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Redress and empowerment for gender equity in South African education

This study subjects gender equity in the South African education sector to scrutiny by focusing on gender domination, empowerment and redress in order to offer guidelines for effective movement towards gender equity. The education system is the single largest organisation in the country and could thus make a major contribution to the establishment of gender equity, if all forms of sexism and discrimination could be eradicated and if the necessary redress and empowerment were achieved. This study investigates sexism and discrimination, management, the school and the classroom as areas in urgent need of redress and then provides guidelines for rectifying the existing imbalances and for creating a foundation for sound gender relations.

Regstelling en bemagtiging vir geslagsgelykheid in die Suid-Afrikaanse onderwys

Hierdie studie neem geslagsgelykheid in die Suid-Afrikaanse onderwys onder die loep deur op geslagsdominansie, bemagtiging en die regstelling van ongelykhede te fokus sodat riglyne vir 'n doelgerigte beweging na geslagsgelykheid neergelê kan word. Die onderwysstelsel is die grootste enkele organisasie in die land en kan 'n belangrike bydrae tot die vestiging van geslagsgelykheid lewer, mits die onderwysstelsel self vry is van seksisme en diskriminasie en die nodige regstelling en bemagtiging sou plaasvind. Hierdie studie ondersoek seksisme en diskriminasie in die onderwysbestuur, die skool en die klaskamer, terreine waar 'n dringende behoefte aan regstelling bestaan en lê dan riglyne neer om die bestaande ongelykhede uit die weg te ruim en 'n grondslag vir gesonde geslagsverhoudinge daar te stel.

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In 1994, in his opening speech to Parliament, the then President Nelson Mandela said: “Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression.” Since then, government has made a real attempt to promote gender equity by enacting the White Paper on Education and Training (RSA 1995b), the South African Constitution (RSA 1995a), the South African Schools’ Act (No 84, RSA 1996), the Employment Equity Act (No 55, RSA 1998) and the Act on the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination (No 4, RSA 2000b), among other legislation.

In spite of these major governmental attempts to promote gender equity, South Africa, with its long history of male domination, still exhibits one of the highest levels of gender inequality (CGE 1998: 3-4), excluding half its human resource potential from development and from taking up their rightful positions in the labour market — a situation which South Africa cannot afford. The problem is that movement from male domination to gender equity cannot take place overnight. Empowerment on various levels is of the utmost importance. The education sector has a major role to play in this regard. The White Paper on Education and Training (RSA 1995b: 53) indicates that the education system is the single largest organisation in the country and thus “has [a] great potential influence on gender relations”.

The question remains: What redress and empowerment should take place in order to equip educators to bring about the required paradigm shift from male domination to gender equity in South African schools so that the education system can exert its full potential impact on gender relations?

1. Aim

In order to address the problem of redress and empowerment for gender equity in the context of South African education, it is necessary to

- provide a fundamental perspective on gender domination and empowerment, with specific reference to the South African situation;
- investigate certain areas of education which are in urgent need of redress, and

- provide guidelines for redress and empowerment in South African education.

2. Methods of research

A literature study of relevant sources on the topic provides a foundation for the argumentation and recommendations of the study. Quantitative data from questionnaires, as well as qualitative data from interviews with women in the South African education sector, are used to identify areas in need of redress and empowerment for gender equity (cf section 4).

3. Theories of gender domination and empowerment

Much of the cultural and conceptual complexity of human life today stems from the dichotomy between maleness and femaleness — a tradition giving rise to conceptions of masculinity and femininity. This male-female dichotomy has generally been prejudicial to women.

The twentieth century gave birth to several theoretical notions or perspectives on gender-role development. According to Basow (1992: 2) the assumption that the apparent behavioural and personality differences between males and females can be attributed to biological differences is not true: most differences between males and females are largely due to social factors. Feminist theorists usually attempt to account for how the different treatment of the sexes influences women and how prejudices against women are maintained by economic, political and social arrangements (Gatens 1991: 1). For example, the landscape of childhood includes three major sites — families, neighbourhoods and schools. Each of these worlds contains different people, patterns and arrangements of gender, and so boys and girls draw lessons from their surroundings as to what is expected of them. While the human personality experiences various phases of development, the social context in which these developments take place contributes to the establishment of behaviour patterns. The allocation of gender roles is thus strongly socially constructed, with people tending to behave according to what society expects of them. It is the distinct characters of the sexes that constitute two separate gender “cultures”, meaning that masculinity and femininity engender clear pic-

tures of two sets of behaviour and personal attributes to which males and females are expected to conform (Basow 1992: 1, Unger 1989: 15). From the above it is clear that gender roles form an intrinsic part of the heritage and paradigms of societies.

