

DIVERSITY CHALLENGES IN LANDBASED EDUCATION

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Abstract. Equality and equal opportunities for women and men are central values of our society. Changes in traditional gender roles can only be achieved if people learn to be more aware of them. Gender-sensitive pedagogy assumes that girls and boys enter school with different interests, strengths and weaknesses through their socialisation in family and society and are confronted with different worlds of experience. For this reason, school – alongside family – is an extremely influential institution for the development of social gender and an equal relationship between the sexes. Based on the concept of the course "Sexuality and Gender", possibilities are shown how gender-sensitive education can be introduced in agrarian and environmental pedagogical professions and how the school system can benefit from it.

Keywords: Agrarian and Environmental pedagogy; gender; gender competence; gender-sensitive; diversity; sexuality; methods

1. Design, Aim and Methods of the Course “Sexuality and Gender”

Since autumn 2008, the University College¹⁾ has been offering Environmental Pedagogy as a study programme in addition to the classic bachelor programme Agrarian Pedagogy. The programme is suitable for future teachers and advisors who want to become involved in environmental and sustainable development (Karre, 2008: 115). In 2016/17, the programme was renewed to introduce a teaching qualification in biology at all vocational secondary schools with an environmental focus. Apart from anthropology, physiology, anatomy, health and nutrition, the course "Sexuality and Gender" was implemented in the new programme.

1.1. Design and content

The compulsory course, which comprises 1 ECTS point, is offered in the third semester and organised as a lecture with excursion character, i.e. during the four units at least one excursion relevant to the course has to be carried out. The course focuses on theoretical foundations and reflection in combination with various methods on the following main topics:

- Definition and difference of social and biological gender
- Socialisation in relation to gender roles

- Gender in the school setting
- Possibilities of reproductive manipulation and embryonic development of humans (excursion to the worldwide unique Museum of Contraception and Abortion in Vienna)
- Sexual identities and gender diversity/LGBTIQ (guest lecture by a team of experts from the *RosaLila PantherInnen*, a gay and lesbian initiative from Graz)
- Self-perception versus external perception and critical examination of body images in relation to social media and pornography (documentary film "Embrace", which questions socially determined ideals of beauty and presents the Body-Positivity Movement as a possible alternative)



Picture 1. Sex education at the Museum for Contraception and Abortion, Vienna, November 2019.
Source of picture: Sarah Eichinger



Picture 2. Guest lecture about Gender Diversity with Joe Niedermayer, RosaLila PantherInnen, October 2017. Source of picture: Sarah Eichinger

1.2. Aim

The overall aim of the course is to enable students to acquire gender competence so that they can act in a gender-sensitive way in their role as future educators and teachers. Gender competence includes professional competence, methodological competence, social competence and a self-reflective attitude. Professional competence is the knowledge of gender relations and the effects of their attributions, recognising consequences for the personal development of pupils, and knowledge of current research on linking gender with other social dimensions. Methodological competence is the ability of a teacher/educator to acquire new specialized knowledge or new teaching methods and to link these to the topic of gender. Social competence refers

to the ability to discover the needs of students hidden behind gender attributions, for example through active listening, and to promote skills in this way. A self-reflective attitude makes it possible to question one's own and society's gender roles. (Mach es gleich!, 2013: 33).

In detail this means that the students deal with the main topics mentioned above and discuss and reflect on them with their fellow students. As a result they are able to understand and present sexuality as a biological, social and psychological phenomenon and the difference between biological and social gender. They are familiar with various possibilities of reproductive manipulation and the embryonic development of a human being. They can list health-related, legal and socio-political facts of people with all kinds of sexual identities and gender diversity. They are aware of predominant body images in combination with gender clichés, which are prevalent in advertising and film and often reproduced in social media channels. They know about the Body-Positivity Movement and can list differences between mainstream and alternative pornography.

1.3. Methods

A central aspect of gender competence at school is to enable teachers to recognise themselves as educational subjects with a biographical awareness of their own history as girls/boys and to reflect on their own involvement in gender relations. Everyday school life is characterised by many rapidly changing situations, events, processes and decisions in which teachers have to rely on their own basic assumptions and perceptions. Therefore, the acquisition of gender competence is characterised by extensive reflection work. It is a matter of recognising and, if necessary, expanding one's own basic assumptions, patterns of perception, behaviour and reaction and critically questioning one's own practice. Such fields of practice may include break situations, social interaction in school culture, counselling or preventing violence. Teachers should not define girls or boys in terms of a rigid image of being a girl or boy – for example: “I need a strong man to move the tables” or “Girls are better at reading than boys” or “Boys are better at mathematics than girls.” This applies both to stereotypes and “modern” role expectations, even if these are desirable and based on personal experience. (Mach es gleich!, 2013: 33 – 34).

In order to become aware of one's own socialisation and ideas about (gender) roles, the following methods are used for self-reflection.

1.3.1. What if...

The method “What if” takes 30 minutes and aims to take the perspective of the opposite sex. In addition, exchanging personal experiences on the topic of gender is to be promoted.

The students get together in small groups and exchange views on the main question: “What would have become of me if I had been born as a girl (for men) or as a boy (for women)?” The following questions are intended to stimulate discussion:

- What would I have played with? Name specific games from your childhood.
- Who would I have played with? Name real people from your childhood.

