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Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality

Gender, education and citizenship

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CITIZENSHIP

Gender equality in educational access, participation and outcome is central to the promotion of democracy. A vibrant civic life in which citizens are engaged in all aspects of society is critical to the flourishing of democratic institutions, and an important precondition for promoting social justice and human rights. Citizens' rights, responsibilities and duties/obligations to society are premised upon individuals, groups and communities having access to and being represented in national political/governmental structures and being able to participate fully in the range of economic, cultural and political decision-making in society. Without education, individuals cannot develop their full potential, nor can they participate fully as citizens in society. Educational institutions therefore play a key role in the democratic process by giving individuals the opportunity, the knowledge and the commitment to influence the nature and direction of society.

Educational institutions also contribute to civil society by offering individuals a chance to better their lives. Educational qualifications are a form of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1997) which can be converted into economic capital in the labour market. However such qualifications are a two edged sword. If unequally distributed, qualifications can increase the gap between those who already are advantaged and those citizens who are disadvantaged or marginalised. Education therefore can empower citizens but it can also become the mechanism for social exclusion. The distribution of education therefore has considerable significance for those groups in society, such as women, who still need to access what is their civic entitlement.

Social justice for men and women as well as for different cultural, religious and ethnic groups also entails 'recognition of diversity' (Fraser, 1995). This recognition principle is as important as the redistributive principle even if it is difficult to use in practice. There is always the danger that by recognising gender differences, beliefs about essential biological/natural sex differences are legitimated. Nevertheless, recognition of the particular circumstances which have shaped women's lives and the contributions they can and have made to the development of society is central to the achievement of social justice. At a minimum level, this entails teaching about men and women's different social positions, values and expectations. It also means thinking about the gender assumptions behind current notions of citizenship; it involves breaking with the past and including within the framework of citizenship what Martha Nussbaum (1995) called 'the affective domain' - the field of personal/emotional relationships. In this domain, the caring ethos (Noddings, 1988) and maternal rather than fraternal values provide alternative citizenship values. Recognition of gender diversity would also entail addressing the diversity of women's experience as members of different ethnic, cultural and religious groups and socio-economic communities.

In sum, the establishment of democracies is dependent upon national/international educational institutions offering full access and recognition to women, minority ethnic and religious groups, and other marginalised groups. For women to achieve equal status and power to men and to be awarded recognition as individuals in their own right is central to this international agenda. Such recognition can only be achieved through the promotion of a gender sensitive education.

EDUCATING THE 'MODEL CITIZEN'

Nation states have particular ways in which they shape young people as citizens. Different principles of distribution and recognition have been used to construct national educational systems. Some countries have worked with egalitarian and social inclusive principles educating all children in a common school system thus assimilating social, ethnic and cultural/religious differences. Other societies have segregated, stratified or differentiated the forms of education received by different groups of children either positively in order to recognise differences or more negatively to exclude certain categories in society. In these ways, educational systems have played a key role in shaping future citizen's identities and lives.

The need to transmit core values or 'citizen virtues' across social divisions in order to unite members of a community has to be carefully balanced against the need to transmit differential knowledge and skills to different groups of children in preparation for economic life. In choosing common values to transmit to the new generation of children, some educational systems have prioritised national values and cultures through an emphasis upon patriotism and such symbols as the national flag and anthem, and key national institutions. Socialist or communitarian principles have emphasised the importance of schooling in creating social equality and collectivity. Western European liberal democratic approaches to the education of the citizen have tended to focus the development of individual potential (Heater, 1990). These political principles change in different eras and reflect shifts in societal values. However they all point to the key role given to educational systems in creating a model citizen.

The model citizen in liberal democracies has tended to refer narrowly to the rights, duties and obligations which individuals have in relation to government, the state and the political sphere. This sphere is usually marked as masculine, with women associated primarily with the private sphere. Carol Pateman (1988), for example, found that the concept of society in Western European liberal democratic philosophy was based upon a *social contract* between men, 'a fraternal pact', which allowed men to take control of government. Women were assumed to represent 'disorder' (Pateman, 1989), and were understood to be subversive of a social order which was based on rationality and justice. Hence women were excluded from the public realm and subjected to men through an equally important *sexual contract* (often in the form of marriage contract). In this way men gained control over women's sexuality and therefore over biological reproduction. The conditions for women's inclusion in liberal democratic citizenship were their subordination to men and their exclusion from the public sphere. For women to achieve

full citizenship status, the distinction between male public and female private spheres would need to be removed.

