MAKING WOMEN THE SUBJECT OF EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

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"Women's Studies is old news by now, but it continues to raise the question: What are the experiences of girls coming of age in a culture that contains the need for Women's Studies? The absence of women from the curriculum that poses a problem in education also creates a problem in girls' development, a problem that girls encounter in the course of their education. As the swirl of controversy currently attests, secondary and higher education constitute an initiation into Western culture, leading students into the ways of seeing and listening and speaking that over the centuries have created both Western civilization and the need for Women's Studies. To see the absence of women as a significant omission means to change civilization, to reform the disciplines, and thereby to change education."

Carol Gilligan,
"Teaching Shakespeare's Sister: Notes from the underground of female adolescence".

Carol Gilligan, in this statement which makes welcome links between Women's Studies and girls' education, is asking a very important question with an emphasis which is unfortunately all too rare: how do girls experience an educational curriculum in which women do not figure significantly? A second vital question is what exactly is the nature of this omission and what is its significance for girls' education?

This paper presents a partial analysis of efforts to reform girls' education, with this context of the experiential standpoint of girls as a diverse group in mind. In particular, the paper presents a critique of the educational philosophy underlying efforts to gain equality of educational outcomes for girls.

Probably the most dramatic feature of these efforts is their limited success in breaking down sexual stereotyping of subjects and thereby expanding girls' occupational choices. This is a world-wide phenomenon - a cross-national study by the O.E.C.D. in 1986 found that across all western, industrialised countries, despite significantly increased retention rates in secondary schools, marked gender divisions in subject choices persisted. There was however some improvement in the Scandinavian countries, most notably Sweden, where since 1970, a core curriculum in childcare, domestic skills and technical competencies has been compulsory for both sexes to the age of 16. This achieved an increase in female enrolments in upper secondary technical courses from an initial 7.6% in 1979 to just over 20% in 1984. (Scott, 1982:129)

Why has this rigid gender-differentiation in subject choice been so extremely resistant to change and is this important? It is important for at least two reasons:

1. The outcomes of subject choice are clearly directly related to Australia's continuing extreme degree of occupational segregation by sex. In fact, the O.E.C.D. found in 1977 that of 12 countries it studied, Australia had the highest degree of occupational segregation by sex.

2. The overwhelming emphasis in both State and national policy on gender reform in education has been on increasing girls' participation in non-traditional subjects and post-school occupational choices. This is consistent with current Government policy and likely to be intensified. It is necessary, therefore, to evaluate this priority and its accompanying strategies. Also, this particular aspect of reform efforts brings to the surface several very important philosophical issues which I want to discuss in this paper.

Working backwards from these extremely gender-differentiated outcomes, the educational philosophy underlying schooling, and its curricula and practices must be seriously questioned.

I want to offer some reasons for the lack of success of the strategy of increasing girls'
participation in non-traditional subjects as a means of reforming education for girls, and to suggest that a very important omission has been the failure to apply the insights and new knowledge coming forward in recent feminist theory, to educational theory and practice.

The strategy has to be seen in the context of the liberal theoretical framework of equality in which equal educational opportunity for women is gained by extending men’s education and its benefits to women. This has its roots in the work of John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Florence Howe (1984) said,

"One of the central ideas of co-education provides a central myth: that if women are admitted to men’s education and treated exactly as men are, then all problems of sexual equity will be solved."

While I do not wish to deny the importance of the potential both for empowering women and for transforming male-dominated areas by the entry of women to these areas, I believe the assumptions of liberal individualism underlying this entry as the major strategy for sexual equality in education are problematic.

Liberalism, from its origins in the late eighteenth century, has been based on two principles: that the liberal conception of the individual should be extended to include women, and that women ought to be accepted on equal terms with men in the public realm. Reforms are sought within the status quo of the public realm: equal pay, equal opportunity in employment and education and so on, that is to allow women to participate in the public realm according to its categories and values, relative to the male normative benchmark and as Grosz (1986:192) has suggested, as "surrogate men". A major argument has been that women possess the same capacities as men, and if only educated properly can do everything that men can do. Problems of inequality in education could be solved by the extension of a male-defined educational framework to women, and the inclusion of women-related content, while the basic framework remains largely unquestioned.

