Gender Equity and Schooling: Linking Research and Policy

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In Canada over the last 25 years, a variety of approaches to gender equity and schooling has developed. The history of educational research and policy making on this topic reveals how the two activities have been linked, primarily through the work of teachers and their organizations. Although sex-role socialization theory has been most influential in shaping government policies and pedagogical practices, teachers also have drawn on a wider body of research to inform their work in schools.

Au cours des 25 dernières années au Canada, diverses approches ont été élaborées en matière d'égalité des sexes à l'école. L'histoire de la recherche en éducation et de l'établissement des politiques sur ce sujet révèle comment les deux activités sont reliées, surtout à travers le travail des enseignants et des établissements auxquels ils sont rattachés. Bien que la théorie de l'apprentissage social des rôles sexuels ait beaucoup influencé l'élaboration des politiques gouvernementales et des pratiques pédagogiques, les enseignants se fondent sur un corpus de recherche plus vaste pour orienter leur travail à l'école.

Feminist research has had a noticeable effect on education policy makers.[1] Although a significant portion of the most important and influential research has come from the field of women's studies, feminist scholars in Faculties of Education as well as teacher-researchers[2] have also made key contributions. Indeed, the nature and purpose of feminist research in education, whether it occurs inside or outside Faculties of Education, is such that no artificial polarity between research and policy is created; rather, there is a conscious linking of the two — research informs policy making, and policy successes and failures inform research. At the same time, some specific types and forms of feminist research have been more widely influential in the policy arena than have others. The recent history of research and policy making illustrates both how these two activities are linked, largely through the efforts of female educators in a variety of roles, and why some research approaches are more acceptable to and are used more often by policy makers than are others.

SEX ROLES, STEREOTYPING, AND SCHOOLING

For centuries, access to education has been seen as a central policy initiative in the struggle for women's equality. With the resurgence of the women's movement in Canada during the late 1960s, education was again identified as a

key policy domain. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (1970) listed education as one of nine public policy areas "particularly germane to the status of women" (p. ix). By using the contemporary research on sex-role socialization, the Commission and many women's groups argued that sex-role stereotyping, the lack of strong female role-models for girls, and inadequate career counselling were key factors contributing to women's inequality in Canada. For the best part of the next two decades, this type of analysis, as part of a larger liberal feminist[3] agenda, shaped policy making around women's education, and resulted in remarkably similar initiatives across the country.

The earliest initiatives centred on sex-role stereotyping in textbooks. During the 1970s several research studies were conducted (*Ad Hoc* Committee Respecting the Status of Women in the North York System, 1975; Batcher, Brackstone, Winter, & Wright, 1975; Cullen, 1972; Women in Teaching, 1975). They relied heavily on a quantitative approach to stereotyping and reported how many times women and men appeared in stories and illustrations, and in what types of roles in the work force and family. All studies came to the same conclusion. Textbooks were biased. Batcher et al. (1975), for example, concluded from their review of all the reading series approved for use in Grades 4 to 6 in Ontario schools, that none could be termed "positive-image" or "non-sexist" (p. i). A North York study found ample evidence of sexism in the readers used in Grades 1 to 3 as well as "shocking evidence of various other kinds of rigid stereotyping and of racism" (*Ad Hoc* Committee, 1975, p. 16). Policy was developed in response to this research. By 1987 every Canadian province had guidelines for textbook selection and an evaluation grid designed to eliminate sex bias in learning materials (Julien, 1987, p. 53).[4]

Closely tied to the concern for sex-role stereotyping in textbooks was an emerging assessment of women's absence from the curriculum in general (Pierson, 1995). Beginning in the 1970s, a range of lesson plans and units was developed to assist teachers. For example, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), through its Lesson Aids Service, published a variety of kits and curriculum packages with titles such as "Women in the Community," "Famous Canadian Women," "Early Canadian Women," and "From Captivity to Choice: Native Women in Canadian Literature." The Ontario Ministry of Education (1977) published a resource guide for teachers called *Sex-Role Stereotyping and Women's Studies,* which included units of study, resource lists, and teaching suggestions for teachers at all grade levels. In 1977, the British Columbia Department of Education published *Women's Studies: A Resource Guide for Teachers.* At the same time, other government agencies, institutions, and commercial publishers began producing materials for classroom use. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, for example, compiled *The Women's Kit* (1974), a collection of print and audio-visual materials. So began the first stage of curriculum reform, a clear illustration of what has been called "the add women and stir"

model, an approach still prevalent today. Information about women continues to be added to existing curricula in the form of individual lessons or a special unit.

