

CURRICULUM AS A “SAFETY NET”? SOME INTERVENTIONS INTO REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER(S)

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Abstract

The aim of this contribution is to provide conceptual tools to challenge some of the existing frameworks of thought with regard to (re)presentations of gender(s), and to use this “challenging” approach in a curricular analysis. The basic starting point is rooted in feminist epistemology: the concept of “situated knowledges” enables us to problematize the subject and object of knowledge, and to argue for the non-innocence of all knowledge claims. This, among other things, entails, first, (self)reflexivity in the process of knowledge construction, second, importance of epistemic responsibility, and, third, the recognition of marginalized subjects. In the author’s opinion, these insights are the precondition for educational analyses where another dimension plays a role – the dimension of knowledge transmission through educational (didactic) materials – which also means taking into account the construction and transmission of official knowledge and, at the same time, the need to develop a critical stance toward “universal” truths. This involves developing awareness that a school curriculum is not neutral knowledge, but instead the result of complex power relations, struggles and compromises among various social groups that construct what society has acknowledged as legitimate and truthful (as stated by Michael Apple). The author then presents some findings from an analysis of a small sample of Slovenian primary school curricula. The main objectives were to reflect on the representations of gender in the field of education, to confront this “official” version with alternative views, and to ascertain where the discrepancies between the two were at their greatest. The results show that gender sensitivity in Slovenian curricula today is, in a so-called postfeminist era, lower than twenty years ago and that the dimension of gender sensitivity is on the verge of non-existence. One “safety net” against exclusions and silences should be curricula with precisely defined contents and emancipatory knowledge brought to the forefront.

Keywords: Representation of Gender, Curricular Analysis, Knowledge Transmission, Power Relations