Gender
In/forms Curriculum
FROM ENRICHMENT TO
TRANSFORMATION

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Preface

The authors contributing to this book represent a diverse set of perspectives on the significance of recent developments in research on gender and on what it means for the school curriculum. The introduction to the book describes in some detail what happened as we gathered the authors together to write and discuss their work and what we learned from the process about the collective experience of curriculum reconceptualization and reform. “Introduction Revisited: Better a Maroon Than a Mammy,” contributed by Annette Henry, one of the participants in this project, supplements the Introduction. As the introduction and its supplement are occupied with the crucial issues of deliberation, dissent, and reflection, this preface will simply provide an overview of each of the chapters in the book, pointing to the particular focus of each, orienting the reader to what is included, and giving a first overview of the arguments of each author. Each chapter is designed to stand on its own, addressing a common subject area of the school curriculum, from art education to technology studies. Less readily apparent from the titles of the chapters are the diverse ways in which the authors have handled the scholarship on gender, the different ways they have approached the question of an informed curriculum. The chapters are arranged alphabetically by author, a technique that avoids the complicated politics of imposing a conceptual scheme to organize the various school subjects that are discussed or the approaches that are taken to the study of gender and curriculum. In highlighting the contributions of each of the chapters here, we pay special attention to how the basic question of gender and curriculum is addressed. Our aim is to encourage readers to cross discipline boundaries in a comparison of strategies for taking up the larger question of how gender informs curricula. We have much to learn from our differences.

In Chapter 1, “So We’ve Got a Chip on Our Shoulder! Sexing the Texts of ‘Educational Technology’,” Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell engage the contested construction of gender amidst increasing emphasis on the role of technology in education. Their analysis resists the typical notion that the participation rates and attitudes of female students are
the issue in the face of a benign technology. Instead, they suggest that what is made to seem to be a "programming" problem with female students needs to be focused instead on the machines and their exponents. Bryson and de Castell find a gap in the literature on the educational use of computer technology, as this work tends to overlook "the ways in which differences are produced through social relations and institutional practices." Although they do give examples out of their own recent teaching experience, the aim of this chapter, as they clearly state, is not to identify a new best approach to the use of computers and other technology in the classroom. Instead, they seek to bring forward radical interventions, through such devices as cyberpunk manifestoes and protopolitical technologies, which recast the relationship between women and technology, taking them as signs that things could be otherwise.

Georgia Collins pursues the book's original theme of enrichment and gender in the context of art education. She points out the degree to which school subjects are already set within an economy of gender that discounts art as an area of enrichment for the curriculum. Chapter 2, "Art Education as a Negative Example of Gender-Enriching Curriculum," argues the importance of recognizing that this gendered curriculum precedes feminist interests in reforming the way subjects are taught and studied. Through this historical analysis of the development of art in the curriculum, we can begin to appreciate how existing categories tend to marginalize realms of experience and gendered states. The enrichment theme, in the case of art, becomes itself a critique of the processes of curriculum reform and rationale. Collins does not hesitate to recommend that art educators move beyond an obsession with rationales, which appears as its own form of defensiveness. After describing how discipline-based art education would "defeminize" art to raise its curricular status, she concludes by suggesting that the achievement of gender equity in education will require challenging the masculine values that have played a dominant role in determining the purpose and function of America's public schools.

Jane Gaskell takes up the ways in which schools are most directly involved in preparing young women for employment in "Making It Work: Gender and Vocational Education" (Chapter 3). In an assessment that links the realms of school and work, she provides a reading of the gendered implications of business education and other vocational programs in terms of gender differentiated job demands. Gaskell explores the ways in which women are being trained for work in these courses—to which they are expected to bring the subtle skills in caregiving that are taken for granted as women's work even as they are discounted as contributions to the workplace. Her interviews with a range of business education teachers dramatize the need for a far more informed curriculum around issues of how women's work is undervalued and misconstrued and how it needs to be rethought as a source of greater equity in the workplace. It becomes clear through this chapter that what is taken as work and skill, especially within the context of gender, points to a need for education and development of progressive vocational programs.

Chapter 4, "Reading and the Female Moral Imagination: 'Words Mean More Than What Is Set Down on Paper'" by Francis Kazemek, presents the basis for an ethics of engagement in reading programs and language arts classes. He draws on a number of the works dealing with women's ways of caring and knowing, as well as readings of King Lear and Maya Angelou's autobiography, to construct his vision of the reader's moral imagination. As much as it derives from the response and situation of women, Kazemek stresses that this moral sensibility does not need to be regarded as gender-specific. It comes of reading lessons that foster a commitment to "care, concern, and a multiperspectival view of life." Using instances from the challenging and rewarding literature available for young readers, he sets the basis for an individualized program in reading that asks students to respond to the books they read in imaginative and collaborative ways. It is a program concerned with immersion in the experience of narrative, but one that is also concerned with the positioning of both texts and readers within the ideological landscape of these often troubled times.