Education policies also were shaped in response to women's failure to enrol in mathematics, sciences, and technology courses, and women's apparent lack of interest in non-traditional work in the trades. This area of concern has been pursued vigorously in the policy domain because it maps onto the discourse about education for global competitiveness and schooling for the new economic realities. Again, based on sex-role theory, it was argued that girls lacked effective role models and received inadequate career counselling, and hence were socialized to consider only a narrow range of occupations. The policy response to this "problem" has been massive. As Julien (1987) discovered,

The breadth of guidance materials made available by the provinces to female students concerning career options is enormous. Preparing young women for the new technology, broadening their career goals to include options that may have seemed unavailable to them, and introducing non-traditional occupations as career alternatives, are subjects of a seemingly constant flow of literature. (p. 5)

Across Canada, teacher federations, school boards, ministries of education and labour/employment, women's directorates/secretariats, and women's groups such as Women Into Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology, and the Women Inventors' Project developed posters, pamphlets, videotapes, films, and workshops for girls, urging them to be all that they could be. Role modelling and mentoring programs, speakers' bureaus, girls-only career days, and girl-friendly computer courses were developed. The extent of these types of responses is illustrated in a 1992 survey of Canadian mathematics and science programs for girls and women conducted by the Nova Scotia Women's Directorate. This survey yielded information about 92 separate programs as well as a conclusion that there were many more programs not reporting (Armour & Associates, 1992, p. 5).

Across Canada, the dominant approach to gender-equity policies in education, and even then implemented unevenly and inconsistently, remains the relatively shallow one of sex-role stereotyping first articulated in the 1970s. A recent report from the Maritime Provinces Education Foundation (1991), for example, concluded that in education there was

a) the need to promote a better self-image among female students beginning in the earliest grades; b) the need to expose female students to a broader range of career options, especially in the field of mathematics, science and technology; and c) the need to recognize and build on the positive effect that role modelling has on female students. (pp. i–ii)

Ontario's recent Royal Commission on Learning (1994) identified sex-role stereotyping, the absence of women in physics, engineering, and technology, and

the lack of women's awareness about the range of career opportunities available as key gender-equity issues (pp. 42–43). These conclusions are no different from those in the 1970 report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.

Why sex-role socialization theory remains dominant in education can in part be explained by the fact that it is a form of critique easily accommodated within existing state arrangements and liberal notions of equality of opportunity. It sits very comfortably with a view of the state as a relatively benign institution, and one that is inherently fair. Coupled with this explanation is the force of a common understanding of teaching, an understanding shaped overwhelmingly by educational psychology and its emphasis on the individual. In this context, each student must be helped to realize his/her full potential and becomes responsible for his/her individual successes or failures. Each student is seen only as an individual, outside the social relations of sex, class, ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation. The gender reform and non-sexist strategies arising from the sex-role framework emphasize changing *individuals* and hence present no fundamental challenge to either the state or the schools.

CHALLENGING SEX-ROLE EXPLANATIONS

Although the forms of policy development and implementation outlined above are still dominant today, some significant shifts in analysis and action have begun to develop. By the mid-1980s, a cogent critique of earlier research, and hence of the policies based on that research, emerged. Feminist scholars began to point out that many policies and practices of non-sexist education were based on assumptions that girls were "lesser boys" and the goal was to make girls more like boys, to make women "less defective men." That is, by adopting a non-sexist approach, teachers were, in essence, inadvertently reinforcing the notion of women's inferiority because girls were being pushed to be like boys or men. As Gaskell, McLaren, and Novogrodsky (1989) point out, interventions based on sex-role theory, especially role-modelling programs, "leave unchallenged the gender bias in schools . . . [and are based] on the assumption that girls must be changed. Men are the model of achievement, and compared to men, women don't measure up" (p. 16). It was also observed that role-modelling programs, self-esteem workshops, and the like are based on the notion that individual girls must be helped. These types of programs rarely take account of the very real material circumstances and barriers young women will face. Even when these programs acknowledge barriers, the solution is to "empower" each girl to overcome the obstacles rather than to challenge the obstacles themselves.

The sex-role stereotyping approach also was criticized from the radical or cultural feminist position for devaluing women's "special" contributions, namely nurturing, care, and concern. The work of Noddings (1984), Martin (1985), and, most influentially, Gilligan (1982) became important in policy debates as some

women began to demand the revaluing of the feminine and women's ways of knowing, caring, and teaching. How this new position intersects with the development of education policy is best seen in the arguments brought forward to support more women in positions of leadership in education.