The model of the citizen, although appearing to apply to both men and women equally, may only refer to what are conceived of as male roles in society - traditionally the worker, the voter, and the soldier. In these cases, women are excluded from participation in nation building since the dominant image of the citizen is framed by a warrior ethos, male narratives of nationalism or militarism (Turner, 2001). Even the Western European civic republican tradition of participatory democracy offered a model of the citizen that was 'associated with the involvement of men in formal politics, their association with the civic virtues of military valour and political activism' (Heater, 1999: 91-2). Being a citizen and doing the practice of citizenship has been assumed to be 'a uniquely male function' (ibid, 92). Often these sorts of political principles have been built into educational institutions so that there were considerable differences in the education thought appropriate for a male child and that required for a female child. The female child is often only prepared for the role of wife and mother and carer rather than the citizen. Women are assumed to adopt specific roles within the community and family, outside the sphere of the male public domain of government.

The implications are that, although girls might receive an education, they are unlikely to meet the high levels of participation demanded by public life and have therefore tended to be seriously under-represented in politics. Providing girls with a domestically oriented education confirms women as second-class citizens. However, as can be seen in many advanced economies, high female academic achievement does not necessarily ensure women the full entitlements of citizenship in the labour market or in the polity. Equal distribution of education therefore is an essential condition for gender equality but it is not sufficient on its own to ensure these goals. Careful thinking about the nature of the curriculum, teaching and learning is also required.

FROM PUPIL TO CITIZEN¹

These particular normative models of the male and female citizen are learned as the child progresses through the levels, hierarchies and processes of the school. The rituals of the school (assemblies, uniforms, celebrations), the forms of discipline, the relationships between the teacher and pupil and the curriculum content shape male and female citizen identities. School staffing structures also represent to pupils the principles of the social order. The question is whether these normative models built into the educational fabric is conducive to the promotion of greater social equality. Ideally learning environments should model democratic principles in all their aspects. If girls are able to learn through schooling that they are in control of their own lives, then they will be more likely not just to perform well but also to engage in political issues when adult.

Educational institutions can help this process by questioning some of the obstacles which hinder women from taking up their full rights and obligations as citizens, A major obstacle to female civic participation has not only been the narrowness of the official

¹ Drawn from Gordon et al 2000.

curricula for schoolgirls, but also the failure to recognise the restrictions which unequal gender relations in the private sphere represent in relation to women's contribution in the public arena. The role which men play in the family is a central aspect of this. By teaching about family structures and personal relations, schools allow young men and women to explore the personal consequences of life choices - especially the family - work balance and the sexual division of labour in the household. Sexuality education arguably also could be more powerful were it to be part of civic education. Learning about the relationship of sexuality and citizenship allows pupils to consider how male and female adolescents negotiate sexuality and how the norms of heterosexuality in many societies impinge on the citizenship rights of a range of individuals and groups who do not fit its prescriptions (Richardson, 1998). In the context of HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancies, sexuality education has become a critical aspect of both male and female citizenship entitlement. Schooling girls therefore opens up the possibility of genuine dialogue between the sexes about the importance of this sphere and about ways of encouraging personal responsibility.

Another way in which educational institutions can broaden and deepen female civic participation is by educating all young people about women's politics. Although women might have been formally excluded from public democratic frames, this does not necessarily imply that women have failed to engage with political life. The school curriculum can value women's contribution to the development of society through the study of women's political movements - especially since women have been particularly strong in group based forms of opposition to unjust politics (Young, 1995). Other important topics include whether there are differences in male and female ethico-political values (Gilligan, 1986). Women as educators, carers, mothers and as community activists have also played a key role in promoting citizenship. Yet, this contribution to citizenship is often neglected or rendered invisible. Girls can be encouraged to look for positive role models of women in their community who have contributed to the common good. Such strategies challenge the view that it is not feminine to work in the public domain and challenge the negative stereotypes of women who do.

Achieving full citizenship status for men and women is not a static one-off event. Attention needs to be focused on how to evolve active male and female civic participation through styles of teaching and learning. For example, it is now recognised that there should be opportunities for both boys and girls to achieve a sense of agency - of being in control of their lives and the social environment in which they are located. Boys tend to be offered more chance to negotiate their identities in school whilst girls can be constrained by an overly protective environment (Gordon et al, 2000). This difference can be expressed in the amount of physical, linguistic and pedagogic space taken up by boys in mixed classrooms and schools; much of the 'action' in schools is male. Girls and boys need to experience the possibilities of human action and they should be able to participate fully in the learning experience without fear of intimidation, violence, marginalisation or silencing.

