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Summary of the research
Gender stereotypes in elementary school textbooks
in use in Montenegro
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Introduction

The first structured and scientific notions of the world and ourselves in it are acquired at primary school.

Before the beginning of elementary schooling, children learn about the world in accordance with own interests, depending on natural curiosity and feedback from parents, who may, but not necessarily so, satisfy all the needs and provide the answers to all questions. The school, through compulsory education, offers uniform knowledge claimed to be scientific. School textbooks are one of major tools in education process. They are most trusted and represent a repository of truth and knowledge. Textbooks have a major socialisation role in the development of children. They convey important messages to the young on how the social relations in a society are to be organised and which value system they should adopt. Through the characters represented in textbooks children are offered a pattern of a preferred individual and behaviour model in the given society.

There appears to be a glaring omission in many textbooks. They omit the accomplishments of half of the human race. History, literature, art, music, and science books focus primarily on the accomplishments of men while simultaneously trivializing the accomplishments of women. They diminish the importance of women, placing them in positions of subordination and passivity. What also lacks are the descriptions of women who have taken on roles stereotypically reserved for men.

Psychological development of children at the time of entering school is characterised by fast development of perception that approaches “naïve realism”. A child sees the world as it is presented to him/her. Knowledge acquired at this so-called concrete stadium of thought is internalised as complete and true. Not before the age of 12, with the development of abstract thinking, does this knowledge become questioned and changed. We believe that some of the knowledge acquired, having the existing education models in family and at school, never becomes subject to critical analysis and the change of attitudes and beliefs. It, thus, happens that this adopted ready-made knowledge lays the ground for bias and stereotypes in relation to gender, nation, religion, race, etc.

Textbooks analysis

The textbooks analysed, Serbian, (Nature) and Science, and History, have been selected as subjects essential for creation of the awareness of self and others (the I-others relation). We regard them as crucial in creating the sense of identity, gender identity in particular, i.e. "I as a boy/girl in the world".

First, fourth and eighth grade have been chosen as turning points in education cycle and development processes of children at different development stages.

During the preparatory stage to our analysis, we researched relevant literature and similar analysis to help select the appropriate criteria. We wanted to compile the criteria to provide reliable findings and also to be able to control subjectivity and possible constant error that may stem from it.

The set of criteria refer both to the texts and the accompanying illustrations. We believe that they are of the same importance. Both representations of male and female characters in texts and their visual representations influence the creation of beliefs and stereotypes referring to male and female gender roles. Also, the younger the children are, the more important the illustrations are. As children grow, they are replaced by messages presented in texts. Thus, we agreed for both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the chosen textbooks, using the following set of criteria:

Quantitative:

1. the presence of men and women
2. the presence of boys and girls
3. the activities of boys and girls
4. the roles for men and women
5. lists of professions and presence of men and women in different professional roles
6. number of men and women as authors of texts

Qualitative:

1. What the text is about:
 - How are performance standards expressed?
 - Who solves problems and how is it done?
 - Gender roles: is the success of girls and women based on own initiative and intelligence or because they are pretty or connected to a boy/man?

- Can the story be told if gender roles have been switched?

- Gender-related character traits and behaviour

2. Life style

3. Relations between people

- Are boys/men in power, are they agile, are they leaders, do they make decisions, or do girls/women do that?

- Family relations – who has the dominant role, etc.

4. Who are the heroes in stories?

5. Is self-esteem of girls/women included?

6. Which gender does the textbook author use?

All three researchers worked with the same set of parameters, aiming to increase objectivity of the findings through interpersonal reliability.

Observations and caveats

It is difficult to generalise the results since all the textbooks are different, and there are many criteria for analysis. Still, some trends are evident, like the more recent the textbook is, the more gender sensitive it is, or that the textbooks for Nature and Science and History, which are among the last that have been published, are more politically correct textbooks, so there is an increase in the presence and visibility of women and sensibility for women's issue. The most gender sensitive of all the textbooks analysed is the Nature and Science for 1st grade.