In most cases, accepting the value system and culture of society implies accepting the superiority of masculine values and occupations. This is what De Beauvoir (1975: 735-41) and Firestone (1979: 137) refer to when they condemn the maternal role of woman, which portrays the female biology as a serious limitation to women's transcendence into "life" and the world of labour. The mere assumption that women's biological functioning inhibits the life world of the female sex may be the root of most women's oppression. To overcome the barriers of domination and empower women has become one of the major challenges facing modern society.

Empowerment superficially refers to the development of human capacity, but at a deeper level it implies acting successfully within the existing systems and structures of power and even taking on a leadership role. Leadership has therefore always been associated with exercising power, whether the power to command, the power to govern or the power to persuade and effect transformation. Middlehurst (1997: 9) goes so far as to state that the maintenance of a leader's power and authority depends on his or her continuing ability to fulfil the expectations of followers. Authors such as Kouzes & Posner (1987: 52) argue that leaders can even increase their power by empowering their followers. In view of this, McCabe (1996: 36) correctly defines empowerment as a strategic action taken by management to legitimise changes in order to increase production and profits, while at the same time directing their empowerment actions towards what Inglis (1997: 6) regards as a means of encouraging workers to make a rational choice to commit themselves to the values, goals, policies and objectives of the organisation.

Viewing the status of women in terms of empowerment, the Victorian John Stuart Mill (1971: 487) stated that any system in which the skills of women are lost is wasteful. This implies that measures should be taken to rectify any such system involving purposive actions of redress and empowerment required to raise women from their position of subservience. Mill (1971: 456) attributed the "powerless"

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position of women to the fact that they were generally denied a free and rational choice as to how to lead their lives. Instead of a life of “rational freedom”, they could only “choose” a life of servitude in marriage. Mill (1971: 427) further argued that women were also denied autonomy and equality, with the married state denying them autonomy and the prevailing male-dominated society denying them equality. This denial of freedom, autonomy and equality stemmed from the use of force: in reality an abuse of power.

More recently, Foucault (1988: 189) places the concept of power in perspective when he argues that power is not localised in one social sphere, but diffused throughout the multitude of institutions that constitute society. By implication, if power is everywhere, it must be opposed everywhere. Women, as “subordinates”, are not localised in a single institution, but are elements of every institution. Hekman (1992: 186) states very clearly that the subordination of women cannot be eradicated by reforming only certain (eg political and/or economic) structures, because elements of that subordination and the exertion of male, dominating power are to be found in all areas of society. Foucault (1988: 189) feels very strongly that women must oppose the power structures in society that keep them subordinate. This abuse of power, placing women in subordination, represents the exertion of absolute power, about which Inglis (1997: 4) is concerned when he says that a full understanding of the matter can only be reached if people realise that nobody has absolute power, but that every individual is limited and controlled by the discourses and practices of society.

The locus of power started to shift in the final quarter of the twentieth century with the decline of socialism and the growth of a free-market economy which permitted women to seek greater opportunities in the labour market. The majority of countries in Africa experienced this expansion in the two decades following the end of the Second World War (Leach 1997: 41). Because of the demands of the growing economy, women had to reposition themselves since no country could afford to host “any system in which the skill of women [was] lost” (Mill 1971: 487). This development in the labour market compelled employers to review their education and training programmes to address the specific needs of women, providing them

with the necessary skills to become “powerful”. The female sex, which previously occupied numerous disadvantaged positions, has thus now become one of the groups on which future empowerment action is focused.

It became necessary for South Africa, too, to address the urgent need for skilled workers. The enormous expansion in education allowed millions of women as well as men to acquire at least a minimum level of formal education. In fact, all over the world the gap between male and female enrolments at all school levels was reduced, and in South Africa females even outnumber males by constituting 51% of the total learner enrolment in schools (RIEP 2000: 8). The position of the female sex has become such an important issue in South Africa that Section 3 of the Bill of Rights (1992) determines that:

To this end the highest legislative body may by legislation of general force and effect introduce such programmes of affirmative action and vote such funds therefore as may reasonably be necessary to ensure that through education and training, financing programmes and employment all citizens have equal opportunities of developing and realising their natural talents and potential to the full.

In the light of the above, women should have opportunities equal to those of men, but unfortunately the closing of the gender gap is not reflected in all areas of education. Women form about 67% of the teaching body while they are severely under-represented in promotion posts, only 4% of them being school principals (Dept of Education 2000). This under-representation in management implies that much still needs to be done to have women appointed in top positions, as well as in preparing them to take up such positions.

