

Fall/Winter 2001-2002

An Inclusive Approach to Excellence

Gender stereotypes about careers still limit students' interest and participation in career options. Developmental research by Linda Gottfredson found that children begin to eliminate careers because they are the wrong "sextype" between the ages of six and eight.

W. L. Stitt-Gohdes, "Career Development: Issues of Gender, Race, and Class," ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1997.

The Vocational Equity Research Training Center (VERTEC) and *Equity News* strive to draw attention to bias in the classroom and focus on ways to equip educators with the means to address inequity. We promote methods that enhance learning and maximize opportunity for all students in order to level the playing field for under served populations. Educational strategies which attempt to include every student and accommodate different learning styles benefit all students and those who have been left behind begin to achieve at a higher rate and reduce performance gaps. These methods contribute to an environment of excellence, which positively affects everyone.

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What Do We Say When We Hear “Faggot!”?

Homosexuality is a highly charged issue, and consequently, teachers rarely confront children who use homophobic epithets to humiliate, infuriate or tease other children. Many teachers do not realize that this sort of name-calling can be dealt with in much the same way as other kinds of bigotry and stereotyping.

Homophobia is used to reinforce rigid sex and gender roles. When we challenge homophobia by teaching children non-judgmental facts about homosexuality and correcting bigoted myths we also reinforce anti-sexist educational values. Furthermore, if adults criticize other forms of sexism and bigotry but ignore anti-gay behavior, children are quick to conclude that homophobia is acceptable.

Discussions about the words “lesbian” and “gay” often create discomfort in the classroom. This discomfort is evidence of lingering misconceptions and oppressive social structures that are maintained and perpetuated by ignorance. A discussion that includes student feedback as to what the words “lesbian” and “gay” mean often reveals that students perceive a gay man to be effeminate. When the stereotyping inherent in that myth is discussed, as well as the fact that “effeminate” means “behaving like a woman,” the class begins to realize that it is the perceived feminine behavior that is viewed negatively.

When asked what it really means to be called a “faggot” and why it is insulting for a boy to be called “gay,” students will often respond that saying a boy is like a girl is the worst insult imaginable. At this point, girls are likely to sense that something unjust has been touched upon, and they will often take up their own defense, while simultaneously having their own consciousness raised.

Another effective way to combat homophobia is to invite a speaker from a gay organization to address the class. Listening to a gay man or lesbian who is also a living, breathing human being—someone who has parents and siblings and who students may be able to relate to—is often a decisive factor in eliminating homophobia and teaching acceptance.

Teaching children to be critical of oppression is teaching true morality, and teachers have the right, indeed the obligation, to alert their students to all forms of oppression.

To invite a speaker to your classroom or to learn more about combating homophobia in your school contact: GLSEN Connecticut at (203) 232-1480 or visit their website, www.glsen.org.

This article has been adapted from an article by Lenore Gordon, which appeared in *The Bulletin of the Council on Interracial Books for Children*, Vol. 14, Nos. 3 & 4.

Facts About Homophobia in Schools

- * 90.8% reported hearing the expression “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” frequently or often.
- * 81.8% reported that faculty or staff never intervened or intervened only some of the time when present when homophobic remarks were made.
- * 23.6% reported hearing homophobic remarks from faculty or school staff at least some of the time.

The 2001 National School Climate Survey: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students and Their Experiences in Schools GLSEN.

- * 97% of students in public high schools report regularly hearing homophobic remarks from their peers.

Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth: Report of the Massachusetts Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 1993.

- * 77% of prospective teachers would not encourage a class discussion on homosexuality; 85% oppose integrating gay/lesbian themes into their existing curricula.

Sears, James. “Educators, Homosexuality, and Homosexual Students: Are Personal Feelings Related to Professional Beliefs?” in Harbeck, Karen, ed. Coming out of the Classroom Closet. New York: Harrington Park Press, 1992.

Sexual Harassment: Having a School Policy Is Not Enough!

At the beginning of every school year students are given a handbook that explains what will be expected of them during the upcoming year. Every student handbook should contain the school's sexual harassment policy and grievance procedure as well as identify the school system's Title IX Coordinator. Many schools feel that having this information in the handbook is enough. In reality, if you ask teachers and students alike to identify their Title IX coordinator and explain the school's sexual harassment policy and procedure you will inevitably get a variety of wrong answers.

What this reveals is that giving a student a handbook in the beginning of the school year is not enough. Teachers must familiarize themselves with their school's sexual harassment policies and procedures, as well as, reinforce the information in the handbook by creating and enforcing classroom rules that support the policy and by providing the opportunity for discussion surrounding the topic of sexual harassment.

Classrooms that have an explicit policy of respect and specific outcomes for harassing behavior outlined and agreed upon by the students and teachers at the beginning of the year serve as examples of the environment that the students have a right to expect while in school. Discussions of acceptable and unacceptable behavior and enforcing the agreed upon rules when necessary, creates a safer, more productive learning environment for all.

