

# WOMEN'S EDUCATION DES FEMMES

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## Women's EDUCATION des femmes

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### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In this issue, Susan Gray Dueck, Nattalia Kilborn, Betty-Ann Lloyd, Chantal Phillips, Wendy Priesnitz, and Lona Smiley take a good look at mainstream forms of education and learning and come up with some serious critiques and a few alternatives. Beryl Tsang describes for us the work of an anti-racist educator, Sandra Acker compares situations for female academics in Canada and Britain, and Francoise Sigur-Cloutier outlines the importance of recognizing women's contribution to the francophone community in Saskatchewan. Marilyn Hodgson Tuck, in our Commentary, muses why so few rural students, particularly women, achieve a higher level of education, and we are indebted to Norma Lundberg for her review of Patti Lather's book and for pulling it all together in the Editorial. Poetry in this issue comes from Elizabeth Brewster, Ronnie Brown, Linda Rogers, Gillian Harding-Russell, and Gail Youngberg.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial contribution of Secretary of State, Women's Program.

### REPRINT POLICY

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### SUBMISSIONS

WEdf invites all readers to submit articles, ideas poetry, humor in all forms, commentary, reviews and resources. Please send submissions care of the Editor,

Views and opinions expressed in *Women's Education des femmes* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of CLOW. Secretary of State. or other fenders.

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## **COVER**

The cover graphic for this issue was created by Julia Blushak. It depicts women together on a journey through a maze. They each have their own perspective and may each go their own way, but they share the tools to help them see where to go.



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### WOMEN'S

#### EDUCATION DES

**FEMMES** est une revue publiée tous les trimestres par le Congrès Canadien pour la promotion des études chez la Femme. Le CCPEF est un organisme national bénévole chargé de promouvoir l'éducation et le développement du plein potentiel des femmes.

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## EDITORIAL

# Learning From Each Other

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by Norma Lundberg

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*" We all cross the water on  
stepping stones of our own."  
-Susan Gray Dueck*

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This issue of *Women's Education des femmes* appears at a time when the country is going through great stress economically, and women are bearing the brunt of the strain. Cutbacks in education, in training programs, literacy programs, in the workplace, and childcare all affect us profoundly. The articles gathered here are not explicitly about these cutbacks nor are they organized around anyone theme. They are about women's struggles to learn, and implicit in all of them is the connection between our learning and our livelihood, and our awareness that our lives can not be compartmentalized.

If there is a common thread among the articles in this issue, it is of women confronting difference--of race, class, physical ability--in their learning. What comes through the conflict is respect for difference, the acknowledgment that there are many paths to change, and that within the categories of "women", "visible minority", "disabled" (or any category of traditional exclusion) are individual voices with stories to tell.

Sandra Acker writes about women working in higher education--a system difficult for women academics to enter and attain status, a system in which women rarely, if ever, are permitted to join the inner circles. "Equity" for women, visible minorities, aboriginal people, disabled people (what Mary O'Brien has called "commatized" people) is just beginning to happen (1). Another writer meets and shares stories with disabled women in El Salvador, women who had despaired of being given an education and so organized to educate themselves. In the process, they discovered their strength. And an anti-racist educator explores the permeation of racism in our lives, and the particular challenge that racism presents to feminism. Struggles over racism are part of the work of Sistren Theatre Collective, described in another article in this issue.

At the last board meeting of CLOW, we discussed the need to pay more attention to women's diversity, so that our "national voice for women's education and training in

Canada" would represent the voices of Canadian women from all contexts. When we look at ourselves, we see a board that is predominantly white and middle-class. There is an element of shock in this recognition, for we have believed that we attempt to listen to all women's voices.

We are eager to be open to and to hear from other women about their lives and their learning. We can all learn from one another. We learn from Lona Smiley in this issue who writes of her endurance and anguish in a job re- entry program. We also learn about alternatives to our exclusionary and gender-biased educational system from a home-schooling parent and from a student of experiential learning portfolio development.

1. Mary O'Brien, "The Commodification of Women: Patriarchal Fetishism in the Sociology of Education", *Interchange: A quarterly review of education*. Vol. 15 No. 2, 1984.
2. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976 p. 246.

What I have learned, since becoming a board member last June with CCLOW, is the power of our collective voice through the respect for our individual selves. Our struggles for education need not be isolated struggles for individual differences to be heard; we gather strength from each other, from telling each other our stories. What continues to excite me about CCLOW is the commitment to individual growth and participation in communities, whether these be communities of higher education, childhood education, education for work, etc.

As Adrienne Rich wrote in *Of Woman Born*: "The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities" (2). Think of what we can do together.

**Norma Lundberg** sits on the Board of CCLOW and is a member of the Editorial Committee.

## S'instruire les unes les autres

par Norma Lundberg

---

*"Nous traversons toutes des torrents sur nos propres pierres de gué".*

Susan Grey Dueck

---

Ce numéro de *Women's Education des femmes* paraît à un moment où le pays traverse une grave crise économique, et où les femmes portent le poids du stress qui accompagne celle-ci. Les coupures budgétaires en éducation, dans les programmes de formation et d'alphabétisation, en milieu de travail et dans les garderies nous touchent toutes profondément. Les articles de ce numéro ne portent pas explicitement sur ces restrictions et n'abordent pas un seul sujet. Ils traitent des luttes que mènent les femmes pour s'instruire, dans tous est implicitement pressenti le lien qui existe entre notre apprentissage et nos moyens d'existence, mais aussi notre conviction que l'existence ne peut être compartimentée.

S'il y a un fil commun à tous les articles de ce numéro, c'est bien celui des différences (de race, de classe sociale, d'aptitudes physiques) auxquelles les femmes font face dans le cadre de leur apprentissage. Ce qui ressort de ce conflit est un respect à l'égard de ces différences, l'admission que nombre de choses doivent changer et que dans les diverses catégories de femmes, de minorités visibles ou de femmes handicapées (ou toute catégorie traditionnellement exclue), il y a des femmes qui ne demandent qu'à se raconter.

Sandra Acker parle des femmes travaillant dans l'enseignement supérieur, secteur où les universitaires du sexe féminin ont du mal à entrer et à atteindre un certain statut, secteur où les femmes peuvent rarement se joindre à la coterie des hommes. L'équité pour les femmes, les minorités visibles, les peuples autochtones et les personnes handicapées (ceux et celles que Mary O'Brien appelle les personnes dans un état comateux) commence à peine à se faire sentir (1). Une autre auteure a rencontré des Salvadoriennes handicapées et nous livrent les récits. Ces femmes, au désespoir d'avoir accès au système d'éducation, ont décidé de s'organiser et de s'instruire elles-mêmes. En cours de route, elles ont découvert leurs points forts. Une éducation anti-raciste étudie la rançon dont le racisme envahit notre existence et le problème précis qu'il pose au féminisme. Dans le cadre de ses travaux, la troupe de théâtre collective Sistren lutte contre le racisme, comme l'exlique un autre article de ce numéro.

À la dernière réunion du Conseil d'administration du CCPEF, nous avons invoqué le besoin de prêter plus attention à la diversité des femmes, de façon qu'en tant que porte-parole national de l'éducation de l'apprentissage des femmes au Canada, nous représentions mieux les Canadiennes de tous les horizons. Quand nous jetons un coup d'oeil sur les membres du Conseil d'administration, nous remarquons qu'ils sont pour la

plupart blancs et appartiennent à la classe moyenne. Nous sommes choquées de le reconnaître car nous étions convaincues que nous essayions d'être à l'écoute de toutes les femmes.

Nous avons vraiment envie d'être ouvertes et d'écouter d'autres femmes parler de leur existence et de leur apprentissage. Nous pouvons tant apprendre les unes des autres. Dans ce numéro, nous nous instruisons aux côtés de Lona Smiley qui a suivi un programme de réinsertion à l'emploi et nous raconte la persévérance qu'il lui a fallu et les angoisses qu'elle a connues. Nous prenons aussi conscience qu'il n'existe pas que ce système d'éducation se fondant sur l'exclusion a le sexisme grâce à un parent qui scolarise ses enfants à domicile et à une étudiante qui prépare un portfolio sur ses apprentissages expérimentaux.

Depuis que je suis membre du Conseil d'administration du CCPEF (juin dernier), j'ai appris à comprendre le pouvoir que nous détenons collectivement grâce au respect que nous éprouvons pour chacune d'entre nous. Nous luttons pour améliorer le système d'éducation, mais nos luttes ne doivent pas être isolées pour que nos différences individuelles soient entendues. Nous nous donnons mutuellement des forces en nous racontant nos histoires. Ce que je continue à trouver enthousiasmement à propos du CCPEF est son engagement à l'égard de la croissance personnelle à sa participation dans différentes communautés, qu'il s'agisse celles de l'enseignement supérieur, de l'éducation de la petite enfance ou de la formation professionnelle. Comme le dit Adrienne Rich dans *Of Women Born*: La chose la plus importante qu'une femme peut faire pour une autre est de l'éclairer sur ses possibilités et d'élargir celles-ci. (2) Réfléchissez à ce que nous pouvons accomplir toutes ensemble.

**Norma Lundberg** siège au Conseil d'administration du CCPEF. Elle est également membre du Comité de rédaction.

1. Mary O'Brien, "The Commodification of Women: Patriarchal Fetishism in the Sociology of Education", *Interchange: A quarterly review of education*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1984.

Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976 p.246.

## LETTERS

Dear *Women's Education des femmes*

Thank you for the copies of the special issue on "Women in Science" and the issue on "Girls in Science".

You may know that Hannah Gay of the History Department at SFU will be editing a memorial issue for Maggie Benston for *Canadian Woman Studies*. Val Oglov's and my interview of the experiences of women in postsecondary science will be included. John Walkely, who worked with Maggie, is conducting a survey of women in science graduates to determine what retraining programs are needed. In the meantime, a pilot project on immigrant women has started.

One warm, witty, and wise woman that I would like to read about through an interview in your magazine is Rosalie Abella. I have used her report on Employment Equity and heard her speak. I think she would be wonderful reading.

Sincerely,

**Hilda Ching**

Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology  
P.O. Box 2184 Vancouver, B.C V6B 3V7

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Dear *Women's Education des femmes*

Congratulations to you for an excellent double-document on the questions and answers involved in "Women in Science". It's a wonderful collection, and aesthetically most pleasing. Definitely a keeper.

Thanks also for all the poetry and photos. I think it brightens up what is often a "good for you" subject. And I *love* the sketch on page 45 of "Women in Science" especially the stylized wrench in the spot where one normally sees the compulsory double circles of breasts. It's a symbol of the whole thing - refreshingly innovative.

Sincerely,

**Heather Menzies**

Ottawa, Ontario

---

Dear *Women's Education des femmes*

Thanks for copies of the Science issue--it's a fascinating issue. Amazing how similar our

experiences in all these various fields, the very same words! What can it be ... ? I have just published a book of poetry, mostly about being a carpenter. It's called *Covering Rough Ground*

Thanks for your excellent publication. It's been a pleasure working with you.

Sincerely,

**Kate Braid**

Vancouver, B.C.

---

**Dear Women s Education des femmes**

Thanks for sending us copies of "Women in Science: Options and Intolerance" and "Girls in Science: Discovering their Choices". Both magazines were very well done and we have enjoyed reading them. Each article was different, interesting and informative.

"Women in Science: Options and Intolerance" will serve as an excellent learning tool for African women taking courses at the Centre. It would help them to expand their options to read about other women and programs in science. ATEC has also planned to do a Workplace Orientation Workshop series for 1992, and the magazine would be useful to us there as well.

Sincerely,

**Margaret Anderson-Clarke**

African Training and Employment Centre Toronto, Ontario

## POETRY

### MIRROR IMAGE

In the corner  
of my eye I see  
Middle age  
In my mirror.  
She has pockets  
Under her eyes.  
Her jawbone is  
Disappearing. She  
Looks away. She  
Doesn't know me.

**Gail Youngberg**  
*Saskatoon, Sask*

# Home is Where the Learning Is

---

by Wendy Priesnitz

"Until I entered school for the first time when I was 13, it never occurred to me that I might not be able to do anything I wanted to; that my career path might be restricted by the fact that I am female. It bothered me that most of the girls in my grade nine classes had a limited outlook on the world because of their lack of confidence and a bunch of 'shoulds' and 'should nots' that they seemed to have picked up somewhere along the way - just because they were girls. But that's nonsense. I feel free to be whomever I want to be, and do whatever I want to do...the whole world is out there waiting for me." (1)

**Home-based education is on the leading edge of a profound change not only in our educational system but in the ways we view childhood and learning**

Those words were written by my daughter Heidi, now 18 years old. Heidi and her sister Melanie, now 17, spent their elementary school years outside formal educational systems, exploring the world at their own pace, experiencing an educational adventure that was facilitated, but not structured, by my husband and I.

The learning process was an authentic one that dealt directly with the world, rather than the more conventional process of mostly simulated, classroom-based experiences. Free to seek answers to her personal questions about the workings of the world, each girl developed an impressive personal body of knowledge, a social conscience beyond her years, and the self knowledge and confidence to use that information to the limits of her personal potential.

My family, although a relative pioneer in the field of home-based education, is not alone. The option is being explored by thousands of Canadians under the home schooling provisions of the various provincial Education Acts.

I have come to believe that home-based education is on the leading edge of a profound change, not only in our educational system, but in the fundamental ways in which we view childhood and learning. Home-based education has the potential to demonstrate what can happen when the barriers to the integrated progress of the individual are removed.

## **La scolarisation des enfants à domicile**

par Wendy Priesnitz

La fréquentation obligatoire d'un établissement d'enseignement est un phénomène assez récent. Si les lois qui ont rendu la scolarité pour tous et toutes obligatoire ont été positives sur le plan social, le système d'éducation actuel est le symbole de cette notion erronée et arrogante selon laquelle ce que nous apprenons pour nous-mêmes est sans importance.

L'apprentissage chez soi est un moyen de contourner nombre des problèmes que pose le système d'enseignement officiel, dont cette socialisation fondée sur le sexe. Les enfants qui sont libres de s'aventurer à leur propre rythme dans des situations sociales compliquées ont davantage confiance en eux et éprouvent un plus grand sentiment de contrôle que ceux qui sont obligés de suivre l'emploi du temps de quelqu'un d'autre.

Les autodidactes considèrent aussi l'éducation comme un processus qu'ils déclenchent eux-mêmes, sans arrêt et pendant toute leur vie. De surcroît, ils retiennent plus souvent les connaissances et compétences qu'ils acquièrent dans un contexte qui convient à leur existence. La scolarisation à domicile est sur le point de mener à de profonds changements, non seulement en ce qui concerne l'éducation, mais aussi quant à l'attitude que l'on a à l'égard des enfants et de l'apprentissage.

## **To Learn is not to be Taught**

**Creativity and the love of learning can easily be destroyed by the coercive teaching of topics in which children are not interested or are not yet ready to study.**

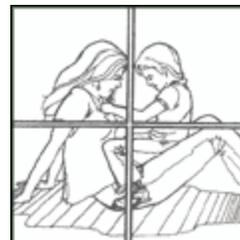
Compulsory attendance at an institution of learning is a relatively recent experiment that accompanied many other changes in society after the Industrial Revolution. The governments of the time had good reasons for enacting legislation that would ensure an education for all.

Unfortunately, the positive social innovation has, over the long haul, resulted in an unfortunate blurring of the distinction between learning and schooling. The

educational system now reflects the mistaken (and, I feel, arrogant) notions that real learning is the result of being taught by a teacher in a formal setting designed for that activity and that what we learn for ourselves is not important.

According to the renowned American educational philosopher John Dewey, learning is a personal process of development which arises from personal experience. He described it as a "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience and increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (2).

If learning is an internal process of understanding the world and of acquiring the confidence to explore its workings, then education is the deliberate influencing of the process, according to Dewey's way of thinking. The Latin root of the word education is "educare" (meaning, "to bring up") which suggests a process of helping the student develop her own natural ability to discover and understand the world. Schooling is merely an organized program devised by modern society to facilitate education. And curriculum is the means by which the school program is organized.



For me, the definition of learning implies that optimum learning occurs when an individual sets, and is able to pursue, her own personal curriculum.

### **Avoiding the Negative Messages**

Whenever a group of adults attempts to organize the learning process for children, it is bound to be accompanied by the values and biases of that particular group of adults. In the school setting, this can result in the communication of a variety of both overt and subtle social messages, some of which can be destructive to the egalitarian development of students in spite of the best intentions of educators. Clumsy bureaucracies, declining budgets, large enrolments and resistance to change contribute to the fact that, more often than not, what occurs in schools on a daily basis does not reflect the goals that teachers and administrators say they are trying to achieve.

One of the main messages that I wanted to avoid on behalf of my own daughters was, of course, that there are different career paths open to girls and boys. Home-based learning provides a way to circumvent much of this gender-based socialization pressure. For Heidi and Melanie, it has provided a way of finding out who they are and what they want to achieve without suffering from the assumptions inherent in the educational system.

### **Developing Strong Self-Concepts**

My observation of hundreds of home educated children has shown that children who have the freedom to venture into sophisticated social situations at their own speed develop an inner confidence and a sense of control that are often absent in those whose development follows someone else's timetable. Nurtured by supportive interaction with parents who respect them, these children are able to make sense of the world by experiencing it in increasingly larger, more adventuresome bites.



Wendy Priesnitz

In contrast to this, school attendance can have a devastatingly negative effect on self-concept. One group of American researchers reported that 80% of students entering

school feel good about themselves. But by grade five, only 20% have kept that feeling of positive self worth. By the time they are seniors in high school, according to this report, only 5% still have positive self worth (3).

Critics picture home educated children as social outcasts due to an over protected, insulated childhood. But this is far from the reality; these children often have contact with a wider variety of people than if they were in school. They meet and interact on a regular and personal basis with people from all walks of life, seeing examples of all facets of the adult world without losing any sense of the child world. Because they're not segregated in a school building all day, their lives can be full and integrated into the everyday life of their community.

Home educated students are also often actively involved with both older and younger children on a day-to-day basis. Modern North American schools don't provide this age mixing; instead they segregate children into "age ghettos".

Developmental and social psychologist Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University has noted that young children can greatly benefit from the modeling and reinforcement that results from relationships with older children. However, he laments the lack of such opportunities in the education systems of the western world. He goes so far as to state that such age segregation creates culturally deprived children who are robbed of their humanity (4).

