The
development and application of a theory of change for achieving gender
equity in early childhood centres

Giving Children a Fair Go

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The differences between males and females have been studied with
intensifying interest and debate during the 1980s and 90s. Popular myths
have been exploded, controversy about the interpretation of research
findings has abounded and speculation concerning causes and effects has
been challenged. Central to the debate is the meaning which people attach
to the distinction between sex differences and gender differences, and
their origins.

Assumptions that people who share a common gender also share a common set
of abilities, interests, values and roles have evolved over centuries and
have become institutionalised and therefore an invisible aspect of our
socialisation, with the consequence that they are extremely difficult to
change. In recent years it has become obvious that adherence to rigid
'gender role stereotypes' results in the oppression of girls and women, and
severely limits the opportunities and choices for all children. That such
adherence is considered to be the norm, is hegemony at work. The hegemonic
process is an educational process through which male leadership and
domination are maintained, not by conscious design, but in an unconscious
and invisible way, that is largely accepted by society as normal. Thus
those who are oppressed by the process, also collude in it.

It is argued that, because hegemony is operating at every level of society,
and therefore in families and in educational institutions, more severe and
more destructive effects occur in the development of girls' potential than
boys'. A theory of change will describe ways in which those involved in
early childhood education centres are enabled to recognize the process of
hegemony in action, both in their own personal and professional lives and
in the experiences of the children and families at their centres. Changes
in their perspective will empower them to find ways of raising the
consciousness of the centre parents, along with reducing significantly the
limitations placed on the children in their care, that are brought about by
gender-role stereotyping, gender discrimination and hegemony.

A socialist feminist perspective underlies the proposed theory of change.
Jaggar's (1983) declaration that "the differences between men and women
underlines her definition of socialist feminism. In calling for a general
reordering of society, socialist feminists express their commitment to the
abolition of both class and gender (ibid.). The change process must
include, within this framework therefore, an acknowledgement of the sexual
division of labour in childrearing, that perpetuates the social and

psychological inequality between men and women. The low status of childcare in a male-dominated society needs to be analysed, as part of the consciousness raising process for both parents and staff.

More broadly, the socialist feminist conception seeks to liberate women by enlarging their options in life. A gender-inclusive early childhood curriculum is one means of setting girls on the road towards self esteem, a wider job market, and economic independence, making more possible the freedom from compulsory heterosexuality and socially enforced motherhood, for example. Gender equity in early childhood education centres is not, of course, a panacea for the whole of society, but, as the educational service that works most closely with the families it serves, I suggest that the influence on society at large of its philosophy and practice should not be underestimated.

RATIONALE FOR CHANGE

The detrimental effects for girls and women of living in a patriarchal society justify the need for social change. The effects are exacerbated for women in minority ethnic groups. For example, the unemployment rate, twice as high for women in general as for men, is almost four times as high for Maori women as it is for men. (1986 N. Z. Census).

Women's earning capacity is restricted; for every dollar a N.Z. man earns, a N.Z. woman earns 80 cents. (Working Group on Equal Opportunities and Equal Pay, 1988). When women are in paid employment, it is in a very narrow range of occupations. 51% of women are employed in 6 occupations: sales, clerical, secretarial, nursing, teaching, bookkeeping.

The figures quoted have come about as the result of a socialisation process that begins at birth and is firmly established by the time a child is three years old. A growing body of research is showing us that the majority of education institutions, from preschool to tertiary, reinforce and perpetuate the deeply embedded sexism in society (Mahony 1985; Spender 1982; Stanworth 1983). There is clear evidence that subject choices are more restricted for girls than for boys. For instance, one in 5 boys leaves school and takes up a trade. One in 33 girls leaves school and takes up a trade and of these 75% go into female hairdressing (Stevenson 1986). This means that, in contrast to 1 in 5 boys going into trades, 1 in 132 females goes into a non-hairdressing trade.

At preschool, where girls usually select the family corner and craft activities more than boys do and where boys usually select the block area, manipulative and construction materials more than girls do, one can see and predict the the "tracking" of females and males into stereotyped life patterns (Shapiro et al. 1981, Ebbeck 1985, Bruce 1985, Meade 1985).

Girls at school, as early as preschool, are not only discriminated against,

but victimised and oppressed: "Sexual and other forms of harrassment are common experiences for girls in preschool and schools. Complaints are difficult to make and often cause further embarrassment. One form of harassment is the use by boys of ridicule and intimidation to secure and retain the use of space and equipment." (Curriculum Review, 1987)

Among the influences that contribute to the shaping of children's sense of self, are teachers. When they are unaware of the effects of their own socialisation, the different expectations they have for males and females remain invisible, but powerful and consistent. For example, when a new toy or piece of equipment is introduced into an early childhood centre, teachers may unconsciously gender-type it (Serbin, in Sprung 1975).

