

Forgotten Documents – Gender and Curricula Work in Civic Education: The Case of Germany

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1. Curricula: a Stubborn Field of Research

The research on curricula is triggered by the increasing importance of comparative studies on the education systems like PISA (OECD 1998; Gudem, Hopmann 2002). Particularly in Germany, the poor results by students triggered the activities concerning the revision of curricula. Nevertheless, there is a different understanding between the federal states and their sciences. There are two types of traditions “[...] that pose major problems of intercultural communication: the Anglo-Saxon tradition of curriculum studies and the Central and North European tradition of didactics (*Didaktik*)” (Gudem, Hopmann 2002, 1). For the international dialogue this means that all the different meanings and institutionalisation of curricula must first be discussed. Even if communication is successful concerning the significance of curricula (including the process of their making and construction), “the fundamental problem about curriculum obstinately refuses to go away. How learning is organised, how it is perceived, how issues about it are debated are always rooted in the particularities of national histories, of national habits, and of national aspirations” (Reid 2002, 11). But a general characteristic is: “In all cultures the curriculum is informed by social values, in the sense that is an expression of the knowledge and skills deemed necessary for young people to acquire in order to prepare them for their future and adult role” (Riddell 1992, 1). In conclusion, each country has a specific curriculum discourse (Gudem, Hopmann 2002). Therefore, I will take into account historical aspects of the discourse. In Germany the term “curriculum” often means “syllabus” In this article I would like to follow that meaning of curriculum.

The pedagogue Ewald Terhart outlined the major steps in general curriculum development since 1960 (Terhart 2002). In the practice of curriculum development concerning the subjects, there have been no inquiries, no empirical research since the “Curriculum Boom” of the 1970s. Especially gender issues are not mentioned, not even for the subject of politics (“*Politik*”) or sociology (“*Gesellschaftslehre*” or “*Sozialkunde*”), the different concepts of teaching social studies/civic education at school. The research on gender in curriculum development in Germany is very difficult in different ways. First, one main reason is the federalism in Germany (*Kulturhoheit der Länder* or the states’ independence in educational and cultural matters). Each state is responsible for its own curriculum development, since there is no national curriculum like in England or Norway. Also, the curricula vary because of the different school types. Second, interest in curriculum research stopped in the mid-1980s (Terhart 2002, 117). Third, there are only a few studies on gender issues in syllabi on an international level (Taylor 1989; Riddell 1992; Grumet, Stone 2000). The research is dominated by other urgent problems like globalisation, neoliberalism (Alba et al. 2000), multiculturalism, social problems (Center for Educational Research 1999; Wulf et al. 1998) or on syllabi links (Künzli, Hopmann 1998).

In Germany the discussion is often focused on the research on genderism as a “hidden curriculum” of schooling or on gender-specific learning factors in natural science subjects like chemistry, physics, biology and mathematics, which initialised research on co-education questions. Maybe this is because the gender gap in these disciplines was judged/perceived to be more unfair than in other less important subjects (humanities). The lack of research is a surprising fact while the strategies of gender and diversity mainstreaming are widely implemented in politics and economy. But there is a single study concerning the equity of women and men in curricula ordered by the Education Ministry of *Schleswig Holstein* (Bigga, Braun, Hoffmann 1994). They analysed curricula for different subjects and found that a male view on life dominates the selection of contents. For the subjects of economy/social studies they proposed twelve issues completely lacking anything from a feminist point of view. Research clearly influenced the curricula for civic education in the state of *Schleswig Holstein*.

The research on gender and didactics for civic education increased in the past few years (Hoppe et al. 2001; Boeser 2002; Nyssen 2003), even though still focusing the gender questions as girls’ problems instead of analysing them as applying to both girls *and* boys.