Ursula Kelly's "The Feminist Trespass: Gender, Literature, and Curriculum" (Chapter 5) pursues the dynamics of the English class as a forum for challenging the curricular acts of cultural imperialism by drawing on poststructural and feminist developments in literary theory. She argues for an understanding of how the teaching of literature, as an institution, has been constructed around masculine identities. Within the critical framework she develops in this chapter, the traditional and exclusionary literary canon falls before the call for a far wider range of literature. Students are invited by Kelly to respond out of their own experience, finding in it the basis for a critical reading that redresses the gendered inequities that have long marked the English class. She discusses the study of literature in its tendency to position students within a given set of gendered identities that have the force of something larger than fiction. This relationship between identity and writing, she recommends, should itself become part of the subject of English literature classes, as she concludes her chapter with a series of intimations toward "a curriculum and a pedagogy for and of difference."

In Chapter 6, "Tone Deaf/Symphonies Singing: Sketches for a Musicale," Roberta Lamb renders a critique of music education in multiple
parts. By way of an improvised “fiction theory,” she explores the forms of representation, the nonlinear patterns of recurring motifs that are otherwise missing from a field that she finds tone deaf to “the symphonic chorus murmuring beneath the surface.” This piece, with its tribute to the unsung, its powerful pastiche of poetry and criticism, brings out true stories in master-apprentice models of music education. Amid parts long practiced and played, it offers hopeful moments of children working the music of their daily lives through their own productions and compositions. It asks students of music to think about composing as women, to hear with the female ear, instead of, as it has long been, the other, masculine way. The chapter comes with its own commentary on how the author has played it. It is a chapter that not only advocates but also demonstrates the process of recomposing the texts of gender and curriculum.

Arlene McLaren and Jim Gaskell, in “Now You See It, Now You Don’t: Gender as an Issue in School Science” (Chapter 7), use the experience of girls enrolled in senior secondary physics classes to make suggestions for the transformation of science teaching. They place their analysis within the larger dilemma of how to make gender explicit in a school system that claims to be gender blind, and often sees gender blindness as equivalent to gender equity. The girls they interview have persevered in a subject where girls are markedly underrepresented, and they point both to the continued male dominance of science classes and to the difficulties of bringing about change. While recognizing that every classroom will be different, McLaren and Gaskell suggest making gender a part of the official science curriculum so that questions can be raised publicly and attacked collectively.

Jane Roland Martin takes the organization of curriculum subjects itself as the focus of her analysis in Chapter 8, “The Radical Future of Gender Enrichment.” School subjects, she points out, “were never just ‘out there’ in the world.” The human processes involved in deciding which things will serve as the basis for a school subject, which things will count as part of a liberal education, are deeply gendered. Physics, but not parenting; political science, but not education. Educational goals and subjects reflect the priority given to productive processes in society, to those areas of activity that have been dominated by men. This priority reflects the scorn men have for women and their work in the home, and can only be addressed by a concerted attack on misogyny in all its guises. The hidden curriculum of antidomesticity must be replaced through many small acts of courage.

In Chapter 9, “Family Studies: Transforming Curriculum, Transforming Families,” Linda Peterat reviews the way feminists in the area of family studies curriculum have understood and responded to gender equity. Family studies was included in the curriculum due to the efforts of the women’s movement in the nineteenth century. But by the 1970s it was seen by many as an oppressive force, reinforcing women’s identification with the domestic. Efforts to enroll boys have succeeded to some extent, but the content of the curriculum and forms of pedagogy have emerged as more critical and intractable issues. The marginal status of the subject and its identification with women, Peterat states, offer unique possibilities for transformation. “Probably no school subject has the potential to be more effective in changing gender outlooks, understandings and practices of students.”

Jane Bernard-Powers’s “Out of the Cameos and Into the Conversation: Gender, Social Studies, and Curriculum Transformation” (Chapter 10) examines the belated recognition of women in the development of the subject area of social studies teaching. She questions a tradition of gender-blindness in the study of history, as the sins of the parent disciplines in the university are visited on the education of the young in social studies. Using specific instances from around the United States, Powers points out how the valiant efforts to redress this long-standing imbalance in curriculum programs and textbooks are only now beginning to be developed as the necessary resources for achieving a greater degree of gender equity in social studies. Her review of the research on these changes, however, brings to the fore the sometimes superficial efforts in improving women’s role in the classroom materials. Her focus is on the field’s responsibility for improving the situation of the social studies curriculum, and she finds some very promising responses from a series of relevant professional organizations. The chapter combines an interest in the materials that support pedagogical practices with concern over the development of resources that bring the study of women into the realm of the integrated social studies program.

Kathleen Rockhill and Patricia Tomic, in Chapter 11, “Situating ESL Between Speech and Silence,” explore the area of English as a second language, starting with the striking observation that learning the language is a process of empowerment, yet it is simultaneously a process of colonization. Women particularly suffer from not knowing the dominant language, but in the process of learning it, they are defined as “other,” as culturally and linguistically inferior. The contradiction cannot be erased in a racist society. The authors argue for an approach they call “situated ESL,” wherein the dominance of Whiteness is replaced by the possibility of transcultural identities, and the process of learning about dominance, linguistic and otherwise, is as important as the skill of learning English words and grammar. This chapter faces head on the difficulties of joining
discourses of race with those of (hetero)sexism, and notes the power of language always to situate us in our social context.

