Connecting Gender and Disability

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Discrimination is an enduring issue for all people with disabilities. Women and girls with disabilities however, are subjected to double discrimination: sexism as well as disability bias. Needless to say, women and girls of color who are disabled face a third layer of bias in the form of racism.

While there are many ways in which this discrimination manifests itself, one key result is that women with disabilities are significantly poorer than men with disabilities and women without disabilities. A variety of factors contribute to this situation: women with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed; if employed, they receive considerably lower wages than men with disabilities; and women with disabilities have not been part of nondisabled women's increases—in numbers or salaries—in the paid labor force.[1]

But employment is not the only culprit. The educational system—both formal and informal—must also be held accountable. In this article, we examine the negative and positive sides of the coin. On the one hand, education plays a pivotal role in contributing to the lack of equal opportunity for women and girls with disabilities. On the other, it is just as clearly the arena that offers the greatest potential for positive change.

Legislation

To lay the groundwork for change, it is necessary to look at the existing federal legislation that has been enacted to ensure equal opportunity irrespective of gender and disability. Title IX, passed as part of the Education Amendments of 1972, outlaws discrimination based on gender within all educational programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance. The law applies to most public and private schools, from kindergarten through graduate school. In addition, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 mandates that children with disabilities be educated in the "least restricted environment," meaning a setting that affords the students the maximum opportunities to learn, socialize, and interact with students without disabilities, while still meeting each child's individual needs.[2] Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of disability by federal contractors and grantees. Most recently, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 guarantees equal opportunity to people with disabilities in the areas of employment, public accommodations, state and local government, transportation, and telecommunications.

Unfortunately, we have not yet figured out how to legislate away the negative attitudes that continue to interfere with equality of opportunity in general and equity in education in particular. While many gains have been made, both attitudinal and physical barriers still keep female students with disabilities from reaping the benefits of excellent education. According to a recent AAUW report, to achieve economic independence and participate fully in the boom industries of the 21st century, girls and young women will need to study disciplines like computer science, biotechnology, and environmental science. The report also states that gender equity and the achievement of high standards for *all* students are inextricably linked.[3] However, despite the laws to the contrary, female and male students with disabilities are still not being fully integrated into their local education

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system, much less into the academic disciplines that are becoming essential for career growth in the 21st century.

K–12 Education

The biased attitudes, skewed representation, and low expectations that limit the learning potential of students with disabilities assert themselves as soon as children enter the school system. The limitations exist in both special education and inclusion programs, but are revealed in different ways. Problems within special education are segregation of students, overrepresentation of African American and Latino males, and underrepresentation of girls who may need services. While inclusion offers much more potential for equality of opportunity, it can also be problematic unless adequate teacher preparation and support services within the general classroom environment exist to ensure successful learning for children both with and without disabilities.[4]

Special Education

Underlying the specific problems and contradictions in special education is the erroneous assumption that there are two distinct types of students: "regular" students and "special" students. While "regular" students supposedly learn well in general classrooms, "special" students are said to need "special" services. In fact, because all students, with and without disabilities, are a rich mixture of intellectual, physical, psychological, and social characteristics, diagnoses that are based on one or just a few qualities rarely consider the needs of the whole child. To make matters worse, many schools place students with a variety of disabilities in the same special education classroom, even when their talents or learning styles have little in common.

A corollary of this "regular" versus "special" dualism has been that a student's assumed disability, whatever it is, is thought to reside entirely in the child, when in fact it is societal attitudes that create many of the problems. Indeed, the very training special education teachers receive makes them see their students as needing "special" help.

The division between being nondisabled and disabled is far less obvious than a specific mobility, visual, or hearing disability might sug-

gest. For example, half of all children diagnosed as learning disabled, the largest classification within special education, would be more accurately described as children who, for a variety of reasons, have difficulty learning *in their classrooms*. In fact, it has been said that 80 percent of all public school children could be classified as learning disabled by one or more of the diagnostic procedures now used.

Not surprisingly, diagnoses of physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities are influenced by a number of factors that have nothing to do with how well or under what conditions students can learn. Nationwide, African American students are twice as likely as white children to be put in special education programs.

If race/ethnicity distorts the diagnosis and placement of students, so does gender. For example, boys are more likely than girls to be classified as mentally retarded, learning disabled, and emotionally disabled. Ironically, this is because our society's standards for achievement are higher for males than for females, so that traits similar to those commonly assigned to children with learning disabilities or mild retardation are considered "healthy" for females.