Another observation I have made of home educated children is that they are often relatively ignorant of social game-playing skills--refreshingly innocent of the type of manipulative and power-oriented social interaction which is so pervasive in our society. They are products of a process of positive socialization that may well lead them to experience a personally soul-satisfying and socially constructive adulthood.

## **Educational Benefits**

If students are to be free to pursue their chosen career paths, they must obviously possess the appropriate academic tools. In most instances, the home-based learning experience results in high academic standing, with many previously home educated students attaining excellent secondary school marks and receiving university scholarships. The advantages of one-to-one instruction, the time and space to make meaning of the world, and the lack of pressure to perform, all contribute to academic progress often beyond that of peers in the school system (5).

In addition, the active learning process inherent in home-based education helps foster a number of positive related attitudes and skills. Our rapidly moving, information-based society badly needs people who know how to find facts rather than memorize them, and who know how to cope with change in creative ways. For this reason, most home education families stress the process of learning and ensure that their students develop the self-reliant skills which will allow them to cope easily with a conditional and shifting body of facts. Self educated people treat education as a self generated, on-going process

that continues throughout life, rather than as a narrowly defined activity happening to someone between the ages of five and twenty.

The protection of the love of learning and of creativity-as well as the development of problem solving and research skills-sometimes transcends the specific facts that are to be learned. Home-based educators recognize the fragility of these qualities and that they can be easily destroyed by the coercive teaching of topics in which children are not interested or are not yet ready to study. They also recognize that facts and skills are more easily retained when learned in a context relevant to a child's daily life experience.

### **Nurturing Autonomy**

**The mere fact that education is compulsory reflects an attitude of mistrust of children and their desire to make sense of the world.**

Strong objections to the compulsory aspect of schooling provide another major motivation for choosing informal, home-based education. For some people, the mere fact that education is compulsory reflects an attitude of mistrust of children and their desire to make sense of the world.

Home-based educators value autonomy as the full development of a child's capacity for independent reflection, judgment, decision-making, and action. If autonomy is seen as the link between intellect and responsible action, how can it be fostered in an atmosphere of coercion? How can independence be fostered in an atmosphere of dependence?

While home-based educators who are also concerned with children's rights do not quarrel with the necessity for protection or advocacy on behalf of children, they also give to young people what seems to be missing from the protection definition: respect.

### **Trusting Children to Learn**

Perhaps the main reason why most people put their children into formal learning situations at increasingly earlier ages is a lack of understanding and acceptance of the phenomenon of spontaneous learning. When children are small, much learning goes on that we don't notice; the early learning of a large number of complicated concepts and skills (including walking and talking) occurs somewhat spontaneously in response to curiosity and a strong, basic need to learn and grow. Home-based educators know that children continue to learn in the same way as they grow older-if they are allowed to continue to follow their curiosity within an environment that is as supportive and stimulating, relative to their age, as that which most parents provide for their infants.

And so, for some parents, the alternative home-based learning emerges as one that provides the best opportunity possible for nurturing the growth of their children into well rounded, confident, secure adults.

**Wendy Priesnitz** is a professional editor, writer and publisher who founded Canada's first support group for home-based educators in 1979. She and her husband facilitated the home-based education of their two daughters until each girl entered the public school system in grade nine. Information about home-based education is available from her do The Canadian Alliance of Home Schoolers, 195 Markville Road, Unionville, Ontario, L3R 4V8.

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1. Wendy Priesnitz, *School Free* (Unionville: Village Books, 1987).
2. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1916).
3. *Toronto Star*, September, 1988
4. Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Two worlds of Childhood U.S. and U.S.S.R* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970).
5. Wendy Priesnitz, *Home-based Education in Canada-An Investigation* (Unionville: Canadian Alliance of Home Schoolers, 1990).

## POETRY

### 1. BEGINNING AGAIN (May 12, 1988)

My life starts again, I think  
creakily, the old wheel turning

here, in this bare, clean room  
in Vancouver  
in a university residence.

There's a bed,  
a desk, a chair, a bookcase.

I sit on the bed, reading  
the Cantos of Ezra Pound.

Outside my window  
a man and a woman talk  
beyond my hearing

hands gesturing

papers on the floor,  
maybe an apple to eat.

I remember myself (mainly)  
as a happy student  
though I know I wasn't always

(that great ache of loneliness,  
the weight of youth;  
smell of magnolias  
sweet and sensuous  
on a hot Indiana night  
drenched with moonlight)

but this part of it was good:  
the book of poetry  
(more likely MacNeice or  
Auden

a visible language.  
Blossoms drift down  
(cherry? peach?)  
on green grass.

The late afternoon  
sun is drawing water.

Always I like to come back  
to these university days  
in the May of life

a succession of Spartan rooms  
with a few books

back then)  
with a pen to mark the best  
bits,  
the apple,  
the sense of time expanding:

all the books of the world to  
read and some to write

**Elizabeth Brewster**  
Saskatoon, Sask.  
(from *Garden Cantos: A  
Month of Poems*)

## Experiential Learning Recognition

---

by Nattalia Kilborn

**Experimental learning recognition identifies, evaluates and validates the knowledge which has been obtained outside the classroom.**

**E**xperiential learning used to be a foreign concept to me. I started to understand it when I asked the students of my General Educational Development class to write an essay in order to present and support their opinion on where and when education occurred: "Does it take place only at school or is it a life long activity?" Most of them opted for the later alternative. They all felt that the concept of who they were, what they did, and most of what they knew had come from the greatest of teachers, namely, life.

We all learn from our experiences. A child who touches something hot learns to avoid hot objects. We learn about friendships by having friends and about family life by being in a family. Reading about love and relationships is not the same as experiencing love and relationships and no one would want to ride an airplane when the pilot has only read a book on how to fly it.

Experiential learning has longer history than theoretical learning. It was the only mode of learning in use until the invention of schools. Its concept is broader than that of classroom learning as it occurs in all human settings: from school to workplace, in personal

relationships and through life events. It encompasses all life stages: childhood, adolescence, middle age and old age.

Learning from experience is the process whereby human development occurs (1). Experiential learning theory assumes that ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but that they are formed and re-formed through experience. Learning can be described as a process whereby concepts are derived from and continuously modified by experience.

### **Dossier de la reconnaissance des acquis**

**par Nattalia Kilborn**

Il est possible d'apprendre à tout âge, en des lieux, en des temps, dans des situations ou selon des modes variés. Dans une optique de justice sociale, il devient indispensable que notre société se dote de mécanismes fiables pour reconnaître officiellement les acquis expérimentaux, c'est-à-dire les apprentissages faits à l'extérieur du cadre scolaire.

La reconnaissance des acquis est le processus d'identification, d'évaluation et d'accréditation des apprentissages issus de l'expérience. La méthode du portfolio est reconnue comme étant la méthode d'évaluation par excellence pour apprécier la qualité des apprentissages expérimentaux et les juger de manière équitable.

La reconnaissance des acquis revêt pour les femmes une importance capitale puisqu'elles ont traditionnellement consacré plus que tout autre groupe social leur temps et leur énergie à des tâches domestiques et bénévoles, en marge du système formel d'emploi rémunéré. Par la reconnaissance des acquis, les femmes peuvent bénéficier d'une juste appréciation par le milieu scolaire ou de travail des apprentissages qu'elles ont déjà réalisés, et atteindre plus rapidement leurs objectifs, soit obtenir un diplôme, un emploi ou une promotion et donner un nouveau sens à leur vie.

**Prior learning assessment is of particular interest to people, especially women, who have a great variety of experience in their background.**

Experiential learning recognition identifies, evaluates and validates the knowledge which has been obtained outside the classroom. It is a concept based on equity as it takes into consideration that a person is the sum of her experiences. It prevents discrimination against people who did not or could not follow the traditional educational route. It can protect those who have accumulated a lot of knowledge but are less eloquent in the enunciation of that knowledge. Experiential learning recognition helps to facilitate a person's entry into formal education or the labor market.

In the United States, the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL) has been the guiding source of information on this subject. It has clarified the needs of various clienteles and developed procedures for granting recognition. Its involvement has assisted in the definition of more than 200 types of portfolios in the U.S. A portfolio is a document through which experiential learning is evaluated in a concrete and professional way. In Canada, Le Centre d'information et de recherche en reconnaissance des acquis (CIRRAC) is undertaking similar work.

Portfolios are beginning to play an important role in adult education. Many adults wish to return to school and to obtain a diploma but do not want to repeat in the classroom what they have already learned extra-institutionally. People who want to have access to a different line of work or get a promotion or simply give a new direction to their lives can prove their prior learning through a portfolio development course. In a course such as this, the participants analyze what they consider to be the major learning experience of their lives. This exercise also allows them to notice when positive learning resulted from an experience which, at first, seemed quite negative. Following this introspection, they are able to define their potential, match their knowledge and skills to their goals, and present evidence to support the claim that learning has occurred. The claim can then be assessed by a college examiner or by a prospective employer.

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**How many women  
would switch work  
and lead happier  
lives  
if it did not mean a  
long arduous  
transition?**

The prior learning assessment process is of particular interest to people who have a great variety of experiences in their background. Women, as a rule, have multiple roles. Their lives are subject to a myriad of influences which do not follow a rigid linear progression. They need a flexible program which deals with the uniqueness of a life pattern shaped by unremunerated volunteer work and invalidated familial responsibilities. They need a program which helps them find a stronger sense of identity, increases their self-esteem, makes them aware of their potential outside the traditional role dictated by society, and helps them identify their transferable skills. I became aware of this reality while writing my own portfolio.

Writing a portfolio is a little bit like learning to drive a car. It gives you a sense of freedom mixed with a sense of power. It pushes boundaries and makes unknown countries reachable. Learning how to drive does not get you a car or tell you where to go with it, however; neither does it guarantee you a life without tickets. Developing a portfolio makes you aware of who you are and of what your choices are, and empowers you to make decisions and helps other people recognize these decisions as valid.

In doing my portfolio, I realized my values, my priorities and my uniqueness. I felt I had been soft clay, reshaping myself constantly, afraid that if I stopped moving I would solidify forever in a shape I did not want. Now, it no longer matters what shape I take. I know my core is solid. Knowing who I am means not being afraid to risk placing my trust in others, not being afraid of making mistakes, and not avoiding painful circumstances.

I think that many women today feel, as I do, that the gap between their formal education and current work demands is widening. They may see blank spots in their education and wish to fill them with appropriate courses. They may feel a disparity between their personal goals and the utilization of their abilities in their current environment. How many of them, once they believed in themselves, would settle for an existence of stagnation? How many need to look in the right direction in order to stop seeing themselves as victims? How many would readily switch work (and lead happier lives) if it did not mean a long, arduous transition? Once a person addresses his or her self-concept and values through a portfolio development course, planning for the future, be it business, retirement, career or study, becomes an easier task.

There is a need to create greater awareness of experiential learning recognition so that colleges will offer the portfolio development course in a classroom setting and have a greater diversity of prior learning assessments available to all adults wishing to further their studies. A similar campaign is needed to address businesses, so that employers who offer training programs will appreciate the transferability of the skills and knowledge a person has acquired through his or her life experiences. Furthermore, employers who offer retirement packages could use the portfolio process to guide their employees in finding ways to channel their experiential learning toward new endeavors.

The same portfolio process can be used by government as a generic approach to fact-finding in order to identify the basic training needs of various target groups. Services provided could then be more closely tailored to the specific needs of groups seeking employment such as immigrants, women, disabled people, native people and youth. Such a program would prove to be cost-efficient as it would, in effect, provide group career counseling and in doing so, replace, in part, individual counseling.

Human development involves the integration of all aspects of an individual. We live more abundantly when our experiences provide us with opportunities for growth. Validating prior learning can help all individuals to go through what are sometimes difficult changes whether they are self-imposed or imposed by a society in transition. But experiential learning recognition will only become reality once the concerted efforts of government, business and academe provide the support mechanism needed for its implementation, and the best support mechanism I know is the portfolio development course.

**Nattalia Kilborn** is a Francophone living in B.C. who has tried to promote the idea of portfolio development, with lukewarm reception. Those interested in further information may want to investigate a book entitled *Where Do I Go From Here With My Life?* from Crystal and Bolles.

1. This is taken from I.S. Vygotsky, though I do not have information on the exact source.

My DAYS	
are comforting, they're so full. I set the table once again. The bright food sits between us waiting to be eaten. A shaft of sunlight pierces your water glass, the molecules dancing like fairies. If we pause too long, consider it too closely, it will ruin, the food growing cold, the vegetables turning brown, the three-egg omelet becoming leather. Then something or other (it's so hard to predict) will grow a beautiful blue-green mold (not ugly like the fungus on that bread - a ratty, beardlike fungus) or	the width of a cotton thread (You would not know this was happening: a time warp. You'd just know, then not know like slipping into sleep or falling out of consciousness, the light gone out to see the shadow of pain over your shoulder. And without a body, who could say you are dead? You would not exist.)  Now I ask you: How do you write about nothing while it crystallizes brilliant green, staining the

smell rank as week old garbage  
broken out of incubating green bags.  
A new race will walk out of the  
microbes: little men with luminescent  
blue hairs (each hair having a  
creeping life of its own) if only you  
could see the crawling within  
crawling under the microscope!

What would happen if forgot to set  
the table or we forgot to eat the food  
I set on the table? My days are

so much the same: a time warp to try  
things out. I could not set and set the  
table, practice not doing and doing.  
Not eating and eating, the meal not  
getting and getting cold depending  
on how you look at it. And what  
would happen? Nothing. Absolutely  
nothing. (It's this nothing at the  
inside of days so full on the outside  
I'm talking about.)

If you were sucked into a black hole  
you'd be stretched to the height of a  
skyscraper

porcelain? While it draws strange  
lines around your eyes and mouth  
that tell you how you've been smiling  
or frowning these short years when  
you catch yourself looking sideways  
in a mirror, strategically placed in a  
public building? While your tooth  
crumples on a stone in the salad  
you've washed and prepared and  
consumed unsuspecting the stone  
inside the folded leaf?

**Gillian Harding-Russell**  
*Surrey, B.C*

# Stepping Stones to the Land of the Living

---

By Susan Gray Dueck

**I spoke about the importance of disabled women telling their messages to the world, the inherent significance of these stories, and the power of writing.**

**O**n Sunday, February 10, 1991, forty-one women with disabilities arrived at the splendid Hotel President in San Salvador, El Salvador. Dressed for cocktails, they watched each other across the tables of carefully arranged wine and cheese at the kick-off event for a week-long seminar entitled, "Disabled Women and Functional Literacy." These women had arrived from all over Central America: Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador. They had come to learn about writing.

Months prior to this Sunday evening, each of these women had received publicity information that explained the upcoming seminar and invited them to partake in the event. And so they had bought tickets, found funding, packed suitcases and traveled to San Salvador. For many, this was the first time they had ever ventured from their villages, the first time they had ever had the chance to come to something as momentous as a week-long seminar. And now here they sat, dark eyes taking in everything in their midst, women from different countries exchanging tentative greetings. Although some women would use the hotel toilets as washtubs (because they had never before seen these white structures) while others had left behind their maids and houseboys, every woman in attendance sought knowledge. Every woman in the room had a disability and craved empowerment within societies that see them as sick, helpless and pitiful.

Sitting in that room, flanked by Spanish / English interpreters (provided for me by the organizers of the conference) I was struck by the undercurrent of urgency. I had arrived only an hour before and my home in snowy freezing Winnipeg seemed a vague half-memory, obscured by the heat and the beauty of the El Salvador darkness. I had been sent from Canada as a consultant for the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (C.O.P.O.H.), a national advocacy organization of people with disabilities. For many months, COPOH staff had worked together with members of ACOGIPRI (a self-help organization of people with disabilities in El Salvador) to plan this project. The groups had joined as partners in developing the seminar, making arrangements and acquiring funding from the Canadian International Development Agency.

**Pierres de gué pour atteindre le Royaume des vivants**  
par Susan Gray Dueck

En février 1991, quarante et une femmes de toute l'Amérique centrale sont arrivées à San Salvador (Salvador) pour assister pendant une semaine à un séminaire sur "Les femmes handicapées et l'alphabétisation fonctionnelle". Parmi ces femmes, beaucoup n'avaient jamais eu auparavant l'occasion de quitter leur village ou de parler de la lecture et de l'écriture.

La Coalition des organisations provinciales Ombudsman des handicapés m'avait envoyée au séminaire pour présenter un article sur la coproduction d'une anthologie internationale de textes écrits par des femmes handicapées. Mon intuition me poussa à parler plutôt d'un autre sujet, soit de l'importance qu'il y a à ce que les femmes handicapées se racontent, du sens profond de leurs récits et du pouvoir de l'écriture.

Les femmes qui m'écoutèrent furent enthousiasmées par les implications de mon message. Elles étaient nombreuses à se sentir seules et isolées au début du séminaire, mais elles en partirent fortes d'un nouveau sens de leur pouvoir et déterminées à faire en sorte que l'on réponde à leurs besoins et à propager leurs récits.

Quant à moi, je quittais San Salvador pleine d'admiration pour ces femmes passionnées qui pouvaient avoir des rapports dépourvus de la moindre inhibition et timidité. Nous ferions bien au Canada de communiquer aussi librement que les Salvadoriennes.

**As they listened to each other speak, their faces filled with understanding and recognition. Whispered confidences and wild laughter went on into the night.**

and remote.

The following morning, the week began in earnest. The hotel meeting room, be-decked with flags from the Central American countries, held a congregation of quiet, serious women who sat alert but somehow detached. Their eyes looked curiously at me and although they were scrupulously polite, there was a reserve in them I felt but could not understand. They sat, on chairs or in wheelchairs, hands in their laps, faces concerned and rigid, straining to grasp the concepts of the presenters. On and on talked these speakers and the women gazed at them- intellectually curious, separate

Watching them, I felt my heart sink. If this was their reaction to Spanish-speaking keynotes, what on earth would happen when I stepped in front of them to deliver my paper on coediting a book? I wouldn't even be speaking their language. My hands were sweating when my interpreter whispered that we would be presenting soon and was I ready? I glanced over at a woman from Nicaragua. She sat tall in her wheelchair, with a

grace and pride of bearing that were striking. Her face, as she gazed impassively back at me, was stone. No! I most certainly was not ready. What was I doing here?

As if in a dream, I moved, on cue, to the front of the room and looked numbly out over the cool faces. I began to talk. My paper was about the experience of coediting an international anthology of writings by women with disabilities. I had originally planned to focus on the mechanics and technical aspects of going about such a project and bringing to fruition a manuscript made up of many diverse pieces. But suddenly my path became lit by some strange intuition. I switched routes and began to explain why my coeditor and I believed in the importance of the project. I spoke about the importance of disabled women telling their messages to the world, the inherent significance of the stories each woman had to tell and the power of writing in this process.

