

Teachers, femocrats¹ and academics: activism
in London in the 1980s

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for Kate Myers (ed) *Whatever Happened to Equal Opportunities*

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This paper seeks to record and celebrate the commitment to progressive and innovative education of many women and men in the 1980s, at a time when there was intense central government conservatism and reaction. It looks at three projects in which I was involved as a feminist working in higher education in London: the Women's Education Group (WedG), the Local Education Authorities' Consortium for Equal Opportunities (LEAC); and, more briefly, a link between them: the Centre for Research and Education on Gender (CREG) at the Institute of Education. In all three, teachers in schools, feminists employed in a community agency and in local education authorities, and teachers and researchers in universities worked together in different ways at different times. Teachers and non-governmental workers took the lead in WedG; femocrats in LEAC; and academics in CREG.

In each case I shall first give a brief outline of the history of the project and then look at some of the main problems encountered and what was achieved, ending with an assessment of the (continuing) difficulties of working across the schools-LEA-HE divide. It is, I think, a local history from which we can learn broader lessons.

This is written, of course, with all the provisos one must make when giving accounts of events in which one was a supposedly central character - 'the meta question of what and how we remember, both individually and collectively, and the process of turning memory into history'.² These are my recollections, supplemented by archival material and conversations with a few key actors. A full account would need far more work than I have time for, though I think it is important that it should be done. In particular, I would have liked to interviewed more of the people involved, and those who have taken up post in these localities subsequently, to help in assessing the (intended and unintended) influences we had for good or ill, and to investigate the opposition we encountered more fully. I would also have liked to analyse more closely the texts (magazines, reports, teaching programmes and materials) which remain, though this account does give a context for reading them and some sense of the excitement at the time and the material circumstances in which they were produced .

- 1. Maestros
- 2. Genders
- 3. Educación
- 4. Mujeres universitarias
- 7. Mujeres profesionales

But whatever its shortcomings, this paper fulfills a duty to remember, since feminism is in danger of forgetting its recent history, and memories of anti-sexist/gender work done in the past are certainly very short in many London boroughs. This is partly because the work we did was trashed and networks broken up, as I shall show; and partly because of high staff turnover. But it means that current initiatives to improve boys' achievement are not crediting the contribution of feminist work of the 1980s to the improvement of girls - and boys - academic performance (see also Arnot et al, 1996), and may be unwittingly undoing improvements to pedagogic and management practices.

a. the Women's Education Group (WedG) 1980-1988

'WedG grew out of a meeting [in 1980] of grassroots teachers, youth workers, career [guidance] workers and lecturers who felt the need to make contact with others committed to equal opportunities and positive action for girls. We wanted to create a network of teachers and other workers to exchange experiences, ideas and to provide each other with support and encouragement.

Many of us felt isolated in our work situations and when we publicized our existence as a group the response was overwhelming. Over 400 London teachers have attended our meetings and we have made contact with others outside London.' (Beecham, 1981)

That is to say, the original group resulted from a professional/friendship network between school teachers, several of whom had been doing masters degrees; the academics teaching these courses and involved with initial teacher training and inservice education; Advisory Teachers who had been holding workshops on gender issues in Teachers Centres; Local Education Authority (LEA) Inspectors and Advisors; local Labour Party council members; those working in QUANGOs like the Schools Council (Weiner, 1994 p18) and the Equal Opportunities Commission; and research students and visiting academics from abroad. We held regular seminars at the Institute of Education, which is part of the University of London and has a building in centre of the city, but the field was constructed as much extramurally as academically. It drew on the passion and excitement of the women's movement, and the experience of community organizing many of us had acquired in the 1970s. We constituted the group's presence by producing a newsletter which was circulated to everyone who put their address on a mailing list,³ and, after the first year, we held a conference on 'Equal Opportunities Across the Curriculum'. This was attended by 'more than 700 students, teachers and interested individuals, of whom 150 were from outside the ILEA [inner London] catchment area (WedG 1981).⁴

Following the conference, some WedG members went ahead with trying to raise funding for a more established support/information network to maintain contact around Britain. le to provide

a resource centre and ... an anti-sexist educational magazine and newsletter. Open meetings were held throughout 1982 to discuss how best to achieve these goals. We decided to apply to several funding bodies to support these projects. Finally, in January 1983 the GLC [Greater London Council] Women's Committee and the Inner London Education Authority [ILEA] approved joint funding. (Editorial Collective GEN Issue 1, 1983 p 2)

Thus they caught the rising tide of the ILEA's 'Race, Sex and Class' initiative⁵ and the new urban left's local government women's initiatives.⁶ The ILEA provided two rooms in its Tape and Drama Centre in Princeton Street in central London, and, together with the GLC, funding for the wages of three workers, the purchase of resources, and to run a newsletter/ magazine.

The funders required a formal constitution, which recorded that: 'The name of the organisation is [the] Women's Education Group (WedG) to run a centre called the Women's Education Resource Centre (WERC) and to produce a magazine called GEN.' (minutes 21 Jan 1984) The 'workers',⁷ who had obtained the funding, established and staffed the resources centre and, in collaboration with volunteers, made up the WedG collective. The collective planned weekly meetings - talks, the showing of videos, workshops, a day festival, and exhibitions at outside galleries, eg the Cockpit. A separate section of the collective planned a newsletter and the magazine GEN: an anti-sexist education journal. An attendance allowance was available for childcare for those who came to meetings.

