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Editorial. Gender and education

CEPS Journal 7 (2017) 2, S. 5-8



Empfohlene Zitierung/ Suggested Citation:

Taşner, Veronika; Antic Gaber, Milica: Editorial. Gender and education - In: CEPS Journal 7 (2017) 2, S. 5-8 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-145922

in Kooperation mit / in cooperation with:



University of Ljubljana
Faculty of Education

<http://www.pef.uni-lj.si>

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Editorial

Gender and Education

The first feminists were more than aware of the fact that education is one of the crucial areas with potential for achieving gender equality and equity. Mary Astell demanded higher education institutions for women as early as in 1694. In the eighteenth century, two exceptional thinkers, Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges, claimed that women and men are born equal and yet do not have equal rights. They both believed that education would bring women greater equality. Inspired by Catherine Maculay's *Letters of Education* (1790), Wollstonecraft advocated changes to the education of girls, claiming that education should not differ for boys and girls. She argued for education of women that would equip them for cooperation with men and fought for the same model of education for both genders in families and schools, as she believed that women would be free if they were enlightened and able to provide for themselves independently of men. In her opinion, women were weak due to education that forced them, from their earliest years, to be passive, obedient and (only) beautiful. She recognised the reasons for the subordination of women as being rooted in the social environment and insufficient education. Her claim for equal educational opportunities for girls and women, allowing women to participate equally in all spheres of social life, aligns her with those thinkers who advocated a different social order, and therefore a different gender order. Maculay's and Wollstonecraft's ideas were undoubtedly revolutionary and had to wait for centuries to become our reality, but they were crucially important ideas that eventually became the basis for changes in social conditions allowing structural changes to take place in the various fields of our individual and social lives.

On the background of these and similar ideas, and despite the fact that gender equality seemed to be a rather distant goal, we witnessed the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. The fact that feminism was and is not just one unique phenomenon – there are many feminisms supported by different feminist organisations and groups with specific attitudes and demands – led to debate on a wide range of topics, including inequality in education, demands for more gender-neutral schools, critiques of gender-stereotypical subjects, the inability of girls to make different professional choices, the unequal treatment of girls and boys in institutionalised contexts, and the effects of the hidden curriculum that privileges boys at almost all levels. Among the important demands of the second-wave feminist movement – based on an awareness of the lack or almost complete absence of knowledge on women's lives in history and in the present time in the official curriculum – was a demand for special courses on women, in order to fill the gap in

knowledge production, to raise awareness of the importance of women's lives, and to overcome "man-made language", male-centred knowledge production, etc.

Five decades later, we can see that this is not an easy task. Gender equality and gender equity in education is still an important and highly debated issue, as there are still enormous differences and a wide range of inequalities in this field worldwide. On the one hand, there are millions of girls who are still illiterate in poor countries and, on the other, there are countries in which girls significantly outperform boys in school achievements. There are countries and regions that tackle the issue of gender (in)equalities in education and countries that do not care about them, countries that support the development of women and gender studies and countries in which these studies are on the margins and addressed only by women's NGOs.

The present issue of the CEPS Journal is the first edition of a scientific journal completely dedicated to the question of gender and education, and is an important element in the mosaic of scientific production on the theme in Central-East Europe. Moreover, this issue brings six articles all dealing with specific gender-related issues in the field of education.

The issue starts with the article "Mapping Women's and Gender Studies in the Academic Field in Slovenia", which maps the development of women's and gender studies (WGS) in the academic field in Slovenia. In her paper, Milica Antić Gaber asks and answers the following questions: How, when and why has this happened? How has this been connected to the women's and feminist movements and politics towards women's issues and demands? What have the obstacles been in this process? Who were the agents and what were the factors that supported demands for the incorporation of WGS in academia? as well as many other questions. The mapping in this paper is primarily based on the primary sources of university programmes and their curricula at faculties of the University of Ljubljana, as well as on interviews with important agents in the field.

In their article "The Anti-Gender Movement in Europe and the Educational Process in Public Schools", Roman Kuhar and Aleš Zobec analyse the mass protests across Europe against marriage equality, reproductive rights, gender mainstreaming and sex education, which have centralised in the past few years around so-called "gender theory". The authors point to the fact that many of these debates (and concrete actions) are targeted towards schools and the education process. It is believed that "gender theory" is already being taught in schools, and that this will have detrimental consequences for pupils. Taking this debate as the starting point, the authors first examine the roots of the term "gender theory" and point to its "empty signifier" nature. They then analyse the various types of anti-gender actions across Europe that interfere with the educational process in public schools.

