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## **Breaking the sex barriers OISE's Breaking the Mold kit teaches children that little girls can plan to be pilots too**

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### WOMEN

A MAN AND HIS SON are in a car accident. The father is killed. The child badly injured and is taken to hospital, where it becomes apparent he needs an operation. The surgeon comes in and examines the boy before the operation and exclaims: I cannot operate. This is my son. How can this be? Why is this riddle difficult?

The riddle is from Breaking The Mold, a new curriculum just published by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Breaking The Mold is a teachers' guide, a set of lesson plans for exercises to teach children that little girls can plan to be pilots too, and that little boys don't have to be tough all the time. What's exciting about Breaking The Mold is that it's unique in Ontario. For all the hullaballo in the media and for all the desire of so many individuals for a non-sexist society, there has been no help for teachers to counteract the mythology that still prevails in textbooks - the inculcation of tender young minds with a belief system that puts women in the kitchen, in the laundry room, in the nursery, but not in the driver's seat.

Breaking The Mold was a natural consequence of OISE's Women's Kit which was published three years ago. The Women's Kit is a big brown box, over 10 kilos of non- sexist materials for use in high schools and community colleges. Filmstrips, posters of Canadian pioneering women, essays on questions like why women fear success, a giant consciousness-raising kit.

About 1,000 copies of the Women's Kit have been sold - to high schools, community colleges, libraries, church groups. Teachers use it in family studies courses, guidance counselling and women's studies courses. And the feedback has been that they like the kit - a lot. Small wonder. As Becky Kane, one of the women who created the kit, points out, Women were totally excluded from the formal curriculum in high schools - from the textbooks in terms of their historical contribution to Canadian society, from active roles in illustrations in math and science

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textbooks, and in terms of role models showing occupations beyond certain limits. High school girls were getting a pretty strong message that although a woman might want to have something to fall back on, her basic career was to be a wife and mother. The Women's Kit addresses itself to changing that.

And interestingly enough, favorite item in the kit, the part in it that high school students like the best, is the booklet called Tying the Knot, which deals with marriage laws in Canada and looks at what happens to a woman's body rights and property rights when she marries. The students' response to that is generally disbelief, then shock, and then to question: Does it have to be like that?

The teachers' response to the Women's Kit was to ask for more. Teachers pointed out that it was certainly good to do this at the secondary school level, but what about the elementary level, where no such materials exist, and where kids are socialized, where a child's attitude in relation to society is really formed?

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation had written a teachers' guide that responded to that very need. It was a series of lesson plans for elementary school teachers to use in classrooms to fight sex-role stereotyping, and it was very good. But without the support of a monolith like OISE, the B.C. teachers couldn't get their curriculum published and marketed to a mass of educators. The Women's Kit Project at OISE got hold of the B.C. guide, added some pictures and an extremely thorough bibliography of non-sexist books and filmstrips that teachers could get, and published it as Breaking The Mold for use in kindergarten through Grade Eight.

Teachers can use one exercise from Breaking The Mold, or proceed through all of them. The lesson plans fit into English courses, history, family studies, and guidance. In one exercise, students are asked to construct two large collages from magazine pictures and words, to illustrate the themes of what it means to be a boy or a girl. Then the class discusses the collages, answering questions like: Are there things that boys want to do but aren't supposed to do, and vice versa? Do you think it should be like that? In another exercise, students divide into small groups, and pretend to be parents to discuss their sons and daughters, and what they expect from them in terms of helping around the house, doing well in science, and coming home at a certain time. After the role-playing, the students discuss what happened in the small groups, and in what ways parents view sons and daughters differently.

In another exercise, the class pretends to be doing on-the-spot TV coverage of a suffrage march. One student plays the TV commentator. Others play suffragists, male hecklers, female hecklers, male supporters. And afterwards, they discuss what it all means. And the last exercise is to create Utopia. Students work on designing a Utopian future society, where people's lives are not concerned by what sex they happen to be. They can paint murals or act out their Utopia or do a puppet show.

A teacher in Thunder Bay wrote in a response to Breaking The Mold that

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she found the male-female role reversal extremely interesting - in the classroom, however, the girls adapted easily to male roles in the exercise, but the boys hated playing girls' roles. Click!

Breaking The Mold could be the beginning of a long line of non-sexist material - if the Women's Kit Project had not lost its funding two weeks ago. According to OISE director Clifford Pitt: The decision hasn't finally been made, but the strong likelihood is that it will go in that direction. It's true that OISE is suffering severe financial pressure from cutbacks in its funding, but if they don't publish materials like Breaking The Mold, who will?

As Becky Kane says: As far as the educational community is concerned, this stuff is not a priority. If there was a clear mandate from the ministry that women had to be included in this way in the curriculum, it would happen. Like metrics, for God's sake. They send teachers on special retraining for metrics. Textbooks are changed. All the research is available. Material is provided. Why not this mandate for women?

If you allow all the potential of everybody in your society to be realized as fully as possible, you move towards a healthy society.

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