When race and gender biases converge, the result is often disastrous. African American and Latino males are more likely than either white males or females of color to be seen as troublesome or out of control—and so to be classified as having "behavior problems." The result is obvious: Latino and African American boys are disproportionately placed in special education classes; at the same time, girls end up being underserved. These issues are beginning to be acknowledged. The recent revision of IDEA requires school districts to examine the special education population by race/ethnicity, but not by gender.

Beyond the academic problems of special education classes, civil rights legislation in this country has made it clear that separate is never equal. For students with disabilities, the very fact of separation creates what is called "ableism"—that is, states of dependency in which students are not recognized as, and do not see themselves as, full human beings, capable of leading independent, useful, and interesting lives. Not surprisingly, this second-

Many schools place students with a variety of disabilities in the same special education classroom, even when their talents or learning styles have little in common.

Preparing Young Women for the Workplace

By Carl Sargent, Beaverton High School, Oregon

Female students with disabilities confront challenges that differ from those faced by their peers, especially as they prepare to leave high school. To help them make a smooth transition from school to the world of work, female students with disabilities can benefit from vocational preparation in high school. Many of these students have been involved in some type of work-based learning program as part of their educational plan. The program may be connected to an existing school-to-work program or a work experience program designed exclusively for students with disabilities.

Whichever program the girls participate in, "readiness skills training" is one of the most important ingredients for successful placement at a community work site. Procedural readiness (filling out applications, interviewing, resumes, and form letters), is an important part of every student's readiness package. However, young women with disabilities need more.

Beaverton High School

The Beaverton High School Transition Services Program has a work-based learning component designed especially for young women with disabilities. The program accomodates 10 to 15 female junior or senior students who participate on a voluntary basis. Program participants have mild learning and/or language disabilities, health concerns, or physical limitations. The program focuses on nontraditional career exploration and planning, and each student develops a career portfolio which accompanies her through the duration of the program.

Beaverton's program activities include direct instruction on specific workplace readiness skills, business visits, college program visits, guest speakers, participation in career fairs, and work-based learning placements. Students participate in structured work experiences and job shadows, and are helped to prepare for the school-to-career transition. The following five elements of readiness training have proven to be successful for female students with disabilities in the Beaverton program:

1. **Workplace Expectations:** The American workplace is full of unwritten rules and procedures that need to be interpreted and taught to students before they enter the workplace. The business world has high expectations regarding social competence and an understanding of business operations. Students must learn that in the workplace they must abide by a set of rules determined by their employer. Unfortunately, many students become accustomed to the lenient and informal environment of school. Making the change to a more structured environment is often particularly difficult for young women with disabilities, many of whom have little or no previous work or community experience and may come from unstructured home environments.

2. **Safety:** Teaching both personal and environmental safety is another important readiness skill for young women with disabilities. In many of today's work environments, men and women must work together in close proximity. Sexual harassment needs to be discussed openly, and such discussion involves explaining what constitutes proper behavior in the workplace, what social cues to watch out for, and what to do if difficult situations occur. Students need to be taught to listen to their own intuition and feelings. Personal safety also encompasses appropriate sleep habits, diet, and physical exercise or fitness.

   Environmental safety is equally important, even for those students who have had previous work experience. Depending on the specific job placement, appropriate dress and grooming habits need to be reviewed to prevent possible injury or hazardous situations. Environmental safety requires knowledge of fire safety, proper use of tools and equipment, and taking care to keep workspaces clean. Students should be taught to stay alert, be cautious, and look closely at the work site.

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Students should be helped to set career goals and to develop a structured action plan.

3. **Self-Advocacy:** Assertiveness and self-advocacy skills are an essential component of readiness training, especially for those with language and cognitive disabilities. A young woman new to the work force may feel overwhelmed and intimidated by a male supervisor or manager. In addition, a business may unwittingly misplace or exploit the student worker. Vocational preparation should focus on oral communication skills, posture, attitude, honesty, and knowing when and where to get assistance.

4. **Rights and Responsibilities:** Students should be taught their rights and responsibilities in the workplace as part of the readiness activities. Students who have behavioral difficulties need to know the expectations for behavior at business sites. They must also understand the consequences for misbehavior, the corrective measures the workplace or school will use for rule infractions, and what rewards will accompany a positive experience. A plan of assistance or behavioral contract can be prepared if necessary.