Despite resistance from the ILEA, the Centre, or more specifically the workers' office, soon became a service for women only. On the other hand, the fact that both its hours and collections were geared around the needs of school teachers and youth workers, and to a lesser extent further education teachers, and parents, certainly reflected the populist interests of the politicians who provided funding as well as those of the employees:

'The Women's Education Resource Centre is open to all women interested or involved in education. It is a library of non-sexist children's books, reference books and periodicals covering a wide range of topics, many solely [sic] devoted to anti-sexist, anti-racist education. These together with research on sex differentiation, examples of anti-sexist school policies, curriculum developments, conference reports and teaching materials make-up the resources housed in WERC.

We also maintain a contact network and the centre can be used by women for meetings. All women are welcome to drop in. Holborn is the nearest tube station and there is a car park off Sandland Street.

opening hours 11.00- 6.00 Mon and Wed
11.00-8.0 Tues and Thurs
11-5.0 Fridays
(In school holidays we are open to 6.0 Mon-Thurs and to 5 on Fri)'

(note on back page of GEN issue 3)

GEN soon combined with the Newsletter, and ran for 13 issues (including several double issues), produced at somewhat irregular intervals, from autumn 1983 to February 1988. It was available on subscription, or free to ILEA teachers, with its print run increasing from 2000 to 6000. Funding allowed it to be quite glossy and well designed from the start.⁸

GEN tried to cover national initiatives and events as well as those in London and, from issue 5 (spring 1985), it consciously increased the amount of material it included on non-western countries. Collective members said they regretted it being initially an all White collective, and sought new, Black members and articles on racism and on issues affecting Black women. But they were nonetheless fiercely attacked in a Black women's issue edited by 'front-line activists, Women- Warriors from Five Continents and at least one ocean with a global perspective and so for the first time truly relevant to an extremely broad cross-section of people' (Oct-Dec 1985, GEN issue 6 p.1).

New workers had by then been appointed, and each was encouraged to concentrate on a specific topic. These included self defence for girls and for women teachers (which was controversial - and an article on it in issue 3, summer 1984, was defended in the editorial in issue 4,) and a Black women's creativity project (for writing and the visual arts, see supplement to issue 7/8, March 1986). There were also special issues on young women (issue 9), and on challenging heterosexism (issue 10/11, March 1987), with a final slim double issue when the end was in sight because the GLC had been abolished in 1986 and ILEA was under threat, on the centre's 'continuing .. work with refugees' (issue 12/13, February 1988). This last makes no mention of education.

GEN covered a very wide range of topics, and included a lot of reprints from fringe and local publications. It could however make uncomfortable reading. Disagreements were freely aired and there were a number of sharp personal attacks and self-righteously critical, even hectoring, articles, when legitimate anger should have been directed to issues rather than to individuals. The journal also did not hesitate to criticise its funders' actions and their publications. But from my personal point of view, what was sad about it was that the editors did not articles on higher education: neither general discussions of what was happening to women students and staff, nor women's studies, nor specific discussions of teacher training and INSET (except in issue 10/11 on heterosexism) - even though important changes with major gender implications were being put in place, and even though the ILEA was responsible for polytechnics as well as schools and further education. After issue 2, it did not even include events and courses in HE in its listings or resources section.

This was certainly partly because a number of us who had connections to HE had 'gently disentangled themselves' from WedG to work elsewhere (editorial GEN issue 4, 1984, p2). Personally, after having been seconded to the Open University to head the team in Milton Keynes producing its first Women's Studies course (1980-1983), my involvement on return to teaching in London was mainly with continuing the work within the Institute of Education which had started with WedG. Moreover, since there was considerable staff turnover in WERC from 1985 onwards, although at first I kept in close touch even when I could not manage to get to meetings, as the staff members I knew moved on, I stopped dropping in. But it was also a reaction to WedG's view that the real EO work was being done in the schools - which I didn't and don't agree with - and its 'anti-elitism', maintained despite the fact that an increasing proportion of the population and especially of women were then going to university. I do however understand teachers' reaction to the arrogance of higher education and the use of theory as mystification, and to the teacher blaming present in much 1960s educational research.

b. the Centre for Research and Education on Gender (CREG)

1985 to the present

With the departure of WedG from the Institute of Education, getting sexism addressed in our educational research and teacher education had been left hanging. An informal group⁹ of 'Women at the Institute' continued the work, holding seminars, producing booklets on who was interested in women's and gender issues in the institution, and coordinating teaching on gender in initial teacher training and inservice courses. But the group had no official existence or resources and we were unable to go down the route followed by the Universities of Kent and Lancaster and gather individuals together around a Women's Studies course because of the prior existence in the Institute of a Masters degree in Human Rights. While this had some illustrious feminist alumni, it did not fulfill a networking role and it precluded others from teaching in its area.

However, we persevered - and the full story deserves to be told in full elsewhere. Here suffice it to say that although from 1982-5 we tried to establish a unit to parallel the Centre for Multicultural Education which had been established in the Institute in 1979, gender was not of as much concern to the senior management of the Institute as race, and we had instead slowly and laboriously to network and push proposals through committees, eventually being allowed to set up a Working Party to consider, and then to develop a proposal for a Centre for Research and Education on Gender, provided it was at 'no cost' to the Institute.¹⁰

We then had to seek funding externally - unsuccessfully from the ILEA and the GLC, but we did get a small Economic and Social Research Council grant to build a database on current research on gender and women which enabled a one day a week researcher/administrator¹¹ to be employed; and she continued for the following two years (1987 and 1988) when we ran self-funding international summers schools. We also worked with Teacher Researchers from various LEAs on one-day-a-week secondments to develop equal opportunities initiatives in primary and secondary schools, and ran INSET courses in LEA Centres, which gave antisexist teaching some credibility within our institution.¹²

Eventually, in 1990, ten years after the first WedG meetings and after some very difficult negotiations, we were able to start a Women's Studies and Education Masters course, and in 1993 to make an appointment in this area¹³ - up to then all such work had been done on top of people's other commitments; and we have since successfully competed for ESRC funded research projects within CREG and become a major centre for feminist research in education in the 1990s.

