
GENERATING WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAMS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

THE USE OF HUMAN, PRINT AND AUDIO VISUAL RESOURCES

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Cette présentation va traiter des façons dont les enseignants peuvent se servir des revues spécialisées et d'autres ressources pour la recherche individuelle, comme matériel pour des présentations de groupe, comme modèle pour légitimer des expériences personnelles, et comme sources pour aider le développement d'une pensée critique au niveau de l'école secondaire.

I would like to speak briefly about some of the programs which are part of Women's Studies at the Toronto Board of Education and about the relationship between the healthy supply of resources (of which Women's Studies journals constitute an integral part) and our ability to generate and maintain healthy, growing programs.

There has been in the past decade an astronomical growth in the number of print, audio visual and human resources available to service a Women's Studies program. Lack of adequate resources is fortunately no longer a reasonable excuse for failure to initiate Women's Studies programming.

Organizationally, each of Toronto's 166 schools has a Women's Studies representative. This person may also serve as the Affirmative Action representative in the school. Representatives meet three times a year and are introduced to ideas for programming, films, and books which may be used to develop women's studies programs in the schools. Representatives also receive monthly mailings which include articles and notices of events of concern to women. Every year each school is responsible for each year developing an Action Plan in which goals and objectives for implementing Women's Studies are clearly stated.

There exists at the Toronto Board of Education both a Women's Liaison Committee and a Status of Women Committee whose responsibilities are to deal with Affirmative Action and issues such as sexist practices in the schools, sex role stereotyping and other issues of concern to women. Special funding was granted to every school library to develop a collection of non-sexist books and/or a Women's Studies collection. This money could not be used for any other purpose.

As the Assistant Co-ordinator of Social Studies for the Toronto Board of Education, I have specific responsibility for Women's and Labour Studies. There is also a full time Advisor on Affirmative Action.

What are some of the specific programs developed around Women's Studies in the schools?

First, there are specific units of study. One of these is a unit on Women's Suffrage designed for Grade 8 students as part of the Social Studies program. Several secondary schools have developed full courses of study on Women's Studies. Other schools have developed units of studies within larger history, sociology or literature courses.

In addition, there has been a considerable effort to use the arts to assist in the discussion of issues of concern to women. This winter, for example, 900 Grade 8 students saw "Fighting Days," the very fine play by Wendy Lill which told the story of suffragist Francis Benyon.

On May 10 of this year, 250 Toronto secondary school students will attend a one-day workshop entitled "Life After High School: Changing Roles in a Changing World." The conference will focus on the kinds of problems women will face after high school – at home, in the workplace, in the community and in the nation

– and on how women are organizing to solve their problems. A fall conference entitled "Expanding Your Horizons" has been held for the past two years for female students in Grades 7 – 13. This careers conference is designed to increase women's interest in mathematics and science, to foster awareness of career opportunities for women in math and science related fields, and to provide students with an opportunity to meet and form personal contacts with women working in traditionally male occupations.

Attended by over 400 students last year, participants had the opportunity to meet and talk with women who have entered fields such as cabinet making, chiropractics, industrial technology, geology and paleontology. In addition, Toronto and North York co-hosted an interboard conference for adults, teachers and support staff. The theme of this year's conference, held on 10 April 1985, was "Working Together: Towards Better Health Care for Women."

If the Ministry of Education grants approval, there will be an experimental course in Women's Studies run in the evenings as part of the Toronto Board of Education's Continuing Education Program. In addition, in September of 1985 a Women's and Labour Studies Resource Centre is scheduled to open at Monarch Park Secondary School.

Finally, the Women's Studies Department supports a program directed at young male students called "Boys for Babies." This is a brief hands-on course in basic infant care for pre-adolescent boys designed to help boys overcome their fears, doubts and preconceptions about gender roles and gender identities through learning to bathe, feed, diaper, play with and care for babies.

The basic goals of Women's Studies activities in Toronto Board schools are:

- to raise consciousness about sexism in curriculum and in school practice;
- to pose alternative models and a different frame of analysis for students;
- to rediscover the lost history, heritage and culture of women;
- to foster an appreciation of the ways in which women see and contribute to the world.

In light of the study released this week by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women which revealed the unrealistic way in which teenaged girls predict their future, it is clear that an additional goal of our Women's Studies program needs to be to prepare young women for the struggles which will lie ahead for them, both as individuals and as members of various collective groups.

The large and diverse feminist community in Toronto provides enormous support for Women's Studies programs. As guest speakers for classrooms and conference participants, this community has been well used.

The April Inter-board Conference drew upon 21 women working in the health care field in areas as diverse as naturopathy, midwifery and public health. City School, an alternative secondary school in the west end of the city, sponsors an annual celebration of International Women's Day at which dozens of activists from various sectors of the Women's Movement have volunteered time and expertise in each of the last five years.

The Toronto Board of Education has published a Speakers' Directory which lists over 140 women who will speak to classes on issues ranging from Affirmative Action to Women and Law.

Film, photo, record, slide and poster collections on issues of concern to women are now growing and offer valuable supplementary sources for Women's Studies programs.

Finally, it is the burgeoning supply of Women's Studies journals that allows us to demonstrate to our students, especially those at the secondary level, that Women's Studies issues are serious, ongoing, and of interest to ordinary people and scholars alike. Of course, the journals are used extensively by teachers as resource material and as background reading. Some of the journals are also used by students for research projects.

The simple and understandable format of journals such as *HERizons* makes Women's Studies issues accessible to students whose reading level would prevent them from using some of the more sophisticated sources. Reviews of books and films analyzed from a feminist perspective are useful to school librarians and to those who purchase resources for Boards of Education.

As we attempt to integrate consciousness about Women's issues across the curriculum, in the arts and maths and sciences as well as in the humanities and social sciences, it is necessary that the flow of ideas and information contained in both the scholarly and popular Women's Studies journals continues. And as the assault on feminism and feminist practice is intensified by groups such as Real Women, it is vital for us in all sectors of the educational establishment to retain this most important forum for reflection, speculation, news, and debate.

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Myra Novogrodsky (left) with Frieda Forman, Somer Brodribb and Shelagh Wilkinson.