5. **Career Planning:** Career planning is another important element of readiness training. Many young women with disabilities will have often experienced years of stereotyping regarding behavior and career development. As part of their readiness training, they should be exposed to nontraditional career exploration, taken to visit businesses that promote equity and diversity, and given the opportunity to hear nontraditional career guest speakers in school.

Students should be helped to set career goals and to develop a structured action plan for successful implementation.

Implementing the Plan

Working with the business organizations participating in your work-based program is key to ensuring a successful outcome. The following additional program components will maximize the chances of a successful work-based experience for all participants:

1. Technical support for businesses regarding accommodations and assistive technology.

2. A job coach or trainer for the workplace.

3. A procedure for late arrivals and emergencies.

4. Alternative methods for student performance evaluations.

5. Workshops or employee trainings, to teach businesses about disabilities.

6. Distribution of your schools' risk management plan.

7. Assistance for businesses in celebrating the work-based program's success.

8. Visits to professional technical programs at local community colleges.

All of these activities will help build a high-quality program for young women with disabilities. If possible, involve the participating business organization in teaching the readiness skills. Combine strategies and resources with your school-to-work coordinator, tech prep specialist, and counseling staff. Your enthusiasm and commitment will pay large dividends for students and the community. ❖

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ary status has a greater impact on girls with disabilities, because they are even more likely than boys to receive a double dose of "learned helplessness," that is, infantilism and dependence fostered through excessive help given in the guise of "kindness."

Inclusion

Fortunately, the current school reform movement's stress on heterogeneous grouping and individualized learning for *all* students makes the merging of special and general education a natural part of reform efforts. Educators have come to see that the "homogeneous" classroom is a myth that has supported teacher-directed lessons, a style of teaching that isn't particularly good for any student. Instead, schooling is most effective when teachers see all their classes as heterogeneous and create lessons di-

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Most of this information is from the IDEA website (www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/IDEA)

With bipartisan support, President Bill Clinton signed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 on June 4, 1997. The IDEA raises academic expectations and accountability for the nation's 5.8 million children with disabilities. It also bridges the gap between the curriculum for students with disabilities and the curriculum for non-disabled students.

The IDEA was originally called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142), and was renamed in 1990. Prior to 1997, the Act did not specifically address general curriculum involvement of children with disabilities. The 1997 Amendments shifted the focus of the law to one of improving teaching and learning, with a focus on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) as the primary tool for enhancing the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum.

The final regulations of the IDEA appeared in the Federal Register of March 12, 1999. The regulations require that the IEP for each child with a disability include:

- A statement of the child's present levels of educational performance including how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum;

- A statement of measurable annual goals related to meeting the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum;

- A statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services; and

- A statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals, be involved and progress in the general curriculum, and participate in extra curricular and other nonacademic activities and to be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children.

The following is excerpted from the IDEA:

Findings

The Congress finds the following:

(1) Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. . . .

(5) Over 20 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by—

(A) having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access in the general curriculum to the maximum extent possible;

(B) strengthening the role of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home;

(C) coordinating this Act with other local, educational service agency, State, and Federal school improvement efforts in order to ensure that such children benefit from such efforts and that special education can become a service for such children rather than a place where they are sent;

(D) providing appropriate special education and related services and aids and supports in the regular classroom to such children, whenever appropriate;

(E) supporting high-quality, intensive professional development for all personnel who work with such children in order to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to enable them—

(i) to meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, those challeng-

The IDEA raises academic expectations and accountability for the nation's 5.8 million children with disabilities.

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ing expectations that have been established for all children; and

(ii) to be prepared to lead productive, independent, adult lives, to the maximum extent possible;

(F) providing incentives for whole-school approaches and pre-referral intervention to reduce the need to label children as disabled in order to address their learning needs; and

(G) focusing resources on teaching and learning while reducing paperwork and requirements that do not assist in improving educational results.

(6) While States, local educational agencies, and educational service agencies are responsible for providing an education for all children with disabilities, it is in the national interest that the Federal Government have a role in assisting State and local efforts to educate children with disabilities in order to improve results for such children and to ensure equal protection of the law.