2. Gender Issues in Curricula for Social /Civic Education

The curricula in Germany are edited by the ministries of the federal states (*Bundesländer*). That’s why revision in curricula in Germany is sometimes triggered by the change in political power in a state (Ohlhaber 1999, 5). Some states established special agencies for the curriculum development. Normally the ministry nominates the members for a curriculum committee. This

committee develops the curriculum for the specific subjects, according to the type of school (special school/*Sonderschule*, lower secondary school/*Hauptschule*, intermediate secondary school/*Realschule*, upper secondary school/*Gymnasium*) in the four-track school system. This chosen curriculum will be the guideline for the ministry's authorisation of textbooks and that is also the way the curriculum works on the classroom teaching (Vollstädt et al. 1999). Nearly 70% of the teachers work with textbooks (Harms, Breit 1990), but ignore the curriculum text itself, thus making the textbook(s) a hidden curriculum (Grammes 1998, 23).

Gender issues are rarely implemented in curricula for social education. Maybe this fact is due to an understanding of "equality of men and women" as a "[...] general educational/political guideline [...] obligatory for the syllabi work" (Ohlhaber 1999, 2), serving at the same time as an excuse for the lack of issues.

There are only a few curricula reflecting gender relations as a subject. The following research is principally based on data from the site (for German school class syllabi) www.lehrplaene.org by the words "*Geschlecht*" (gender) and "*Geschlechterrollen*" (gender roles).

In *Schleswig Holstein* equality is a "Key Problem" in the tradition of didactics by the pedagogue Wolfgang Klafki, who defined specific problems to help select the subject matter for students (cp. below). In each curriculum for civic education "gender" is included as a subject. For the lower education level in the junior high school (*Realschule*) and in the comprehensive school (*Gesamtschule*), there is the unit "Women and Men at Work in Business and in the Community". The unit handles the themes "gender roles", "typical career choice" and "gender pay gap". In this way "gender issues" still focus contents as "women's issues". They completely ignore the aspect of encouraging the interests of boys in so-called "female careers" (*Schleswig Holstein* 1997). The curriculum for the higher education doesn't use the possibility of achieving a better understanding of "gender" (*Schleswig Holstein* 2002).

In the state of *Rhineland-Palatinate* "gender and generation relations" are mentioned as a "Key Problem" for equality as well, and in each curriculum attention is given to gender issues. For example, in the curriculum for the lower education level gender roles and gender stereotypes are an issue under the central question: "Why does the family change?" (*Rhineland Pfalz* 1998, 253). In contrast, the higher education focused the issue on the change of the *female* gender role and the change of "how women see themselves" (*Rhineland Pfalz* 1998, 38).

In *Saxony-Anhalt*'s syllabus for higher education the issue "Family" is related to "Gender" (*Sachsen-Anhalt* 2003, 87) and contains "Social Construction of Differences: Identity, Gender and Power/lessness" as questions of coeducation and gender-specific differences in disciplines. The issue is part of the unit "Society". In the editorial Sibylle Reinhardt is mentioned as an educational expert, a professor for social education at the University of Halle in *Saxony-Anhalt*. For a long time she has also been the only female researcher in the germane discourse of civic education. Maybe she has influenced the

implementation of gender issues. The engagement of individual members in curricula committees will be an important aspect (see 3.1).

In *North Rhine-Westphalia* (NRW) there are some differences concerning the types of school as well. In a guideline called “Civic Education” for the lower secondary school, the authors wrote: “Social education supports young men and women in analysis of discrimination (genderism, racism)” (MSJK NRW 2001, 11; own translation). Further, “the Equality of the Sexes” appears in one way with the theme “Coexistence of the Generations” as the module content “Identity and Life Course in Modern Society”.

In the recent curriculum for science at the primary school, there are some remarks concerning “Reflexive Coeducation”. The issue “Girls and Boys” is mentioned in the unit “Human Being and Community”. The contents are procreation, pregnancy, birth; these aspects of *sexual* education are not a preferable access for a *gender-sensitive* education, because they may reinforce a sex-related understanding of gender.