This strategy rests on three extremely problematic assumptions about women. These are:

1. The liberal assumption of the gender-neutral, (that is, male) abstract individual.

2. The relationship of women as the excluded "other" in opposition to this (male) abstract individual and the associated set of dualisms which valorize masculine attributes as the norm.

3. The split between public and private in social life.

These basic assumptions of liberalism fail to acknowledge the asymmetry of sexual relations and further, their operation in educational theory and practice has serious implications for the education of girls.

The project of liberal thinkers such as Harriet Taylor, John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft was that the notion of the abstract individual be broadened to include women on a basis of gender neutrality in the public realm, that women are rational and should be treated on the same terms as men, that is they should be treated as individuals in their own right. This conceptualization fails to recognise both the maleness of the abstract individual and the division between public and private spheres in society, in features of persons and in the systems of value accordingly assigned to male and female activities and attributes.

Genevieve Lloyd (1984:104) has articulated very clearly the contradiction inherent in the notion of extending the liberal conception of the individual to women, and implicitly,
the impossibility of success via this strategy:

"Women cannot easily be accommodated into a cultural ideal which has defined itself in opposition to the feminine. To affirm women's equal possession of rational traits, and their rights of access to the public spaces within which they are cultivated and manifested, is politically important. But it does not get to the heart of the conceptual complexities of gender difference...... For it seems implicitly to accept the downgrading of the excluded character traits traditionally associated with femininity, and to endorse the assumption that the only human excellences and virtues which deserve to be taken seriously are those exemplified in the range of activities and concerns that have been associated with maleness."

This contradiction is deeply embedded in the curricular world-view of schools. Furthermore, liberal arguments for equality continue to be extremely compelling and it is worth noting a couple of reasons for these arguments. Firstly, in the nineteenth century the exclusion of women from the public and political realm was so marked that arguing in terms of equal rights, for example, the vote, seemed an obvious and necessary strategy. Secondly, any perception of differences is inevitably turned to the disadvantage of women and so, until very recently, it seemed a logical counter-move to stress women's sameness as, and therefore, equality with men. Third, it seems ostensibly that struggles for equality are likely to be more effective if located in a context of fairness and justice, that is, if the problem can be shown to arise from a failure to apply fairly the values and standards everyone acknowledges.

The failure of liberal strategies for equality, however, is clearly demonstrated by the fact that there are very few women in positions of power in government or industry. Despite a measure of formal equality, in the sense of equal opportunity, Day (1978) and many others have pointed out that actual equality of outcomes in the public sphere (particularly in education) remains negligible. Women's relegation to the private sphere has not changed significantly and is often redefined when they do participate in the public, for example in the public world of education, women predominate in the direct classroom teaching of children, while men occupy administrative posts, with accompanying differentials of salary and status.

On the theoretical level, Caust (1989:58) argues that,

"equal opportunity theory is located within a liberal tradition which desperately seeks to restrict and contain the feminist debate. As a consequence, gendered power relations are reinforced."

Furthermore, some recent educational reforms which appear to be more empowering for women can be seen to be a sophisticated re-working of the liberal/equality position. Present moves to re-conceptualize "women's studies" as "gender studies" with its supposed gender-neutral and gender-balanced connotations of equality, also illustrate this kind of re-working of the liberal position of gender equality.

The ideal of gender neutrality is clearly impossible to implement in a patriarchal society governed by a division between the public and private. As Tapper (1986:43) points out,

"arguments for the equality of women in the public sphere which fail to take account of the sexual structuring of the division between the public and the private, including the maleness of the abstract individual, will not overcome the secondary status of women but rather relocate it within the public sphere."

There exists an outstanding body of feminist work in political theory, for example, Pateman and Gross (1986) and Pateman (1989) which demonstrates clearly the fallacious nature of arguments for women's equality within patriarchal societies governed by a division between public and private and Pateman (1988) in an analysis of contract theory, shows how the sexual contract historically has been constitutive of the patriarchal
social contract which denies women citizenship as free and equal beings.