Although it had long been obvious that women were underrepresented numerically and proportionally in administrative posts, the argument that women brought special attributes to leadership, that women were better listeners and team players, more democratic principals, and often were more effective in managing change (Shakeshaft, 1989), seems to have been more effective than simple justice or fairness arguments based on numbers and the concept of equal rights. What is at work here is women's use of the "different but equal" strategy. During the 1980s and early 1990s, female educators lobbied for more women in educational administration based on the research that suggested women bring different (and by implication better) perspectives and strengths to leadership tasks (Joly, McIntyre, Staszenski, & Young, 1992; Tabin & Coleman, 1993). In Ontario during the 1980s, the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO) and others lobbying for change tied the radical/cultural feminist arguments about women's special abilities to the liberal feminist arguments about the importance of students seeing women in leadership roles in schools. The eventual success of this lobby led to an amendment to *The Education Act* in 1988 which allowed the Minister of Education to require school boards to implement employment-equity programs with respect to the promotion of women to positions of added responsibility. The Minister of Education indicated that, as a goal, 50% of the occupational categories of vice-principal, principal, and supervisory officer should be held by women by the year 2000. However, since the election of a Progressive Conservative government in Ontario in 1995, all references to employment equity have been removed from the statutes, a step the teacher federations regard as a setback. Nonetheless, it appears that many school boards, having begun the process of examining their hiring practices and policies, will continue with some form of employment equity at the local level.

Although research studies (Baudoux, 1995; Gill, 1995; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1992; Rees, 1990) suggest there is a long way to go in every province before women are well represented in administration, there is no doubt that women's access to leadership positions in schools is a well-established issue and women are likely to continue to enter into administrative positions with school boards. By 1990, eight provincial ministries of education and school boards in six provinces had some form of equal-opportunity, affirmative-action, or employment-equity policy (Rees, 1990, p. 85) designed to improve women's representation in administrative positions. The prevalence of these policies attests to the power of female teachers' political lobbying and the combined influence of liberal and radical/cultural feminist research that united the discourses of equal opportunity and women's "special attributes."

The concepts of "a different voice," "women's ways of knowing," and "women-centred learning" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) have had other effects. Responding specifically to the research of Gilligan (1982) and her colleagues (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990), a feminist girls' school, The Linden School, was recently established in Toronto (Moore & Goudie, 1995). In Edmonton, the Nellie McClung Program provides an alternative junior high school for girls within the public system (Sanford-Smith, 1996). Single-sex mathematics and science classes are being seriously considered or are already in operation in a number of jurisdictions across Canada (Conrad, 1996). The practice of women-centred learning is particularly obvious in specific job training or re-entry programs such as Women Into Trades and Technology (Gedies, 1994; Pierson, 1995) and in some literacy programs (Lloyd, 1992).

The focus on women's experiences has led to a number of studies of sexual harassment and of other forms of violence against female students (Larkin, 1994; Staton & Larkin, 1992, 1993), and the development and implementation of several projects designed to curb that violence. The Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) (1990b), for example, published a curriculum document called *Thumbs Down: A Classroom Response to Violence Towards Women* and several provincial federations and school boards have also provided materials for the use of classroom teachers. In Ontario, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), the Ontario Women's Directorate, and the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1995) co-operated in the production of a teaching resource called *The Joke's Over: Student to Student Sexual Harassment in Secondary Schools.* Staton and Larkin (1996) have produced a resource for elementary school teachers called *Harassment Hurts: Sex-Role Stereotyping and Sexual Harassment Elementary School Resources.*

In a unique study, the CTF (1990a), in co-operation with its provincial affiliates, used teachers to conduct a national, school-based, action research study of girls which resulted in the publication of *A Cappella: A Report on the Realities, Concerns, Expectations and Barriers Experienced by Adolescent Women in Canada.* As a result of this report, follow-up activities to educate teachers and youth workers about the problems of adolescent girls, especially concerning self-esteem, harassment, and violence, have been undertaken (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 1993a, 1993b). At the same time, and most unfortunately, much policy currently being developed by ministries of education and teacher federations around the safe schools issue ignores the gendered dimension of violence, whether that violence is directed towards teachers or students (L. Robertson, 1996). Sexual harassment policies are unevenly developed across Canada and are non-existent in many locations (Rees, 1990). Where policy exists, it is often inadequate. As H.-J. Robertson (1993) discovered in her analysis of the assumptions underpinning policy and contract language, there is only "a superficial

recognition that sexual harassment is the abuse of power in a system in which power has been distributed by gender" (p. 47) and "a conflicted view of culpability and responsibility in the event of harassment" (p. 46).