In “Gender and the Physical Education Curriculum: The Dynamics of Difference” (Chapter 12), Patricia Vertinsky gives broad coverage of physical education and health-related subject areas. She covers the considerable literature on the inequitable treatment of women in physical education programs that range from basic differences in the level of investment based on sex to the exaggeration of physical differences as a means of perpetuating a misogynistic ideology of sport. Her comparison of the trade-offs of coeducation and segregated physical education classes reveals that there are not going to be any simple solutions to the gender equity issue. More promising than these structural efforts are developments, she argues, in gender-sensitive programming aimed at fitness and well-being, at an “active living” philosophy rather than the production of elite athletes. Vertinsky deals with the specifics of recent work in the psychological development of the young with special attention paid to gender and minority differences. While these are sometimes treated far too glibly in school programs, she still sees strong possibilities of building far more of a “caring community,” beginning with the experience and education of teachers.

John Willinsky takes on the “essential” process of writing itself in Chapter 13, “Learning to Write: Gender, Genre, Play, and Fiction.” The differences between the styles and language of men and women who write have too long been the focus of scholarship on gender and writing. Instead, Willinsky argues, teachers and students should explore the way writing has shaped our understanding of maleness and femaleness, and how the processes of writing are organized within structures of difference based on gender. Who has written and who has been written? Using Nadine Gordimer’s reflections on writing responsibly within her divided country, he explores a curriculum that would play against the confinements of traditional genres.

In the book’s final chapter, Sue Willis takes on a number of dimensions in “Mathematics: From Constructing Privilege to Deconstructing Myths” (Chapter 14) by confronting the loss of an initial confidence in working with numbers especially among female students. While situating her work within a variety of approaches to gender and mathematics education, she is able to draw from her own research the prevailing prejudices over who mathematics is for, as well as to describe a program that she directed in its reconstruction of what it means to be good at mathematics in ways that increase the subject area’s relevance to the “real world.” Her approach is both to advance the cogency of the curriculum and to turn its attention to issues of social import in the lives of the students.

The chapters are various, then, in audience, theory, language, and subject. Placing them together serves to highlight the diversity, while at the same time it invites the reader to link them, and places them within a single conversation. This conversation is addressed to our increased, if always imperfect, ability to formulate, think about, and create gender equality in the schools.

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CHAPTER 8

The Radical Future of Gender Enrichment

JANE ROLAND MARTIN

How does the study of gender enrich curriculum? Let me count the ways.

The androcentrism of the disciplines of knowledge is by now an established fact. Thanks to the study of gender, we know, for example, that the field of history, that comprehensive study of the past, misrepresents when it does not entirely skip over the lives, works, and experiences of women. We know that instead of being universal, as claimed, psychology’s norms and its narratives of human development have been derived from studies of boys and men. We even know that biology’s accounts of nature have mapped society’s sex stereotypes onto the animal “kingdom,” its studies of primates have consistently made the male the main actor of the troop and the linchpin of that small society, its predominant account of human cultural evolution has done likewise although there is no more evidence for the theory named “man-the-hunter” than for the one called “woman-the-gatherer.”

In addition, research on gender has cast doubt on the very objectivity of the judgments by which some works of art, literature, history, science, and philosophy have been deemed valuable, or even great, and others have been put in the scrap heap. I do not simply mean that scholars have recovered long lost works by women and that recent research challenges the portrayals of women enshrined in science and history as well as in literature and the arts. Accepted definitions of what constitutes great art and literature and even good science have been called into question.
by the study of gender and so has the idea of canonizing any set of works.

Insofar as school’s course of study draws its subject matter from fields such as history, literature, mathematics, the natural sciences, the human and social sciences—as of course it does to a great extent—it repeats these distortions. But to recognize that the gender bias of the disciplines is reflected in the subject matter of school is one thing and to improve the school curriculum is another. If this end is to be achieved, more accurate representations of women’s lives, works, and experiences must be incorporated into the school curriculum.

The question is, how? Even as some scholars have begun to reconstruct the intellectual disciplines, others have distinguished different stages of curricular change and have debated the pros and cons of making the study of women a separate subject as opposed to integrating subject matter about women into existing school subjects. The question is also, which women? Do we introduce into the school curriculum a few famous ones or do we attempt to bring in all women? And whichever course we adopt, do we unthinkingly cast our net so as to include only middle-class, White women or do we make sure to reach out to all women?

As participants in the National Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) Project on Inclusive Curriculum1 and other groups attempting to transform the school curriculum, we all know that the task of subject matter inclusion is as challenging as any curriculum maker could wish. Yet it would be a mistake to think that the androcentrism of the school curriculum is due solely to the fact that its subject matter mirrors the gender biases of the intellectual disciplines. By alerting us to the contamination in one of curriculum’s wellsprings, the study of gender allows us to shut off a major source of distortion and misrepresentation. But school’s subject matter normally comes wrapped up in those neat bundles we call “subjects” and even a quick survey of these by one wearing gender-sensitive lenses reveals another kind of bias.

II

At a time when we are continually being reminded that gender is a social construction, it is not always remembered that school subjects are constructions too (Martin, 1982). Our subjects were never just “out there” in the world waiting to be brought into school’s course of study. On the contrary, those bundles of subject matter that are so often treated as God-given were actually made by human beings. This does not mean that curriculum development is a capricious enterprise or that school subjects are nothing but arbitrary collections of subject matter. It does, however, signify that one of the most important decisions curriculum makers face is that of determining which of the innumerable things there are should serve as the points of departure for our school subjects.

