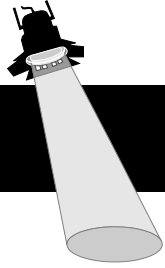


Gender Notes

A newsletter to support Gender Healthy Schools in Boston and Cambridge—a project funded by the Schott Foundation.



Spotlight on Open Hearts/Open Minds, a Project at Madison Park High School



"What would you do?" Student Yveline Charles (middle) acts out possibilities with Urban Iprov actors in the Homophobia Workshop.

360 Degrees of Love

*Our Community is a circle that holds 360 degrees
Of love, and happiness, a circle of diversity, peace, kindness, and respect.*

*Our community is a circle of friends, smiles, and
Hopes. A circle of needs, dreams, and desires.*

*Our community is a circle where children play
Without fear of violence, youth are free
Of drugs and the elders are loved and respected.*

by Lucy Montiero, Albert Einstein, Ingrid Fortin, and Denise de Oliveira

"One of the riches of the United States is the diversity of people and cultures that live here. We think this school represents such diversity. During this year we had the opportunity to do peer tutoring. We worked with students from countries like: Haiti, Brazil, Cape Verde, The Dominican Republic and other Spanish speaking countries. When people from different places work together they learn about one another's cultures and customs. This knowledge helps them to live together in peace."

by Flavia Rangel

The above writings were taken from the June 2001 issue of *Dreamwriters*, an ESL newsletter created by the Open Hearts/Open Minds Project at Madison Park Technical Vocational High School. In its third year as a Gender Healthy/Respectful Schools project, the teacher team of Lee Hewitt, Kathy Brucker, Carmen Valentin, and Adelina daSilva continue their work with ESL high school students around issues of

continued on p. 2

Winter 2002

Vol. 2, Issue #2

Sharing the news of the Gender Healthy/Respectful Schools (GH/RS) project in Boston and Cambridge Public Schools

Open Hearts/Open Minds, continued from p. 1

gender equity and diversity. *Dreamwriters* is only one facet of this project.

Another aspect is the Dreamwriters website, which is currently under construction but will ultimately feature student work. For teachers who are curious as to how this student work was generated in the classroom or how it might be used in their own lesson plans, there will be a teacher resource link. In addition, a growing library of books, videos, and magazines provides students with a variety of resources to build their literacy skills in a language infused with equity. The library also serves to promote literacy through media that students can relate to on a personal level.

As a third component of the project, several ESL, Special Education, and mainstream classes participate in improvisational acting workshops with the drama troupe Urban Improv. Urban Improv is a Boston-based group that uses drama to bring very real and difficult issues in students' lives into a forum where students feel safe to explore their ideas and experiences with their peers. This year, a series of Urban Improv workshops were opened up to other classes within the Health Academy at Madison Park on such issues as dating violence, sexual harassment, homophobia, and bystander issues, exposing

more students to this wonderful resource for creating dialogue and sharing around the difficult issues they face. Warley Coelho, an ESL student, states:

I think that it is hard to do what Urban Improv does, like calling attention to the subjects of sexual harassment, stereotypes, and homophobia, and make people discuss and have fun at the same time . . . I can say that I learned how to respect and how to be respected because if you don't respect other people's lives, they will not respect your life either.

Lee Hewitt powerfully sums up the team's work: "[The project] has made an impact on all the participants involved. It has enabled our curriculum, our dialogue, and our relationships amongst students, teachers, and administrators to be richer and more meaningful. We believe it has also strengthened students' critical thinking and literacy skills and has contributed to the development of their identities as students, workers, and community and family members." For more details about the Open Hearts/Open Minds project at Madison Park Technical Vocational High School, contact Lee Hewitt at leeleehew@aol.com. ❖



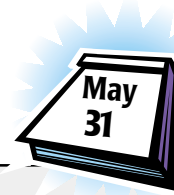
Students Eric Smith (second on left) and Aida Rodriguez (last on right) act in a scene with Urban Improv actors at the Bystander Workshop.

Blueprint for Gender Equity in Education Conference

Three Gender Healthy/Respectful Schools projects will present at the Blueprint for Gender Equity in Education Conference on March 20, 2002. Sponsored by the Long Island Fund for Women and Girls, Stony Brook University's Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, and the Office for Diversity and Affirmative Action, this year's theme is "Building a Future for Girls that Includes 'Non-Traditional' Paths (Science, Math, Engineering, Technology, and the Trades)."

The Chinese Girls Technology Program at Charlestown High School in Boston and the Science Club for Girls at the M.L. King and M.L. King Open Schools in Cambridge will present a workshop entitled "Science and Technology: Successful Programs Empowering Girls." Teresa Feeney, team leader of the Chinese Girls Technology Program, and Mary Memmott, program director of the Science Club for Girls, will be the presenters; Shirley Mark of the Schott Foundation will serve as moderator. The workshop will highlight the work of the two projects in supporting girls in pursuing interests in the sciences and technology and in feeling comfortable thinking of themselves as successful in these areas.