CWEALF provides student, teacher, administrator, and parent trainings on the subject of sexual harassment. Although these trainings tend to be most effective in the beginning of the school year, they can be scheduled at your school's convenience. As a teacher it is important that you find out who your school's Title IX Coordinator is and what is expected of you if you witness sexual harassment or become aware of it through a verbal complaint. To start the conversation about sexual harassment in your classroom simply ask your students what Title IX represents and to identify the school's Title IX Coordinator. You will be amazed at how many students are not aware of their rights and who accept inappropriate behavior as part of the status quo.

For more information on CWEALF trainings call: (860) 247-6090.

Hostile Hallways Facts

American Association of
University Women (AAUW) Educational Foundation,
*Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and
Sexual Harassment in School*, 2001.

According to *Hostile Hallways*, an AAUW report based on a national survey of 2,064 public school students in 8th through 11th grades conducted by Harris Interactive:

Eighty-three percent (83%) of girls and 79% of boys report having experienced harassment.

The number of boys reporting experiences with harassment often or occasionally has increased since 1993 (from 49% to 56%), although girls are still somewhat more likely to experience it. For many students sexual harassment is an ongoing experience: over 1 in 4 students experience it "often." These numbers do not differ by whether the school is urban or suburban or rural.

Seventy-six percent (76%) of students have experienced non-physical harassment, while 58% have experienced physical harassment.

Non-physical harassment includes taunting, rumors, graffiti, jokes or gestures. One-third of all students report experiencing physical harassment "often or occasionally."

Words can cause as much pain as actions do. When given 14 examples of non-physical and physical harassment, students say they would be very upset if someone did the following:

Spread sexual rumors about them: 75%.

Said that they were gay or lesbian: 73%.

Nearly all students (96%) say they know what harassment is, and boys' and girls' definitions do not differ substantially.

A substantial number of students—both boys and girls—fear being hurt by someone during their school career. Eighteen percent (18%) are afraid some or most of the time, and less than half (46%) are "never" afraid in school.

One-third of students fear being sexually harassed in school. Hispanic boys and girls are more likely than African American students to feel afraid.

Students surveyed were provided with the common definition of sexual harassment as "unwanted and unwelcome sexual behavior that interferes with your life. Sexual harassment is not behaviors that you like or want (for example wanted kissing, touching, or flirting)."

A copy of the report can be ordered online, <http://www.aauw.org/2000/hostile.html> or by calling (202)728-7602.

How to Jump Start A Conversation About Gender

Christina Testo, Gender Equity Trainer

When we talk about “gender” what do we really mean? Are we asking if someone’s chromosomes are XX or XY or is it a more complex question? What makes up the “idea” of gender is not only your biological make-up but the societal attitudes and influences that affect us from the moment we are born. Take a female baby for example. She will generally be described as being sweet, delicate, beautiful, and will undoubtedly be wearing something pink. The parents of this little girl would probably be offended if someone peeked into the crib and said, “Wow, look at those shoulders. She’ll definitely be a future linebacker.” Why? Because in our society we are taught that boys and girls are different and therefore need to fit into certain societal stereotypes in order for us to feel comfortable. If an individual does not fit into the narrow stereotypes pertaining to their specific gender, then we label them with such terms as “sissy”, “tomboy”, “gay”, “faggot” or “dyke.”

As a gender equity trainer, one of the activities that I use with students to start a discussion on gender stereotyping is called **Be a Man/Act Like a Lady**. Put these two phrases on the board. Split up your class into smaller, mixed gender groups and have each group come up with words, ideas, phrases, etc. that they feel would fit under these headings. As a larger group, have the student’s share their lists placing all answers on the board and then open up the conversation for additional ideas and comments. What you will discover is that even in the year 2001, students still have very traditional ideas about what is appropriate appearance and behavior for the two sexes. Ask the students if they agree with everything on the board and if not, why.

Their responses and the resulting dialogue will begin to reveal the lingering stereotypes and gender roles perpetuated by our society, as well as, reveal to the students their own biases and the sexism among their peers. These conversations create an opportunity for students to become ethnographers in their own school casting them as experts, as well as, causing them to reflect on their own values.

I encourage you to use an activity like this as a tool for starting a conversation about gender. You may be surprised at the doors you will be opening up for future conversations.

High School Student Gender Equity Competencies

Excerpted from: *Classroom Activities in Sex Equity for Developmental Guidance*, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

The following competencies were developed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction as guidelines for teachers and counselors to expand student expectations and to give students the opportunity to develop their interests and talents without the limitations of bias, stereotyping and discrimination based on gender. By emphasizing their students’ mastery of these competencies, teachers and counselors can ensure that students are making informed decisions based on equitable possibilities.