It is equally important that any formal civic preparation or citizenship education, such as school councils, pupil leadership roles, assertiveness training, courses on leadership

skills, and statutory/non-statutory forms of civic/citizenship education, are available to girls/women as well as boys and men. Attention in some countries therefore is now focused on findings ways of promoting gender equality both in the school generally and more specifically within formal citizenship/civic education programmes (see Irish example in box)

GENDER EQUALITY AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN IRELAND

Citizenship education is a central aim of the formal education system in the Republic of Ireland. The Civics, Social and Political Education (CSPE) programme for the post primary education for 12-15 year olds was introduced in 1990. It is mandatory, subject to external assessment and has a concrete set of goals and teaching resources which teachers can use as a starting point from which to explore topics of interest or relevance to students or the school ethos. Gender equality is one of the sub themes which should be addressed as part of the 'commitment to oppose prejudice, discrimination and social injustice at all levels of society' (CPSE curriculum, p14). The teaching guide offers suggested activities for the Human Dignity/Independence concept focusing on stereotyping and various aspects of gender equality. Some of the suggestions include:

- Track how families are portrayed by the media in advertising or in the popular 'soaps' like "Fair City", "Glenroe", "Coronation Street", "East Enders", etc.
- Interview elderly people to explore how family life has changed in relation to gender roles
- Compare an evening of advertisements and the programmes they accompany to examine gender/stereotyping
- Survey the jobs done at home and by whom for 1 week
- Investigate range of school subjects on offer for boys and girls in local area
- Survey range of careers students within the class would like to pursue
- Investigate the way different groups, e.g. women, travellers, refugees, the unemployed, etc. are portrayed in the media
- Invite a speaker from the National Women's Council of Ireland.

The topics also include sex stereotyping, differentiated employment rights, media representations and domestic roles. Gender equality is presented as a concern for both public and private spheres. The gender dimensions of the private sphere are reinforced in the Junior Cycle Social and Personal and Health Education syllabus under the 'Relationships and Sexuality' Unit.

Lynch and her colleagues in the Equality Studies Centre at University College Dublin have developed an Equality Framework which has been adopted formally by the Irish Government. This framework proposes that all economic, political, legislative and social policy should address four core contexts which generate gender inequality. These are:

- the **economic** sphere concerned with the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services;
- the **socio-political** sphere concerned with the production, transmission and legitimisation of cultural practices and products
- the **political** sphere refers to all activities in which power is enacted including decision making spheres and procedures.
- the **affective** domain connotes those activities involved in developing bonds of solidarity, care and love between human beings; socio-emotional relations that give people a sense of value and belonging of being appreciated, loved and cared for in their personal, community and associational and working lives.

'The pursuit of a socially just society', they argue, 'needs to address all of these four core equality issues' (Lynch et al. *ibid* 24-25).

GENDER, CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND THE GLOBAL AGENDA

Globally, many countries are considering the role of education in the creation of citizens in the twenty first century (Cogan and Derricott, 2000). The movement to rethink development studies, environmental education, global and human rights education, multicultural education, peace education and world studies reflect concerns about complexity of global economics and government, the vulnerability of societies and individuals, the multitude of citizenship identities and the need to create greater social cohesion, stability and order in the world. Traditional distinctions between public and private activities, between national and international governments, are becoming blurred. Global developments suggests that civic society needs to be reinforced in order to cope with the increased levels of risk, instability, and the speed of social change. In response, new centres for civic education have been set up; there is, for example, an Asian network of civic education, Commonwealth countries are being encouraged to consider citizenship education and the Council of Europe suggests it is time to consider what values and skills individuals will require in the 21st century (ibid).

The goals of global education encapsulate the key themes of justice, equality, tolerance and peace and are now being adopted by countries all over the world. The goals for educational institutions are two fold:

- to ensure education for all across the globe;
- to educate all about the most important issues in the world (such as development issues).

UNESCO and NGO campaigns across the world have focused on how their ideal model of global education could incorporate gender. One example of a global education course which achieves this is described in the box.

Global Education and Gender

A variety of Development Education Centres across the UK are currently involved in 'World Voices' or 'Let's Talk' projects which aim to engage students of all ages in a discourse about global issues. For example, the 'Let's Talk' project in Birmingham (organised by Teachers in Development Education) is a strategy to encourage older secondary students to look at the economic, political, environmental and social dimensions of global issues, and the latter involves raising questions about 'how gender, race, disability, class and age affect social relationships'. Interestingly a significant proportion of the students involved in actually running this project are female. World Voices projects involve speakers, usually with direct experience of living in other countries across the world such as China, Africa or India, going into primary and secondary schools to talk about topical global issues, 'working locally of global justice and equality'. For example, in Norwich (Norfolk Education and Action for Development) about 50 per cent of the 'voices' or speakers currently involved in the programme are female and some of which are willing to talk explicitly about issues relating to gender.

Global education curricula, with its traditions of critical thinking, may be able to address gender equality and female citizenship issues more effectively than mainstream school subjects. It can encourage students to reflect upon and problematise gender patterns that affect global communities, national communities, local communities and/or the individual. In mixed classrooms boys, for example, may be more receptive to considering issues of female poverty in another country in the first instance and this can be used as an effective stepping stone to considering gender inequality issues closer to home (whether it be in an economically developed or less developed country).