A serious shortcoming of educational reform in Australia has been a failure to address the relationship of the sexual structuring of the public/private division in society with curriculum change in education.

I would like briefly to consider this relationship.

THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE DICHOTOMY AND EDUCATION

The emphasis of the liberal framework of equality on seeking to grant women equality with men within masculine paradigms means that any achievement of equality is confined within those areas which are masculine preserves, ignoring the particular realms of women's existence. This emphasis has meant that the dichotomous distinction between the public and private realms has gone largely unquestioned within liberal discourse generally and educational reform policy in particular.

There are two main implications for education. Firstly, the distinction itself has gone unquestioned and reform efforts have been concentrated in the public realm of masculine concerns (for example, the more valued male-dominated subjects of mathematics, science and technology) ignoring the private domain of women's lives and work, centring on domestic life and interpersonal responsibilities and concerns. Secondly, and for the reasons just stated, the distinction has, I believe, become increasingly institutionalised within education. The distinction is inherent in the epistemological assumptions of educational philosophy which are in turn reflected in curriculum, classroom practice and education's own public/private distinction between the roles of male and female education practitioners, producing the extreme gender-differentiated outcomes found across all western societies by the O.E.C.D. (1986).

Indeed, these outcomes suggest that the assumptions of educational philosophy itself may have changed little since Rousseau's exposition of the public/private division in educational philosophy, concerning the education respectively of Emile and Sophie. Gatens (1986:2) makes the point that, although the theme of The Social Contract concerns the birth of citizens into social and cultural life, Emile makes clear that this second birth and the accompanying rights of citizenship applies to men only. Rousseau observes (1972:172),

"We are all born, so to speak, twice over; born into existence, and born into life; born a human being and born a man".

Women, on the other hand, are only born once: born into existence, born into nature and excluded from culture and civic life, which is restricted to men only.

In Emile, the tutor's task is to be midwife to Emile's birth into culture and Rousseau clearly sets out his recommendations for the very different educations of Emile and his life companion, Sophie. Rousseau is concerned with the second birth of male citizens into public social life and women figure in this entry into social life only insofar as "it is not good that man should be alone" (1972:321). Sophie and her character are important only in that she is indispensable to Emile's ability to function as a citizen. Gatens comments (1986:3),

"It is not that Rousseau is uninterested in the education of women but rather that they should be left as close to their natural state as possible. Thus, women have no need, on Rousseau's account, of instruction in the sciences, in ethics, or in political life. All these aspects of cultural and social life are to be managed by men and women's role is to merely reproduce the conditions necessary for the continuation of culture. This involves the bearing, caring and rearing of children and the provision of the emotional and physical well-being of her husband. The most important aspects of these tasks, according to Rousseau, is that they are undertaken in a spirit of chastity, modesty and
As the O.E.C.D. Report (1986) concluded, gender divisions in the outcomes of education have been particularly intransigent to change and it would seem that the division between public and private social life as Rousseau defined it, and consequent divisions of productive and reproductive functions along sex lines are alive and well. As Pateman (1989:8) points out, even when attempts are made to include women in the public realm, women and men stand in a different relation to that realm. She notes that women's particular position, before and since gaining the vote, is full of paradoxes, contradictions and ironies and that both women's exclusion from the public world and the manner of our inclusion have escaped the notice of political theorists. Similarly, educational theorists, concerned with granting women equal opportunity, have failed to understand women's different relationship to the function and processes of education.

Education, then, can be seen to be concerned primarily with the initiation of young men as citizens into the "productive" processes of society and its culture. The relationship of young women to these educative priorities and processes is something about which we still know very little.