In the syllabus for “Social Sciences” for the high school, equality is mentioned without any consequences for the programme (cp. MSWWF 1999, XIV). In the unit “Individuals, Groups and Institutions” the issue “Emancipation – Doesn’t It Matter Anymore Today?” is recommended.

A good example is the curriculum “Civic Education/History” for the lower secondary school (1989). The gender history takes high-lighted place in the curriculum: “It is necessary to analyse history in a gender-specific way because the norm of equality of the constitution is not realised” (MSJK NRW 2002, 57; own translation). Students should carefully expand or elaborate their consciousness of time, place, culture and of gender: “Teaching history often implies handling the prejudices against gender roles which may obscure the students’ view of human history as a different one for women and for men and that both genders must make great efforts for a common future” (MSJK NRW 2002, 60; own translation). These contents call to mind the scientific work of Annette Kuhn, a famous pioneer in gender history. One of her assistants is now responsible for administration of the agency in North Rhine-Westphalia specialised in curriculum development (*Landesinstitut für Schule*/state school agency), and inserted these subjects in the curriculum.

In conclusion, if gender issues are implemented in curricula for civic education, “gender issues” will still mean “women’s issues”, with contents often relating to aspects of “family life” or “work-life-balance”. They are still following an understanding of gender as a gender-related category – a category similar to “age” or “ethnicity”. They don’t understand gender as a cross structural category (cp. Oechsle, Wetterau 2000).

The research on the curriculum work itself will show that the discourse is guided by power relations and these are in this case principally gender relations.

3. The Making of Curricula

3.1. Actors, Criteria and Categories: the Curriculum Committee

In the setting of a democratic system, the state ministries try to include different social groups (teachers, education experts, politicians, syndicates) in the curriculum work. In discourse analysis terms, these committees are “discourse communities” in which the actors have different positions and human resources. They debate the teaching and learning goals, the contents and sometimes the methods as well. Research on these processes has just started (Künzli 1999); the empirical research on syllabi work on this level shows the structure of the committee (gender, age, formation) and their values for selecting the contents. But there is still no research on the interaction between the members and how each member’s themes and perspectives will be achieved. The average committee consists of ten members (Ohlhaber 1999, 2). Experts for education are underrepresented (14.4%). In general the committees are dominated by teachers (over 60%), with the majority of them male (70%) and over 50 years old (53.8%).

The process of the curriculum work can be divided into these steps (Bähr, Fries, Rosenmund 1999, 104):

- the reception of a special knowledge by the members;
- the selection of this knowledge: knowledge stock;
- and the recombination of the knowledge stock.

The syllabi can be understood as a cognitive system of knowledge terms. The members choose the knowledge which seems to them relevant, on the one hand, for the social progress and the needs of society/economy and, on the other hand, for the civic education of the students. They construct a new social “reality” for girls and boys. Scholz wrote: “Their intention is to run and to control social processes by schooling. The rules of selection and transformation processes are guided by power relations and social control” (Scholz 1981, 11; own translation). Generally the contents in syllabi must be scientifically legitimated, especially in terms of the student’s needs for personal development. But there is only a little empirical research on decision-making processes when defining and legitimating curricular contents. How do the committees decide exactly about the contents? How do they summarise in the *debate* all the knowledge the three main reference disciplines offer for civic education? We don’t know. If gender-specific learning factors and needs as *consequences* of the historical gender order are not perceived and reflected as relevant categories, the traditional gender roles will continue.

The category “gender” is completely missing in research programmes on curricula work. In his survey Ohlhaber asked the committee members: “What guides your decisions in syllabus work?” He offered eleven possibilities, but gender didn’t appear as a relevant category. Nevertheless, it’s interesting that 54% of the members voted for the “fundamental of teaching” and 33% for “ability to execute the plans” as the most important guidelines for syllabi work.

Only 2% answered that the “interests of disadvantage groups in society” are a guideline (Ohlhaber 1999). Ohlhaber summarised: “On the whole, the answer behaviour for this question shows that current curriculum development is guided less by political aspects than professional, educational and pragmatic ones” (Ohlhaber 1999, 7).