Research reported by the NZ Department of Education (1989) states that when students of either sex are praised for their work and criticised for their behaviour (as males usually are) their confidence increases. Those who are criticised for their work and praised for their behaviour (as females usually are) lose confidence. Females receive different kinds of praise and attention from that received by males. The kind of praise females receive is more likely to be for quiet behaviour than for achievement (ibid.). Females receive less praise and attention than boys for the same task. In at least one study, boys were given more praise, more step-by-step instruction - 8 times as much as girls were given (ibid.). Girls seek adult and peer approval as proof of success. Girls seek adults' help more than boys but for reasons less likely to foster cognitive development .(Hodgeon 1985). Girls (in preschools) were attended to differentially, according to how close they were to the teachers. Boys were attended to (with praise, comments, instruction, etc) anywhere within eye or ear contact of the teachers (Serbin, in Sprung 1975).

It can be seen from the evidence described, that the unconscious acceptance and reproduction of societal patterns that oppress women have been at the expense of the actual learning characteristics and the real physical, intellectual and psychological needs of girls and women. A capitalist

system which keeps women in low-paid, low-status jobs, and attributes no productive value to the work carried out by women in the home, creates alienation for women, and therefore must be taken account of in the strategies for social change. A socialist feminist perspective aims to demystify the prevailing hegemonic and capitalist ideology and develop alternative ways of perceiving reality and alternative attitudes to it. Early childhood education teachers are unquestionably qualified to know about the gendered structure of paid labour in the field of education, where it is mostly women who work with very young children.

Models of change are needed that are responsive both to the needs of young children and their families, and to society's demands for effective education systems and a productive non-sexist society. To bring about such responsiveness, the invisibility of existing oppressive processes has to be

exposed. That is the challenge for early childhood educators seeking to
achieve gender equity in their programmes.

In the New Zealand Government's reforms in the structuring of education,
gender equity is taken up as a requirement that must be met in the charters
to be developed by early childhood education centres, and National
Curriculum Guidelines will specify the ways in which such requirements are
to be met.

Unless the gender bias and discrimination against girls are confronted in
the hidden curriculum, ie, the organization and the content of the early
childhood programme, the books, resources and equipment, the language used
and the attitudes, behaviours and expectations of the staff, and unless
people's consciousness is raised to recognise the sources of conflict and
resistance that relate to their own socialisation, any attempted change
will arouse antagonism, an entrenchment of prejudiced attitudes and an
inflexible adherence to the status quo or frustration and burn-out (Harvey
and Hergert 1986). Further, the potential conflicts between the home
culture and the culture of the early childhood centre (eg, in expectations
of the child's behaviour) must be addressed (Katz, in Sprung 1975).

A THEORY OF CHANGE
Based on the feminist position outlined above, an explicit theory which is
deemed to be appropriate to an early childhood setting is outlined, whereby
changes can be conceived, formulated and carried out within that setting.

A theory of change that will maximize the possibilities for effective
outcomes will incorporate the following components:

1) a feminist perspective, whereby the agents of change (early childhood
staff) will be in a position of power, not powerlessness;

2) an analysis of the social relations within the setting where the changes
are planned, whereby an understanding of the individual is contextualised
within an understanding of the structures and interrelationships that
govern her role; "Change is bound by its context" (Fullan 1982).

3) an examination of the sources of resistance and opposition to change;
(Acker, 1988; Rust, 1989)

4) an articulation of the invisibility of many aspects of the behaviours
which are identified for change; (Browne and France, Eds. 1986)

5) identification of an existing set of behaviours and attitudes that
e.c.e. staff want to alter; (Sarason, 1971)

6) identification of the intended behavioural outcomes for the people
involved in the change process, ie, the goals; (ibid.)

7) explicit criteria by which to decide whether the consequences of actions

are consistent with the values to which they are supposed to be related,
eg, are new practices that address gender equity in line with the overall

philosophy of the centre ?

Change is by definition an upsetting of the existing regularities that
occur in a behaviour setting. The first point to be clear about when
proposing change is whether existing practices, as far as they go,
satisfactorily meet the goals of the people involved in the setting, or
whether some behaviours fail to meet those goals.