And that's when a spark jumped live and bright into the room and caught itself in the dry brush of a dispassionate group worn out with living in worlds that, so often, looked right through them. The spark, in an instant, blazed into a fire that ran roaring around the room. The women who had written in our book were women just like them! Their own stories were as powerful, as important and as interesting as those in the book which would be read by the world who would hear their songs, share their thoughts, feel their passions. How these women shone, transformed by the dawning of these realizations!

By the time I reached the end of my presentation and began to speak about the difficulties we encountered in finding a publisher for our anthology, the women were shouting from their seats. I explained that although we had, only the week before, reached an agreement with a press, several editors had turned away the project saying that the stories of individual disabled women simply were not "political enough". "We must be heard!" called the voices in the room. "We will write for the world," they cried.

Once these women realized that I was interested in them as individuals, that I wanted to ask questions as well as answer them, they surged around me. From them, I learned of their stories, of life in their societies; from me they learned of my experiences. And as they listened to each other speak, their faces filled with understanding and recognition. A magic started. It wove itself around their midst and their passionate discourses. Whispered confidences and wild laughter went on into the night. Most of these women had come to the seminar filled with such a sense of loneliness and isolation. "I am so alone at home in my village," said one, "and I didn't think that women from such different countries would understand anything about my life. But we share so many experiences! So many feelings!"

With the exchange of stories came an almost desperate need for information. How do disabled people organize themselves in Canada? Why is Maria's leg brace of such lighter weight than mine? What technical aids do you have in Costa Rica for taking baths? Are you married? My husband left me. We were fighting for the guerrillas in Nicaragua when a bomb backfired.

**The women at this seminar grew and thrived and the pivotal point in their growing was the realization that they deserved the chance to learn.**

I was left paralyzed and he went away. Yes, I am married. Four years ago my husband crashed our car into a tree and now I'm a quadriplegic. He said that of all the things I had to break it would have to be my spine. He says that's typical of me.

I, too, am married but I am terrified. At my home it is Carnival now and I know that since I am not there to watch him, he will sleep with other women. But I had to come here,

it was so important for me to come here and learn. This is my life! But tonight I will call him again.

The women at this seminar grew and thrived and the pivotal point in their growing was the realization that they deserved the chance to learn. After believing for years that it was pointless for a "hopeless cripple" to acquire an education, they realized that their futures and their development lay in empowerment through organizing and educating themselves. Juanita, whose costume jewelry flashed and long nails gleamed vivid red, had been forced to stay shut in her house from the time she had gotten polio at the age of eight to the time when her parents died and she went, illiterate and socially undeveloped, to live with her sisters. The sisters had taught her beauty secrets and let her come often to visit the jewelry store they owned. But now, Juanita was trying to organize a group of disabled women and she needed to learn communication skills--how to write a newsletter, how to write reports, how to write to politicians. She needed to learn skills that would allow her to cross to the land of the living.

And what did I learn? All too often, when projects between developed and developing world countries are arranged for "mutual gain," developed world citizens smugly believe there is nothing that they could possibly learn from people living in "undeveloped places." I thought about this when I was flying to little El Salvador which looks, from the air, like a crinkled piece of emerald green foil. Although I was sure that I'd learn something, I never realized how much newly-gained empowerment I would carry home with me.



*The opening plenary panel at the Seminar*

All week, I watched these Central American women in admiration. I saw these passionate people speak and interact with an air of freedom, a lack of inhibition and self-consciousness that was both beautiful to behold and quite foreign to me. I realized the extent to which people in our society are burdened with the weight of creating an impression which we hope, when filtered through the minds and consciousness of those who behold us, is flawless. The women at this conference, free of probing, cruel, demoralizing self-doubt, spoke plainly and sincerely about their ideas. The result was

always clear, straightforward, free and beautiful. Wild Vielka, timid Carmen, business-like Ruth; each woman said what they had to say and did not, for a moment, waste time worrying about their image.

And in this way I, too, learned about communication. We all cross the water on stepping stones of our own. They lie within us in the form of our talents, strengths and individuality, and they can be illuminated through the light of other strengths, other minds, other cultures.

**Susan Gray Dueck** works as a Program Coordinator for the Humanities and Professional Studies Area of the University of Manitoba's Continuing Education Division. She has an invisible disability called Glanzmans Thrombasthenia, a condition affecting blood clotting and platelet function. The international anthology mentioned in this article was edited by herself and Diane Driedger and will be published by gynergy books in the fall of 1992.

## Women Academics in Britain and Canada

---

by **Sandra Acker**

**In both countries, women academics are at a serious disadvantage vis-a-vis men.**

**H**ow can we best conceptualize the situation of women academics in higher education? How can we change it? Having spent my working life as a woman academic and sociologist of education and gender, I have strong personal and intellectual interests in these questions. Until recently I taught in a British university. My move to Canada was in part a search for more nourishing environment for women, for feminists and for women's studies scholars.

### Documenting the Differences

In both countries, women academics are at a serious disadvantage vis-a-vis men. Not only are women in the minority but they are disproportionately found in lower ranks and in less secure posts. In Britain in 1988-89, women were about 19% of all full time academics, similar to the 1987-88 Canadian figure of 17.9% <sup>(1)</sup>. British figures can be broken into two subsets, as shown in table [1](#): those faculty who teach and are expected to do research as part of their normal work (termed "traditional academics" in the table) and those who do "research only." Women are much more likely than men to be in the second category, so much so that the 19% figure becomes misleading: women are 31.1 % of the research-only group but only 13.4% of those following traditional university careers.

## **Les femmes universitaires en Grande-Bretagne et au Canada** par Sandra Acker

En Grande-Bretagne et au Canada, les femmes universitaires sont en minorité. De plus, on les trouve trop aux échelons inférieurs et à des postes sans grande sécurité. En Grande-Bretagne, parmi les femmes universitaires, 13,4 % font des carrières universitaires traditionnelles, tandis que 31,1 % travaillent dans le secteur en pleine expansion et pas très stable de la recherche. On rencontre peu de femmes aux rangs supérieurs, d'où les chances restreintes qu'elles ont de jouer un rôle quant à l'embauche, aux promotions et dans hautes sphères du processus de décision.

Dans les universités canadiennes, les femmes sont aussi sous représentées aux échelons supérieurs et en trop grand nombre aux postes de contractuels et à temps partiel. Toutefois, une fois nommées à un poste menant à la permanence, leurs chances d'avancement à des postes de niveau intermédiaire sont plus grandes que celles de leurs homologues en Grande-Bretagne.

Dans l'ensemble, au Canada, le gouvernement a davantage participé aux programmes d'équité et le mouvement féministe y est plus fort, ce dont les universitaires ont tiré parti. Dans les deux pays, toutefois, les réformes féministes se heurtent à une opposition considérable. Pour expliquer ces inégalités et cette résistance, les féministes libérales invoquent les conséquences de la socialisation, les conflits de rôle et la discrimination et élaborent des méthodes utiles pour combattre ces problèmes. L'analyse des féministes socialistes et radicales nous fournit peut-être néanmoins l'explication la plus solide quant aux raisons pour lesquelles les changements surviennent avec une telle lenteur.

**In many universities, the number of women professors can literally be counted on the fingers of one hand, while the men number in the hundreds.**

Most of the people in the research group are on contracts, which means their salaries come from bodies outside the universities, such as research councils. Their job security only extends for the duration of their contract, which might be as short as six months. For some, a succession of contracts constitutes a career. Contract researchers are often excluded from other academic employee benefits, such as maternity leave, and are not always well-integrated into departmental life. The contract research sector, which now contains about a third of full-time academics, is the growth area in British universities, shooting up from around 5000 in 1972 to 14,000 in the late 1980s (2).

Do women in the traditional career lines fare any better? In Britain, the lectureship is the so-called career grade. Above this in rank are readerships and senior lectureships, different from one another on promotion criteria but equivalent on salary scale.

Readerships and senior lectureships are usually internal promotions, with a restricted number available each year in each institution. The selection is meant to be based on merit, yet because of greater numbers wanting promotion than can receive it, candidates are voted upon and ranked, usually by committees of professors or deans. In effect, a candidate goes through a series of competitions at departmental, faculty, and university-wide levels.

A small proportion of British academics achieve the rank of professor. Professorships can be internal appointments but are more often nationally advertised. There are rarely more than one or two in a department and apart from a small number of "personal chairs", more can be hired only when a position is vacant. The system does not seem to favor women, as table 1 shows. Among men, 15.2% are professors and 29.3% senior lecturers or readers; among women, 3.2% are professors and 16.4% readers or senior lecturers.

	Traditional Academics		Research Only	
<b>Rank</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Professor	15.2	3.2	0.8	0.1
Reader/Senior Lecturer	29.3	16.4	3.3	1.6
Lecturer	54.9	76.2	67.0	55.8
Other	0.6	4.2	29.0	42.6
<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>(27,371)</b>	<b>(4,231)</b>	<b>(10,119)</b>	<b>(4,561)</b>

*Source: See Note 1*

In Canadian universities women are also under-represented in higher ranks, and there is the same tendency for women to be disproportionately located in contractually-limited appointments and part-time positions, which cannot be discerned from the published statistics (3). But once in the tenure track, Canadian women's chances of advancing to middle levels are greater than those of their counterparts in Britain (table 2). Slightly over a third of each sex are associate professors. The difference in Canada comes at the full professor rank which is held by about 13% of the women and 40% of the men. The use of a competitive promotion procedure in British universities, together with minimal commitment from the government to redressing gender inequities, may produce the contrast with the Canadian situation.

Figures such as those in tables 1 and 2 tell us what proportion of each sex reaches a given academic rank. They give us an indication of career chances for each sex. Our other

option is to show the relative proportions of each rank that are held by women and men. The two options give us different information. If women are severely under-represented in the population as a whole, then even if most were to rise to the top level they would remain only a small proportion of that level. Tables 3 and 4 show the figures arranged accordingly.

These figures give us an idea of what the outside world (or the students and others in the institution, for mat matter) sees. Table 3 shows that nearly all professors in Britain are men and mat men hold me vast majority of other senior positions. We see me same trend for the Canadian figures (table 4) but again, it is less exaggerated. The impact of me imbalance on British academic life is extreme, especially when combined with tendencies towards hierarchy and elitism still found within many of me universities. Professors in British universities are me people who head departments, represent me university to the government, serve on working parties, act as external examiners and make hiring and promotion decisions. In many universities the numbers of women professors can literally be counted on the fingers of one hand, while the men number in me hundreds.

**TABLE 2**  
**Distribution of Faculty Across Ranks by Sex**  
**Great Britain 1988-89**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Full Professor	41.1	13.4
Associate Professor	36.1	33.9
Assistant Professor	17.2	34.1
Other Ranks	5.5	18.5
<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>99.9</b>
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>(29,233)</b>	<b>(6,371)</b>

*Source: See Note 1*

**TABLE 3**  
**Representation of Women and Men in Each Rank**  
**Great Britain 1988-89**

Percentages				
Rank	Professor	Reader/ Senior Lectuer	Lecturer	Other
Men	96.9	92.1	82.3	46.9
Women	3.1	7.9	17.7	53.1
<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>(4,307)</b>	<b>(8,720)</b>	<b>(18,233)</b>	<b>(337)</b>

*Source: See Note 1 "Research only" faculty are not included in this table*

### Cross-Cultural Comparisons

**Male dominance in universities is not only numerical. It is also expressed through curriculum, pedagogy and the sexual politics of everyday life.**

How do we explain patterns such as those described above? We need to consider why there are differences between the two countries, as well as why women in both settings suffer a disadvantage relative to men.

In neither Britain or Canada is there a network of privately financed universities, as in the United States. Central government is particularly influential in the British case; local and county levels of government have no control over universities. The Conservative government of recent years has been interventionist to an unprecedented degree: universities have experienced financial cutbacks and pressures to provide value for money. But there have been no interventions to support moves in universities towards gender equality.

That there is a void in this respect is not surprising in light of the general indifference, even antipathy, towards feminism in Britain. Feminist groups have relatively little input into the political process. Nor do they have easy access to the courts or much financial support. Although there is legislation on sex discrimination and equal pay, and an Equal Opportunities Commission to oversee it, the legislation is generally thought to be weak. There are no strong liberal feminist networks, no affirmative action plans, no top-level enquiries. There is little public concern about the situation of women academics and hardly any literature on the topic.

A major difficulty rests with the very small numbers of women in the system in secure

posts. Many women are isolated in departments where there are few others of their sex. It is difficult to reach the level of activism which would kick start successful efforts to introduce reform.

There are some signs of change. In recent years, universities have begun to call themselves equal opportunity employers (though often with little evidence to support the claim) and have set up working parties or committees to consider the issues. The Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), an association of the heads of universities, has issued guidance suggesting institutions formulate equal opportunities policies. The Association of university Teachers (the academics' union) publishes a supplement to its bulletin called *AUT Women* which has increased consciousness among academics.

In Canada there are policies at both federal and provincial level which have as their aim the reduction of gender (and other) inequality (4). The Federal Contractors Program requires employees of more than 100 people who wish to receive federal contracts for \$200,000 or over to put into place plans to increase equity for women, visible minorities, aboriginal people and disabled people. Many universities have joined this program. Some provinces, have introduced additional equity measures.

For example, Ontario has provided money for employment equity coordinators and special I projects in universities as well as "faculty renewal" funds earmarked for hiring young faculty and helping faculty, especially women, move from marginal positions into tenure-stream posts. Quebec has a compliance review program similar to the federal one. There is also a voluntary program which gives technical and financial support to institutions trying to increase equity. Canadian universities also benefit from a higher level of feminist activism than British ones and there is evidence that such efforts have been influential (5).

## Explanations and Strategies

**If we want to understand fully the persistence of gender differentiation and inequality, there remains a need to develop the analysis using the full range of feminist theory.**

What remains to be explained is why, in both countries, academic women remain disadvantaged and men remain in control. For answers here, we have to turn to feminist theory. Many writers list liberal, socialist and radical feminism as three major types of theory. There are numerous criticisms of this categorization, including some from black feminists and members of other marginalized groups who argue that none of the approaches has adequately addressed their situation. Nevertheless, the division can be useful in pointing us to types of explanations for the problems identified.

By far the majority of approaches to women and higher education rely on liberal feminist

perspectives, generally accepting society as it is but aiming to alter women's share of its rewards. There are several strands. One is the argument that women have been socialized into behavior which impedes career progress, such as low levels of confidence, inadequate ambition, and over-sensitivity to the needs of others. A similar perspective adduces that women are held back by overload and time pressures caused by conflicting family and career roles. These perspectives, while containing some truth, tend to overgeneralize and put the onus on the individual to make the best of a bad situation. Trying harder or clever manoeuvring might help one woman, but the same problems are there for the next.

Two more largely liberal feminist views of the problem shift the emphasis from the individual to the structure. One is the charge that society fails to invest sufficiently in woman power (for example by not sufficiently encouraging women to enter scientific careers). The other explains the position of academic women in terms of sex discrimination. Strategies which follow from woman power and discrimination arguments make use of legislation, persuasion, argument, publicity and litigation. I have suggested above that such strategies can meet with some success in favorable circumstances.

But while it makes sense to continue with such strategies, we need a more powerful explanation of why progress is so slow. Other varieties of feminist thought such as socialist and radical feminism may provide a framework which helps make sense of the situation.

Socialist feminists see the workings of capitalism as the foundation for class and gender inequality. The labor market exhibits systematic patterns which confirm female disadvantage. For example, many women hold jobs where low levels of skill, low security, low wages and poor career prospects are the norm; domestic responsibilities and educational channeling reinforce this disadvantageous division of labour.

Socialist feminists have written relatively little about higher education, but a number of questions arise from a socialist feminist analysis. For example, what part does higher education play in reinforcing gender divisions in the labour market and the family? Why does the same amount of education bring a lower rate of return for women and minorities than for white men? Why is higher education, especially in Britain, only available to a small proportion of the population? If education is about increasing social mobility, how is it that these patterns are so persistent?

And British universities have their own "academic proletariat-the temporary, contract research staff-who are disproportionately female and whose numbers are increasing in the name of economy and flexibility. The abolition of tenure in universities by the government's Education Reform Act of 1988 would seem to suggest "traditional" academics are vulnerable too.

**TABLE 4**  
**Representation of Women and Men in Each Rank**  
**Canada 1988-89**

<b>Percentages</b>				
<b>Rank</b>	<b>Full Professor</b>	<b>Associate Professor</b>	<b>Assistant Professor</b>	<b>Other Ranks</b>
Men	93.4	83.0	69.8	57.7
Women	6.6	17.0	30.2	42.3
<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>(12,878)</b>	<b>(12,725)</b>	<b>(7,211)</b>	<b>(2,790)</b>

*Source: See Note 1.*

In radical feminism, patriarchy is the source of women's subordination. The figures shown earlier support the argument that men dominate universities. But male dominance in universities is not only numerical; it is also expressed through curriculum, pedagogy and the sexual politics of everyday life. Feminists have produced extensive critiques of scholarship in many fields and have created specifically feminist research methodologies and women's studies courses. There is also considerable concern, especially in North America, with developing a women-centered alternative to competitive, hierarchical, individualistic approaches to higher education.

Radical feminists are especially concerned with the power men hold over women, which can become sexual harassment. But even simply being a women academic in a male dominated Institution brings forms of "sexual politics" - dilemmas of control, visibility, relationships - into everyday life. Women who rise in the hierarchy find themselves allowed in as individuals to a culture which is shaped by men. They may never join the inner circles.

Socialist feminist strategies might include efforts to, develop further a class-gender-race analysis of the university's social role; to encourage alliances of workers, especially women, across occupational segments; to increase commitment to gender issues in the more left-leaning political parties and trade unions; to work towards increased access to higher education for groups traditionally deprived of it. Radical feminist strategies include developing women-centered knowledge; making institutions safe for women; finding space for women within the academy.

In practice, socialist and radical feminists often make use of the more widely acceptable liberal strategies, recognizing them as means to an end rather than as ends in themselves. However, if we want to understand fully the persistence of gender differentiation and

inequality, there remains a need to develop the analysis of both British and Canadian - universities using the full range of feminist theory.