That every school subject takes something in the world as its starting point is seldom acknowledged, perhaps because a subject usually derives its name from what, for want of a better term, I will call its subject-entity. Thus, the school subject physics draws its name from the science physics, the school subject French draws its name from the language French, the school subject reading draws its name from the activity of reading. Quite clearly, despite the sameness of name, a subject is not identical with its subject-entity. On the one hand, the subject French, for instance, has an educational function that the language French does not; on the other, the subject matter belonging to the subject French can be drawn from a whole range of sources that includes the French language but goes beyond it to, for instance, linguistics, literature, history, and geography.

Now I can think of only one subject, and it is very much to the point that I am not sure what name to give it—should I be calling it home economics, family studies, or something else altogether?—that clearly and unequivocally draws its subject-entity from “the world of the private house,” to use Virginia Woolf’s phrase (Woolf, 1938, p. 18). Need I say that, historically, this world has been considered women’s domain? Need I add that even in the best of times this school subject tends to be situated much closer to the margins of curriculum than to the center, and that when there are budget crises, the subjects on the margins are the first to go?

The devaluation of home economics—or family studies, if you prefer—is not news. Study the social construction called gender, however, and one sees that the negative assessment is part of a larger pattern of discrimination against a whole class of subject-entities.

The very different treatment in the school curriculum of the strikingly similar cases of politics and education illustrates the double standard by which subject-entities are judged (Martin, 1992, p. 139). As activities in the real world around which institutions have grown up, education and politics would each seem well-suited to be a subject-entity of a school subject. Nevertheless, one and not the other has been welcomed into the general or liberal curriculum in this capacity. Notice that in becoming a subject-entity the activity called “politics” has been converted from an occupation to be undertaken into an object of study. Students are taught theory, history, and research about politics, not politics itself. Success in the subject that sometimes goes under the name “political science” and sometimes “government” is judged by the comprehension of a body of
knowledge and perhaps the ability to undertake relevant inquiries, not by the efficacy of action taken in the real world. But the activity we call “education” can also be recast. It too has inspired its fair share of theory and research, some of it as enlightening and profound as one could wish. And despite disclaimers, education is no less interesting than politics. Indeed, from the standpoint of the survival of both the individual and society, not to mention the planet, it is surely as important a set of activities and institutions as any.

Why have curriculum makers favored politics as a subject-entity over education? The advantage politics has is that, considering it one of society’s “productive” processes, North American culture has situated it in the public world and placed it in men’s care. Education’s problem is that even though school has moved it out of the private home and into the public world, it is seen as a “reproductive” societal process whose “natural” practitioners are still assumed to be women (Martin, 1985).

Just to recognize the unequal treatment of subject-entities drawn from society’s reproductive processes or associated in our cultural consciousness with home and family is to enrich curriculum making. After all, calling attention to the unrepresentative nature of our subject-entities, and hence our subjects, is a necessary prelude to redressing the curricular imbalance. However, I do not see how the double standard can be abolished if the gap in school’s goals is not filled in.

III

Don’t lenses of a student of gender and one sees not only the absences and distortions in the content of today’s course of study and a serious subject-entity imbalance. One notices for perhaps the first time the telling omission in the list of goals curriculum is supposed to further (Martin, 1990, 1992).

It has been said that “the stated goals of education in modern democratic societies remain constant: the development of each person as (1) a worker, (2) a citizen, and (3) an individual” (Waks & Rustum, 1987, p. 24). A case for adding (4) a keeper of the cultural heritage can be made, and the list with this emendation seems correct. To be sure, the four goals are not given equal time in every discussion of education. Still, together they represent the full range of what education is expected to do. That these expectations fail to take account of a basic function of education in a modern or post-modern society, namely, (5) the development of each person as a member of a home and family, escapes everyone’s notice.

Let me make it clear that in adding (5) to the list I am not presuppos-
portion quite possibly on the rise. Investigators are now discovering that males as well as females are victims of child sexual abuse and that women as well as men are the victimizers. There is no equal representation in the two categories, however. Female victims far outnumber males and the great majority of offenders are men. Interestingly enough, despite our ever-present fear that a stranger will molest our children, the vast majority of child sexual abuse cases occur in or close to home. Nearly 8 million of those victimized as children were abused by a family member. When the abuser is not a family member, he or she—but far more likely he—is very probably a family friend or else a neighbor, the family physician, or someone standing in loco parentis: a baby-sitter or day-care worker, a teacher or coach, a foster parent or a member of the staff of an institution for abused and neglected children (Breines & Gordon, 1983; Crewdson, 1988).

Include in this picture the statistics on divorce and desertion and one sees clearly the folly of assuming that in American society, at least, being a person who contributes positively to home and family comes naturally.

