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School as a Gendered Space for Democratic Practice

Abstract

This paper explores how the democratic values are gendered by the school practice. It looks at the way how the curriculum objectives stressing the assimilation of democratic values of belonging/inclusion, participation and solidarity are practiced in the school context. The article shows that girls deal better with democratic values as they gender morality/femininity renders them more empathic, participatory and caring for others than boys. While, boys lack the experience of caring for the well-being of others and they refuse to provide it in terms of their masculinity. The social meanings of masculinity devalue everything that is feminine such as caring for the well-being of others, inclusion, equality, acceptance and empathy. Masculinity becomes a barrier in translating democratic values in practical acts. Furthermore, schools do not provide support to boys to learn to change behavior for becoming more inclusive. School reiterates gender disparities in practicing democratic values through the educational process of cultural reproduction. Instead of preparing boys to interiorize democratic values and perform democratic practices, the school contributes further to the reducing of boys' social competence and responsibility. The value of belonging seems to have no institutional interest and social responsibility lags behind other social abilities.

Keywords: Moral; Democracy; Curriculum; Gender; Responsibility

1- Introduction

Numerous studies have reported that education reproduces gendered cultural norms in schooling process mainly through the socialization. Gender is a social construction that corresponds to the learned social roles. The social roles are culturally defined in norms, customs and common social values. The roles provide different rights and duties to men and women. The fulfillment of the gendered social roles leads to a differentiated way of perceiving women and men. A typical stereotyped perception is that women are perceived as caregivers, while men as breadwinners. Social roles are taught to boys and girls since they are born, during socialization process, which begins within family and expands to other social institutions such as educational system, work, politics, and marriage. The social roles differ from one society to another. Differences are evidenced even between people of the same culture, sharing the same space and corpus of societal values. However, although the gender is the principal marker of the social role, it is not the only one. Other sociological variables such as age, race and class intersect with gender in defining what is defined as a socially ascribed role. Therefore the social role does not depend only on the gender of the holder, but on the age and social status as well. The social status is strongly related to the social roles which define the rights and duties for bearers. The balance between rights and duties indicates whose role is more important in the society. Based on that perception, certain roles place certain people to a higher position in status pyramid. Others positions are subordinated. This way, the roles and status tell the hierarchical position of people in society.

Women are subordinated to men because the patriarchal society ascribes to them a lower status and less important social roles compared to men. Women are reduced into reproductive roles of mother/wife, while men are valued to be productive. The reductionist ascription of women role confines them to the family/private sphere, while the validation of the role of men as productive and providers ascribes them an asymmetric access and monopoly of the public sphere compared to women. The interaction within social institutions is shaped by normativity - a set of cultural norms - which guides people conduct to the socially desired direction. One of the most significant social functions of the social norms is to keep the social cohesion intact from deviant behavior which may threaten the collective co-habitation. The acceptance of norms allows society to function normally or reasonably (O'Donnell, 2002:8). People perform the normativity in the daily routine and they become so accustomed to it that it seems they are born with. Therefore they tend to consider the normativity as a natural fact, rather than a cultural construction born out the human meanings and interaction. It is for that reason that the gendered social roles are taken for granted by society. However, as Judith Butler argues (1990) gender categories of masculine and feminine, are not biologically fixed, but culturally presupposed; therefore gender is a reiterated social performance rather than a prior reality. Gender categories performance shapes our experiences. The social roles are deeply gendered, meaning that the rights and duties are different for men and for women. This holds true for every society, despite the intensity of the gendering effects. People perform social roles daily in their symbolic interaction,

expressed in words and acts. This routine has a great impact on the creation of self-identity within the ascribed collective identity of being a woman or a man. We create the identity by the bond of belongingness to our similar others. A boy creates the masculine identity by doing things that other boys do. Similarly, girls become aware of their feminine (gendered) identity by mentally belonging to the feminine collectivity and acting like women. Thoughts and acts are culturally acceptable or deniable according to the moral value attached to them. The thinking process takes the course of the moral self-judgment before allowing people to act or not. Thus, before acting, boys and girls anticipate action consequences as if they were morally judged by others. The moral defines what is permitted or not, given the shared values or norms. The moral judgment conducts them towards ways of behaving that are different for each of groups. Boys behave differently from girls in order to accomplish what is morally correct for boys and not for girls. The same situation is replicated by girls within the cultural boundaries that define what is right and wrong for female behavior. As a consequence, boys and girls behave like how society wants/expect them to behave in order to get the social rewards for appropriate manners.

