

After Beijing: Women and *Education and Training* in New Brunswick ¹

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ABSTRACT

New Brunswick's economic reform policies and gender equity initiatives in education are examined in light of the promises made at Beijing and found wanting. By embracing "economic restructuring" and the language of feminism the Province has masked who has access to education and who is left out.

RÉSUMÉ

Les politiques de réforme économique du Nouveau-Brunswick et les initiatives d'équité entre les sexes dans l'éducation sont étudiées à la lumière des promesses faites à Beijing et qui se révèlent insuffisantes. En incluant "la restructuration économique" et langage féministe la province a masqué qui a accès à l'éducation et qui est exclus.

INTRODUCTION

Canada made a public commitment towards education for women at three United Nations world conferences.² If these promises still stand, it would be reasonable to expect improvements in women's access to education and attention to gender equity in all Canadian provinces since the 1980s. Yet there are reports that the successes of feminist educational reforms of the 1970s and 1980s are now waning. In the last decade, "economic restructuring" policy agendas in education have resulted in diminished attention to women's issues and education (Barlow & Robertson 1994; Coulter 1996a, b; Eyre & Blaney 1998a). However, there has been little in-depth analysis of how individual provinces are attending to feminist educational agendas or why governments have adopted particular ideological positions in relation to girls and women.

Education in Canada is a provincial matter, so questions of women and education are best examined province by province. In this article, I examine some current education initiatives in education in New Brunswick and their implications for women. I explore what Nancy Fraser names the

"the tacit norms and implicit assumptions that are constitutive of [government] practices" (1989, 146), and what Roxana Ng identifies as the systemic relations of gender, race and class that are "taken for granted and not ordinarily open to interrogation" (1993, 191). A closer examination of provincial government education initiatives may shed light on why gender equity initiatives appear to be waning and may enable critical reflection on present day education agendas across the country. Moreover, examining current government strategies may lead to renewed strategies for social change.

A starting point is to ask the following question: "Do recent education initiatives in New Brunswick benefit girls and women?" If they do, it is also important to ask How? and Why? And if they do not it is equally important to ask How? and Why? this has happened. As a feminist academic working in a faculty of education, with 20 years of high school teaching behind me, I have, for some time, been concerned about how feminist education reforms have been implemented in education. In working with departments of education, I have witnessed how government administrators have been tied to feminist concepts of sex roles and stereotyping and individualistic solutions to gender

inequities, while resisting contemporary feminist thinking about identity, subjectivity, and difference, and systemic institutional practices of discrimination against women. I also have observed how governments downplay, undermine, or appropriate feminist concepts to fit a particular government agenda. How do we interpret these strategies and how do we best respond? This paper is my attempt to publicly name what I see happening in relation to women and education in the province. Naming is an important strategy for change work.

I argue that while the New Brunswick government could make the claim that it is attending to women's issues in education and training, the Province is far from fulfilling the spirit of the promises made at Beijing. Reform initiatives tend to be based on gender neutral assumptions. When gender equity is addressed, the Province conceptualises gender as an isolated category separate from other dimensions of women's lives. Solutions to gender inequality are grounded in ideologies of individualism, and ignore the systemic and institutional structures that limit women's full participation in education. And initiatives that may be positive for women are often undermined by the gendered subtext³ of the Province's larger "economic restructuring" reform agenda. I suggest this contradiction may have more to do with the making of the patriarchal Canadian state than with any misunderstanding about women's educational requirements.

The article is organized in five parts. First, I provide an overview of recent developments in economic reform in New Brunswick. Second, I outline and provide a feminist critique of the provincial education initiatives that could be said to fit the education objectives agreed to at Beijing. In the third section I draw attention to the contradictions operating within the government's education initiatives and between these initiatives and competing policies and programmes. The fourth section attempts to show how the government initiatives connect to larger practices of the state. The final section raises further questions for consideration and points to strategies for social action.

