

Addressing Gender in the Education of Teachers: Dramatizing versus Dedramatizing Approaches

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Abstract: The dimensions of gender play an important part in disciplinary cultures. Studies have shown that the doubts and reservations girls have about STEM subjects can be explained by the explicitly male coded disciplinary culture rather than by a lack of knowledge or competence on behalf of the girls. On the other hand, the male coding makes the STEM subjects more accessible for boys. The stipulated transformation of the disciplinary cultures in mathematics and natural sciences aiming to open up STEM as a field of interest and occupation for girls takes effect not only by showing up career paths. Rather, a transformation of the underlying cultural codes is intended. This points to the fact that gender acts as a “deep structure”. In order to bring out and reflect upon these structures within disciplines, teachers need firm gender competence. How this can be organized and communicated as part of the professionalization process is up to debate. Dramatizing gender issues by explicitly addressing the topic in the education of teachers stands against a less dramatic approach that includes gender into the process of imparting subject knowledge. Based on empiric examples gathered from qualitative studies, the respective strategies’ risks will be juxtaposed. In order to address the gender encoding of different disciplinary cultures rather than the gendering of actors, the authors opt for a circle-model that includes dramatizing as well as dramatizing approaches.

Key words: gender competence, STEM, education of teachers

1. Introduction

It is a common place, that boys participate more successful in subjects like mathematics, natural sciences or informatics (Jacobs & Eccles, 1985). The PISA survey replies this finding with persistence (Organization for Economic Cooperation Development, 2009). The reservations girls show towards STEM subjects are verifiable, and they can be explained — so is the main argument — by explicitly male coded disciplinary cultures rather than by a lack of knowledge or competence on behalf of the girls. In fact, they rule out the STEM professions based on implicit decisions. Accordingly, the male coding makes the STEM subjects more accessible for boys (Kerr & Kurpius, 2004). Similar forms of gender encoding can be shown for other disciplines: for example the female coding of the social professions can be seen as the main reason for boys’ reservations about these subjects.

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A variety of arguments have been put forth discussing prevailing gender norms, society's bipolar gender structure or issues of socialisation. Against this background we will discuss a special framing of the problem. We will focus on yet another circumstance that can give further insight into "why it is what it is" with women and STEM or men with the social professions: namely gender coding within disciplinary cultures. It is a commonly recognized aim to open up the fields of interest equally to all students in order for them to develop their individual skills independent of gender norms. In order to achieve this aim, the gender coding of the disciplines has to be resolved. Such an appeal to transform the disciplinary cultures in mathematics and natural sciences quickly leads to the question of an appropriate strategy. How can the re-coding of disciplinary cultures be realised?

Empirical research has shown a *covert connection* (Budde, 2011) between *gender* and *disciplinary culture*. Gender as well as disciplinary culture acts as, *deep structure*, inset into a complex and only partially conscious web of habituated action, tacit, and explicit knowledge (Hyde & Lynn, 2006). In a constructivist view neither of these components in question nor their intersection are fixed and stable. Rather, they are constructed in interaction processes. The well-known concept of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1991) theorize this processes. The disciplinary culture, too, is constructed through action, which, in turn, brings the actors into focus: In our research topic — the school — teachers can be regarded as representatives of disciplinary cultures.

A transformation of the disciplinary cultures understood here as a cultural change, calls for a transformation of the teachers' routine actions. The term *gender competence* refers to the capability or skill to transform and reflect one's actions. Such a guiding principle when it combines willingness, knowledge, and skill breaks up the gendered action structures and, as a consequence, the gendering of culture. Gender competence is even marked as a key competence for pedagogic professionals (Metz-Göckel & Roloff, 2002). The focus lies on *reflexivity*, a key capacity that opens up the disciplinary cultures to transformation processes.

2. Imparting Gender Competence

Focussing on the question of imparting gender competence in educational and professionalization processes of teachers we were searching for strategies. In short, the relevant literature discusses two different approaches. A direct approach that, for example, *explicitly* provides gender related education propositions. Here, gender has special status and is treated as an issue in its own right. For example, Mono-Education is a famous method. The reverse approach understands gender as a cross-sectional theme — rather than granting special status — and wants to *implicitly* address gender in context with other educational aims. Drafting this paper has compelled us to round up what *our previous qualitative studies* actually show with regard to those educational processes that make gender an issue. Three empirically identifiable discourse strategies can be differentiated:

- (1) The explicit discussion of gender differences;
- (2) The explicit discussion of the cross-sectional interrelations of gender issues;
- (3) The conscious but implicit discussion of gender as a category of social inequality.

2.1 The Explicit Discussion of Gender Differences

Several studies point to the fact that an explicit discussion of gender differences in pedagogical settings tends to invoke gender stereotypes and dichotomies (Hannover & Kessels, 2002). Analysing studies about gendered educational offers for adolescents, we have been able to show that working with the differences between boys and girls reproduces what it is supposed to question and deconstruct. Examples would be on an organisational level forms of monoeducation or on a content-related level in tasks such as collecting "typically" male and "typically"

female traits (Harker, 2000; Parker & Rennie, 2002; van der Gaer, Pustjens, Van Damme & De Munter, 2004). The recipients connect the gendered educational process according to their own commonplace constructs of gender differences with the result that reifying effects can be made out.

Our studies on young men about career opportunities in the social professions confirm the hypothesis that gender stereotypes about disciplinary cultures seen as effeminate are among the primary reasons for ruling out a career in the social professions (Budde, Böhm & Willems, 2009). The young men interviewed were not opposed to the social professions *as such*. Rather, they dismiss them based on assumptions about a disciplinary culture seen as effeminate and a resulting negative image with regard to style, work time and social recognition. It is the symbolic capital of social professions which is uninteresting particular for traditional orientated young man. Here too, addressing the young men directly *as men* who want to take up a social profession (or vice versa young women as women equally qualified to take up a STEM profession) works to reify the dichotomy rather than to undermine it. Thus, it is argued that gendered education processes cannot simply aim to reduce the lack of information. Rather, a cultural change of the matter in question as well as gender concepts must be facilitated.

