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Gender and curriculum : a case study

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rest of the text. In Modern Typing (1976) women are invisible and the emphasis in the text is the part men play in the business world. The implication is firstly that women are not in positions of authority which involve making major decisions, and secondly, the necessary yet minor clerical tasks are allotted to women because references are indirectly made to the secretary as a female. In this way women are made invisible by omission; the fact that they do not feature in some texts reveals something about the subject. For example, biology would be seen as a science and could perhaps be part of a course designed for boys while typing would be seen as part of a commercial course and thus designed for girls. Also, the invisibility of women would thereby reveal an aspect on the pervading ideology of sex differences.

Another way in which women are made invisible is through language. The part played by language has been discussed fully in chapter two; in this chapter the research will concentrate mainly of the quotations found in the school texts.

The geography and history texts reflect an emphasis on the parts men play; as mentioned earlier,

women are either omitted or they are portrayed in secondary, dependent roles. Auchmuty (1976) has shown in her study on women's portrayals in history textbooks that women are not described as pioneers in any movements and that they are in the background when men are very much in the foreground, and this is also true of the history text studied in the research. In the geography text studied, women are not portrayed significantly in human or regional geography. Both the geography and history texts use male-appropriated language which promotes the invisibility of women. Some examples would be:

> man's understanding; his (the reader's) aim; he (the teacher) should ....; man finds himself; ambitious men rose to the rank of nobility; Declaration of the Rights of Man; Frenchmen; 'Let us be masters of the straights'; Dutchmen; brotherhood of men; statesman; frontiersmen; chairman; kinsmen.

The above examples show how the use of the generic masculine excludes women as well as any experiences or contributions women may have had which are not reflected in the geography and history texts.

The history text, Legacy of the Past (1960), does use feminine references but it must be pointed out that these often refer to objects which men handle or control or defend. Thus women are once again represented as submissive, passive and dependent. Men are the active participants and the beings in control:

> ..... this league threatened her (Britain's) seapower ... Britain was mistress of the seas (while France dominated the land). It had become a struggle between 'a whale and an elephant' ..... (1960:39)

...mother-tongue. (1960)

The example of "mother-tongue" implies that a language is learnt at home, at the mother's knee. Women are once again located at home with the children and they are portrayed as teachers or instructors; once more fulfilling a limited occupation.

All the school texts studied use the generic masculine form but the housecraft text as well as the typing text refer to women specifically because they assume their readership to be female. Some

texts, especially Vlot Afrikaans (1983) and Comprehensive English Practice (1972) are inconsistent in their use of the generic masculine form. The following quotations come from the English text:

> ..... since neither a girl or boy can have the most ordinary contacts by himself ..... (1972:129)

> 1. Choose your character and a background in which he/she will operate ...
> 2. ..... Is his strength physical or intellectual .....
> 6. ..... Does he drive a Rolls Royce? ...
> 7. ..... that the reader symphathizes with nim/her? (1972:170)

Sometimes the following examples are used in the text: "people", "oneself", "he/she", "him/her", "person". These examples reflect neuter which refers back to an earlier point made in chapter two and that is, the recognition of masculine and feminine and neuter gender. The inconsistency is evident because the above neutral forms are used while male pronouns are adopted in the majority of examples. The use of neuter becomes the exception more than the rule and overall the

the invisibility of women is perpetuated. The following quotation is a rule pertaining to gender found in Comprehensive English Practice (1972):

> The usual rule is that, when a pronoun is used to replace a noun .... or .... a person whose sex is unknown to the listener, the masculine is used. Women's libbers might demand that one say:
>
> > Tell him/her that you'll murder him/her.
>
> But even the most extreme of women's libbers would have to admit that this is rather clumsy ..... (1972:320)

This quotation not only attempts to justify the use of the generic masculine, but perhaps it can be said that it is a good example or persuasive language as well.

Negative references are also made towards women. In fact, these references are often related to them taking part in 'male' activities such as driving a car or being a politician. Often when women are involved in tasks usually seen by society as being male-specific, of if they are engaged in tasks that males have always

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been involved in, they risk being 'diminished'. In Comprehensive English Practice (1972), the following negative references are made:

> Women are such bad drivers. (1972:259)
>
> Nature has given women so much power that the law has very wisely given them little ..... (1972:299)
>
> Women .... scuttled giggling ... and screeched as they splashed their stockings .... (1972:311/2)
>
> Why is thinking something women never do?
> Why is logic never tried?
> Straightening up their hair is all they ever do, why don't they straighten up the mess that's inside? (1972:330)
>
> 'Close your face!' said Mimi Chatterbox. (1972:352)

The assumptions in the above quotes are that women are essentially beings who lack logic and reason. These 'qualities' are often attributed to males who use them in the decision-making business world. Illogical and irrational behaviour (like giggling

and screeching) are negative behaviours which are often attributed to women. In Vlot Afrikaans (1983), women are portrayed as gossips:

> Die vroumense beskinder mekaar. (1983:167)

They are portrayed as being hysterical and afraid:

> Die vroumense het mekaar vasgeklou.
> Hulle het histeries gegil. (1983:167)
> Alle vroumense skyn skrikkerig te
> wees vir muise. (1983:72)

In conclusion, how are women seen in broader social arrangements? They are portrayed negatively when involved in 'male' activities and they are also negatively referred to when notions of femininity (like being passive, silly or timid) are being highlighted. Women are not seen as being as actively involved in society as men are, they are made invisible by omission and masculine language. When women are referred to, then they often earn recognition through men's status; they do not stand or act independently but are portrayed as being in the background of male activities.

