An Agenda for Gender-fair Education

ZENAIDA QUEZADA-REYES

My long involvement with women's studies has made me sensitive to what I read. I automatically classify books as either sexist or not. I examine the participation of women and the biases against them in many books that I use in teaching social science subjects. As one writer states:

> No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances in life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society.
>
> No production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstance (Said, in Saigol 1995).

I support an antipatriarchal ideology and envision a society that pursues gender equity in the area of education. Gender-fair education involves the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of girls and women as well as boys and men (DE, USA 1995). It aims to promote the teaching and learning of gender equity, highlighting female experiences as products of historical and cultural processes.

Gender-fair education works on the following principles:

- Men and women are born equal, and so they must be given equal opportunities to develop their potential.
- All students have the right to a gender-fair learning environment.
- All education programs and career decisions should be based on the student's interests and abilities, regardless of gender.
- Gender-fair education incorporates issues of social class, culture, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and age.
- Gender-fair education requires sensitivity, determination, commitment, and vigilance.
- The foundation of gender-fair education is the cooperation and collaboration among students, educational organizations, and other relevant institutions.

These principles must guide teachers, school administrators, curriculum writers, and, most important, the textbook writers, in eliminating patriarchal ideology in the classroom.

Philippine Schools' Gendered Curriculum

Schools reflect the social, economic, and political structures and processes of a given society. They tend to reproduce the social order and maintain the status quo (Cortes 1993). Philippine society supports patriarchal ideology. The formal education system promotes and propagates patriarchal ideology. The first Church-run schools and tertiary educational institutions were established in the 1600s under Spanish colonial rule. Only the sons of Spaniards and upper-class Filipinos could attend. Their sisters entered *beaterios,* where they were trained in housework, religious music, and religious rituals. While men pursued higher education, women stayed at home and took care of their families. Even the Spanish Royal Educational Decree of 1863, which established the public school system in the Philippines, did not allow women to go to school, and set up

training schools only for male teachers. The Spanish Royal Decree of 1865 gave even more privileges to men by extending the public school system to the secondary level. Vocational and technical schools were established, also only for men.

Under US colonial rule (1898-1946), the Education Act of 1901 established the public school system and free primary education. But while women now had access to education, schools continued to uphold traditional roles of both men and women, as girls studied home economics and boys took up practical arts.

Under Japanese colonial rule (1942-1945), the Basic Principles of Education were the following:

- Present the Philippines as a member of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.
- Eradicate the idea of relying upon Western nations, especially the United States and Great Britain, and promote a culture based on Filipinos' identity as Asians.
- Encourage people to be less materialistic.
- Spread the Japanese language and stop the use of English.
- Promote elementary and vocational education.
- Encourage people to be industrious.

Subjects were similar to those under the US system, including social studies, arithmetic, science, industrial arts for boys, and housekeeping and household arts for girls. The only difference was that the Japanese required students to undergo military training.

Teachers were ordered to modify their instructional materials. Anything that hinted at American ideology was to be discarded. Compliance, however, was more artificial than real (Pangilinan 1954). The teachers remained loyal to the United States and to the patriarchal ideology embodied in the US school curriculum.

After World War II, all prewar superintendents, supervisors, principals, and classroom teachers were reappointed. They resumed propagating the US curriculum, with emphasis on democratic values and community participation. At the primary, intermediate, and secondary levels, boys and girls took up general subjects—math, science, social studies, English, Filipino, health and physical education, character education, and vocational education (UNESCO 1960). From the intermediate to secondary levels, however, boys took up industrial arts, gardening, and club work, while girls studied home economics, needlework, cooking and housekeeping, food selection and diet, and home nursing.

In 1957, the curriculum was revised to separate students as destined either for vocational schools or college. General subjects were offered to both groups during the first two years of secondary education. During the third and fourth years, students preparing for college took college-oriented courses; the rest took vocational courses. Boys still took vocational education and girls still took home economics.

In the 1970s, the government revised the curriculum, but girls continued to take home economics, and boys, practical arts. Real change took place only in 1985, when the curriculum was further revised, allowing boys and girls to choose between home economics and practical arts. Boys were now able to learn sewing, cooking, and interior design, while girls could learn carpentry and how to do electrical repair.