2.2 The Explicit Discussion of the Cross-Sectional Interrelations of Gender Issues

Viewed in this light, it is even more remarkable what we have found out in another study on teacher training with the topic “gendered and cross-sectional prevention of right-wing extremism”: Even a complex theoretical and methodological approach works first and foremost to reproduce gender stereotypes and differences (Budde, Offen & Schmidt, 2013). Here, the *complexity* of the theory seems to be incompatible with the participants existing commonplace constructs about gender differences. When asked to transfer the theory into a practice project, the teachers, overwhelmed by the issue, revert to what appears as the most familiar — with Bourdieu one could say habituated — theoretical proposition. As a result, for example one practice project for a biology lesson about “rats” puts Camus’ “The Plague” on the curriculum for girls while the boys were asked to calculate the density of the rat population in the sewer system. Here too, the explicit discussion of gender issues reproduces — even reinforces — the dichotomous construct it wants to break up.

2.3 The Conscious but Implicit Discussion of Gender as A Category of Social Inequality

Explication stands up against implication. Therefore, a third educational approach is to incorporate gender issues without explicitly discussing them. Several ethnographic studies with teachers point to the fact that implicit discussions of gender tend to reinforce gender differences as well and result in gender stereotyped practices with students (Budde, 2009). Gender is introduced casually in the context of day-to-day experiences, personal presuppositions and common knowledge and discussed equally en passant during education processes that serve an entirely different purpose. A gender dichotomous sequence of calling on students may serve as an example for the de facto implementation of an implicit approach, the discussion of men and women in the Middle Ages as an example for dealing with gender issues in the context of subject matter (here history). These semi-theoretical constructs on supposedly gendered learning and behavioural performances result in social positioning processes focussed on difference (the male “class clown”, the female “cow”, the male “disturber”, the female “darling”). On this note and with the goal of facilitating cultural change in mind addressing gender implicitly in educational processes does not seem an ideal strategy.

A different study with university lecturers for education and didactics enquires after the relevance of gender in the education of teachers and strategies to impart gender competence (Budde & Blasse, 2014). Consistently, interview partners identify gender as a relevant issue in the teaching profession. Equally consistently, however,

they understand gender as a crosscutting category within the framework of heterogeneity and prefer an implicit approach to the explicit treatment as a special issue. In this context, the ‘danger of forgetting’ is addressed. Stratifying the categories of difference (in question migration background and inclusion) take precedence over gender issues. Viewed in this light, treating gender within the framework of heterogeneity runs risk of neglecting and displacing gender issues.

3. Conclusion

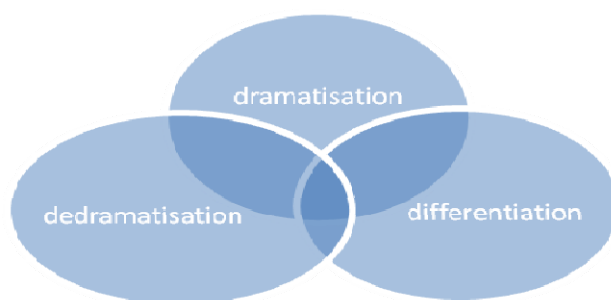
Summarising our present findings on gendered education processes we observe the following fundamental problems:

(1) Treating gender as a *dichotomous category* proves to be problematic because it takes the form of either commonplace constructs or educational discourse. In both cases the differences between genders are ever-present.

(2) The only other option, however, appears to be the *deliberate or accidental dismissal of the category* of gender. At this point, we want to draw attention also to a study by Klinger that probes into the discourse on gender issues amongst university students in educational sciences (Klinger, 2014). It confirms that an engagement with gender issues does not directly result in a reflexive and deconstructing conduct.

We thus face a dilemma: Aiming to endow educational professionals with gender competence either *difference-focussed common-sense theories* are reified or gender issues are *completely phased out*. Both risks must be taken seriously if it is the objective to facilitate cultural change and, consequently, reflexive educational action that is poised between the awareness of societal dichotomies and their deconstruction and works to acknowledge the individuality of learning interests and learning processes.

As an alternative, considering both explicit and implicit approaches, we plead for a theoretically founded and more complex set of gendered discourse strategies made up of the following constituents: dramatization, differentiation, and dedramatization: The dramatization of gender issues can be initiated by difference-focussed theoretical approaches and self-referential analysis, for example by rationalising one’s personal attitudes and experiences. Here, the objective is to determine gender effects within the disciplinary culture. Differentiation, on the other hand, expands on dramatizing and difference-focussed insights by incorporating other categories of social inequality and cross-sectional approaches. Here, the objective is to treat gender issues in relation and perspective. The component of dramatization aims to deemphasise gender issues in educational action in favour of situational aspects and to facilitate a reflexive process on the relevance of gender issues. It is the component of dramatization that opens up perspectives that go beyond dichotomous categories. With reference to the STEM subjects in question the gendered deep structure of the disciplinary cultures comes back into focus as a possible topic for gendered educational processes. In this way, a cultural change could be initiated, leading to a permanent transformation of action routines.



The abovementioned constituents cannot be treated isolated or individually. Rather, they should stand in constant tension and consciously consider self, society and disciplinary culture as reference points. The theoretical framework of tension between these three constituents must now be put into research and pedagogical practice. Existing strategies for imparting gender competence must be changed, adapted, and expanded on.

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