Ironically, the revaluing of women's contributions and experiences has also led to some small initiatives involving boys' education. Canadian schools have long encouraged boys to take home economics or family studies classes and some provinces make this mandatory. In New Brunswick and Quebec, for example, industrial arts/introductory technology and home economics courses are compulsory for both girls and boys (Julien, 1987). Another intervention occurs in the form of a program for pre-adolescent boys ranging in age from about 10 to 13. Known as "Boys for Babies" and sponsored by the Toronto Board of Education, the program description suggests that:

Through learning to bathe, feed, diaper, play with and comfort real babies, boys overcome their doubts, fears and preconceptions about gender roles. The program validates and rewards caring and nurturing feelings and behaviour in a boys-only context just at the age when boys are most urgently concerned with learning how to "be a man." . . . The boys are allowed and encouraged by their peers, as well as by the instructor, to demonstrate gentleness, care, and sensitivity to the babies' needs, and they see that this in no way contradicts or diminishes their masculinity. (Wells, 1991, pp. 8–9)

Although mentoring programs and career days based on sex-role analysis often encouraged girls to be more like boys, this program took the opposite approach and encouraged boys to be more like girls.

However, as the example of "Boys for Babies" illustrates, although the research and policy approach which reclaims and revalues women's lives has some important benefits, it also has the effect of emphasizing women's difference and "otherness" from men as well as essentializing women's experiences (Fuss, 1989).

MacKinnon (1987) puts the case against the "different but equal" strategy well. She argues that Gilligan's emphasis on

the affirmative rather than the negative valuation of that which has accurately distinguished women from men, . . . mak[es] it seem as though those attributes, with their consequences, really are somehow ours, rather than what male supremacy has attributed to us for its own use. For women to affirm difference, when difference means dominance, as it does with gender, means to affirm the qualities and characteristics of powerlessness. (pp. 38–39)

ANTI-SEXIST APPROACHES

Another body of research suggests that analyses of sexism in schooling which emphasize sex-role stereotyping rely on an oversimplified understanding of complex issues and hide the ways the gendered nature of education is played out

in the content and practice of schooling (Gaskell, 1992; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Ng, Staton, & Scane, 1995; Thorne, 1993; Walkerdine, 1990). Classrooms do not exist in isolation and individual teachers, however well equipped with curriculum packages and video-tapes, cannot alone eliminate sexism. Individual efforts to provide a non-sexist education are doomed to failure, for as Briskin (1990) argues,

The goal of "non-sexism" (non-racism or non-classism) reflects a belief embedded in liberalism that discrimination is somehow incidental to the system — a result of prejudice — and that good attitudes and intent can erase that discrimination and make sex, race and class irrelevant, especially in the classroom. Such a view conceals rather than reveals structural inequality and institutional limits. (p. 12)

A focus on the systemic nature of sexism and schooling and on developing antisexist, as opposed to non-sexist, pedagogies is growing.

An explicit example of this can be found in the reasoning behind the Toronto Board of Education's parallel four-day retreats on sexism for selected female and male high school students, which began in 1991. In separate conference centres, male students, teachers, and facilitators and female students, teachers, and facilitators meet for three days to discuss a range of topics including sexism in schools, sexuality, homophobia, violence against women, and family life. On the fourth day, male and female participants meet together to share their experiences and to plan for follow-up activities in their schools. The organizers of the retreat, although acknowledging the importance of equal opportunity and compensatory programs for girls and women, argued for the importance of going beyond efforts to create gender equity within existing social structures. They wanted to help students and teachers

to begin to understand some difficult concepts: One is that sexism is a form of systemic discrimination which ensures the power of one group in society over another group. Sexism isn't just what individuals say or do, it relates to the entire way we've set up a male-dominated society. The second is the perplexing idea that patriarchy is a system not only of oppression of women, but one that has a contradictory impact on men as well: men's privileges and power are linked to the pain and alienation suffered by men themselves. (Novogrodsky, Kaufman, Holland, & Wells, 1992, pp. 69–70)

As well, the organizers worked hard to create experiences for participants that would not disempower young women by creating a victimization mind-set but rather would emphasize women's collective ability to work for change through women's movements. Similarly, efforts were made to ensure that young men were not bogged down with feelings of guilt but could see ways of doing anti-sexist work in support of women and in challenging the sexist nature of society. All of this work was done within a context that situated gender in relation to race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Novogrodsky et al., 1992).

