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STAGES OF GENDER EDUCATION IN CANADIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the issue of educational preconditions of gender education formation and development in Canadian secondary schools. On the basis of conducted scientific and pedagogical literature analysis it has been determined that gender education has undergone three main stages and is currently developing during its fourth, modern period.

The research is focused on different aspects of gender education in Canadian schools, namely the objectives, principles, methods, content and means. The transformation dynamics of the aforementioned gender education dimensions at each stage has been examined. It has been concluded that the objectives of gender education in Canadian secondary schools have considerably evolved since 1960's; the methods and means of teaching students about gender have become more versatile and relevant to the requirements of the present-day informational technology society; the content of gender education has extended its scope. The provision of gender education in secondary educational establishments in Canada has transformed from a haphazard "add women and stir" approach to a more consistent manner, which demands availability of certain policies (gender equity policy, anti-discrimination policy, safe schools policy) and codes of conduct in action at schools; integration of gender equity issues into different subject courses across the curriculum, as well as introducing separate fully-fledged courses, like "Women's Studies", "Men's Studies", "Gender Studies".

Key words: *gender education, sex-role stereotypes, gender equity, equal opportunities, equal access.*

INTRODUCTION

In its present-day aspirations to integrate into the European Union, Ukraine has to deal with a series of tasks connected to reforming society on democratic tenets. Achievement of these objectives demands partnership and effective cooperation of all Ukrainian citizens. Therefore, formation of egalitarian consciousness, teaching mutual respect and understanding among representatives of both sexes, which will create favourable conditions for development of personal potential to its fullest, are becoming an immensely topical issue. For this reason gender education, which is an asset at solving the aforementioned tasks, is high on the agenda. Schools are partially responsible for the young generation's learning and development. They need scientific and methodological framework to implement gender education. Due to the fact that gender education at Ukrainian schools is a relatively recent phenomenon, the experience of gender education in



foreign countries, particularly Canada, where gender education in secondary schools originated as far back as in the 1960's, is of high value and interest.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The objective of the article is to analyze educational and pedagogical preconditions of gender education in Canadian secondary schools at its different stages of formation and development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

Our research is underpinned by the studies of such scholars as R. Coulter, L. Eyre, J. Gaskell, A. McLaren, and R. Pierson, who examined gender education development in Canadian schools. In addition, we mainly base our investigation on the textbooks and recommendations on gender issues for teachers, on school policies and curricula in Canada, etc.

It has to be pointed out that foreign experience in gender education has also been a matter of research of Ukrainian scientists, such as S. Koval (gender-oriented approach to teaching and moral development of secondary school students in the United States), L. Kovalchuk (gender education of students in German schools), N. Lavrychenko (gender education politics and gender socialization of school students in modern Great Britain), L. Lushpai (gender education of secondary school students in Great Britain), O. Tokmenko (gender approach in the American system of education), O. Yurieva (gender education for bachelors of Humanities Specialities in Canada), M. Zubilevych (gender education of adolescent girls in Great Britain). However, the theory and practice of gender education of the youth abroad demands further examination and analysis in order to implement best ideas and practices in the Ukrainian system of education.

For the purpose of the study a set of methods was applied, specifically, analysis and synthesis for processing and analyzing literature on gender education in Canadian secondary schools, and historical – for defining and elaborating the main stages of gender education in secondary educational establishments in Canada.

RESULTS

On the basis of analysis of scientific, pedagogical and historical sources we determined four stages of gender education in Canadian secondary schools in the period from the end of 1960's to the present. We used educational and pedagogical features peculiar to each stage of gender education, such as the purpose of gender education, its principles, methods, content and means, to define the time period for each stage.