2- Gendering impact on girls' and boys' morality

Naturally, with few exceptions, people identify themselves primarily as male or female, given the biological sex. But only the anatomical constitution does not answer to the question what it means to be socially a man or a woman, or what are the societal expectations towards men and women. We are exposed to the socializing process since the first years of the childhood. The process of socialization begins at an early stage of people's life and goes on for the life. It is accomplished alongside the life-cycle by many social agents such as family, neighbors, peers, school and job and is conditioned by age and social role. The socially approved gender behavior is learnt through socialization as well. During childhood, girls are nurtured to care for others, in order to be able to fulfill the societal expectation of care-giver. They continue to perform the role of caring for all their life, as this is a social imperative imposed on women. There is nothing wrong with caring for others, and women do often sacrifice their needs to fulfill that role. But imposing women to care for the others needs primarily, conditions their opportunities to answer the needs of themselves sufficiently. They place the self under the other. The caring role is interiorized as a moral duty which is expressed as a social responsibility. The social responsibility is strongly related to the democratic values of knowing, accepting, valuing the other for what he/she is. Although considered a feminine attribute, caring is a great influential capital for women as it is translated in a high interest for the collectivity well-being.

Contrary to girls, boys' socialization goes to another track. Boys are taught to be successful and achievers. But above all, they are forced to be self-dependent. They have to model themselves to be what society likes them to be, by following the socially desired image of White middle-class heterosexual man. If boys do not resemble to that image when men, than they might feel disintegrated and might face social refusal in Durkheim's words. The main concern for boys must be the

individual success and not the care for others. In order to be successful they have to count on themselves and become individualistic. These are masculine traits created by social norms, and have to be different from what is feminine. Boys are told in many ways that everything that is feminine should be rejected, because feminine is labeled as a symbol of weakness. Therefore, caring for others, as a feminine quality, threatens boys' gender identity (masculinity). In this way, boys are taught to give up the social responsibility. The different socialization impacts the individual moral perception of boys and girls. For example, boys are asked to be logical and objective. This urges them to leave emotions out of their thinking and doing. By reducing empathy we allow them using the other instead of caring for. Boys become instrumental to fulfill the social imperative of being a successful individual. The achievement of this socially desired objective legitimates the abuse and misuse of others.

The social responsibility reinforced in girls through socialization process renders them more empathic towards others' needs. Girls care for the other; they are concerned of not hurting. Their presence provides comfort and safety to the other. Their morality is expressed in respecting others' presence. As noted by Gilligan (1982), the traditional attitude on women's role goes the same direction as social morality. Therefore girls do not find it difficult to cope with moral agenda of democratic values. These include the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable (Ohrn, 2001:321). The masculinity confuses boys' attitudes towards democratic values and places them in front of the moral dilemma: whom should they serve first, to the self or to the others? While femininity saves girls the dilemmatic inquiring to whom should they serve. They know the answer: serving the other is socially desirable. Therefore, girls find it easier to submit the self to others needs (care-givers), while boys face social role confusion in assessing what fits better to them. Being inclusive and empathic is a requirement imposed by democratic values, while being instrumental is a cultural imperative. The gendered dichotomization of social roles restrict boys from 'caring for the other's well-being', as this is considered to be feminine role and consequently is less valued. On the other hand, the masculinity encourages the individualistic selfishness and instrumentality that 'submit others to their self'.

2.2-Gender and the practice of democracy in school

Socialization educational function last for the rest of life and is well-played within school settings. Education in school takes place as a binary process, firstly as a formal education which is accomplished through implementation of national curriculum, and secondly as informal education which is realized in the school hidden agenda. The school, as an educational institution, conveys and reinforces the social norms, thus contributing to the further gendering process started by family. In a functionalist perspective, school, like other social institutions, works to preserve the status quo. School realizes that function both ways, through academic program and through socialization. Students are submitted to pedagogical discipline and school rules to accustom to authority. Similarly, before attending school, they have been forced to obey to the parental authority in family. After school they will comply

with authority in the work-place and finally they are deemed to obey to the supreme authority of the state as citizens. The socialization process is part of the hidden agenda of the school, meaning that is not regulated by the curriculum. Socialization process is invisible to institutional objectives of the schools and remains a private issue amongst pupils, and pupils and teachers. For example, when discriminatory attitudes are spelled out in offensive expressions by some pupils, or when a student is excluded from the group as different, the issue is kept private and does not constitute an institutional concern. But when pupils break the school discipline or infringe school internal rules, than the violation becomes an institutional issue. By leaving the discrimination issue to individual discretion, the schools relegate the democratic values in private sphere. Pupils having more troubles with school life are mostly boys, as they engage more in conflict, both verbal and physical, while girls are less problematic with violence. Boys are both aggressors and victims. Many conflicts are mediated by boys themselves. If not for serious damages to health, teachers do not interfere. They leave the issue to the pupils to solve it privately. This way, teachers ignore the institutional importance of the violence and let this cases pass institutionally unnoticed. By letting the implementation of the democracy values to the personal discretion of the pupil, school does not help the promotion and practicing of democracy in school. Additionally, by letting pupils negotiate in private the democratic values, the school does not institutionalize their implementation, nor renders acts of antidemocratic conduct public.