Recent post modern critiques of feminism tell us that no one approach can be considered total truth. Mainstream feminists also have to deal with the difficulties that diversity among women creates for their attempts to use "women" as a political category and basis for identity. It remains the case, however, that institutional, disciplinary, and departmental cultures may be transmitting a hidden curriculum of gender in higher education which needs critical study.

## Conclusion

Women academics are undoubtedly disadvantaged in British universities, and somewhat less so in Canadian ones. Resource to feminist reform is deeply embedded in normal university practices and beliefs in both countries. More efforts at comparative analysis may pinpoint features of higher education systems (such as promotion procedures or state intervention) that can be in various measure helpful or harmful to women. Feminist theories help us understand how serious the situation is and why change is so frustratingly slow.

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1. British statistics are from *Universities Funding Council, University Statistics 1988-89, vol. 1* (University' Statistical Record, Cheltenham: 1990), p. 77. Canadian statistics are from *Statistics Canada, Teachers in University 1981- 88*, (Minister of Supplies and Services, Ottawa: 1991),p.17.
  2. Rees, T., "Contract research: a new career structure?" *AUT Woman*, No. 16, 1989,pp.1 and 4; Universities Funding Council (see note 1).
  3. Drakich, J., Smith, D.E., Stewart, P., Fox, B. and Griffith, A, *Status of Women in Ontario University: A Report. vol. 1: Overview*, (Draft copy 1990).
  4. These are described in Breslauer, H. and Gordon, J. "Redressing the imbalance: the public policy agenda and academic women," a paper presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education Annual Meetings (Victoria: 1990); and in *Canadian Association of University Professors, Status of Women Supplement*, (CAUT, Ottawa: 1991).
  5. Drakich et al. (see note 3).

# La situation des femmes francophones de la Saskatchewan dans les années quatre-vingt-dix

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par Françoise Sigur-Cloutier

**Les documents officiels de la communauté fransaskoise évoquent très peu la contribution des femmes.**

Grâce aux efforts d'expansion de la Fédération des femmes canadiennes-françaises (fondée en 1914 à Ottawa), les femmes francophones de la Saskatchewan sont officiellement regroupées depuis 1967. Ces efforts ont d'ailleurs commencé dès les années trente puisque l'on trouve les traces d'un premier groupe à Gravelbourg, cœur de la francophonie de la Saskatchewan; ce groupe avait été mis sur pied pour contrer les méfaits du "Homemakers Club" (1).

Au fil des ans, le regroupement né dans le sud s'est rapidement propagé au nord et s'y est développé. Puis, le mouvement a vieilli et a senti le besoin de se donner un nouvel élan. En 1989, les groupes du sud et du nord ont décidé de se donner une structure provinciale. Malgré ses efforts pour s'implanter dans les villes, le regroupement des femmes francophones de la Saskatchewan est resté essentiellement rural; or, en raison de la situation économique de la province, les régions rurales perdent de leur vitalité au profit des villes qui grossissent. Une restructuration à l'échelle provinciale permettrait, on l'espérait, de pouvoir recruter les nouvelles énergies qui s'étaient concentrées dans le milieu urbain.

En 1990, alors que les groupes de francophones participaient à un grand mouvement de concertation et que le féminisme se réorientait, les Fransaskoises devaient définir la base de leur unité. Elles le firent en adoptant le *Discours des Fransaskoises* (2). Ce Discours précise leur rôle dans le passé-leur histoire à elles, en quelque sorte--retrace les grandes lignes des principaux enjeux auxquels elles ont à faire face aujourd'hui et prépare le terrain pour demain.

## **Francophone Women in Saskatchewan : The Nineties**

by Françoise Sigur-Cloutier

La Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises (Federation of francophone women in Saskatchewan) centers its work on five principal directives. These are:

1. Francophone women have contributed and continue to contribute to the development of their community, despite the restrictions placed on them

because of their sex.

2. The work of women in the francophone community, which is often devalued or not recognized, must be made visible in order that it is not lost to the community.
3. The needs and concerns of francophone women merit special attention since the rapidly changing role of women in society has a particular impact on the francophone community.
4. Francophone women are perfectly capable of defining their own collective reality and planning their future, and they have the right to resources, information, and the support necessary to do this work.
5. Women more often acknowledge the difference and diversity around them, and their involvement in the development of community helps to identify and celebrate the richness that exists in Saskatchewan today.

Though early efforts can be traced back to the 1930s, francophone women in Saskatchewan have been formally organized since 1967 due primarily to the expansion activity of the Federation of French-Canadian Women in Canada. It was in 1989, however, that groups operating in the south and the north of the province decided to merge into one provincial structure. This has remained a largely in rural group; however, as population and economic power shift to the cities, there is hope to recruit new energy and enthusiasm from this source.

La Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises, organisme qui représente les femmes francophones de la Saskatchewan, oriente son action d'après cinq principes directeurs.

1. **Les Fransaskoises ont participé et participent toujours au développement de leur communauté, en dépit des restrictions historiques qu'a imposé à leur champ d'action la division du travail selon le sexe.**

**Les femmes ont de plus en plus accès à des domaines non traditionnels tandis que les hommes n'ont que très peu étendu leurs champs d'action dans les domaines dits "féminins".**

Les documents officiels de la communauté fransaskoise évoquent très peu la contribution des femmes, mais les témoignages de femmes permettent de cerner le rôle important qu'ont joué et que jouent toujours les Fransaskoises, laïques et religieuses, dans le développement de leur communauté. Pas uniquement leur rôle en tant que mères de familles nombreuses-- quoique cette contribution ne soit pas négligeable mais de leur participation active à la survie de leur communauté dans certains domaines traditionnellement réservés aux femmes, promotion de la santé, éducation des enfants et développement du sens d'appartenance à la communauté fransaskoise entre autres. Même aujourd'hui la communauté aurait beaucoup de difficultés à assurer sa survie et son épanouissement sans la participation et les

connaissances des femmes dans ces domaines.

L'envers de la médaille est que les femmes sont aussi traditionnellement exclues d'autres domaines: situations de porte-parole, de prises de position, de gestion de ressources financières importantes, etc. Dans les organismes, comme au foyer ou à la ferme, la femme s'occupe des tâches "intérieures" tandis que les tâches "extérieures" reviennent à l'homme. Or de nos jours, les femmes ont de plus en plus accès à des domaines non traditionnels tandis que les hommes n'ont que très peu étendu leurs champs d'action dans les domaines dits "féminins", d'où le danger que courent les femmes de s'épuiser et le risque de pénurie de main-d'oeuvre dans les secteurs encore considérés comme féminins.

Ce genre de division du travail est dangereux parce qu'il crée un cercle vicieux, à savoir une "discrimination systémique". Ainsi, on refuse aux femmes la possibilité d'apprendre certaines techniques ou de participer à certains réseaux mais, par la suite, on exige d'elles qu'elles connaissent ces mêmes techniques ou contacts pour accéder à certains postes. L'exemple type en Saskatchewan est le Collège Mathieu, fondé en 1917 pour développer une élite fransaskoise. Le collège n'a accepté les filles qu'à partir de 1970, et cette exclusion, sans être exceptionnelle pour l'époque, ne peut qu'avoir une influence sur la participation des femmes aux postes de direction aujourd'hui.

**2. Les contributions des Fransaskoises sont trop souvent dévalorisées ou passées sous silence. Nous devons rendre leur travail visible pour assurer leur participation continue au développement de la communauté fransaskoise.**

Peu de gens affirmeraient que les domaines traditionnellement féminins, comme la santé, l'éducation et la culture, n'ont pas d'importance dans une communauté; au contraire, la communauté fransaskoise a identifié les deux derniers secteurs comme étant prioritaires. Alors même que nombre de femmes participent depuis des décennies à ces domaines, nous n'entendons que très peu parler de l'importance de leur apport. Comment expliquer un tel écart entre la participation et la visibilité des femmes dans leur communauté? Première raison: le travail des femmes est un travail "non-marchand", donc dévalorisé dans notre société. Il est perçu comme l'expression d'une relation personnelle et non comme un "vrai" travail. C'est pourquoi ce travail est rarement analysé ou mis en évidence parce qu'on le voit comme relevant de la vie privée et, par conséquent, en dehors de la sphère des valeurs sociales.

Deuxième raison: le travail des femmes est accompli par des femmes. Dans un monde où les femmes sont généralement considérées comme inférieures aux hommes tout ce qu'elles font a tendance à être dévalorisé.

Cette hiérarchie du travail n'est pas plus "naturelle" que la division du travail selon le sexe, mais on l'excuse souvent en déclarant que le travail des femmes n'est qu'un simple "soutien" aux activités "centrales" d'un organisme. Mais ce que l'on considère comme central ou comme soutien est surtout fonction de la perception que l'on en a. Si on part de l'idée que la contribution des femmes n'est pas aussi valable que celle des hommes, on trouvera inévitablement que leur travail est secondaire, voire sans importance, dans l'évaluation d'une situation donnée. Le travail des femmes devient alors invisible.



La Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises

**Beaucoup des Fransaskoises trouvent que leurs compétences acquises ne sont pas reconnues et qu'elles ont besoin de plus de formation pour faire sur le marché du travail les tâches qu'elles faisaient auparavant dans un cadre relationnel.**

Cette invisibilité du travail des femmes comporte un danger pour le développement communautaire, d'une part car on procède à une étude de la communauté à partir de données ne reflétant pas toute la réalité. Ainsi, on peut avoir du mal à comprendre une diminution du sens d'appartenance à une communauté parce que nos modèles d'analyse ne tiennent pas compte de nombre d'activités qui favorisaient ce sens d'appartenance et ne nous permettent pas par conséquent de constater clairement leur disparition. De plus, on risque de perdre beaucoup de temps et d'énergie si on se lance dans une quête d'appartenance sans tirer parti des connaissances

que les femmes ont accumulées dans ce domaine.

D'autre part, l'invisibilité du travail des femmes rend déjà impossible une évaluation juste de leur taux de participation au développement communautaire. Il est essentiel de rendre ce travail visible pour permettre aux femmes d'établir leurs priorités en matière de participation et de trouver des façons plus collectives de résoudre des problèmes qui peuvent paraître personnels et inabornables à une femme isolée. Les témoignages des Fransaskoises qui sont actives dans les organismes communautaires sont unanimes sur ce point: elles ne peuvent pas faire plus que ce qu'elles font déjà. Si on veut augmenter les activités dans les communautés, il faut réévaluer le travail qu'y font déjà les femmes en se fondant sur une analyse juste de leur participation passée et actuelle.



Françoise Sigur-Cloutier

- 3. Les besoins et les préoccupations des Fransaskoises méritent une attention particulière car les changements rapides du rôle des femmes affectent la communauté fransaskoise de façon particulière.**

**Peu de choses ont autant changé au Canada** depuis quelques décennies que le rôle des femmes. Les changements les plus importants découlent de l'entrée massive des femmes sur le marché du travail. Selon Statistique Canada, environ 75% des femmes âgées de 20 à 44 ans faisaient partie de la population active en 1988, tandis que dans la génération de leur mère, soit les femmes âgées de 55 à 64 ans, le taux d'activité n'était que de 36%. Ceci implique que la génération qui est maintenant en âge de prendre le leadership dans nos communautés se trouve obligée d'inventer un nouveau modèle de vie familiale et communautaire. Cet ébranlement des structures familiales et communautaires est plus le résultat d'une situation économique difficile que d'un libre choix. Cette entrée massive des femmes sur le marché du travail a provoqué des changements majeurs dans la communauté fransaskoise.

Le changement que mentionne le plus souvent les Fransaskoises est une nouvelle surcharge de travail; les travaux domestiques effectués par les femmes n'ayant jamais été reconnu par la société, rien, ou presque, n'est prévu pour les remplacer quand elles se lancent dans une vie professionnelle. Par conséquent, elles sont obligées d'accomplir la majorité des tâches d'une femme au foyer à plein temps, tout en travaillant à l'extérieur. Aussi, si elles ont plus de contrôle sur leur propre argent, elles en ont, par contre, beaucoup moins sur leurs loisirs et leurs activités bénévoles, faute de temps. De plus, le lieu de travail rémunéré est devenu pour nombre de femmes un lieu privilégié où établir des contacts sociaux et amicaux. Le besoin de contact et de valorisation sociale auquel répondait le bénévolat est maintenant comblé par le travail rémunéré.

Cette situation piège les Fransaskoises à deux niveaux: tout d'abord, beaucoup trouvent que leurs compétences acquises ne sont pas reconnues et qu'elles ont besoin de plus de formation pour faire sur le marché du travail les tâches qu'elles faisaient auparavant dans un cadre relationnel. Ensuite, les systèmes de soutien traditionnels s'écroulent et les Fransaskoises éprouvent des difficultés à avoir accès aux services qui leur étaient jadis accessibles grâce au bénévolat. Or, dans l'état actuel des choses, les Fransaskoises ne peuvent pas compter sur les gouvernements pour leur fournir les services qui pourraient en partie alléger leur tâche; les programmes ne sont pas assez adaptés aux communautés locales pour tenir compte de leurs besoins spécifiques.

**Ce n'est qu'en échangeant leurs expériences que les femmes pourront s'attaquer aux racines sociales de ces problèmes et établir des priorités qui correspondent à leur véritable vécu.**

Le nouveau modèle de vie familiale et communautaire que doivent inventer les Fransaskoises a aussi à tenir compte des changements que provoquent les mariages mixtes de plus en plus nombreux. Comment prendre des décisions qui protègent les traditions fransaskoises dans ces familles de langue mixte, sans nier au ou à la partenaire non-francophone ses droits? Sans vouloir dicter de nouvelles mœurs familiales, on ne peut pas non plus reléguer ces questions au domaine du privé en demandant à chaque couple d'inventer de toutes pièces leurs propres solutions. Il

s'agit d'un changement social qui doit être traité comme tel.

**4. Les Fransaskoises ont toutes les capacités voulues pour exprimer leurs réalités actuelles et planifier leur avenir. Elles ont droit aux ressources, à l'information et au soutien nécessaires pour faire ce travail collectif.**

Leur exclusion historique des structures décisionnelles et une tendance générale à considérer leurs difficultés comme des "problèmes personnels" qui doivent être résolus dans le cadre du cercle intime, posent des défis importants aux femmes qui désirent participer à l'évolution de la communauté fransaskoises. Or, selon l'expérience du mouvement féministe, ce qui semble être le problème personnel d'une femme isolée est très souvent le symptôme d'un changement social qui force une remise en question d'anciennes valeurs et de modes de vie. Ce n'est qu'en échangeant leurs expériences que les femmes pourront s'attaquer aux racines sociales de ces problèmes et établir des priorités qui correspondent à leur véritable vécu. Pour prendre pleinement part à une nouvelle stratégie de développement communautaire, les Fransaskoises doivent se regrouper pour tracer un tableau collectif de leur situation actuelle et prendre des décisions qui affecteront surtout les femmes. Il est important que les préoccupations des femmes soient respectées et perçues comme des défis à relever par toute la communauté au lieu de les considérer comme des difficultés spécifiques aux femmes.

**5. Les Fransaskoises ont intérêt à célébrer la diversité dans leurs organismes ainsi que dans leur communauté.**

Les Fransaskoises ont besoin de groupes et d'organismes qui reflètent la multitude de leur situation et les divers rôles qu'elles jouent. Pendant trop longtemps, les femmes ont souffert car on leur imposait des modèles de féminité, véritables carcans, qui ne correspondaient pas à leurs vraies expériences de vie et de travail, et les isolaient les unes des autres. Combien de femmes ont lutté contre l'intériorisation de fausses contradictions entre "carrière ou famille", "belle ou intelligente", "être aimée ou être compétente"?

La femme contemporaine doit jouer plusieurs rôles dans une même journée et ces rôles changent au cours de sa vie; de plus, les relations entre les hommes et les femmes, entre les femmes elles-mêmes et entre les parents et les enfants ont beaucoup évolué, d'où l'importance d'accepter toute femme sans porter de jugements sur son style de vie. Il faut non seulement tolérer la diversité, mais la célébrer comme une force. La socialisation des femmes encourage la valorisation des qualités uniques de chaque personne et une reconnaissance de la valeur de toute contribution.

C'est grâce à cette vision que le mouvement des femmes a développé en matière d'organisation une tradition non hiérarchique et participatoire qui s'exprime le plus souvent par le recours au cercle plutôt qu'à la pyramide comme modèle organisationnel de base. C'est ce modèle que la Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises a privilégié comme structure organisationnelle pour célébrer la diversité de toutes les Fransaskoises. Ce modèle vise à identifier, à valoriser les différences et à s'en servir pour célébrer la richesse des organisations et des communautés de la Saskatchewan d'aujourd'hui.

**Françoise Sigur-Cloutier** est directrice-générale de la Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises.

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1. Ce "club" est mentionné par Micheline Desjardins dans *Les Femmes de la diaspora canadienne française*, publication de la FNFCF.
2. *Le Discours des Fransaskoises* a été rédigé par Catherine Graham suite à une consultation des Fransaskoises à l'été 1990, puis revu, corrigé et approuvé par les leaders des groupes le 15 septembre 1990.

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## Anti-racist Education: A Career in Social and Political Change

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by **Beryl Tsang**

**Racism is part of an overall system of class which generates, maintains, and protects the power and the privileges of a small minority.**

**I** like to view anti-racist educators as catalysts for social and political change. While it may be a bit of a cliché to say so, our job is to transform people's thoughts and actions.

Although I have tried on many occasions to describe what anti-racist educators do, I have realized that there is no one way to illustrate our work. How anti-racist educators go about fulfilling the task of teaching people to recognize and eliminate racism differs. Each anti-racist educator has his/her

unique approach but most of us use methodologies that challenge people's existing notions of race, educate them about how these personal notions of race inform the creation of racist structures, and offer them workable solutions to transform racist notions and Structures into non-racist ones.

Anti-racism is not a new concept. It has roots in the British Labour and the American Civil Rights movements. Over the last decade anti-racism has been slowly gaining public prominence in Canada as racial tensions in this country reach new heights. While some point to increasing immigration from non-European nations as a cause of this tension, history reveals that Canadian society is inherently racist.

Racist elements in Canada's past include the establishment of residential schools for Aboriginal-Canadians and separate schools for Afro-Canadians; the passage of the

Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act and the exclusion of Jewish immigrants in the 1930s; and openly bigoted acts such as the internment of Ukrainian-Canadians during World War I and Japanese and Italian-Canadians during World War II.