The possibility of a policy shift towards a more fundamentally critical anti-sexist approach can also be seen in the validation draft of the gender-equity support document recently issued by Ontario's Ministry of Education and Training (1994). Called *Engendering Equity* and reflecting some of the more recent debates in post-structuralist feminist scholarship about education (see Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1994), this document calls for a transformed curriculum that is much more than "adding on" women. It notes that an inclusive curriculum "means rethinking the content, form, and context of curriculum" and requires that the "causes and patterns of sexism, racism, and all forms of discrimination and prejudice are explored and challenged" (p. 4). The document critiques the Ministry's own earlier approaches based on the sex-role stereotyping analytical framework and argues for antisexist strategies that name inequitable power relations between men and women and take into account the whole social context and the intersections of race, class, and sexual orientation with gender (pp. 11–12). Given the election of the Progressive Conservative government in Ontario in 1995, it is not clear that *Engendering Equity* will ever receive final approval and be distributed widely throughout the province's schools.

A recent Ontario debate over textbooks contrasts the dominant liberal individualist position with a more radical alternative. In 1987, the FWTAO published a study of school readers as a follow-up to the study it had commissioned in 1975. The study concluded that:

The ideal Reader world would be one where young people would be welcomed as cherished members of the human race and are denied nothing because of the accident of their birth. (Batcher, Winter, & Wright, 1987, p. 43)

It was suggested that readers should show women and men "in equal, caring and joyful partnerships" and that "human existence is changeable if we want it to be" (p. 43). The implication is that if educators just want something to happen badly enough, it will happen. Repo (1988) takes issue with the perspective adopted by the FWTAO study. Noting that the report recommends that readers portray a world in which all problems have been eliminated, she goes on to argue that:

The real world out there is still sexist, racist and class-biased. Surely the challenge for School Readers which are trying to combat these inequalities is to both to [*sic*] clarify actual experience and to show protagonists struggling to change this world. This means that inequalities have to, in the same sense, be named. . . . The resourceful girl protagonist has to be seen functioning—not in some egalitarian paradise—[*sic*] but in a world where men are more powerful (and some of them more powerful than others), where she may not easily find role models and where the prince of her choice may indeed need reeducation. (Repo, 1988, pp. 150–151)

At stake here is a vision of education. Many teachers, including feminist teachers, have accepted uncritically that the purpose of schooling is to maximize

individual development and to help students fit happily into the world. Too few teachers recognize the political agenda of compliance underpinning this position and consequently they engage in gender-equity initiatives that do little to aid in a fundamental transformation of schooling. Gaskell et al. (1989) suggest an alternative:

Children should be helped to see the world as it is, while being encouraged to develop a critical consciousness, a sense of active and co-operative participation that equips them to engage in the struggle for social change. (p. 38)

This debate about textbooks and teaching also provides evidence of a rich and flourishing feminist scholarship. As understandings of systemic sexism, gender relations, and patriarchy are developed, these understandings are applied to schooling, and are re-worked and refined through research on classroom interactions and language use, teaching practices, evaluation methods, gender dynamics among students, among teachers, and between teachers and students, sexual harassment in schools, and other topics. The feminist research on women's absence from curriculum content and the new scholarship on women evident in the traditional disciplines has affected debates about what knowledge is of most worth and what should be included in core and elective subjects.

It is possible to be guardedly optimistic about positive linkages between research and policy making on gender and education for a number of reasons. One has to do with the very nature of feminist research. Sydie (1987) has observed that feminist social scientists are the true granddaughters of the founding fathers such as Weber and Marx, for it is the feminists who continue to observe the principle that the purpose of research is to understand and solve social problems. That is, feminist educational research is, for the most part, openly and consciously about eliminating sexism and contributing to the realization of gender equity. Because feminist research is often about making change, it is not surprising that research and policy linkages are forged.

Furthermore, feminist scholars tend to be education activists as well, and hence their research informs their practice and their practice informs their research. The women's movement, too, through its lobbying efforts, focuses the attention of policy makers on gender, and the "femocrats" (Eisenstein, 1991) are instrumental in transforming research findings into policy statements. Finally, it should not escape attention that the majority of teachers are women, albeit white and middle-class, with a specific stake in understanding and re-working gender relations. Many research-policy linkages come from the work of teachers.

