Chapter 8: Gendered/Sexed Education

Key Concepts

**bullying:** “Repeated negative events, which over time are directed at special individuals and which are carried out by one or several other people who are stronger than the victim” (Aluede, 2008, p. 152). It is systematic verbal, physical, and/or cyber harassment of other individuals.

*Examples:* This website offers information about a Mentors in Violence Prevention program and its usefulness. Retrieved from: <http://www.uni.edu/resources/features/uni-preventing-gender-violence-and-bullying>

\*Download Cedar Falls, Iowa High School’s presentation on how to address bullying. Retrieved from: <http://www.cfhs.cfschools.org/staff-resources>

**emancipatory education:** Educational practices that seek to challenge accepted categories, unexamined norms, and repressive practices.

*Examples:* A Swedish school is eliminating the gendered nature of their classrooms and playground by using a gender neutral pronouns and making sure all the children feel free to play with all of the toys regardless of their gender assignment.

Hebblethwaite, Cordelia. (2011, July 7). Sweden’s ‘gender neutral’ pre-school. *BBC News.* Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-14038419>

**gender-relevant model:** This model includes girls *and* boys, as it attempts to make the gendered dimension of social life and education a part of the discussion. Educators directly address stereotypical assumptions as a part of the lesson, albeit reading, writing, math, or science.

“The United States has not had a woman president because girls get a different education” (Frawley, 2005, p. 221). Girls tend to get a different education than boys. Similarly, why haven’t more men of color, out gay men, or poor men become president? The type of education (and related political benefits) needed is only offered to an elite group of boys. Frawley argues teachers’ bias can be unintentional and yet send harmful messages to children about what they can and cannot do.

**gender-sensitive model:** “A gender-sensitive model of an educated person” that does not fall into the simplistic trap of biological determinism and false dichotomies (Rolland, 1991, p. 10). What is a gender-sensitive model? It is more than focusing on individual learning styles and needs. Although an individual focus sounds good in theory, it does not address the underlying structural barriers in education that are tied to racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia.

*Examples:* Gender/sex–sensitive education can be achieved only if one addresses the entire learning environment. Educators must pay attention to what is on the shelves and walls of schools, making sure they send inclusive, nonstereotypical messages. Schools also must provide opportunities for girls and boys to play together safely at recess.

\*Another version from the Swedish grade school that has made the efforts to avoid gendering the students and has paid special attention to the toys and equipment to avoid gendering those as well.

Soffel, Jenny. (2011, June 27). No “him” or “her”; preschool fights gender bias, *Associated Press.* Retrieved from: <http://news.yahoo.com/no-him-her-preschool-fights-gender-bias-122541829.html>

\*Transgender students need to be included in teacher education discussions of gender. To fail to do so contributes to the high level of bullying and harassment of students who do not fit cisgender norms.

**connected teaching:** This model suggests that learning is more accessible when topics are concretely related to learners’ individual life experiences rather than taught in abstract ways, isolated from context. Connected teaching requires teachers to provide examples to which students can relate, to share the ways in which they themselves connect to the material, to be more flexible with their teaching styles, and to be less controlling. It also requires teachers to share control over the learning process by being willing to engage in the learning moment with students rather than simply using the classroom as a place to report what one knows. The instructor works together with the students to construct knowledge through interaction. The ultimate goal is to learn how to learn, which requires recognizing the complexity of class members’ identities.

*Examples:* Author bell hooks (1994) suggests teachers find ways to discuss hidden dimensions in the classroom, such as social class. Help students connect their family’s social class experience and values with the learning process. Particularly in higher education the norms of classroom interaction tend to have classist expectations, such as what is considered for appropriate tone and volume of voice, a taboo on the use of profanity, and the degree of animated bodily actions, etc.

**gender-specific model:** This model creates changes in education and curriculum that target only one sex.

*Examples:* Canyon Heights Academy is a gender-specific Catholic school. A part of the school’s website on gender-specific classes offers gender-based reasons for separate learning environments including allowing boys to fidget and girls to speak their mind in class. Retrieved from: <http://www.canyonheightsacademy.com/gender/index.html>

\*Dr. Leonard Sax, leading proponent for single sex public education argues for example, that boys need a louder volume in teacher’s voices to be able to listen than girls do. The National Association for Single-Sex Public Education (NASSPE) suggests teachers use microphones to regulate volume according to the sex of the class. Retrieved from: <http://www.singlesexschools.org/>

**hidden curriculum:** Norms, values, and beliefs that are a byproduct of education that people often fail to question. The hidden curriculum of education makes clear that a critical gender analysis must go further than simply comparing individual women and men for possible differences in educational experiences. It must explore how society conceives of and pursues truth and knowledge. Furthermore, what gets taught to students as truth and knowledge reflects predominant cultural values.

*Examples:* In 2010, when the Texas Board of Education voted to approve new guidelines for social studies curriculum in elementary, middle, and high schools. Rather than selecting already written textbooks, the Board told the expert authors what would and would not be included in the textbooks the state chose to endorse. The list reflected a White, heterosexual Christian bias, ignoring individuals from other groups who had contributed significantly to U.S. history.

**peer pressure:** Pressureto conform to the norms of the group they want to be a part (Swain, 2005). Peer groups have as much, if not more, influence on adolescents’ gender identities than do parents.

*Examples:* Peer pressure is often behind group bullying of individual students who do not fit binary heterosexual masculine/feminine gender norms.

\*Peer pressure can lead girls to dressing in more sexually revealing ways, ceasing to play physical games during recess. It can lead boys to allowing other boys to mistreat students because they do not conform to masculine expectations and to internalize negative messages about themselves if they fail to meet these expectations.