

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

### **Beyond "Gender Sensitization" and "Gender Mainstreaming": Comparative and International Education towards the Democratic "Re"-construction of Gender**

This issue of *CICE* is devoted to furthering our understanding of the complex ways in which gender relations are constructed and maintained within educational settings and of the implications of gender discourses produced within these contexts, or in relation to education, for reconstructing a more truly democratic "gender order" (Connell, 1987). Since the 1970s, there has been much attention devoted to the ways in which social institutions, including education, served to reproduce inequalities in the larger society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Some of these theories have demonstrated that schooling processes are deeply implicated in shaping gendered identities which legitimate different modes of behavior for boys and girls within schools, and reproducing a social order that values hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 1996).

The emergence of Resistance theory rendered visible the role of schools and those who inhabit them in constructing gender identities and reproducing gender inequality. Although gender was not central to his analysis, Paul Willis' critical ethnographic account of a group of twelve "non-academic working class lads" in their last two years at a school in the West midlands in England in the mid 1970s, was the first study which demonstrated how boys' identities are defined in relation to, and in opposition to femininity and subordinated forms of masculinity and underscored how gender and sexuality served to secure and legitimate their power and domination (Lesko, 2000; Skeggs, 1992).

More recently, the theoretical focus has shifted to a number of more explicitly gender-centered approaches to compensate for the previous neglect, or undertheorizing of, women's experiences (Grant, Horan, & Watts-Warren, 1994). This issue of *CICE* attempts to contribute further to gender-centered theorizing in education by deconstructing gender discourses as they occur within the context of various formal and informal educational sites, including elementary and secondary schools, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and in the international development arena, in order to provide clues as to how we might go about democratically reconstructing gender. Collectively, they underscore the need to challenge and transform gender relations if educational spaces and society more generally are to become more democratic educational spaces.

The first article by Gail Boldt provides a critical reconceptualization of gender, power, and agency which is informed by her thoughtful reflections about her own personal experiences and the conceptualization of "power as a doing." In *Toward a Reconceptualization of Gender and Power in an Elementary Classroom*, Boldt elaborates the struggles she faced as an elementary school teacher committed to challenging sexism and gender inequity by raising the consciousness of children she taught. Citing episodes in the classroom, she discusses her initial interpretations and reactions from a model of "school as reproduction of sexist society", and then describes how utilizing a view of

identity as performative (Butler, 1990, 1993) allowed her to reconceptualize her concept of power as it was enacted among her young students. She discusses the children's uses of liberal feminist discourses in ways that were effective for some identity claims and highly limiting for others. By elucidating the implications of viewing girls as in need of empowerment and encouraging them to make choices that the teacher/adult sees as beneficial for girls, Boldt warns us how easy it is even for a critical educator with best intentions to contribute to perpetuating the very disempowered status of girls and women. For Boldt, the democratic "re-construction" of gender in an elementary classroom starts from her acknowledgment that she is no less likely than the children are to hold contradictory, biased, or self-interested positions and her determination to devalue the role of the teacher. She discusses how changing her original view of girls as victims and boys as victimizers changed her conceptualization of the role she as the teacher could play in the classroom. She sees a transformative role of elementary education in the teacher's more respectful attitude toward children and open discussions of contested claims and practices in the daily life of the classroom.