Concerning the role of teachers, Riddell concluded in her research about “gender and curriculum”: “A cluster of ideologies and operating principles linked with their professional identity often underlay their acceptance of gender divisions as a relatively unimportant fact of life” (Riddell 1992, 224). “Gender” defined as an “unimportant fact of life” by men *and* women – however unintentionally and/or unconsciously – will never become a “Key Problem.” There is no interest in changing the traditional system: “Male teachers in the school often adhered to a traditional ideology of femininity, characterising women’s principle role as that of home-maker and mother rather than worker” (Riddell 1992, 225).

There is a little historical example to reveal the character of debates concerning gender roles as an issue in classrooms. In 1970 the Ministry for School, Youth and Culture in North Rhine-Westphalia edited materials for the new syllabus for politics (“*Politik*”): “Only a Girl?” was the title of a small volume for teachers and students. Referring to the relevant basic constitutional law, the authors wrote: “In this context [democratic education] it is obvious the role of women in our society must be analysed, to sensitise [the women] to the problem of a non-legitimated inequality” (Bech et al. 1973, 6; own translation). The authors analysed the relations between men and women under the aspect of “power” and concluded that the relations are deeply infected by the labour segregation (*Kultusminister NRW* 1973, 26 [Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs]; own translation). This analysis was criticised by pedagogues as “a sociologically limited interpretation of the world” (Willeke 1974, 82; own translation). The pedagogues refused seeing the “natural gender role of girls” as a problem without consulting the findings of biological science or behaviourism. And finally they suggested that it would be very dangerous to destroy gender roles without offering new roles which can be assumed by the girls and boys. This might be the problem up to now. The “gender roles” are – from a sociological point of view – an essential element of social structure, and from a psychological one, “gender identity” is the most important component of personal identity. Maybe this is why the sociological theory of “gender roles” resists all the new theories about social construction of gender, “doing gender,” or “queer theory”. Even if gender roles changed in some domains, there is a nucleus: the sexualised representation of bodies founded on biological differences intertwined with “gender roles”. The increasing meaning of biological research on sex differences today (brains, hormones, physical constitution) reflects the threat aroused by strategies like gender mainstreaming.

Ignorance of gender as a basic structure of modern societies and as a functional mechanism for reducing social complexity, fitting individuals like a second skin, is interwoven in the discourse on the didactics (“*Fachdidaktik*”), its categories and how politics (“*Politik*”) is defined by the dominating actors. So neither the teachers in the syllabi committee nor the experts for civic education at the universities have an elaborated, political understanding of “gender,”

because they – as socialised “men” – have other experiences with gender than “women” do. But “men” know what a “woman” is, or better, has to be: “The intransigence of the institutionalised structure of power/knowledge that defines what it is to be a woman, and is stubbornly deaf to criticism, blocks women’s access to the authority they require to take responsibility for their circumstances” (Code 1991, 177).

Maybe that is an important notice concerning gender issues in syllabi: first, there is no understanding of gender as an urgent political problem; second, the dominating “fundamental of teaching,” defined by the general theory of teaching, does not include gender (Nyssen 2003, 97), in which the teachers’ aversion for didactic concepts complicates the problem. A survey showed that nearly 70% of the teachers didn’t use didactic concepts for teaching (Harms, Breit 1990, 94). In interviews with instructors for teachers in the school system, Georg Weißeno found students at the universities distanced themselves from the professors’ concepts (Weißeno 1998). They were too theoretical and not suited for classroom teaching. The instructor’s own subjective didactic seems to be the most important one and that is what he teaches students, who themselves become teachers one day. Because of that, the one place to impress new concepts of political learning on future teachers is at the universities which form them.