It is consequently of the utmost importance that such empowerment programmes should be relevant to the needs of women — and in South Africa particularly, which has been characterised by male dominance for so long. The Bill of Rights acknowledges the existence of gender inequality in the country and considers women as victims and disempowered people. But problems arise when one looks at the integration of women into the country’s development plan and finds that women are empowered to be like men and to keep pace with them, which implies a mainstream paradigm, patriarchal in nature, into which women may be dragged without recognising that their

particular “culture” has its own educational and developmental needs. In order to develop girls and women to their full potential, recognition should be given to their unique female “culture”. According to the South African Constitution (RSA 1995a), the Fourth General Amendment Act (No 132, RSA 1994) and the Equity Acts (No 55, RSA 1998 and No 4, RSA 2000b), the pathway to equal rights is open, but it is precisely the idea of equal rights which could become a barrier in the career of female educationists. Having equal rights is the ideal, but it may imply that women are placed in a mainstream paradigm in which males and females are treated equally and the unique developmental and educational needs of women are once again neglected.

It must be borne in mind that for many years women had very few opportunities of being appointed to management positions in the education sector or even of being educated according to their specific needs — a situation in which the opportunity for “developing their natural talents” was neglected. Consequently women in South African education experience a backlog due to their long-standing disadvantaged position. All these problems relating to inequality reveal a need for redress and for effective empowerment programmes in the education sector. Areas in need of redress must be identified so that the education sector can take the appropriate empowerment action and fulfil its great potential for influencing gender relations.

4. Areas in need of redress for gender equity in South African education

4.1 Research background

It was necessary to probe the issue of inequality in order to identify the areas in need of redress. The degree of equity in South African education is relatively unexamined, although there has been an increasing recognition among educational researchers of the importance of gender. It was therefore necessary to conduct a quantitative and a qualitative investigation in order to determine the appropriate empowerment actions.

First, three hundred questionnaires were sent to women principals, deputy-principals, departmental heads and educators in schools in eight of the nine provinces (KwaZulu-Natal was not included as an address list could not be obtained from the provincial Dept of Education). Although the participants were selected randomly from departmental address lists, the researcher ensured that the sample represented primary and secondary schools, rural and urban schools, schools with learners from various racial groups, and schools with various languages as their media of instruction. The response rate was 61.8% (N=185; 40 principals; 81 deputy principals/HODs, and 64 educators). The data from the questionnaires revealed critical gender issues in urgent need of redress and suggested solutions. The data from the quantitative investigation is too extensive to report within the limited scope of this article, hence only the parts of it relevant to the issues under discussion will be reported here.

The quantitative investigation was followed up by a qualitative investigation as gender equity is a very sensitive issue and it was necessary to “get under the skin” (Duff 1992: 87) of the women in education. In-depth interviews were conducted with the participants to obtain first-hand evidence of their problems relating to gender relations and their need for empowerment.

The participants were identified by means of the snowball technique, with one participant recommending another. Interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was reached after eight participants. These participants were from various cultural and linguistic groups, and all were active educators. Five of the eight participants were principals.

Before the interviews were conducted each participant's permission was obtained to record her responses, and confidentiality was assured. The interviews were conducted in surroundings familiar to the participants in order to put them at their ease. Consequently most of the interviews were conducted in a conversational manner in offices or classrooms, with the researcher playing only a facilitating role, and the participants as the main sources of information. The researcher wanted “the object to speak for itself” (Smaling 1994: 17) and therefore followed an unstructured grounded theory approach during the interviews. The exact words of the participants were later

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transcribed and the transcriptions were coded and analysed according to the themes that arose from the data.

Although different respondents participated in the quantitative and qualitative investigations, there was an obvious similarity between the results of the two studies, resulting in three major areas being identified as in need of redress, namely sexism and unfair discrimination, a lack of relevant management training and the inequitable school and classroom environments.

4.2 Areas in need of redress as identified by the research

Examples and a synthesis of the relevant qualitative and quantitative findings, supplemented by information from the literature, will now be provided.

4.2.1 Sexism and unfair discrimination

The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (No 4, RSA 2000b) specifies in subsection 8 that unfair discrimination includes gender-based violence, preventing women from inheriting family property, any practice which impairs the dignity of women, any policy that limits women's access to resources, discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy, limiting women's access to education or social security, denial of access to opportunities, failing to take steps to reasonably accommodate the needs of the designated groups and any systemic inequality of access to opportunities experienced by women as a result of the sexual division of labour.

Despite the latest legislation, the data from the questionnaires revealed that a large number of women in education are still subject to sexism and unfair discrimination. The following table reflects the number of women involved in the investigation who had been victims of discrimination during the previous two years.