Anti-racist educators help groups who want to deal with their racism do so in an effective manner. We facilitate processes through which individuals and organizations learn to recognize the roots and the different forms of racism and we teach them practical ways of eliminating it.

Since racism is so pervasive it is not only necessary to educate white Canadian society about it but to assist ethno and racial specific groups to fight discrimination and bias. Anti-racist educators provide this assistance. We validate the experience these people have with racism. We support their various initiatives in combating it and we attempt to give visible minorities a sense of ethnic and racial pride.

### **Éducation anti-raciste**

par Beryl Tsang

Les spécialistes en éducation de l'anti-racisme servent de catalyseurs aux changements sociaux et politiques. Nous remettons en question les idées que les gens ont sur les races et offrons des solutions pour que des concepts et structures racistes soient abolis au profit de concepts et des structures non racistes.

Trois défis se posent à nous lorsque nous côtoyons des groupes féministes se composant de blanches. Le premier: faire admettre à ces groupes que le mouvement féministe, comme le reste de la société, est intrinsèquement raciste. La plupart des blanches font des suppositions sur les femmes non blanches qui ne se fondent pas sur le dialogue mais sur leurs propres perceptions. Le deuxième: convaincre les blanches qu'il n'existe pas un seul féminisme, mais plusieurs. En matière d'égalité, les femmes de couleur n'aborderont peut-être pas les mêmes questions que les blanches, et celles-ci doivent savoir que c'est très bien ainsi. Le troisième: faire en sorte que le processus visant à se défaire de tout racisme est permanent. Si les blanches se heurtent tous les jours au sexisme et à des moeurs patriarcales, les femmes non blanches, elles, font face au racisme. Il faudra des années et des années pour que ces forces soient abolies dans notre société.

J'entends constamment que le racisme n'existe pas. Mais, je me rends pourtant compte au fut et à mesure que je progresse professionnellement que je sers vraiment à quelque chose.

## Some Personal Reflections

**Few white women have any context for recognizing and validating the racism that non-white women feel.**

Growing up as a Chinese-Canadian in British Columbia I was aware from an early age about racial inequality. British Columbia has a long legacy of anti-Asian sentiment and white supremacy. The schools I went to condoned racist books. Images that depicted Asian women as coy, shy and submissive or mysterious, manipulative and exotic were not only accepted but promoted. Throughout my whole elementary and high school education teachers treated me according to these two stereotypes. I knew that this was racist but I had no means of fighting it. It was just too overwhelming. Even if I was able to complain who would believe me? A white guidance counsellor?

My undergraduate studies at the University of British Columbia (a bastion of white Anglo-Saxon protestant hegemony) helped me put my experience into perspective. There I met Aboriginal-Canadians and other Asian-Canadians who could relate to the issue of racism, and white Canadians who sympathized. I learned from these people that racism was part of an overall system of class which generated, maintained, and protected the power and the privileges of a small minority. It was in the best interest of this minority to keep people of different ethnic groups in subordinate positions. That way they could use us as cheap labor when times were good, as "whipping posts" when things were so-so and as scapegoats when times were bad.



But it was not until I was working in international student counseling and saw my clients being treated in openly racist ways that I began to feel that racism was morally wrong. When looking into the issue of employment I heard numerous horror stories about people who had been scientists, teachers or accountants in their own country and were now working at non-unionized, menial, minimum-wage jobs. I knew I had to do something to change the existing system.

### Working With Feminist Groups

I have found it both challenging and rewarding to work with the feminist or women's community. The challenges I have encountered help me to become more committed in my work, while the benefits are so numerous I cannot even begin to count them.

Three main challenges surface when working with white feminists. The first is getting them to admit that the women's movement, like the rest of society, is inherently racist. While some white women openly exploit non-white women to maintain and preserve their power and privileges, most do not. Most, do, however, make suppositions about non-white women that are not based on dialogue or knowledge of non-white women's

struggles but on their own perceptions of these struggles. Often non-white women are stereotyped as "backward" with no fully developed sense of feminism, or as more victimized by men than white women.

White women also attempt to speak for all women and in doing so ignore the fact that non-white women can speak for themselves and may have something different to say. The majority of white women likewise exclude non-white women from their institutions and organizations, whose focus is usually on the struggles women have with sexism and patriarchy and not with the struggles women have with racism. Few white women have any context for recognizing and validating the racism that non-white women feel.

Most white feminists do not do any of these things out of maliciousness or ill intent but out of lack of experience with non-white women, ignorance of their needs, and fear of making contact with the "unknown." They are afraid of what will happen when they approach non-white women or women who do not speak English. Are they going to be perceived as radicals, stereotyped as "bra-burners," or laughed at? Many white women also find it time consuming to try to make contact with non-white women and non-white women's groups. To have a true women's movement, however, white women's organizations and institutions have to recognize the existence of racism and change their attitudes and structures to become more inclusive. Few women would dispute this but almost all would ask how.

**The needs of non-white women may not necessarily focus on doing away with patriarchy, fighting oppression, and gaining self-realization.**

Working with white women, I help them find the source of their racism. This is done by discussing differences. I ask questions about how individuals discern difference (is it racial, physical, ideological?) how they feel about it, when they started noticing it, when it matters and when it doesn't, who their friends are, and why they prefer friends who are the same or different from them. Then I ask how they would feel when confronted with specific kinds of difference. From this an individual woman can learn to understand how her experiences with difference have shaped her perceptions towards it. Once there is a recognition of where these biases come from, no matter how rational or irrational, they can be dealt with.

It is difficult for most white feminists to confront their racism. Perceiving themselves as "equality seekers" it is hard to see themselves as "inequality perpetrators." I always stress that, no matter what our colour is, we are all racists because society is inherently racist, and we must work together to unlearn racism. This may seem like a simple statement of fact but it is an important one. It prevents individuals from being overwhelmed by their own racism. It says that we must work together to challenge each other about our notions of race, class, and gender.

The second challenge to work in the women's community is convincing white women that there is not one feminism but many, and that the majority of white organizations only

accommodate one or two. This is not to say that all women's groups are the same. Each tends to focus on a specific area (for example, reproductive choice, education, poverty, or violence), but almost all work towards helping women break down sexist barriers, eliminate their oppression and realize self-fulfillment.

While non-white women often do not have reproductive choice, opportunities for education and freedom from violence, their needs may not necessarily centre on doing away with patriarchy, fighting oppression, and gaining self-realization. They may be more interested in issues such as finding a place for themselves and their community in this society, fighting racism, and maintaining their ethnic and racial heritage. Many non-white women may not use the term "feminist" but in their own way are equality seekers. White feminists need to learn to respect this and understand why it is so.

To help white women's organizations learn more about non-white women I encouraged them to join coalitions with non-white women and to actively network with non-white women's organizations working in similar fields. Before this coalition building and networking begins I would talk with white women about how their racism may create barriers to dialogue. Once we decide on ways in which behavior can be changed and obstacles can be overcome, it is up to the white women to make contact and have conversations with non-white women.

Once white women gain an understanding of the issues that confront non-white women, they have to decide what to do with what they have learned: assist non-white women in their struggles, leave them to fight their own battles, or make white women's organizations more inclusive. I have always stressed that the white women's community could not attempt to speak on behalf of non-white women. It could invite non-white women to speak at its forums and rallies but attempting to speak for non-white women is a racist gesture.

The third challenge in working with the women's community is to keep going the process of unlearning racism. It is not enough for white women to recognize their own biases, talk to non-white women's groups, and declare themselves anti-racist. White women must be sensitive to the fact that just as they continue to face sexism and patriarchy everyday, non-white women face racism everyday. It will be a long, long time before either of these two forces are eradicated from society.

To continue being sensitive to non-white women's needs and issues, white women's groups must maintain regular dialogue with non-white women's organizations. Non-white women must be made to feel welcome in white women's organizations even if they do not choose to participate in them. White women must continue going outside of their community to let non-white women know that they have a place in the women's movement. They must take the time to do this even if it means focusing less on what seem to them to be more immediate issues.

As an anti-racist educator, it may appear that I demand a lot. But I make no apologies. The white women's community is the dominant women's community and as such has a responsibility to share its knowledge and power with the non-white women's community.

## Making a Difference

**White women must be sensitive to the fact that just as they continue to face sexism and patriarchy everyday, non-white women face racism everyday.**

Working with white women's organizations has taught me a lot. It has given me the opportunity to learn about feminism and see how gender and not only race and class affects my life and helps to define who I am. I see now that it is not enough to fight against racism and classism but that patriarchy is a very real oppression which like racism and classism has many different and far reaching forms.

To be an anti-racist educator is not an easy task. At the heart of the work is the belief in the equality of human dignity and the commitment to forward social change. These ideals, while high and noble, are difficult to put into practice. I constantly face denial that racism exists. Even when it is acknowledged, individuals often don't want to change the status quo to eliminate it.

Racism is everywhere. In art, language, music, television, sports, culture, entertainment... Every action sometimes to me seems motivated by racism. Often I get discouraged and wonder why I do what I do. Then I remember that my work allows me to learn and to grow. And as I get farther and farther along I can see that-although real, lasting change takes a long time-I am making a difference.

**Beryl Tsang** is a senior program consultant in Multicultural and Anti-racist Services of the Addiction Research Foundation. She has worked as an anti-racist educator for several years.

## POETRY

### BIANCA, AN ANNIVERSARY POEM

My daughter sleeps under the ice,  
her eyes and fingernails  
transparent,  
her bridal opening filled  
with curious fish.  
Her story is white-  
a silence frozen in water,  
aborted poems and styrofoam cups,  
my milk hardening between her  
lips.  
I am her radio  
tuned to the mirror between us.  
She is my unfinished song,  
my footsteps loud on her grave,  
the sound of breaking glass,  
her foot in my mouth,  
the smile shaped scar on my belly.  
She is my winter fugue  
and not a drowned child really,  
but only my sister sleeping.

**Linda Rogers**

*Victoria, B.C.*

### Discovering the strength of our voices: Women and literacy programs

This is the report of the first phase of a CCLOW research project into women and literacy programs. Researched and compiled by Betty-Ann Lloyd, this report documents the concerns and questions of women students and teachers in four literacy programs in Canada.

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# Learner -centred / Woman-positive: Research with Adult Literary Programs

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by Betty-Ann Lloyd

**"As soon as you're singled out as a woman, there's a spectre of violence out there. "**

**I**n the spring and summer of 1990, I visited four Canadian communities (Duncan on Vancouver Island, Arviat in the Northwest Territories, downtown Toronto and St. John's Newfoundland) to talk with women about their experience in literacy programs. As a contract researcher with CLOW, I spent 60 days exploring how women's gendered experience affects their access to and participation in adult literacy programs.

The report of this research, *Discovering the Strength of our Voices*, has been published by CLOW, and we have embarked on a second phase -a participatory /action research project with twelve programs from across Canada (1). This second phase involves asking women literacy workers to commit themselves to developing, implementing and documenting a woman-positive activity within their programs and to be "up-front" about the nature of this activity with administration, staff and students. As women said during the first phase.. this level of clarity about being woman-positive involves a certain amount of risk:

*We feel increasingly vulnerable because we are concentrating on ourselves as women and that becomes quite-I don't know what the word would be, we don't have a word-- "Nerviness 'like a heightened awareness that has a bit of fear in it and that talks about the violence that's out there. As soon as you're singled out as "woman, "there's a spectre of violence out there. (2)*

This "nerviness" is echoed by many of the women who are going ahead with the research. It is mixed with a tremendous sense of excitement, relief, and awkwardness that we are going to be women together, talking about our work as women in literacy, in a community with other women.

## **Les programmes d'alphabétisation des adultes : un apprentissage axé sur les élèves par rapport à des cours de nature positive pour les femmes**

**par Betty-Ann Lloyd**

Le CCPEF a entamé la deuxième étape de ses recherches sur les femmes et les programmes d'alphabétisation. Cette étape consiste à demander à des travailleuses d'alphabétisation d'élaborer et de mettre en oeuvre une activité de nature positive pour les femmes dans leur programme et de fournir de la documentation sur celle-ci. De plus, les travailleuses devront se montrer très ouvertes quant à la nature de cette activité vis-à-vis de l'administration, du personnel et des étudiantes.

Les douze organismes participant à cette recherche (dont un centre d'amitié autochtone, une prison pour femmes et un groupe canado-antillais) se définiront comme étant axés sur les apprenants et apprenantes ou communautaires. Mais, en matière d'alphabétisation, la théorie visant l'émancipation a été édictée d'après un modèle qui ne fait pas de distinction entre les membres de la collectivité et les élèves. On part du principe que les membres communautaires et les élèves ne forment qu'un tout, comme le terme générique "homme" est censé comprendre les femmes. En ajoutant une activité de nature positive pour les femmes dans ces programmes, on montrera clairement comment les besoins des femmes ont été exclus.

Outre le sexe, les élèves peuvent être aussi différents et ce qui concerne leur race, aptitudes, statut d'immigration, situation familiale, sexualité, etc. Si on ne tient pas compte de ces différences à un niveau ou à un autre, on ne se donne pas de toute évidence les moyens de répondre aux besoins de tous les élèves.

### **Woman-Positive**

**Why do we have to fight to do something positive for women without having to do something equally for men?**

What do we mean by woman-positive? This is a central question for the second phase of research: how do different women, within different programs, apply the concept "woman-positive" to literacy-related activities? A second central question is: how will their understandings of "woman-positive" change as we go through the research process?

For this second phase of the research, I take a "woman-positive activity" to be an activity that, in its particular context, arises out of the expressed needs and desires of particular women working in that context. It is an activity that is also open to change when the women undergo a process of



reflection and analysis, vision and strategizing. This means the activity is not fixed, and does not have to meet all the needs and desires of all the women in the program, although it must meet some of the expressed needs and desires of some of the women in the program.

It also means, for me, that during the process of planning, implementing and documenting the activity, the women involved come to understand which women in the program have benefited from the activity and, potentially, which women have been disadvantaged by the activity. We want women to be able to envision and strategize around future activities that may meet resistance or more effectively gain support and benefit more women within their context.

Let me give you some examples of the kinds of contexts involved in this research. We have a program located in public housing, one located in a Friendship Centre, the WEST (Worker Education for Skills Training) program through the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, a program located in a women's prison, a program that serves women who live and work on the inner-city streets of Toronto, and several community-based and community college programs. Two of the community-based programs are facilitating writing by women students who want to explore their experience of physical and sexual abuse. The community college programs include a federal employability enhancement program called Aboriginal Women in the Workplace, and an English literacy class attended by Inuit women at Arctic College in the N.W.T. Clearly, women from these different programs are going to have very different understandings of what it means to be woman-positive.

In addition, although CLOW is a feminist organization, we do not expect the programs or the women who represent the programs to identify as feminist. We do we ask that the contact women believe women may benefit from taking part in activities designed specifically for women, and that they will benefit not because women are somehow deficient, but because the programs and the government policies that structure the programs are deficient. The contact women will also presumably agree with the conclusion of the first phase, that learner-centred or community-based programs are not necessarily woman-positive.

### **Learner-centred / woman-positive**

I came to make the distinction between learner-centred and woman-positive in the first phase of my research. During discussions with fifty-seven women and four men, I had a persistent feeling that I was missing something in my understanding, as if I was hearing something backwards or looking at a photographic negative.

I finally isolated two threads of responses to my talk about women's experience. These threads seemed to be entwined with two recurring phrases: "What about the men?" and "But this program is learner-centred/This program is community-based." It was only when I put these phrases into context that I began to understand what was happening.

A woman, strongly feminist and an experienced instructor, told me about a women-only

class held where she worked several years ago. "It turned into a consciousness-raising group," she said. "A really tight little group of women, who gave each other support about all kinds of stuff. And they did a whole lot of literacy work around that. It worked beautifully in terms of them using reading and writing skills to tackle their problems, as well as doing some straight academic work" (3).

Two things happened with this class. First, nobody wanted to work with the men that were left. They were seen as unsociable, unmotivated, unruly. Second, the instructor teaching the women's group became uncomfortable with her lack of control over the class and the curriculum. She couldn't integrate the women's active participation into her context of "teaching, reading and writing" So they stopped having a women's class.

Another woman literacy worker said: "Women want a women-only support group because they need a safe space. Men don't support each other, so a men-only support group is a contradiction. Women support men. So a mixed group is a men's support group" (4).

All the programs I visited in the first phase of the research would identify themselves as "learner-centred" and community-based. Yet, although commonly used, these are difficult terms to define. For example, Elaine Gaber-Katz and Gladys Watson in their new study of community-based literacy identify some contradictions between learner-centredness and empowerment of individuals. "A point of some tension," they write, "is whether a self-determined curriculum, which focuses on the individual learner's experience, can also be a 'social change' curriculum that will support the empowerment of individuals and the community through collective social action" (5).

Placing individual students at the centre of the program may help resolve some of the authority issues inherent in one-to-one or teacher-centred programming. However, it does not necessarily confront other contradictions- those that arise out of differences in race, sex, class background, abilities, source of income, immigration status, and so on.

### **What about the men?**

My first response to being repeatedly asked this question was frustration that, even for an afternoon, we couldn't focus on women's experience, on women's learning needs. We had to keep coming back to the men. By finally paying attention to the context, I realized there were at least two different questions being asked.

The first question was: What are we going to do for men who don't want or who are unable to change? How can we guarantee these men a safe place in a program that has decided to include woman-positive activities? This question seemed to assume that the woman-positive women should supply sexist men with a safe place before they proceed with activities that are "up-front" designed for women.

The second question was: What are we going to do for the women who are in contact with

these men? How can we guarantee them a safe place in a program that has decided to include woman-positive activities? This question seemed to assume that the woman-positive women should ensure that other women have support and protection before they proceed with activities that are "up-front" designed for women.

These are questions we need to consider seriously both as we begin this second phase and as we reflect on and document what happens in each location. For example, we may want to ask: Is it our responsibility to work with the men, or even to try to interest men in taking some responsibility for working with other men? We seem to have little ambivalence in terms of our responsibility to continue working with the women in a way that provides them with necessary support. Yet, if we do take on the responsibility of working with the men, that will leave us very little time, energy or resources to continue our work with women.

Why do we have to fight to do something positive for women without having to do something equally for the men? The response is often that we can't do something woman-positive because then we would be seen as no longer working with "learners" or with the "community." As I continued my discussions, I began to recognize two suspicions lurking behind these responses.

First, women who want to work with women are practically suspect. They are feminist and will, therefore, have a biased agenda and their practice will discriminate and bring about division within the program and within the community. (As if that division did not already exist.)

