

Sex Equity for Rural American Women

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There is clear evidence from vocational education enrollments and employment statistics from rural states which shows traditional values to be highly resistant to change regarding females in non-traditional skill/trade areas. These data dramatically demonstrate the need for special programs that can produce changes in attitudes, beliefs, values and behavior on the part of local rural schools and communities leading to greater female enrollment in non-traditional vocational educational programs. An examination of existing programs indicates none specifically focus on the issues discussed above from a systematic approach to change in rural educational systems. This paper suggests a model for sex equity in vocational education in rural education systems. The model recognizes the uniqueness of rural education systems and builds upon these facets to bring about change. This model incorporates all components of a rural education system to interact in the development of programs that will help remove sex-role stereotyping in rural school systems.

Since 1972 there has been legislation that prohibits sex discrimination in education. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 specifically prohibits discrimination in education on the basis of sex, and Title II, Vocational Education, of the Education Amendments of 1976 requires that sex discrimination, sex bias, and sex stereotyping be eliminated from all vocational programs. Title II further requires that policies and procedures be developed that will assure equal access to vocational education programs.

In the Vocational Education Amendments of 1976 each state was provided funds to establish a position in its State Department of Education to deal with sex equity in Vocational Education. These sex equity coordinators have accomplished much in working to make people aware of the problems that exist in vocational education. However, the sex equity coordinators have been hindered from making progress in one segment of the population—the rural population. Because those who live in rural areas are geographically isolated, the systems which deliver services must be different than those for urban populations. This geographic isolation, as well as the great diversity of rural culture limits the effectiveness of some sex equity coordinators. At this time, most rural state sex equity coordinators do not have the time or adequate resources to impact significantly on the enrollment of females in most nontraditional vocational education programs in rural education systems.

Significance of Employment

Women are still having to contend with occupational segregation, despite the fact that legislation has mandated sex equality.

The percentage of women in the labor force has, however, increased steadily since the turn of the century. Women made up 20 percent of the labor force in 1900, 29 percent in 1940, 33 percent in 1960, 38.1 percent in 1970, 41 percent in 1980, and according to current projections, will comprise close to 50 percent of the labor force in 1990 [8].

Along with the increase in the proportion of women in the total labor force, is an increase in the number of women who hold positions in traditionally male-dominated fields. The number of women in professions such as architecture, engineering, journalism and college teaching has increased, although only *one in six* women in these fields holds a position of high status and earnings [8]. In the skilled trades such as plumbing, carpentry, and drafting, women still, however, comprise only 3 percent of the work force [8].

Regarding female employment in nontraditional occupations, Rieder [7] points out that

more than 40 percent of all women in the work force are employed in ten occupations: secretary, retail sales, bookkeeper, private household worker, elementary school teacher, waitress, typist, cashier, nurse, and seamstress. By comparison, only 20 percent of males are concentrated in the 10 largest occupations employing men.

Nearly 70 percent of working women are employed in three occupational groups: clerical, 35%; service, 18%; and professional and technical, 15%. In comparison, only 50 percent of working men are employed in the largest three occupational groups employing men: skilled crafts, 21%; professional and technical, 14%; and managers, 14% [pp. 2, 3].

It is obvious that of the number of women in the labor force, 70 percent are working in the traditional female occupations such as clerical, sales, and teaching, and that even in those occupations in which women outnumber men, women are seldom found in management positions.

The paramount problem of occupational segregation can be directly linked to job preparation and training. While both men and women can be found in all occupations, the majority are still employed in jobs traditional to their sex because they have been led to believe these are the only options available. Therefore, they become trained for such jobs.

Even though many doors in nontraditional areas are slowly being opened to women, few women qualify because they lack proper training. Vocational programs in the secondary schools have consistently failed to recruit, educate, and train women in fields nontraditional to their sex.

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The fact that vocational education continues to prepare people for jobs in areas that are traditional to their sex constitutes a persistent institutional and attitudinal barrier to women's obtaining equity in education and the labor force. This barrier must be overcome in order to insure women an equal opportunity to compete for high job status and earnings, and to pursue career choices on the basis of personal interest rather than societal pressures.

Significance of Educational Impact

Despite the fact that equal employment and educational legislation has been passed to insure women the right to compete equally with men for skill trades, male-domination of vocational programs and other training programs continues, as can be seen in the 1979 study by PEER [1]. In this study, it is apparent that women are not yet enrolling in significant numbers in the traditionally male vocational courses. In the state that ranks No. 1 in the study, only 20 percent of those enrolled in traditional male courses are female, while in the 50th state less than 2 percent are female.

As can be seen in Table 1, nationally, the number of females enrolled in male dominated vocational programs is quite low.