TEACHERS WORKING FOR CHANGE

Through analysis and political organizing, the Canadian women's movement has put women's inequality on the agenda in this country (Vickers, Rankin, &

Apelle, 1993). However, the broader community-based or grass-roots women's movement, busy with struggles around employment, poverty, child care, violence against women, reproductive rights, and a host of other issues, has devoted remarkably little direct attention to girls' elementary or secondary schooling. Ironically, though, governments and other institutions have responded to many demands of the women's movement by suggesting that the solution is to be found in education. Eschewing structural or systemic explanations, governments identify sexism as being simply a "wrong" attitude and target education, especially the schooling of children, as the means to change this attitude. As a result, governments often pass weak legislation or develop "soft" gender equity through education policies, designed to offend no one. However, the importance of laws and policies, inadequate as they might be, should not be underestimated. They provide a necessary legitimation for educators to raise gender issues in the schools and offer teachers an opportunity to work out the practical meaning of equity. Indeed, implementation efforts in the schools have been left primarily to female teachers working individually (Coulter, 1995), in small groups or networks, with their school boards or federations, or, more commonly, in all these ways. It is teachers, through their practice, who provide many of the real links between research/theory and policy.

Julien (1987) found that teacher federations are the most active agents in providing teachers with the knowledge and tools to understand and implement gender-equity policies. One teachers' federation, the FWTAO, merits special mention because it has had since its birth in 1918 the explicit goal of improving the status of female public elementary school teachers and the situation of women generally (French, 1968; Labatt, 1993; Staton & Light, 1987). FWTAO members, together with other female teachers, have been active participants in struggles to achieve child-welfare legislation, minimum wages for women, maternity leave, equal pay for equal work, and other social reforms (Prentice et al., 1988). More recently, in the early 1970s, the FWTAO was instrumental in the establishment of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and it continues to support the organization to this day (Staton & Light, 1987). The FWTAO has focused much of its energy on promoting opportunities for women in educational leadership and on developing materials to combat sex-role stereotyping in the classroom. Within this federation, liberal feminism, combined with elements of the ethics of care taken from radical/cultural feminism, has proven dominant.

The history of the BCTF Status of Women Program provides another illustration of work through teacher federations. In 1969 a small group of female teachers in British Columbia, influenced by the growth of women's liberation, began to talk about their shared concerns with respect to sex discrimination in education. In that year they formed a group called "Women in Teaching." In 1970 the group wrote to the BCTF urging the executive to read and discuss the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women which had appeared

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that year. As a result, the BCTF established a task force on sex discrimination in school systems. One member of Women in Teaching, Linda Shuto, was asked to join that task force. Shuto found that "the members of the task force had considerable differences of opinion concerning the nature and extent of sex discrimination in our school system" (Shuto, 1974, p. 1). She ended up submitting a minority report to the BCTF's Executive Committee when the task force reported in 1971. The Executive, apparently more sympathetic to her consciously feminist analysis, accepted the minority report and then struck a new task force in 1972. The second task force reported in 1973, and five of the seven recommendations sent to the 1973 Annual Meeting of the BCTF passed. As a result, the BCTF extended the life of the Status of Women Task Force and hired a full-time staff person to work in the area. Shuto was the first person seconded to this position for a fixed term of two years. Over the years several other female teachers have been seconded to the program, which is now well entrenched in the BCTF and operates at the local and provincial levels.

From its inception, the BCTF Status of Women Program consciously emphasized two goals. The first was to find and educate local teachers who would build the Status of Women Program in each school district. Exemplifying the best of union and feminist organizing, considerable attention was given to initiating and maintaining local programs and developing communication networks within the province. The second objective was "to stress that the program is one designed to help solve sex discrimination in the education system, not a vehicle for women to rise in the hierarchical structure" (Shuto, 1974, p. 2). Thus the BCTF program opted for a focus on curriculum, classroom interactions, and teacher attitudes rather than on personal advancement for individual female teachers, and reflected the BCTF's continuing commitment to social responsibility. The Status of Women Program emphasized the links among sexism, racism, and classism and named "the system under which we live, . . . a system that values competition, aggression and domination over co-operation and sharing and caring about other people" (Shuto, 1975, p. 5) as being responsible for, among other things, the oppression of women. The influence of socialist feminist thought here is clear.

