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Gendersensitive joborientation in education

The first part of this article is about the impact of SET school-subjects in view of job decisions of girls and boys; in the second part I will present „mut!“ as an existing good practice project in Austria, in order to argue for a general implementation of gendersensitive measures in curricula of education and further education.

The main approach of this article is the fact worked out in sociological research of genderstudies, where especially Prof. Angelika Wetterer has to be mentioned, that institutions are reproducing genderdifferences and inequality and therefore I am stressing the necessity of a discussion about the responsibility of institutions and institutional measures to counteract gender-inequality.

In the current discussion of a reform of the austrian schoolsystem one gets the notion, that structural reforms with deep impact are very difficult to implement and there is a lot of resistance which counteracts structural reforms.

Although I don't have representative numbers, in interviews I've done with pupils about their attitude and their feelings about SET on the basis of questions worked out of the **Motivation-team**¹ I gained the impression, that things didn't change very much since I have been at school: The pupils talked about some SET-teachers, who don't like to explain things twice, so pupils do not dare to ask them at all, other SET-teachers are doing a better job, but still their methods often do not take care of the needs of pupils: the lessons are very theoretically and more or less boring, there are almost no practical lessons, which are frustrating for a huge number of pupils. All interviewees told me, that they would love to do more experiments, more practical things. I have been in a lycee / Highschool in Graz/Austria specialiced on languages, where practical SET lessons are very rare. This fact has big impact on the job decisions of the pupils because a lot of them don't like SET, because the lessons are frustrating, boring.

The attitude of the pupils I talked with towards SET is divided in two parts along an evident gender axis:

The boys are still interested in SET, even if they criticize the way SET lessons are organized, and they integrate SET jobs in their future plans, while the girls were very frustrated about the whole SET – complex, and a job, where they have to deal with mathematics and physics and technical things on a higher level is in their words more like a horror vision than a dream job. . Some SET lessons in single subjects like chemistry couldn't change their whole attitude against it. Although the few interviews give only a very small insight, they are corresponding to a well-known trend in society.

One explanation for that may be, that the expectation of the familiymembers and society make a difference between girls and boys in view of expectations:

¹ MOTIVATION is funded as Coordination Action within the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission. Involved are the following persons: Felizitas Sagebiel (coordination) and Jennifer Dahmen in Germany, Anita Thaler and Christine Wächter in Austria, Anne-Sophie Godfroy-Genin and Cloé Pinault in France, Els Rommes and Karen Mogendorff in the Netherlands, Carme Alemany in Spain, Bulle Davidsson in Sweden and Natasa Urbancíková and Gabriela Kolveková in Slovakia. For further information see: www.motivation-project.com.

The boys are expected to choose SET jobs, or at least it is expected, that SET jobs are existing in future plans of the boys, because in these jobs the salary is rather high.

I found it very interesting, that the background of the boys verbally expected a SET choice, and the boys had to cope with this image of masculinity, as part of their identity.

„My father always sees me in a technical job.“quoting a male interviewee.

There is no such expectation, that girls should do a SET job, in the opposite, the family would be surprised if their daughters select a SET job, because it is still an exception.

Like DR. Christine Wächter pointed out, young women have to struggle in a situation in which they are an exception, even if they are successful to get a SET – job, they have to cope with a male technique culture.

So there is this a whole background maintaining the structures leading to a gender segregated labour market. The Interviews showed not very astonishingly, that there are no genes, that drive boys into a technical direction, and make girls hate it:

The first boy I talked with, was very enthusiastic about history and being an author, the other shows fascination working with human beings.

The fascination of one girl when she was small was matador and later on a chemistry-set, but this fascination has been cut off in school.

So one one measure to counteract this problem ist to improve the SET education and to open it for more pupils. The importance of the influence of the teacher is clear: „I know, that I´m interested in biology, but I still don´t like it very much, because the lessons areawkward“, quoting a male interviewee.. The boy says, that he still could imagine tu study biology, but there is far more enthusiasm in his voice in view of subjects like history, in which the teacher knows, how to make the pupils interested and excited about it.

In addition this boy participated on an initiative where the pupils could visit the working place of the parents of the children in the same class, and he chose the TU, and this impressed him very much: He told me, that they were „constructing environmental friendly engines“ and since the boy wants to „do something good for our planet“, it was an important practical experience in a field that makes sense to him. This single experience has a big impact on his job decision, because he regards construction environmental friendly engines as a serious possibility for his future job.

The second boy I talked with said, he would be interested in all SET subjects, and the teachers would hardly influence his interest, but in general he prefers languages. His dad has a firm engaged with trucks and cranes, and although this seems to be a realistic job decision, but his fascination working with people seems to be more authentic: „you have to work with your hands and brains, the challenge you have every day, when someone comes to you and says: „I have this and that“, then you have to think of something“. To sum up, one could say, those two boys are trying to find a solution between their own wishes, and the pictures their fathers have.

One girl I talked with was quite enthusiastic about practical SET-experiences, playing with matador and doing chemical and physical experiments she likes very much, but since there are almost no experiments in school and she never visited an institution and she didn´t participate on a joborientation measure, she could not collect experiences or selfesteem about those fields. So the only experiences she has with SET at all are SET subjects in school, which are related with a lot of strong negative feelings, because her maths-teacher works with fear to discipline the pupils. So she hardly has practical experiences, very few information about her possibilities and a lack of experiences, and last time when she really felt competent with SET, was in her early childhood. SET in general has a very negative imprint on her.