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Table 1: Women subject to sexism and unfair discrimination in schools during the previous two years

| Participants | Yes | | No | | Total |
|---------------------------|-----|------|-----|------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | |
| Principals | 11 | 27.5 | 29 | 72.5 | 40 |
| Deputy principals/ HOD | 24 | 29.6 | 57 | 70.4 | 81 |
| Educators | 17 | 26.5 | 47 | 73.5 | 64 |
| Average | 52 | 28 | 133 | 72 | 185 |

The questionnaires also revealed that quite a number of the women had been victims of a variety of forms of sexism and unfair discrimination.

Table 2: Number of women who had been victims of various forms of sexism and unfair discrimination in schools

| Response | Number | % | Total |
|---|--------|----|-------|
| Discrimination on grounds of | | | |
| • pregnancy (eg unpaid leave or discrimination on return to work) | 22 | 12 | 185 |
| • marital status (eg housing subsidies, leave, etc) | 44 | 24 | 185 |
| • family responsibilities (responsible of employees regarding their spouses, dependent children or other family members in need of support, eg career breaks due to children) | 37 | 20 | 185 |
| • sexual orientation (eg partner/companion not member of medical aid) | 5 | 2 | 185 |
| Victims of | | | |
| • sexual harassment (any unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature, irrespective of whether the doer considers it unwelcome or is aware thereof — jokes, remarks, touching, pictures, e-mail, etc) | 22 | 12 | 185 |

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| Response | Number | % | Total |
|---|--------|----|-------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> emotional harassment (where a person is belittled on the basis of sex, or her opinions are passed off, or she is excluded from some groups but the same opinions are accepted as valid in other groups) | 52 | 28 | 185 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> gender-based violence (remarks that belittle or mock the role or characteristics of a specific gender) | 24 | 13 | 185 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sexist language and remarks/hate speech (any communication of words based on gender which can be reasonably explained as intending to hurt, cause prejudice or propagate hate) | 46 | 25 | 185 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> impaired dignity (eg belittling remarks, running down the female gender, etc) | 48 | 26 | 185 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> intimidation (manipulation of a person as the result of gender in order to make that person do things which he/she does not want to do) | 14 | 7 | 185 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> victimisation (approach towards or exclusion of person when she claims her rights or because she criticises) | 24 | 13 | 185 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> nepotism (preference in that family or friends are part of an "old boys' club" or "someone's" wife) | 15 | 8 | 185 |
| Experiencing their work environment as unsafe | 50 | 27 | 185 |

The responses above indicate that marital status and family responsibilities are the areas in which women in schools experience the most discrimination. It is also evident that a large number of women suffered from emotional harassment, sexist language and remarks and impaired dignity. Although 12% may seem a low percentage, it in fact means that numerous women are still victims of sexual harass-

ment. It is also a matter of concern that such large numbers of women experience their work environments as unsafe. All these forms of sexism and unfair discrimination could have an extremely negative effect on their performance in the school.

The qualitative interviews provided a deeper insight into the above data as women in schools expressed their feelings and experiences regarding sexism and unfair discrimination. The following are typical examples:

When I was appointed as principal, my male colleagues were very negative towards me and didn't want to co-operate. It is better now, but I still have problems with two of them.

Tydens 'n onderhoud is daar aan my gestel dat vroue in die algemeen ooremosioneel is en gevra of ek dink dis moontlik dat so 'n persoon 'n suksesvolle skoolhoof sal kan wees.¹

In my school boys don't have any respect for women — they just look at you and don't respond. There are also male staff members who have no respect.

I can't work alone in my office at night — I am scared of being raped.

I am often afraid to be alone with the bigger boys. There are so many incidents of gang-rape.

My male colleagues are always telling jokes in the staff room which make fun of women and portray them as being stupid and the worst part is that I don't know how to react in such situations.

I once received a letter telling me that the men on the staff are laughing at me because I try to act as a leader in the school.

I really don't know how to handle this type of sexist treatment I get. I don't know what to do when the men attack me emotionally. I have never received guidance in this regard. Maybe this kind of thing should be part of every teacher's training at College or University. I don't even want to think about sexual harassment.

My principal says it clearly that he doesn't want female teachers.

I was told that I am the acting Head of Department, but apart from the extra bit of money on my cheque every month, nobody ever mentioned anything again — I am not part of the management team.

I was invited for an interview for the Chief Director's post — there was not a single woman on the interview panel, except for the re-

1 During an interview it was suggested to me that women are generally over-emotional and I was asked whether I think it possible for such a person to be a successful principal.

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cording secretary. When I drew their attention to the fact, they remarked: It's again gender, you are now talking for women, you are arrogant and want to control us. I wish I knew what my rights were in this case.

