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Gender and curriculum : a case study

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Sex-role theorists have also studied the way schools encourage the notions of roles played by different sexes in the workplace. In terms of future aspirations it has been argued that girls are socialized into accepting that the roles of wife and mother are important, and boys are socialized to have confidence in their own competitive strength and to be active in the workplace (Henricksen, 1981). In this way, the sexual division of labour is perpetuated and maintained. In fact, in her discussion on the relationship between class-specific and sex-specific socialization, Henricksen (1981) says that both boys' and girls' sex-specific roles are common across class boundaries. Boys know as children that when they grow up they must get a job and will need to provide for a family. Girls learn that prestige for them can be acquired through their own work, but that it is more likely that they will acquire status through marriage to a high status man. Henricksen's comments point to the fact that boys may accept the idea that men's jobs often require them to move either away from the family unit by working shifts or needing to work in different areas, or moving on a transfer because it implies promotion. Henricksen's argument attempts to throw some light upon the socialization of girls (and in particular, working-class girls), and she argues that girls feel a

greater sense of obligation to the family and their careers do not take precedence over that notion.

Liberal feminists who work within role-theory believe that girls will be able to free themselves of the restrictions imposed upon them when they are granted the same opportunities as boys (for example see Byrne, 1978). In this way they will enjoy equality through the power of qualifications. As mentioned in chapter one, this equity is seen as being possible within the existing social structure of capitalism. Liberal feminists have shown a deep concern with inequity and have concentrated on individuals in schools in an attempt to bring about equality of opportunity albeit within the existing framework of capitalism.

The liberal perspective has offered insights into the nature and extent of inequality as well as providing useful evidence for those studying patriarchal forms of control in schooling. The school can be seen as not only a social process but one suited to male interests (Loftus, 1974) and a means by which women are qualified to a lifetime of service and domesticity.

However sex-role theory does have weaknesses. The restrictions and limitations of the analysis have been highlighted (see Arnot, 1981). The theory does not trace roots of gender differentiation; it merely assumes that differentiation exists. In other words, the theory does not explain why gender has taken the form it has; it assumes rather than investigates the generality of one social construction of gender and gender difference and the successful acquisition by each generation that follows of the definition of masculinity and femininity. Secondly, sex-role theory is somewhat over-simplified in that socialization is seen in too general a way. For example, it does not take into account that girls are socialized differently for various reasons; girls have different ethnic backgrounds or cultures, and girls come from different social classes and these factors affect the 'success' of socialization because some girls will be experiencing conflict. In other words, the school and family may be in major conflict for children so one cannot assume that socialization is taking place. Moreover, the sex-role theory is individually based rather than socially or historically based. It tends to see the problem lying within the individual; it is within the individual's means to change the situation of

inequality and this leads to a "blame the victim" notion (Kessler et.al. 1985: 35).

Because of the problems with the notion of how sex roles are actually acquired, sex-role theory can be criticized as not providing sufficient explanation. The acquiring of certain characteristics, aspirations and role models is treated too simply. Can the "victim", that is, the girl at school be blamed for the sex roles she has acquired? Socialist feminists have attempted in their critique of sex-role theory, to address the reasons for gender inequalities in society and education.

Socialist feminists in education (see example Wolpe, 1981; Deem, 1978 and MacDonald/Arnot, 1981) acknowledge a patriarchal system of oppression but they criticize radical and liberal feminists for being ahistorical and leaving unequal class structure unexplained. Socialist feminists in education use reproduction theory as a means to explain gender inequalities in education and this theory is known as the political economy perspective (Arnot, 1981).

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY THEORY

The political economy model is the second of the two models mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Political economy theorists attempt to explain reproduction of gender inequalities and therefore look at the relations between capitalism and schooling as well as how the relations of capitalism and patriarchy are expressed in schools to reproduce inequalities of class and gender. Major theorists in this perspective are Wolpe (1976), MacDonald (1981a and 1981b), Deem (1978) and Arnot (1981).

Madeleine MacDonald (1981) has described major focuses of socialist feminist educational research and in her article, "Schooling and the Reproduction of Class and Gender Relations" (1981), says that within capitalism, the relations of class and gender take a unique form. They are united through the maintenance of capitalist social relation of production in which male dominance is perpetuated. Also, biological reproduction occurs within the family mode: a patriarchal household which is monogamous and applies the domestic sexual division of labour.