If we try to sum up some of the findings according to different criteria, we come up to the conclusion that the presence of boys and girls in illustrations is approximately equal, i.e. girls are represented in 48% of cases, and boys in 52%, taken totally for all the textbooks analysed. The situation changes drastically for adults, where women are shown in 18.5% and men in 81.5 % of all the illustrations in all textbooks analysed.

It is much more difficult to calculate the presence of women in texts, but the most striking example is the one in Serbian Reader for the 4th grade, where the hero of the story is a boy in 31 cases, and a girl only 5 times (3 of them being fairy tales). We will give the example with a girl as a hero of the story ("Bird's nest in a mail box"). The girl does a noble thing and helps little birds to make a nest and take care of the eggs. In the task after the story, the author asks pupils to make the boy a hero of the story and finish it. By doing so, on a rare occasion of a girl as a hero in a Reader having six times more texts with boys as heroes, the author does, in our opinion, unjustifiable discrimination.

Not a single task after texts abounding in male characters did ask for the gender roles to be switched for a girl or woman to become the hero of the story. Moreover, what did the author expect would happen if the gender roles were switched? Is it maybe, the stereotype of boys being violent?

Speaking of adults, the greatest disparity is probably present in textbooks for 8th grade abounding in male characters, particularly Serbian Reader and History textbook, with over 90% of male characters.

As for the activities of boys and girls, there is approximately the same number of school activities both represented in the illustrations and in texts. As for other activities, and this particularly holds true for Serbian textbooks for 1st and 4th grade, they are, for the most part, gender stereotypical. Thus, girls go for walks, make themselves pretty and tend to spend their leisure time in a passive way. Boys, in contrast, go in for sports and hobbies, they are adventurous and demonstrate more practical skills.

Speaking of roles, activities and professions for adults, taking the Reader for 1st grade as an example, we see women as housewives, doing housework when at home, or going for walks and sitting in parks with female friends and children, when outside. Men representing fathers are always dressed in suits, even at the dinner table, very severe, and only relax playing the traditional folk instrument (gusle). In texts, women are mostly referred to as mothers, and when in professional settings they are usually teachers. Men are represented mostly in professional roles, rarely as fathers, let alone husbands.

Texts for lower grades abound in men in professional roles, mostly crafts, usually obsolete ones and not found in modern Montenegro. As an illustration, the texts from Serbian Reader for 1st grade, have women represented in two roles altogether, as teachers (15 occurrences) and shop assistants, and men as chimney sweepers (4), huntsmen (8), florists, construction workers (2), writers (2), teachers, poets (5), ploughmen (6), crop farmers, sowers (2), reapers (2), combine drivers (2), millers, bakers (2), shop assistants (2), “opanak” (old-fashioned peasant footwear)-makers, watchmakers, servants (4).

As for the language used in the textbooks analysed, it is also very difficult to generalise. One of the basic indicators is the gender authors use when addressing pupils/readers and what gender they use to refer to all people. Here, a great range of different solutions may be noticed. On one side, as a gender stereotype extreme, there are textbooks in which authors consistently use masculine gender to address all pupils. Such textbooks are those used for the Serbian Reader and Grammar in 1st grade, Grammar for 4th grade and Science for 4th grade.

Then there are textbooks addressing readers neutrally, like the Reader for 4th grade, in 2nd person singular of present or imperative, both of them gender unmarked. However, whenever there is a need to be gender-specific, masculine gender is used, with one sole exception when the forms for both genders were used. The Reader used in 8th grade is similar, except that here the form used is 2nd person plural of present and imperative. There are a few exceptions when masculine gender was used, and again only one

including both genders. As for the History textbook used in 8th grade, it is consistently, throughout the book gender unmarked.