During its first year (1973–1974), the Status of Women Task Force held a series of intensive meetings with 41 local teacher associations and with all educational stakeholders, including community and women's groups. Status of Women contact people were named in 72 locals. A major conference for teachers and the public was organized and registration had to be capped at 500. As Shuto (1984) put it, "The times were with us. Preparations for '1975, International Year of Women,' were underway. Women's programs and groups were blossoming everywhere. Media attention was high" (p. 12). As teachers' consciousness of the issues was raised, teachers began actively to support the program. The task force was able to use the resources and existing structure of the BCTF to build a Status of Women network, provide in-service activities for teachers, organize

workshops and conferences for students and teachers, develop materials for classroom use, prepare briefs for presentation to school boards, and get Status of Women representatives onto local executives. Internally, efforts were made to integrate women's issues into all divisions of the Federation so that women's issues were not isolated or seen as of concern only to the members of the Task Force on the Status of Women. The BCTF also was active in encouraging status-of-women activities across the rest of the country. It initiated the first CTF conference on women's issues (Grove, 1984, p. 13). Entitled "Challenge '76: Sexism in Schools," the conference brought together delegates from all the CTF member federations to discuss the issues and to develop organizational strategies for action, strategies which were then shared through a series of publications (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 1976, 1977). By 1977, and as a result of all this work, the Task Force achieved recognition as a permanent committee of the BCTF (Roberts, 1984, p. 14). By the late 1970s, most other provincial teacher federations had women's committees and programs of one kind or another (Julien, 1987).

Teachers have also worked through more broadly based coalitions to effect change. A good example of this strategy can be found in a recently formed Ontario organization called Educators for Gender Equity (EDGE). The London secondary school teachers who founded EDGE explicitly acknowledged the importance of feminist educational research and theory to their thinking. One noted,

I grew into feminism quite naturally because of my life experiences. Feminist theory, a lot of feminist theory that I then read in those years [while at university], was what I had already lived. . . . It wasn't a sort of, you know, conversion experience either although some people thought I was suddenly a born again feminist. I grew into it intellectually . . . and quite naturally, I think, too, because I was exposed to it at university. (P. Dalton, personal communication, 9 April 1996)

Another teacher talked about the importance of taking a women's studies course as part of her personal in-service professional development.

That was really a big boost because I now had the vocabulary to define my experience that I hadn't had before, and I also had a community to confirm what I had been thinking. . . . Having the language is incredibly powerful. (J. Pennycook, personal communication, 17 April 1996)

These teachers have used their understandings and knowledge to work on gender issues with their students in the school setting. Their activities have included establishing gender-equity clubs in secondary schools and organizing a board-wide annual equity conference for students.

The founders of EDGE also work within the local branch of the OSSTF and some are key members of the Status of Women Committee. Through this group

they plan and implement a range of professional development activities, including lectures and workshops. Some teachers also have played an active role in a key co-operative venture with the London Board of Education. A joint federation-board committee, the Gender-Balanced Resource Committee, developed a resource document, for all teachers in the system, which integrated feminist curriculum and pedagogical theory with a practical approach to classroom teaching (London Board of Education, 1995).

Concurrently, however, while these teachers continued, or even accelerated their activities within the federation and the board, they decided there was a need for a wider network that could include government bureaucrats, equity officers, and senior administrators from the school boards, professors of education, students, teachers, and even non-educators interested in gender and education-related issues. A network formed outside of official structures appeared to be an effective strategy to move the equity agenda forward. As one of the founders observed, "I think being outside of the federation has a lot of advantages because right now we are self-funded" (P. Dalton, personal communication, 9 April 1996). This guarantees an independence that allows EDGE to pursue whatever initiatives it desires without worrying about the sensitivities of teacher federations or school boards.

Currently, EDGE serves two main purposes. One is the networking function. Members exchange information, discuss specific problems, and provide support and resources to one another. They are able to track the impact of economic and educational restructuring on equity work. As an adult educator put it, "there's a basic common understanding of the fact these issues need to be addressed, and what are we going to do, and let's think about strategies" (K. Ball, personal communication, 16 April 1996). The second major purpose is self-education. EDGE meetings provide opportunities, through speakers and workshops, for members to hear about and discuss current research in education. At these meetings time is spent thinking about various aspects of gender reform, about linking equity work on race, class, and gender, and about the politics of economics and education. In other words, EDGE meetings are a forum in which explicit linkages between research, policy, and practice can be explored, where those who do the research, write the policies, and teach the students can talk across and through differences in understandings and experiences.