Purposes

The purposes of this title are —

(1) (A) to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes spe-

cial education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living;

(B) to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected; and

(C) to assist States, localities, educational service agencies, and Federal agencies to provide for the education of all children with disabilities;

(2) to assist States in the implementation of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families;

(3) to ensure that educators and parents have the necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities by supporting systemic-change activities; coordinated research and personnel preparation; coordinated technical assistance, dissemination, and support; and technology development and media services; and

(4) to assess, and ensure the effectiveness of, efforts to educate children with disabilities.

For more information about the IDEA '97 statute and implementing regulations, contact the Department of Education at 202-205-5465 or 202-205-5507, or visit the Department's website at **www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/IDEA** ❖

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rected to the individual needs of each and every child with or without a disability.

However, budget pressure in public schools makes integrating special education students *without* proper support and training a constant threat. Thus, it is essential for teachers and other educators to argue that full inclusion means not a reduction in services, but the same services provided in a general setting. In fact, the change from funding based on program placement to a system that allows money to follow the child, providing whatever resources are necessary to meet that student's educational needs, is likely to make more efficient use of resources.

Vocation/Career Preparation

It has been suggested that the combined effects of stereotyping based on gender and disability track women and girls with disabilities into the most traditional female roles. In secondary schools for students with disabilities, for example, comparatively more females take home economics and life skills instruction, while more males take vocational education.[5] In addition to being channeled into historically female fields by school counselors, women with disabilities often feel pressure from those same counselors to pursue a career in disability-related fields such as social work, rehabilitation counseling, or special education.[6]

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IDEA requires that all students with disabilities aged 16 and older have a written plan to set goals and establish support for their transition from secondary school to adult life. Research indicates, however, that youth with disabilities have great difficulty making this transition, as evidenced by their high dropout rates, low employment, and low rates of postsecondary education.[7] Although females with disabilities drop out of school at about the same rate as males, the reasons differ. Parents report that 23 percent of female dropouts leave school because of marriage or parenthood, compared with only 1 percent of male dropouts.[8]

The difficulty in progressing from secondary school to adult life is exacerbated for young women with disabilities, because they tend to participate less in activities outside the home than do young men with disabilities or young women without disabilities. Two years after leaving secondary school, women with disabilities are significantly less likely to be employed than men with disabilities (32 percent versus 52 percent), and women are less likely than men to be engaged in volunteer work, job training, or postsecondary education (51 percent versus 69 percent). Although young women and men participate equally in social and community activities during the first two years following high school, women's participation declines markedly in the next few years (from 29 percent to 17 percent); in general, women are less likely than men (40 percent versus 57 percent) to see friends socially.[9]

Informal Education

It is in experiences outside the classroom, particularly in afterschool programs, that young people receive valuable training in social and vocational skills.[10] In an afterschool program, students can choose from a wide range of activities requiring varying degrees of physical or intellectual skills. Afterschool programs provide opportunities for students to learn more about themselves and one another. Sharing like interests minimizes differences. Having fun with arts and crafts, playing sports that require peer coaching and teamwork—all such interactions reduce differences, provide opportunities for students to appreciate one another, and are critical preparation for adult life.

Access to afterschool programs, however, is not automatic. Transportation is often a major barrier. In rural areas, the lack of accessible transportation and the distances to be traveled create an obvious obstacle. However, even in urban areas where youth programs are within walking distance for most nondisabled young people, for many young people with disabilities even a short distance can create a barrier. Creative solutions are needed to ensure the safe passage of those young people who may not have the physical, sensory, or cognitive ability to travel even short distances independently.

This situation is exacerbated for young women with disabilities, whose families tend to be even more protective. Few afterschool programs address the needs of girls in general, whether disabled or nondisabled, and there are almost no programs directed specifically to meet the needs of girls with disabilities.[11]

It would seem that family, school, and community thus conspire to keep girls with disabilities at home, and that young women with disabilities are being systematically programmed out of the afterschool experiences essential to later jobs, careers, and education. Several critical factors come into play:

- Girls may be steered in a direction based on their disability and the attitude that girls are "only supposed to do certain activities." The patronizing perspective is, "We know what is best for her. If she can't run and play, we should leave her inside and protect her—both physically and emotionally."

- In society, women and people with disabilities are perceived as not being decision makers. This combined impact of gender and disability fosters the myth that a girl with a disability will not be able to make decisions by herself.

- The stereotype that women and people with disabilities are unable to protect themselves from unwanted attention is a significantly limiting factor in the lives of girls with disabilities.