For example, in a typical childcare centre the goals could be summarized as
follows:

a. Of Employers:To run a cost-effective, high quality facility that
satisfies clients' needs.

b. Of Staff: To work effectively with children and families in ways that
are congruent with their personal value system, in excellent working
conditions, valued and supported by employer and parents.

c. Of Parents: To have their child's individual, developmental needs
met in the best possible ways at all times; and to attend a facility that
meets their own needs for flexibility, costs, level of involvement,
support, and that reflects their basic values.

d. Of Children: To receive the support they need that will enable them,
through their experiences, to develop in every aspect of their lives, to
their fullest human potential, with the approval of those who are important
to them.

The contradictions and conflicts emerge when the issue of gender is
considered in light of the above goals.

If the needs of children are met (d), as they are in a high quality early
childhood centre (a), there will be no evidence of sex-role stereotyping,
affirmative action will be taken to empower girls and to encourage cross-
sex play and behaviour. If however, the values of the parents include a
belief in 'gendered' behaviour (c), the staff cannot feel supported by
parents (b); nor can the employer meet the clients' needs (a) and as a
result cannot support the staff (b). If there are staff members who share
parents' stereotyped notions concerning the socialisation of children,
attempts by other staff to introduce change are likely to be sabotaged,
with the serious repercussions of damaged staff relationships. In addition,
children are likely to be reluctant to engage in behaviours (such as cross-
sex play) that are either disapproved of by parents or ridiculed by their

peers.

In view of the research evidence outlined earlier, it becomes apparent that, as long as gender inequity is not made overt and changed, none of the people in the early childhood setting are having their goals met. The point must be made clear that "....anti-sexism must be seen as good educational practice rather than as an isolated or peripheral issue." (Ord and Quigley, in Weiner (Ed.) 1985). On the other hand, if the issue is addressed and changes made, there is a possibility that some staff and/or some parents and/or some children may object, as they see conflicts with their traditional values.

Therefore although the existing regularities must be changed, and not simply added to, there must be a co-requisite effort to raise the consciousness of those affected by the changes to understand that the changes are in their best interests and will not be destructive. Without a change in people's consciousness, the creation of new goals will be simply interpreted as a loss - a loss of the old goals that had been part of their consciousness and everyday practice.

Lilian Katz warns of the dangers described: Never put children into positions in which meeting your expectations increases their conflicts with their parents' expectations. This is an ethical issue. It seems to me that it would be unethical to increase the likelihood that when children meet your expectations, they are going to be in greater difficulty with their parents.(p.60)

The first task in implementing change must be a consciousness raising exercise. Following a participatory research model, in which the researcher (or facilitator) works to support, strengthen and mobilize workers in their workplace, time must be allowed for staff members to express all their feelings and attitudes about gender roles, within an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. By using a feminist paradigm as delineated earlier, staff will address the ways in which women's oppression is reflected in their lives and their work roles and in the early childhood education

system. At the same time, they will be encouraged to consider their own active agency and consciousness in their ability to define and alter social reality. Only then will staff be willing and able to actively take on a commitment to change.

The facilitator's key role is one of empowering the staff. A process of education will occur in this phase, whereby new awarenesses can facilitate changed attitudes.

Time must also be devoted to reflecting on the possible conflicts for parents and children of implementing change. Staff must undertake willingly the task of 'educating' parents and children likewise through a process of consciousness raising. With informed and concerted action, staff will

determine a variety of strategies that will make these new awarenesses in others possible. Only then will the goals of all involved be congruent. The difficulty of those tasks should not be underestimated! To avoid the resistance from parents that can occur from the "expert-staff-know-best" approach, staff members must engage in dialogue with parents, share information, and express willingness to learn new things from the parents' culture and knowledge, in addition to 'letting go' some of their own understanding and knowledge. Only in a partnership of shared power will true co-operative effort be maintained. That partnership is most likely to occur where staff are committed to developing a one-to-one relationship based on trust and respect with each parent using the centre.

THE ACTION

1. Analyse from a feminist perspective the relationships of the groups of people involved in the early childhood setting and in the implementation of change. This means acknowledging that staff are controlled by their employers and are accountable to parents for their actions. It also means understanding their role as women in a patriarchal society, and as workers in an undervalued service.

     An essential feature of the proposed undertaking, therefore, is that recognition and value be accorded the staff for the time and effort they put into this professional in-service development. The consent and the support of the employing body becomes an integral aspect of the exercise. Providing pay for the time staff members spend in meetings outside working hours is a satisfactory and empowering acknowledgement of the value of such efforts.

     The process must also take account of the varying levels of political, psychological and intellectual understanding between individual staff members.