Contemporary rhetoric related to strategies for achieving gender equality frequently highlights the need for the development of women as citizens globally. For example, UNIFEM's (the United Nations Development Fund for Women) mandate recognised that multilateral institutions have a responsibility to understand and respond to the need to 'build women's capacities to advocate for their own interests' and that UNIFEM also 'has a key role to play in bringing the women's movement's experience with empowerment into the context of multilateral policy-making' (www.unifem.undp.org). But in relation to development issues in less economically developed countries, the need to transform the education of the female citizen is especially pressing. For example, in Zambia, rural women with no education are twice as likely to be living in extreme poverty as those who have benefited from between 8 and 12 years of education. Nearly, 12 million children under 5 die each year as a direct result of avoidable infectious diseases associated with poverty, education could save many of their lives. Evidence shows that each year spent by mothers in primary schools reduces children's risk of premature death by around 8 per cent. Therefore the more educated the mother, the more healthy the mother and child (www.oxfam.org). Getting all girls into school addresses more than a fundamental human right - it is essential for the health and social and economic prosperity of a community, a nation or a world region.

Global education has been linked to the more controversial issue over whether children should be educated not just *about* but also *for* global citizenship. It will be important to ensure that women and their experiences are included in these newer concepts of citizenship. Women after all have made a major contribution to the promotion of global peace and social harmony. Yet global citizenship education, like national citizenship education, also contains potential challenges to education for gender equality. For example, although issues within private or domestic living can feature within a variety of global topics within a curriculum such as global religions or global health, topics linked to the work or public sphere (such as global fair trade or political elections) appear to be featured more regularly. Teachers and curricula also have to consider the consequences of exposing their students to examples of comparatively 'worse' patriarchal systems and gender inequalities.

A gender-sensitive, global citizenship education within a national school curriculum has the potential to help women contribute to cross-national global thinking, it provides a space for addressing gender-related issues and it embraces a pedagogical philosophy that empowers students by encouraging them to engage critically with contemporary concerns. In the more economically developed countries, it can encourage non-

exploitative forms of intercultural communication and sharing with countries that might experience economic or humanitarian predicaments on a more significant scale. Global education courses on gender therefore sit comfortably with other UNESCO projects such as 'Creating our Common Future: educating for unity in diversity'² which seek to address issues of inequality in education through international discourse.

Global media and ICT can also help the project of offering Education for All, through the provision of materials which support this democratic project, by developing young people's skills in relation to ICT and by offering opportunities to explore alternative political agendas, identities and relationships. The virtual global community can offer women opportunities to experience autonomy and independence and can facilitate active involvement in global alliances. Educational institutions, communities and families can utilise such global networks to encourage greater female democratic participation in society, over and above the constraints and restrictions of national contexts and customary traditions (Kenway and Langmead, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

Educational institutions have many different aspects to consider when educating girls and boys. The aim is to ensure that both sexes succeed in education. Educating girls from all different social and economic groups up to the basic level of schooling is not only an economic priority but it is also a cultural and humanistic priority. Without education girls cannot successfully enter the labour market, nor work with formal political structures. The education they receive should value and promote female contributions to society and challenge the constraints upon women's lives if they are to be effective. Educational institutions need to work with the principles of social inclusion, egalitarianism and recognition.

Educating girls from all different backgrounds can bring democracy that little bit closer so long as the model of the 'citizen' which is constructed by such institutions is flexible, contestable and adaptable. Gender relations are changing globally and within many nation states. They are also changing within social class cultures and ethnic or religious communities. Educational institutions therefore can play a major role in bringing citizenship identities into line with such contemporary changes and in line with the principles of human rights and social justice.

By educating girls, they learn that they are respected as individuals and as members of a community; they learn that they have control over their own lives as individuals in their own right and that they acquire the confidence to act (these are what Bernstein, 1996 called democratic pedagogic rights). And, if girls acquire an appropriate form of political literacy, a full sense of civic (moral and social) responsibility and a commitment to become active citizens in the society in which they belong, then once adults, arguably they will be in a stronger position to promote those egalitarian reforms required in the

² Discussed at the 40th International Conference of the World Education Fellowship, Australia, 1998. The corresponding publication was published in 2001 edited by Jack Campbell, it is called *Creating our Common Future: educating for unity in diversity* UNESCO publishing/Berghahn Books.

name of human rights and social justice. For this to be achieved, women need to ensure 'privacy, protection and autonomy' within the educational system as well as outside (Yuval Davies and Werbner, 1999). The principle of gender equality in line with 'recognition of diversity' should be built into the educational fabric and supported through civic curricula. Providing education for both girls and boys is the first step to recognising that, first and foremost, women have a legitimate place as citizens in a democratic society.

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Note:

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