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ABSTRACT

Junior high students at a middle school in Colorado are offered a course in women's studies as part of the social studies curriculum. The nine-week unit explores identification of ideals, analysis of sex roles, investigation of sex stereotyping, investigation of the historical development of women, and examination of social issues relating to women. The focus of the course is on personal development and increased student awareness, and is not a feminist indoctrination program. The course centers on teacher neutrality, allowing students to develop their own views based on input from a variety of sources and activities. Teaching activities include keeping a journal and providing an opportunity for students to reflect on the personal meaning of being a female. Role playing and mock trials of Susan B. Anthony and Salem witches are course activities to show the historical development of women. Rewritten fairy tales with reversed roles, self-defense demonstrations, and guest speakers add dimensions to student's understanding of what it means to be a female in the world today. (Author/JB)

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Women's Studies in the Junior High School

Note: This Profile of Promise is not for women only.

When the course, "Woman: Her Image and Her Role," was first proposed for Cherry Creek Campus Middle Unit, several considerations were discussed. Does women's studies belong in the social studies curriculum? Are middle school students mature enough to deal with women's issues? Are the students too impressionable to be introduced to such concerns? Is there any interest in such a course among the students?

Two years' experience with "Woman: Her Image and Her Role" has convinced the staff at the Cherry Creek, Colorado, middle school that women's studies does have an important place in a social studies curriculum. They are also certain that middle school students are both interested in women's issues and mature enough to deal with the subject matter.

Gabrielle Olejniczak, the social studies teacher who directs the course, has two major objectives in her course outline. First, she wants to introduce students to the broad social issues being raised in the women's movement and to explore with them the social implications of those issues. Second, and more important, she hopes to help students see how their own identities and roles in society are affected by the issues being discussed. The course, as taught by Olejniczak, has been enthusiastically received by both students and their parents.

INTRODUCING WOMEN'S STUDIES INTO THE CURRICULUM

The impetus for introducing "Woman: Her Image and Her Role" into the Cherry Creek curriculum came from Olejniczak and her personal interest in women's studies. As a social studies teacher, she felt middle school students needed to explore the social issues surrounding the women's movement and to examine the effect such issues would have on them as adults. Since Cherry Creek Middle School is based on a nine-week course schedule, it was relatively easy to introduce a women's studies elective into the social studies curriculum.

The early concern that middle school students were not mature enough to deal with issues such as the place of women in society, sex stereotyping, and human liberation proved unjustified. In fact, Olejniczak feels that the middle school level may be a better age than later adolescence to explore such issues. Middle school students, she observes, are in an important stage of personal development. They are beginning to be interested in their own identities and roles in society, but they are not yet feeling the social pressure produced by dating which dominates the later teen years. Because middle school students are in a social, physical, and emotional transitional stage, they are usually open and responsive to exploring the issues and alternatives relating to women.

Although "Woman: Her Image and Her Role" has been open to both boys and girls, so far only girls have enrolled. Olejniczak feels that having only girls in the course has been helpful to the students and to the teacher. "At their age," she points out, "talking in front of boys is very threatening to the girls, and coed classes would inhibit the kinds of discussions I like to have in the course." Also she feels that middle school girls are more socially mature than their male counterparts, and the difference in their maturity levels would make mixed classes difficult to teach.

The course description written by Olejniczak emphasizes the value of the course in the personal development of students. This is the aspect of the course which she considers most important, and she wants administrators, parents, and students to understand that the course is not a feminist indoctrination program. Once the course is underway, Olejniczak contacts parents by letter before controversial activities or speakers are introduced in the class. She invites the parents to attend the event or to voice objections before the activities take place. The instructor feels this continuing contact with parents has been helpful in eliminating negative reaction to the course.