CONCLUSION

Although the recent history of gender-equity initiatives in education illustrates the ways in which research and policy are linked through the practical work of classroom teachers, it also demonstrates how complex and context-dependent social change is. At specific historical moments, events have conspired to make gender equity more or less possible. In the early 1970s, the social context, which included a vibrant women's movement, the Report of the Royal Commission on

the Status of Women in Canada (1970), and an International Women's Year, provided the stage for feminist educators to take up the case for non-sexist schooling. The growth of feminist research and the introduction of women's studies courses at universities provided the language and theory for policy possibilities; the demands of the women's movement created the political climate for policy development. Teacher federations, such as the FWTAO and the BCTF, with historical commitments to social justice, provided institutional structures for teachers wishing to take up the gender-equity agenda. And individual teachers, working in provinces in which they had opportunities to co-operate with and receive support from the wider women's movement, were most successful in making use of the specific constellation of circumstances facing them.

The policy framework established during the 1970s proved to be remarkably resilient. It has been taken up by federal and provincial governments seeking to demonstrate their commitment to women's equality without in any fundamental way threatening existing power and economic arrangements. Explanations drawn from sex-role socialization theory proved capable of driving a large number of initiatives stemming from 1980s policy concerns about girls and women in science and technology. With the attention of the women's movement given over to concerns about employment and the economy and to the politics of difference, there was little public demand for further action in the area of schooling. Teachers attempting, as part of their implementation strategy, to incorporate new research into public policies on gender equity toiled in relative isolation.

By the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the social context for policy making was changing drastically. The full impact of economic restructuring is now being felt in the public sector and public education itself is under attack. Women are proving to be particularly vulnerable to the neo-liberal agenda of reduced social spending (Brodie, 1995, 1996; Dacks, Green, & Trimble, 1995). The emphasis on "self-reliance" and rampant individualism threatens any systemic or structural interpretation of gender-equity policies. A perfect example of this can be seen in Ontario, where the government is proposing to remove the current sex-equity policy from the secondary school program of studies and to replace it with an antidiscrimination statement that does not even mention gender (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1996). In addition, ideological hostility to gender equity is revealed in a number of ways, including the "political correctness debate" (Ayim, 1996; Smith, 1995) and various forms of resistance (Kenway, 1995).

Much of teacher federations' attention has, of necessity, been focused on defending public education, and teachers, faced with threats to their job security, salaries, time, and autonomy, have been less able to devote energy to gender-equity issues. The political activity of the women's movement is focused on employment, poverty, and social security, and schooling is far down the agenda. In the short run, the necessary conditions for linking new research to policy development appear to be largely absent, and insofar as any policies on gender

equity survive educational restructuring, they will remain policies shaped by sex-role socialization theory. Teachers working for change in this context face an uphill battle but they retain some optimism. One of the founders of EDGE observed that he and his colleagues are "in there for the long haul and are not going to be deterred by the sorts of things that happen" (J. Wilson, personal communication, 17 April 1996). This note of optimism, tinged with a sense of reality, reveals that efforts to link research and policy will not disappear; they will simply find new, and probably more local, arenas.

NOTES

[1]   An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1994 symposium organized by the Canadian Society for the Study of Education to discuss "the widening gap between educational policy and research across the country" (S. Cook, personal communication, 22 January 1994).

[2]   Bailey (1993) provides an excellent example of work done by teacher-researchers. See also Barton (1994), Hart (1996), and Ortwein (1996) for examples of teachers' research completed as part of their graduate work. Nor should it be forgotten that most professors of education, myself included, have been classroom teachers, as have researchers such as Briskin (1990) and Larkin (1994).

[3]   Until recently feminists have commonly been categorized as liberal, radical, or socialist. Liberal feminists argue for equal opportunities, seek to identify and remove barriers to women's success, and theorize sex inequalities through the sex-role socialization framework. Radical feminists, often called cultural feminists, are concerned with structural issues and tend to focus on the role of the school in reproducing the power relations of patriarchy and on the sexual politics of schooling. Socialist feminists, influenced by neo-Marxist theories, tend to focus on the economy and the family; to the extent that they consider education at all, they are concerned with how the schools work to replicate the social relations of gender, race, and class. This brief summary does not, of course, do justice to the three approaches to education, which are discussed in more detail in Acker (1994), Kenway (1990), and Stromquist (1990). These three authors note the difficulties of cleanly and simply categorizing approaches to gender reform in education and also remark on the growing influence of a post-structuralist feminism. Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail (1988) and Wine and Ristock (1991) claim that Canadian feminists have, in practice, worked across their differing political positions and agree more than they disagree. Nonetheless, the three categories provide an heuristic device for broadly differentiating theoretical understandings and approaches to equity issues in education.

[4]   How effective these policies are is a different question. Recent assessments of learning materials (Batcher et al., 1987; Light, Staton, & Bourne, 1989) suggest that antibias policies have not been adequately implemented and textbooks are far from non-sexist.

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