

THE FEDERATION OF WOMEN TEACHERS' ASSOCIATIONS OF ONTARIO: CELEBRATING SMALL AFFIRMATIVE ACTION VICTORIES*

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Kay Sigurjonsson, directrice générale adjointe de la Fédération of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (la fédération des associations d'enseignantes de l'Ontario) se sert de son expérience pour nous avertir que, bien que nous n'osons pas devenir satisfaites de nous-mêmes, nous pouvons célébrer les "petites victoires" de l'action positive. Pendant bien des années la Fédération a fait campagne pour obtenir l'égalité des chances pour les femmes dans les systèmes scolaires et pour des chances pour les femmes (et les hommes) de travailler à temps-partiel en préservant toutefois leur pension et leurs autres droits. Elle rapporte ici leur progrès jusqu'à date.

If success were measured by media attention alone, the women's movement would rank as an unqualified success. But we measure progress by concrete improvements in the normal circumstances of ordinary women: we are far from realizing our goals. A few women sit in board rooms and in the House of Commons. A handful of women hold jobs in trades traditionally dominated by men. Many men "help" with housework; a few actually take responsibility for it. A majority of women are now in the paid labour force, but the wage gap has changed little in fifty years. Many women continue to be beaten by their partners. Child care remains scandalously inadequate. Schoolgirls still believe they will marry and live happily ever after.

In the face of these injustices, we dare not be complacent. We can, however, celebrate small victories. The Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO) has campaigned for many years for affirmative action to bring about equality of opportunity in school systems, and for opportunities for women (and men) to work part-time while still protecting their pension and

other rights. The following is a celebration of some victories in these areas.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

It would be foolish to ignore the criticism of affirmative action which precedes, accompanies and follows any attempt to introduce it in school boards. The criticism is always the same: (a) we don't need affirmative action because we already have equal opportunity; (b) affirmative action is reverse discrimination; (c) affirmative action results in the employment and promotion of the unqualified. The facts are that there is inequality of opportunity everywhere, as statistics clearly indicate; that affirmative action is designed to overcome discrimination, not to perpetuate it; and that it is insulting to suggest that unqualified women would be promoted because of affirmative action, when there are significant numbers of qualified women who are rejected by employers on no discernible grounds but gender.

In Ontario elementary schools, at least, there are more women than men with university degrees, and women now constitute over 40% of participants in the principals' course and over 25% of the candidates for supervisory officers' qualifications. We have a very long way to go before we need fear promotion of unqualified women. In fact, cases that come to our attention involve the selection of unqualified men for promotion, while fully qualified women are passed over. Systemic discrimination against women may well have resulted in the promotion of some men who hold the positions they do solely because of gender. There is precious little evidence of such systemic discrimination in favour of women!

Talking about affirmative action usually requires a lengthy explanation of what it is *not*. Affirmative action doesn't mean reverse discrimination, doesn't have to

mean "quotas", isn't a subversive plot by a bunch of female crazies.

What affirmative action *is* is good management; it is a plan for using the skills and experience and strengths of all employees, whether female or male, where those skills can do the most for an organization. It is not just equal opportunity or employment equity, which are merely states or conditions. Affirmative action is the way to bring about equal opportunity.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IS THE GOAL: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IS THE METHOD

One of the problems in convincing school boards and other employers to introduce affirmative action is that they say they already have equal opportunity. One glance at the statistics in any province will tell us how much equal opportunity exists in reality. In Ontario, for example, where almost exactly two-thirds of the elementary teachers are women, 12.7% of the principals are women. Looked at another way, 1.3% of women elementary school teachers are principals, while 17.3% of men elementary school teachers are principals. In Ontario secondary schools, almost 70% of the teachers are male, but 96% of the principals are male.

And things are not getting better. Nationally, Statistics Canada reports that over the last ten years the number of positions in school administration has dropped by 5%, but the number of women in these positions has declined by 10% – and the representation of women was small to begin with. Things are not going to get better unless we replace wishful thinking with positive action.