This chapter has focused on representations of

women in selected school texts. It has identified various themes which reflect a particular ideology, an ideology of gender-differentiation. What has been evident is firstly, that women's so-called femininity involves notions of attractiveness in which women are expected to be actively involved; they are expected to adopt personal codes as well as nurturing correct attitudes and behaviours. Secondly, women are regarded as responsible for bearing and rearing children as well as taking responsibility for other members of the household like husbands and guests. These responsibilities successfully locate women in domestic tasks in the home. Thirdly, women are involved in a dual-situation when engaged in the workplace because even though they may be involved in waged work, they are also seen as responsible for the home. Also, waged work for women is often an extension of domestic work and generally, women's work is reflected as secondary and unimportant. Lastly, women are often subject to diminishment in other areas by being negated, by being placed in subordination to men and by being made invisible through male-appropriated language. As mentioned earlier, these themes reinforce one another because they are interrelated; together they construct an ideology of gender evident in school texts.

CONCLUSION

What this research report has presented are some ways in which gender codes are reflected in schools and school texts. The emphasis has been on how curricula, and texts in particular , play a part in promoting gender relations. The evidence for various gender codes was found in the prevailing themes in the literature studied which were outlined in chapter four.

But this is not necessarily a complete reflection of what is happening in schools and in the classroom. Students do not necessarily internalize messages in the texts. This study has not shown the possible resistance which may be taking place; interviews and various observations are needed for more conclusive evidence. Research has shown that pupils often challenge gender stereotypes (Clarricoates, 1981; Delamont, 1976) and that various interactions between pupils and teachers are constructive in eliminating these stereotypes (see for example Spender, 1980).

It cannot be assumed that pupils or teachers are

not challenging the status quo. These challenges can take form in debates; being exposed to articles, stories and texts written by women (feminist writing as well); teachers propagating women's view points and encouraging alternatives to views expressed by existing authors to show the contradictions and inconsistencies that exist; children being encouraged to do subjects that they are interested in or have an aptitude for rather than being channelled into 'sex-specific' subjects.

Marion Scott (1980), has shown that different teachers interpret materials in varying ways and this enables the pupils to receive numerous messages from the teacher; they can make many assessments about the content of a subject. Scott centres on the fact that the dynamics of the classroom can be affected by the presence of boys; mixed classes affect the quality of lessons and therefore their potentially sexist or non-sexist nature. In fact, Scott believes that teachers are often 'influenced' by the dominant elements in a class (like boys misbehaving or demanding attention), and often the nature of materials presented are crucially circumscribed. There is a need to change this, and Scott has personally tended to use material which would appeal to all the pupils even if

some pupils are wary of taking on unfamiliar or unattractive tasks.

Another important point to mention is that text-books are not necessarily the only sources of knowledge used in the classroom. Texts might not always be consulted. They could be useful for some definitions or exercises, but the possibility exists that they are being used alongside other texts or media. Teachers may also select their own material gathered from various sources and they might choose to ignore texts entirely eith[illegible] in some or many sections of the children's work.

In the same way children and teachers can challenge textbooks by exposing contradictions or inconsistencies that exist in them. It can be pointed out that certain biases are evident and various opportunities can be presented to offer alternatives to statements or reflections found in literature.

The syllabus is often perceived by teachers as a broad framework and although the aims set by syllabi are known, teachers might not see them as restrictive. Teachers arrange the content of their material to suit their own and their pupil's needs (bearing in aims of the syllabus

in mind), but they can take the opportunity to present their subject as they see fit. The syllabus can be seen as a guide or outline but it need not dictate the ways in which subject matter is actually taught, changed or developed; teachers can exercise freedom in this regard.

Furthermore, it is very important to take resistance into account. It is also important to entertain the possibility that educators are involved in reform. Many who are researching sexual inequalities in education are also offering alternatives. For example, Miller and Swift (1981), offer alternatives for sexist writing as a start towards changing male-appropriated language. By using various examples which counteract the generic-he form, they attempt to show ways in which language can be unbiased. Rosemary Auchmuty (1976) in her study on history texts, has suggested that texts be rewritten, using inclusionary language. Also, the parts women have played politically are to be acknowledged. Women's contributions in the workforce and in education need no longer be overlooked. Criteria upon which women are currently included in texts can be changed or broadened. Shapiro (1981) offers model-lessons on a primary school level for teachers who do not know how to go about presenting knowledge in a non-sexist way.

She shows how boys and girls can be encouraged to do tasks which are regarded as being gender-specific.

Thus, in summary, changes within the school are very important but it is just as crucial to consider areas outside the school. Social structures like the institutions of the family and the workplace need revision and change because these areas are also subject to a prevailing ideology which in turn permeates the structure of the school.

This study does show the ideological patterns of gender differentiation in texts and these patterns need to be discussed in their own right.

What is essential, as Salzman-Webb (1971) says, is that people's understanding is increased from looking at women's experiences and seeing how and in what ways women are oppressed. It is important to analyse social institutions that create the context of women's oppression. Real change can come about if the above is used as a springboard for further, definite action.

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