The first stage of gender education in Canadian secondary schools, named “non-sexist education”, occurred from the end of 1960's till the beginning of the 1980's, basically from the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1967, which demanded that equal opportunities in all spheres, including educational, were granted to women and men (Gaskell, McLaren, 1987). The objective of gender education during this period can be determined as development of a personality that: realizes availability of various opportunities to fully realize its own potential and aspirations regardless of gender; attempts to understand experience which is different from its own; and is able to be an active member of society. During this stage gender education was based on the principle of equality of opportunities which consisted in assisting all students, regardless of their gender, to realize personal potential by means of providing them with equal opportunities, equal access to resources, and equal treatment (Coulter, 1996).

Analysis of practical recommendations for Canadian teachers and theoretical works indicated that three groups of methods were used for gender education during class activities in Canadian secondary schools in the period from the 1960's till 1980's. The first group consist of the methods of consciousness development of citizens who are aware of



the presence of abundant opportunities for self-realization in society, regardless of their gender: discussion, lecture, debates, the method of role-models, discussion of films, literature works, television and radio programs, commercials, newspapers, magazines, processing collected materials. The second group includes the methods of organization activity, discussion and formation of positive experience of social behavior towards both sexes: case studies, individual and group projects, drama, interview, field trips, role plays, brainstorming, dilemmas, invitation of guest speakers, debates, panel discussions, etc. The third group comprises the methods of control and self-control over effectiveness of gender education: writing essays and paragraphs, oral presentations, Power Point presentations, keeping journals.

Gender education during the stage “non-sexist education” in after-class activities was primarily aimed at encouragement of girls to study nontraditional courses, for instance, Mathematics and Science. These initiatives were implemented by means of such methods as inviting guest speakers from the community to school events, organizing the Career Days for girls, participation of girls in mentoring and role models programs, summer camps, also by methods of encouragement, such as allocation of grants and scholarships for girls (Coulter, 1996).

The means of gender education at this stage were textbooks, manuals, curriculum documents, audio-, radio-, and video materials, films, literary works, posters, brochures, newspapers, magazines, photographs, art pieces, legislative documents, documents on school codes of conduct for students and personnel, statistical data on school staff (gender, position, courses taught, and age) etc.

It should be highlighted that during this period profound efforts were dedicated to expertise of existing textbooks with the purpose of elimination of sex-role biases in their content, language, illustration of women and men (Gaskell, McLaren, 1987). Analysis of primary school readers demonstrated that women and girls were portrayed performing typically secondary roles while men were depicted in main and versatile roles. In the secondary school textbooks the problem lay not in sex-role stereotypes, but in absence of women in them. This was sometimes caused by lack of awareness of women’s achievements, sometimes by belittling and ignoring them (Pierson, 1995).

Abundance of sex-role stereotypes in teaching materials led to development of recommendations for writing non-sexist textbooks as well as the creation of “corrective” textbooks (Pierson, 1995). In addition, researchers concentrated on investigation of information about women’s (mainly white women’s) contribution into social, historical, economical and political development of Canada, which soon was integrated into school curricula. Textbooks with recommendations for teachers and bibliographies of sources on gender education were published during this stage (Gaskell, McLaren, 1987; *Sex-role Stereotypes and Women’s Studies*, 1978). Curricula, lesson plans’ development was the domain of provincial Ministries of education, governmental organizations and institutions, private publishers, separate school boards, Teachers Federations.

In general, the material about women was integrated into the existing curricula in the form of separate lessons or chapters (Coulter, 1996). Gender component was included into such subject courses as English, Social Studies, Guidance or locally developed courses. In this way, the first stage of the curriculum reform, called “add and stir” began (*Women’s Studies: A Resource Guide for Teachers*, 1981).

Numerous sex-role stereotypes both in and outside school such as male domination in teaching materials created the demand for enrichment of curricula and textbooks with information about Canadian women. Therefore, the content of gender education in Canadian secondary schools during the period from 1960’s till 1980’s was predominantly



centered around women's issues, specifically learning about sex-role stereotypes and their impact upon personality, acquiring information about activities and portrayal of women's roles in family, work, law, politics, sports, art, media, education, their contribution into Canadian society throughout history, famous Canadian women, First Nations women, women in other cultures; fostering understanding and respect for a "different" experience, building confidence in personal and other people's potential regardless of sex; instilling in students belief in the fact that women and men are more similar than different (Coulter, 1996). Girls were mostly taught such frequently "missing" traits as independence, confidence, and competitiveness.

