

Women educators

Women who work in women's programming face a difficult uphill battle. Let us examine their position. For the most part, they are deeply committed to improving the situation for women learners. Yet they are operating within an institutional structure which does not give validity to their priorities. Their concerns remain outside the mainstream of what institutional policy-makers sanction. Further, most women educators have not learned how to work 'successfully' within institutions which are competitive, hierarchical, and bureaucratic. Books such as *The Managerial Woman* and *Men and Women of the Corporation* show how the socialization of women works against them. Women teaching women's programs must recognize the obstacles they face and work towards creating a collective and collaborative response to these obstacles. Most of them who are developing programs for women are operating alone, in a vacuum. They are isolated even within their own institutions. Their positions are often slighted or at best considered to be a magnanimous gesture on the part of the administrators. Caught in this bind the woman educator inevitably adopts the 'rules' of the institution in which she works. In short, she becomes institutionalized. She falls into the trap of working competitively, and refuses to share information with other women educators as freely as she could. She may be reluctant to challenge some of the structures of the institution in order to improve the situation for women learners. In short, if she operates within the institution and adopts the institutional style of operation she will fail in her effectiveness as an educator of these women students with their unique needs.

It is difficult for women educators to counteract all the pressures caused by institutional structures as well as a tightening economy. As the economy gets worse, the 'special' funding which many women's programs have been getting will be cut back or cut off. In fact, all over Canada this is beginning to happen. Again, this is because such services are seen as 'frills'. It was fine to indulge women while the funds were available, but when funds are tight women's programs are the first to go. However, the declining enrolments of the school-aged population is working somewhat to the advantage of women. Educational administrators are beginning to realize that women can be a potential 'market' to fill empty classrooms. But they must also realize that these classrooms cannot be filled unless women learners have the necessary support services to free their time and energy for studies.

What can women educators do?

They have a significant contribution to make to the mature woman student who is re-entering the learning situation. It is extremely important that these educators work together. They must collectively design support systems and actively co-operate with each other to overcome barriers and to design strategies for change. Such lateral supportive 'networks' may appear counter-institutional, but in my estimation they are the only methods that will work.

If women can work together as teachers and students — and for most of us that means we are simultaneously teaching and learning — then we will help women to take control of their lives. More importantly, women teaching women in first-step programs will effect changes in society that will benefit us all.

A Dwelling Place Revisited



I walked there today
to retrieve valueless cellar belongings
abandoned in our lonely quarrelsome haste
at leaving
I walked there
among the lilies of the valley
aborting
the bruised
anguish of
a budded sapling
twisted in sudden savage uprooting

I stopped there
in the neglected
seedy
garden
while memories of
seven lean years
in that crowded tenement
flowed from the land
through my sorrowing feet
like an electric current
not reaching
the mind but
echoing
within my body

O mocking
mocking
echoes

Shirley Lynn



Realism



It is the barren season
that heralds the long
sleep of winter

then the soft
pure snow shroud
muffles the polite
protests of the dying

animals slumber
content in unhallowed
winter graves
mindless of the bitter pattern
of renewal

Yet now
now
old scars open in shrill winds
limbs falter and fall apart
in acid rain

weary share-croppers
reckon up the dreaded cost
of summer's love
and autumn's yield

encircled by rods
of stubble
I am
wary of the ploughman

Shirley Lynn