When examining the predominately rural areas of the country, a conclusion of the Report of the National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs is accurate: "With respect to the educational needs, little attention is being directed to rural girls and women" [3, p. 11].

In general, the rural population has a great many social problems and, as a rule, receives fewer federal dollars to solve these problems than do urban populations [3].

As the National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs has pointed out,

Rural girls and women need far greater exposure than they now receive to non-sexist, non-traditional occupational/career guidance information. They also need increased opportunities to become acquainted with women actively engaged in occupations/professions, both traditional and non-traditional [3, p. 16].

Table 1

Percent of Students in Traditionally Male Vocational Courses Who Are Female

Rank	Region	Percent
1	Mt. and Pacific, NW	17.98
2	Southwest	13.69
3	New England	10.60
4	Great Lakes	10.13
5	Southeast	9.88
6	Midwest	9.20
7	Mid-Atlantic	8.71

Source; PEER, 1979

It is clear that systematic procedures need to be developed that will help all those involved in the rural education system become aware of their attitudes about both rural girls and women and the expectations which rural women and girls have. Teacher training institutions, especially, must work with the rural systems to insure that future teachers will be familiar with non-sexist teaching and counseling materials.

Any system that attempts to deal with change must recognize the uniqueness of the rural setting. Rural communities are particularly resistant to change when *external input* is the motivational force; therefore, *local decisions* about how a program will be developed and implemented are of vital importance. Any design for change must come from within the community and acknowledge its unique capabilities and characteristics [2].

When one looks at the number of women in nontraditional employment—70 percent in traditional female occupations—and the low percentage of females in non-traditional vocational education programs, it is apparent that a comprehensive new initiative is needed.

While the projects that have been conducted—Project EVE, New Pioneer and BORN FREE and those that are still in progress, such as project MOVE—have made some excellent contributions to the development of recruitment strategies in nontraditional vocational education, none has included a proactive involvement of the local systems in developing a sex equity plan for program implementation in their own unique situations.

Current Efforts

Since the passage of the legislation mandating sex equity education, several recruitment strategies aimed at vocational education have been developed through funded projects across the nation.

In the early 70's a program called "Discovery" was initiated in New York. This project, which called for prevocational nontraditional mandatory enrollment, was started by faculty and administration and has led to some success in the project school. However, similar tactics of regulating nontraditional registration have not been successful in other settings. In a study of six southern schools it was found that providing career exploration to prevocational students does not serve as a positive recruitment for nontraditional enrollment in vocational education [8].

Another project (EVE), conducted during the 1975-1976 school year in Houston, Texas, was designed to be used as a recruitment model for sophomore women to increase enrollments in nontraditional vocational education. This project included needs assessment, analysis of job opportunities, advisory committees, development of recruitment materials and a community-wide publicity campaign. While this project was successful with the three recruitment efforts made by the EVE staff, the transition to other settings was not as successful. For one thing, schools did not have the additional personnel required to supply one-to-one support that the EVE staff had provided. Another problem was that the presentations in auditoriums were not as effective as in the smaller classroom sessions. And finally, the materials

developed by this project were designed for such broad use that much adaptation is needed to meet specific local situations [8].

While EVE began as a local project, the New Pioneers project in North Carolina began at the state level and spread out through the local system. This project, which dealt with statewide training of vocational administrators, instructors and counselors in sex equity, focused on developing recruitment strategies for an enrollment model. While the project took into account several facets of the school system, it did not provide for the development of a plan for each local situation [8].

In Project MOVE, in-service training for teams of secondary staff was developed for the state of New York. These teams, whose members were selected by superintendents or building administrators of the vocational schools, are asked to participate in a two-semester graduate level course in sex equity. Tuition is paid from vocational funds, and the course is opened to vocational education teachers [6].

While Project MOVE seems to be successful, it is so closely tied to the separate vocational/technical schools in New York that it does not readily translate to a Rural Vocational Educational System. Furthermore, there is no attempt to develop comprehensive vocational education plans for individual school systems.

The BORN FREE Project, funded by WEEA in Minnesota, was a more comprehensive system-wide program. Termed a Collaborative consultation Model for Career Development and Sex-Role Stereotyping, this project sought to create educational environments that encouraged students to freely explore and pursue the wide range of career and life-style options potentially available to them. The intent of the program was to heighten the awareness of teachers, parents, and students to the nature and effects of sex discrimination and sex role stereotyping through films and packets of materials appropriate for in-service training. This project did not deal specifically with Vocational Education but rather with all phases of education—elementary, secondary, and post-secondary. Many of the materials developed in BORN FREE could be particularly useful in developing a model focusing on sex equity in vocational education in rural education systems.

