

# Women's Studies in a College Prep Program

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## Les Etudes de la femme dans un programme collégial

Comment introduire un cours sur la femme dans un programme qui prépare au 'Collège communautaire' (Cégep), profil 'professionnel'. Les étudiants s'inscriront au programme collégial normal et de là iront sur le marché du travail. Les bandes-vidéo et le manuel tirés de *Women's Studies: A Multi-media Approach* ont été particulièrement utiles, stimulant d'excellentes discussions de groupe concernant les rôles masculins et féminins.

Last January I included the workbook *Women's Studies: A Multi-media Approach* into a course that I was teaching for one semester. The workbook had just been published and seemed appropriate for use in connection with certain issues in the 'Art of Learning' course. I found the resource material in the workbook extremely helpful. There is an extensive, current bibliography and a list of films to go with each section of the workbook. In addition the authors have reprinted certain articles for use in the classroom. These would be hard to track down if a teacher was left with just the titles but here they can be easily reproduced and handed out as discussion topics.

The objectives of the 'Art of Learning' course are to examine the nature of the learning process, to establish the prerequisites for learning, and to isolate the factors that prevent or promote learning. The effects of sex-role stereotyping touch all these concerns and must be dealt with.

We had a normal enrolment in the course, which is twenty-five students with an almost equal number of males and females in the class. The students represent a cross-section of society and most of them are in their early twenties, although there were several older students and one much younger person in the class. A number of the women had been married and were now separated or divorced and had one or two children to look after. Most of the students attend school by virtue of grants or loans and none has completed high school. At the outset it became apparent that stereotypic behaviour and thinking patterns were well estab-

lished, as they are in most classes. Naturally each topic we discussed was addressed from a traditional, conservative model of male and female behaviour. These students had come back to school to equip themselves for a brighter future, but they thought that this meant continuing with their usual response to life. They expected that their existing models would serve them in the future as they had in the past, and serve them well. However, as the course progressed, lifestyles and traditional reactions to problems were examined. Alternative lifestyles and behaviours were analysed and some students began to see the benefit of change.

One goal that I had set before the course was to attempt to move students, both men and women, *toward* training for non-traditional jobs. This proved to be most difficult even though the material in the workbook is conducive to changing attitudes. By and large students start this course with the idea of entering the college, after they have completed their academic upgrading, and taking one of the traditional college programs. Consequently the skills being developed are usually extremely traditional and, because of this, limited. The most successful argument for change is financial gain. But of course it is more beneficial for women to train themselves in non-traditional skills than it is for men. The videotapes in the workbook give many alternative lifestyles for women but at this level (College Prep.) it is the people in the counselling department who have the enormous task of helping these students if they are to be much different from their parents in choosing their vocations. As the course progressed it became obvious that a supportive network of classroom teaching, resource material, and counselling services will have to be established if we are to help students choose from a wider variety of options.

The ideas in the 'Women and Work' section presented problems to both sexes but the most controversial issue was the idea of *women in management*. While there was a question of, and an antagonistic attitude towards, most authority figures, the presence of a woman *boss* amplified the antagonism. Time-constraints often prevented us from pursuing to the end the positions taken by various members of the group.

But even if the problems were not solved at least they were identified. By watching these videotapes the students had to clarify their reactions to the new reality of women in the workforce in jobs that are not usually accepted as 'female'. The introduction of such discussion is important in a course on the learning process. This could become one of the most basic changes in society and will certainly affect us all.

Another section of the workbook that we used in some depth was on the subject of violence, and student reaction to this was frightening. The cynicism and bitterness expressed by women who had experienced marriage breakdowns was overwhelming. But both male and female students said they would be extremely reluctant to become involved in family disputes. Nearly everyone seemed to know of a wife- or child-battering incident. Almost always, the authorities appeared in the worst possible light. Qualified speakers came in to talk to us and to give us information, and follow-up sessions on an individual basis served to verify the student experiences that had been shared in the classroom. What emerged from these discussions was the total inadequacy of existing laws and legislation. People caught up in this situation are trapped as the videotapes show and as student response proves. Discussion seems to be fruitless until the rules of the game are changed. Causal factors may be identified and examined but little change will occur. Certainly the use of the material in the workbook provokes thought and demands that we find out more about this topic and press for changes in legislation.