MacDonald believes that class and gender relations are closely interwoven so that it is problematic to set them apart within a specific historic combination. The ideological forms of masculinity and femininity cannot be removed from the material

basis of patriarchy, nor can they be disassociated from the class structure. MacDonald argues that one of the major reasons for the reproduction of the male and female workforce is the reproduction of a domestic division of labour. Women's positions are determined along biological lines and thus the workforce is organized along the lines of sex segregation. Beneath this lies a concealed ideology of sex differences.

The underlying emphasis in socialist feminist perspectives is that this ideology cannot be accepted as natural; it is perpetuated by society. Class-based definitions of masculinity and femininity are transmitted in the family and the school; there also exists a sexual division of labour. This sexual division of labour is what gives sex-segregated ideology its impetus and it is reinforced through different agencies of the state.

Arnot argues that the relationship between the family and the school and the school and waged labour are the important issues within the context of education. This also involves looking at women's dual location. Firstly, women play an important part as cheap labour power in the

workforce within the existing framework of capitalism. Secondly women are expected to take prime responsibility for the family, thus playing an important part in the social relations of the home. Arnot therefore locates two areas of research; the analysis of the historical nature of state ideology and the provision of women's education, and the analysis of the relationship between education and the dual location of women.

In Arnot's argument, the bourgeois ideal of the family constitutes a wife who is the housekeeper and mother, and a husband/father who earns the wages. She argues that the attempt of the bourgeois ideology is to win the consent of people to 'white, male bourgeois dominance'. This ties together with MacDonald's article, "Schooling and the Reproduction of Class and Gender Relations" (1981a), in which she discusses the concept of 'bourgeois hegemony'. The consent of men is gained to a definition of masculinity which involves their going out to work and being responsible for their homes and families by providing financially for them, thus offering a degree of security and protection. Similarly, women consent to be keepers of the home or to be involved in occupations which require little recognised skill. These jobs are regarded as secondary in status with

low income; the reason for this is the accepted notion that women also have domestic commitments which are regarded as priority; thus women's dual role is once again evident here. Arnot argues that the dominant pattern of education is geared toward these understandings of sex differences; which brings us more specifically to some of the debates surrounding education.

In socialist feminist educational literature, the relationship between gender and education and the labour process has also involved analyses dominated by an Althusserian notion of reproduction of the labour force.

The debates surrounding this viewpoint as well as the reproduction theory of Bowles and Gintis have been influencial and useful in socialist feminist perspectives. Althusser argues that some apparatuses of the state operate primarily by repression (like the army or police) and others operate by ideology (like the family and the educational system, for example). In contemporary capitalism the dominant ideological state apparatus is the educational system in which schools drill children in the ruling ideology.

Althusser argues that society reproduces itself partly through ideology. Society must reproduce its social relations of production and schools help to do this. Schools are seen as dominant ideological state apparatuses in capitalist society and the levels of school involvement as well as the content of subjects impart a particular ideology. Ideology interpellates people into a kind of subjectiveness and it prescribes how people should respond. In this way a certain ideology is secured as well as the position of a dominant social group; thus schools under capitalism help to perpetuate and serve ruling class interests.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) have investigated the hidden curriculum of schools and believe that schools correspond structurally with the workplace by reproducing the social relations of capitalist production. The students themselves as well as their relationships towards teachers, work and any other relationships of authority and control reflect the hierarchical division of labour within the workplace.

Both Wolpe (1981) and Deem (1978) have used Althusser's theory as a point of departure in their explanations concerning gender and education.

Wolpe has argued that there is a division of labour within the family and this is paralleled by the sexual division of labour in employment where women occupy the secondary sector of the labour market. These two areas are closely linked and the educational system promotes the requirements of both. The educational system plays a major part in the production and re-production of the ideological structure. Deem has argued that the sexual division of labour is reproduced within education because this division is essential to capitalism. Deem has extended Althusser's theory to cover the sexual division of labour and has argued that this division forms an integral part of capitalist relations because it ensures the reproduction of a gender-divided labour force. This sexual division of labour is also evident in the school.