The third project, from the Morse Middle School Cluster in Cambridge, will present a workshop entitled "Dismantling the Pipeline: Using Project-Based Experiences to Challenge Current Norms." Leading this workshop will be Karen Spaulding, science teacher, and Joanne Lowre, social studies teacher, with Maria-Paz Avery of EDC moderating. The goal of this project is to dismantle the current educational pipeline that directs females and minority students away from scientific fields and to redefine gender-biased roles in the humanities. The workshop will include an overview of the student data that prompted the project's work, implementation strategies and challenges, family outreach strategies, and tips for program sustainability. ❖



**Attention all 2001–2002
Gender Healthy/Respectful
School Grantees**

SAVE THE DATE:

Friday, May 31, 2002

It's time for our annual
year-end dinner and expo!

Details to come . . .

Start thinking now about how
you plan to display your work
from this year.

**Please contact
Mason Mitchell-Daniels at
mmitchell-daniels@edc.org
or by phone at (617) 618-2127
with any questions.**

See you then!

Gender Equitable Schools: They Benefit Everyone

by *Sundra Flansburg, WEEA Equity Resource Center at Education Development Center*

ENC Focus Article Sparks Discussion

The controversy surrounding gender equity work in education has been building over the last several years. Recently, this controversy landed right here in ENC Focus. Following publication of the article “Teacher Fellowships Close the Gender Gap,” by Janalee Jordan-Meldrum and Tina Coplan of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), we received calls criticizing our coverage of gender equity as well as a letter from a school principal who wanted to know why there were no articles about disadvantages faced by boys. It has become politically incorrect, the principal said, to address gender equity for boys. AAUW responded to the principal’s concern by explaining that its goal is to encourage women to engage in high-tech education and careers “while also looking at the broader picture of what works best in schools for both girls and boys.” Because the topic has sparked so much response from our readers, ENC invited the director of the Women’s Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Equity Resource Center to discuss the controversy surrounding gender equity. Let us know what you think. Send your comments to editor@enc.org.

In recent years, much of the coverage of gender equity in the news media tends to frame the issue in terms of “girls versus boys,” or to assume that improvements in girls’ educational achievement come at the expense of boys’. These arguments are often rooted in misconceptions about the work of those who promote gender equity in education.

Gender equity has never been about benefiting females more than males. When advocates and practitioners first began to work toward educational equity in the 1970s, they focused on girls and women because females experienced more discrimination than males in terms of access to educational resources and benefits. For instance, females were being shut out of or concentrated in certain classes (vocational education was especially sex-segregated), received substandard funding and opportunities in athletics, endured sexual harassment, faced quotas of maximum enrollments in professional schools, and so on. All of these barriers kept young women as a group—especially young women of color, poor women, and women with disabilities—from reaching their potential and being able to contribute fully to society.

Few people today deny publicly that this discrimination existed, or that the situation was blatantly unfair not only to females but also to society as a whole. However, some

now state that in the 29 years since Title IX (the principal federal legislation guaranteeing educational equity) was passed, discrimination against girls has ended. Therefore, they argue, work aimed at girls is not only unnecessary but also thwarts boys’ achievement.

Although the opposition groups’ numbers are small, their skilled handling of the media has often garnered more attention for their opinions than what their numbers justify. While leaders opposing gender equity often seek media outlets and public recognition, this mode of work has not often been preferred by equity advocates and practitioners. Much has been written about the mass media’s love of reporting “gender wars” or “battles of the sexes” (e.g., Tannen, 1999), but most gender equity supporters shy away from this approach.

Gender Equity Is About Males and Females

For decades, a number of gender equity advocates have been working in areas in which boys and men are disadvantaged. Both male and female researchers have identified the need to look at such issues as why African American boys are overrepresented in special education classes, why boys as a group do not perform as well as girls on verbal skills assessments, and why inappropriate expressions of anger and

Gender equity has never been about benefiting females more than males.

Helping females achieve economic self-sufficiency has proved to be much more complicated than simply removing discriminatory barriers to equitable education.

violence are concentrated disproportionately in the male population. Most equity advocates feel that many of the disadvantages boys face are the result of sex-role stereotyping and other related factors, and thus feel the issue of masculinity needs to be examined and challenged, just as notions of femininity have been.

Much work is already being done to address male issues with a gender equity focus. More is needed. Many specialists and researchers have called for greater attention to these problems. This reflects an evolution in gender equity work and theory, as would be expected as the field matures.