In terms of the curriculum in its broadest sense, as Leck (1987:344) points out, students are generally taught in school, for them a microcosm of the public world, to value those matters that are of public concern and to distinguish between public-sector values that are associated with males - economics, production, public service and property (and increasingly, science and technology) - and between private-sector values that are associated with females - domesticity, reproduction, sex, social service and health maintenance. The primary assumption of patriarchy - that the "public" activities of males are of a higher value than the "private" activities of females is woven into the entire intellectual paradigm that is foundational both to the curriculum and to current schooling practice.

Indeed, the lesser value ascribed to the private sphere of girls' education was demonstrated in a very interesting way in the Melinda Leves case in N.S.W. The case was won by Melinda because the expert witnesses for her case were able to establish that Melinda's schooling in the private realm of social life would disadvantage her in relation to her brother whose education was seen to be preparing him for the public world.

The following are statements by one of the expert witnesses, Dr Shirley Sampson. This evidence was very important in convincing the Equal Opportunity Tribunal hearing the case that Melinda's schooling was discriminatory.

"The curricula in schools are a statement about maleness and femaleness often as much as they are intended as introductions into various activities in life. Unless the curricula show that women can do a large range of activities, such as industrial and technological work, computing work.....then a girl.....may be totally devoid of self-esteem when it comes to activities that she might engage in. I would argue that for Melinda Leves, the schools are not cultivating a sense of competence and esteem in any area other than the traditional female ones of caring and study of languages, and relating to human beings." (Sampson, 11th April, 1986, p.23)

"You will not find boys coming en masse into anything which is for girls. Similarly with girls you will find that they'll be hesitant about going into occupations which are at present seen as male. And the consequence is that they require a school which is a non-threatening environment, an equal opportunity environment. Not until schools take it upon themselves to change these perceptions, that is by giving girls "hands on" experience in computers or giving them "hands on" experience with enamelling, metalwork or ceramics and things like that, girls will not perceive that they are capable of performing that kind of work". (11th April, p.16)

The Tribunal was convinced by these arguments. While acknowledging that Home Science and
Textiles and Design had relevance and value, the Tribunal found that “as a preparation for the workforce or for further studies, they are manifestly less relevant and useful than the Industrial Arts subjects offered to the boys”. (p.35)

Thus the Tribunal concluded that if the objects of schooling included the "imparting of competence to undertake further studies....and to enable entry to the workforce" then: "it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Melinda has been treated less favourably than Rhys.....For she has been given a choice of electives which, on any view of the material before us, has provided an unequal and inferior basis for future studies and/or employment when compared with those which were offered to Rhys." (p.33) Kenway (1990:107)

I would like now to make some brief comments on the curriculum itself.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN AUSTRALIA

My comments on curriculum must of necessity be somewhat generalized because of the different approaches and priorities of the various States of Australia.

However, at the national level, the most influential curriculum strategy in girls' education has revolved around the notion of the "gender inclusive curriculum". The National Policy for the Education of Girls (1986:21) defines inclusive curriculum as "a curriculum which avoids bias in content and practices, which acknowledges the contributions of women from all social groups to the collective experience of society and which employs diverse teaching and learning processes to meet the full range of individual and group preferences and needs".

The Australian Curriculum Development Council (1985:21) emphasised that "inclusive curriculum" describes processes by which curricula and schooling can adequately provide for groups whose interests may have been subordinated or marginalised on such grounds as differences in gender or cultural background". In such formulations women were often, to use Mary O'Brien's (1984) term "commatized", along with other "disadvantaged" groups, and invariably viewed as a homogeneous population, ignoring differences of race and ethnic background. Good education was seen as that which was "humanly inclusive" and the objective of the inclusive curriculum was that women and men would "become equally human". Students studied additional units with women-focussed content, demonstrating the history of women's achievements and the contemporary social position of women. The inclusive curriculum was seen to be consistent with a general democratization process which characterized curriculum development in Australia in the 1980s.

Similarly, an ideology of sameness pervaded this approach. It was assumed that girls and boys are basically gender-neutral participants in schooling and therefore the same, and if given the same treatment, the results should be the same. There was little serious questioning of the assumption that girls are a homogeneous population, and that crucial differences for example, those of race and ethnic background, could by and large be ignored in curriculum reform.