In conclusion, it depends on the engagement of individual members, their formation, their attitudes, their visions and their capacity to get their preferences accepted in the committee. So how does introducing gender into syllabi work? One starts with the administrations at the ministries –the superordinate authorities who decide about the curriculum. If the contents don’t agree with the ministry’s point of view or of some of their consultants, they edit the text as they like. That’s the reason for publishing the curricula often without designating the members of the commissions. Here could be the link for inserting gender as a cross structural category in the syllabi: a pre-requisite the syllabi committee has to fulfil.

3.2 Actors, Criteria and Categories: the German Civic Education Discourse

Presuming an effect on syllabi work by the formation of teachers in the universities, the conception of school books or classroom materials and the participation in curricula committees, I will depict some main topics of the discourse in civic education from a historical perspective.

Democratic education was a main problem in Germany National Socialism and the Second World War. American efforts to re-educate the Germans had little success in the post-war period. A vital step forward was taken when the subject “aspects of politics” (*Politikunterricht*) was introduced in the 1960s and 1970s. Right from the start of the discourse, experts controversially discussed the definition of politics (*Politik*) and the best ways for a democratic education. Three disciplines – sociology, political science and economic science – became the main reference disciplines for didactics of civic education. Between the three, political science became the dominant one. In addition, educational

theories and principles for teaching like “learning by examples”, “pupils’ orientation” or “hands-on approach” had a notable influence on the concepts.

Many concepts were produced over the fifty years of discourse. Each author struggled for the best ways for teaching, jockeying for the best position in the discourse community (scientific community) of German political didactics (“*Politikdidaktik*”). Extreme differences in political attitudes appeared as well in the 1970s as consequences of the Cold War and the students’ movement of 1968 (Marxism vs. liberalism; conservative positions vs. progressive).

In the history of the West German discussion of political didactics, the experts developed many criteria for the selection of subject matter in combination with general educational theoretical approaches (Terhart 2002, 115): the “Existential” or “the Challenges by Social Change” under the topic of “Chances and Risks” (Hilligen) or “Political Conflict” (Giesecke). An important criteria became the definition of “Key Problems” by Wolfgang Klafki, a famous didactics representative deeply affected by the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. In 1985 Klafki published for the first time the concept of the “Key Problems”: peace, ecology, mass media, social inequality (Klafki 1985). The relations between men and women appeared as an aspect of social inequality. In 1991 he added gender roles, sexuality and love as particular human relation problems. Even if there was a consciousness of gender roles as a part of social inequality, they didn’t really become a “Key Problem” in the theories for social education.

The experts debated the meaning of politics. Some defended a restrictive definition of what politics means, other a wide definition. In the late 1970s this problem was framed in the dichotomy of “life-world” or “micro-world” versus “system” as “macro-world” (Gagel 1983; Grammes 1986), following the theory of communicative action by Jürgen Habermas. This dualism fits with other well-known dichotomies like “public and political life vs. private life,” “state vs. society” structuring the perception of social life (Grumet, Stone 2000). You even can go so far as to link these dichotomies with “a male and a female understanding” of politics like Dagmar Richter did (Richter 1996, 197) or with a “male or female classroom teaching” like Sibylle Reinhardt (Reinhardt 1997). She compared teaching concepts concerning the abortion laws in Germany under a gender perspective. Reinhardt criticises the so-called “difference approach” in feminist theory and shows that the interests of girls and boys in issues depends on concernment (Reinhardt 1997, 44). If girls are more interested in the abortion laws than boys, that’s because they are affected in *other* ways than boys.

The concurrence of the reference disciplines means also a dichotomy between “political science” representing a restrictive definition of politics- and “sociology” with a wide definition (cp. Späte 2005). Connecting these different aspects you even can go so far as to draw the following dichotomies which constitute a matrix of the civic education discourse in Germany (Fig. 1). The slogan of the German women’s movement “The private is political!” in 1968 wasn’t realised by the majority of the experts in civic education as a demand to inquire as to the causes for the discrimination of women, except for a remarkable work published in 1977 by Bernhard Claußen: “Emancipatory Education and Gender Role

