

Contemporary Issues in Gender and Education

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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 Condrón, Reay, Ferguson)



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