A number of researchers have pointed out that more than three decades of work have led us to see that gender equity is more complex than many people first imagined. For instance, Barbara Bank reflects that

. . . As far as schooling is concerned, there is considerable evidence to support the conclusion that girls not only have absorbed the message that they should achieve but also have been successful in doing so. . . . Despite their good grades and other educational achievements, girls and women have not been able to win the status and other rewards that are consistent with their educational credentials. (Bank, 1997, pp. 10–11)

Patricia Campbell and Nancy Kreinberg (1998) have noted the shift from seeing “access and treatment at the core of accountability” to recognizing “outcomes at the core of accountability.” So while we should celebrate the advances made in terms of narrowing the gaps between young women’s and men’s achievement in a number of areas, we have found that this does not automatically ensure equitable outcomes.

continued on p. 6

Definitions for Thought . . .

Classism—a system of power and privilege based on the accumulation of economic wealth and social status. Classism is the mechanism by which certain groups of people, considered as a unit according to their economic, occupational, or social status, benefit at the expense of other groups. The effects of this imbalance are pervasive in the social system, affecting all facets of people’s lives.

Compulsory heterosexuality—the assumption that women are “naturally” or innately drawn sexually and emotionally toward men, and men toward women; the view that heterosexuality is the “norm” for all sexual relationships. The institutionalization of heterosexuality in all aspects of society includes the idealization of heterosexual orientation, romance, and marriage. . . . It can also include legal and social discrimination against homosexuals and the invisibility of or intolerance toward lesbian and gay existence.

Ethnocentrism—the emotional attitude that one’s own ethnic group, nation, or culture is superior to all others or is the norm by which others are measured.

Heterosexism—a system of beliefs, actions, advantages, and assumptions in the superiority of heterosexuals or heterosexuality. It includes unrecognized privileges of heterosexual people and the exclusion of nonheterosexual people from policies, procedures, events, and decisions about what is important.

The above definitions are from an exercise in *Writing for Change: Raising Awareness of Difference, Power, and Discrimination*, a curriculum available for downloading at www.tolerance.org/teach/expand/wfc/index.html. *Writing for Change*, a powerful teaching tool, offers a wide range of writing exercises that uncover the bias that exists in our language.

For more information on ways to combat prejudice and develop a common language, check out the Anti-Defamation League’s education Web site at www.adl.org/main_education.asp.

For one, women are still paid less than men with similar educational levels in similar jobs. In other words, helping females achieve economic self-sufficiency has proved to be much more complicated than simply removing discriminatory barriers to equitable education.

We have also found that equity work to improve girls' achievement has positively affected boys' achievement as well. Susan McGee Bailey and Patricia Campbell state that

. . . We must get past the idea that education is a zero sum game where a step forward for girls is automatically a step backward for boys. . . . Teachers know that when something works for girls, it often works for boys as well. For example, providing students with hands-on experiments reflecting the ways science relates to daily life has proven helpful in involving girls in science. This approach works for boys, too. Not allowing student "putdowns" makes many girls feel more comfortable in class, and boys find they also learn better when they don't have to worry about being teased or insulted. (1999)

For instance, the teacher professional development program Generating Expectations for Student Achievement (GESA) was originally developed to address gender disparities in teacher-student interactions but was later reshaped to focus on race and ethnicity as well. Not only did GESA reduce the disparities between teacher interactions with males and females, but students in GESA classrooms also significantly improved achievement in both reading and mathematics. Not just girls, but all student groups. These results and other data show that focusing on gender equity in education often helps all students.

We cannot talk of excellence in schools without speaking of equity. By definition, high-performing schools must be equitable schools, since excellence has not been attained if there are achievement and outcome gaps by gender, race/ethnicity, class, or other factors. This connection between excellence and equity was the focus of several sessions at recent Improving America's Schools conferences sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education.

Why We Must Continue to Work

Work in gender equity aims to eliminate disparities in outcomes between females and males to benefit all students. It is about opening up our educational system to support expanded opportunities and achievement for both sexes—not just removing arbitrary and systemic barriers but also creating an environment in which all young people feel respected and challenged to reach their full potential. As a recent WEEA publication confirms:

Gender equity means creating an educational climate that encourages females and males equally to develop, achieve, and learn—without setting any limits on our expectations based on gender, race, ethnicity, or disability. Gender equity is inclusive. It supports the education of boys and is integral to the achievement of students of color, students with disabilities, and students from poor households. . . .

When we achieve gender equity, our education system will provide an equal chance to learn for females and males, open options to learn subjects and prepare for future education, jobs, physical activity, careers, and family responsibilities, with no limits on expectations due to gender, equal encouragement for both genders to develop, achieve, and learn, [and] equitable treatment of male and female students. (WEEA Equity Resource Center, 1998, p. 3)

Recognizing and working on the issues that disadvantage boys and young men is vital. This does not mean, however, that work with girls and young women can or should end. In spite of hard-won gains, women continue to face greater obstacles than men in such areas as becoming economically self-sufficient, balancing the multiple demands of productive and reproductive roles, and so on.