The 'virtual' Centre was, however, used through the 1980s as a base for topics considered too hot to handle in Teachers Centres - notably a day course on the 'Harassment of Women and Girls: sex and power in school',¹⁴ and for lesbian and gay issues.¹⁵ It was also a central, neutral ground between LEAs in which to base a network and support group, and in April 1986 CREG organized 'the first ever conference for advisory teachers, advisors and inspectors with responsibilities for equal opportunities and those working in the field of pre- and in-service training for teachers, whose work involves them with issues of gender' (Times Education Supplement 7.1.86). Moreover, resources and individuals came to us in extremis, eg when the ILEA was finally disbanded in 1990 and teachers' centres premises were 'recycled', many of the WedG resources came to rest, and continued to be used by teachers, within the Institute of Education. Hence CREG was an obvious a base for a major cross-LEA initiative in the late 1980s.

c. the London Boroughs' Consortium Equal Opportunities (Gender) Project, later the Local Education Authorities' Consortium for Equal Opportunities (LEAC) 1987-90

LEAC had its origins in a 1985-86 Schools Curriculum Development Council/ Equal Opportunities Commission (SCDC/EOC) pilot project in the London Borough of Merton, where Kate Myers worked with eight schools to promote EO work (Myers, 1991). One outcome was Genderwatch!, a set of self-evaluation schedules for schools (Myers, 1987); and another, when she was appointed as Equal Opportunities Organizer by Ealing LEA, was a collaboration with Jenny Hall (of SCDC) to gather together a group of outer London Local Education Authorities committed 'to change the image of [EO] work' (Myers 1991, p5).¹⁶ They deliberately involved both Labour and Tory led councils to stress that EO was not political but 'simply good educational practice'.

It was proposed that each LEA make a £4000 contribution towards the salary of a central co-ordinator, to be based in the Institute of Education, who would be the centre of a support network for the one or more Equal Opportunities Advisory Teachers (ATs) and the EO Inspector or Advisor in each LEA. Schools which volunteered to participate could use 'quality' inservice education organized centrally by the coordinator, and the LEAs would provide a supply teacher to cover for the times when the Head and/or the School Based EO Coordinator (a class teacher who had one afternoon a week free to organize anti-sexist work) were attending INSET or promoting EO work in their school.

The Institute appointed the Coordinator¹⁷ and provided an office, seminar rooms and conference venues, and the support of a member of its teaching staff. The SCDC initially provided support for the meetings of a Steering/Advisory Group consisting of all the LEA inspectors/advisors, representatives of the ATs and from the Institute, and the Coordinator¹⁸ And some of the funds were used to pay for an evaluation by two external consultants.¹⁹

The LEAC Coordinator and the ATs then organized a programme of conferences and INSET, with occasional specialist input from the Institute of Education, and meetings for ATs, and for Officers and Advisors, to share and discuss their problems and successes in implementing EO initiatives. The Consortium produced annual reports, including accounts of the LEAs, the ways in which the Coordinator and ATs were working together, and reports on the work being done in individual LEAs and schools;²⁰ reports from the evaluators (Janes & Lloyd, 1989; Lloyd & Janes, 1988); and a policy documents on the timing of inservice sessions to best suit women, as some LEAs were moving to twilight and weekend sessions with no supply cover to release teachers during school hours (French, Harrison, & Packer, 1990).

The participating LEAs changed in the second year²¹, and again in the third²², with an increasing geographical spread out to the shire counties and an increased political and ideological range in the member authorities. There was also an increasing disparity in the numbers of ATs in the LEAs, such that, in the final year, one Authority had four experienced people, and another only one: a part-timer with no EO experience. Also some schools had coordinators with regular EO time allotted, while others had no time, or not even a named coordinator at all. Several EO-committed officers and ATs left and were (or were not) replaced. And the first co-ordinator moved (autumn 1988) to a more permanent post, and her place was taken and developed by a successor.²³

Moreover, after a year the SCDC was transformed into the National Curriculum Council, and those of its employees who were retained were moved to York, including the officer and administrator who had supported the Merton/Genderwatch project and then LEAC. The Institute therefore had to take over the co-ordination of the Advisory Group (which later became a Steering Committee, with the Chair and administrative support rotating among the LEAs), and it also provided the administration for a smaller Management Group - as recommended by the evaluators - to provide day to day support for the co-ordinator. And last but not least, the Institute had to take over billing and extracting money from the LEAs.

By 1990, central government cutbacks in LEA financing; sensitivities in Haringey around gender and sexuality (following the Positive Images initiative, 1986-88 - see Cooper, 1989; Cooper, 1994); and a change of political party in local government in Ealing (in May 1990, see Myers, 1991) - two key LEAs for LEAC - meant it was no longer possible to get enough authorities to commit themselves in advance.²⁴ So, despite the plans for 1990-91 being well developed early, and better presented, and the Consortium having finally formally sorted out its Aims to everyone's satisfaction (!), it came to an end.