Despite positive effect of gender education at the stage "nonsexist education", its implementation was marked by some difficulties. Firstly, gender education initiatives were not systematically and evenly introduced in different Canadian provinces and territories as well as within the same province or territory (Coulter, 1996). Secondly, at the beginning of 1970's teachers worked on the issues of gender education basically in isolation; only by the end of the decade did teachers' federations provide institutional structures for pedagogues who were interested in advancement of gender education. Thirdly, sexism was looked upon as an individual's and not a system's problem, consequently, gender education was essentially directed towards assisting girls to become more similar with men or become "less defective men". Moreover, gender education was mostly concerned with white women and girls, ignoring the issues of the indigenous and immigrant women. In addition, the principle of equal opportunities and access did not guarantee obtaining equal results by all students (Robertson, 1998). Lack of enthusiasm from a large part of girls to study traditionally male courses was another obstacle in the process of gender education.

The second stage of gender education, "different, but equal" in the history of Canadian secondary school can be outlined from the beginning of 1980's till the end of 1980's. The aim of gender education throughout this period was related to development of a person who: respects differences between women and men and values social contribution of both sexes; is capable of being an active and effective member of society. In contrast to the previous stage, the governing principle of which lay in ignoring sex differences, during the second stage the fundamental principle consisted in recognizing differences between males and females and taking them into account in the educational process; rethinking and revaluing significance of reproductive (women's) and productive (men's) spheres.

In order to implement gender education an array of methods was applied, similar to the ones that were used during the previous stage. However, during the second period of gender education the methods of feminist pedagogy became widely employed. This rested on the works "In a Different Voice" by C. Gilligan and "Women's Ways of Knowing" by M. Belenky et al., which ascertained the difference in women's and men's ways of thinking. Due to the fact that knowledge and values transmitted by school education at that time were mostly created from an androcentric perspective, feminist scholars accentuated the necessity to make the teaching methods more relevant to girls. For instance, it was proposed to use cooperative learning, single-sex learning (either for specific subject courses or for single-sex schooling for all subjects); to take into consideration personal experience in the educational process; to transform relations "teacher – student" into nonhierarchical, egalitarian relations; to create safe and caring learning environments (Pierson, 1995).

Gender education was realized with the help of diverse means, similar to those which were applied during the first stage. Researchers continued to conduct evaluations of the teaching materials because every province was required to eliminate sex-role stereotypes from textbooks, etc. till 1987 (Coulter, 1996). A new initiative which appeared during this



stage was making Home making and Industrial arts courses compulsory for students of both sexes in 1980's. These changes resulted from criticism of schools distorting women's values, lifestyle and contribution. Scholars argued that school curriculum gave more prominence to public, productive spheres and male features than to private, reproductive spheres and female qualities (Hayibor, 1990). Reevaluation of women's reproductive role led to "compensatory" education for boys which stipulated acquisition of knowledge and skills which were typical of girls.

The content of gender education during 1980's comprised teaching about women's contribution to the country's development; instilling respect for unique female experiences and contributions, namely, nurturance and upbringing; and encouraging girls to widen their spectrum of possible professional roles (Gaskell, McLaren, 1987). Overall, gender education at this stage as well as at the previous, was mainly directed towards girls, however, much more attention was paid to "compensatory" education for boys. They were encouraged to develop such qualities as care and empathy. We could infer that gender education was supposed to develop personalities whose roles could have been mutually substituted so that women and men could be effective both in their career and family life.