2.   Allow time for change. ".... change is most productively seen as a social process that gradually unfolds over time." (Fullan 1982). Given the diversity among the agents of change, as described, it becomes essential to successful outcomes to make a generous time allowance for change in attitudes, understanding, knowledge and practice to occur. The time perspective, so often constrained by outside limitations (eg, term dates, finances, licensing requirement deadlines, etc), is crucial. This is "often grossly underestimated, resulting in feelings of anger or discouragement on all sides." (Sarason, 1971).

3.   Once the process of consciousness raising is under way (under the guidance of a facilitator), all the sources of resistance and opposition must not only be made visible, but be confronted by the group and resolved in ways that allow for moving forward.

4.   Staff must clarify and articulate what they want for the children and families that they serve. This should involve identifying the goals of 1)

employers, 2) parents, 3) staff, 4) children, for an early childhood service. Gender equity must be related to those goals.

5. Practical strategies for change should be decided on by staff, based on what existing realities they perceive as needing change. The facilitator must offer practical support in whatever ways possible to enable appropriate action to be carried out by staff. For example, staff may see a need for an observer to make explicit for them the invisible aspects of gender-defined activity and setting. The facilitator may be able to fulfil this function of gathering data on existing practices.

Until parents have been involved in the aims of the intervention and given opportunities for input, staff should limit putting into practice any desired changes to their interactions with children, or other aspects of the children's experiences. Staff's strategies for change must include, if the consciousness raising process has been successful, a commitment to raising the consciousness and gaining the support of parents in their plans for change.

6. Provide useful tools. Staff must be well equipped with the means for best achieving their aims. G.E.R.T.I.E. - 'Gender Equity Resources for Teachers in Educare' must be developed. A kit of resources, responding specifically and appropriately to the needs of the staff, must be an integral part of the change process. Without G.E.R.T.I.E., staff are left with good ideas, frustrated by the lack of materials, making comprehensive implementation of such ideas a dream.

7.   Evaluation. There are two aspects to the evaluation. The first aspect concerns the extent to which the aims of the intervention were achieved. The second aspect concerns the degree of effectiveness of the method used to achieve change.

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE: A PILOT PROJECT DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GENDER EQUITY IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE

Methodology

The intervention was grounded in socialist feminist theory. This meant that an essential component of it was the valuing of women. At each step of the way, this aspect had a high priority, since the process of change involved confronting to some degree one's own oppression as women. Demonstration by the facilitator of that valuing included

a)   limiting the number of meetings to a minimum, as the staff were already working to their limits;

b)   seeking recognition of their worth by asking their employer to pay them for the professional inservice training they were participating in

through the project;

c)   utilising their ideas and responses to form solutions to the problems of gender inequity in their centre;

d)   making the meetings comfortable, in pleasant surroundings, with wine and supper offered.

e)   articulating the merit of their work by describing (in writing) in strong, positive terms to them the excellent aspects of their skills with children and parents. (see Affirming Output)

The feminist underpinning also meant that there was a belief that the existing social structures could be challenged by changing some of the practices and attitudes occurring within those structures. In this instance it was the early childhood education setting of their work-place that was to be the focus of change. The small-scale nature of the intervention ensured that there were no lofty expectations of burying the remains of patriarchy in the sandpit. However by applying the key aspects of the author's theory of change, effective outcomes in terms of increased gender equity practices and attitudes in the setting (involving children,

staff, parents and management) could be expected.

The Intervention

The intervention was designed as a series of three two-hour meetings, each with a specific set of aims. The role of the facilitator at the meetings was to draw out, in discussions among all staff of the centre, the attitudes, beliefs and insights of each of them, within a framework of mutual trust, respect and confidentiality, and with a view to achieving the specified aims.

1) After receiving a positive response about the project from the Supervisor of an early childhood centre after she had consulted her staff (N=6), the author arranged to visit the centre and meet the staff.

2) Now in the role of the facilitator, the author visited the centre to become acquainted with staff, to explain more details, including the facilitator's role, and to distribute some relevant readings. A draft of a letter to the Management Committee was shown to the staff for their comment. In it permission was sought to carry out the intervention and a request made for some paid time allocation for staff. Permission was obtained from each staff member to tape-record meetings, explaining the purpose, ie, for analysis and writing-up only.

At the initial visit to the centre, each staff member was given a folder, entitled G.E.R.T.I.E.: Gender Equity Resources for Teachers in Educare. In the folder was
1) the story of "X: A Fabulous Child's Story" by Lois Gould, and
2) a summary of research findings concerning the discrimination against girls and   women, and concerning the gender-defined activities and behaviours of   preschool children.
The reading material was presented to the staff as being optional.

The first meeting was arranged by the staff during the next few days, and the Supervisor notified the facitlitator of the agreed arrangements: evenings at the author's home.