Finally, the authors consider the role of parents and their right to intervene (or not) in the educational process.

In the first part of their paper “Gender in the Teaching Profession: University Students’ Views of Teaching as a Career”, Veronika Tašner, Mojca Žveglič Mihelič and Metka Mencin Čeplak discuss the fact that women prevail numerically in the teaching profession and examine the reasons behind this fact. In the second part of the article, which is based on a pilot study including 132 students, the authors attempt to address the context from which pre-service teachers’ desired characteristics of their future employment arise. They single out the factors influencing the choice of teaching as a career, as well as students’ attitudes towards the reputation of female and male teachers. The collected data confirmed the thesis that the prevalent number of women in the teaching profession(s) is an effect of the harmonisation of the female respondents’ habitus and their perception of the field they are entering.

“Students’ Gender-Related Choices and Achievement in Physics”, authored by Ivana Jugović, explores the role of motivation, gender roles and stereotypes in the explanation of students’ educational outcomes in a stereotypically male educational domain: physics. The research sample included 736 grammar school students from Zagreb, Croatia. The variables that were explored were expectancy of success, self-concept of ability and subjective task values of physics, gender roles and stereotypes, educational outcomes (academic achievement in physics), intention to choose physics in the high school leaving exam, and intention to choose a technical sciences university course.

In their article “Gender Differences in Children’s Language: A Meta-Analysis of Slovenian Studies”, Ljubica Marjanovič-Umek and Urška Fekonja-Pekljaj offer readers the first meta-analysis of ten Slovenian studies published between 2004 and 2016, which include in total 3,657 toddlers, children and adolescents, aged from 8 months to 15 years. The language outcome and gender differences measures referred to various aspects of language ability, including vocabulary, mean length of utterance, sentence complexity, language expression and comprehension, storytelling ability and metalinguistic awareness.

In the final article published in this focus edition, “Adolescent Boys, Embodied Heteromasculinites, and Sexual Violence”, James W. Messerschmidt summarises several life-history case studies of adolescent boys who eventually engaged in various forms of sexual violence. The life stories reveal the interrelationship between in-school bullying, reflexivity, embodiment and the social construction of heteromasculinites in the commission of adolescent sexual violence. The author concludes with a discussion of the implications of the research for the evolving discussions on social scientific conceptualisations of reflexive embodiment and heteromasculinites.

The Varia section of this edition of the CEPS Journal includes two articles. The article by Milan Kubiátko, Gregor Torkar and Lenka Rownanova entitled “The Teacher as One of the Factors Influencing Students’ Perception of Biology as a School Subject” aims to determine whether the teacher is one of the factors influencing students’ perception of biology as a school subject. The article also aims to identify the influence of certain other factors, such as: students’ gender and place of residence, the number of biology teachers who have taught the students, and the teachers’ gender. The sample consisted of 261 lower secondary school students (ISCED 2) in Slovakia, aged 14 and 15 years. The findings confirm the impact of biology teachers on students’ perception of the subject, while the students’ gender and place of residence did not have any significant influence on their perception of the subject.

The article entitled “To What Extent Do School Leaders in Slovenia Understand Physical School Environments as a Learning Factor?” by Majda Cencič analyses how school leaders assess the school environment as a factor of learning. A total of 150 school leaders in primary education in Slovenia were invited to complete an online questionnaire asking them about their views regarding the extent to which their school as a physical environment encouraged certain factors. The results show that, in their school environment, school leaders assess ecology, movement and respect the highest, while feelings, imagination and space gain the lowest assessment. The results provide interesting information, especially for school policymakers and everyone involved in the planning, building or renewal of school premises.

The present edition of the CEPS Journal ends with Nina Perger’s review of the book *Returning to Reims* by Didier Eribon. The book is presented as an attempt at social self-analysis, which is “an analysis of one’s own biographical trajectory in relation to social factors that influenced it”. Eribon’s work is inspired by Bourdieu’s social self-analysis, yet, as Perger stresses, the author takes his self-analysis a step further by taking “into the account the experiential and affective side of rupturing one’s habitus by wilful distancing from primary social environment and its di-visions of social world and thus entering the process of resubjectivation”. In the reviewer’s opinion, the book offers a valuable elaboration of Bourdieu’s self-analysis, because, as Nina Perger concludes in her review, Eribon’s work “enables us a sociologically important insight into how relationality between objective structures and everyday life on a subjective level is played out not through a relation of causal determination, but through a dynamic in which there is a space for creative innovation that, at the same time, requires creative destruction of the unquestionable”.