The above responses are typical of the long history of male dominance in South Africa and the resultant sexism and unfair discrimination. The recommendations arising from the questionnaires and those in the report of the Gender Equity Task Team (Dept of Education 1997) should serve as guidelines for improvement. It has been indicated that there is an urgent need for:

- the development of programmes focusing on the sensitisation of males in order to counteract behaviour which places females in a subordinate position;
- programmes of empowerment for women to develop skill in handling cases of victimisation, intimidation, harassment, sexist remarks, hate speech and all forms of sexism;
- policies promoting gender equity and prohibiting all forms of discrimination or sexism in education and in particular in the school and the classroom;
- measures aimed at making schools and classrooms safe areas, ie areas free of crime, violence and sexual harassment;
- gender-sensitive curricula;
- gender-sensitive teaching methods and strategies;
- the establishment of girls' schools and the introduction of single-sex classes in co-ed schools, which would allow a school to cater for the needs of girls, develop excellence among them, protect them against harassment and violence, and permit them to step outside the boundaries of their gender identity;
- official documentation free from sexist language;
- affirmative action in order to promote equal representation at the various levels of education, in particular management;
- standardised questions and selection procedures for use during interviews, and appointment of suitable candidates, and
- the introduction of quota systems to ensure equal distribution in institutions and decision-making bodies.

The above recommendations reflect the prevailing gender inequality in the South African education system and consequently reveal an urgent need for redress so that the whole school system can be improved.

4.2.2 Lack of relevant management training

Affirmative action measures have been introduced by law to correct the under-representation of women at management level. Numerous female teachers have to be appointed to management positions, which will result in many women being empowered to perform their management task efficiently. For management training to be effective, the training programmes have to be relevant to the needs of the trainees, which implies that they should be specially designed.

Kendall (1993: 184-5) is opposed to the idea of merging the two "cultures" into one and feels that neither sex can be successful outside its specialised nature. This specialised nature can to a large extent be attributed to the way in which men and women are brought up. According to Chusmir *et al* (1989: 67) one's personality is largely determined by upbringing and the accompanying value system. The two sexes are raised differently and therefore their personalities will differ, resulting in different management styles. Because women seem to reveal a distinct management style, they will also have distinct management training needs. Ortiz & Marshall (1988: 137) even go so far as to say that the whole education system would be "different" if it had been structured according to the values, needs and priorities of women.

Because only 20% of management posts in schools are held by women (Dept of Education 2000) and this exclusion from management positions is long-standing, it comes as no surprise that most management training programmes are directed primarily at the needs of men (Hough 1992: 8). This gives rise to a situation where women in education find themselves in a vacuum concerning empowerment for their management task.

During the qualitative investigation the female principals interviewed reacted as follows concerning the relevance of management training:

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Toe ons as nuwe skoolhoofde ons oriëntering gehad het, is vroue en hulle behoeftes nooit in berekening gebring nie — daar is byvoorbeeld vertel dat 'n skoolhoof professioneel geklee moet wees en aangedui wanneer hy 'n baadjie en das behoort aan te hê en wanneer dit nie nodig is nie.²

I know there are things I do well, but there are also management aspects in which I would like to get more guidance. During training I have to go through topics in which I do not need any training. As a matter of fact most of the women feel that the training programmes are for men and not for our needs.

It is clear that there is a great need for programmes addressing the specific needs of women. In order to design relevant programmes, in-depth research on the training needs of women is a necessity. The studies of Niemann (1994a & 1994b) as well as other female researchers such as Greyvenstein (1989), Lemmer (1989), Mlamledi (1996), Kruger (1997), Motlhakoana (1997), Palm-Forster (2000) and Van der Walt (2001) have contributed towards a framework for future training and empowerment of female managers by identifying the areas in need of training.

From the findings of these in-depth studies on the management style of female education managers in South Africa, as well as from the interviews conducted for the purpose of the present study, it is clear that female South African managers possess numerous strong qualities, but that there are various areas in which they need training in order to be empowered. Some of these areas are:

- Women have been found to be good communicators and good listeners, but are often too talkative and allow others to interrupt them while speaking.
- Women work hard at establishing sound interpersonal relationships, reveal efficient conflict-resolution and problem-solving skills, are sensitive to the needs of their staff members and show a lot of empathy. On the other hand they tend to get too involved in the problems of their staff and are sometimes too emotional. In this

2 When we, as new principals, had our orientation, the needs of women were not taken into account — for instance, it was indicated that a principal must be dressed professionally and it was explained when he ought to wear a jacket and tie, and when not.

regard, most of the respondents with whom in-depth interviews were conducted indicated that after some time in management, they had learnt to keep their emotions under control.