First Meeting: Becoming Acquainted and Consciousness-raising

1. The aims of the first meeting:

 i) To ascertain again from the staff, after their reading of the material provided, whether they saw gender equity as an issue, that created problems to be solved or changes to be made.

 ii) To raise the consciousness of each person of their own sexist socialisation   and the social forces that mitigate against gender equity anywhere, before   encouraging them to clarify what they want for the children and families that they serve.

2.   The Process:

The purpose and goal of the intervention was reiterated, underlying principles were outlined and a diagram showing the professional relationships of all those involved in the setting was shown to the group and discussed.

The readings were discussed. Personal histories were shared, and reasons why early childhood work was chosen.

Full-ranging discussion according to the needs of the group. It was expected that topics to come up as a follow-on from the introduction would be likely to include:

    points raised in the pre-meeting readings; the family; the role of mothers; the low status of child-rearing and childcaring; pervasiveness and consequences of sex-role stereotyping; children's reluctance to be androgynous; parents' concerns about effects of non-traditional behaviours of their children; homosexuality; feminism; breaking down the family unit; men's attitudes; difficulty of changing an ideology that is centuries old; differences between effects on boys and girls; dealing with hostility or opposition from parents; lack of suitable materials; reluctance to modify interactions with children; feelings of inadequacy, lack of confidence, lack of commitment to proposals.

Using responses from the group, one or two-sentence statements were to be
written up, which identifed the goals of 1) employers, 2) parents, 3)
staff, 4) children, for an early childhood service. Gender equity was to
be related to those goals. An attempt was made to identify conflicts
between the goals of different groups.

In the course of brainstorming ways of resolving those conflicts, the
matter of charter requirements and parent education was introduced. Staff
expressed a need to find ways of uncovering some of the invisibility of
gender bias, if research findings are valid. They wanted to know what
things were happening in the centre that they were unaware of, that
discriminated against girls, and that "tracked" both boys and girls into
gender-stereotyped activities and choices.

Staff decided to utilise the facilitator (the author) for the purpose of
carrying out observations at the centre and decided what type of
observations they believed would be useful.

Observations checklists for staff to observe staff, wording for parent
noticeboards, newsletters, suggestions for how to respond to those who
resist ideas for promoting gender equity, etc. were drafted Some published
resource material from New Zealand, U.S.A., Australia and England was also
made available. Such materials were to be shared with the group as and when
the need arose, in order to complement or support their own ideas. They
were not to be imposed as either "the best thing to do" or "the solution."

Between the first and second meetings: Collecting Data.

1) time-sampling observations, to record every ten minutes the numbers of
boys and girls (over 2 years of age) engaged in which activities.

2) event-sampling observations of two staff members (at their request).The
events observed were drawn up from the research evidence about the way
staff might interact differentially with boys and girls.

A five-point rating scale was given to each staff member, with a request
that they evaluate their previous and their present attitude to the two
issues stated on it.

Second Meeting: Brainstorms and Decisions.

1. The aims of the second meeting:

i) To have the evaluation forms returned, and discuss any changes in
awareness of gender issues over the previous two weeks, in terms of events
and thoughts that have occurred during the interim.

ii) To share with staff the results of the observations carried out at the centre. The key points arising from the observtions to be presented on a sheet of newsprint, and diagrammatically, if appropriate, so that they can be discussed fully. To affirm the positive aspects of the staff's work.

iii) As a result of new knowledge about existing practice, to generate ideas about changes that staff wanted to initiate, (a) with children, (b) with parents, (c) with themselves and each other.

iv) Identify how this will be done, by whom, when and where. Facilitator to continue sharing further resources or offer to adapt existing ones according to staff wishes.

Between the second and third meetings: Continuing Input and Affirming Output.

Notes summarising the main points arising from the second meeting were provided for each staff member. Additional reading related to the discussions was also enclosed. (SET article: "Don't Take That Dress Off

James !" by Anne Meade.)

Third Meeting: Outcomes and Evaluations

1. The aims of the third meeting:

i) Each person to share their view of what has been happening with regard to the implementation of changes at the centre.

ii) Facilitator to list on newsprint the concerns/anxieties of each person. The group can be encouraged to contribute ideas about how the concerns might be resolved in the long term.

iii) Facilitator to list also the positive outcomes indicated by the staff (if not already covered in i).

iv) Staff to brainstorm further ideas for implementation and maintenance over the long term.

v) Evaluation

    a)   Staff to express opinion as to the extent to which the purpose and goal   of the intervention were achieved. This to happen through group discussion, preceded by their completion of a simple attitude rating scale, in order to gauge individual differences.

    b)   Staff to give facilitator feedback as to effectiveness or
otherwise of the   method used to achieve change. A simple form
for each staff member   to fill in on an individual basis, followed by
a group discussion.

vi) The facilitator to undertake the writing of a report to go to the
Management   Committee of the centre, after being shared with the staff.