- Counselors and other professionals expect girls with disabilities to be taken care of and therefore conclude they don't need the same opportunities for social and emo-

Women with disabilities are five times as likely as women without disabilities to have less than eight years of formal education.

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Women and girls with disabilities can take their rightful place in the community through gaining increased access to available programs and services.

tional growth or career development as girls without disabilities or boys with disabilities. Girls with disabilities are often denied even the most traditional female roles.

- Staff in afterschool programs tend to assume that girls with disabilities should engage in activities generally considered appropriate for younger children, especially if they have cognitive disabilities.

- Parents of adolescent girls with disabilities tend to be especially overprotective. On the one hand, such parents worry about the possibility of physical or sexual abuse, while on the other hand they simultaneously deny their daughters' sexuality. If agencies have not made appropriate accommodations for girls, parents may be reluctant to let daughters participate.

- If a girl is in need of personal care, parents are concerned about who will provide that care. They fear often abuse, particularly if the girl will be assisted by a male. Since people are accustomed to women caregivers, parents of boys are generally less anxious about a female providing personal care to their son.

- As stated earlier, more boys than girls are assigned to special education. Therefore, more groups are created specifically to meet the needs of those boys. Programs specifically designed for boys often do not meet the needs of girls.

- Many afterschool programs highlight sports and recreation, unfortunately often detering girls while attracting and encouraging boys.

The complex, interrelationship of parents, schools, and community agencies has traditionally stood in the way of equal participation for girls with disabilities. The multiple barriers that girls with disabilities face, together with the stereotypical view that disabled girls are dependent, incompetent, and lacking in leadership potential, must be overturned. Working together to examine and eliminate all the forces that have created such effective barriers is our only hope of enhancing girls' opportunities and, ultimately, empowering them.

Postsecondary Education

Women with disabilities are five times as likely as women without disabilities to have less than eight years of formal education. Only 16 percent of all women with disabilities are likely to have any college education compared with 31 percent of nondisabled women and 28 percent of men with disabilities.[12]

To reach college, young women who are disabled must overcome incredible barriers. The majority have had little preparation for independence, have been overprotected and undervalued, and have had no role models to assure them that others like them have done it before. Yet it seems that for young women with disabilities, getting to college is only half the battle. Overall, women students with disabilities are segregated from what, on the outside, appears to be a mainstreamed campus environment. Although universities and colleges provide basic academic and physical accommodations, there is very little commitment to facilitate the social and/or personal adjustment of female students with disabilities.

For women with disabilities who do go on to college, very little is known about their specific needs and how colleges and universities can meet them. Results of a survey conducted by Educational Equity Concepts in 1991 revealed a continuing lack of attention to the needs of female students with disabilities. The study found that issues relating to women with disabilities are more likely to be addressed by offices for disability services than by women's centers or women's programs, and that almost all offices for disability services have no contact with women's groups either inside or outside the college. As a result, far fewer women than men are served by these offices, and almost no students of color of either sex are served.[13]

To redress this inequity, ongoing collaboration is needed between offices for disability services, women's centers, and programs for students of color. An environment needs to be created in which the academic, physical, social, and personal needs of women students with disabilities are explicitly addressed. Offices of disability services need to serve the broader college community, be proactive not reactive, pro-

WEEA Resources for Gender and Disability

Barrier Free
Serving Young Women with Disabilities
Barrier Free is designed to increase the educational, vocational, and social options of adolescent girls with physical or sensory disabilities. It outlines practical steps for training groups who provide services to this often overlooked population. In addition to offering guidance, visualizations, brainstorming sessions, and discussions, the book includes down-to-earth information on language, accessibility, recruitment, transportation, sexuality, and program adoption. By Linda Marks and Harilyn Rousso. (53 pp.) 1991•#2732 $12.00

Gender and Disability
New! **An Inservice Training Program for Educators Working with Students with Disabilities**

Gender and Disability was written to enable one or more facilitators to conduct inservice training on gender equity for professionals and paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities, particularly middle, junior high, and high school students. The program is designed to (1) assist educators in understanding issues related to gender and disability; (2) provide a comprehensive overview of gender inequitable practices in education; and (3) give educators the tools they need to provide gender equitable educational practices to students receiving special education services. Consists of four two-hour training programs that can be used separately or in combination. By Harilyn Rousso and Michael Wehmeyer. (155 pp.) Forthcoming spring 2000• #2814•Call our hotline at 800-225-3088 or TTY 800-354-6798 to receive a publication announcement.