Despite my efforts to get the Institute of Education to give the coordinator a two year rolling contract, on the basis that we did have four boroughs signed up to continue in June 1990 and could certainly continue to raise more than her salary each year from INSET work, she was given only a one year fixed term continuation, and the organised programme of gender INSET ceased. So she spent most of 1990-91 contributing to mainstream Institute PGCE and Curriculum Studies teaching and to Women into Management short courses, and then she moved to another job.

Problems faced by WedG

The group from the earlier WedG which wrote the proposals and got financial support from ILEA and GLC, suffered early and continuing pangs of guilt. They were worried about 'taking money from more worthy causes' and about the journal being elitist and 'ivory tower'. This was exacerbated by a public contestation of their having got the money and taken the jobs without advertising them, which led to an open meeting held at the London women's movement centre, A Woman's Place. One special line of attack was the fact that all three were White.

The EO policies which were part of local Labour Party municipal projects in the early 1980s involved having separate and equal committees and units for each set of social inequalities. The establishment of these units was important as an indicator that social differences other than those related to social class were now considered important and were going to be tackled; but having separate race, women's, and lesbian and gay units did not allow for the interaction of the various sets of power relations, nor for the fluidity whereby which status is most salient varies with context. It did however feed into a politics where power relations were reduced to questions of personal identity and minority status essentialism - where people had to be accepted as what they identified themselves as being, and where they had a right to be heard on the basis of experiences they were assumed automatically to have had as a member of a particular group - as a black, working class lesbian, for instance.

Certainly at the time of the establishment of WedG/WERC/GEN in 1983, feminism was changing from stressing women's difference from men, to an increased stress on differences among women; and from a politics based on group membership and individuals' involvement in oppositional practices, to identity politics. Subsequent appointments to WedG were therefore primarily (race) identity based, with feminist and school and community activist experience coming secondary. The politics of the group thus moved from gender-based oppositional separatism to a stress on the diversity of women and identity affirmation strategies, including the promotion of cultural and artistic endeavours: from 'sisterly' support to guarded coalitions.

But although these changes made important interventions and allowed some individual, previously silenced, voices to be heard, they prevented other political issues being debated openly. Since the management structure established for WedG²⁵ was egalitarian, with open consultation, it was possible for identity politics to be used to allow intolerance of others, and to cover personal antagonisms and ambitions, with little resistance. And because the editors of the journal (from issues 1 to 4) felt privileged, highly visible and responsible, they narrowed their audience down to the 'grassroots' and stressed political correctness; and this well-intentioned practice allowed some authors to adopt a self righteous and critical, rather than a generous and encouraging tone, which discouraged risk-taking theoretical discussions and writing from potential contributors who want to avoid personal attacks.

Problems faced by LEAC

LEAC also spent a considerable time defining its management structure, but it was a much larger and much more unwieldy being. The first coordinator was committed to a 'cooperative' style of working, but her appointment late in the academic year - and her taking school holidays - meant a slow start, made slower by consultation, and there was not the large inaugural conference at the start of school year in September, with a programme planned for the term presented in a well produced booklet, which those concerned with visibility wanted. It was also what headteachers needed, because they had to fit time out from school for INSET into their staff diaries.

Issues of management also lead to pressure from feminist ATs and the coordinator to reduce the hierarchy they saw embedded in ATs being only represented (by one of their number) on the management committee. They wanted to be involved in the discussions about the Consortium as a whole and to agree the aims, policies and practices before starting. This sat ill with their line managers' views on their time commitments, and it was difficult to agree on aims anyway because of the very different commitments to EO of the LEAs involved - whatever the common commitments of the officers who had pressed to get the LEA into the Consortium in the first place.²⁶

The differential commitment of LEAs involved both political differences around the desirability of EO work, and a very differential provision of resources for such work - the two being, of course, interconnected. So, eg, in the first year of the Consortium, one of the Conservative authorities had virtually to hide its involvement and the Inspector in charge was not able to come to the Steering Group and only a dozen schools were involved; while at the other extreme, Ealing, with a newly urban-left Labour controlled council, had a full-time, especially appointed EO expert, with three (later four) full-time ATs, and 40 volunteer schools.²⁷ But even in some Labour districts, ATs were rather unsupported. Some initially did not have even a desk and a phone; some could work with cross-departmental Women's Units and Race Units in their boroughs but others were isolated within Education; and the amount of time devoted to EO, and the knowledge of gender issues, of the Officers they were working to and who represented them on the LEAC Management Committee, also varied considerably.

Moreover, as the political pressure on some LEAs forced them to withdraw in the third year, and the consortium was desperate for new members, it had to accept any LEA that came, so its members became geographically wider and wider spread (Kent, Bucks and Surrey). Hence the distance teachers had to travel in to INSET, or the coordinator and ATs to travel out, was considerable. LEAC also had to accept that some of the ATs being put forward had no feminist background knowledge.

Hence what LEAs could put in and wanted to take out of the Consortium became increasingly diverse. All wanted (and had to show their Chief Education Officer and finance committee that they were getting) their money's worth out of the centre, but none was keen/able to release much time to help a neighbouring LEA. There were complaints that some ATs spent too much of their time at the IoE - helping the coordinator or other ATs, or improving their own expertise (prior to moving on to another job). And while all the LEAs were keen for the Consortium produce some publications, most did not want their staff take time out from working with schools to do the writing, and many were nervous of writing anyway. Moreover ways of tackling issues which might be politically contentious had to be tailored to the sensibilities of the more conservative authorities.

