



WOMEN'S EDUCATION DES FEMMES

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING
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INTRODUCTION

We are all agreed that education is the key to our ability to maintain our position in the international marketplace. What is unfortunate is that much of our workforce is presently attempting to train and update themselves at night on a part-time basis and with inadequate resources.

There are really three issues as we see them, and we will share the presentation of those issues. They are the provision of appropriate education, making education accessible to all learners, and accountability. There is an additional point we will address, which is the development of the national policy on paid educational leave.

APPROPRIATE EDUCATION

It helps to begin by refreshing our memory on the learner population we are dealing with. Let us concentrate on the 1980s. First of all, we have the new entrants to the labour force: 2.6 million people expected to join the labour force this decade. Of that, two-thirds, or 1.7 million, will be women. On the other hand, you have the people already in the labour force who are currently trying to adapt to new work and new working environments created by micro technology. These two groups will be seeking adult education.

Within the group of people needing to adjust to technological change during their working lives, you can find essentially three identifiable groups. There are the two-thirds of working women concentrated in support-type occupations, working as clerical, sales or service workers - and as the government's own Labour Canada Task Force on Microelectronics reported last year, women are likely to bear the brunt of technological change because they are concentrated in these types of very vulnerable occupations which furthermore almost invariably lack opportunity for training and development.

The second group you can identify are middle managers. In Vancouver recently, we were told that MacMillan Bloedel is in the process of relocating into very much smaller premises than it used to have. It is not because everybody has been on Weight Watchers, but because they have laid off - as somebody put it to me - acres of middle managers during the recession. While right now they are hiring back loggers, they are not hiring back all these middle managers. That includes six women who finally made it into middle-management ranks a few years ago. And of course they are last in, first out. So the middle managers include men as much as they include women.

The third group includes factory and warehouse workers, skilled and relatively unskilled workers. Here we are talking about several minority groups: the older people, who were identified as a critical group in the parliamentary task force a couple of years ago, who have not finished their high school education and therefore are very much handicapped in their pursuit of continuing adult education and retraining. Then another group includes immigrant women. You find them in garment factories in Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg. They are again very much handicapped in their ability to get the additional

training and education they need. There are francophone outside of Quebec. They are handicapped because of the lack of educational resource opportunities in their language.

Women just happen to be the major proportion of both the groups entering the labour force this decade, as well as needing to do that adjustment to and adaptation to technological change during their working lifetime.

What we find is that the education system is badly out of sync with women's educational needs. This is graphically illustrated in some of the following statistics. In 1982, of all women graduating from Canadian universities, fewer than 3% had degrees in engineering, computer sciences or really in any of the sciences whatsoever. In 1981-1982, enrolments in high-tech courses at community colleges right across this country were 95% male and less than 5% female.

The problem is accessibility of these types of courses for the future to women. McGill University in Montreal during the 1960s was .virtually inaccessible to Quebecois learners because of the language and many cultural barriers. So many of the math and science programs are inhospitable to women because of the way courses are taught and because of the culture associated with them.

Another accessibility problem: Part-time learners are the growth students group of the 1980s. By the year 2000 at the rate part-time learners are becoming a major factor on the campus, it has been estimated that over half the students at colleges and universities will be part-time students. Today the majority of part-time students happen to be women. It has been found that women are making career decisions at about the age of 30 and that is when they are going back, but again, having to content themselves with what is available on a part-time basis.

The problem they face is that many courses and programs are not accessible to the part-time learner. To give you one illustration, the University of Waterloo has an excellent course in introduction to computers which they would love to make available to all part-time students, to all students who are trying to get the applied computing aspect to add to whatever is their educational area, be it architecture, urban planning, nutrition or whatever. Unfortunately, due to budget restrictions, due to the fact that we have seen year after year a hold on educational spending, they are unable to provide that course to anybody except students enrolled full-time in the computer sciences program. This means, then, it is inaccessible to the kind of people we are talking about.

Neither are the Canada Manpower programs as accessible as they should be. Although women are 40% of workers, in 1982-1983 they were down to 26% of programming... i.e., seats allocated for training - and of course, this was a direct reflection of the fact that, through the National Training Act, this education has been targeted to the so-called nationally designated occupations. They just happen to be seen as very male and they happen to be very male dominated, without special measures to ensure that this type of training is accessible to women. Therefore, you end up contributing to and being an

accomplice to discrimination against women in the field of education.

The point here is not necessarily that women are not getting a fair share of the appropriate educational resources for the 1980s. The point is that the educational resources are inadequate and are out of sync with the educational needs of the emerging labour force.