Second, women who want to work with women are theoretically suspect. Feminist theory breaks solidarity along sex lines and reinforces difference rather than commonality. Since emancipatory literacy theory has been built on an empowerment model that does not distinguish between student and student, community member and community member, making these distinctions based on sex is disempowering. (As if not making distinctions based on sex is not disempowering.)

**We need to continue to seriously question the assumption that the community members and students are generic people.**

I have explored some of these themes in other work (6) and hope this year to continue exploring the implications of what I consider an important difference between modern and postmodern, androcentric and woman-inclusive perspectives. I believe we need to continue to seriously question the assumption that community members and students are generic people. Just as generic "man" does not include the gendered woman, generic "student" and generic "community member" does not include the gendered student or community member.

Similarly, members of communities and students are differently located in terms of race, ability, immigration status, responsibility for children, employment status, sexuality,

source of income and so on. To erase difference on any level is surely to restrict our ability to meet the needs of students, community members, family members and workers who live the experience of these locations in all facets of their lives, including in literacy programs.

**Betty-Ann Lloyd** is a white, middle-class researcher with a wide variety of life experience. She is currently doing interdisciplinary research at Dalhousie University in feminist research, critical theory, language and power, social welfare policies, and training opportunities for women who are single mothers on social assistance. If you wish to be on the mailing list for information on the second phase of research, please contact CLOW.

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1. *Discovering the Strength of our Voices* is available through CLOW. Use the order form in this issue or see ordering information on page 28.
2. Lloyd, Betty-Ann, *Discovering the strength of our voices: Women and literary programs*. Toronto: Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, 1991, p.42.
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For a full bibliography to Betty-Ann's research, please write to the Editor, *Women's Education des femmes*.

## Women's Job Re-Entry: A Personal Account

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by Lana Smiley

**The problem is not that women are unskilled. but that there are not enough jobs in the community offering a single parent a living wage.**

I attended a Women's Job Re-Entry Program in my community from the fall of 1989 to the spring of 1990. I already had a bias against such programs when I entered it, but a bias based not just on personal dislike.

I live in a very small community on the B.C. coast. The population of the total area is slightly over 5,000, with 2500 each in the two major communities. The jobs available for women with no training in non-traditional work are moody retail and waitressing. The majority are part-time and pay minimum wage or not much more. The problem is not that women seeking to re-enter the workforce are unskilled (though this may compound the problem) but that there are not enough jobs in the community offering a single parent a living wage.

In previous years, Women's Job Re-Entry Programs in the community were aimed specifically at women on welfare who had been out of the workforce for three years. These women were taught to be retail clerks. It seemed to me that this was a more appropriate program for jobless single young people than for more mature women, the majority of whom had families to support. As one of these women, I felt I was better off remaining on welfare, where I could at least be available for my children, than working at a low-wage job that would not give me any kind of credible employment history.

By 1989, however, things had changed. The powers that be evidently decided that re-entry women deserved better jobs than the previous programs had trained them for. This time the course was to focus on upgrading secretarial skills. The average wage in the community for this type of work, we were told, was about \$7.50 per hour. Still not great, but such training seemed to promise the chance of a better job sometime in the future, particularly as experience on computers was to be a part of it. This course was not limited to women on welfare.

### **Les programmes de réintégration professionnelle pour les femmes: un compte rendu personnel**

**par Lona Smiley**

Est-ce que les programmes de réintégration professionnelle que les femmes suivent répondent à leurs besoins? Voici un bref résumé de ce qu'une étudiante qui a été inscrite à ce genre de programme pense de son expérience. Au fait, l'étudiante en question, c'est moi. J'ai pris le cours dans une petite ville de la région côtière de la Colombie-Britannique en 1989-1990.

Le cours posait deux problèmes principaux. Le premier: on nous formait pour un marché du travail qui n'existait pas chez nous. Le personnel de coordination avait du mal à nous trouver des stages en milieu de travail, ce qui laissait à penser que nous ne trouverions pas d'emploi à la sortie du programme.

Deuxième problème: le cours étant axé sur les besoins du milieu des affaires, on passait outre ceux des femmes en milieu de travail. Un salaire médiocre, une double charge de travail et une pénurie de services de garderie redoublent le stress d'une femme dans la main-d'oeuvre. Pourtant, il s'agissait de problèmes personnels et ni l'employeur, ni la société n'avaient la moindre responsabilité à ce sujet.

J'estime que le cours aurait pu être bien meilleur si des féministes et des militantes du mouvement syndical avait eu leur mot à dire.

**Previous courses  
seemed more like a  
way to create jobs for  
the instructors than  
employable skills for  
the desperate women  
taking the course.**

It seems appropriate at this point to say a few words about myself. I was, at the time I entered the course, a 41-year-old single mother on welfare who had been out of the workforce for seven years. I had left my last paid employment shortly before the birth of my second child and shortly after the dissolution of my marriage. My older child was eleven at the time I entered the course. My previous paid work experience had been clerical. I am comparatively well-educated, with three years of university.

I had moved to this small community from Vancouver when my son was nine months old. I knew it was an area of few employment opportunities, but finding paid employment had not been one of my priorities at the time. I left the city to escape a rental crisis and harassment by my ex-husband. Though I consider myself a feminist, I have never felt that work outside the home equals liberation. With the present employment climate, I feel that women are not given access to jobs that give them financial independence from men. Instead, women are being asked to take on low-paid work and the dubious privilege of the double work day while we are also still forced to rely on a man or the state in order to adequately support ourselves and our children.

I was neither typical nor atypical of the women who took the course—they ranged from young single mothers of preschools to women; in their fifties whose children were grown. Some I were on welfare, some on U.I.; at least one was financially independent and taking the course not out of necessity, but to give herself something to do.

I decided to take the job re-entry course for a number of reasons. By 1989 there was a lapse in the recession, giving me hope that I might obtain a credible job in the community I had grown to love. My youngest child was now in school, so childcare seemed less of a concern. The year before, the Ministry of Social Services and Housing (welfare) had declared single mothers with children over six months old to be "employable". By being in a training program I could avoid being hassled to take just any job. There was also a training allowance from Canada Employment, the sponsor of the course, and I was allowed to keep \$100 plus 25% of this allowance over and above my welfare cheque. I was still, however, skeptical about Women's Job Re-Entry. When the previous courses were run (during the recession) a friend had remarked that it seemed more like a way to create jobs for the instructors than employable skills for the desperate women taking the course. I was inclined to agree, but perhaps things would be different now that the economic climate had improved.

I feel I should say a few words about the subjective mental state I was in when I entered the course, as well as my state of political awareness. The course began a few days after I'd had an abortion. I was (and am) in a happy relationship with a man who had himself been having career problems. A skilled tradesman, he had been thrown out of work during the recession, and had recently found steady employment after five years in a career limbo. It was, however, heavy physical work. As a middle-aged man with back problems, he was not able to offer a great deal of help with my increased work load. Nor did he feel secure enough in his own new-found employment to offer financial assistance should I not find a full-time job at the end of the course, though I have never been financially dependent on him. Nor was he capable (again because of physical pain) of giving his usual emotional support. Had we not already known each other for three years our relationship would not have survived the burden placed upon it.

My eleven-year-old daughter had been chronically depressed for a long time and was refusing to see a counsellor. I was seeing two counsellors—one to learn how to deal with her and one for myself. My son was fine at the beginning of the course, but his reaction to having a stressed-out mother was to become the sort of child no one was willing to baby-

sit after school. I mention all this, because I think that a family can be pushed over the edge into "dysfunctional" by society's refusal to acknowledge the work a parent does in the home.

**It was definitely my impression that the needs of business took precedence over the needs of women.**

This leads to a question I want to ask readers, educators, the government and the public. Should these courses be oriented towards the needs of the women taking them, or should they be run for the benefit of business? It was definitely my impression, while taking the course, that the needs of business took precedence over the needs of women. One of the two women who coordinated the program was definitely from a business background, with business values. This did not have to be a bad thing. It could have added a note of practical realism to the course. However, the message her business experience gave us was a negative one that I have heard voiced far too often in my working life. The boss is God. He or she has "earned the right" to dominate you. He/she is not interested in your petty concerns such as a need for respect, time to take care of your family, any problems that might take your attention away from the job. The seething stew of emotional life at home was of no consequence, nor was the problem of time to take care of the niggling practicalities of shopping, doctor's appointments, laundry, etc. (We were told to make our doctor's appointments after 4:00 p.m. even though every clinic in the community closed about that time.)

The other coordinator was from an education! counseling background. She seemed, when questioned, rather embarrassed by her colleague's style with us, but she wasn't about to rock the boat. I suppose she had her own post- recession career anxieties to deal with.

There were many things wrong with the course. First, there was the "perfect secretary" list handed out by the typing instructor. I had taken a secretarial course twenty-one years before in which such hand-outs would not have been surprising. How naive I was to suppose that things had changed! I won't go through the whole list. The point that offended me most was, "Absolute loyalty to the boss."

Even more appalling was an incident that led to my walking out of the course and staying out until one coordinator and some friends and fellow-students talked me into going back. The more business-oriented of the two coordinators told our class that just because the boss might choose to "dress like a slob," it was not okay for us to do so. She went on to say that "the boss has paid his dues and earned the right to tell you what to wear." As well as rage, these words evoked in me a deep sadness. The room was not full of kids just out of high school who needed to be "put in their places" (if any of us ever do need that). It was filled with women whose average age was about thirty-five, most of whom were mothers. There wasn't a woman there who had not "paid her dues," and none of us deserved to be told we could be brow-beaten by some petty tyrant who by one means or another had become a "boss".

Class prejudice also played a part in our experience of the course. I am from a working

class background. However, through my education I have learned how to act like a middle-class person. I believe that this was one of the reasons that, despite my rebellious comments in class and the afore-mentioned walking out, I was generally looked on with favor by the instructors.

A young woman who could not type at the beginning of the course and who could not type very fast by the end of it was a favorite student of the instructors. She was generally approved of because she had sensed the way to dress and behave that would gain the most approval. One of the instructors made it very clear that she considered this woman as the most likely to succeed.

Another young woman began the course with a typing speed of 25 words per minute, and she progressed to 40. A couple of the instructors, however, chose to impose on her their own single mother stereotype. Rita (I will call her) had a loudly working class persona. She did not participate in the "dressing for the office" game. Her previous paid employment had been as a barmaid. She had a two-year-old and constant childcare problems, yet she was determined to work and escape the "welfare mother" image. She had, in fact, worked whenever she could since her baby's birth. I got to know her as a generous person, always willing to go that extra mile to help somebody else. Her low self-esteem, however, had the usual effect of making her an easy scapegoat, as well as someone to be taken advantage of .

**There was no positive talk of sisterhood, solidarity, or the advantages of labor unions.**

When we went to our "host employers" Rita allowed herself to be exploited, simply because she didn't know any better. Rita worked overtime and on weekends for no extra reimbursement because she believed she had to place herself at the disposal of the host employer. Later, when classes had resumed and she had to miss class time because of her child's sickness, the coordinators ruthlessly docked her pay and were rude to her when she pleaded with them not to treat her harshly. Despite the fact that Rita was very competent at the computer and that her typing skills exceeded those of the student deemed most likely to succeed, she was never given credit for what she did well. Instead, she was criticized for not typing fast enough and for her "irresponsibility" for putting her child's well-being ahead of the course. Not surprisingly, Rita dropped out before the course was over.

I could go into other examples of prejudicial treatment, but I'll suffice it to say that people were treated differently and that their treatment had more to do with how they fit into the office-worker stereotype than with their actual competence at the skills we were learning.

I also did not like the fact that we were encouraged to identify with management. We were told, for instance, that identifying too strongly with our fellow employees would retard our



advancement. This may be true. There was, however, no positive talk of sisterhood, solidarity, or the advantages of labor unions to off-set this message. Indeed, one instructor bemoaned the fact that letter-carriers were getting \$13 an hour and we "skilled workers" could expect much less. It did not occur to me at the time but the obvious answer to this was that most unionized workers are men. Women are taught to gain power by submitting to those who have power (husbands, employers). The result? The "perfect secretary" only gets \$7.50 an hour!

Was anything right with the course? The life skills component, which I had expected to despise, was actually all right. It was rather like group therapy, which I'm sure we all needed. My typing speed increased. The training allowance provided some extra money with which I could placate my children for the energy I could no longer give them. Also, it was a privilege to know many of the women who took the course.

Was the course effective? Did it get most of us out into the workforce? I don't know for sure. I haven't done a survey of the twenty-two women who took the course. Two years have passed and I run into some of them now and then. A couple are working in retail stores. Another tells me that several have started their own businesses doing housework. Our computer training was next to useless, a mere introduction to Word Perfect and spread sheets. Book-keeping was similarly rudimentary.

I am still on welfare. Every secretarial job I apply for is part-time and overwhelmed by applicants (women who have moved here from the city with their husbands and who already have excellent secretarial skills). My latest endeavor is to have business cards printed up and to offer a typing service.

How do I think things could have been better handled? Well, since we women are being pressured, whether we want to or not, to enter the paid workforce in large numbers, then that workforce should come half-way to meet us. How about flexible hours, job-site childcare, and a pay cheque that's not insulting? How about training programs that turn out women with high expectations, women who demand the respect they deserve. The benefit for employers would be happy, well-motivated workers who want to stay on the job for a long time, who look forward to going to work in the morning, and who know they will not be docked pay or guilt-tripped if they lose time because of family needs. And I would like to see training courses taught and coordinated by feminist trade union activists!

I know. Dream on.

**Lona Smiley** is a single mother of two living in a small community in British Columbia. She has formerly written a single mother's column for Vancouver's *Maternal Health News*.

## PRAMB'LING AT NOON

I watch the shadows slide  
crisscross  
the gravel, slices of wheel  
measuring pavement.

The sun plays tricks - a child rips  
the sidewalk, past me on a  
skateboard.

In the ditch beside the road  
fallen blackberries, sweet and  
wasp-covered  
this hot August day a dead bird  
I cannot identify but must:  
yellow-tipped head marking the  
pituitary,  
small as a chickadee but not one.

Alarmed  
I look to the baby, so fragile  
before me  
with blue and purple veins  
marking the dimensions of her  
skull.  
She is wrapped  
in a lacey white blanket -in a flash  
she is old in a wheelchair, shawl  
draped  
about her thinning hair,  
her crumpled shoulders.

The sun plays tricks, I say...

A construction crew ahead:  
A girl flags me on, stopping  
to peep at the baby: "A girl, eh?" she  
says  
eager to be friendly. She has one twelve-  
weeks old at home. Does she choose to  
work among those men in the dirt?  
Someone curses her for slacking off

Outside Surrey market  
an old man tips his hat  
walking stick extended into the grainy  
sidewalk,  
The creases of his face sizzle  
into a smile. I think of  
torn paper, ancient letters  
disintegrating in the folds, suddenly  
burning up.

The sun plays tricks when mirrors cross  
spark the mind

Turning the pram  
in a wide arc through the gravel, I go.

Again  
the boy on the skateboard rasps the  
sidewalk  
past me. He looks back briefly to check  
my expression. This time I remember  
to say "Hello".

**Gillian Harding-Russell**  
Surrey, B. C

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## Educating Across Difference: Sistren Theatre Collective

by Chantal Phillips

**Sistren has developed a solid reputation in the field of popular education through street theatre.**

**S**istren is a women's popular education theatre group. I met two members of Sistren at the V Encuentro De Feministas De America Latina Y El Caribe (the Fifth Congress of Feminists From Latin America and the Caribbean) in 1990. During its fourteen years or so of existence in Jamaica, working with the urban poor (market vendors, farmers, informal sector laborers, etc.), Sistren has developed a solid reputation in the field of popular education through street theatre.

The small group of working women who began Sistren have had great success, not only among the women who participate in their organization and their workshops, but also among international funding agencies such as the Canadian development organizations MATCH, OXFAM, and CUSO. Sistren has grown beyond its central goal of doing popular theatre and is now producing T-shirts and fabric art in order to keep raising funds for the organization. There are also books associated with the group; for instance, Honor Ford Smith wrote *Lion-Heart Gal* about Jamaican women in their own dialect (available from Sister Vision Press, Toronto), and a video has been made which celebrates the work of Honor Ford Smith and the forming of the Sistren collective in the seventies.

I had heard about Sistren in Toronto, but most of the women at the Congress in Latin America had no idea about the feminist movement in the Caribbean. Although there have been congresses in the region, both nationally and internationally, for at least ten years, it has been difficult to bridge the language barrier between English- and Spanish-speaking feminists. The V Encuentro in 1990 was the first opportunity for English-speaking women of the Caribbean to formally attend the international congress and speak about their work back home. It is no surprise that Sistren was contacted to present a workshop; their reputation has led to many opportunities for collective members to travel and speak with other women's groups around the world.

## ***La différence au service de l'éducation : la troupe de théâtre collective Sistren***

**par Chantal Phillips**

J'ai assisté en 1990 à un atelier de la troupe de théâtre collective Sistren sur le racisme et les barrières en matière de culture, de sexe et de classe sociale au Cinquième Congrès des féministes d'Amérique latine. Installée en Jamaïque, la troupe travaille avec les pauvres des villes.

L'analyse du racisme dans les groupes féministes de toute l'Amérique latine ne date pas d'hier et certains progrès ont été effectués dans ce domaine pour les femmes qui sont victimes d'une double, voire d'une triple, discrimination. Les membres de la troupe Sistren qui aimaient l'atelier nous ont demandé d'expliquer ce que nous entendions par race et classe, et ont ensuite représenté nos idées en sculptures.

La sculpture la plus mémorable était celle de deux femmes se faisant face, les mains tendues mais ne se touchant pas, écart qui symbolisait la barrière invisible les séparant alors même qu'elles essayaient désespérément de se rejoindre. Cette sculpture en révélait long sur les malentendus et l'apparente invisibilité du racisme qui nous divise.

Pendant tout le Congrès, on a constamment répété que la différence et la diversité sont les deux thèmes sur lesquels il faut se pencher pour qu'un féminisme fort se développe. Les travaux de la troupe Sistren sont un exemple stimulant pour qu'un nouveau dialogue s'établisse et pour habiliter les femmes.

Sistren is part of a group that is continually battling language barriers. The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research (CAFRA) produces a newsletter in four languages: French, English, Spanish and Dutch. The two members of Sistren who conducted the workshop, Joan and Hilary, are used to struggling with Spanish and English. Many of the participants, however, were unacquainted with slow translation, whispering among Portuguese, Spanish and English speakers, as well as long pauses while we all searched for words to express ourselves in a foreign language. The experience can be frustrating. We all understood each other on a basic level but trying to verbalize our experience of complex issues left a lot to be desired.