It was thus difficult to know even what INSET to provide - the very *raison d'être* of the Consortium. Which phase or topics to prioritise? Assuming what levels of prior knowledge and experience? How frequently to run meetings? If coordinators came in regularly, when did they have time to follow up ideas in their schools? If they didn't come often, did they feel isolated and discouraged? Some authorities released most of the school-based coordinators each Thursday afternoon, and if they all came into the Institute, they 'swamped' those from other LEAs. There were complaints that there was not enough information in the programme to allow schools to know which sessions to choose to attend; that sessions were not written up fully for those who could not attend; that there was not systematic needs identification; and that the evaluation of the sessions was poor - not analysed and written up systematically, or that events were evaluated not the programme as a whole. Etc, etc. Which is not to say that most people did not get a lot out of the sharing of ideas which took place, but rather than no one could be fully satisfied.²⁸ All of which was compounded by the impossibility of long term planning. We were never certain until late summer who would be involved the following year, or if the programme would continue at all. Basic sessions had to be constantly repeated; contentious issues continually put on the back burner. And the poor conditions of employment in a low status (even if interesting and personally compelling) field, encouraged many to pass through rather than commit themselves to the project.

The basic problem was of course underfunding. The Consortium always needed a few more member LEAs, or a few more thousand pounds from each, to be really viable. Consequently, although the coordinator had a good office and salary, and plenty of teaching rooms were available, there was no money for secretarial support (till spring 1989) and no computer. (I got one on loan.) Each coordinator therefore had to do a lot of routine administration and preparation at the expense of other activities focussed more closely on the promotion of EO in education; and needed desktop publication and marketing skills they did not necessarily have. The Consortium therefore never achieved the national profile it merited, and it did not fully develop possible links with other institutions (eg work with the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative, the National Curriculum Council, School Governor training, and the Equal Opportunities Commission, *inter alia*, were all mentioned in meetings, but not followed up).

The short-termism and shortage of funding in LEAC also undoubtedly contributed to the uncertainties about my own role. LEAC was centred at the Institute because of the existence of CREG and to get 'cost effective, guaranteed quality INSET'. But there was little income for my teaching time²⁹ and no money to buy in other Institute expertise, and it was not possible to recruit a second IoE representative. Instead of using higher education as a teaching and research base, LEAC used it as a geographical centre and as an editorial base for publications; and, as the evaluators noted, expected me to be the line manager for the coordinator - though I thought I had volunteered to work with her. This grew more marked when the NCC severed not only administrative but also financial links, and I/ the IoE was left in charge of chasing money and supporting the evaluators and servicing the meetings of the Advisory Committee and the Management Group.

Achievements

To evaluate properly what the two projects did, nonetheless, manage to achieve, unfortunately needs more than the resources available for this paper. One of the problems of EO work in the UK (cf Australia and the USA) has been the lack of evaluation or the restricted evaluation that was undertaken (or possible) given the resources available and the fact that the projects were cut off in mid career.

WedG certainly provided resources and support for teachers; it allowed the exchange of ideas; it gave individuals a sense of being part of a strong movement; and it helped raise the visibility of gender in education through its talks, videos, exhibitions and its journal. It could be very outspoken and produced material on race and sexuality and violence against girls and women, and critiques some of ILEA's own publications (eg the Hargreaves and Fish Reports), which ILEA itself could/did not. Most importantly it helped develop 'mothers' (as opposed to parents), and Black women and lesbians (as mothers and teachers) as communities in which to campaign and as constituencies (or as we might now say 'stakeholders') to be consulted.

LEAC had far more resources, but was much more bounded, not only by the managerial problems outlined above, but also because radical approaches were organised out and liberal pluralism prevailed. This was partly a result of the policy making processes (proceeding by consensus and voluntary involvement), but also because (and here I refer to general discussions on the fall of the urban left which are developed in the next section) the dominant ideology of education in 1980s suggested that articulating alternative, counter-intuitive forms of knowledge and explicitly advocating the contestation and transformation of social meanings was transgressive of Education's proper role and remit. This was rarely challenged even by progressives working in LEAs. ³⁰

Where it was challenged and views which were commonplace in feminism were put forward - eg critiques of the family, or saying that homosexuality was acceptable and lesbianism a mode of resisting male dominance, or that sexist and racists should change their behaviour at work or be dismissed - it aroused phenomenal opposition and LEAs allowing such discussions were represented as fascist.

What we did manage to achieve certainly was getting these institutions up and running. WedG and LEAC clearly worked largely 'because people willed them to' (Janes & Lloyd, LEAC evaluation 1989 p1): because committed women and some men worked hard to make EO work part of their jobs as educators, and then put in many extra hours voluntarily to make change happen. That both these projects ended was NOT because they were not used or wanted; nor was it because of political differences among feminists (which are so often blamed for the fragmentation and decline of the WLM). Rather the answer to 'whatever happened to these particular Equal Opportunities projects' was rather that they were attacked, indirectly or directly, by Conservative central government and ridiculed by the tabloid press as part of more general moves against left-wing local government and 'progressive' education. And they were not supported by the national Labour Party because of its distancing itself from 'loony leftism' from 1987 onwards, in its over-riding concern with electability.