The reasons for adding (5) to the list of educational goals and for restructuring the school curriculum accordingly are many, but a nagging question remains. If education for family living is really needed, is it not home's responsibility rather than schools? School and home are indeed partners in the education of a nation's young (Martin, 1992). Moreover, it is correct to say that, in the past, (5) was assigned to the hidden partner whose continuing contributions to a child's development are both relied on by school and society and refused public recognition. But home and family have been transformed in the last decades. As John Dewey pointed out almost a century ago in connection with the changes in the American household wrought by the Industrial Revolution, when conditions change radically "Only an equally radical change in education suffices" (Dewey, 1943, p. 12).

Dewey's answer to the question he posed in The School and Society of what radical change in school suffices when home changes—namely, placing the occupations of the once traditional home at the center of the school curriculum—does not address the problems created at century's end by the most recent transformation of our private homes. The issue today is not the removal of work from the household into factories but the domestic vacuum that is created when mothers as well as fathers leave home each day to go to work. To be sure, it is not just in the last decades that women have left their own homes to go to work—often in other women's homes. But in the past it was primarily the very poor who did not return home once they had children.

Let me emphasize that to acknowledge this new reality is not to blame mothers for going out to work. After all, if fathers had not already done so there would be no domestic vacuum. However, the evidence I have cited suggests that in the United States, at least, the changed and changing home is not adequately handling the assignment of teaching young children to live at home in families and preparing older ones for their future lives there. There would seem, then, to be no alternative but to respond to Dewey's challenge by adding (5) to our list of the goals of schooling.

That curriculum will thereby be enriched goes without saying. Why is so little space presently reserved in the general curriculum for subject-entities and subject matter associated with home and family? The curricular gap is explained by the gap in our goals. Why learn about home and family, why study society's reproductive processes, if school's function is to equip students to take their places as workers and citizens in the world outside the private home? Granted, education's goals do not dictate the details of curriculum. But just as the exclusion of (5) from the list accounts for its extraordinary absence in school's course of study, its inclusion will insure the presence of what has been left out—or at least some of what is missing, for (5) can all too easily be interpreted very narrowly. It can be construed as mandating simply that curriculum space be given over to theories and narratives about home. It is equally important, however, that boys and girls alike learn to exercise the virtues that our culture thinks of as housed in our private homes.

IV

Basic knowledge about home and family—for instance, about their histories and their different cultural forms, indeed, the fact that they have histories and take different forms—has been missing from the school curriculum because of the gap in school's goals and the prejudice against subject-entities drawn from society's reproductive processes. But that is not all. In the reports issued in the 1980s on American higher education, lower education, teacher certification, and professional preparation, one finds repeated demands for proficiency in the 3Rs; for clear, logical thinking; and for higher standards of achievement in science, mathematics, history, literature, and the like. One searches in vain for discussions of love or calls for mastery of the 3Cs of care, concern, and connection.

Once again, a gender analysis explains the omission (Martin, 1992, pp. 136–137). Associated in our cultural consciousness with home and with the reproductive processes housed there, and viewed as women's exclusive property, the 3Cs are thought to have no bearing on the activi-
ties of the public world. Those reports on the condition of American education testify, however, to the preoccupation of educators with life in that domain. Giving homes the silent treatment, they view boys and girls as travelers to the public arena, and school as the place they stop on route in order to acquire the knowledge, skill, attitudes, and values that they will presumably need when they reach their destination.

Once children enter school they do not go home again in this unexamined scenario—not ever, not even as adults. True, the authors of the reports expected children to do something called “homework,” but the term is a misnomer. Designed by teachers as part of the ongoing work of the classroom, these assignments have no more to do with the business of the home than the brief a lawyer reads on the commuter train each evening, or the papers a teacher corrects after dinner. Homework is schoolwork done after school hours. The workplace may be the private home, but the home represented in the script is a house in which the silence of school prevails and parents act as proctors for their offspring.

The reports turn school’s partner in the educational enterprise into an antagonist ever ready to subvert its mission. The idea that because home has changed school might have to change did not occur to the authors of these tomes. The thought that school should take over its partner’s responsibility of preparing young people to live in those homes and families from which they exit each morning first to go to school and then to go to work in the public world was the furthest thing from their minds.

Obviously, to go beyond is not necessarily to leave behind. Nevertheless, in the United States, if not in all Western societies, people tend to think of becoming educated not just as a process of acquiring new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. They also assume that it is a matter of casting off attitudes and values and patterns of thought and action associated with domesticity.

Does it matter? In May 1989 a courageous 16-year-old wrote to the *Boston Globe* expressing concern about the rise in teen violence (cf. Martin, 1992, pp. 44–45; Naples, 1989). He said he had gotten used to kids carrying knives, but now they were carrying guns. “There are a couple of reasons for this rise,” he said, “but the main one is to be tough or well respected. They feel powerful when they have that deadly piece of steel in their hand. Another reason is that they are so easy to get.” Since he had noticed this trend in just 6 months, he wondered what the world would be like in 6 years. Would it turn into “a combat zone” controlled by kids with guns?

Historians have shown that when the Industrial Revolution irrevocably changed the American household by removing both work and workers from it, home—specifically the White, middle- and upper-class home—came to be viewed as a haven in a cold, cruel world: the place to which men retreated after spending a long day in the greedy, pugnacious, possessive, jealous public arena. Whether or not it ever actually fit this description, its presumed ethos of love and intimacy and the values of care, concern, and connection it was said to embody were thought to be conducive to the rest and renewal required by the husbands and sons who were expected to reenter the fray each morning. But home’s culturally assigned task was not merely to refresh and invigorate. It was expected to play a moral role as well. Besides indoctrinating infants into human culture and teaching young children the basics of American life, it was supposed to provide its members with an ongoing education in the very kindness and cooperation, affection and sympathy that were also considered to be the prerequisites of life in a harmonious society.