Strategies for Maintaining a Support Group
Designed to help support groups establish healthy, supportive ways to work through difficulties and keep going. Addresses issues that women with disabilities face that only other women with disabilities can fully understand: transportation problems, wheelchair access, feelings of isolation, and helplessness. By Pearl R. Paulson. (64 pp.) 1989•#2706 $12.00

WEEA Digest "Middle School Voices on Gender Identity: A Positive Sense of Self for Girls with Disabilities"
This brief article presents a summary of the views of a group of 60 ethnically diverse adolescent girls with physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities who live in the New York City area. It explores the difficulties they face in being seen as women and illustrates the obstacles in their path to social acceptance, such as exclusion and oppression. By Harilyn Rousso. (8 pp.) Call 800-225-3088 for your free copy of the *WEEA Digest.*

Practical Tools and Support for Gender-Fair Learning

The WEEA Equity Resource Center at EDC can help you find the tools you need to create gender-fair multicultural learning environments.

Call the Center's hotline at **800-225-3088** or **TTY 800-354-6798** for resources and referrals.

The Center's website is full of exciting information and tools, from fun facts about the history of equity to a list of practical curricula designed to help make any subject gender-fair. The Center's website was designed to be accessible to users with disabilities.

www.edc.org/WomensEquity

EDEQUITY (the Educational Equity Discussion List) is designed to encourage discussion about international theory and practice. To subscribe, send e-mail to <Majordomo@mail.edc.org>. The subject should be left blank and the body of the message should read:

subscribe edequity

To order WEEA materials call our distribution center at 800-793-5076.

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vide information and resources on multiple equity issues, openly address issues of sexuality, and conduct campuswide programs related to women and disability.[14]

Current Advocacy: The Good News
As a testament to their strength, despite all the barriers, women with disabilities are becoming a political and social force. Throughout the world, grassroots organizing on the part of women with disabilities has helped individuals address discrimination based on gender, disability, and race/ethnicity. These valuable connections to other women with disabilities have given women the power to build a movement.

In September 1996, more than 300 women with disabilities participated in the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. The location of the "disability tent" was (as might be expected) far away from the main area of the conference. As if the distance itself was not enough of a barrier, the rain and mud made it inaccessible—but women with disabilities organized. Joined by nondisabled women, the group successfully worked to move the disability tent to a central and more accessible location.

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In June 1997, 600 women with disabilities from 82 countries gathered in Bethesda, Maryland, to report on the progress made during the intervening 15 months since Beijing. Slow but steady progress in education, employment, and health care was reported on and appreciated by participants.

Throughout the United States, programs and conferences focusing on the issues confronting women with disabilities are increasing. Mobility International USA, an organization based in Eugene, Oregon, conducts leadership programs for women with disabilities that draw participants from throughout the world. The Women's Studies Center at the University of Southern Connecticut held its eighth annual conference on Women and Disabilities in October 1998. At the Society for Disability Studies (SDS) conference in Washington, D.C., in 1999 the women's forum was again held on the first day. In September 1999, Wayne State University sponsored the Michigan Conference on Women and Disabilities: Celebrate, Motivate, Organize, Activate. And these are only a few examples.

It is attending meetings such as those listed above that truly empowers women with disabilities. Women and girls with disabilities can take their rightful place in the community through gaining increased access to available programs and services, bringing women with disabilities in touch with others in their vicinity, and promoting understanding between women's groups and disability groups. The support of other women, access to print and video information for and about women with disabilities, and awareness of their rights under laws such as the ADA all provide women with disabilities with the tools for self-advocacy.

At the beginning of this article, education was presented as a negative/positive duality—on the one hand, contributing to limitations for girls and women with disabilities and on the other, offering the best possibility for positive change. The gains cited above are in large measure due to girls and women who have used education to forge a path to increased advocacy and power. The task for educators who are committed to gender equity is to ensure that the educational path for girls and women with

Two years after leaving secondary school, women with disabilities are significantly less likely to be employed than men with disabilities.

disabilities is not so steep and filled with barriers in the future. If advocacy for gender equity includes girls and women with disabilities, *everyone* will benefit. ❖

Notes

1. Reported in *Women with Disabilities: Issues, Resources, Connections Revised*, prepared by Rannveig Traustadottir, updated by Perri Harris. The Center on Human Policy, Syracuse University, June 1997.