The Ministry of Education in Ontario, reluctantly and after many years of delay, has put some teeth into the voluntary affirmative action they have been advocating for years. The Ministry is providing a

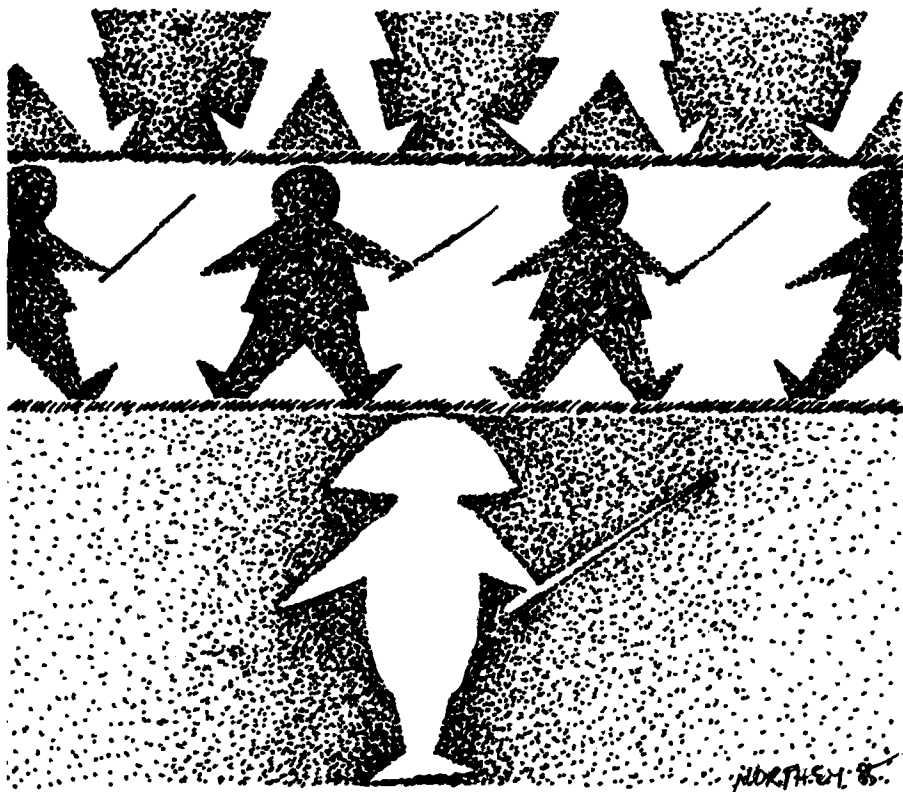


Illustration by Jane Northey

small amount of incentive funding (up to \$20,000) to encourage school boards to employ an affirmative action coordinator or, if they already have a coordinator, to support special projects related to affirmative action. Perhaps more important, the Ministry has requested school boards to:

- adopt a formal policy of affirmative action for women employees;
- appoint a senior staff member to develop and coordinate an affirmative action plan, which would identify goals and timetables for the hiring, promotion and training of women employees at all levels, including both teaching and non-teaching staff;
- collect and analyze data on the occupational and salary distribution of male and female staff, job competitions, projected vacancies, and staff training and development.

School boards will be *required* to report annually to the Ministry of Education on their progress in affirmative action, and the Minister will table in the Legislature a report on *each school board*, as well as a provincial summary.

WHAT SHOULD AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAMME LOOK LIKE?

In the opinion of FWTAO there are identifiable elements of successful

affirmative action. Nobody should be deceived – or satisfied – by plans which do not contain these elements.

1. *Education* to prepare women to compete successfully for advancement, and to prepare school administrators to encourage women and to accept and work comfortably with women in leadership roles in education.

2. *Identification* of women who are qualified, experienced and wish to seek promotion.

3. *Fair and objective promotion procedures* to ensure that all candidates are given appropriate and serious consideration.

4. *Numerical goals and timetables* to increase the representation of women within specific job categories where they are underrepresented. This is critical to the success of an Affirmative Action program. Realistic goals should be developed based on an assessment of the number of women who already hold the qualifications necessary for promotion within the school system; short and long range timetables should be established in relation to these goals.

5. *Accountability* for the effective implementation of an Affirmative Action

program. This must be required from the chief executive officer of a school board in the same way as that person is considered responsible for the implementation of curriculum goals. One of the main criteria used during performance reviews for educational administrators must be the degree of success in implementing the Board's Affirmative Action program.

6. *The right to appeal* a hiring or promotion decision made by the Board.