Gendered Textbooks

An analysis (adapted from Saigol [1995]) of selected Asian history textbooks being used in Philippine secondary schools reveals their patriarchal construction of gender through their writers' (i) point of view, (ii) handling and interpretation of facts and events, (iii) definition of concepts, (iv) images, and (v) in-depth analysis. The textbooks examined are the following:

- *Kabihasnang Asyano.* 1989. Serye ng Secondary Education Development Program (SEDP). Pilipinas: Kagawaran ng Edukasyon, Kultura at Isports.
- Latourette, Kenneth Scott. 1967. *A Short History of the Far East.* Philippines: Ken Inc.
- Leogardo, Felicitas. 1988. *History of Asian Nations.* Manila: Sto. Niño Catholic House.
- Pearn, B.R. 1970. *An Introduction to the History of Southeast Asia*. Hongkong: Sheck Wah Tong Printing Press.

The gender bias of textbooks may be explicit or implicit. It is explicit when men and women are shown as having certain roles: women as mothers and wives, for example, who have to sew, weave, cook, clean, and take care of children; and men as soldiers, leaders, and citizens.

Of history books, Fernandez (1998) has this to say:

> Judging from what is written in history books, one would be led to conclude that:
>
> 1. Women must have wombs a hundred times bigger than their body size such that they can beget thousands of male children with one or two females only. This would explain the scarcity of females and the overwhelming presence of males in recorded history;
> 2. Women do nothing but watch while men single-handedly make history as conquering heroes, national liberators, victorious generals, benevolent monarchs, wise lawgivers and some such;
> 3. Some women, on a few occasions, assist men in history-making as when they sew a flag made out of their skirts which the men raise over a conquered territory or when they use their feminine charms on the enemy to ferret out military or state secrets; and
> 4. A few women, on rare occasions, make history somehow, and that is because they are not truly women in the first place, but men in women's bodies.

None of the textbooks examined show the role of women in nation building, except when they become national leaders after their husbands (or fathers) are assassinated (Corazon Aquino, for example, and Sirimavo Bandaranaike). Otherwise, women are portrayed as housewives and mothers who submit to their husbands. Some mention that Asian women, specifically Chinese women, have attained equal rights. Yet, although women are given the freedom to work for economic production, they alone bear the burden of reproduction.

Implicitly, Asian history textbooks impart the characteristics of maleness and femaleness. The hidden voice in the text or subtext (Saigol 1995) is not openly articulated. The author may not even be aware of it. The significant events in Asian history are subtly used to dichotomize categories that represent masculine and feminine characteristics: open/enclosed, light/dark, good/bad, brave/timid, powerful/powerless, and so on. Gendered construction of history as masculine discusses war, bravery, aggression, conquest, fearlessness, and dominance. Women, however, are objects of male desire with no needs of their own as individuals. They are humble, respectful, good, and pure. The words "masculine" and "feminine" do not appear as biological and natural characteristics in the hidden text. But the manner in which facts are presented are socially constructed as having male and female characteristics. In other words, the discourse used by the writers has "masculine" and "feminine" aspects (Saigol 1995). The patriarchal discourses appear in the following threads: masculine/feminine positioning, celebratory view of history, glorification of the military, and powerful state and submissive citizens.

Masculine/Feminine Positioning in Asian History

The triumph of democracy over communism is prominent in discussions on Asian history. In the discourse of Leogardo (1988), for example, Asian nations attained their true independence by rejecting communism. Before democracy, there was darkness, misery, and conflict, which are "female." Under democracy, Asian nations experienced light, happiness, and independence, which are "male."

Latourette (1967) projects the technologically advanced, male "West" and the backward, female "Far East." Western colonialization, therefore, signified the development of Asian civilization.

The discussion on conquest and subjugation uses male and female imagery. The colonizer was the "male" conqueror, liberator, and subjugator of "female" Asian countries and "virgin" land. Asian history textbooks are stories of conquest (by Kublai Khan, for example) and colonization (by foreign powers) of well-established civilizations, which brought misery and political, economic, and cultural dislocation.

The Celebratory View of History

Representations of Asian history as a series of male political leaders glorify personalities such as Kublai Khan, Emperor Akihito, Mao Zedong, Khomeini, Nehru, Sukarno, and so on, who are held up as role models for children. In the books, men are preoccupied with war. Peace and happiness are invisible in the stories of humankind.

Glorification of the Military

The narratives of the great kingdoms that later on became nation states concentrate on the military prowess of leaders. The description of strong Chinese leaders, the shogun of Japan, colonization by the West, and World War II, for example, send out the subtle message that leaders are strong, male commanders. Women are never portrayed as defending their country.

The greatest military leaders are projected as fighting for a just cause (as in Pakistan, for example), mainly in defense of the Motherland, mothers, and children.

Powerful State and Submissive Citizens

Asian history textbooks promote ideologies of citizenship and the relationship between the state and the citizen. The citizen is the passive, infantilized, feminized Other of the patriarchal state. The chapter on political systems of Asia in the SEDP series sends a subtle message that citizens must respect their leaders just as they respect their own fathers.