It is only the Science and Nature textbook for 1st grade that has all the instructions and comments consistently given using both genders. Feminine gender and female forms are given in brackets, after the male counterparts, although sometimes precede the male forms, especially when dealing with teachers. This textbook is a proof positive that political correctness in textbooks is possible and easily achievable, as a counterargument to all those who doubt the practicality of introducing double forms to include feminine gender.

The next important criterion is the presence of males and females in examples. Looking at the presence of men and women in examples in Serbian textbooks, it is seen that men and masculine gender are used in 83% of examples, and women and feminine gender in the remaining 17% (this statistics includes only the examples talking about humans, not the one with only grammatical gender).

As an extreme example, in the Grammar book for 4th grade, when talking about Past Tense in Serbian, the author provides only examples for masculine gender and says that "forms for feminine and neutral gender differ slightly from the given masculine forms." Are these not of the same importance? After all, we do have a language with a highly pronounced grammatical gender.

Using the same book as an illustration, we will show that even when women are used in examples, they are depicted in highly stereotypical gender roles and relations. For instance, when simple sentences are taught, pupils will also be able to see how Srdjan's family functions: "Grandma is knitting. Mother is cooking. Srdjan is drawing. Father is writing. Sister is singing." Or when simple sentences are expanded, there is an example "Mara is knitting." which eventually becomes: "Today my curious little girl Mara is knitting a nice jumper for her brother." Curiosity here is only declarative, whereas "good" or "obedient" would be more suitable. Also, based on the messages sent throughout this and other textbooks, it is only to be expected a sister would knit a jumper for her brother. It is impossible to knit it for herself or not even mention who it is for.

The use of the word "čovjek" (inclusive word for "human being") is highly interesting. For instance, when a wolf asks if there is a good "čovjek" in the village where he could go, a cat sends the wolf to four different men (Reader for 1st grade). Or the example from Grammar book for 4th grade as an illustration of adjectival gender "A good "čovjek", a good woman, a good child", or when describing a market day, "Crowds of people, women and children are coming", even though we have a separate word for "men".

This use of the word "čovjek" to mean "man" is very usual. We point this out since it illustrates well the so-called generic use of male forms. It is usually said that we use male forms generically, to refer to all people. It is hard to believe that generic use readily invokes generic meaning – that is, using male forms in neutral contexts does not result in

most people thinking both of men and women, since, obviously, it does not happen even with a purely generic and inclusive word.

Conclusion

The analysis of selected textbooks clearly shows that the recognisable patriarchal socialisation pattern still holds true for our educational system. Rare are the textbooks with gender sensitive orientation which open up possibilities for constructing different perception of gender roles and gender relations. In most of the analysed textbooks gender roles still reflect traditional, stereotypical and binary male/female division.

Female roles include a couple of stereotypical ones, usually mother or “extensions” of mother figure, like the one of a female teacher.

Male roles are no less stereotypical, they are only more diverse. Still, most of them are historical and mythical, then craftsmen and soldiers.

Gender stereotypes are also present as regards boys and girls, but compared to men and women it almost looks benign and subtle. There are in certain textbooks some gender-related divisions both in illustrations and texts. Thus, girls are either invisible, or passive, caring and dressed up, while boys are skilful, intellectually dominant, naughty and of adventurous spirit. Still, boys and girls often have the same number of different roles and activities, particularly connected with school.

Thus, it raises the question of what happens to agile, active and capable girls when they grow up to be mothers and housewives, closed indoors and passive, without professional lives. Is it that such an educational system with textbooks in which authors mostly address males, with stories that reassert the passive position of women and carefully protect them from the public eye, makes that girls, early on in their lives, get these messages which will later on prevent them from developing their full abilities?

Patriarchal Montenegro in 21st century is a place where it is necessary to redefine the existing stereotypes of gender roles and gender relations, break taboos connected with male-female positions and abilities. Changing the image of women/men represented in textbooks is one way of raising the awareness for the issue, of developing critical thinking and creating a new, more correct notion of the world and the place of women in it.

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