Ignoring or failing to fully take into account these facts as we work in education would be unconscionable and irresponsible. Knowing this, our work with girls and women continues to be of utmost importance, especially research and practice that benefit females of color, females with disabilities, and poor females. Work to improve educational opportunities for

We must get past the idea that education is a zero sum game where a step forward for girls is automatically a step backward for boys.

We have learned that good teaching engages all students, with no disparities by gender, race, ethnicity, class, or disability.

women and girls who face barriers due not only to gender but also to other factors has been at the core of the Women's Educational Equity Act Program's work for many years. Advances have been made, which is reassuring for females and for society because this shows that it is possible to improve women's status in their communities. Many gains have been made, but with these gains comes the realization that many more inequities exist. For instance, while access and outcomes have improved for white, middle-class females in general, gains have been minimal for poor females and females of color. This points to the continuing need to collect data disaggregated by gender, race/ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic class, and other factors so that we can identify problems that may affect different groups in different ways. Interventions also need to focus on specific groups of girls and women, for example, females with disabilities.

As many have noted, gender equity work seems to get more complicated rather than less. With successes comes increased scrutiny, and we have found that it was easier to win support for the struggles against the blatant discriminatory policies of the past than against the current lingering effects of sex-role stereotyping or unconscious bias. But we cannot fall back on simple answers or sound bites. We have learned that good teaching engages all students, with no disparities by gender, race, ethnicity, class, or disability. This is what a great number of practitioners and advocates continue to strive for. ❖

Sundra Flansburg is director of the Women's Educational Equity Act Equity Resource Center at Education Development Center. She has written and published in such areas as women's human rights and self-esteem and the

role of legislation in educational equity efforts. She has also worked and studied in Latin America on women's issues. This article, however, was written in her capacity as a private citizen and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the U.S. Department of Education, funder of the WEEA Equity Resource Center.

References

- Bank, Barbara J. (1997). *Introduction: Some Paradoxes of Gender Equity in Schooling*. In Barbara J. Bank and Peter M. Hall (eds.), *Gender, Equity, and Schooling: Policy and Practice* (pp. 3–29). New York: Garland Publishing.
- Campbell, Patricia, & Nancy Kreinberg. (1998). *Moving into the Mainstream: From "Equity a Separate Concept" to "High Quality Includes All."* Available online at www.campbell-kibler.com/Moving_to_Mainstream.htm
- Grayson, Dolores A. (1988). *The Equity Principal: An Inclusive Approach to Excellence*. Administrator Handbook. Canyon Lake, CA: GrayMill.
- McGee Bailey, Susan, & Patricia B. Campbell. (1999). *The Gender Wars in Education*. Available online at www.campbellkibler.com/Gender_Wars.htm
- Tannen, Deborah. (1999). *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words*. New York: Random House.
- WEEA Equity Resource Center. (1998). *Raising the Grade: A Title IX Curriculum*. Newton, MA: WEEA.

Citation information

Flansburg, Sandra. (July 2001). *Gender Equitable Schools: They Benefit Everyone*. *ENC Focus* 8(3) p. 9–11.

Gender Healthy Schools

Gender and Diversities Institute
Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02458-1060

Education Development Center, Inc. Gender Healthy/Respectful Schools Project Staff

Project Director

Maria-Paz Beltran Avery

Research Associates

*Marianne Castano
Kimberly Sansoucy*

Project Coordinator

Mason Mitchell-Daniels

Gender Notes Newsletter

© 2002 Gender Healthy Schools
Gender and Diversities Institute
Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02458-1060
Phone: (617) 969-7100; (800) 225-4276
Fax: (617) 332-4318
E-mail: equity@mail.edc.org

Gender Healthy/Respectful Schools Project Mission Statement

The Gender Healthy/Respectful Schools Project works with teacher teams from Boston and Cambridge Public Schools to support the growth of school communities that are free from sexism, gender bias, and other discriminatory practices that inhibit academic achievement. Learning environments that are socially, emotionally, and physically safe and in which students and adults respect themselves and one another provide an essential foundation for fostering academic excellence and social responsibility in all students. Funded by the Caroline and Sigmund Schott Foundation, the project supports the professional development of teachers and other educators on equity issues; strengthens and expands a network of activists and advocates for gender equity; and raises the awareness of gender inequities among district administrators, principals, policymakers, parents, and the public. The project uses a reflective practice approach that assists teams in documenting the impact of their work and disseminating their learnings about gender equity to the broader community. ❖