Implementation of gender education at the stage "equal, but different" also faced some challenges. Firstly, the use of initiatives with two opposite principles, specifically "equal opportunities" and "different, but equal" could have been observed (Coulter, 2013; Eyre, 1999). Secondly, ignoring differences (racial, cultural, economical, ethnic, ability/disability, sexuality) between representatives of the same sex and paying attention almost exclusively to white middle class women, aggravated problems of Canadian immigrants, whose numbers were rising dramatically and whose countries of origin were becoming increasingly diverse. In addition, some men were hostile towards women who enrolled in traditionally male specialties at universities or colleges.

The third stage of gender education "anti-sexist and inclusive education" lasted from the end of 1980's till the end of 1990's. Gender education at this period was aimed at development of a personality who: possessed knowledge about relations between men and women at different times in Canadian history and in the history of other countries; was aware of social construction of gender norms and expectations and the influence of rigid gender stereotypes and sexism in society; could think critically in order to deconstruct them; treated people of both sexes tolerantly despite their race, class, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic position, ability/disability, sexual orientation; was ready for becoming an active citizen; did not tolerate inequity; realized personal power in deconstruction of gender norms and took an active stance on building a just society for all citizens (Baxter et al, 2006).

Gender education at this stage was founded on the principle of gender equity in the educational process, which, according to the Report of the Gender Equity Advisory Committee of British Columbia, stipulated the right of all students to a gender-equitable learning environment; provision of possibilities for students to select school courses and their future profession according to individual interests and abilities regardless of gender; incorporation of such topics as social class, culture, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and age into curriculum (Gender Equity, 1999).

Similarly to the earlier stages, teachers took advantage of a wide range of methods to realize gender education in Canadian secondary schools. It has to be emphasized that after-class and after-school activities targeted at gender education were on the rise. For instance, clubs of "Women Equality" were created, retreats on the topic of sexism were held, conferences and symposiums for students were organized (Coulter, 2013). In addition, since 1992 Canadian schools began to celebrate Women's History Month which was dedicated to various topics each year (Status of Women, 2014).



At that time a sound basis of teaching materials on gender education at secondary schools had already been established. All textbooks were analyzed by means of the Canadian exchange of instructional materials analysis model); bibliographies of non-sexist reading materials were created; the resources with the list of study programs and options for employment in science and mathematics were developed; recommendations regarding organization of class activities and teachers' behavior were published. The potential of the subject courses related to health, career decisions, family, media, and society was used more efficiently for integration of gender components in secondary school education (Canada's Fourth Report on the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1996).

During this period men also became interested in gender education, primarily about the issues that concerned them. For example, organization "Men for Change" developed a Healthy Relationships Violence Prevention Curriculum in 1994 (Men for Change, 2004). Another significant peculiarity at this stage was the introduction of Codes of conduct at schools, policies on sexual harassment and other forms of sexist and discriminatory behavior. Development of school policies on gender equity was also a crucial step in 1990's.

The content of gender education at the stage "antisexist and inclusive education" considerably expanded and included the issues of sexism as a problem of a system, not of an individual, sexuality, self-image, violence, relations, masculinity, discrimination, rights, career choice etc. in the context of various aspects of identity; teaching students the skills of cooperation, teamwork, peaceful and effective conflict management, problem solving and decision making.

Moreover, there have also been some changes in the initiatives pertinent to improvement of students' access to educational services and maximization of students' educational outcomes. Firstly, schools became more "sensitive" to students' diverse individual and learning needs. Secondly, much consideration was given to overcoming the gender gap in learning achievements of boys (mostly in reading and writing skills) and girls (mostly in mathematics). Provincial and state testing (Student Achievement Indicators Programme) was introduced in 1993 for this purpose.

During the stage "antisexist and inclusive education" many provinces and territories experienced cuts in funding allocated to gender education initiatives. Due to the economic crisis at this time solving state's economical problems became a priority. Another problem at this stage was the increase in the number of one-parent families, divorces and decrease in the birth rate. Some Canadian scholars connected these issues with feminist movements.