They nonetheless produced changes in individual teachers careers,³¹ in the patterns of girls achievement, and a lasting effect on the culture, or at least the rhetoric of education.

There is much less attention to improving the position of women and girls in education in 1999 than there was ten years ago, 'political' people concerned about the subordination of women no longer use the language of EO, and the renewed concern with 'boys underachievement' is certainly partly a backlash; but there is undoubtedly much more concern with gender in education, and a very changed situation, from twenty years ago. Two-thirds of the schools surveyed for the EOC in 1995 had instituted EO policies since 1988 (Arnot et al 1996), OFSTED inspections look at EO issues; and government agencies have gender working parties. EO now has become quite managerialist - transformed but embedded in institutional language. But schools I visit hold on to (at least) two discourses on gender - the managerial AND the socially transformative one, and continue to work creatively even with the National Curriculum.

The attack on left-wing local government

The history of Tory moves against left-wing local authorities in the 1980s when the government saw their potential for undermining Thatcherite reforms; and its use of projects around anti-racism and lesbian and gay equality, and to a lesser extent around gender, to castigate the socialist municipal project, has been told elsewhere.³² Here I will just note how the government and media represented the improved funding for community projects addressing women's issues in the 1980s as reprehensibly luxurious provision, and the establishment of local Council Women's Units to develop and implement women-friendly policies as a 'Kremlin-like' abuse of power. Supporters of such initiatives were thereby put on the defensive - which certainly did not encourage innovative thinking and indeed made many severely censor themselves. Labour councillors concerned with electability, and local government employees/femocrats concerned with accountability, held back. Added to this, central government intervened legally to diminish local government powers and imposed major budgetary cuts. Thus many previously local responsibilities were moved to newly established central bodies; and the new urban left largely disappeared with the remodelling of local government from 1987-93.

As regards education, left-wing councils' activities were tied to, and dismissed as further examples of, the problems with 'progressive' teaching. Encouraging girls to take science was OK; but discussion of sexist violence and sexual abuse in schools was another example of misguided modern teaching; while 'promoting' 'positive images' of homosexuality was beyond the pale. Some CEOs, including Haringey's, were sent bullying letters by the DES to remind them of the limits of LEA discretion, which raised education service anxieties (Cooper 1994, p 119). And there were media panics and arguments for the 'banning' of certain books (notably Jenny lives with Eric and Martin) and, conversely, attacks on the supposed banning of 'classics' like Barbie dolls. (See Sue Adler's chapter in this volume.) Central government and the media presented education which confirmed the gender status quo as 'not political', while purposive efforts to change relations between men and women (in radical directions) (by local government) were constructed as inappropriate/ 'brainwashing' of children (who were presented as empty vessels accepting everything that teachers said).

That is to say, in the attack on the left's local government project, and on left-wing LEAs, it was not only what was being said that was objected to, but also (indeed mainly) the purposive nature of the intervention which was rubbished as being 'ideological'. All of which ended with councils defensive about policies, and willing to allow only incremental change and nothing that could be seen as radical reform. To this were added cuts in central funding, which affected LEA Equal Opportunities work because the numbers of Advisors and Advisory Teachers fell drastically. (Many were scale 2 teachers on short term contracts who could be returned to the classroom.) And anti-sexist and anti-racist initiatives were additionally disrupted by the brutally swift introduction of major educational change in a series of Education Acts, including the major 1988 Act.³³ This required LEAs to concentrate their resources on implementing the new (supposedly gender insensitive; 'non political'; non ideological - sic!) requirements of the new legislation. Finally the ILEA itself was broken up in 1990, in part at least because of the socialist majority among its elected members and its record of commitment to equality of opportunity.

For WedG and LEAC this meant that, whether or not we would have been able to resist ideological pressures and ridicule, all the structures we were using were continually being remodelled, cut back or disbanded, with less and less money available and more and more conservative, centralised control - and consequent insecurity of jobs and resources and time wasted chasing funds. It became impossible to make sensible forward plans and finally each institution broke down, confirming earlier radical feminist concerns about becoming dependent on the state.

Operating across the educational sector

To a certain extent we managed to counter some of these restrictions by operating creatively across the school-voluntary sector-LEA-HE divide, as well as across our political differences. Of course each sector had its own specific immediate priorities, whether these were raising awareness in youth clubs, or changing the pedagogy and curriculum content to improve the experience of girls in classrooms, or developing actions in minority communities, or finding practicable and not too contentious projects with swift and visible results in local politics, or trying to research and theorise on-going changes in academe. Not surprisingly, we did not manage to overcome all the hierarchical relationships and tensions which exist between the groups: between primary and secondary and tertiary education, and between teachers and LEA Inspectors and HMI; nor the requirement for femocrats to appear confident and authoritative (not to exposing their uncertainties) and to engage in a certain amount of competitive power dressing!

But ILEA and LEAC did manage to use the extra-governmental WedG and CREG to construct meanings and strategies outside the boundaries placed on local government itself, as noted above: WedG as a source of critiques of ILEA in-house documents and a constructor of specific campaigning constituencies; CREG as a location for discussing dangerous topics. (It is no accident that the photos of individuals in the GEN issue on homosexuality are all of workers in lesbian and gay units, in WedG and in the Institute of Education. School teachers and education Inspectors could not and cannot afford such visibility.) GEN published articles on topics which LEAC could never have tackled, while LEAC got an assurance of academic credibility from the University and its INSET could include 'the latest feminist thinking' without committing LEAs to such ideas.