This type of equal opportunity strategy posits a gender-neutral subject who, given the right/same encouragement and conditions, can succeed equally in the public realm regardless of gender. The emphasis is on access and success.

This contradiction involves a kind of philosophical "double-think": it is difficult to see how such assumptions of the gender-neutral, (male) universal subject rest so easily alongside the extreme gender differentiation of both society and schooling. As I have already suggested, a very significant factor is the failure in curriculum reform to address the public-private division in schooling and society.
Also at odds with the assumption of sameness has been the construction of girls as somehow lacking in comparison with boys, in a deficit-style framework.

In this framework, the rationale for the inclusive curriculum and indeed, more recent reform proposals has been constructed around deficit-style notions of women's lesser access to, and achievement in, male-dominated areas, as illustrated by the following observations from the N.S.W. "Education and Training Strategy for Girls and Women" (1989:2).

"In Schools girls:
* have a low level of participation in technical and key science subjects and highest level mathematics and science courses
* consider a narrow range of options in making career choices
* have lower levels of self-esteem".

This common way of formulating the "problem" of girls' education in relation to the male norm demonstrates the manner in which the curriculum reinforces male-defined educational criteria of success and failure.

It has its historical background in the Karmel report of 1973, Schools in Australia, which stated,

"being a girl is an educational disadvantage, except when it is also associated with high socio-economic status".

The higher value given to the areas in which males are successful is graphically illustrated by simply reversing this process in the following hypothetical manner:

"In Schools boys:
* have a low level of participation in the domestic sciences and key areas of personal growth and development
* consider a narrow range of options, such as effective parenting and interpersonal skills
* have lower levels of self-discipline, socialization and relationship skills."

Although this is an emphasis not commonly seen in official statements, it demonstrates easily what a curriculum which reflected women's skills and values might look like.

Just as there has been little questioning officially of the "disadvantaged" framework, similarly the other side of this relationship has not been seriously questioned: namely, why and how do boys continue to be advantaged in education?

Although issues of female access to the male-dominated areas of science and technology remain a priority, philosophical questions about the nature and value of these areas and the different relationship of boys and girls in schools to these areas, are not being raised by curriculum developers.

At the same time, these areas are undergoing intensive examination by feminists working in other disciplines and in women's studies. However, this activity generally speaking is not occurring in education. There is a gap between contemporary feminist theory and educational philosophy which has meant that reform efforts are only now being subjected to serious scrutiny.

In terms of curriculum, there has been little questioning or challenging of the masculine
paradigmatic value system running through the content and teaching of male-dominated subject areas and the focus of intervention has been on girls themselves as objects to be modified rather than as subjects in a total educational environment which needs changing. Although some recent Reports, for example, a N.S.W. Department of Education Report by Crawford et.al. (1990) have been highly critical of the teaching of computer literacy within a masculine context in schools, they nevertheless emphasise the empowering nature of such courses, rather than that the need to challenge and transform the entire epistemological foundations and values inherent in them. Statements such as

"if computer technology is as empowering as the rhetoric suggests, then it is vital that girls are enabled to be equally participative in engaging with the technology as boys" (1990:4)

illustrate this tendency. This paper suggests that both emphases are necessary for real change to occur.

Similarly, the implications of merely including some female experience within an essentially male-defined curricular world view have not generally been seriously questioned at the level of theory - some exceptions are Foster (1987, 1989); Suggett (1987) and Yates (1988), who have raised theoretical problems with this approach.

Inclusive strategies which attempt in the liberal tradition of equality merely to extend men's education to women while constructing women as the "other" within a deficit model, have serious consequences for women. They require women to adapt or accommodate to the values, structures and systems created by men. As Martin (1981:104) has commented, on the double bind for women in education, for anyone constructed as "other" in relation to patriarchal school settings, this means that

"to be educated they must give up their own way of experiencing and looking at the world, thus alienating themselves from themselves. To be unalienated they must remain uneducated".

As First Year students in Foundations of Education at Macquarie University have observed,

"women may have gained some equality with men, but not as women" and "equality" is seen as women having equal rights in a man's world; they have chosen to be equal on men's terms".