"WOMAN: HER IMAGE AND HER ROLE"--COURSE OUTLINE

The nine-week course outline which Olejniczak has developed for "Woman: Her Image and Her Role" is as follows:

- I. Identification of Ideals
What is the perfect man? the perfect woman? the perfect person?
- II. Analysis of Sex Roles
What are sex roles? how are they learned? how do male and female roles differ?
- III. Investigation of Sex Stereotyping and Its Effect
Advertisements, comics, media, cultural assumptions, traditions, education
- IV. Investigation of the Historical Development of Women
Major historical events and trends involving and affecting women

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V. Examination of Social Issues Relating to Women

Personality and Self-Actualization	Career
Family and the Liberated Mother	Law
Pregnancy and Rape	Women in Literature
Women's Movement	Women in the Future
Value Conflicts and Alternatives	Universality of Liberation
Anti-Women's Liberation Views	Female Advantages and Tricks

Olejniczak believes a course in women's studies should begin "where the kids are"; she also feels the first day of a new class sets the tone for the '90s course. Therefore, she has carefully developed a strategy for introducing students to the course content.

Olejniczak begins the first class by writing the words "perfect man" and "perfect woman" on the chalkboard. She then asks students to list adjectives which describe each. Under "perfect man" students usually list words such as "intelligent, strong, ambitious, determined, courageous, practical." Under "perfect woman" they most often list adjectives such as "good looking, gentle, understanding, good personality, charming, affectionate, helpful."

When these two lists are complete, the teacher writes the words "perfect person" on the board and asks students to suggest descriptions of a perfect person--the kind of person needed to change and shape the future of the world. The words suggested by the class are usually "intelligent, strong, practical, courageous"--the words they used to describe the perfect man but not the words they used to describe the perfect woman. Without moralizing about the descriptions, the teacher asks the students to think about the lists on the board and to consider the implications for themselves as women of the future. There is usually a lively discussion among the students as they leave that first class.

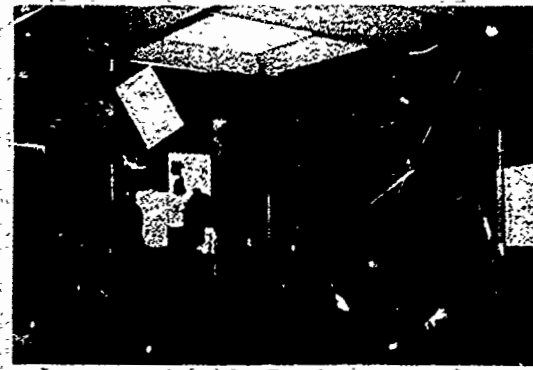
At the next class meeting, students inevitably ask the question, "Why were our descriptions of men and women so different?" That question leads to a discussion about sex roles and how they are learned--a discussion that lasts several days. Olejniczak asks the students to reflect on their own family situations and to consider if, or how, their parents treat them differently from their brothers. Students soon begin to point out differences in the ways boys and girls are treated--the pink and blue distinction for infants, the difference in the way male and female babies are physically handled, the distinction between toys for boys and girls, the varying expectations for neatness, the contrast in acceptable ways of dealing with emotions. In these discussions the teacher is careful to examine the role expectations of boys as well as those of girls and to explore the problems which role stereotyping presents for males.

To understand the impact of sex stereotyping, Olejniczak encourages students to look for examples of stereotyping in the world around them. One requirement of the course is that each student keep a scrapbook with examples of stereotyping. Every scrapbook entry is to be accompanied by the student's own reactions to the example. The possibilities are numerous. Students have included advertisements from magazines, comic strips, reports on TV programs, and newspaper and magazine articles. Olejniczak feels this activity helps students begin to see concrete illustrations of how role expectations affect both men and women.

The historical survey of women in society is by necessity general and "sweeping." Basically, Olejniczak attempts to show both how women have been viewed by society and how they have viewed themselves over the years. The survey highlights early tribal (matriarchal) social systems, ancient (patriarchal) civilizations, the role of women in the Middle Ages, the concept of the Victorian lady, the entry of women into the industrial labor force during World War I, the suffrage movement, the rise of women in professional ranks in the 1930s and 40s, the "back to the home" trend of the 1950s, the impact of *The Feminist Mystique* in the 1960s, and the current feminist movement.