- Because women are so empathetic, they are hesitant to delegate because they do not want to add to the workload of their staff members. Women principals indicated that they tend to be perfectionists and therefore prefer to do a job themselves as they believe that others might not perform it with the same precision. Women also find it difficult to say “no” and this adds to their workload.
- Women principals often avoid taking risks. To a large extent this can be attributed to gender role stereotyping, as the play of girls does not include risky games and they are brought up to conform to what is expected of them. The same goes for achieving success, as women tend to avoid success for fear that society may regard them as unfeminine.
- Women principals seem to be good planners as they are holistic thinkers. Most of the female principals selected for this study felt that they tend to pay too much attention to detail and are unsure of themselves and therefore act very cautiously when it comes to changes in the school.
- Another area in which women seem to encounter problems is that of assertiveness. Here again, the gender role or unique gender “culture” plays an important part: while the male role carries with it the aura of superiority and competence, the female role does not. The participants in this study said that they hesitate to act assertively as society reminds women not to be overconfident or too assertive.
- Women managers are usually very democratic and effective when it comes to participatory decision-making. The female participants felt that they are reasonably successful in getting their staff involved, but admitted that they often become too accommodating, and want to please everybody. Because they are so accommodating, the staff often feels that they are not in command of a situation.

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- Women principals often feel very unsure about policy-making and attribute this to the fact that they have been excluded from it for many years.
- Women often also experience obstacles in performing their management tasks because of the perceptions the staff hold of women, such as that they are dependent, easily influenced, passive, not aggressive, emotional, not competitive, illogical, and lacking in confidence or ambition.

For the effective empowerment of female managers for education, training programmes addressing the areas in need of development (as identified above) are a necessity and should be a priority for the provincial education departments.

4.2.3 Inequitable school and classroom environments

The education of girls has always been considered different and less important than that of boys (Gilbert & Taylor 1991: 4). The school can be regarded as the formal agent of gender socialisation (Lemmer 1998: 9) and the teachers as the bearers of educational change (Riddell 1989: 123). Socialisation is the means whereby culture and the notions of appropriate gender roles are transmitted. Social expectations of gender-appropriate behaviour, which are based largely on stereotypical beliefs, are transmitted to children by means of the curriculum. Such a curriculum operates on two levels, intentional and unintentional: on the intentional level certain bodies of knowledge and skills are imparted, while the unintentional level refers to the “other” things that a child is taught in addition to academic skills.

The role of school education in establishing gender equity was identified by the Ministry of Education in 1995 and the Gender Equity Task Team was appointed to:

- identify means of correcting gender imbalances in enrolment, drop-out rates, subject choices, career paths and performance;
- advise on the educational and social desirability of single-sex schools;
- propose guidelines for addressing sexism in curricula, textbooks, teaching and guidance, and
- propose a complete strategy, including legislation, for countering and eliminating sexism, sexual harassment and violence throughout the education system (RSA 1995b: 54).

According to Frazier & Sadker (1973: 82) it is particularly the hidden curriculum (the “unintentional level”) of a school that is gender-differentiated. Teachers thus need to be empowered to address the hidden curriculum in order to eliminate gender inequalities, as pupils usually want to conform to their teachers’ expectations.

Several studies reveal evidence of gender stereotyping by educators, and this stereotypical treatment in the classroom that has to be rectified.³ According to these, educators should avoid the following patterns of behaviour:

- considering girls less independent, creative or autonomous than boys in the classroom;
- cherishing implicit expectations about the social roles that males and females should play both in the classroom and in adult life, and considering learners who do not measure up to these gender expectations to be deviant;
- transmitting the idea that they expect girls to enter subordinate occupations and have their careers disrupted by marriage;
- spending more time talking to boys, which implies that boys receive more assistance, and also calling on boys to answer more frequently;
- ignoring girls for longer periods than boys;
- giving boys more extensive feedback;
- punishing boys more severely than girls for infractions;
- giving more attention to boys, as they demand it by rowdy, asocial behaviour;
- tending to address girls collectively, while usually calling boys by their names;
- tending to know more personal detail about boys than about girls;
- regarding boys as aggressive and unruly but essentially intelligent and thus giving them more attention in the form of rewards as well as punishment;

3 Cf Van der Walt 2001, Matthews *et al* 1998, Lemmer 1993, Hanna *et al* 1992, Sadker & Sadker 1992, Stanworth 1983, Skolinck *et al* 1982, and Spender 1982.

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- generally regarding boys' failures as the result of a lack of effort, rather than a lack of skill;
- only rewarding girls for conformist behaviour, thus encouraging them to be compliant, rather than autonomous;
- treating girls in such a way that they experience inferior status in the classroom, while boys receive preferential treatment;
- allowing boys to take over the leadership roles in class and so teaching girls to defer to the decisions of boys;
- reinforcing the perception that women teach and men lead, which may be one of the causes of the under-representation of women at the management level, as there are few role models encouraging girls to become leaders;
- taking a far more passive role when advising girls than when advising boys with regard to career guidance;
- interacting in mathematics and science classes in a manner that favours boys. (Because mathematics and science traditionally have a strong masculine image, girls are traditionally underachievers and are usually under-represented in these classes).