As an indicator of the ongoing nature of the process of change, discussion
time will be given to the future direction that staff wish to take, in
their efforts to achieve gender equity in their centre.

What happened

There was immediate agreement by the staff that gender equity was an issue
for them at their centre. "It definitely is an issue - an ongoing one.
We try to have a non-sexist centre, but within that, there are still things
we don't do and need to do - even just sitting down as a staff group and
talking about the issues, which we haven't done till now."

Discussion began with reactions to the story "Baby X." The diversity of
the group was immediately apparent, as the story had been read twice
through by one person, but only the first page of it read by another.
Everyone reported examples from their own experience of children being
treated in stereotyped ways by adults and other children. The meanings
attached to various terms were discussed, eg, tomboy and sissy, sex
differences v. gender differences, butch, women's work, cooks and chefs,
with acknowledgement of the disparagement attached to the activities that
females engage in. This was further emphasised when group members talked
about their own backgrounds and the direction their lives have taken.

For the person who had "always wanted to drive trucks" the attitudes
expressed by relatives made it too difficult for her to pursue; childcare
was much easier to get into, and was seen as more appropriate by other
people. Several staff members connected their decision to enter the
childcare profession with their low self-esteem, or being told that they
were "not too bright." "Looking after children" was considered to be an
appropriate solution to their desire for a career.

The discussion raised a wide range of issues, resulting in the
possibilities for new understanding. eg, The comment "Women have the
babies. Men have higher paid jobs. You can't get away from it," was
countered by another staff member with "Yes, you can. That's what we're on
about. It has to change." The importance of providing preschool boys with
role models, experiences and encouragement in caring and nurturing was

stressed.

As the discussion turned to what happens in their centre, and they were

asked, "Do you think girls are limited or discriminated against in your centre ?" one person responded, "I think we'll have to observe our behaviour." Later, another said, "We might be really surprised by what we find."

Staff talked about the kinds of children and the kinds of play that they perceived were occurring in their centre. They also reflected on their own preferences and dislikes of activities or play areas. At this stage, the same person who had earlier commented that one couldn't get away from the fact that men had higher paid jobs, was now making statements such as "Our ball skills and carpentry are not very good because of our own socialization."

There was a consensus of opinion that what was needed was for some observations to be carried out in the centre, so that staff could find out if there were things happening that they were unaware of. The author's role as facilitator was reiterated, and it was agreed that she should do the observing. Two staff requested that she observe their specific interactions with children according to an observation sheet already drafted. (These observations to establish whether boys and girls were being addressed differently by staff failed to turn up gender differences in the two people who were observed.)

The second meeting with staff began by sharing the results of the observations. I began by showing them the following statement that summarised much of what had been observed during the half-day at the centre, and was an affirmation of the good work they were doing.

"Active, busy, co-operative, peaceful, happy children, who were being treated with respect and affection by adults who understood and skilfully met their diverse individual needs. Within an environment that is calm, yet stimulating at the same time, staff demonstrated their ability
    to extend and encourage each child
    to build each child's self esteem
    to encourage children to develop independence
    to encourage children to find solutions to their problems
    to make evey child feel secure and cared for
    to offer a wide range of appropriate activities
    to work flexibly as a team."

The results of the time-sampling and other observations carried out at the centre (with the over-twos) were shared with the group and discussed. On the morning in question, at the times the observation sheet was marked,

- significantly more boys were engaged in large muscle activities, carpentry activities and riding trikes, etc. than girls.

- Significantly more girls were involved in 'making house' (indoors), doing collage activities and having swings, than boys.

- No children were observed playing with the blocks.

A diagram was shown to the staff, demonstrating what had occurred at the carpentry table at one point during the observation period. The event consisted of a girl attempting to do some carpentry, who spent considerable time watching one of four boys at the carpentry table, who was enthusiastically creating a complex "fly-catcher" out of a wooden chair leg, several pieces of variously shaped pieces of wood and a number of nails holding it together. At one point the boy engaged the assistance of two staff members to help him. The girl eventually left the table with one piece of wood with one bent nail hammered into it. The facitlitator made a positive comment about what she had done as she walked past her, whch was responded to with a shrug of the shoulders. When this event was discussed,

a staff member reported that when the girl went to put her construction into her locker, the nail fell out. The staff member offered to go back to the table with her to hep her hammer it in more securely. The girl quickly put the nail into her pocket, said, "It's not important" and went off to another activity.