Just as Boldt sees hope in a teacher's conscious effort to live together with children in a respectful way, Alice Ginsberg in *Building on Student Knowledge: A new frame for gender equity in education that transcends the sameness/difference dichotomy* sees hope in the efforts of middle and high school teachers who use critical pedagogy to raise the consciousness of teenagers. The second article by Ginsberg reports on some of the successful efforts of participants in a three-year professional development program called GATE (Gender Awareness Through Education), which was piloted in the school district of low-income urban neighborhood in the United States. Although both Ginsberg and Boldt write on the US schools, minority students attending urban public schools in Ginsberg's article make a sharp contrast with white, middle-class students in a private elementary school featured in Boldt's article. A number of teachers profiled in Ginsberg's article found ways to transcend a discourse of sameness versus difference that emphasizes the teaching of "appropriate" attitudes, behaviors, or choices for boys and girls, looking instead to pedagogies and practices where student knowledge was central, and student agency was essential. Ginsberg argues that GATE participants' concern with helping "at risk" boys and girls had meaningful and positive impacts on these students' lives only when teachers successfully engaged students in defining the problems and seeking answers in specific contexts. Similarly, pointing out that her very concern with helping girls initially prevented her from viewing girls as powerful, Boldt suggests that an enthusiastic critical educator does not automatically translate into practices that acknowledge students' agency. Both Boldt and Ginsberg reconfirm that what we need in order to promote gender equity is much more than those adults who are highly aware of gender issues, calling for students' active participation in the democratic "re-construction" of gender.

In the third article of the issue, the terrain shifts from the formal schooling context of the United States to the informal educational sphere of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in an entirely different geographical space, namely Israel. In *Minding the Political Gap: The educational imperative of NGOs*, Cathryn Magno underscores the emancipatory potential of nonformal and informal educational processes in assisting women in realizing their "political selves" and encouraging them to take action toward social change. Magno builds upon feminist critical theory to reconstruct the manner in which

the discipline of political science treats women's political participation, envisioning nothing short of a re-vamping of the field in order to account for women's pathways to political influence. Magno argues that civil society contains spaces wherein democracy can be enhanced, particularly for those for whom opportunities to participate in decision-making at the state level are few. Magno argues that women's participation in civil society through NGOs constitutes its own kind of educational social movement that has the catalytic effect of increasing women's "political capital". The NGOs profiled in her study foster the networks, skills and knowledge that enable women to take action toward re-constructing gender paradigms and approaches to authentic power. Supporting women's education and growth through NGOs, Magno maintains, is one way to redress the gender gap in political education and the inequalities that persist in society at large.

All four articles in the issue deal centrally with notions of agency and empowerment, concepts which have enabled educators to imagine greater possibilities for structural change from collective action. As Weis reminds us, "agency is not enacted without reference to social structure (of which the school is only one part); indeed it is absolutely enacted in relation to such structure (...)" (1996, p. xi). In, *Constructing Consensus: The feminist modern and the reconstruction of gender*, Frances Vavrus also focuses on issues of empowerment and agency, as conceptualized in recent development documents, but with a view to underscoring the real-world limitations that accompany such terms in the absence of broader structural changes in the political economy. While not wholly negating the role of true empowerment and agency in fostering positive social change, Vavrus calls for changes in the national and international political-economic climate alongside these more individual sources of transformation. Through a textual analysis of contemporary international development documents, Vavrus assess the complexities and ambiguities inherent in those discourses which locate women and education at the heart of development programs designed to address such varied topics as population, HIV/AIDS and environmental conservation. Vavrus problematizes those discourses which have served to construct and sustain a consensus regarding women's education as the primary solution to complex development problems from the vantage point of "the ways that crises are policed by examining the problems and solutions specified in international development policies". Adapting Said's method of "strategic formation" to study the connections among texts and between texts and society, Vavrus utilizes a "developmentalism" framework to explore the ways in which women in the Third World are conceptualized as capable of transforming themselves through such avenues as education, empowerment and individual agency. Vavrus challenges the construction of women as the sole targets for intervention, rather than on gender relations as the locus of social re-construction, contending that "developmentalism has made women visible without a concomitant re-visioning of the macroeconomic environment that shapes gender relations". Vavrus article thus highlights the inadequacies inherent in those agentic discourses which focus exclusively on the individual as the source of change and transformation, and exposes them for what she regards as a strategy that "lifts the burden for development from international financial institutions and national policy makers and places it squarely on communities and individuals, especially on women".

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