RE/FORMING NEW BRUNSWICK

Recent changes in federal and provincial politics have had a major impact on education, health and social programmes in New Brunswick. The government's "economic restructuring" agenda has resulted in reduced expenditure on health care and more emphasis on individual responsibility for illness prevention (Fuller 1998). Funding for social services also has been slashed, including an \$80 million cut to the province's welfare system (Dufresne 1997). The cumulative effect of these cuts is substantial in a province that already has an average income below the national average, an official unemployment rate that hovers around 13 per cent, the lowest social assistance rates in the country, and discriminatory policies⁴ directed at those receiving social assistance and student grants (Perkins 1997).

As a strategy to shift New Brunswick from its position as a "have-not" province to one that is economically sound, the Province has focused attention on education. Following a review of its education system (New Brunswick 1992; 1993a, b), the Province committed \$61 million to education and training. Public school initiatives included programmes for students with "learning disabilities," students with "behaviour" problems, students "at risk," and those "requiring enrichment." There was to be an increased emphasis on communications technology and specific programmes to encourage young women to pursue careers in mathematics and science. In the tertiary system, funds were allocated for distance education, communications technology, and aboriginal teacher education.

At the same time, the government increased ideological control of public school education. The Province introduced an academic curriculum for the early years and an outcomes based programme at high school, and placed increased emphasis on standardised testing. The Province also eliminated school boards and replaced them with parent advisory committees (groups without legislative power), downsized its curriculum development branch, and down loaded management responsibilities onto individual

schools. There also were attempts to deregulate the teaching profession through cutbacks, contract hiring, and a proposed salary reduction for beginning teachers. In the tertiary system, the Province privatized upgrading, language and job training programmes, and shifted the emphasis from general training to training for those eligible for unemployment assistance. Many of these changes were implemented inconsistently and badly, raising the ire of teachers, parents, students, academics, and community groups.

Economic issues appear to have replaced issues of equity and social justice in the province. The situation for many women is serious. As Nancy Fraser says, because women constitute a majority of clients, paid human service workers and unpaid caregivers, "welfare wars will be largely wars about, even against women" (1989, 144). To compound the situation, the Province has frozen funding to the transition houses for abused women and children and has cut all funding to the province's only sexual abuse crisis centre. The province also has attempted (unsuccessfully) to block the establishment of a free-standing abortion clinic and does not support the availability of emergency contraceptives. It is unlikely the situation will improve in the near future. The recent dismantling of the Minister's Advisory Committee on Women's Issues, along with the closure of the Provincial Women's Directorate and the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and the recent re-assignment of the president of the New Brunswick Status of Women Committee from a full to a part-time position, has, in my view, created a crisis situation for women in the province.

GENDER EQUITY INITIATIVES

In this section, I examine the province's gender equity⁵ initiatives in education and their implications for girls and women. I frame the initiatives around the Beijing Platform,⁶ *Education and Training of Women*, Strategic Objectives, Section B, agreed to by the Province: B1) *Ensure equal access to education*; B2) *Eradicate illiteracy among women*; B3) *Improve women's access to*

vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education; B4) *Develop non-discriminatory education and training*; and B5) *Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms* (United Nations, 1995). Government documents and conversations with individuals⁷ in various government departments and agencies have served as my primary sources of information regarding the initiatives in place.⁸

Beijing Platform commitment to Strategic

Objective B1:

Ensure equal access to education

Although New Brunswick does not have an official gender equity policy in education, the Province has sponsored activities directed at furthering women's access to education. In the late 1980s the former Minister's Advisory Committee organized summer science camps for girls aged 9-13, and school districts offered science camps for girls and boys together. All public schools are now connected to the Internet, and TeleEducation sites have been set up across the province. The government also has supported violence preventive initiatives, including a *Personal Safety* curriculum for elementary school students, the development of *Child Victims of Abuse Protocols*, research on dating violence and violence in schools, and a dating violence curriculum for junior high-schools.⁹ Individual community colleges have initiated their own violence prevention programmes, such as *Dating Violence and Woman Abuse* at Woodstock. Day care is now available at one high school and at five community colleges across the province.

