



Gender and Education in Luxembourg and Beyond

Local Challenges and New Perspectives

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Introduction

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Introduction

Gender and education are two inseparable terms. The concept of gender refers to the social and cultural processes of female and male identity construction. Children are not born as girls or boys, but they develop their gender identity by adapting to social and cultural norms. Societies, such as Western ones, impose a gender duality that runs through every aspect of our lives: family, school and working life. This has important implications as it limits and dictates the life choices of every individual.

Instead of seeing gender as a continuum, society constructs two categories and classifies individuals into them by means of a set of assigned attributes and stereotypes. The importance given to gender identity in different aspects of our lives encourages individuals to conform to those attributions. In addition, people can be born with a variation of sex characteristics and do not necessarily clearly fit female and male categories. Often, they are forced to assign themselves to one gender.

Gender identity and stereotypes play a role from early childhood on. For example, department stores organise toy sections by sex rather than interests. Fashion stores differentiate between female and male clothes, even for babies and toddlers. Girls are generally attributed characteristics and interests that relate to domestic life, beauty, care and friendship. Boys are often associated with adventure, discovery and construction. Consequently, the daily experience of these stereotypes has an impact on a child's development and self-concept. It directly and indirectly influences their interests and skills, and later their choice of career paths. Education, both formal and informal, is therefore an important lever for creating an egalitarian world in which individuals can develop naturally according to their personality rather than constructed categories.

The aim of this book is to provide a starting point for a discussion about gender and education in Luxembourg through national and international perspectives. We have chosen contributions that range from fieldwork to research as it is important to explore the topic from both a practical and a theoretical perspective. Furthermore, gender and education can only be fully understood by taking an intersectional perspective and considering how other socio-cultural factors, such as sexual orientation, ethnic origin, migration background and disability, intertwine.

The book is divided into three different, yet also overlapping, parts. The first part examines gender issues in nonformal and informal educational contexts, such as the home but also society at large. It starts with an introductory chapter by Kathrin Eckhart and Isabelle Schmoetten, in which they explain that a feminist pedagogy can act as a powerful tool for political and civic education. The questioning of societal gender roles continues with a paper by Miriam-Linnea Hale and André Melzer. The authors analyse stereotypical representations in the media (such as television, video games and social media) and the effect these can have on an individual's life, especially on their well-being and career choices. Sandy Lorente then picks up the theme of well-being by discussing how the consumption of pornographic content influences the ways young people construct gender roles – which has a direct effect on their psychological development. Carole Blond-Hanten presents the results of a social experiment, in which the author used a game to de-construct gender stereotypes that children and adults might have. Based