The above recommendations are substantiated by data from the questionnaires in which the female educators indicated the actions they regard as most important for the promotion of gender equity.

The following table summarises responses to ten actions which the respondents regarded as crucial.

Table 3: Areas in which educators should be empowered in order to promote gender equity in the classroom

| Educators should be empowered to: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N | Average grading | Ranking order |
|--|---|---|---|----|----|----|-----------------|---------------|
| Cultivate self-confidence and self-worth | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 59 | 64 | 4.88 | 1 |
| Equip learners with the necessary skills to be able to assert themselves in cases of emotional and sexual harassment, victimization, etc | 0 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 56 | 64 | 4.83 | 2 |
| Give equal attention to both sexes | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 59 | 64 | 4.81 | 3 |
| Provide equal leadership opportunities; | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 55 | 64 | 4.77 | 4 |
| Create a climate of trust in which stereotyping is avoided | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 57 | 64 | 4.75 | 5 |
| Sensitize both sexes so that they are able to accept and respect each other's similarities and differences | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 57 | 64 | 4.75 | 5 |
| Stimulate open and free communication (not exalting one group above the other, or using sex-differentiating language) | 1 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 53 | 64 | 4.70 | 6 |
| Open up the various fields of study to both sexes | 0 | 0 | 6 | 8 | 50 | 64 | 4.69 | 7 |
| Encourage equal participation in all activities | 1 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 51 | 64 | 4.67 | 8 |
| Recognise and address the needs and expectations of both groups | 4 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 48 | 64 | 4.55 | 9 |

The qualitative interviews elicited the following personal experiences:

For years I have not been gender sensitive; it is only recently that I started to become aware of sexist language and stereotypical portrayal of females. I feel ashamed, because I now realise how many sexist things have passed through my class and I haven't done anything to prevent it. I so wish I [had been] made aware of these things during my training.

I am very gender sensitive and always on the lookout for pictures and stories that do not place women in subordinate positions. It is shocking to see how much sexism there is in textbooks and journals.

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I only wish I had more background on how to equip the girls in my classes with certain skills, such as assertiveness, self-confidence, acting as leaders and such.

As principal I have arranged for a gender sensitization workshop at my school. Initially the men did not want to attend, but afterwards they came to thank me. I think it is so important that both sexes become gender-sensitive.

Ek voel dis uiters belangrik dat geslagskwessies soos teistering en diskriminasie deel uitmaak van elke opvoeder se opleiding, want as jy eers in die klaskamer staan, moet jy weet wat om te doen.⁴

Ek het op Universiteit 'n module oor geslagsgelykheid geloop tydens my opleiding. Ek beseft nou eers hoe belangrik dit was. Ek is nou daarop ingestel om nie diskriminerend op te tree nie en aan seuns en dogters gelyke geleenthede in die klas te gee. Ek sou graag nog sulke kursusse wou doen sodat ek meer kan bydra tot ons dogters se ontwikkeling.⁵

From the above it is clear that there is an urgent need for empowerment programmes to equip educators with the knowledge and skills needed to establish gender equity in the classroom situation.

Apart from the need to address the aspects above, it is also necessary to take action to redress basic approaches to education in South Africa. With the advent of the Bill of Rights, the new Constitution, legislation abolishing statutory discrimination against women, the White Paper on Education and the South African Schools' Act, educationists in South Africa are taking a fresh look at all gender issues in schools. Curriculum 2005, moulded onto the principles of outcomes-based education, is the new approach to all school education, which implies recognising "equity" principles in new curricula, syllabi, textbooks, and so on. As Curriculum 2005 only started in 1998 and its implementation has been re-investigated and adjustments recommended, it is hard to determine to what extent gender bias will form

- 4 I feel that it is of the utmost importance that gender issues, such as harassment and discrimination, form part of the training of every educator, because when you are in the classroom, you must know what to do.
- 5 When I was at university I took a module on gender equity during my training. Only now do I realise how important it was. I am now very careful not to act in a discriminatory way and to provide equal opportunities to boys and girls. I would like to do more such courses so that I can make a greater contribution to the development of our girls.

part of the future scenario and whether the special needs of girls will be fully met. Although equity seems to underlie many foreseen education developments, the possibility remains that the unique “female culture” with its specific education needs may continue to be neglected.