- Which hobbies would I have had?
- What clothes would I have worn?
- What television programmes would I have watched? Name specific programmes that were on television at the time.
- Which books would I have read?
- What would my parents have allowed me to do, what would they have forbidden?
- What would I have received praise for?
- What school subjects would I have been interested in?
- What subjects would I have been good at?
- Which profession would I have chosen?
- If I had become a teacher: What subjects would I teach? Would they be different from the subjects I teach now?
- What would I do differently at school if I were a female/male teacher?

Finally, in plenary session, the groups exchange views on what kind of gender-specific socialization they would assume for themselves. (Mach es gleich!, 2013: 56-57).

1.3.2. In my school days

The method “In my school days” takes 30 minutes time. It aims to make one's own socialisation regarding gender roles visible by reflecting on experiences from earlier school years.

First of all, the students recall their own memories of earlier school days and complete a worksheet with sentences such as “Girls/boys were allowed to...”; “Girls and boys should...”; “Girls/boys were particularly good at...”; “Girls/boys were interested in...”. Afterwards they find themselves in small groups and try to answer the following questions:

- What was my role in these communities?
- How do I feel today when I think back to my school days and my role as a boy/girl?
- What in particular do I remember? What did I consider disturbing, what did I enjoy?
- What role did the teachers play concerning the relationship between girls and boys in my class?
- Did the teachers treat me differently – in an unfair or privileged way – because of my sex?
- Did these experiences influence/shape my future life? In which way?
- Which behaviours and patterns do I still encounter in my professional practice today? Which ones have changed? (Mach es gleich!, 2013: 58 – 59)

2. Why is Gender-Sensitive Education Important?

International studies on school performance have repeatedly shown that education and gender are closely linked. In a recent study, researchers at the University of Hamburg have now examined the cliché “Boys cannot read as well as girls”. For years, the PISA test has shown that girls in almost all countries perform better than boys in reading comprehension tests. To find out what could be a reason for this,

researchers have analysed data and questionnaires from around 1.500 pupils from 60 school classes in Germany. Not only did they ask how the children assessed their own reading skills, but also whether the children thought that girls or boys read better, read more or had more fun reading. As in the PISA test, the boys in this study also scored lower than their female classmates in the reading comprehension tests. What is surprising however is that in those classes especially where this gender cliché was widespread and many children were convinced that girls read better, the boys scored significantly worse than in classes where the stereotype was less dominant. Additionally, the more the prejudice was represented in the classroom and the more the students felt that they could not read well, the less willing they were to read (Muntoni, Wagner & Retelsdorf, 2020).

Why is a gender-sensitive training of teachers and students important for the agricultural school system? Because traditional gender roles and stereotypes still exist, especially in the agricultural school system, and they have a great influence on the lives of girls and boys and on the decisions they make, for example when it comes to choosing one of the different school types. In Austria, there are about 80 different technical schools for agriculture and forestry with a duration of three years, and twelve higher agricultural and forestry schools whose students can take the Matura (A-levels) after five years. These schools offer different vocational specialisations such as agriculture, rural home economics, horticulture, viticulture and cellar management, forestry or horse husbandry and enable students to work in these areas after graduation²⁾.

Unfortunately, the target groups of the different branches of agricultural schools are still very homogeneous. Very few girls attend an agricultural school with a focus on agriculture, and even fewer boys choose a specialisation in rural home economics. Is it because boys cannot cook and girls cannot drive a tractor or – as the study of the strong link between gender and education shows – because they simply believe they cannot do it and find themselves in gender-stereotypical roles? If a school system and the teachers behind it want to achieve that girls can develop independently of predetermined gender-specific requirements and that boys are more willing to read, or that girls develop more interest in farming or natural sciences, then gender competence is required. Ultimately, the agricultural school system would also benefit from an expansion of the target group, since the number of enrolments at agricultural schools is steadily declining.

“The issue of gender equality is not just a question of economic participation. It is a moral imperative – an imperative of fairness and justice, which has numerous political, social and cultural dimensions”. This quote from the OECD report “Gender Equality – Time to Act” accurately describes the tasks of equal opportunity offices, and the implementation of this mandate begins with gender equality in education. (Mach es gleich!, 2013: 9). After all, the development of talents and competencies is still done with what are known as “gender glasses”. Young people experience themselves as girls or boys in gender-stereotypical roles. Reflecting on these often subtle mechanisms,

breaking through them and subsequently developing all the young people's skills pose particular challenges for the learners, but also for adults and teachers.

NOTES

1. The University College for Agrarian and Environmental Pedagogy is located in Vienna and is known as the only Austrian pedagogical centre for teacher and advisor training in agricultural, forestry and environmental pedagogical professions. In the bachelor and master study programmes Agrarian and Environmental Pedagogy students have the opportunity to become agricultural and environmental pedagogues and advisors. Sarah Eichinger is part of the Institute for Further Education, where numerous courses and seminars are designed and offered to enable teachers and advisors to respond to current needs and challenges in their profession. Beside her work at the Institute, she is also active in teaching and is responsible for the course "Sexuality and Gender" in the bachelor study programme Environmental Education and for the course "Education Management" in the extra-occupational bachelor study programme Agrarian and Environmental Education. In order to meet the requirements of a different and critical examination of gender and sexuality, especially at a pedagogical level, she is currently completing a training course to become a certified sex pedagogue.
2. Bundesministerium für landwirtschaft, regionen und tourismus: <https://www.bmlrt.gv.at/land/land-bbf/bildung-agrar-schulen/agrarfachschulen.html>

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