Therefore, students especially boys, are not helped to develop the moral autonomy and social capacity to implement democratic values in school. If this is a case, than democracy becomes a tokenism; we say it in school, but we do not do it. Consequently, school, contrarily to what is stated in curriculum on promotion of democratic values, continues to reinforce the domination of patriarchal norms that urges boys to contradict democratic ways of behaving, as culturally unfitted to their gender identity. Democratic values such as inclusion, solidarity, peaceful cohabitation, tolerance, acceptance, concern for collective wellbeing, are perceived by boys to be suitable to feminine identity. Although it might seem paradoxical, unlike for boys, schools demand from girls to be sociable, inclusive and ready to help. These demands are not related to the development of democratic values practice in schools by girls, but are related to the reiteration of gendered norms in school. The beneficial latent function of this attitude of school on girls is that it contributes to the development of their social competence in civic domain.

For example, teachers frequently ask girls to help boys or provide for them in classroom, based on the gendered role of help-givers (Orstein and Hunkins, 2000:345). Although school may skip the institutional responsibility on socialization process, or informal education, they cannot do the same for the formal educational program, which is contained in the national curriculum. The curriculum is obligatory as it strives for scientific knowledge which will prepare students to be ready for the labor market. Knowledge constitutes the visible part of school program and is well arranged in taught subjects that are objectively assessed. Despite interest in sciences, the curriculum is equally promoting the development of the democratic practices in school as a precondition to learn civic co-habitation. Democracy values

and institutions are taught in specific subjects such as citizenship and knowledge on society. However, there is still a contradiction between what curriculum promotes and what socialization supports, which produces confusion to boys and girls morality versus democratic values in school. While curriculum demands pupils to embrace democratic values of solidarity, empathy, tolerance, acceptance and cooperation, the socialization reproduces the masculinities and femininities in school. The masculinity confuses boys' feelings and perceptions regarding democratic values, whereas the femininity advantages girls to be convincingly supporters and implementers of these values. In that sense girls contribute more to the democratization of the school practice regarding inclusion, while masculinity puts boys at disadvantage. Masculinity is somehow blind to democratic values of acceptance, participation and cooperation. Directed towards instrumentality rather than sociability, boys lack both social responsibility and social competence, while girls are better positioned with the moral of democratic values.

2.3-Cultural reproduction of gendered roles in educational settings

The sociological theories on education provide a wealth of information on the cultural reproduction in school. Although not focusing on gender disparities in school, sociological theories constitute a frame for explaining inequalities produced by formal education through gendering process. However the greatest contribution to that issue comes from feminist scholars that used gender lenses to explore the reproduction of masculinities and femininities in school. In the sociology of education, the cultural reproduction theory (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) has played a crucial role in explaining the maintenance of social inequalities in school. Schools together with other social institutions reproduce cultural normativity which serves to the stability of the status quo. School hidden program facilitates the assimilation of the values, mores and attitudes that are previously transmitted by family.

The masculinity and femininity are produced and negotiated during the socialization process of boys and girls which takes place in family and school. These gendered experiences mark the moral differences in boys and girls consciousness. Ilich (1973) found that school hidden agenda teaches children the social role and prepares them to accept the ascribed statuses given by society. Similarly, Basil Bernstein (1975) argued that school maintains social disparities by institutionalizing the linguistic codes of the white-collar class and imposing that on working-class children. During childhood period, children develop linguistic codes that impact their school experience. By codes, Bernstein did not mean the verbal capacity or vocabulary distinction of children, but differences of children in language use which showed that poor children did not use the same linguistic codes as wealthy/rich children. Although linguistic codes analysis reported inequalities in school between children coming from poor families and those from wealthy ones, it proves to be useful to show parallel inequality in language use between boys and girls. The linguistic codes developed by children, as boys or as girls, impact their school experiences, both academic and social activity. The language codes that teachers use when talking to boys are different from codes they use when talking to girls. Children as well use different language codes when talking to each other. When

taking with the same gender, pupils use same codes, but when talking to the other gender codes are different. Put differently, although speaking the same language, boys and girls use different (gendered) linguistic codes to understand each other. The different linguistic codes used in school enable children to reinforce their gender based differences. This fact shows that school contributes to safeguard the systemic gender differences by performing gender normativity.