According to Dewey (1943), before the Industrial Revolution, industry, responsibility, imagination, and ingenuity were the basic elements of home’s curriculum. Perhaps so, but after that cataclysmic event it was considered home’s particular function to teach what Carol Gilligan has called an “ethics of care.” Serving to curb the selfishness and dampen the pugnacity of men who spent their days in the public world of work and politics, the moral education extended by the home was supposed to keep society as a whole from slipping into a war of every man against every man. As the nations of nineteenth-century Europe were deemed able to keep the peace so long as the balance of power among them was maintained, the individuals in a society were considered able to live together harmoniously so long as the moral equilibrium between private home and public world was preserved.

Whatever efficacy that delicate balance of home and world might once have had, the changes in both make our continued reliance on home for a curriculum in an ethics of care anachronistic. That the 3Cs are vital to the well-being of the world beyond the private home and essential to the maintenance of life on earth makes this outdated arrangement all the more reprehensible. Yet even as research on gender exposes this curricular absence, thus paving the way for curriculum improvement, it uncovers the scorn that boys have for girls and women. For an ethics of care to be a genuine part of the curriculum of boys as well as girls, school will have to address the misogyny of its male inhabitants.

V

For 4 years in the 1970s, Rafaela Best watched a group of elementary school children in the Central Atlantic region of the United States learn
what she called the “second curriculum”—the one that teaches each sex “how to perform according to conventional gender norms” (Best, 1983, p. 5). Coming to know the children intimately, she reported in We’ve All Got Scars that although most of the boys did not master this material by the end of first grade, in the next 2 years the majority became proficient in it. The ones who did not grasp the norms or were simply unable or unwilling to meet them were scorned by the other boys and excluded from their club. These outcasts were not necessarily shunned by the girls in the class, but they were perceived as losers both by themselves and by those who had passed the various tests of masculinity with flying colors.

Tracing the mastery of the second curriculum by 6-, 7-, and 8-year-old boys, Best showed how closely the macho ideal to which they aspired was linked to a scorn of girls and women and a fear of feminization. The excluded boys “were regarded as being like girls and not like real men,” she reported (Best, 1983, p. 24; cf. Martin, 1992, pp. 72, 102). For a third grader to be called a sissy “was a fate worse than death” (Best, 1983, p. 22). To be a cry-baby or to be oriented to one’s mother or female teacher was inexcusable. Kenny, one of the “losers” in the class, liked doing housekeeping tasks in school for his teacher and enjoyed receiving her hugs in return. Jason, another “loser,” cried frequently. And Edward, whose behavior in school was far too perfect, was not good at games. Fighting, or at least the willingness to fight when challenged, was one essential ingredient of masculinity in the “winners”’ eyes. Playing well and playing rough was another. Engaging in “antiestablishment” activities ranging from throwing mudballs at houses and cars to stuffing paper in the school lock was a third. All three aspects of 7- and 8-year-old machismo were valued in large part because their opposites betokened femininity.


There is nothing idiosyncratic about these images. Here is what Margaret Clark, in The Great Divide, reported that primary school girls in Australia have to say on the subject:

There’s a group of boys in our class who always tease us and call us—you know, dogs, aids, slut, moll and that. (Clark, 1989, p. 25)

This boy used to call us big-tits and period-bag and used to punch us in the breasts. (Clark, 1989, p. 25)

They take things off us and drag us into the boys’ toilets. (Clark, 1989, p. 39)

They call us rabies, dogs, aids. (Clark, 1989, p. 39)

They reckon I’m a dog. My brother gave me to them. He said, “Oh, come here, I’ve got a pet for you. Do you want my dog?” And he gave me to them as a pet dog. (Clark, 1989, p. 40)

According to the female teachers in Clark’s report, the girls were not the boys’ only targets, however:

I’ve been here for four years, but at the beginning of this year the whole school blew up with some problems. Boys that I had visited at home, taught in my class and been on camp with—I thought I had a good relationship with them—put their fingers up at me and then stood there as if to say, “What are you going to do about it?” I was horrified. I could not believe it. (Clark, 1989, p. 22)

I used to spend a lot of time on the basketball court, to get the girls involved but last year I was bullied off the court, by one of my boy students. I was in tears. He bullied me off. (Clark, 1989, p. 22)

Almost any day of the week I see boys using sexuality as a way of exerting power. You know boys going up to a female teacher and sticking two fingers up at her. (Clark, 1989, p. 23)

There’s a case of a little boy in this school. Now he didn’t know that I was the principal. I guess he just assumed it would be a man. He was sent to me for being obnoxious and obscene with one of the children in the playground. So I went and spoke to him, treating him fairly gently because he does have a lot of problems. He just stood there and was quite defiant. I just said to him “now listen. I am the boss of this school”. Now that child just changed. (Clark, 1989, p. 24)

Female teachers are nothing to some male children. (Clark, 1989, p. 23)