Learning:

- ✓ Identify ways in which sex bias, sex-role stereotyping and sex discrimination affect learning environment and outcomes.
- ✓ Understand the impact of course selection upon future plans.

Understanding (Personal/ Social):

- ✓ Define “sex-role stereotyping,” “sex bias,” and “sex discrimination,” and become familiar with personal values in these areas.
- ✓ Identify how sex-role stereotyping, sex bias, and sex discrimination affect development, choices, and futures. Identify ways to overcome these barriers.
- ✓ Develop a more positive attitude about the abilities of both sexes.
- ✓ Identify the effect rigid sex-roles, sex bias and sex discrimination have on self-concept.

Applying (Career/Vocational):

- ✓ Understand that both men and women work out of economic necessity and need marketable job skills.
- ✓ Demonstrate awareness of the range of career and occupational choices, including nontraditional jobs.
- ✓ Demonstrate knowledge of labor force facts that have been affected by sex bias, sex-role stereotyping and sex discrimination.

Equity Facts

✓ Women continue to be concentrated in fields that historically have been dominated by women. In 1996, women earned 75% of education degrees, the same rate as in 1970. In engineering, women went from less than 1% in 1970 to 16% in 1996.

National Center for Education Statistics, *Trends in Educational Equity of Girls & Women*, 2000.

✓ Women are 73% of the elementary and secondary school teachers, but only 35% of the principals.

National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education

✓ Seventy-two percent (72%) of women age 16 and over in 2000 worked in one of four occupational groups: administrative support, including clerical (24%); professional specialty (18%); service workers, except private household (16%); and executive, administrative and managerial (14%).

U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics* 1998, 1999.

✓ Between 1977 and 1994, women went from earning 7% to 43% of all law degrees, and from 9% to 38% of all medical degrees.

U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard Riley

✓ Women's salaries in science and engineering lag behind men's by 12 to 15 percent.

C. Hollenshead et al., *The Equity Agenda: Women in Science, Mathematics and Engineering*, 1995.

✓ In 1996, 46% of all Hispanic women age 25 and older had less than a high school diploma. Twenty-seven percent (27%) were high school graduates; 13% had some college; 9 percent were college graduates; and 5% had associate degrees.

Women's Bureau (U.S. Dept. of Labor), *Facts on Working Women*, 1997.

✓ Occupations which did not exist at the beginning of the 20th Century, computer scientists and analysts, for example, have become increasingly important in the information technology revolution. Yet, women's employment in this important field is actually falling behind, widening the occupational gap between women and men.

U.S. Department of Labor, *Future Work Trends and Challenges for Work in the 21st Century*, 1999.

Resources

GENDER EQUITY INFORMATION

- Ⓜ <http://www.ncsee.org/announcements/usdeptedu.html>
- Ⓜ <http://www.edc.org/WomensEquity>
- Ⓜ <http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW>
- Ⓜ <http://www.umbc.edu/cwit>

GAY/ LESBIAN SUPPORT SITES

- Ⓜ <http://www.glsen.org>
- Ⓜ <http://www.pflag.org>
- Ⓜ <http://www.apa.org/ed/hlgb.html>

SEXUAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION INFORMATION

- Ⓜ <http://www.wcwonline.org/harassment/index.html>

Save The Dates!

CHILDREN FROM THE SHADOWS - MARCH 22ND & 23RD, 2002

www.ourtruecolors.org-(conference information/ registration form now available)

The ninth annual Lesbian, Gay BiSexual, Transgender (LGBT) youth conference includes workshops for and about LGBT youth and families. A great learning opportunity for LBGT students, teachers and allies alike.

Location: University of Hartford

NTO (NON-TRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS) CONFERENCE- APRIL 14TH, 2002

www.cga.state.ct.us/pcsw

For more information about workshops and presenters, please visit the website.

Location: Pending

Equity Points!

The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) offers school based trainings on a variety of issues. Due to recent court cases, including Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education, it has become extremely important for schools to show that they have appropriate sexual harassment training for both students and staff. Other trainings include:

- ◆ Nontraditional Occupations for Women
- ◆ Homophobia in Schools
- ◆ Gender Equity in the Classroom

For more information on having a speaker come to your school, please call CWEALF at (860) 247-6090.

The following schools took advantage of CWEALF's Sexual Harassment Trainings for their students or staff this fall:

- ★ Prince Vocational Technical School-Hartford
- ★ Oliver Wolcott Vocational Technical School-Torrington
- ★ Ashford Middle School
- ★ Wilcox Vocational Technical School-Meriden
- ★ Horace Porter Middle School- Columbia
- ★ North Haven School System
- ★ Terryville/Plymouth School System

Equity News, formerly entitled *Shop Talk*, is a publication of the Vocational Equity Research, Training and Evaluation Center (VERTEC). VERTEC is a project of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) and is funded through a grant from the State Department of Education through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act. For more information about VERTEC call Krystin Horrocks at (860) 247-6090.