This experiential dimension of curriculum is one that to date has not been prominent in reform strategies. Moreover, adopting female experience as an ordering principle or variable or category of analysis has not generally guided curriculum development activities as it has begun to do in Women's Studies. This process will clearly need to be a vital concern for educators. Such an approach to curriculum would involve a shift towards process as well as content and opening up the curriculum which, as Maher (1985:30) has suggested, allows for a

"pedagogy appropriate for voicing and exploring the hitherto unexpressed perspectives of women and others (in a way which) must be collaborative, cooperative and interactive".

Maher suggests a method by means of explicating the traditions of women's group behaviours and ways of relating to authority. Some impressive developments in praxis exploring the relationships of female teachers and students have been undertaken by Judy Dorney (1990) and others working in Carol Gilligan's Centre at Harvard University. In this context, Luce Irigaray's notion of alterity is useful as a starting point for alternative approaches to curriculum, which have women as their subject. "Alterity" is essentially an ethical term which refers to an independent and autonomous "otherness" not in relation to the masculine or sexually neutral subject, and not therefore based on equivalence to the male norm. Grosz (1989:xiv) defines Irigaray's concept of "alterity" as "a notion of the other outside the binary opposition between self and other, an independent and autonomous other with its own qualities and attributes". Alterity does
not merely imply difference, and in this way presents possibilities for conceptualizing "woman" which go beyond sameness/difference debates, that is, beyond a view of women as fundamentally relative and reducible to the male benchmark.

Schuster and Van Dyne (1984) have identified six stages of curriculum change, all of which are necessary if the underlying masculine paradigms of the curriculum are to be challenged. These stages are reproduced in Table 1 on page 12. They draw our attention to the "invisible paradigms" of masculinity which they define (1984:417) as

"internalized assumptions, the network of unspoken agreements, the implicit contracts that all the participants in the process of (higher) education have agreed to, usually unconsciously, in order to bring about learning".

Similarly, Leck (1987:344) cites the British sociologists Brittan and Maynard (1984:204) who define the paradigm, "masculinity" as an

"ideology which becomes generalized in society. Those who are objectified, who are dominated, come to see the world through male eyes. The 'male epistemological stance' becomes everybody's stance. Women and other objectified groups define their own realities through the perspective of their oppressors."

This paradigm, Leck suggests, produces a kind of reification of masculinist values in curriculum, teaching practices and processes, by which success is measured.

As mentioned earlier, some recent educational theoretical developments which appear to be more empowering for women can also be seen to be a sophisticated re-working of the liberal/equality position. I am referring here to developments in critical theory, change theory, and some aspects of cultural theory which seek to empower young women through "restructuring femininity", for example, Taylor (1989:28).

This is not to deny the value and importance of individual pedagogical strategies implied by these theories, but rather to suggest that unless such strategies are informed by an all-embracing paradigm shift, they will have limited success within the existing patriarchal framework.

A similar point is made by Gore (1989:2) when she warns of the "dangers and normalizing tendencies" of notions of empowerment within both critical and feminist discourses and also in a discussion of the pervasiveness of the male benchmark by Irigaray (1985:133) in her essay, "Any theory of the 'Subject' has always been appropriated by the 'Masculine'.'

What is extremely heartening in the brief exploration of these extremely complex issues attempted in this paper, and in the wealth of recent scholarship in the area of feminist pedagogy is the movement towards what Leck (1987:353) describes as a

"consciousness of the entanglement of gender with paradigmatic problems in patriarchal theories of schooling".

I am suggesting that this entanglement is endemic to all existing theories of schooling resulting, as Leck suggests, in the need for a

"wariness of the patriarchal facility to categorize and bury feminist pedagogy, for example, within liberation pedagogy, rather than to consider it as a viable challenge to the overall patriarchal paradigm."

However, it is clear that the strength of feminist theoretical and pedagogical work as it is currently developing, is posing a profound challenge to the entire basic structure of this paradigm.
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