By comparison, the experience of 16-year-old Kathy, an Inner London comprehensive school student, seems mild:

Sometimes I feel like saying that I disagree, that there are other ways of looking at it, but where would that get me? My teacher thinks I’m showing off, and the boys jeer. But if I pretend I don’t understand, it’s very different. The teacher is sympathetic and the boys are helpful. They really respond if they can show you how it is done, but there’s nothing but “aggro” if you give any signs of showing them how it is done. (Spender, 1980, p. 150)
Yet other reports cited by Spender resemble these given by Clark:

A group of year 6 students were walking across the school yard from the library to the classroom. One of the boys ran up behind one of the girls, rammed a rule between her legs and called her a slut. (Clark, 1989, p. 25)

Well, as the music started, without a word spoken, the girls lined up at the back and the boys all moved together and sort of faced the girls. The girls started to move and sing but the boys stood in the line and started singing very loudly and moving in a very sexual way, you know swinging their hips and their arms and legs and walking slowly towards the girls as they did it, staring at them. It was an aggressive and threatening situation. The girls immediately stopped moving, stopped singing and just looked at each other with very stunned expressions. (Clark, 1989, p. 42)

Studies of gender relations in classrooms leave little doubt that boys need training in the 3Cs. The reports of male violence point to the same conclusion. Yet how can we expect boys and men to appropriate for themselves traits and values that both they and their culture associate with girls and women? Why would anyone want to adopt an ethic belonging to a despised people?

Given the misogyny that stands in the way of teaching the 3Cs to boys, it is tempting to renounce the undertaking. Yet insofar as both our private homes and public spaces are plagued by violence, the policy of excluding an ethics of care from the school curriculum or including it only in the curriculum of girls is a recipe for disaster. Yet what can we do?

The studies cited here make it quite clear that misogyny is learned in school as well as in society at large. One response to a hidden curriculum of school or society or both is to do nothing, to act as if it does not exist (Martin, 1976). But nonaction scarcely seems defensible when the hidden curriculum at issue dehumanizes half the population. A better response than inaction to an offensive hidden curriculum is to raise it to consciousness by bringing it into the curriculum proper as an explicit topic of study. Besides making it possible to reduce the misogyny, this step would enrich the school curriculum by introducing subject matter about the psychological and cultural construction of gender and even perhaps by making gender itself the subject-entity of a school subject. Yet although it would also help to pave the way for the entrance of the 3Cs, it is not enough.

VI

If the goal of preparing young people to live in private homes as family members does not assure space for the 3Cs in the curriculum of boys as well as girls, neither does it guarantee that domesticity will be made the business of both sexes (Martin, 1992, pp. 106–107, p. 150). In 1975, one of Best’s boys said to her, “I’ll starve to death before I’ll cook” (Best, 1983, p. 80). When asked how he planned to keep his house clean and have food to eat he replied, “I’ll get a wife for that.” This scorn for things domestic finds an echo in Anne Machung’s report on a survey of the expectations of graduating seniors at the University of California at Berkeley (Machung, 1989). The overwhelming majority of those studied hoped to marry, have children, and pursue a career. Of the women, nearly nine-tenths planned to acquire graduate degrees and half thought they would earn at least as much as their husbands. Few anticipated getting divorced or raising their youngsters alone. Each one believed she would rear two or three children and expected to interrupt her career for anywhere from 6 months to 12 years to do so. While in Machung’s words the women were “talking career but thinking job” in order to be in a position to take care of the children they wanted to have, the men were talking family but thinking career. They were willing to “help out” at home but they did not want to be told what to do or have their contributions measured against their wives’, let alone share housework equally. As for child care, most not only believed it to be the wife’s responsibility, but could barely see themselves making day-care arrangements or missing work when the children were sick.

If Machung’s college seniors sound like Best’s boys grown up, they also bear a close resemblance to the young men in the philosophy of education course I recently taught. Like many of the women students in my class, I had started to think that American culture was no longer in the clutches of those traditional gender stereotypes that place women in the home and put them in charge of society’s reproductive processes. Then, in connection with our study of Rousseau, I played the song “William’s Doll” from the recording Free To Be You and Me and was forced to change my mind. Young William wanted a baby doll to hug and hold and wash and clean and dress and feed. As the song proceeded and William continued to ask for a doll against his father’s wishes and his friends’ taunts, the young men in my class began exchanging looks. By the time Grandma had come to William’s rescue, saying that he wanted the doll so that when he was a father he would know what to do, they were beside themselves. Why? It turned out that, to a man, they believed that if you give a small boy a doll to play with—not a GI Joe but a baby doll—he will grow up to be homosexual, in their eyes something definitively unnatural and abnormal. That he will ultimately contract AIDS seemed also to be a foregone conclusion.

Although I did not know this at the time, a decade earlier Best had played the same song for the young children she was studying and to
similar effect. The boys in Grades 1 to 3 did not look askance—they crawled under their desks and hid under the coats on the rack. Commenting that some years later those boys could listen to “William’s Doll,” “without experiencing trauma,” she said that for fifth graders gender “stereotypes were no longer so urgent” (Best, 1983). Quite possibly her 10-year-old boys were beginning to make some accommodations to girls because of her interventions in their classrooms, but the scene in my classroom attested to the staying power of the stereotypes. It also bore witness to young men’s continuing resistance to domesticity.