When Laurie R. Harrison, a prominent research scientist, asked state vocational directors, "What actions to encourage equity are being undertaken at the state, local education agency, and school levels?", this is the response she received: "...the activities that states have undertaken primarily involve review and analysis of programs, policies, and procedures" [4, p. 40].

These activities were being conducted by approximately two-thirds of the states in 1978, but only 30 percent of the states were taking any kind of programmatic development action [4].

Research points out that vocational programs are the necessary preparatory routes to the skill trades and that the percentage of females in male-dominated vocational programs has increased very minimally in the last 8 years:

- 8 per cent increase for agricultural programs
- 3 per cent increase for technical programs

— 0 per cent increase for trades and industry [4].

The time has come for local units to plan and implement programs that

- (1) Increase the utilization of human resource potential for society and,
- (2) Have a potentially significant effect on increased productivity in the nation's labor force.

Because the rural education systems are integrated within the social fabric of the community, a unique plan could be developed to make sure that each rural student develops to his/her potential.

In order to clarify the active elements in the rural educational system, a model is suggested which shows directions of influence and interrelations within the system. Oriented around the vocational educational program, this model forms the central concept for implementing programmatic change regarding sex equity in non-traditional career training in rural communities.

Description of the Model

When the components of the Rural Vocational Education System are examined, they are not unlike the components used in an urban setting. The difference lies in the direct bearing each component of the system has upon the individual vocational programs (see Figure 1).

In the rural education system the School Board has much greater influence on the internal working of the system than merely setting policies. In some rural systems this policy making board is in reality the enforcer of the established policies.

The administration interacts with the school board as a liaison person between classroom teachers as well as an enforcer of policies. Within the immediate school setting, the administration interacts directly with the vocational educator.

The vocational programs are then directly influenced by the upper levels of administration along with the community through the use of vocational advisory committees. The culmination of influence in the Rural Vocational Education System is the student. As the model shows, the student is directly influenced by the vocational educator through the vocational program, the counselors and parents.

Parents in rural school systems have a much more direct influence in the change process than do their counterparts in an urban school system. Occasionally an influential parent in a rural community can have a significant effect on the success or failure of a vocational education program. For example, in some small rural communities girls' athletic programs were nonexistent until the "banker's daughter" became interested in sports.

Therefore, when attempting to increase sex equity in rural school systems, the entire rural community must be involved.

Given the facts previously discussed, it becomes highly apparent that very special programs are needed in the rural regions to provide special help in removing sex-role stereotyping currently prevailing in vocational education programs.

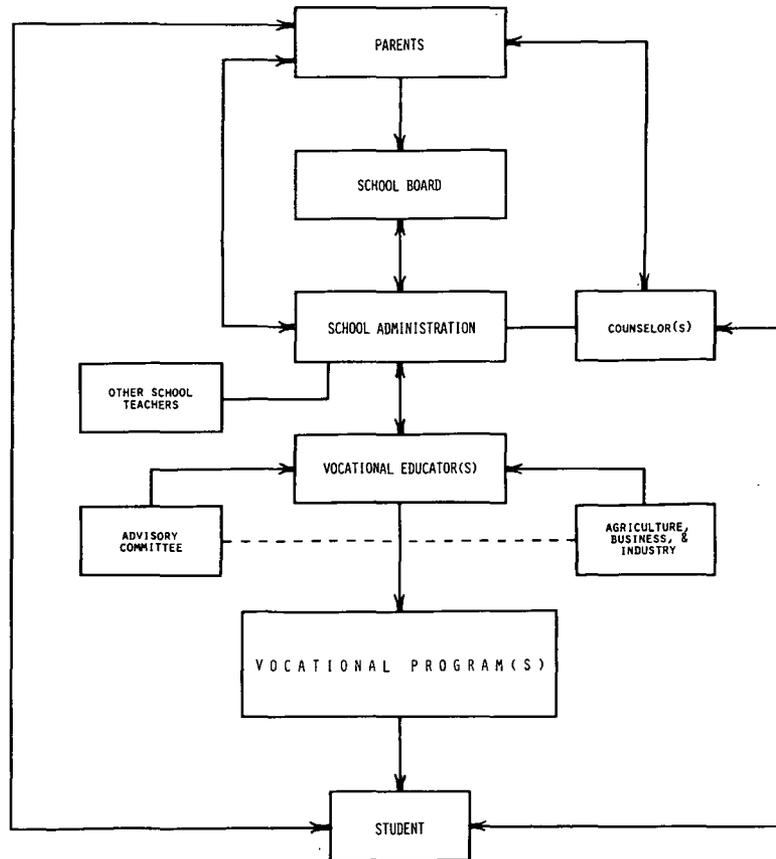


Figure 1. Components of a Rural Vocational Educational System.

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