These initiatives do address some of the issues that limit girls' and women's access to education. The under-representation of women in science and technology has long been a concern of feminist educators; violence against women, and a lack of quality, affordable, flexible child care, remain serious issues. However, the initiatives reach few women in the province, and there are inherent problems. The science camps for girls treat women as a group, offer individualistic solutions, and ignore feminist concerns about the social

relations and material conditions that limit women's access to knowledge. The camps aim to change girls' attitudes to science: girls, rather than the social relations of science or science education, are seen as the problem that needs to be fixed. Unchallenged are the more difficult questions about why women students actively avoid science or about patriarchal Western constructions of science (Harding 1991).

The Province also has set up the physical infrastructure for Internet across the province, but has ignored the gendered social relations around technology and the material conditions of women's lives that can prevent their access to the new technologies. According to Madeline Boscoe the Internet should be looked at through a "gender and grassroots lens" (1997, 1), women ought to be viewed by government as a "specific community with unique needs" (3), and the Internet "should be viewed and regulated as a public resource [and] principles of equality and diversity need to be included in all aspects of policy and programming" (5). Boscoe calls attention to a lack of child care and elder care that prevents many women from travelling to sites to gain access to the Internet, and a need for gender sensitive training and mentoring programmes for women. In New Brunswick, this is not happening: a group who applied for an *Industry Canada Community Access Project* grant to set up "women-friendly" community access sites in various locations across the province (a school, a downtown office, an inn, an aboriginal resource centre, and a women's intercultural centre), were discouraged from applying and were ultimately turned down because they were deemed "a special interest group" (Robbins 1997).

The school violence prevention initiatives also take a gender neutral approach, and when they do deal with gender they tend to undermine feminist concerns about systemic institutionalized practices of violence against women. A focus on "building self esteem," "peer mediation" and "anger management," suggest that violence is a degendered, deracialised, and declassed issue. Although the dating violence curriculum does deal with gender, same sex relations are ignored. Moreover, the initiatives leave the issue of violence at the level of the individual. The social relations of

sexism, racism, heterosexism and homophobia that are reproduced and produced through daily interactions and across institutional structures are ignored.

Beijing Platform commitment to Strategic Objective B2:

Eradicate illiteracy among women

The Province, in partnership with the federal government, non-government agencies and the private sector, has introduced a number of initiatives aimed at literacy. These include: a publicly funded kindergarten programme, the *Canadian Challenge Program*, and a province-wide *Stay in School* initiative. A *Bridging Year and Community Academic Services Program*, and the *Learning in the Workplace* initiative offer basic literacy and academic upgrading. Other initiatives include a mandatory *Health Education* curriculum for students in grades seven to nine, and curriculum initiatives on AIDS offered by the community colleges.

Although these initiatives support literacy, they are based on gender neutral assumptions. In other words, they assume literacy issues are generic and the initiatives can be taken up by women and men equally. The Province appears to ignore concerns about curricula and pedagogical issues surrounding literacy programmes for women (Lloyd 1992; Venema 1995), as well as the effects on women of the privatisation of language training programmes (Butterwick, 1993/4; Lior 1993/4). The initiatives also ignore what feminist critics have long since pointed out, that women's efforts to claim an education are limited by structural conditions. Poverty, a lack of affordable transportation, a lack of specific facilities and resources for women with disabilities, and a lack of affordable quality child care for women who are mothers, all have serious implications for women and literacy. Violence is also a mitigating factor. No doubt there are women enrolled in basic literacy programmes in New Brunswick who experience literacy as both a "threat" and a "desire" (Rockhill 1991).¹⁰ Kathleen Rockhill says "To act seriously upon the principle of literacy or learning as a right

- or even a possibility - for women, we must, reconceptualize how we think about the 'political' to include the 'personal'" (348).