That's what affirmative action *really* means. It works, as we know from studies of the results of mandatory affirmative action in the United States. Companies forced by U.S. federal law to hire women and minorities increased their rate of employment of minorities by 20% compared to 12% in the companies not doing business with the federal government (and therefore not required to have affirmative action programmes). The affected companies increased their employment of women by 15.2% compared to 2.2% in the non-complying companies.

MORE PROGRESS: JOB-SHARING AND PENSION PROTECTION

FWTAO first promoted job-sharing in 1978 as one approach to the problem of declining enrolment and teacher redundancy, while answering the need of many women teachers to work part-time temporarily. No doubt because it appeared an inexpensive and innovative way to reduce the impact of declining enrolment, job-sharing was greeted enthusiastically in many quarters. While representatives of teachers and the Ontario government wrestled with amending the *Teachers' Superannuation Act* to incorporate job-sharing, school boards and teachers began including the notion in collective agreements. By 1982-83, 25 local teacher collective agreements in Ontario contained some version of job-sharing. None, of course, could protect pension rights which are determined provincially.

For this reason the new *Teachers' Superannuation Act, 1983* received more than a warm welcome when it included an option to obtain pension credit for job-sharing, now called *position-sharing*. School boards do not contribute to the Teachers' Superannuation Fund: the government of the Province of Ontario sponsors the fund and matches the teachers' contributions. Thus the amendment represented provincial financial

commitment to position-sharing as a means to expand the opportunities for an Ontario teaching job.

Conceptually, position-sharing for the purposes of superannuation has been given the broadest possible meaning. Any teacher with a right to a full-time teaching assignment may relinquish a specified portion of the assignment to the school board (the employer). The school board, in turn, may assign available teaching positions to suit the needs of the school system. The teacher who voluntarily relinquishes some of his or her teaching assignment obtains full service credit for superannuation by contributing as though receiving full salary. The government matches the contribution. The school board retains control over the assignment of staff. Teaching employment opportunities increase, and the scheme is very easy to administer. The rules are simple:

1. Any teacher who was teaching full-time in the preceding school year and who is entitled to a full-time assignment in the school year of volunteering to position-share is eligible to participate.
2. The teacher must retain at least a 40% assignment so that up to 60% assignment may be relinquished in a school year.
3. A teacher may acquire up to 1.8 years only of credit in superannuation by the process of position-sharing during a career.

Credit for seniority, increment, employer share of insured benefits, and calculation of a retirement gratuity continue to be governed by collective agreements bargained locally. It is too soon to determine how successful local groups have been in obtaining the added protection, but lively discussions have ensued around the province.

FWTAO continues to believe that position-sharing, so long as all the necessary protections are in place for the participating teacher, represents one attractive, inexpensive solution to the pressures of shrinking school systems while accommodating the career patterns of many women. In the six years since FWTAO first proposed the idea and its official acceptance within the teacher pension plan, the proportion of part-time teachers in the FWTAO membership has grown from 8% to 14.3%.

CONCLUSION

There should be no misunderstanding.

Affirmative action is in its infancy in Ontario, and equal opportunity seems far away. Job-sharing with pension protection is only a partial response to the fact of women's differing career patterns. We must celebrate even small victories, though, in order to strengthen ourselves for the rest of the long, slow march to full equality.

**Parts of this article appeared in the ATA magazine published by the Alberta Teachers' Association (May/June, 1985). Joan Byrne, of the FWTAO staff, wrote the description of the job-sharing scheme.*

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

What is the future in this area?

Equal Opportunity managers will be required to implement policies arising from legislation or governmental directives, with municipalities, ministries, industries and voluntary agencies in Canada.

Men and women who already have a degree or diploma or suitable work experience, who have analytical, interpersonal and organizational skills, and who anticipate a leadership role in a changing environment are invited to register.

Subjects offered in the Equal Opportunity Management Program are: Research and Statistics; Social Stratification - Analysis of Inequality and Discrimination; Human Relations and Organizational Behaviour; Personnel Management; Communication Skills - Critical Thinking - Language and Logic - Writing Skills; Negotiating Skills; Equal Opportunity Law; Implementation of Affirmative Action; Management Issues of the Future; Interviewing, Recruitment, Selection and Orientation; Wage and Salary Administration; and Training Methods.

The Equal Opportunity Management Certificate Program is presently offered on a part-time basis through Continuing Education. Ruth Cunningham is Director of Equal Opportunity Programs.

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