Amongst other contributions, Bowles and Gintis (1976) theory on education and capitalism, provides an in-depth analysis of the modern educational system and reports that education is a function of the industrial production and serves to the economic interests of the capitalism. Schools work in a twin track approach. Firstly they prepare students to gain technical and social skills to work for industrial enterprises, and secondly they teach students discipline and respect for authority. Girls and boys are prepared to do different jobs in the industry sector which is gendered as well, meaning that some jobs are for women and some for men. This is called professional segregation and education provides a distinct contribution to that process. Some secondary educational and higher educational institutions, such as technical schools and engineering universities are overpopulated with boys. These schools project them directly for the frontline production. While other schools/universities, prepare girls for service providers in health, social and educational sector. Girls are mostly projected to serve to social and human sector which implies the emotional ability of caring and empathy. Although with same level of education, men are better paid than women.

This proves true not only for employment in different sectors, such as production and service, but even for employment within the same sector and it is not due to the different work abilities but to the gendered work concepts that privilege men as more competent than women and more dedicated to work than women. For women work responsibility competes with the family responsibility. Besides projecting students as future workers, schools cultivate the obeying attitude in students (Giddens, 1989). School discipline subordinates pupils to the institution/teacher's authority, thus creating a hierarchical relation in school. Although apparently discipline control is applied equally to all pupils, girls are deemed to be more compliant and obeying. Boys are much more tolerated when infringe the discipline or engage in personal or group conflict in school, while girls are labeled to be deviant if performing such acts. Girls are discouraged to behave like boys. This imperative conveys the message that girls are not equal to boys. Despite disapproval for deviant behavior, boys are still allowed to be deviant, while girls are double punished, firstly for breaking the rule and secondly for breaking the gender normative or behaving like boys. The differentiated treatment of girls and boys is expressed in curriculum delivery as well. In many feminists' view, the curriculum delivery is patriarchal and works for the reinforcement women subordination. Teachers (even women) privilege boys in classroom by allowing them more space for expression and tolerating their mistakes (Orstein and Hunkins, 2003:216).

3- Discussion and Conclusion

Since boys are placed in an uncertain position regarding internalization of democratic values, articulated in curriculum, school has to remedy their positioning. School has a double role in implementing the curriculum objectives, first through academic program, written out in the visible agenda, and second through socialization, performed in a hidden agenda. The school role is not only serving to the capitalism economic interests, which in a way unfortunately seems to be the main concern of the formal education. School has a crucial role for the education of individuals as part of organic society. If the education will not direct the interest of boys towards social needs, the selfish individualism will develop in them. The democratic ideals spelled out in curriculum do not make sense in absence of the social interest for boys. What is said about democracy in schools is not done in practice. Democracy becomes an abstract empty word that boys might recite well in words, but contradict in actions, because masculine gender norms compete with public social ideals. Boys lack the interest in becoming pro-social as this threatens their individualistic attitude, informed by masculinity which is learnt during socialization. Boys are hindered in practicing democratic values in school because these values are culturally feminized or rendered private instead of public and because school does not institutionalize them in practice (Ohrn, 2000). Consequently, boys ignore the acts that aim the wellbeing of the abstract other and lack experience of dealing with inclusion and equality in school. In so doing, they miss both social responsibility and social competence. School can change boys abilities related to the social responsibility through the moral education which may increase the moral autonomy in boys and enables them to critically evaluate what is learnt by socialization process. This proves beneficial to the girls' education as well. In Dewey's (1916) point of view, school is a way of social living and as such creates opportunities for students to link thinking with action. If the unity between thinking and action is ignored, than the education has no moral. Democracy is learnt by doing more than by saying it. Teachers have a privileged role in facilitating the learning process of democratic values, not only because they instruct, but because they select the social factors that influence student's attitudes and identify their needs for social adaptability.

The institutional reaction to the moral difference regarding democratic values in boys and girls, implies that the school has to institutionalize the practice of democratic values of belongingness, inclusion, equality between boys and girls, respect for other and diversity, empathy and care for others wellbeing. What is public in curriculum has to be public in relationship as well. Shifting democratic values from private to public interest, school targets both: the de-genderization of the democratic values and the institutionalization of the social responsibility for all students.

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