In New Brunswick, feminist academics have raised additional questions about the working conditions for those employed in the literacy initiatives. Pamela Nason and Pamela Whitty (1992) report that support structures for compulsory teacher upgrading in the new kindergarten programme are limited, particularly for teachers who are geographically isolated. Also, for the first few years of the programme the province will continue to pay kindergarten teachers one half to one third the salary, and fewer benefits, relative to other teachers. Similar problems exist with the adult literacy initiatives. Dorothy MacKeracher (1994) says the adult literacy programmes operate on the backs of underpaid "facilitators" hired from among those who are eligible for income assistance or unemployment benefits, some of whom are qualified teachers, and many of whom are women. MacKeracher says the facilitators have "no assurance of future work, no long-term benefits such as a pension plan, sick leave or dental coverage, no opportunities for professional or remunerative advancement, and no opportunities for professional development" (51).

In addition, although the province has attempted to deal with literacy of the body by making school health education compulsory, curricula efforts ignore feminist challenges to dominant bio-medical and psychological discourses about the body. In sexuality education alone, issues of desire and the social and cultural construction of femininity, masculinity, and heteronormativity are avoided completely, and even when considered from a biological perspective the curricula is filled with silences and distortions about sexuality (Eyre 1997).¹¹ Promises of a high school sexuality curricula have not materialised; efforts to deal with sexuality and reproductive health for women in the college system are scattered and fragmented.

Beijing Platform commitment to Strategic Objective B3:

Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education

Government initiatives that fit under this strategic objective include the *Women's Doctoral Scholarships* and the *Canadian National Railway Scholarships for Women in Non-Traditional Trades* programmes. Also, community colleges offer various incentives for women, such as the *Increase Equity in Apprenticeable Trades* pilot project, and the *Canada Bursary in Technology*. The doctoral scholarship program ends in 2003, only three women presently hold CN scholarships, the bursary program is on hold, and community college initiatives are localized.

The Province must do more than encourage a few women to enter these fields. Moreover, support structures to facilitate entry into vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education must be in place for all women, including appropriate services for women with disabilities, affordable quality and flexible child care for women with young children, language programmes for women who need them, and financial assistance for women in poverty.

Anti-feminist backlash (Faludi 1991)¹² against women who enter traditionally male dominated fields is also a serious problem and appears to be completely ignored by government. It is well known that misogynist work environments cause some women to limit their education and training potential; others drop out. As a solution some advocate that more attention be given to women's unique learning styles (MacKeracher & McFarland 1993/94), and women-only programmes (Braundy 1993/94). But Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell argue the social relations of technology pose the greatest barrier for women. They write:

What is really going on in such "learning" situations must be understood as first and foremost an acquiescence to a highly stratified, hierarchical and punitively enforced set of social relations...It is

hightime we had the courage to look at how and why women and girls are actively being prevented from developing competence, and recognize that there has been for too many years now an active war being waged on women. (1995, 22)

Women at a recent provincial conference on women in trades and technology would likely concur: a conference participant told me that she heard women speak about having their cars "pissed on," their tools "sabotaged," and union meetings turned into "strip shows." She also said it is still common for women to be paid less than men for the same work. Her message was - "It's tough to stay."

**Beijing Platform commitment to Strategic Objective B4:
*Develop non-discriminatory education and training***

Most of the Province's anti-discrimination initiatives have been directed at the public school system. The Department of Education has published three documents dealing with sex roles and sex stereotyping: *Educational Opportunities for Girls and Boys: A Commitment to Sex-Equity* (1987), *Sex Equity in Our Schools: A Guideline for Action* (1989), and *A Checklist for Detecting Bias and Stereotyping in Instructional Materials* (1990). A draft position paper on gender equity developed by a woman responsible for women's issues and education, before the demise of her position, remains on hold. The Province also has distributed *Raising Young Voices* (Ministry of Women's Equality 1994), a video on gender issues in schools, and has supported voluntary gender sensitivity programmes for teachers.

These initiatives conceptualise women's issues in education as an issue of sex roles and stereotyping, and treat gender as an isolated category separate from other forms of discrimination. They also offer individualistic solutions to what feminists now consider to be rather complex problems. *Raising Young Voices* focuses on girls' "low self esteem." The video claims the "problem" can be fixed by exposing

students to an equal number of women and men authors, and by teachers giving equal attention to girls and boys in their classrooms. The video treats girls as a group, and locates the "problem" of girls' silence in girls themselves. Girls are portrayed as victims, rather than as agents who actively resist the gendered, raced and classed hierarchies of classrooms and schools, and the multiple positionings of girls and women are ignored.