The Institute itself unquestionably benefited for several years from the contacts made through WedG and especially through LEAC. It helped us to develop ideas and also to recruit to our MA in Women's Studies and Education which began in 1990-91, and to PhD studies. I sorely miss having this extensive contact with schools and LEAs, especially since it has not been possible for many HE teachers and researchers to contribute to Initial Teacher Education since the mid 1980s because we do not have recent school classroom teaching experience (see Wormald, 1985; Leonard, 1989).

Conversely, work done in HE and particularly in Women's Studies (often by teachers in their dissertations) was an important intellectual base for EO work and politics, and the powerful innovative and oppositional discourses developed by HE have been missing from grassroots school and adult education work on women/ gender of late. One of the enduring legacies of the Thatcher-Major years was the splitting of feminist networks and the informal cross sectoral, as well as the institutional support, they built.

CREG has however survived and even strengthened, and far from being a small esoteric activity remote from the real world of schools and LEAs, it can now provide the continuity and memories lost in the fluctuations and short-termism of LEAs: archives, libraries - and a location for DfEE researchers to phone and ask 'to you know anything about what ILEA did in the 1980s?' (January 1999).

Which returns me to the issue of memory with which I started. Feminists active in the 1980s grew up with just a caricature of what was achieved by the first wave of western feminism. Today, although we have to some extent recovered our long term history, we have lost the recent past; and this matters for the future, for without this knowledge we are condemned to repetition: to rediscovering and saying again from the start what was said in 1900 and 1968 and 1988, rather than updating and moving on. When I talk about the events described in this paper, people say they had no idea how hard we had to struggle then. They thought being a feminist was just difficult nowadays because of shortage of money and time and interpersonal and inter-institutional competitiveness.

Certainly the modes of resistance have changed. But the important point is that the things women achieved in the 1970s and 80s have either now been made to seem inevitable: in the course of things, or misattributed (eg girls achievement as due to the National Curriculum), or if they did not survive the trashing, completely forgotten. Our successes then were the result of a strong social movement, and this movement was at the time, and has also subsequently been covered in mud. Women are still unwilling to affiliate fully with it and use the classic phrase 'I'm not a feminist, but ...' We therefore owe it to each other to reflect upon, and to declare repeatedly and in detail what feminism has actually managed to achieve, and how.

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Footnotes

¹ This Australian neologism was produced to refer to

'official or state feminists, namely women who are employed within state bureaucratic positions to work on advancing the position of women in the wider society through the development of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination strategies of change.' (Yeatman, 1990 p 65).

They are distinguished from women career public servants in that

'a femocrat is "a feminist in an official capacity, that is, someone for whom their feminism is considered a qualification for which they are selected to do the job they are performing" ' (Eisenstein 1987 quoted in Yeatman 1990, p 65).

This would therefore include those employed as women's officers in political parties and trade unions, women's units in councils, law centres, Oxfam, and economic development agencies; but not those working in voluntary agencies if they do not have full-time, professional or career-level positions' (Yeatman 1990, p 66).

See also Halford, 1988; Halford, 1992; and Watson, 1992.

² Liz Jacka quoted in Bashford, 1998 p 52

³ The newsletters were first produced by Dale Spender and Renate Klein, and an early survey of those on the mailing list was analysed by Maureen Dyer (then on a study visit from Australia).

⁴ The conference planning group consisted of:

Geraldine Locise	ILEA Careers
Sheridan Welsh	ILEA F.E.
Gaby Weiner	Schools Council
Cathy Moorhouse	ILEA Learning Materials Service
Yvonne Beecham	ILEA Teacher
Diana Leonard	Institute of Education
Ruth Van Dyke	London School of Economics
Kate Myers	ILEA Teacher
Liz Wynton	CASSOE
Margherita Rendel	Institute of Education

The conference was sponsored by the ILEA, the Schools Council and the London University Institute of Education.

⁵ See ILEA, 1982; ILEA, 1983 and the chapter by Frances Morrell in this volume.

⁶ See Boddy & Fudge, 1984; Halford, 1992; and Lansley & al, 1989.

⁷ Initially Ruth Van Dyke, Marilyn ? and ? Later appointments included Claudia da Silva, Maud Sulter, Hazel ?, ?? and a researcher worker Amanda Green.

⁸ Unlike the Manchester produced Women and Education, which started with a Women and Education conference in 1974 and was typewritten and roneoed. The CASSOE Newsletter was produced more regularly than GEN and was very thorough in its coverage of events, but it also consisted of simple roneoed sheets.

⁹ Coordinated by Janet Maw, Lynne Chisholm and myself.

¹⁰ Ie no staffing, though we have always had an office/resources centre and have been able informally to use other fixed resources, even if we have had to cover variable costs.

¹¹ Margaret Littlewood

¹² Eg Valerie Wakerdine collaborated with the ILEA Inspector, Carol Adams, to run short, research based courses (Adams & Wakerdine, 1986) and Janet Holland and I developed 10 session 'twilight' INSET courses in Ealing (1987 and 1988), Waltham Forest (1988), and Merton (1989).

¹³ Debbie Epstein

¹⁴ May 1985 with funding from ILEA, which their Advisor, Hilary Bourdillon and two teachers, Carol Jones and Margaret Sandra, organised with me, and whose Isledon Teachers' Centre did the administration

¹⁵ See GEN issue 10/11, pp 23-4.