Learning in Childhood.” The pedagogue, affected by the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School (like Klafki) radically analyses the ideology of the so-called complementarity of the sexes. He pointed out the subordination of women and declaims the legitimacy. He wrote about the economic dimension of exploitation of women and refers to the historical dimensions of the gender roles. Finally Claußen sketched the possibilities for encouraging alternatives in gender role expectations. Two years later he published a similar work with Sighard Leifert titled: “Political Education and the Emancipation of Women” (Claußen, Leifert 1978). They studied the gender roles and the process children go through while growing up. They adopted the prejudice theory to enlighten the relationship between men and women intertwined with class elements. They argued in favour of another education, which is gender-sensitive and guarantees equality for men and women. These works did *not* become mainstream in the discourse on civic education. Only by the participation of more women in the didactics discourse community did gender start to clearly become a subject in the discourse, interwoven with the rising research on gender in political science.

In 1991 Dagmar Richter published a small volume about gender-specific socialisation and political education (Richter 1991). In 1996 Heidrun Hoppe developed a concept for political education based on a subject-orientated approach centred around biographical research methods. Her method is like a “tool” which takes into consideration the differences in political learning by girls and boys. Empirical research on the political socialisation of girls and boys (and men and women) often shows a “gender gap” in political knowledge, interests and attitudes, women always operating with a very limited understanding of politics. So they ask for political men, power relations, institutions, political parties, all about the political democratic system, but nothing about civil engagement, affiliations with groups, associations, the work in school, etc. The “malestream” in defining politics (“*Politik*”) was criticised by Helga Kutz-Bauer as well, a former director of Hamburg’s state agency for civic education (*Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hamburg*). She described the discourse as a “men’s domain” (cp. Kutz-Bauer 1992). In the past few years research on gender in the germane civic education discussion has increased (Oechsle, Wetterau 2000). This is certainly due to the fact that more women participate in the discourse as well as to new generations of researchers.

4. Gender Mainstreaming in Curriculum Work

Didactics for civic education will certainly be transformed by a new generation of researchers, and they will instruct teachers in other ways than the last generations did. Their concepts and research projects have to be gender-inclusive ones, because there is no doubt that the teachers themselves are the most important factor in schooling as well as for curricula development. If they are not instructed about the social intermeshing of gender and the ways and functions of “doing gender”, social problems caused by the traditional gender system won’t be resolved.

For civic education this means that research on gender issues and gender as a cross structural category must go on. Until the reference disciplines don’t offer a paradigmatic consideration of gender, the concepts should be completed by the

findings of the gender studies. If economic or political issues are handled in the classrooms, the gender perspective has to be considered. In this way didactic concepts for the classroom teaching of politics education should be developed without creating new gender-specified roles for “girls” and “boys”.

For the curriculum work it would be important that gender becomes a main category. If the process is not initialised by the members themselves, those responsible in the ministries will have to do this. The legislation-backed top-down strategy of gender mainstreaming offers the possibilities of implementing gender in curricula and changing the idea that “gender equality” is only a women’s issue. Some German states (Hesse, Saxony-Anhalt) have even started gender mainstreaming in their education systems. Of the various tools for gender mainstreaming, the “three Rs” method (Swedish Association of Local Authorities 1999) – “representation”, “resources” and “realia” – offers a basic approach. First, gender in the implemented curricula must be analysed (representation). Second, the contents have to be gender-balanced by completing issues and contents and changing perspectives (resources). Third, the effectiveness of the curricula must be evaluated (realia).

On the level of the curriculum committees, participation by more experts and a higher quotient of female vs. male members is important. For the other members, especially teachers, in-service trainings have to be offered.

The Federal Agency for Civic Education (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*) is a very powerful institution when it comes to textbooks and other materials, because the teachers use their products the most (Harms, Breit 1990, 99). The Federal Agency began in 2000 to implement the gender mainstreaming strategy. In 2002 the Agency organised an international congress on “Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming in Europe”. Hopefully they will blaze a trail for social change in questions of gender equality.

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