The Province's silence on heterosexism and homophobia in educational settings is curious given that New Brunswick was "among the first of the provinces to amend its *Human Rights Act* to include protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and among the first to extend same-sex benefits to provincial employees" (Brewer 1996, 1). Also, given that New Brunswick has a history of deeply embedded racism (as well as heteronormativity) played out daily in the media, the medical and judicial systems, and in classrooms across the province, the Province's lack of attention to racism in educational settings is astounding. Recent figures on "drop-out" rates in the province show that Native students are four times as likely to drop out of school than non-Native students (New Brunswick 1997). This finding alone ought to be cause for alarm.

The lack of attention to discriminatory practices in the tertiary sector is equally alarming. College enrolment is differentiated along gender lines, with high enrolments of women in child care, communications, cooking, hospitality and tourism, human services, and office technology. Women who do enter trades training continue to experience sexual harassment. Although individual colleges have attempted to address issues of discrimination in courses and programmes, the Province has made little effort to take seriously evidence of discrimination against women in training for trades, technology and blue collar work.

**Beijing platform commitment to Strategic
Objective B5:**

***Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the
implementation of educational reforms***

The recent educational reforms in New Brunswick closely resemble many aspects of market-based education, now well underway in Alberta, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. Although the full implications of these reforms have yet to be realized, the Province appears to be forging ahead despite well documented concerns about the possible impact on students and educators. Market-led systems embrace corporate values, view students as consumers, and hold restrictive views of knowledge (Harrison & Kachur 1999; Marginson 1997; Whitty 1997). Moreover, they have serious implications for women as students, teachers, and mothers (Dehli 1998; Kenway & Epstein 1996). There is no evidence to suggest that the Province has subjected its reforms to a gender, "race," or class analysis.

Academic researchers in the province already have raised questions about the implications for social democracy of current reform efforts (Weeks 1995), and about the ethics of public/private partnerships in education (Eyre & Blaney, 1998b). Nason (1996) argues that the Province's shift to a more academic curriculum for young children undermines the connections between home and school and the importance of maternal literacies in the early years curriculum. And the New Brunswick Teachers Association (1997) has raised concerns about the potential harmful effect cuts to courses in the arts and fine arts will have on school "drop-out" rates. Given that these areas have traditionally had high female enrolment, it is likely that the cuts will especially hurt women students.

The government also appears to be ignoring critiques of women's experiences in training programmes linked to unemployment assistance (Ballantine 1990; O'Hara 1991). Elspeth Tulloch (1993/4) argues that the *NB Works* programme targets single mothers, but does not consider child care costs, travel expenses, and harassment incurred by women in the programme.

She says that *NB Works* discriminates against women who have yet to enter the paid workforce, and hurts women displaced by "workfare" trainees and workers.

Similarly, while much is made of New Brunswick's investment in multimedia technology and related education and work opportunities, the Province has not responded to feminist concerns about the effects of the industry on women. Joan McFarland (1996) says women have become "preferred workers" in the call centre industry. She says that approximately 70 percent of call centre jobs are filled by women working for low pay and enduring poor working conditions. There are reports of workplace sexual harassment, and unionization is being discouraged by both government and the industry. According to Jean Swanson, National Anti-Poverty Organization, the province supports "competitive impoverishment by using cheap labour to lure companies to the province...and it leads to deep, desperate impoverishment and terrible living conditions" (Urquhart 1996).

UNMASKING GENDER

Although the province has introduced some initiatives directed at furthering educational equity, it is important to examine these initiatives in light of feminist struggles for women's equality. Many of the Province's reform initiatives are based on gender neutral assumptions - as if issues around access to education are the same for women and men. But gender neutrality can merely mask male dominance. As Jo Sutton and Scarlet Pollock argue, "Women and men do not experience social equality in Canada [and] by default policies and projects which ignore gender inequalities are in danger of reproducing them" (1997, 1).