Meanwhile the boy with the fly-catcher had sought and obtained admiration for his creation from four adults, and engaged the help of one of them to set it up for painting, which he then proceeded to do. By the time a parent came to take him home, the painted fly-catcher had 'become' something else, and was much admired by the parent.

As a result of all the information derived from the observations, the group came up with a wide range of ideas and strategies to try out in the centre.

Lengthy discussion took place about where parents fit into the commitments to innovation. There was agreement that until parents have been involved in the aims of the intervention and given opportunities for input, staff should limit putting into practice any desired changes to their interactions with children, or other aspects of the children's experiences.

The need for centre parents also to have their consciousness raised about gender issues was brought out in discussion, and a number of ways of achieving that process were offered by staff. Following the meeting, I sent notes to each staff member, outlining the key points that arose from the meeting.

The third meeting took place several weeks later. Staff commented on the article "Don't Take That Dress Off James" and the notes of the previous meeting, which recorded their ideas. These included the following points:
    -    It was decided to take photos of children engaged competently in play   activities traditionally defined for children of the opposite sex, as well as   photos of mixed sex groupings engaged in play. A set of such photos could well be developed on a wider scale and be commercially marketed as a much needed resource for all early childhood centres.

-      10 different strategies and ideas to use at the carpentry bench.

-       moving several activities into more suitable spaces.
-      working with parents to raise their awareness about gender issues.
-      inviting parents in non-traditional occupations to spend time at the centre for a   specific purpose.

Staff members described the changes that had occurred and the interesting events that that had happened since the previous meeting.

1. Children had helped staff move the blocks into the home corner, where they were well used, and had more space.

2. Blocks were later moved into the 'bedroom.' This was the result of moving the home corner into the bedroom, with unsatisfactory results. Without enough clearly specified places for storing clothes in particular, the area could not be kept tidy, so it was moved back to its original location. However, the comment was made, "I'd like to try it again in the bedroom. We could reduce the number of dress-ups, and make clearer shelf and hanging space available."

3.   When the blocks were in the bedroom, the children appeared not to build a lot constructively without an adult in there, although one of the girls worked alongside a staff member to build a bed out of blocks there.

"We need time to really observe what's happening when we change things." One staff member had begun doing some informal half-hourly time-sampling observations, but had been absent with illness after the first occasion. It was agreed that the observations would be continued the following week.

4. The puzzles were moved into the block area, and have remained there. Staff agreed that this was a good place for puzzles and that they were used more often now, by both boys and girls. It was felt that they needed "stronger supervision," as it was a bit noisy there.

As one person summed up, "A change periodically is a good idea, though not too often of course. No single arrangement is going to be perfect; each one has its advantages and disadvantages. We can promote different things at different times. Say for a month the blocks could be in the prime position."

5. A number of girls had become very active in the carpentry area, with encouragement from staff. With the support of a staff member determined to increase the child's confidence and competence with carpentry, one girl made a doll-sized couch and some chairs, after which she proceeded to sew some cushions out of fabric scraps. "She was really pleased. She showed everybody; she dragged it round with her. She sawed the wood and nailed

it." Another girl chose some pieces of wood and made a truck with four
wooden wheels on it.

6. Staff bought a new tool box and decided to have a peg-board attached to
the carpentry trolley.

Evaluation

(i) The achievement of aims
By examining the staff's aims (ie, the fifth component of the theory: the
set of behaviours and attitudes that e.c.e. staff want to alter), it was
possible by a variety of means to determine the areas of success or failure
in implementing and achieving those aims. In line with a feminist
approach, a process of consultation and co-operative discussion took place,
which reflected the various personal perspectives of all the people
involved - in this case the staff, but in an ongoing programme, the
children, parents and employer as well.

     By identifying the areas of 'failure' - the difficulties, the

conflicts and the resistance, in relation to the original aims that were
constructed, staff could explore further possibilities for changes, in the
light of their experience. Through a further process of consciousness-
raising, generating ideas and renewed or amended aims, the cycle of
development towards long-term goals is continued. The evaluation is
therefore the stepping-off point for further innovation and initiative, not
the end of a finite process.

(ii) The effectiveness of the method used
(a) Those who were the immediate recipients of the intervention, ie, the
staff, were given an opportunity to offer feedback to the facilitator about
how the experience affected them individually, both personally and
professionally. For this purpose, in order to achieve individual and
personal replies, a brief questionnaire for each staff member was used.
After that was completed, a group discussion among staff then allowed for
interactive responses, to enhance the data already obtained.