Another point to make about part-time learners is that part-time learners pay higher tuition fees because the provinces do not allocate sufficient funds for part-time learners in the way they do for full-time learners. Generally, part-time students do not qualify for student loans; yet as we said at the outset, until such time as we do get paid educational leave in this country - which so badly needs such an educational policy - Canadians trying to adapt to the computer age are having to get their education on a part-time basis and at night, yet with the program offering, such as basket weaving, wall-papering and wine making, geared to the hobbyist or to redundant skills and knowledge.

Accessibility Accountability

Adult learners and specifically we are talking about the baby boom generation, who are parents or single parents right now. Yet daycare, career counselling and other kinds of support resources are, at most educational institutions, only available on a daytime basis and therefore inaccessible to those on a part-time basis studying at night. So essentially we are talking about value for our money, ensuring that the educational resources are not only adequate but are attuned to the educational needs of the learners of this decade and ensuring that they are accessible in the fullest sense of the word.

I think you can establish some standards for accessibility. That is your way of achieving some national standards and essentially serving notice that you are going to hold the provinces and the post-secondary institutions accountable. It is not that difficult to do, once you make that commitment. The analogies to other minority groups, whether they are numerically a minority or merely a perceived minority in terms of experience, are very instructive. You have to deal with accessibility in its fullest cultural sense and that means specific actions being taken to make courses that are traditionally perceived as male turf courses accessible to women.

At a federal level, you cannot spell these things out, but you can certainly say: We are tying this funding to this kind of action and we are holding you accountable.

Some examples of standard of accessibility are the way that the courses are offered. They are offered at times of day where women cannot get away. Men may not be able to get away at those times, but there is a way in which universities and post-secondary institutions still assume that the clientele is a full-time clientele, and they run on that basis. So we would have to give a number of examples of how that assumption undermines the access of anyone who is studying part-time, whether or not they be male or female; it happens to be a majority of women.

I have mentioned hours but I could have mentioned the way we are the part-time staff does not have any security, so that the course can get annulled at the last minute.

Computer/science courses are inaccessible for various reasons, very often because of socialization of girls away from math and science, and the Science Council has done a very good job of documenting and illuminating this problem. Women are dropping out of the enriched math courses, the very courses that are the prerequisites to what they need to study even to become MBAs at the university level; so there is the prerequisite inaccessibility.

Then there is the way in which courses are packaged, the way in which they are delivered. If something is only available to full-time day students, then it is inaccessible to perhaps a single-parent mother studying at night.

Eligibility requirements for loans are still based on family income; and that creates an immediate problem for women, in that while they may not have any disposable income of their own, when family income is taken into consideration supposedly they have enough money to go to school, although they may not have that income at their disposal for education purposes and yet are disqualified from receiving loans.

In Ontario, at a community college level, students applying for studies in math, basic education, English—the basic kind of education that we are talking about for people to be able to make intelligent decisions about the future, and educate themselves for it—they have been cut off from student loans as of last August.

Then there is the inaccessibility in terms of the culture associated with various courses. Women continue to be offended, for instance in engineering faculties where they have an engineering—they call it a magazine, they dignify it by that name—that is right up next to pornographic. That is an illustration of the culture associated with certain areas of study, and that is almost a form of sexual harassment to women trying to come into that area.

My feeling is you do not need to be dealing with the nitty-gritty details. What you need to do is signal that these things have to be changed, because we are saying these courses, this kind of education has to be accessible, and if you make that kind of a policy commitment—which you at the federal level are in a position, it seems to us, to do—then, it is up to them to figure out what impedes, what is in the way, what we are doing wrong. Where are we misallocating our resources? Where should we be redefining courses where they are still teaching redundant skills for instance, and that is happening; it is epidemic across the country.

But it is not for the federal government to be telling universities and other post-secondary institutions how to do their job; it is for the federal government to set standards for the country.

You do have the leverage of money, and that is a critical leverage, and by establishing national standards of accessibility and anything else that might be critical to producing

change in the system, people are going to have to readjust their thinking. It seems clear to us that this is the place to start. If there are strings attached to the financing of post-secondary education that meet certain objectives for the well-being of the general population of this country, the parties involved are going to have to readjust their thinking, their planning and their institutions.

On the point, the entrenched special interests, it is always difficult to fund new educational resource needs if it is at the expense of existing and perfectly legitimate educational resource programming. It is a case of robbing Jane therefore to provide computer education to Alice.

I see no reason why education has to toe the line of this wonderful thing called restraint, 6 and 5. If that had not been there for 1983-1984, we would have had 118 million more bucks to provide all this education we are talking about, and for 1984-1985 we would have had 260 million more bucks. So I ask the question, the fundamental question: Why are we putting this restraint lid on education when we all agree that education is critical to Canada's success in the future? Furthermore, you have a political public out there agreeing with this point. A 1982 Gallup poll revealed that people believe education to be the prerequisite to a healthy economy for Canada's future, even more important than an industrial strategy. That is very important.