When the current social problems relating to women's issues are studied, the teacher uses a variety of activities to encourage students to examine many sides of each issue. Some of the particularly successful activities are the following:

- Students watch daytime TV programs--soap operas, game shows, talk shows--to determine how the media views women. Students discuss not only what is contained in the programs, but how the TV programming reinforces stereotyped images.
- Surveys are conducted by students to assess the reactions of several age groups to questions about women. For example, in one survey students asked other Cherry Creek Middle School students questions such as, "Is the woman's place in the home?" and "Is a working mother a detriment to her children?" They then asked the same questions of elementary children and of adults. The answers given by the different groups were compared, and students discussed the similarities and differences in the responses.



Practicing self-defense techniques

Debating the draft of women into military service.



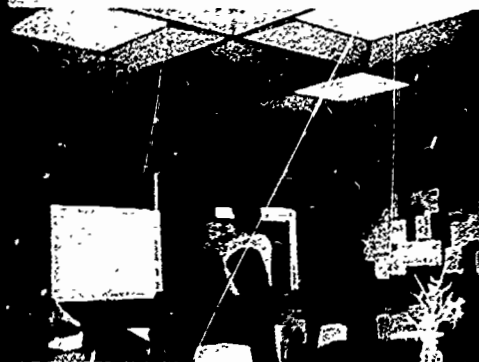
Pro . . .



Group discussions . . .



playing of the Salem witch trials



and con



an important part of women's studies

- Role-playing activities are used to help students gain more insight into family relationships. Students examine why and how parents do or do not reinforce stereotypes, and they explore possible strategies for reducing stereotyping in families.

- Fairy tales and magazine articles have been rewritten by Olejniczak so that traditional roles of princes and princesses or famous husbands and wives are reversed. The purpose of these readings is to help students recognize stereotypes in literature.

- Dramatic skits are used to portray women in historical events and to attempt to understand why the women responded as they did in given situations. One event is the trial of Susan B. Anthony in which the issues raised by the suffragettes are examined. The colonial witchcraft trials are also reenacted with the teacher playing the role of the accuser and the students, the accused.

- Several sessions are devoted to demonstrating simple self-defense techniques which can be used to protect against rape or assault.

- Reading assignments on teenage pregnancy are discussed in class, and students explore alternatives available to young women who become pregnant.

- Each year several resource speakers visit the classes. Olejniczak invites speakers who present three very different points of view on women's issues. One speaker is a woman from Fascinating Womanhood, an organization dedicated to promoting the role of woman as homemaker. The second speaker is a representative from the National Organization of Women who expresses a moderate viewpoint on the women's movement. The third presentation is made by a couple, a woman and man, who espouse a radical feminist position.

The objective in each course activity is to add another dimension to the students' understanding of what it means to be a woman in today's world. Olejniczak summarizes her approach by saying, "I am not attempting to make feminists out of these girls, but I am trying to help them become aware of their own identities as females."

GROWING IN AWARENESS

Because much of the emphasis in "Woman: Her Image and Her Role" is on student awareness and development, Olejniczak requires each student to keep a personal journal into which the student makes five entries every week. These journals are designed to provide students an opportunity to reflect on the personal meaning of being female. The teacher considers the journal entries a good illustration of how students grow in self-awareness during the course. Some excerpts from journals demonstrate the point.

I've noticed how girls treat other girls...It seems to center around popularity. The cheerleaders get more respect than some others.

The dryer broke down today and it made an interesting situation. It's the same old thing of how Dad does the fixing while Mom runs around trying to finish the wash without her dryer. Each in their own little roles...What I want to know is what would happen if Dad died or went on a long trip....

(in response to a cosmetic ad) Why do women have to change or do anything for a man? Why can't you be yourself and let the man love you for it?

Students submit their journals to the teacher every week; she makes notations, adds comments, and answers questions before returning them. For many students the journals have become therapeutic, and in some instances a kind of "Dear Abby" dialogue is carried on between students and the teacher.