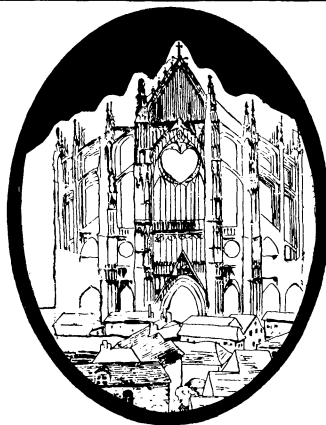
On the topic of interpersonal relationships and the future of the family the workbook provided a more relaxing and humorous experience. Invariably, the discussions dealt with the changes *other* people will have to make. When comments were turned around and directed back to the speaker, the result

was consternation. We quickly realized that the problem always belongs to someone else. Human nature does not change easily. The amount of preparation still needed for the new society is enormous. Yesterday's models will not do, and although they were never fully accepted, they have not been fully rejected. By and large our group did not want to turn the *status quo* upside down. We conceded that change was necessary but we do not know how to create new role models for ourselves. We agreed that we would all probably drift into slightly altered lifestyles, or at best negotiate them as we went along.

The topics of role models, self-image, social skills, and self-confidence were referred to many times. Naturally, the 'Art of Learning' is about personal growth and development. The focus of the course has to be in this direction, and any change in this area will eventually manifest itself elsewhere. To this extent the course was successful as the various members interacted with each other. Some people with rigid viewpoints became slightly more moderate; voluble members learned to listen and those who identify themselves in a survey as 'undecided' or 'no opinion' heard some very good arguments and began to make decisions. The *Women's Studies* kit helped in this specific area. It shows role models who are in fact confident and we see concrete examples of women who have changed their lifestyle and who have altered their attitudes. It is this practical approach that I appreciated most about the workbook and I intend to use it and the videotapes again when courses call for the inclusion of material about social and attitudinal change.

*Women's Studies: A Multimedia Approach*, and the videotapes used in the workbook are available from Ontario Educational Communications Authority (O.E.C.A.), P.O. Box 200, Terminal 'A', Toronto, Ontario.

## Nouvelles de France



Histoire du féminisme français du moyen âge jusqu'à nos jours

'Quinze siècles de l'histoire d'une protestation aussi ancienne que la pensée, une histoire tour à tour sereine et passionnée, grave et légère, besogneuse et festive, une histoire arrachée aux pesanteurs des mythes, des doutes et de la mauvaise foi. . . '

C'est une gageure que de vouloir en quelque cinq cents pages survoler quinze siècles de féminisme en France. Il est vrai que ceux qui préparent les textes scolaires ne se sont jamais fait faute d'en faire autant avec toute la production littéraire pendant cette période. Mais si, devant ces derniers, on s'inter-

roge parfois sur le bien-fondé de l'exercice, ici on ne peut que féliciter les auteurs d'avoir entrepris, et dans l'ensemble réussi, cette synthèse, somme toute, assez osée. Il faut surtout leur savoir gré de leur modestie. Aucune prétention dans la présentation; le livre constitue une mise au point des connaissances actuelles, se veut une sorte de *vademecum* ou de *trésor* et ne prétend nullement être le fruit de recherches originales, bien que celles-ci aient aussi leur part dans le résultat. Aucun désir donc d'épater par l'introduction de textes trop obscurs, par la découverte de quelques manuscrits oubliés au fond de la réserve de la Bibliothèque Nationale, les auteurs s'étant contentés, à quelques exceptions près, de nous rappeler des noms que nous devrions déjà connaître.