I would very humbly submit that the lever in a negative sense that you are dealing with is a rising gender gap. Women across this country have identified both the fact that they need education and that the educational resources that are available to them are inappropriate, plus all the inaccessibility problems we have outlined here today. Therefore, if we continue to have the restraint on educational resources, while at the same time pushing more people into the educational system, and if the government were to implement some kind of a paid educational scheme, without at the same time implementing the accountability measures to ensure equity for women, what you would be doing is contributing to a terrible discrimination where women already marginalized in terms of education would be further marginalized. And let us tell you, that has direct political consequences.

You have a lot more influence in this situation than you seem to recognize. At the moment, it is the National Training Act that has the most impact on the post-secondary system and that is federal legislation in the field of education. So this has more impact on the adult population in Canada. It is federal intervention but there is something missing where systemic intervention is concerned.

The National Training Act provides for a certain number of women. Through the student loan reform, the door has been opened to part-time students, who are often women. So, some steps have been taken to assist underprivileged sectors of the population. However, generally speaking, the National Training Act does not favor women. It is a federal statute that has a great deal of impact on post-secondary education. We are encouraging you to adopt a systemic approach. If you intervene here and there while the population remains generally underprivileged, that is a shame. We are encouraging you to take a good look at

it. You carry a lot more weight than you seem to want to recognize where post-secondary education is concerned. It is thanks to your Act that changes are being made in the community colleges in the provinces. We can see the effect your statute is having in community colleges.

Paid Educational Leave

One of the measures which may in fact make educational resources more accessible to all learners is a national policy on paid educational leave. The federal government, through a task force of Canada Employment and Immigration, is considering a set of policy options at this moment for implementing a universal system of paid educational leave. I would just draw your attention to these two volumes of Learning a Living in Canada in case you are not familiar with them.

This system should be available to all Canadians, but it should focus on two major groups: first of all, the most educationally disadvantaged, and second, workers who have already lost their jobs through the introduction of high technology into the workplace. Most of the people in those two groups are women.

This is an extremely important policy thrust for this country. It has the potential to deal constructively with the serious adult illiteracy problem which we have in Canada and at the same time facilitate the maintenance of state of the art skills in our workforce. CLOW, among many other organizations from the education sector, from business and industry, labour and even governments, is strongly supporting the establishment of a universal system of paid educational leave which would achieve the objectives we have mentioned.

Our major concern at this point with this policy development is that it focus on those who are most in need of such a plan, rather than, for example, as the National Training Act has done, on the already highly skilled in the labour force. We are very concerned about the vast numbers of women who are losing their jobs through the automation of offices and what not and yet are not being given the training education opportunities that they need to retrain and re-enter the workforce. That applies to vast numbers of workers; and it is our concern that a system of paid educational leave would be designed in such a way to focus and most advantage, if you like, those groups of people.

We have some concerns that if it is to be paid for exclusively by employers, it would therefore exclude people who are already out of the labour force, either through job displacement or because they have not been able to get in the first place.

What we would like to see is a much more universal system that would involve a combination of funding sources so that it would be accessible to every adult in Canada.

When the plan is implemented, the demands on the post-secondary system will be even greater than they are presently. It is well recognized that post-secondary institutions are

having great difficulty coping with the students they have right now in their present facilities. Faculty in the post-secondary system are accustomed to dealing with a much younger group of students than they will have to teach once paid educational leave is implemented. Both faculty and facilities will be in need of updating.

Bill C-12, in further limiting financing of post-secondary education, will jeopardize the plans presently under way to formalize and legitimize recurrent education in Canada. It will do that by further limiting the ability of beleaguered institutions and faculty to serve as a fundamental resource for this purpose.

Where women students and faculty are concerned, we would like to make the point that neither the present nor the projected system of financing under C-12 does anything to ensure equitable access to or within the post-secondary system. We know that until the federal government is prepared to tie the money it spends on post-secondary education and training to the solid implementation of equal opportunity programs by those who receive the money, that equitable access will continue to be a major issue.

We and other women's organizations are fully aware of this and we will not be satisfied with any federal financing for any program that does not have as a major component compulsory equal opportunity built into it. Women want and need an equitable share of post-secondary resources.

We would like to conclude by stating that our society must make a choice. We can invest in educational resources which we see as contributing to the dignity of the individual; otherwise, these resources will have to go to welfare and other income support means.

It is obvious that you have the authority to decide whether instead of continuing to support education institutions, you are going to spend more and more on welfare programs. We have found that the majority of welfare recipients are women and that it might be better to invest in our education rather than to keep us in this welfare status.

We want to thank the committee very much for having us. We hope we have at least planted some seeds, and that we can continue in some way to have an on-going dialogue about this. We take the point that organizations like ours need to be looking at how national standards, and what national standards can be established for accessibility; we will be working on that. Thank you.