A maths teacher „who gets easily angry if someone asks“ quoting an interviewee, is failing his job, when he forces the pupils to show on the black board, what they have learned. Because of repeating embarrassing situations for pupils who need more explanations, but do not dare to ask, they have to cope with permanent fear in this subject and the effect is not astonishing: „yes actually I hate maths“ quoting a female interviewee.

She knows that there is a lack of women in SET, but with such bad feelings towards SET she couldn't imagine to study a SET subject. So this intelligent girl, who loved to play with matador and doing chemical experiences will never choose a SET study, because she thinks she is bad in maths, and the feeling of hatred effects all those subjects, having something to do with maths. The other girl I talked with didn't hesitate to admit, that SET doesn't interest her at all.

In the few interviews with pupils I have done I noticed, that information about professional perspectives and possibilities in general is very rare. The information about SET jobs pupils have, comes from SET schools subjects, parents and media, and as Magdalena Wicher and DR. Anita Thaler pointed out, media still has a rather conservative impact on the girls.

So the whole package- the lack of detailed and specific information, the overwhelming amount of abstract knowledge in schools, which are not specialized on technical education and a lack of selfesteeming practical experience work together in a non favourable direction especially for the girls. Girls and young women very often make jobdecisions without being really informed neither about their possible interests, nor about a larger scale of their possibilities, which might be an explanation why girls and young women choose only between 3 from 270 jobs.

The school system is based on luck: if you have nice, committed SET teachers, you are lucky, if you have got brains that can cope with very theoretical stuff you are lucky and you're most of all lucky if your parents are committed, well educated and financial well off to compensate the failures of the system. And the system fails, if it produces inequality.

Another interesting point, that I only can mention here is that SET Image in general seems to be rather unpopular, under boys too. The negative image of SET in general points out the necessity of transformation of SET itself. The pictures drawn by the pupils are mostly showing single working men, constructing bombs or acid liquids.

Austrian good practice project “Mut!”

Mut! focusses the problem, that the number of girls who choose a technical profession is still very poor and the fact, that the girls are choosing only 3 from 270 possible professions over and over again, with the wellknown consequences that they have to face low salary and little chances to make a career.

Mut! does gendersensitive education and further education, workshops with pupils and teachers to build up genderconsciousness and gender-sensitivity;

Mut! deals with the lack of information about gendersensitive joborientation and organizes practical workhops to let the pupils gain practical experiences with technical work in order to strenghten the girls selfconfidence. All those contents are not transmitted satisfactorily in school. The main goal of mut! is increasing the number of girls and young women in institutions of technical or a natural scientific education and professions permanently.

The main target groups are teachers on the one hand, and girls who are about to choose a profession (12-16 years) on the other hand, but also parents, multipliers and decisionmakers.

The most important cooperation partner of Mut! is the pedagogical high school which educates teachers for primary school and secondary modern school (in Austria Hauptschule for children from 10- 14 years).

There are only a few workshops for teachers at high school level, like at university of Klagenfurt there is a workshop implemented on “job orientation”, which exists because of engaged people. Additionally there are also some workshops in Vienna and Salzburg with pedagogues of the Kindergarten and teachers of primary-school, in order to educate women, who are working in a typical female job, becoming a role model for the children with technical know-how.

The initiative „Mut!“ has gained a lot of knowledge and tried out valid measures getting girls in contact with technical fields, but since measures are not implemented in curricula of education and further education, and since teachers are not bound to do further education, their effect is limited. Therefore this a very important demand of mut! – to implement gendersensitive job orientation measures in curricula to reach a broad scale of pupils in order to normalize experiences in technical and natural sciences for girls and young women.

Until there is no regularity of SET - input, the number of pupils, who do come in contact with these measures, depends on the number of committed teachers, which means that it depends more or less on good luck with their teachers, if girls get a fair chance.

As I stated before, the plans of the pupils in view of their future job decisions are corresponding to initiatives they have participated. The effect of regular practical education or at least regular participation of girls in those kind of workshops should not be underestimated. Every girl and boy should benefit by practical education or practical workshops and job orientation in school.

Technological and natural scientific education and professions shouldn't be genderspecific in general and participation and careers of women in those fields should be a normal standard in a modern society depending on all members for future development and competition.

The initiative Mut! is funded by the BMUUK (ministry for education and culture) from resources of the program Fforte (women in investigation and technology and the initiative of the council of investigation and technology development) = all of them national resources, there have been resources of the EU but only in the first and the second periods of mut! from the ESF (European Social Funds.) Without the financial resources but most of all the commitment of the women's councils of each federal country, mut! wouldn't exist anymore. Salzburg has an additional funder in the youth council of the country.

Mut! has worked out a booklet called “Spurensuche”, which is about job orientation for girls and their parents, which is very successful in the 4th edition, because such a material is very rare.

Team members of Mut! are stressing the importance of gendersensitive language and recommend genderhomogenous groups, which are very productive. Besides that, working with role models can be recommended, for example inviting girls having just finished the Higher technical school, because role models, being in the same age as the target group are rather successful to imprint themselves. Working in workshops with historical examples of women who are/ have been extraordinary or successful in their field, like female researchers and explorers - successful women in general is recommendable, as well as working with comics, humour, discussing about commercials etc. It is recommended to stay close to everyday life, where the same experiences can be shared.

Number of participants on measures total: **5000 persons:**

Girls	1400
Teachers	2300
Other persons	1300
Persons total	5000

mut! 3, Oct. 2008

For further information take a look at: www.mut!co.at

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