Chantal Phillips

**At the congress I witnessed a larger dialogue happening between women which was more inclusive than discussions on race I have been part of in Canada.**

The workshop itself dealt with the topic of difference and culture/race/gender/class barriers. It was a topic we all had faced during the congress, if not in our day to day lives. The congress included an incredible diversity of women, almost beyond my ability to describe: from Communist trade union Lesbians who sold bikinis from Brazil to help cover the expense of their trip, to grandmothers from Catholic church groups organized to protest the disappearance of civilians in the ditty war in Argentina, to Nicaraguan Health Care Educators who brought an effigy of their new President,

Violetta Chamorra, to roast at the opening ceremony. The descriptions would take me pages to complete; suffice it to say the crowd was full of all types of women, from teenagers to octenagenarians, four thousand in all. This made a very appropriate background for the exploration of difference, and specifically, of racism that the Sistren collective members proposed.

The analysis of racism in feminist groups all over Latin America is not a new concept. Nevertheless there have been relatively few gains made for women who feel doubly or triply discriminated against due to their skin colour, language, or cultural affiliation. At this congress there were many Black Brazilians who wished to organize a network of Black women in the region. Their meetings were inevitably attended by not only women who identified as 'Black women', but also Hispanic, North American, and European women who wanted to show solidarity, gather ideas to take to women back home, or express concern about divisions among latinsas (women of Latin America) on the basis of color. This meant that there was no space for Black women only to meet and discuss ideas without the input of every woman who wanted to participate.

I was quite confused by all this cross-talk on the issue of race. I have come to respect the right of women of color to speak for themselves and to create their own exclusive space within feminist groups or during conferences. At the congress, however, I realized that no one else was playing with this same set of rules established by "feminist" practice to overcome our racist history. Every meeting, no matter what it was called, was open to any woman, and I witnessed a larger dialogue happening between women which was more inclusive than discussions on race I have been part of in Canada. This was part of the central theme of the Sistren workshop. We were all invited to give our perception on the issue of racism and its connections to class and gender, as they appear to each of us.

Hilary led the workshop and gave a brief explanation of her own perspective of race/class/gender in Sistren. As a light-skinned woman she has more status than darker Jamaicans who have physical features associated with African heritage, like full lips and broad noses. She also had worked her way up in the organization to be a well-paid and well-respected member. This led to the uncomfortable position of at times, her being privileged in comparison to the women she had chosen to work with, and in Sistren's theatre projects with urban and rural poor. Her status and perceived power was sometimes a barrier in her work, despite the fact that she would not have had much of the status she currently enjoys without the help of a group like Sistren that promotes working women. By virtue of its

own organization, Sistren takes women from their underprivileged background and gives them opportunities they may not have otherwise had. Alienation is often part of this process of empowerment.

**Sistren is a challenging example for new dialogue and empowerment among women.**

Hilary used her position to talk about race and class and asked us, a group of fifteen women, to talk about our feelings on these issues. Next we had to turn our ideas into a sculpture. In order to do this quickly we broke down into smaller groups and worked in tight circles discussing and getting to know each other at the same time. After about twenty minutes we began to create our sculptures of bodies and props. The result was fascinating-I wish I had taken pictures.

The most memorable sculpture was made by two women facing each other with their hands held up opposite but not touching. This represented an invisible barrier between them that kept their hands apart although they were pressing with all their strength to try and reach each other. This sculpture said so much about misunderstanding and good intentions that go astray. The invisibility of the barrier that divided these women was a good representation of the lack of comprehension we all seem to suffer when trying to describe racism and how it affects us.

The sculpture I participated in was quite different. A white woman reading a book on racism sat in a chair while another woman cleaned her floors. We felt this represented how the intellectual in every society is supported by the labour of women who are usually darker-skinned or otherwise discriminated against.

The workshop continued with a discussion of how race, class, and gender contribute to the power structure in all the groups we participate in. Issues of diversity and difference seemed to re-occur throughout the congress, as the key things we have to learn to deal with in order for feminism to grow in Latin America and the Caribbean. Someone mentioned that diversity is always threatening at first, but that we should be able to accept that there is no one feminism in common to all women. We must encourage and celebrate our different struggles against male privilege instead of agreeing to follow one path to emancipation.

The Sistren workshop had such a broad theme that I had thought very little could come I from such a short session on such a huge issue. I was surprised by how much I absorbed. Hilary's ideas about racism and her encouragement to use body sculpture brought a startling image to the dialogue. I will never forget seeing those two women pushing against the invisible barrier that divided them-the racism and prejudice that separates us. The image, interpreted by me, changed racism from an intellectual problem to a daily battle that I deal with consciously or unconsciously in every interaction I have with an individual I see as the other/outsider.

Racism means a different thing to everyone perhaps; I find it difficult to define personally. The Sistren workshop opened my eyes to a new way of discussing an issue and I am not surprised that their workshops and theatre projects have been enthusiastically received by many audiences. The concepts they address cross language barriers as well as intellectual boundaries. Sistren is a challenging example for new dialogue and empowerment among women. Though their organization is located in Jamaica, they have toured in central Canada in the past and, with the help of other groups, could do it again.

**Chantal Phillips** is a student of Spanish and Latin America at Simon Fraser University. She has traveled and studied extensively in Central and South America and currently lives in Vancouver with her dog Moh and her lover Sharon. Sistren can be reached at Sistren, 20 Kensington Crescent, Kingston 5, Jamaica.

## BOOK REVIEW

### Getting Smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern. New York: Routledge, 1991.

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by Patti Lather

#### *Review by Norma Lundberg*

Patti Lather's *Getting Smart* provides a rare insight into the thinking of a feminist researcher struggling with the research process and the myriad questions it raises for her about her work as a feminist, researcher, and teacher, and the uses and confusions of what is called "postmodernism". I shrink from the word postmodernism because it connotes nothing substantive for me. I suspect it of being a catch-all, intended to criticize all the other currently fashionable "isms".

The welter of literature concerning postmodernism is overwhelming. Most of it is European and /or North American and male. There is also a "body" of writing by feminists which, according to Meaghan Morris (1), "has acted as one of the enabling conditions of discourse about postmodernism." All of the writings refer to numerous other writings, and the references, interconnections, and proliferation of footnotes and bibliographies relating to postmodernism and its cousin "isms" create a knotty, tangled web. But the references seldom incorporate the lived experience of women, which is the attraction that Patti lather's book initially had for me. I expected to gain an understanding of the struggles in her classroom.

Lather acknowledges the difficulty of coming to terms with the unwieldy concepts associated with postmodernism. She is aware that, in dealing with postmodernism, her writing is actually much like the material she is criticizing: "it does not break with [the tendency towards] a profusion of references and footnotes in its creation of textual authority" (p. 10). She confesses her ambivalence towards postmodernism, her own difficulties in defining it exactly, and prefers to think of it as "postmodernisms" because it resists easy categorization.

The first portion of *Getting Smart* is her effort to sort out the usefulness of some of the ideas of Postmodernism for the particular work she wanted to do. Broadly, she wanted to explore how teaching and research could be used to challenge and change the power relations in the classroom and ultimately liberate her students. More specifically, she wanted to find out if the students in her introductory women's studies classes were resisting her teaching and, if so, how. Her groundwork in the first chapters includes the issues surrounding research and emancipation, issues in feminist research, and theories about resistance. But it is not until page 76 that readers find the first description of her project as "a three-year study of student resistance to liberatory curriculum." She writes that she wanted "to explore what these resistances have to teach us about our own impositional tendencies," that is, replacing old "conceptual maps" in the students' minds with the teacher's "improved" maps .

For Lather, the experience of teaching is useful for the insights it can provide for resolving the theory/ practice problem she sees as central to doing feminist research, and for relating her research and her teaching to the empowerment of her students. She is focused on raising the consciousness of her students for she sees learning as potentially transforming. She is both critical of "liberatory pedagogies" because of their stance (the teacher is liberated while the student is powerless and needs to be liberated) and confesses to similar practices. How, she asks, can we avoid characterizing "the student" as somehow victimized but able to see the world clearly enough to free herself, and potentially transformable through knowledge, through "getting smart"?

Her "data" includes journals kept by her students during the courses, interviews done later, research reports, and her own responses to their writing. Lather and a number of doctoral students sifted through all the material to construct a number of stories. These stories give the reader a glimmer of the initial unhappiness and discomfort of some of her students at having their world view overturned, as some learn to see themselves differently. But the stories comprise a very small portion of the book.

I suspect that those interested in *Getting Smart* will be primarily feminist academics teaching women, particularly in women's studies courses , and feminists concerned with women's representation in language and textuality who have the time and patience to untangle the theories.

Lather is aware that the audience for her kind of critical and academic work is "estranged", and that this kind of work often does not appeal to grassroots feminists who resist being told by me "experts" about their own lives. But despite her best efforts to involve her students in the research, and to ask hard questions, the resulting text reveals deeper problems. It does not prescribe, true, but it does not succeed in making the struggle of her students clearly visible. The chasm between practice and theory is not, to my mind, resolved.

The author's acknowledgment of the difficulties of writing about postmodernism from a feminist perspective does not in itself remove them. Other books provide more insight, with less jargon, to the struggle between feminism and postmodernism (2). Lather's book is an example of the "perils of postmodernism": she is so focused on criticizing varying theories and discussing the division of theory from practice, that she leaves a lot of questions about her project and her women students unanswered. She seldom simply "lets the situation speak", but frequently interrupts her narrative with theories and counter theories.

The book is a cautionary tale, illustrating the difficulties of feminist praxis when it becomes entangled "with/in" a predominantly male-oriented intellectual tradition. As a survivor of higher education who has gone through considerable pain in the process, I appreciate the questions she raises. Ultimately, I was disappointed that she remained firmly fixed in an academic and theoretical framework.

**Norma Lundberg** survived a doctoral program at the School of Library and Information Science at the University of Western Ontario. She now earns a living as a proofreader for Micromedia Publishing, spends some time as a Visiting Scholar at the Centre for Women's Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and serves on the board of CLOW.

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1. Morris, Meaghan. *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism Reading, Post Modernism*. London: Verso, 1988.
  2. For example: Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice / Post-Structural Theory*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987; Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London: Routledge, 1989; and Ben Agger. *The Decline of Discourse: Reading, Writing and Resistance in Postmodern Capitalism*. New York: The Palmer Press, 1990.

## POETRY

### 35 IN THE BACKSEAT (IN REVERSE)

Drunk on wine and wanting, their  
houses full of sleeping obligations,  
they hasten to the backseat of his  
car pursuing stolen satiation. And  
the plot thickens predictably, the  
windows all a-rime with steam;  
they move toward the obligatory  
scene when, suddenly, he leaps  
back to the driver's seat chanting a  
complex liturgy replete with  
abstract nouns: fidelity, morality,  
honesty ADULT -tery! Like a boy-  
scout taking his oath, or a recent  
convert fearful of perdition, he  
continues with his rendition while  
shaking hands fumble for the keys,  
jam the right one into the ignition  
and shift to drive.

Still in the back, her engine's  
flooded, her brain stalled. She sees  
it all as mirror-image déjà vu. All  
those backseat boys the agonies  
she put them through while she  
kept a closed knee on the subject of  
her prized virginity.

Should she try their lines on him?  
Beg softly and say she can't walk  
away, she'll d-i-e, or failing that  
claim that she will maim his  
reputation, brand him a.c.t.?

With age comes sense and humor,  
fortunately. She leans back  
laughing uproariously all the way  
home. And all the way, through his  
rearview, he eyes her suspiciously;  
suspecting she is near hysteria,  
failing entirely to see that he is the  
punch line to an old, old joke she  
finally got quite belatedly!

**Ronnie Brown**  
*Ottawa, Ontario*

# How a Rural Society Discouraged Change

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by Marilyn Hodgson Tuck

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*"Statistics show that, compared with urban areas, rural regions have a smaller percentage of people over 20 years old with higher education and a greater percentage with less than a grade nine education. "*  
*(This Magazine, vol. 24, no. 7, March-April, 1991).*

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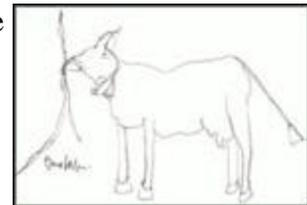
**Most of us who got a higher education had only indirect connections to the farm. We were advantaged teenagers in a disadvantaged small town.**

**T**oday we consider education a social right. Why then did the attainment of high school graduation dupe a disproportionate number of rural teenagers from 1950 to 1960? In these ten years, only eight of approximately 150 in my hometown educated themselves beyond the small rural high school they attended. I was one of three girls.

There are a number of reasons for the low ratio of those who went on to university or business college compared to those who stayed "down on the farm". The outstanding factor was that most of us who got a higher education had only indirect connections to the farm.

Three were from the home of a prominent businessman and community leader, two were from the reeve's family, one was the son of the local newspaper editor, another of a merchant store owner, and only one was just plain brilliant. We all had one thing in common however; every one of us was an advantaged teenager living in a disadvantaged small town.

As in most villages, certain streets were out-of bounds and not one of the "group of eight" went near these. This division confirmed the rigid social class structure of the rural community, and also supports the theory that "education is to a great extent influenced by family background" and "it's not what you know, but who you know".



## **Comment une société rurale a desservi le changement**

**par Marilyn Hodgson Tuck**

Une analyse de la situation dans les années cinquante et soixante montre pourquoi une société rurale avait un pourcentage plus faible de plus de vingt ans qui détenait un diplôme universitaire et un nombre plus élevé de personnes qui avaient arrêté leur scolarité avant la neuvième année qu'une société urbaine.

La raison principale de ce phénomène est que la plupart des jeunes qui finissaient leurs études secondaires, et les quelques-uns qui allaient à l'université, n'avaient aucun lien direct avec la vie à la campagne, avec l'agriculture par exemple. Nous appartenions à l'élite du village.

Il y avait d'autres raisons, bien entendu, dont le poids qu'exerçait le système des valeurs traditionnelles, l'effet des terres et des biens, le manque de stimulation culturelle et financière, l'absence d'appâts économiques et un découragement actif.

Qui dit éducation, dit changement. Et tout changement peut sembler menaçant dans une société rurale qui vit bien grâce à ses terres. Mais la situation change et les problèmes qui font obstacle à l'éducation dans les collectivités rurales doivent être surmontés.

**"The growth of the Canadian Labor Force over this century has been characterized by ... a marked shift away from agricultural pursuits and a decisive movement toward white-collar jobs" (3).**

Another important reason for the low level of education in rural regions is the strength of traditional value systems. In grades four or five, well before high school, a Victorian-style split in this microcosm of society became noticeable to me. There was a small conservative element who had learned to believe in the value of studying, the three "Rs", and deferred gratification; but the hedonistic majority lived to enjoy a pseudo-sophisticated childhood and took as their motto *carpe diem*. During recess, the first group often went to the library (which our three-room school acquired when the junior high school upstairs became part of the new area high school) while the second group went outside to play.

Then there is the effect of land and property. Ownership of land can take precedence over all educational ambitions. I saw this in the case of the family of my best girlfriend. Her father was a farmer and her mother was a hard-working farm-wife. Her two older sisters married farm lads they had gone to school with and her brother quit school to take over the farm that had been in the family for three or four generations.

Cultural and financial attributes were also influential. Our village had almost no cultural

stimulation-no adult library and no theatre, though we were very proud of our weekly newspaper. Like many villages at that time, we were better off financially than culturally: we had three general stores, two gas stations, one drugstore-and-barbershop combined, one bank, one post office, an archaic country doctor and a few women who took in sewing or gave home perms.

Just as most teenagers had little need for pin- money because there were so few places to spend it, there was little need for a higher education. When children were a necessary and economic part of the farm family unit, it was quite logical to ask who needed a B.A to plow a field or to raise children. Only later did I wonder why more consideration was not given to an agricultural or business college training.

Not only was there a lack of economic incentives for formal education, but school learning was actively discouraged for less tangible reasons. In the mid-1950s, resistance to education was widespread as young women and men alike were exposed to the "functional syndrome" as a result of their parents having survived the depression. Education had to have some practical purpose. For instance, my father agreed that education was necessary for a boy but it had to be of some obvious and immediate use. My brother therefore went to business college in preparation for taking over the family business.

But my father could not see any practical purpose in education for his daughters. He told my sister that she didn't need to get a higher education because she would get married in a few years and it would be wasted on her. He believed this even though she had been awarded a Grade 13 academic scholarship and was on the Dean's honour list at university. His attitude toward me was one of indifference. After an ordinary high school career and no scholarship, I went to business college, trained to be a secretary-typist, and went to work. After five years of clerical drudgery, my employer nominated me for a university bursary-scholarship and eventually I earned my Master's degree.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can now speculate why someone like my father would take a functional stance towards education. His resistance to higher education-from acceptance if it was functional, through rejection, to indifference--all were masks to hide what he knew: education meant change. And what person who is successfully making a living off the land was likely to see the need for change? Fortunately his children did, because statistics show that society has changed, and obstacles to education must be overcome.

**Marilyn Hodgson Tuck** is a writer from St. John's, Nfld., who was born and received her early education in Ontario. After obtaining a B.A. from the University of Western Ontario, she moved to Newfoundland with her family and earned an M.A. from Memorial University.

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1. Similar reasons account for the small numbers of those completing high school at that time.
  2. Mervin Y.T. Chen and Thomas G. Regan, *Work in the Changing Canadian Society*. (Toronto: Butterworth, 1985), pp. 124-125.
  3. *Labour Economics in Canada*. (3rd ed.) Sylvia Ostry and Mahmood A. Zaidi. Toronto: Macmillan Co. of Canada. 1979.

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## **RESOURCES/RESSOURCES**

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### **ORGANIZATIONS**

#### **Care for the Caregiver Resource Library Mount Saint Vincent University**

A resource library for home caregivers to the elderly opened in November, 1991, at Mount Saint Vincent. The library is part of a three-year Care for the Caregiver project sponsored by the university's gerontology program and aimed at providing education, information access and emotional support to non-professional caregivers in urban and rural Nova Scotia, as well as to seniors looking for information and services. Located in the Gerontology Department, 5 College Way, Mount Saint Vincent University; open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1-4:30 p.m. and Fridays from 7-9 p.m. Phone (902) 443-Phone (902) 443-4450, exts. 561, 467 or 468.