Other theorists like MacDonald (1981a) and Arnot (1981) have looked at the ways schooling is involved in the processes of legitimation and hence of reproduction of class and gender relations under capitalism. Arnot has looked at the dual locations of family and work for women as well as men. Arnot believes that the starting point for a sociology of gender education should be within the political economy perspective because

it relocates the issue of gender differentiation in education into its social and material conditions of existence and can relate the structuring of the school and its products to the structuring of the labour process and domestic life.

Having looked briefly at what the theories of Althusser and Bowles and Gintis attempt to do, the question still remains as to how far these theories help to explain gender inequalities in society and education. Socialist feminists like Barrett (1980) and David (1978) have argued that both Bowles' and Gintis' and Althusser's analyses are gender-blind. The former recognise a little of the sexual division of labour in the relationships of the school but they see the family playing a more important part in producing these divisions. Commenting on Bowles' and Gintis' theory, David (1978) points out that they do not see the school as reproducing gender relations and they do not explain how schools provide different experiences for different genders.

Barrett (1980) points out in her consideration of whether an Althusserian approach to reproduction of capitalism can provide an analysis of the reproduction of gender division, that the 'substance' of Althusser's argument would need to

be modified in profound ways for it to be of use to feminists. Barrett points out that the theories of class and class reproduction are not automatically transferable to concepts of gender. To simply argue from an Althusserian platform that gender division may be understood or explained in the educational system as it is explained in terms of the reproduction of the sexual division of labour and relations of dominance, would be problematic. Althusser's theory takes place within the context of the reproduction of class relations and not the reproduction of gender. Barrett therefore concludes that feminists' use of Althusser's work must depend, " ..... upon a resolution of the question of the relationship of women and men (qua women and men) to the class structure". (1980:124)

Barrett feels that the notion that women have a dual relationship to the class structure is pertinent. The education and training that a woman receives by virtue of her class background will contribute towards the position she will occupy in the labour force. According to Barrett, the dual character of women's class positions can be seen in the process of educating a workforce which is divided by both class and gender. Barrett then goes on to discuss the reproduction of gender

division and a mediated relationship to the wage as well as the importance of the educational system in securing class differentiation.

Arnot (1981) also does not agree that one can apply Althusser's analysis equally to the reproduction of class and gender relations because she believes that Althusser's emphasis is on class domination and not on patriarchal ideology and the way it is transmitted in the school.

It is important to note at this point that what Marxist feminists are attempting to do is to locate schooling in a wider social context and to relate patterns of gender education to the structure of the labour process and the structure of the family within the capitalist mode of production. Thus the sexual division of labour is the central concept of this analysis in which the historical specificity of forms of gender division is recognised (see for example Arnot, 1981; Deem, 1978 and Wolpe, 1981a). The political economy perspective is firmly rooted within an economic and ideological framework which makes this theory significantly different from sex-role theory:

> ..... blame for the present inequalities of education of women ..... cannot be laid solely at the door of

> educational establishments, educationalists and educational policy makers; the capitalist mode of production, the family, and the role of women in the sexual division of labour are also crucial factors.
>
> (Deem, 1978:127)

Deem's position as mentioned earlier, derives from Althusser's analysis in which he argues that capitalism secures its dominance by reproducing its labour power and relations of production which also entails the reproduction of submission to the rules of the established order. One way this is done (which has been briefly touched upon) is by ideology and the ideological state apparatuses; this leads to a consideration of ideology and the importance of its operation which is central to the argument of this research.

Hartmann (1981) in her discussion on the ideological climate of patriarchy has argued that the ideology of sex differences or appropriate gender behaviour is a set of social relations which has a material base in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them

which enable them to control women. Rubin (1975) while commenting on the sex-gender system says:

> (it is) the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied.
>
> (Rubin, 1975:159)

Both these ideas have presented the notion of power or control. This relates back to the notion that ideology secures the position of dominant social groups - it serves ruling class interests. In the same way, the ideology of gender serves or secures the position of males in one sense, as well as securing or ensuring the notion that sexes are different and therefore act and behave in different, appropriate ways. The apparatuses which help to promote these notions can be seen as the family and the school.

Wolpe (1981) argues that schools implicitly accept the dominant cultural values of the society; they are guided by their ideological assumptions. The ideology provides the legitimation of various actions, processes and forms of teaching that go to making up the school in its entirety; it

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