One of the school guidance counselors, Marty Rankin, has seen several instances in which "Woman: Her Role and Her Image" has been an important personal experience for students. She observes that the middle level age is sometimes difficult for girls, and they often have fewer opportunities to build self-confidence than male students. The course seems to offer them a special identity. "I know of several cases in which the course helped girls develop a new respect for themselves. This respect then helped them deal more effectively with family and personal problems."

Ralph Remes, a teacher from neighboring Cherry Creek Senior High School, had occasion to discuss women's issues with students from "Woman: Her Image and Her Role." He was impressed with the students' awareness of the social issues concerning women, but he did question their "lack of humor" concerning the issues and what seemed to him to be an undue sensitivity to such concerns. "This is a terribly tender age to be so very sensitive about the issues of womanhood and femaleness," he notes.

While increased personal awareness is one of the important outcomes of "Woman: Her Role and Her Image," the course has also promoted group action by the students. In 1973 the class members circulated the following petition:

Many girls feel that they are already acquiring the skills of Home Economics in the home and would enhance their education by being exposed to the Industrial Arts. We the undersigned feel that all students male or female should be able to choose between Industrial Arts and Home Economics.

As a result of the petition, Cherry Creek Middle School opened Industrial Arts to girls some time before federal rulings made such open enrollment mandatory.

WOMEN'S STUDIES: PRESENT AND FUTURE

In her experience with "Woman: Her Image and Her Role," Olejniczak has developed some strong ideas about teaching such a course. First, she feels a teacher must walk a very tight rope when dealing with women's issues at the middle school level. A teacher must take the responsibility of presenting all sides of issues and be careful not to indoctrinate the students to her point of view. In fact, Olejniczak believes students should not be able to identify the teacher's position, at least until the end of the course.

Olejniczak feels a teacher can best accomplish a neutral position by using resource speakers, the media, and outside readings to present varying positions. She has observed that it is more meaningful for students to develop their own views based on input from a variety of sources than to have opinions "force-fed" by the teacher.

As for the future of women's studies, Olejniczak believes the subject of human roles will soon become an established part of most middle school and senior high curricula. Perhaps women's studies will not be taught as a separate course, but the concepts will be integrated into other courses. "After all," Olejniczak reflects, "women's issues are part of values clarification in education. Because adolescence is a time for exploring personal identity, the role of women--and of men--in society will naturally be part of that exploration."

For further information, write:

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If you know of other significant practices write a one page description, including the name and address of a person to contact for further information, and send to:

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- ED 090 470 - *Images of Women: A Bibliography of Feminist Resources for Pennsylvania Schools.* By Elizabeth S. Haller. 53 pp. MF-\$.75, HC-\$3.15, plus postage. This bibliography was compiled to comply with a directive that feminist literature be included in Pennsylvania school libraries. Feminist materials, including films and tapes, are grouped into categories relating to biographies, careers, fiction, history, literature and the arts, psychology, and sociology.
- ED 084 550 - *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives.* By Susan Koppelman Carnillon. 399 pp. Available from Bowling Green University, Popular Press, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403 - \$10.00. This book examines the roles women have assumed in society and those they are now beginning to occupy.
- ED 082 068 - *Perceptions of Fifth and Sixth Grade Females of Vocational Goals and Expected Lifestyle.* By Patricia Roop Burgette. 88 pp. MF-\$.75, HC-\$4.20, plus postage. Data were collected and analyzed regarding goals and aspirations of fifth and sixth grade females. The responses indicated that the girls made their vocational choices from a narrow range of occupations and ones that are traditionally feminine. Recommendations for educational experiences intended to broaden expectations for future lifestyles are included in the study.
- ED 071 954 - *Women Studies: Women in American History: Herstory--Changing Roles of American Women. Preliminary Edition.* By Beth Millstein, et al. 26 pp. MF-\$.75, HC-\$1.85, plus postage. Two courses of study for initial testing are presented: (1) Women's Studies: Women in American History and (2) HISTORY and HERstory: Changing Roles of the American Woman. A bibliography and a list of women's studies organizations are included.

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