



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

on her research with young people from the Cap Verdean community in Luxembourg, Mirlene Fonseca shows how the culture of origin shapes gendered education and can give rise to intergenerational conflicts. Finally, Joanne Theisen addresses the role of gender stereotypes in the personal and professional development of girls and women with autism spectrum disorder.

In the second part of the book, we move over the gender issues in formal education. In her paper, Maddy Mulheims-Hinkel reflects on the political implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Luxembourgish educational context. Enrica Pianaro gives a guide to queer education and explains how queer and feminist theories can help to rethink formal education. Sylvie Kerger and Laurence Brasseur then take a closer look at primary school textbooks and show how an intersectional perspective expands our thinking about gender representations in didactic materials. Hélène Barthelmebs-Raguin is also interested in teaching materials: the findings of her comparative study of the French and Luxembourgish curricula reveal a masculinisation of literature and a clear lack of female authors. Staying in the field of the arts, Dany Weyer reflects on how young people can explore gender identities and roles through drama and theatre in the classroom. The classroom is also a subject of interest to Marie-Pierre Moreau, who reflects on schools as feminised spaces by means of the children's novel Matilda. This part of the book ends with a contribution by Giorgia Magni and Isabelle Collet, who address a different aspect of gender issues in formal contexts by analysing prevention campaigns against gender-based violence in higher education.

The third part of the book is devoted to gender considerations in working life. This section starts with a contribution by Mégane Pittet, Pascal Gygax, Ute Gabriel and Jane Oakhill, who analyse the ways language and gender stereotypes influence young people's vocational interests. Also focusing on vocational aspirations, Merlin Rastoder, Lucija Duric and Claude Houssemand show how professional gender representations influence students' career choices. Alexander Kries then reflects on work and gender stereotypes through the case of male childcare workers. Finally, the book concludes with a chapter by Marina Andrieu, who discusses the low representation of girls and women in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and reviews several projects aimed towards an improvement of this imbalance.

Exploring various aspects of gender and education and coming from a range of different backgrounds, the authors of this book all share a common endeavour: the fight against gender inequality and the belief in the importance of an egalitarian education. We hope that this book will provide a point of departure for a reflection on existing educational practices – in Luxembourg and beyond.