The fourth stage of gender education "gender education in the conditions of globalization and integration processes" began at the end of 1990's and continues till the present. Its goal is to teach students to respect people of both sexes taking into account their race, class, cultural, ethnicity, diversity; to promote inclusive education (related to teaching all students that may happen to be in a disadvantaged position); to teach skills to identify and eliminate discriminatory biases, systematic obstacles and power dynamics, which limit students' possibility to study, develop and make a contribution to society (The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 to 12 – Social Sciences and Humanities, 2013). Gender education at its modern stage is anchored in the principle of gender equity in the educational process which, on the one hand, demands sensitivity and respect for differences between boys and girls, and, on the other hand, encouragement to develop similar abilities without giving preference to a particular sex (Robertson, 1999).

Efficiency of gender education at this stage is provided by a broad scope of methods, which is being continually enriched. For example, introduction of safe and caring schools policies in Canada (since 1990's till present), which prohibit discrimination and bullying,



enables teachers to use the method of punishment for students' gender education. This period is also characterized by the use of methods that are directed towards students' research activity, development and implementation of social projects; extensive use of computer and informational technologies. The latter contributed to diversification of means of gender education: Internet sources, computer programs and games, etc.

It has to be acknowledged that while during the previous three stages of gender education, the gender component was incorporated into such subject courses as English Language Arts, Social Science, Media, Family Studies, at the present stage special optional courses on gender have been introduced, such as Women's Studies (for grade 12 students in British Columbia, 2004), Men's Studies (for grade 12 students in rural British Columbia schools) (Weber, Kitchenham, 2011), Gender Studies (for grade 12 students in Ontario, 2013) (The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 to 12 – Social Sciences and Humanities, 2013). Besides the issues which were raised at earlier periods of gender education, nowadays the topics like gender identity and expression are being gradually raised. Moreover, gender themes are now studied more deeply not only in the Canadian but also in the global context.

In addition, a modern stage of gender education is marked by an increased interest in the problems of boys in the education system and paying particular attention to the gender gap in learning achievements in some specific subjects (Coulter, 2007). Educational outcomes of Canadian students are assessed with the help of testing: provincial, state (the Student Achievement Indicators Programme, 1993 – 2004; Pan-Canadian Assessment Program, PCAP, since 2007) and international testing (Programme for International Student Assessment, since 2000).

Nowadays the content of gender education in Canadian schools (particularly inclusion of topics on gender identity and expression, attempts to normalize homosexuality) causes protests from some socially-active groups of citizens and parents. Another challenge at the present stage of gender education is students' access to the content of Internet resources, which, on the one hand, is a powerful tool of gender education, on the other hand, poses some threats (e.g. cyberbullying) to students.

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of literature on gender education for Canadian secondary school students, definition of educational and pedagogical preconditions of gender education enabled us to make a conclusion about development of the aim of gender education for school youth from the end of the 1960's till the present: from trying to make girls more similar to boys during the first stage; rethinking and accentuating the value of women's unique experiences and social contributions, teaching boys such qualities as care and empathy – during the second; teaching critical thinking skills with the purpose of building a just and equitable society, teaching respect to both sexes in the context of diversity – during the third and the fourth stages.

Such components of the goal of gender education as teaching students mutual respect, empathy to representatives of their own and opposite gender, active social position, and critical thinking skills can be observed at all the stages of gender education in Canadian secondary schools. There have occurred some transformations in the content of gender education, by which we mean that it extended from covering the issues of mainly white women during the first and the second stages; issues related to both women and men of different identities – during the third stage; up to the topics of gender identity and expression during the fourth stage.

Since the end of the 1960's till now, there has been developed a substantial basis of methods and means of gender education, which has been improved and modernized. It has to be emphasized that gender education is also undergoing some transformations at the present stage. Consequently, the perspective of future examination may be connected to the deeper analysis of educational and pedagogical peculiarities of gender education during the modern stage.



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