¹⁶ 'Key people involved in the SCDC/EOC's equal opportunities project were now working in Merton, Hounslow and Ealing and were prepared to develop strategies that were tested in the project. The SCDC agreed to trawl other London boroughs to see if any of them would be interested in joining an Equal Opportunities Consortium. Enfield, Haringey, Redbridge and Waltham Forest became part of the group.' (Myers, 1991 p 5). Ie seven in all.

¹⁷ Lina Patel, who sadly died in 1997.

¹⁸ Participants in 1987-88:

Ealing	Kate Myers, Hilary Claire, Sybil Naidu, Kathleen Pepper, Diane Reay
Enfield	Alan Mutter, Kath Terrell
Haringey	Bob Crossman, Sheila Miles, Jean French
Houslow	Iain Porteus, Bunny Veglio
Merton	Sue Holmes, Sue Taylor, Mary Linnington
Redbridge	Simon Black, Maureen Dainty
Waltham Forest	Christine Archer, Roy Blackwell, Joan McKenna
SCDC	Jenny Hall, Gillian Baderman, John Blakemore
Institute of Education	Lina Patel, Diana Leonard

¹⁹ Julie Janes and Penny Lloyd

²⁰ The first annual report, for 1987-88, was well produced, with photos and cartoons, largely thanks to one of the Ealing Advisory Teachers, Hilary Claire, and the LEAC secretary, Helen Lai, but it did not appear till 1989. Later ones were more modest.

²¹ 1988-89: Hounslow, Haringey, Enfield, Merton and Ealing continued ; Barnet, Kent, Hillingdon joined; Redbridge and Waltham Forest had left.

Participants

Barnet	Jay Myers, Anne Bulloch, Jenny Collinson
Ealing	Kate Myers, Hilary Claire, Sybil Naidu, Kathleen Pepper, Diane Reay
Enfield	Alan Mutter, Kath Terrell/Jane Hobday
Haringey	Bob Crossman, Sheila Miles, Jean French
Hillingdon	Dick Ewan
Houslow	Iain Porteus, Bunny Veglio
Kent	Maggie Gregory, Barbara Brown, Gillian Watson
Merton	Rosalyn George, Mary Linnington

Institute of Education Lina Patel/Mary Packer, Diana Leonard
Evaluators Julie Janes, Penny Lloyd
NCC Gillian Baderman
HMI Margaret Caistor

22 1989-90: Ealing, Enfield, Haringey, Hounslow, Kent, Merton, Hillingdon (partial membership) continued; Bucks and Surrey joined; and Barnet left.

Participants

Buckinghamshire Pam Davies, Christine Alger
Ealing Kate Myers, Hilary Claire, Sybil Naidu, Kathleen Pepper, Hilary Soper
Enfield Alan Mutter, Jane Hobday
Haringey Jean French, Lesley Hagan
Hillingdon (associate) Paul Saundercock
Houslow Iain Porteus, Sue Harrison
Kent Maggie Gregory, Gillian Watson, Annie Carruthers
Merton Rosalyn George, Mary Linnington
Surrey Penny Gaunt, Geoff Taylor, Pauline Williams
Institute of Education Mary Packer, Diana Leonard
HMI Margaret Caistor
TVEI Judith Black/ Heather Flint

23 Mary Packer

24 To contributing not only to the central, Institute, costs but also to guarantee the salary of an EO Advisory Teacher, plus a portion of the time of an Advisor/Inspector, plus the costs of supply teachers, plus travel expenses.

25 Initially through the debates over the problem of men, which continued through many sets of minutes, and then through lengthy discussions of the collective's policies and working methods (see GEN issue 2, 1994, editorial).

26 Here again identity politics and race - expressed in a stated concern about whether Genderwatch! was a proper basis for the Consortium's work - was also a cover for other things, including a personal antagonism between an AT and its author.

27 In 1987-88 the numbers of schools participating were: Merton 41 (including second wave, after the earlier SCDC project), Ealing 40, Hounslow 23, Waltham Forest 20, Haringey 15, Redbridge 12, Enfield 8.

28 The annual report for 1989-90 records the following topics (with the numbers attending):

day conferences - Education Reform Act (59); men's (9) and women's (33) groups; Equal Opportunities issues (54); International Women's Day (36); further education, cross curriculum (47); and sexuality (31)

half day sessions - pastoral care, assessment and testing (54); working with others (32); sexuality (26); school-based awareness raising skills - 2 sessions (30 + 19); evaluation and monitoring (34); planning for 1990-91 (10); working with men and boys (22); harassment (25); science; and geography in the humanities (16)

INSET series for ATs

series of visits from members of the EOC, HMI and DfE.

²⁹ The Institute took 10% of the total income in the first year and 20% in the second and third, to cover the costs of office, rooms, on-costs for the coordinator, and supposedly £3000 for my time.

³⁰ Cf the very interesting and detailed work of Davina Cooper on the effects on Lesbian and Gay activism of engagement in local government in Haringey in the same period (Cooper, 1994).

³¹ A friend started her first teaching job in Ealing on the day the Council leadership changed hands. She described to me how at the first staff meeting the Head 'quite matter of factly' offered day release to anyone who wanted go to a lesbian teachers group, and how all the parents were invited to the launch of the new school policy. The teachers were outraged on hearing that the EO staff had been locked out of their offices by the Tory councillors. These experiences were formative and had stayed with her through her entire teaching career.

³² See eg Leach, 1989; Mather, 1989; Gyford & al., 1989.

³³ Which introduced of course, inter alia, a National Curriculum and national Standard Attainment Testing.