2. The original name for IDEA was The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142). The act was renamed in 1990.

3. *Gender Gaps: Where Schools Still Fail Our Children*. Commissioned by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation as a follow-up to *How Schools Shortchange Girls*. Researched by the American Institutes for Research, 1998.

4. The Special Education and Inclusion sections are based on information reported in "Pressing for Inclusion: In School and Beyond," Issue Paper Number 2. Educational Equity Concepts, Inc., November 1994.

5. "Women, Work and Disability: Opportunities and Challenges," by N. F. Russo and M. A. Jansen, in M. Fine and A. Asch, eds. *Women with Disabilities: Essays in Psychology, Culture and Politics.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.

6. "Female and Disabled: Challenged Women in Education," by M. Davis and D. Marshall. *Perspective*, 5 (3), 1987.

7. Reported in *Being Female—A Secondary Disability? Gender Differences in the Transition Experiences of Young People with Disabilities*, by Mary Wagner, The National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students, SRI International, April 1992.

8. Reported in "Gender as a Factor in Special Education Eligibility, Services, and Results," *To Assure the Free Appropriate Public Education of All Children with Disabilities*, Twentieth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, U.S. Department of Education, 1998.

9. Wagner, 1992.

10. *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours*. Carnegie Corporation of New York, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, December 1992.

11. *Programmed Neglect: Not Seen, Not Heard*. Report on Girls Programming in the United States. Ms. Foundation for Women, National Girls Initiative, October 1993.

12. Traustadottir, June 1997.

13. "A Report on Women with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education," Issue Paper Number 1. Educational Equity Concepts, Inc., April 1993.

14. The Barnard College Office for Disability Services (ODS) is one program where such action strategies have been implemented on an ongoing basis. Although Barnard is a women's college, the case study it provides can (and should) be generalized for the development of services for women students with disabilities in coed institutions.

Additional Resources

Across Borders
Women with Disabilities Working Together
This book of essays crosses political borders to unite women with disabilities. Includes an historical overview, an discussion of the exclusion of women with disabilities from male-dominated disability groups and feminist groups, and the triple oppression due to national underdevelopment (poverty), womanhood, and disability.•By Diane Driedger, Irene Feika, and Eileen Giron Batres (1996). Gynergy Books, P.O. Box 2023, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island CIA 7N7, Canada; (902) 566-5750.

Bridging the Gap
A National Directory of Services for Women and Girls with Disabilities, second edition
Just revised, this directory contains more than 200 listings of agencies and organizations that provide a wide variety of services or programs for women and/or girls with disabilities. A state-by-state listing makes it easy to find available resources in your area.•By Educational Equity Concepts, Inc. (1998). Educational Equity Concepts, 100 Fifth Avenue, Second Floor, New York, NY 10011; voice/TTY (212) 243-1110.

Focus on Ability
Serving Girls with Special Needs
Introduces adults in the girl scouting movement and the greater community to the rewards, pleasures, and challenges of working with girls who have disabilities. Includes ways in which activities can be adapted, behavioral expectations, and simulation activities that help create an awareness of the barriers that people with disabilities experience. •By Girl Scouts of the USA (1998). Girl Scouts of the USA, 420 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10018-2798; (800) 478-7248.

Imprinting Our Image
An International Anthology by Women with Disabilities
An unprecedented collection of writings from 17 countries by and about women with disabilities confronting a world that has imposed false and constricting images upon them. The writers articulate their needs, fight for the right to be equal members of their communities, and document their struggle to form alliances.•By Diane Driedger and Susan Gray (1992). Gynergy Books, P.O. Box 2023, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island CIA 7N7, Canada; (902) 566-5750.

Including Girls with Disabilities in Youth Programs
This booklet will help administrators and staff of youth programs successfully integrate disabled girls into their programs. It is also useful for alerting parents of girls and young women with disabilities to programs they may want to join.•By Ann Cupolo Freeman, Linda Toms Barker, and Marlene F. Strong (1996). Berkeley Planning Associates, 440 Grand Avenue, Suite 500, Oakland, CA 94610; (510) 465-7884. Web: **www.bpacal.com**

Loud, Proud, and Passionate
Including Women with Disabilities in International Development Projects
Features examples of projects organized by women with disabilities; recommendations from women with disabilities who have organized at the grassroots, national, and international levels; practical strategies for outreach, inclusion, and support of women with disabilities; and resource materials and supportive organizations. Available in English, Spanish, and Russian.•Cindy Lewis and Susan Sygall (1998). Mobility International USA, P.O. Box 10767, Eugene, OR 97440, USA; voice/TTY (541) 343-1284. Web: **www.miusa.org**

Playtime Is Science for Children with Disabilities
Designed as an early childhood (pre-K through third grade), hands-on, parent/child science activity curriculum that focuses on the needs and capabilities of children with disabilities.•By Merle Froschl and Barbara Sprung (1998). Educational Equity Concepts, 100 Fifth Avenue, Second Floor, New York, NY 10011; voice/TTY (212) 243-1110.

