Contemporary Issues in Gender and Education

Dorottya Rédai
Central European University, Budapest

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Some important contemporary issues

• The feminization of schooling and the crisis of masculinity
• Gender and citizenship in the educational context
• Gender and sexuality in schooling
• Gender-based bullying, violence, cyber-harassment
• Intersectionality in school research
Context

- neoliberal marketization of education
  - performativity (not in Butler’s sense)
  - competitiveness
  - exclusion of certain groups of learners
  - standardization of measurement and learning outcomes
  - market models
Context

• critical sociology of education
  – role of school in the reproduction of social inequalities along axes of gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality (recently)
  – shift from girls and boys to masculinities and femininities and sexualities

• neoliberal/postfeminist discourses of girlpower

• sexualisation of young people, esp. girls – moral panic
1. The feminization of schooling and the crisis of masculinity

- women teachers: great majority esp. in lower education – low prestige, low pay, blame culture
- 1980s: feminists arguing for increasing the number of males in primary education
- education policy: male role models would eliminate macho, laddish behaviour in schools – as that sort of masculinity was related to boys’ underachievement
- public opinion: boys lack role models – boys become feminised ---> lad culture, learning is uncool – effortless achievement is the ideal for boys
1. The feminization of schooling and the crisis of masculinity – feminist critiques

Since 1990s: narrowing gender gap – waves of panic over boys’ underachievement in schools

• not new phenomenon – now: less jobs, girls have greater access to education and higher professional goals
• debate ignores race and class differences - greater effects on achievement than gender
• focus on boys overshadows girls’ problems in education
• role model theory: unexamined assumptions about the influence of teachers’ gender
• myth: current educational topics and methods don’t meet boys’ interests and that’s why they underachieve – no evidence
• boys don’t underachieve in every school subject – focus on boys’ language skills improvement, not on girls’ maths skill improvement
• the notion of achievement: limited to school performance
2. Gender and citizenship in the educational context

- equity in citizenship – social, legal, economic citizenship
- schools: educate the citizen and provide citizenship education
- education: cultural and social capital - raises gap in access to citizenship rights if unequally distributed
- feminist perspective on citizenship education: challenging social conditions that sustain women’s second-class citizenship
- citizenship education based on abstract notions: can re-establish women’s and minority groups’ subordination
- nation-based concepts of citizenship: fundamentally exclusionary
- separation of public and private in citizenship theory - focusing on the public sphere: ignoring issues affecting women in the private sphere
- liberal democratic concept of citizenship: stresses the individual over groups – how to address collective identities and issues of difference?
- model of good citizenship: based on the heterosexual married family model – exclusionary
- need to include sexuality in citizenship education – sexual order is part of the gender order which is the basis of social order

(Arnot, 2005, Arnot and Dillabough 2000)
3. Gender and sexuality in schooling

3.1. The (uncomfortable) relationship of sexuality and schooling

• school as a sexual/non-sexual space - “informal sexuality curriculum” (Pascoe 2007)

• body/mind division in modernist conceptualization of school education (Alldred and David 2007)

• students and teachers as sexual/non-sexual beings (Youdell, Allen, Epstein, Kehily, Renold, Pascoe)
3. Gender and sexuality in schooling

3.2. LGBTQ students

- Liberal understandings of identity, tolerance, safety, equity → promoting the separation of “queer” youth and “normal” youth – oppression and victimization, pathologization of queer youth
- Contemporary understandings of youth → difficult for young people to embrace non-normative identities
- Subject position: adults (teachers) administer a group with problems and needs - LGBT students constructed as a problem instead of homophobia
- “Just like everyone else” approach – normalisation - codification of sexual and gender identities as stable categories with fixed meanings
- Researching LGBTQ youth in education: interrogation of production of identities and practices, challenging social and institutional norms - how exclusions take place in micro-processes of school (Rasmussen, Rofes and Talburt 2004)
3. Gender and sexuality in schooling

3.3. child and adolescent sexuality theories

- sexual ‘moral panic’ around the sexualisation of young people (Coy & Garner 2012)
- earlier socialisation and psychological stage theories: childhood as developmental stages towards adulthood (Waites 2005)
- adolescence: medicalised, pathologised concept – stormy and difficult phase of psychological and biological transition towards ‘stable’ adulthood - importance of adult monitoring and guidance (Talburt 2004)
- childhood as historically, culturally variable and relational; children as actors with agency
- educational discourses of child sexuality: children as ‘innocent’, asexual or pre-sexual – if acknowledged, institutionally regulated and discouraged
- raced and classed child sexuality
- Silencing and constructing/problematising/medicalising child and adolescent sexualities parallelly, esp. non-heteronormative sexualities
- schools are saturated with sexuality – discourses of heterosexuality as a resource for building relationships with peers and adults (Epstein et al 2003)
3. Gender and sexuality in schooling

3.4. sex education

- form of official acknowledgement of sexuality in schooling
- contemporary sex education: “risk” discourse and “moral” discourse – medicalised approach – scare tactics (Alldred and David 2007)
- feminist critique of abstinence-only sex education (Fine and McClelland 2006)
- reinforcing narrow heteronormativity – reproduction of social inequalities through sex education
- pleasure discourse – often missing – recently problematised – “pleasure imperative” imposed on young girls in neoliberal/postfeminist context (Allen 2012)
- intersectionality – young people’s gender, race/ethnicity, culture, class, religion etc. influences their sexual decision-making
- methodological concerns about sex education – usual format of teaching (centralized, frontal, lecture-like) is inefficient in sex education
4. Gender-based harassment, bullying, violence in schools

- harassment vs. bullying (Meyer 2008)
- sexual harassment in schools – potentially interferes with a student’s educational opportunities
- teacher to student, student to teacher, student to student, teacher to teacher – not equally researched – power relations in school
- student to student harassment and bullying: pervasive – sexual, misogynistic, homophobic harassment
- teachers’ non-intervention – external and internal barriers of intervention (Meyer 2008)
- ways of sexual harassment influenced by raced and classed stereotypes of female sexuality (rahimi and Liston 2011)
- cyber-harassment – high among teenagers – schools’ responsibility in handling it
- bullying – shifting the focus from sexual harassment to bullying, which boys also suffer - attention is shifted away from girls to boys (Stein 2007)
- potential effects of bullying
5. Intersectionality in school research

- education and the reproduction of social inequalities – other significant axes besides gender – intersectional approach needed
- inequalities: the issue is not only access and proportions of men and women
- schools as engines for producing social inequality – systemic exclusion and marginalisation of social groups by educational discourses and practices – curriculum, school or classroom organisation, assessment, policies
- white, masculinist, middle-class values and contents (curriculum) – not addressing diversity of young people – different school experiences
- Influence of socio-economic status, family background and other social factors on school choice – hierarchies within the school system reflecting social hierarchies
- education - mitigating social inequalities, opportunities for social mobility – reproducing reinforcing, increasing social inequalities – growing knowledge gap – parents’ educational level influences school choice for their children
- teachers’ gendered, raced and classed assumptions and stereotypes influence learning outcomes, disciplining, evaluation

(Camilleri-Casar, Morris, Benjamin, Downey and Condron, Reay, Ferguson)
Thank you for your attention!

redaid@ceu.edu