Promoting Gender-fair Teaching Strategies

Gender-fair educators advocate the following (DE, USA 1997):

- Be committed to learning and practicing equitable teaching by being committed to improving the needs and welfare of both male and female students.
- Use gender-specific terms to market opportunities. For example, if a technology fair has been designed to appeal to girls, mention girls clearly and specifically. Many girls assume that gender-neutral language in nontraditional fields means boys.
- Modify content, teaching style, and assessment practices to make nontraditional subjects more relevant and interesting for female and female students.
- Highlight the social aspects and usefulness of activities, skills, and knowledge.
- Recognize comments received from female students; and explore social, moral, and environmental impacts of decisions, especially those that would affect women.
- When establishing relevance of material, consider the different interests and life experiences that girls and boys may have.

- Choose a variety of instructional strategies such as cooperative and collaborative work in small groups, opportunities for safe risk-taking, hands-on work, and opportunities to integrate knowledge and skills (e.g., science and communication).
- Provide specific strategies, special opportunities, and resources to encourage students to excel in areas of study in which they are typically underrepresented.
- Design lessons to explore many perspectives and to use different sources of information; refer to male and female experts.
- Manage competitiveness in the classroom, particularly in areas in which male students typically excel.
- Watch for biases (for example, in behavior or learning resources) and teach students strategies to recognize and work to eliminate inequities they observe.
- Be aware of accepted gender-biased practices in physical activity (e.g., in team sports, funding for athletes, and choices in physical education programs).
- Do not assume that all students are heterosexual.
- Share information and build a network of colleagues with a strong commitment to equity.
- Model nonbiased behavior: use inclusive, parallel, or gender-sensitive language; question and coach male and female students with the same frequency, specificity, and depth; allow quiet students sufficient time to respond to questions.
- Have colleagues familiar with common gender biases observe your teaching and discuss any potential bias they may observe.
- Be consistent over time.

The concept and principles of teaching strategies are useful in developing a gender-fair education curriculum.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Saigol (1995):

> Human beings are gendered emotionally, psychologically and politically because most families are based on gendered relations of inferiority and superiority. The family is the first "political unit". It is a biosocial, political, emotional and psychological space that is riddled with concerns of power. It produces gendered individuals, who, in turn, reproduce gendered families.
>
> Gendered thinking, that is, notions of "masculine" and "feminine" seem to become so infused with *affect (negative and positive)* for both men and women, and so deeply ingrained, that social and political entities take on gendered meanings for people consciously and unconsciously.

This consciousness is reinforced by the school system through the hidden curriculum embodied in textbooks. The school as the second agent of socialization is equally important in shaping the minds of individuals. The teacher must take note of gendered construction of reality in teaching and in the learning environment.

References

Cortes, Josefina. 1993. *Explorations in the Theory and Practice of Philippine Education: 1965-1993.* Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.

Dorwick, Keith. 1997. *Syllabus on the Introduction to Gender, Sexuality and Literature.* Kdorwick@uic.edu.

Exploration of an Idea: Gender Equity. 1995. Victoria, B.C., Canada: Curriculum Branch, Ministry of Education.

Gender Studies Curriculum. 1997. USA: Department of Education.

Fernandez, Albina Pecson. 1998. "Why Women Are Invisible in History." A paper delivered during the seminar-workshop, "History Makes Women, Women Make Herstory," 9-10 March 1998, at the University of the Philippines, Quezon City.

Kabihasnang Asyano. 1986. Manila: Kagawaran ng Kultura at Isports.

Latourette, Kenneth Scott. 1967. *A Short History of the Far East*. Philippines: Ken, Inc.

Leogardo, Felicitas. 1988. *History of Asian Nations*. Manila: Sto. Niño Catholic House.

Pangilinan, Benito. 1954. *Public Education in the Philippines*. Quezon City: Bustamante Press.

Pearth, B. R. 1970. *The History of Southeast Asia*. Hongkong: Sheck Wah Tong Press.

Saigol, Rubina. 1995. *Knowledge and Identity: Articulation of Gender in Educational Discourse in Pakistan*. Lahore: ASR Publications.

Shara, Razavi, and Carol Miller. 1995. *Gender Mainstreaming: A Study Efforts by the UNDP, the World Bank and the ILO to Institutionalize Gender Issues*. Geneva: UNRISD/UNDP.

The Tenth Milestone. 1960. Report by the Education Division USOM to the Philippines.

UNESCO. 1960. *50 Years of Education for Freedom*. Manila: National Printing Co.