Where initiatives do focus on gender they tend to follow a similar pattern. There is a focus on sex roles and stereotyping, women are treated as a category with a common identity, the multiple positionings of women and the intersection, for example, of sexism, racism and heteronormativity in women's lives are ignored. While an emphasis on "sex roles" and "stereotyping" reflects the

orthodoxies of 1970s feminism and led to significant achievements in curriculum and pedagogy at that time (McLeod 1998), in my view, it offers a limited way of examining the complexities of gender identity and women's multiple and shifting positionings. While feminist theory continues to grapple with the category "woman" - wanting to use it for political purposes but resisting the implication of commonality - it is generally agreed, as Iris Marion Young says, that conceptualising women as a group can lead to "normalizations and exclusions" (1997, 12).

In New Brunswick, any initiative that ignores the geographic isolation of women in the province will benefit few women unless an outreach program is firmly in place. Literacy programmes will be ineffective if they do not provide income support for women in poverty, the additional transportation costs and possible attendant needs for women with disabilities, and affordable, flexible, quality child care for women who are mothers. Harassment policies will have limited effect if they ignore how women's experiences of harassment and their ability to use a harassment policy to their advantage, varies according to their subject positioning as, for example, a single parent, a Native woman, a lesbian, or a woman with a disability. It is the lack of attention to the social relations and material conditions of women's lives that closes doors to education and training for many women in the province.

COMPETING DISCOURSES

The Province also undermines its own equity initiatives. Government initiatives specifically intended to benefit women and the government's economic reform strategies are often contradictory. The government has pledged allegiance to women's equality but has introduced reform initiatives that may be detrimental to some women and has not carried out a gender, race and class analysis of all of its education reform policies and practices. The Province has promised to improve women's access to education but has taken a regressive position toward women's sexual and reproductive health, demonizes teen mothers,¹³ and

financially penalizes women students with children. The Province claims to be developing non-discriminatory policies in education but supports cuts to social assistance benefits, implements discriminatory policies against people in poverty, and actively supports the ghettoisation of women's work to support its own economic agenda. The Province has supported a variety of programs on violence prevention but has reduced funding to community organizations that support abused women and their children, and is silent on conditions of systemic institutionalized sexism, racism and heterosexism in the province's educational institutions. The Province has agreed to improve women's access to science and the new technologies but has denied grants to grassroots groups attempting to bring more women on-line. By juxtaposing the language of feminism with "economic liberalism" the Province has masked the moral dilemma of dealing with who has "true" access to education and who is left out.

WOMEN AS PERSONS

In exposing the paradoxes and contradictions in government initiatives and reform agendas, it is also important to expose the social meanings, "meanings that tend otherwise to go without saying" (Fraser 1989, 146), embedded in government policies and programmes. The first thing that has to be said is the Province's contradictory responses to concerns about education and training for girls and women is not likely due to an absence of knowledge about girls' and women's lives. Feminist concerns about women's struggles to claim an education are well documented. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick says, "Ignorances are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth" (1990, 8).

It is difficult not to interpret the government's response to girls and women as anything other than what Nancy Fraser names as "public patriarchy" (1989, 146), and Himani Bannerji identifies as a "politics of exclusion" by the state (1997, 26). As Bannerji says, "Being working classed, being 'raced,' and being of a

certain gender, all restrict access to citizenship in the here and now by modifying conditions of freedom, property, and literacy" (1997, 26). Bannerji argues that "the paradox of belonging/non belonging simultaneously" (24) is a "relation of ruling," a strategy that enables the state "to extend its governing and administrative jurisdiction into civil society while, at the same time, incorporating the everyday person into the national project" (25). She says it is about "the making of Canada...through the exclusion and marginalization of women" (26).

SOME CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

Analysing government education initiatives offers some insight into the political, social, economic, and cultural forces that shape education policy choices and the values, beliefs and ideologies that shape bureaucratic thinking about women and education. The article has revealed what Bannerji describes as "the hollowness of the liberal state" (1997, 37). What remains unclear, however, is what administrators do with knowledge that does not fit its own agenda, or what Dorothy Smith names as a "regime of rationality" (Newson, 1991). For me this raises a number of questions about the way power operates: Who are the major players? Whose interests do they serve? Are particular voices purposefully excluded from the dominant discourses of the state, or do other voices drown out their concerns? How do some concerns get on the government agenda and how are others kept off?