Whatever gains women may have made in the last decades, the cultural conviction that caring and concern are womanly virtues and that domesticity in general and the nurture of children in particular are primarily, if not exclusively, women’s business persists. So does the belief that the activities and tasks associated with society’s reproductive processes are too trivial to command men’s attention and too menial to warrant their participation.

Although boys do not learn to devalue and resist domesticity only in school, the silences about home and family in the curriculum properly constitute a hidden curriculum in antidomesticity. As gender research has long since demonstrated, the power of curricular silence is immense. The British philosopher R. S. Peter was right: whether or not what is taught in school is in fact worthwhile, in calling something “education” we place our seal of approval on it (Peters, 1967, p. 3). Not that education always lives up to its reputation. Peters knew that some teaching is good and some bad, that some curricula are well designed and others are not. His point was that although the content of education differs from one culture to the next, whatever it is that a culture chooses to call “education” will comprise the information it designates as important for young people to know and the activities it considers worthwhile. Peters did not pursue the logic of his own argument but it is easily done. Just as the inclusion of something in the curriculum—a topic, a body of fact and theory, a perspective—signifies the value placed on it, exclusion of something bespeaks the culture’s devaluation of it. In addition, the act of exclusion serves to reinforce that assessment.

The devaluation of domesticity is so widespread that it might seem the prudent course to forego the hope of bringing it into the curriculum as everyone’s business. The problem is, men’s resistance to domesticity is taking its toll on society. “I’ve had 4,000 arrests on nonsupport, and this guy was the smoothest I’ve seen. All he talked about was how he loved sailing and couldn’t wait to get back to it,” a State Department of Revenue investigator told a news columnist (English, 1989). The man’s ex-wife who at one time held two jobs so as to stay off welfare said, “Now, I hope Chip can finish college. He’s such a nice kid. I just do not understand how a father could leave a child like that.”

What with many fathers leaving home altogether, the majority of men who remain there being unwilling to do more than a tiny fraction of home’s work, and mothers as well as fathers going out to work each day, children are being left to their own devices and women are becoming “bone-weary” (Landers, 1990). Gender roles have changed considerably in the last decades and our cultural construction of domesticity has not kept pace. To bring domesticity into school as the business of both sexes will not just enrich curriculum. It will help bring both the concept and the practices of domesticity into alignment with the new realities of family life. “I have a little difficulty being a househusband,” an unemployed coal miner told Time correspondent Melissa Ludtke. “But I love being with the kids. I also believe it is good for them to see me doin’ housework, so they don’t keep believin’ that outside work belongs only to the man and inside is the woman” (Ludtke, 1988).

VII

Needless to say, if the curriculum is really to teach boys as well as girls to shoulder responsibility for the tasks and functions of the private home, our cultural construct—or perhaps I should say constructs—of domesticity and the hidden curriculum in antidomesticity will both have to be raised to consciousness. The links between misogyny and the denigration of domesticity will also need to be addressed for, as the attitudes of Best’s boys make clear, the scorn of things domestic and of females are closely linked. And, of course, school will have to take to heart the fear of feminization that lurks behind these phenomena.

Even this listing suggests that it may well be a mistake to speak of curriculum “enrichment,” as I have been doing. And if the domain of the 3Cs is to be enlarged, curriculum makers will also have to take steps to counteract the stereotypical images of the private home and the public world—and of society’s reproductive and productive processes—as polar opposites. Connoting mere addition—as when milk is enriched by an injection of vitamins—the term does not begin to capture the radical implications for curriculum of the study of gender. Actually, “enrichment” is doubly misleading: it masks the transformative potential of research on gender as it implies that there is nothing really wrong with curriculum, that curriculum only needs a bit of fortification. Add up the misrepresentations of and silences about women in curriculum’s subject-matter, the double standard by which its subject-entities are judged, the gap in
its goals, its failure to save space for an ethics of care and to reserve room for the tasks and responsibilities of domesticity, however, and it becomes quite clear that curriculum as it stands is failing to transmit to the next generation one-half of the cultural heritage. This in itself should be enough to undermine the faith that curriculum requires only minor improvement. Take into account the misogyny and antidomesticity that are now being passed along by curriculum’s silences and distortions, and any lingering doubts that curriculum needs to be radically revised will surely be dispelled.

As I hope I have shown here, the study of gender is as germane to the reconstruction of curriculum as to its deconstruction. I do not want to leave the impression, however, that curricular enrichment and radical curriculum revision are incompatible and that attempts to accomplish the former will necessarily subvert the latter. On the contrary, I have become increasingly convinced that the radical reconstruction of curriculum we so badly need will come about not in one fell swoop but as the “emergent” outcome of massive doses of enrichment, each one of which may require a small act of courage.

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NOTES

1. History and the other disciplines of knowledge also misrepresent the lives, works, and experiences of minority men. However, because the conference topic is gender I will not discuss this gap here.
2. The project is based at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Peggy McIntosh and Emily Style are its co-directors.
3. When one counts the omissions relating to minorities, it turns out that it is actually transmitting much less!

REFERENCES

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