(b) Both the theory and the practice needed to be evaluated in the light of
the wider social reality and the structural context within which they
occurred, while recognising the limited sphere of cognizance of the
facilitator. The perceptions of the other participants in the change
process should likewise be evaluated, as an aid to making sense of what
took place. A summary report of the whole exercise was submitted by the
facilitator to the management committee of the centre, after it had first
been shared with the staff.

After completion of the individual evaluation forms (all of which produced
very positive comments and assessments about the process and the results),
a brief group discussion ensued, in which opinions were shared, challenged

and discussed.

Discussion

The facilitator was fortunate to be working with a group of people who
cared deeply about the well-being and the positive potential of children.
As a result of their commitment they co-operated fully in the purpose of
the project.

The process and outcomes of the project provided support for the theory of
change on which the intervention was based. The seven components
summarising the theoretical base for the intervention, as outlined earlier,
were all put into practice, with the partial exception of the third one.

Resistance. The facilitator's own agenda of aiming for 'positive' outcomes
from the intervention, defined as enhanced understanding, as well as
strategies and resources for implementing gender equity in a centre, meant
that there was reluctance to perceive resistance in any member of the
group. Although the Hollobon theory stated that the sources of resistance
and opposition to change must be examined and worked through, to avoid
sabotage or backlash, the reality of that examination posed a number of
problems.

Firstly, the time constraint meant that it was not easy to focus on one
person during the consciousness-raising phase, at the expense of others who
were "further down the track." Because much of the discussion during the
first meeting was new territory for one or two people in the group, it
would have been better to have had a second session given over to the
conscious-raising exercise, after giving people time to reflect on the
first one.

Secondly, it appeared that the two people who might have felt some
resistance to the ideas being expressed, were also the least confident in
expressing them. Although the effort was made, mostly by the facilitator,
but also at times by others in the group, to draw out their opinions, they
appeared content to go with the flow, rather than express a differing
opinion, or a lack of understanding. To overcome this passivity would have

required not only a longer time, but virtually a whole training in
assertiveness.

'A' showed enthusiasm in the discussions when she was describing something
that she had been doing with children. Otherwise she did not contribute a
great deal, until the very end of the third meeting, when she made a
significant contribution, as follows:

When the goals of the various people involved in a centre were discussed,
no changes were suggested for any of the statements, except that 'A' said
she thought the word "valued" wasn't right in the statement about goals of

staff. 'A' said that a parent might value a babysitter in a patronising way, but what she wanted from parents was respect. Everyone agreed wholeheartedly with 'A''s comment, and the discussion continued along the lines that had been aired at the first meeting, of how undervalued early childhood educators are. The staff felt they didn't want to be valued as some precious commodity, but respected as professionals in their field. They decided that the word "valued" should be replaced with the word "respected."

This rare comment from 'A', combined with her final comments in her written evaluation, that she now felt "a lot more comfortable talking in front of chauvinist men" and that "[it's] made me more aware and I think I'm out to improve" indicate that whatever resistance might have be present in the early stages, had largely disappeared by the end of the final meeting.

If there was resistance, the question must be asked, "what were the factors that contributed to its disappearance by the end of the intervention ?" Possible explanations could include the fact that 'A' felt accepted and supported by the group, and so did not feel the need to become defensive or feel rejected; that the periods of several weeks between the meetings gave A. an opportunity to continue the process of consciousness-raising over a reasonably long period; and that the experience in the project enabled her to find some new meanings in her own life and in what happens at her place of work, the childcare centre.

The outcomes of the project went a significant distance towards addressing other issues of gender inequity identified by researchers, as summarised in the introduction. The staff not only effected some powerful modifications to the programme and environment, in order to bring about new practices amongst the children, but perhaps even more significantly, they became extremely sensitised to gender. They frequently made remarks during our discussions that began, "I've noticed that......" and "Did you see what........?" that related to what boys or girls were and weren't doing and saying. The invisible had become visible.

Staff made strong links between their understanding of gender equity and their responsibility towards parents. By acknowledging the importance of working with parents to raise their (parents') consciousness of the issues, staff were tackling another facet of the children's experience that was subject to being "tracked" into stereotyped life patterns.

In the initial stages of the preparation for the project, the concept of resource development was the primary focus, hence the name G.E.R.T.I.E. (Gender Equity Resources for Teachers in Educare.) As the theory for change evolved it became increasingly evident that the implementation of gender equity in early childhood education centres had to focus on a series of processes. Tangible resource materials were simply the natural consequence of those processes. So the original aim of developing a resource kit became transformed into the aim of developing an effective method for implementing gender equity in early childhood centres, for which

some tools were necessary.

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