Serving Children with Special Needs in Your Child Care Facility
This manual by the Early Childhood Inclusion Network will help child care providers include children with disabilities in their centers. Includes how to identify children eligible for service; models of inclusive programming; the process of setting up a collaborative program; critical elements for successful inclusion; and resources for further information.•The Center on Human Policy (1997). The Center for Human Policy, Syracuse University, 805 South Crouse Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13244-2280; (315) 443-3851.

Strengthening the School-to-Work Transition for Students with Disabilities
A Guide for Educators
This resource guide will help educators improve the career preparedness of students with disabilities. Provides practical advice, materials, and strategies designed to overcome the barriers that have interfered with successful placement of persons with disabilities in the workplace.•The Career Options Institute (1997). The Career Options Institute, 6 British American Boulevard, Suite G, Latham, NY 12110-1402; (518) 786-3237.

Women with Disabilities
Issues, Resources, Connections Revised
This information packet serves as an introduction to the specific issues that women and girls with disabilities face. •By Perri Harris and Rannveig Traustadottir (1997). The Center for Human Policy, Syracuse University, 805 South Crouse Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13244-2280; (315) 443-3851.

We Can Make It
Stories of Disabled Women in Developing Countries
Inspiring stories of 25 women with disabilities from Asia, Africa, and Latin America tell how they defied the odds to become educators, lawyers, farmers, and shopkeepers. Offers suggestions for policymakers. •By S. Epstein (1997). ILO Publications Center, P.O. Box 753, Suite CT, Waldorf, MD 20602; (301) 638-3152.

Regional Resource Centers for Special Education

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education funds six Regional Resource Centers for Special Education to provide technical assistance throughout the nation. Services include consultation by the staff; training; assistance in the development of written documents; participation by staff on state task forces, planning groups, and other work groups; information on research, trends, and best practices; and referrals.

Great Lakes Area Regional Resource Center
Serves: IA, IN, IL, MI, MN, MS, OH, PA, WI
Ohio State University
Phone: 614-447-0844
E-mail: Daniels.121@osu.edu
Web: **www.csnp.ohio-state.edu/glarrc.htm**

Mid-South Regional Resource Center
Serves: DC, DE, KY, MD, NC, SC, TN, WV, VA
University of Kentucky
Phone: 606-257-4921   TTY: 606-257-2903
E-mail: MSRRC@ihdi.uky.edu
Web: **www.ihdi.uky.edu/MSRRC**

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center
Serves: AZ, CO, KS, MT, NE, NM, ND, SD, UT, WY, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Utah State University
Phone: 435-752-0238   TDD or fax: 435-753-9750
E-mail: conna@cc.usu.edu   Web: **www.usu.edu/~mprrc**

Northeast Regional Resource Center
Serves: CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, RI, VT
Trinity College of Vermont
Phone: 802-846-7009   TTY: 802-846-7223
E-mail: nerrc@aol.com   Web: **www.trinityvt.edu/nerrc**

Southeast Regional Resource Center
Serves: AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MI, OK, PR, TX, USVI
Auburn University Montgomery
Phone: 334-244-3661   TDD: 334-244-3800
E-mail: bbeale@edla.aum.edu
Web: **edla.aum.edu/serrc/serrc.html**

Western Regional Resource Center
Serves: AK, CA, HI, ID, NV, OR, WA, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the North Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau
University of Oregon, Eugene
Phone: 541-346-5641   TDD: 541-346-0367
E-mail: wrrc@oregon.uoregon.edu
Web: **interact.uoregon.edu/wrrc/wrrc.html**

WEEA Equity Resource Center
Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel Street, D-1199
Newton, MA 02458-1060

617-969-7100 • 800-225-3088
TTY: 800-354-6798
Fax: 617-332-4318
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www.edc.org/WomensEquity

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