In hindsight, feminist reform agendas of the 1970s and 80s appear to have been quite successful. This raises questions about why present day feminist orthodoxies seem to have reached an impasse. More needs to be understood about why feminist reform agendas are enacted, abandoned, or avoided by government, and why governments favour liberal notions of gender equity over other feminist approaches. Has the government purposefully ignored contemporary feminism or have there been attempts to deal with some of the issues? If so, why did they fail? Are the equity initiatives merely token gestures to feminist

concerns, or have other strategies been considered and abandoned? If so, for what reasons?

Holding governments accountable requires subjecting all government education initiatives and reforms to public scrutiny. It involves exposing the limitations of gender neutral policies and equity initiatives that individualise the issues, ignore difference, and avoid the material conditions of women's lives. It means exposing the paradoxes and contradictions between government equity initiatives and other education reform policies and programmes. Who will do this work? How will it happen? I leave the answer to the first question to the reader. For the second, Karen Foss and Richard Rogers suggest "well timed interventions and temporary incursions into the spaces established by the powerful" (1994, 162). Bryson and de Castell (1993) suggest that such work requires a strategy or overall plan, rather than looking for cracks or fissures in hegemonic narratives. If all else fails, as Martha Nichols says, we can "turn up the heat - through media exposure, unblinkered activism and whatever it takes to keep [governments] from fooling us and themselves" (1999, 11). Again.

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ENDNOTES

1. New Brunswick is Canada's only official bilingual (French and English) province and has separate education systems. This paper is based on the English sector only.
2. The Federal and Provincial governments and the Territories adopted the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (1982), *Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women* (1985), and the *Beijing Platform for Action* (1995).
3. Nancy Fraser (1989) uses the phrase "gender subtext" which she attributes to Dorothy Smith.
4. Discriminatory policies include: the "one welfare cheque per household" rule, a reduction in student aid for mothers with child allowance, the "name the father" rule attached to benefits for single mothers, and the linking of social assistance benefits to workers on training programmes.
5. I am not suggesting that "gender equity" is an unproblematic concept. For an analysis of the contradictions and paradoxes in the term "gender equity" see Bryson & de Castell, 1993.
6. The 12 critical areas identified in the Platform for Action are: *Women in Poverty; Education and Training of Women; Women and Health Care; Violence Against Women; Women and Peace; Women in the Economy; Women in Power and Decision Making; Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women; Human Rights of Women; Women and the Media; Women and the Environment; and the Rights of the Girl Child.*
7. I wish to thank those individuals who provided information and helped clarify my questions and concerns, but who, for their own safety, cannot be named.
8. The research could be said to employ feminist critical policy analysis (Marshall, 1997). It recognizes personal narrative, oral history, and document analysis as valuable sources of knowledge about political activity, and purposely seeks the voices of marginalised groups.
9. The research projects, *Peaceful Learning Environments* and *Dating Violence*, operate under the auspices of the Muriel McQueen-Ferguson Centre for Family Violence Research; the *Dating Violence* curriculum is presented to schools by the Fredericton Sexual Assault Crisis Centre.
10. Kathleen Rockhill (1991), in a study of women in heterosexual relationships enrolled in a basic literacy programme in Los Angeles, found that the women's desire for learning became a source of contention for their male partners and ultimately a threat to their own physical, emotional, and economic security.
11. The Department of Education has informed middle-school teachers that they may explain, but not discuss, masturbation, abortion, and homosexuality; and elementary teachers are told they must say "parts of the body under the bathing suit," rather than name "vagina," "vulva," "penis," and so on (personal communication).
12. For Susan Faludi (1991) a "backlash" is an event that is "triggered by the perception - whether accurate or not - that women are making great strides" (p. xix). For a critique of the concept "backlash" see Newson, 1991.
13. On the fury about single mothers see Marina Warner (1994).

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