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#### **El Colegio De Mexico Summer Course on Women in Mexico**

The College is offering its third summer course for foreign scholars interested in women's issues in Mexico (June 22-July 31). Topics covered include: history, literature, rural development and peasant communities, urban crisis, the Mexico-U.S. border, public policy on education, population and health, female identity, and contemporary feminist theory from a latin American perspective. Contact: Mercedes Barquet, Coordinator, 3rd Summer Course for Foreign Scholars, El Colegio de Mexico, AC, Camino Al Ajusco No.20, Codigo Postal 01000, Mexico, D.F.

### **CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS**

#### **Journal of Distance Education 10th Anniversary Edition**

The spring 1993 issue will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Canadian Association for Distance Education. Papers are invited on distance education and: credit study (at all

levels of delivery), professional development, general interest study, community development and community participation; the future of distance education in Canada; and Canada's international involvement (celebration or concern?). Manuscripts are to be received by June 22, 1992. Forward to: Joan Collinge/Monique Layton, Centre for Distance Education, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., V5A 1S6, (604) 291-3524, Fax (604) 291-4964.

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### **Anthology of Contemporary Black Women's Journals**

Patricia Bell-Scott and Sandra Murray Nettles are soliciting contributions for an anthology of contemporary Black women's journals. Of particular interests are submissions from Black girls or entries written during girlhood. Submit 10 to 30 pages in triplicate by July 1, 1992 with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Send materials to: Patricia Bell-Scott, Department Child and Family Development, Dawson Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, 30602, U.S.A

### **SOUSSIONS DE TEXTES**

#### **Revue d'éducation à distance - Dixième anniversaire**

Le numéro du printemps 1993 célébrera le dixième anniversaire de l'Association canadienne de l'éducation à distance. On vous invite à soumettre des manuscrits portant sur la célébration et l'historique de l'ACED et de l'éducation à distance au Canada. Les manuscrits devront être envoyés avant le 22 juin 1992 à Joan Collinge / Monique Larron, Centre pour éducation à distance, Université Simon Fraser, Burnaby, C.-B., V5A 1S6, (604) 291-3524; télécopieur: (604) 291-4964.

### **GRANTS / SCHOLARSHIPS**

#### **CN Scholarships for Women**

CN is offering 58 scholarships of \$500 each for women across Canada for the 1992 fall semester. The purpose of the scholarship is to encourage women to seek careers in trades, technology, operations and blue collar work and to increase the number of women available for such employment. Candidates may qualify if accepted for the fall 1992 term in one of the participating educational institutions. For a brochure contact the nearest office of Canadian National.

### **SUBVENTIONS**

#### **Bourses d'études du CN pour les femmes**

Le CN offre, dans l'ensemble du Canada, 58 bourses d'études de 500 \$ destinées aux femmes pour la rentrée scolaire de l'automne 1992. Toute femme peut avoir droit à l'une

des bourses si elle a été admise à la rentrée scolaire de l'automne 1992 dans l'un des établissements d'enseignement autorisés. Pour obtenir une brochure, veuillez contacter le bureau du CN le plus proche de vous.

## **FILM / VIDEO**

### **Skip to the**

Beat Magic Lantern Communication Ltd. 775 Pacific Road, Unit 38 Oakville, Ontario L6L 6M4 1-800-263-1717 Fax (416) 827-1154

This 16 minute educational film (with classroom study/ activity guide) addresses the problem of declining participation and low levels of fitness of girls aged 11-17. Suitable for organizations and professionals involved in the physical, social and emotional well-being of adolescents, the film presents a celebratory message about girls' participation in physical activity.

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### **Women in Ontario**

Ontario Women's Directorate (416) 597-4500

This 15 minute video presents an introduction to the social and economic status of Ontario's women today. Educational institutions and provincially funded organizations contact: TV Ontario VIPS, Box 200, Station Q, Toronto, Ontario, M4T 2T1 (416) 484-2637. Non-provincially funded organizations and members of the public contact: LM Media Marketing Services Ltd., 115 Torbay Road, Unit 9, Markham, Ontario, L3R 2M9, (416) 475-3750.

### **Taking Control**

The Arusha Centre 233-10 Street N.W. Calgary, Alta. T2N 1V5 (403) 270-3200

This 22 minute video features immigrant women in situations they find difficult and, with accompanying guidebook, facilitates discussion on how to deal with bureaucracy, employment, prejudice, discrimination, etc. \$55/copy for non-profit organizations + \$10 shipping.

## **FILM / VIDÉO**

### **Skip to the Beat**

Magic Lantern Communication Ltd. #38,775 Pacific Road Oakville (Ontario) L6L 6M4 1-800-263-1717 Télécopieur: (416) 827-1154

Ce film éducatif (un cahier pédagogique est disponible) d'une durée de 16 minutes traite de la forme physique en déclin des filles âgées de 11 à 17 ans et de leur manque de

participation aux activités sportives. Il s'agit d'un outil pédagogique très utile aux organisations et spécialistes qui s'occupent du développement physique, social et émotionnel des adolescentes.

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### **Ma douce moitié**

Vidéo-Femmes (418) 529-9188

Ce vidéo de 22 minutes traite de la qualité de vie des femmes en agriculture.

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### **L'Ontario au féminin**

Direction générale de la condition féminine de l'Ontario (416) 597-4500

A l'aide de statistiques faciles à assimiler, ce film brosse en 13 minutes un tableau de la situation des femmes de l'Ontario. Institutions pédagogiques et organismes subventionnés par le gouvernement ontarien peuvent contacter: TV Ontario, C.P. 200, Succ. Q, Toronto (Ontario), M4T 2T1, (416) 484-2637. Les organismes non subventionnés par le gouvernement ontarien: le public peuvent contacter: LM Media Marketing Services Ltd., Torbay Road, Unite 9, Markham (Ontario), L3R 2M9, (416) 475-3750.

## **BOOKS / PUBLICATIONS**

### **Popular Oral History and Literacy: A Handbook**

Story links - 295 Evelyn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6P 2Z8 - Phone/Fax (416) 604-7126

The handbook, available in print or on cassette, offers a clear explanation of popular oral story, how to do it and how to use it as a tool for literacy. Also applicable to other kind of community-based education with adults or teenagers. Printed guide \$5, tape \$3, plus 15% postage and handling per order.

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### **Willing to Work. Together**

C.O.P.O.H. #926, 294 Portage Avenue Winnipeg, Man. R3C 0B9 (204) 947-0303 Fax: (204) 942-4625

This is the final report of a project initiated by the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped and the National Anti-Poverty Organization to look into employment and disability. The report is also available in French, on tape or in large print.

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**The World's Women 1970-1990**

United Nations Publications Department - 404 Sales Section, Rm DC2-853 New York, N.Y. 10017 U.S.A (212) 963-8302 Fax (212) 963-3489

This publication covers trends and statistics on women's participation in economic, political and family life around the world.

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**Women's Studies: Books by, for and about Canadian women**

Canadian Book Information Centre - 1741 Barrington Street 4th Floor Halifax, N.W. B3J 2A4 (902) 420-0688

The catalogue lists 118 titles from 38 Canadian publishers. Subject listings include: biography, herstory, labor, literature, sexual politics, sociology, etc. Free of charge.

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**Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada**

Formac Distributing - 5502 Atlantic Street Halifax, N.S. B3H 1G4 1-800-565-1975

Edited by Jeri Wine and Janice Ristock, Canadian women activists describe their organizing activities and reflect on successes and failures . \$24.95 + 1.89 GST + 2.00 shipping. Discounts available for bulk orders.

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**Out of the Margins: Women's Studies in the Nineties**

Falmer Press Ltd. - Rankine Road Basingstoke, Hampshire RG24 OPR England

This collection of essays by feminist writers and researchers looks at the pros and cons of building a permanent feminist space within the traditional academy.

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**As Worlds Collide**

University College of Cape Breton - Extension and Community Affairs - P.O. Box 5300 Sydney, N.S. B1P 6L2

Through personal interviews, Patricia Campbell examines the unique and critical pressures, both personal and academic, faced by mature women students in university or college. \$6./ea. 1-9 copies; \$5/ea. 10-19 copies; \$4/ea. 20+ copies (incl. postage & handling). 32 pp.

**Words are What I've Got: International Task Force on Literacy**

c/o ICAE #500, 720 Bathurst St. Toronto, Ontario M5S 2R4 (416) 588-1211 Fax (416) 588-5725

Writings from literacy learners from around the world compiled through the Book Voyage in International Literacy Year are published in this book. \$19.95 + \$3 postage & handling.

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**Double Stitch: Black Women Write about Mothers and Daughters**

Beacons Press - 25 Beacon Street Boston, MA 02108 U.S.A

Developed from a special issue of Sage: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women, contributors include Alice Walker, bell hooks, Tom Morison, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, and others. \$19.95 cloth + \$3.75 handling.

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**Women's Rights in the Arab World**

Middle East Research & Information Project #119, 1500 Massachusetts Ave. N.W. Washington, D.C. 20005 (202) 223-3677

This pamphlet is the first in a series on women in the Middle East that will include publications on gender and family, women and work, and the interaction of secularist, feminist, and Islamist movements. \$2/ pamphlet.

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**Drawing the Line**

Press Gang Publishers 603 Powell Street Vancouver, B.C V6A 1H2 (604) 253-2537

Originally an interactive photo exhibit, this collection of 40 postcards depicts explicit lesbian sexual imagery. Photography by Susan Stewart in collaboration with Persimmon Blackbridge and Lizard Jones. \$12.95 + \$2 shipping for first book and \$.50 each additional book.

**Plain Language: Clear and Simple**

Canada Communication Group - Room A-2403 45 Sacré-Coeur Blvd. Hull, Québec K1A 0S9 (819) 956-1597 Fax (819) 997-8863

This guide is intended to promote the use of plain language in written communications with the aim that people with a wide range of reading abilities should be able to understand messages about products, policies, and services. 59 pp., \$6.95/copy + GST and shipping.

**LIVRES / PUBLICATIONS**

**Entre le juridique et le social: le pouvoir des femmes à Québec au XVIIe siècle**

Les Cahiers de recherche du GREMF Faculté des sciences sociales Édifice Jean-Durand,

bureau 3800 Université Laval Québec, Qc G1K 7P4 (418) 656-5421 Télécopieur: (418) 656-3266

Le 42e numéro de la collection "Cahiers de recherche du Groupe de recherche multidisciplinaire féministe". 211 p., 10 \$ + TPS 7 % + frais de poste.

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**Catalogue francophone canadien des documents en alphabétisation**

Groupe de ressources documentaires en français - 1265 rue Berri Bureau 340 Montréal (Québec) H2L 4X4 (415) 844-3674 Télécopieur (514) 844-1598

Cet outil de référence, qui contient plus de 1500 titres, répertorie de manière exhaustive toute la documentation en alphabétisation recensée dans les bibliothèques et les centres de documentation canadiens et donne des informations précieuses sur l'emplacement des documents.

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**Former des adultes en milieu multiethnique** Éditions Beauchemin Ltée 3281, avenue Jean-Béraud Chomedey, Laval (Québec) H7T2L2 (514) 334-5912 Télécopieur (514) 688-6269

Outil d'autoformation qui sera utile à toutes celles et à tous ceux qui interviennent en milieu multiethnique, ce livre amène les lectrices et les lecteurs à réfléchir à leur travail de formation d'après de texte de Paulo Freire et d'Édouard-Charles Lebeau. Il propose des mesures concrètes et fait des suggestions pour poursuivre l'autoformation. 260 p., 24,95 \$.

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**Répertoire des groupes de femmes traitant d'équité en matière d'emploi et des pensions pour les femmes au foyer**

Union culturelle des Franco-Ontariennes 50 rue Vaughan Ottawa (Ontario) K1M 1X1 (613) 741-1334

L'édition de 1991 est maintenant disponible.

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**Prêts à travailler...Ensemble**

C.O.P.O.H. #926, 294 Portage Avenue Winnipeg (Manitoba) R3C 0B9 (204) 947-0303 Télécopieur: (204) 942-4625

Rapport définitif d'un projet lancé par La Coalition des organisations provinciales Ombudsman des handicapés et L'Organisation nationale anti-pauvreté.

On peut également se procurer ce document en anglais, sur cassette ou en caractères d'imprimerie plus gros.

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### **Words are What I've Got**

Groupe de travail international de l'alphabétisation CIEA #500, 720 rue Bathurst Toronto (Ontario) M5S 2RA (416) 588-1211 Télécopieur: (416) 588-5725

Document trilingue (anglais, français, espagnol); recueil d'articles rédigés par des apprenants et des apprenantes en alphabétisation du monde entier. 19,95 \$+3\$ de frais d'affranchissement et de manutention.

## **AGENDA**

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### **Women and Therapy: Healing and Social Change**

May 7-9, Guelph, Ontario

An examination of feminist approaches to healing and social change, and the struggle for equality in Canadian Society. Keynote speakers: Rosemary Brown, Amy Rossiter, Sandra Butler. Contact: Office of Continuing Education, 160 Johnston Hall, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario N1G 2W1, (519) 767- 5000 Fax (519) 767-0758.

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### **Global Challenge Symposium**

Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation May 8-10, Toronto, Ontario

This international symposium brings together education, labour, government, community and native groups, public and private sectors to address global issues. Presenters include Judy Rebeck, Erica Ritter, and Elija Harper. Contact: Lise Jacob, Symposium Coordinating Secretary, OSSTF, 60 Mobile Drive, Toronto, Ontario, M4A 2P3, (416) 751- 8300, Fax (416) 751-7079.

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### **Learning to Build Communities**

May 10-13, Whistler, B.C.

The conference will focus on the role of learning in the development of community-based

solutions to social, political, ecological and economic issues. For registration information, contact: Continuing Studies, Simon Fraser University, 515 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6B 5K3, (604) 291- 5086, Fax, (604) 291-5098.

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**Feminist Learning: Defining Reality**

Canadian Women's Studies Association May30-June 1, Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Themes to be addressed at the 1992 conference include: Feminist pedagogy and research methods; Feminism and Women's Studies; Feminism and Lesbianism; Feminism and informal learning, etc. Contact Ellen Balka, Women's Studies Program, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Nfld., A1C 5S7, (709) 737-4539, Fax (709) 737-4569.

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**Association canadienne des études sur les femmes**

30 mai-1<sup>er</sup> juin, Charlottetown (Ile-du- Prince- Édouard)

Parmi les thèmes abordés à la conférence de 1992, citons: La pédagogie et les méthodes de recherche féministes, le féminisme et les lesbiennes, le féminisme et l'apprentissage informel. Veuillez contacter Ellen Balka, Women's Studies Program, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Saint-Jean (Terre- Neuve) A1C 5S7, (709) 737-4539; télécopieur: (709) 737-4569.

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**Organizing for Social Change**

International Federation of Settlements & Neighbourhood Centers  
June 4- 10, Toronto, Ontario

Topics to be addressed at this conference, aimed at staff and volunteers from neighborhood organizations around the world and particularly at frontline workers, include: Education as a tool for empowerment and social change, the rights of children, housing and homelessness, violence against women, etc. Contact: TANS/IFS Conference Coordinator, 658 Danforth Avenue, #401, Toronto, Ontario, M4J 5B9, (416) 392-5681, Fax (416) 392-6261.

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**La mobilisation pour le progrès social**

Fédération internationale des centres sociaux et communautaires  
4- 10 juin, Toronto (Ontario)

Parmi les sujets traités, citons: l'éducation en tant qu'instrument de responsabilisation et de progrès social; les droits des enfants; le logement et les sans-abri; la violence faite aux femmes, etc. Veuillez contacter: La coordinatrice de la conférence TANS / IFS, 658, av. Danforth, Bureau 401, Toronto (Ontario), M4J 5B9, (416) 392-5681, télécopieur (416) 392-6261.

**National Action Committee on the Status of Women**

June 5-8, Ottawa, Ontario

This is NAC's 20th annual general meeting, for information, contact:: NAC, 57 Mobile Dr., Toronto, Ontario, M4A 2P3, (416) 759-5252, Fax (416) 759- 5370.

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**Breaking the Barriers: Equity and Access in Adult Education**

Canadian Association for Adult Education - June 17-20, Regina, Saskatchewan

1992 conference themes include: Aboriginal peoples' learning; women's ways of learning; visible minorities; physically and emotionally challenged persons. Contact: Breaking the Barriers, P.O. Box 556, Regina Saskatchewan, S4P 3A3, Fax (306) 787-9562.

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**Summer institute for Environmental Values Education**

July 17- 24, Econiche - Cantley, Quebec

The goal of the institute is to increase the number of educators who can effectively teach about the environment and improve the quality and availability of environmental education in their communities. Contact: Harmony Foundation, 225 Metcalfe Street, Suite 501, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 1P9, (613) 230-7353.

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**Eco-Ed Conference** World Congress for Education & Communication on Environment & Development October 17-21, Toronto, Ontario

The purpose of Eco-Ed is to stimulate informed action by improving the accuracy, quality and delivery of education and communication relating to the environment and sustainable development. Contact: World Congress, 191 Niagara Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5V 1C9, (416) 860-1772, Fax (416) 860-0380.

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budget \$100, 000 to \$500, \$80.25
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The Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CLOW) was founded in 1979 and is a national, voluntary, feminist organization with networks in every province and territory. CLOW advocates equality between women and men by promoting equal participation in our educational, political, economic, legal, social and cultural systems. To overcome discrimination based on gender, age, race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, CLOW focuses on improving educational and learning systems. Our work and research includes maintaining a Women's Learning Resource Centre, publishing a quarterly magazine (Women's Education des femmes), advocacy, program development in local areas and involvement in educational - related activities and events.

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Le Congrès canadien pour la promotion des études chez la femme (CCPEF) a été fondé en 1979. C'est un organisme national, bénévole et féministe qui a des réseaux dans chaque province et territoire. Le CCPEF prône l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes en promouvant une participation égale de tous et de toutes à notre système éducatif, politique, économique, judiciaire, social et culturel. Pour surmonter la discrimination qui se fonde sur le sexe, l'âge, la race, la classe sociale, les caractères ethniques et l'orientation sexuelle, le CCPEF s'attache à perfectionner le système éducatif et celui de l'apprentissage des femmes, publie une revue trimestrielle Women 's Education des femmes, se fait le défenseur des femmes, s'occupe d'élaborer des programmes dans différentes régions du pays et participe à des activités et à des manifestations dans le domaine de l'éducation.