5. Recommendations regarding actions to be taken for redress and empowerment

It is clear that women have for a long time been subjected to discriminatory practices which have to be corrected. In South Africa, addressing gender issues is a core concern and gender equality has become the slogan of the day. With the new Constitution, new legislation and numerous recent documents on education a strong attempt has been made to eradicate the gender imbalances of the past. In order to achieve this fully, sensitization and empowerment programmes are imperative.

Establishing gender equity in South African education also requires all stakeholders to become involved. The White Paper on Education and Training (RSA 1995b: 54) states:

The Ministry is confident of forging a strong partnership between itself and the provincial Ministries of Education on the issue of gender equity, and will seek collaboration from the technikons and universities.

This implies that the provincial education departments, the schools themselves, and the training institutions all have to take responsibility if the education sector is to realise its “great potential to influence gender relations”.

The present investigation revealed the nature and scope of the need for redress and empowerment and demands that crucial actions be taken in order to redress existing inequalities. For the establishment of gender equity in South African education, the following recommendations are made:

- A gender policy must be drafted for every school and put into effect.

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- A gender-sensitive culture must be established in schools and classrooms, raising girls and women from their positions of subordination. This gender-sensitive culture must find expression in all school activities, planning and documents, which must be free of all forms of sexism.
- Sexism and sexual harassment must be eradicated in schools through empowerment programmes: girls and women must be equipped with the necessary skills to handle cases of harassment, victimization, intimidation, hate speech and all forms of sexism.
- School and classrooms must become safe areas in which education can flourish.
- Gender imbalances in enrolment, drop-out rates, subject choices, career paths and expected performances must be corrected.
- Schools must become environments in which girls can develop to their full potential, even if this implies the establishment of single-sex classrooms or special training to act more assertively and not to react submissively in mixed-sex classes.
- Sexism in curricula, textbooks and syllabi must be eradicated by reporting any cases that may occur and making educators attentive to aspects such as the misuse of stereotypical language, examples, pictures, comparisons and ways of addressing learners.
- An awareness of gender bias in the classroom must be promoted so that even the hidden curriculum will become “gender-sensitive” — free of stereotypical treatment in order to ensure that boys and girls are treated equally.
- A plan of action must be formulated to address the under-representation of women in management positions by appointing competent women to fill vacancies. In order to ensure this, a non-sexist procedure for selection, interviewing and appointment must be adopted.
- The management skills of female staff must be developed by programmes addressing the specific management training needs of women.
- All women in education must become involved in the promotion of sound gender relations.

- Female networks must be established so that women can form support systems for one another and act as mentors for novices.

The above recommendations primarily involve actions to be taken by the provincial education authorities and the schools themselves. But investigation made it clear that the responsibility of the training institutions cannot be ignored. Educators in the field recommended that students be equipped during their training to handle gender issues. In the light of this, as well as the Ministry of Education's mission to collaborate with the training institutions (RSA 1995b: 54), this report would be incomplete if it did not pay attention to the positioning of the training institutions.

Unlike research on initial teacher training in the USA, as conducted by Skelton & Hanson (1989), little research has been done in South Africa that could be informative about the role played by gender in the content and structure of initial educator training programmes. Students were previously required to obtain expertise in curriculum subjects, professional skills and educational sciences, while at present the Norms and Standards for Educators (RSA 2000a) determine that initial educator training programmes must focus on the development of practical, foundational and reflexive competencies. These competencies are associated with seven roles that serve as a description of what is meant by a competent educator. These prescriptive guidelines imply that initial education programmes offered by higher education institutions must conform to the structure determined for educator training by national policy, which clearly states that gender issues should be included in education programmes. Every institution has to submit its programmes for teacher education and training for approval to the National Department of Education, among others. It is therefore advisable that the various institutions include gender aspects in the structure of their programmes, but the extent to which such issues will be addressed in the lecture room depends on the institution and the individual lecturer. The Norms and Standards document only states that gender issues should be addressed as part of the educator's community, citizenship and pastoral role. Which aspects and the extent to which they should be dealt with are not specified. As content is dependent upon the lecturer, important aspects such as the influence of gender stereo-

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types on the educational experiences of children, or counteracting sexism in the classroom, may never be addressed.

If a real change is to be brought about in the educational experiences of girls and women, South Africa should not only develop knowledge and skills in schools but should also examine the institutional working of higher educational establishments, since effective training of educators for gender equity is crucial in empowering educators.

6. Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that the global economy, as well as the South African economy, is in desperate need of the contributions of women to the labour market. In taking the recommended actions, gender equity in education could be attained to ensure the girls and women of South Africa equal opportunities to develop and realise their natural talents and potential to the full. It is clear that the education sector has a major role to play in achieving gender equity by addressing the areas in need of redress and by taking relevant empowerment actions so that all members of South African society will be equipped to face the challenges and responsibilities of the future.

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