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Institutionalisation of Gender Equity in an Educational Reform-Project: Perspectives on the Plurality of Rationalities in Expectations, Critiques and Organisational Solutions

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Gender inequality in school performance and educational/professional choice is a stable and enduring phenomenon. For the last decade supranational actors like the OECD or the EU (1) as well as national governments have been striving towards reducing gender inequality in education by promoting policies and measures against the stereotyping of school subjects and fields of study. These expectations towards educational organisations to adjust school culture, curriculum, teaching material and teaching/learning settings in order to avoid gender inequalities can be described as the "driving force" behind educational reforms.

With regard to the question of how schools, headmasters and teachers respond to these expectations to improve gender equality in education by implementing recommended measures we have little empirical data available. In view of results of institutionally oriented research in educational governance we can assume that educational organisations and professions are not in all cases pleased with these expectations of educational administration and gender equality policy. Rather we can suppose that schools and teachers exhibit latent or manifest forms of "resistance" and criticise the expected or on-going reforms.

The aim of this paper is to describe and to interpret on the basis of a sociological conceptual framework the process of institutionalisation of gender equity initiated by gender policies in educational administration. How do different actors justify their intentions for and resistance to gender-related reforms in education? What are the rationalities they are referring to in their argumentations? Which solutions are found inside the organisation to meet the requirements of external stakeholders (administration, parents) as well as the views of the members of the organisation (teacher, headmaster, and pupil)?

Neo-institutionalist approaches of organisational theory argue that formal organisations like schools are embedded in an institutional context of social expectations (e.g. gender equity) which cannot be ignored. In their decisions and activities they have to take into account such expectations of school external stakeholders to not lose their legitimacy (2). As a result, a process of institutionalisation of gender equality (3) on a regulative, normative and social-cognitive level (4) is initiated, in particular by normative mechanisms of alignment (5). The loose coupling between the formal structure of an organisation and its actual day-to-day work activities allows the schools to create "solutions" which coordinate expectations and resistance so that the organisation is able to continue to work without "disturbances" (6, 2).

To reveal and conceptualise the different competing and conflicting rationalities in educational reform processes as well as to understand the cultural compromises and organisational solutions we refer to the so called French sociology of convention (7, 8). Conventions are collectively established principles of orientation and action (orders of worth) on the basis of which coordination, evaluation and legitimation of relations and expectations between several actors take place. The social world comprises a plurality but finite number of conventions. In specific social situations actors reflexively do 'justification work' criticising or justifying particular orders of worth. To keep the organisation running, compromises, i.e. durable agreements, constructed on the basis of different conventions have to be found (9).

Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used
The empirical data stems from an evaluation of a reform project to enhance gender equity in secondary schools in a Swiss canton carried out 2010-2011. The reform project "gender day" (alternative of the well-known "girls day") had been initiated in 2005. It is a result of the national attempts of gender equality administration to reduce gender stereotyping in professional choice at secondary level and to motivate youth to transgress traditional gender-specific barriers.
To gain an insight into the process of institutionalisation of gender equity the study focuses on the driving forces behind this educational reform project on gender equity, on the positive voices, the critiques in schools against measures to improve gender equity, and on the efforts and cultural as well as organisational solutions to coordinate expectations and resistance. For this reason we carried out an online survey among all form teachers and headmasters of all 22 schools. Beside the quantitative data we conducted interviews – on the one hand with the representatives of the administration who had initiated the reform project, on the other hand three group interviews with all headmasters of the schools as well as four group interviews with a sample of teachers from four selected schools.

Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings
The paper is going to demonstrate the plurality of rationalities that underlie the push factors of educational reforms, guide the attitudes of the educational profession and form the basis of the cultural and organisational solutions for dealing with conflicting views. The civic convention is crucial when initiators or teachers call for gender-specific elements in didactics and lesson plans, but it is also relevant when teachers vote against the reform project arguing that they have to treat all children equally. Referring to biologically rooted traditions of gender-based divisions of labour reflects the agency of the domestic convention. Discussions about benefits and impacts of reform efforts, the additional amount of work, the compliance with the curriculum, and the lack of own expertise in gender-specific education are features of the industrial convention. Refusing state-driven school programmes and interventions into the freedom of teaching on the one hand, pointing at the various and interesting possibilities given with the reform project on the other hand, demonstrate the significance of the convention of inspiration for the teaching profession. The results help understand the disputes and blockings in (gender-oriented) educational reform processes and thus allow better support for schools in their duty of ensuring gender equity.

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