project. Clearly, ethnic and women’s materials are scheduled to be integrated into a district-wide multicultural curriculum and handled by people in the mainstream. Possibly there will be a multiethnic coordinator. The pressure created by model programs which are semi-independent of the administration in terms of their commitment first and foremost to making progress in the struggle to end discrimination and segregation on the basis of sex and race, programs which were created as a result of community expression of need, is no longer to be tolerated. We wonder how much progress can be made, in this ongoing struggle, for equity in education without the assistance of people and programs retaining this commitment.

3. We have heard Board members and administrators say that the Women’s Studies Program was created as a result of the pressure of the women’s movement in the early seventies. Now that the pressure has eased, according to these people, the rationale for the Program no longer exists and the Program can be eliminated with minimal fuss. This view overlooks the fact that there is a strong educational rationale for a Women's Studies Program.
Amy Swerdlow

The Sarah Lawrence Summer Institute in Women's History

In the summer of 1976, 43 high school teachers from 16 states across the country participated at Sarah Lawrence College in an intensive three-week Summer Institute on the Integration of Women's History into the High School Curriculum. The Institute was conceived by the Committee on Women Historians of the American Historical Association, sponsored by the American Historical Association, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and co-sponsored and designed by the Graduate Program in Women's History at Sarah Lawrence.

Responding to a need among high school teachers for training and materials in women's history, which has proven to be one of the newest and most stimulating perspectives in the writing and teaching of history, the program not only helped teachers correct the biases and omissions of outdated history texts and lesson plans but also stimulated in them, and ultimately in their students, a deepened appreciation for the relevance of historical study.

The major aim of the Institute was to assist high school instructors to assimilate the scholarship and methodology that have emerged at advanced levels of research and education in women's history by providing an intensive learning experience combining course work, workshops, and tutorial projects conducted and guided by outstanding scholars and educators in the field.

The major results can be summarized as follows:

1. All but two of the teachers have begun to integrate women's history into their conventional history and social studies courses, and many have succeeded in initiating new or expanding already established special women's studies courses in their high schools.

2. Nine curriculum packets have been created and are now being edited for publication and dissemination by the American Historical Association to high school teachers across the country in 1978.

3. Over 70 percent of the teachers have been able to share the ideas and materials acquired at Sarah Lawrence with their colleagues and administrators through lectures, inservice courses, or discussion sessions.

4. Many of the teachers are also reaching their communities through lectures and talks at a variety of women's and educational organizations and through interviews and articles in their local newspapers.

The Institute has set in motion a dedicated network of teachers, inspired and energized by their introduction to women's history, who will go on for years sharing with their students, their colleagues, and the community at large their newly found appreciation for women's role in American history and their reawakened appreciation for history in general.

"Caliber and Intensity" of the Experience

The forty-three teachers described the impact of the Institute on their lives in a signed letter to Ms. Magazine published in November 1976:

_We will never be the same after three weeks together. The caliber and intensity of this experience have not only enormously expanded our knowledge of the role of women in American history, but, more importantly, they have affected how we view that role and ultimately ourselves and each other. None of us has been untouched or unchanged._

What were the factors that shaped the "caliber and intensity" of the experience at Sarah Lawrence? One was the conceptual framework for the study of women's history that was offered. Another was the teaching method combining lectures, seminars, and workshops aimed at encouraging and accelerating individual learning and group interaction. The third factor was the collective process by which the program was developed. The cooperative interaction among the Institute teachers, graduate student assistants, and the director of the program fostered a nonhier-