

Marzanna Pogorzelska

Opole University, Poland

GENDER ISSUES IN POLISH EDUCATION COMPARED WITH EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES

ABSTRACT

The education system and its role in reproducing gender inequality have been discussed in different European countries for over 40 years. The research-based reports from 16 European countries delivered to European Commission within *Exchange of Good Practice on Gender Equality* forum created a unique opportunity to learn about the main themes, intensity and stages of development of gender and education discourse across Europe. The analysis of the situation in various countries revealed some differences and similarities in the approach to introducing gender in education between post-communist countries and countries with long-time history of gender equality debate. The areas of difference refer to social perception of gender, discrepancy between official legislation and practice, cooperation with educational authorities, textbooks contents and attitude to sexual education. The major similarities concern teachers' awareness and attitudes, gender gap between boys and girls in scholastic achievements, segregation in vocational choice and feminization of teaching profession.

The country overview allows to locate Poland on the map of this European discourse as well as to show inspiring examples coming from the countries far more developed in introducing gender sensitive mechanisms in educational practice.

Key words:

gender, education, equality, gender stereotypes, comparison

1. Introduction

The debate on gender and feminism, also in their relation to education, has been present in Western European countries for over forty years. The second wave of feminism – as early as in the 70s and 80s – severely criticized the education system for its role in reproducing gender inequality and, as a result, discrimination of women in various areas of socio-political life.

The most common questions that were taken up in this debate concerned the male-centered curriculum, organization of schools, disciplinary practices, and teachers' behavior and expectations biased by gender prejudices, suggesting girls and boys down different career paths¹. In many European countries, academic research on these problems contributed to the familiarization of gender issues and the mainstreaming of them in many areas of social life, including education. In Poland, in spite of many efforts undertaken by scientists, the introduction of gender-sensitive policies in education still seems a challenge taken up by the few with reluctance of the great majority. Thus, it might be interesting to ask if we are the exception on the European map of gender mainstreaming and what our place is in this debate against the European background.

In October 2012, experts from 16 European countries delivered their research-based reports that focused on the policies, practices, and obstacles in promoting gender in education to a conference organized by the European Commission (*Exchange of Good Practice on Gender Equality*)². This created a unique opportunity to find out what the main themes for the discussion on gender and education are across Europe. The analysis of the situation in various countries revealed some division lines, similarities, and common areas of problems. This made it possible to compare European trends with the current debate and situation in Poland.

¹ B. Francis, *Education and Gender* [in:] *Education for the Good society, The Values and Principles of a New Comprehensive Vision*, N. Lawson, K. Spours (eds.), London 2011, p. 22, www.compassion-line.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/COM0972_Education_for_Good_Society_WEB.pdf [access: 08.07.2013].

² The country reports include: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, the United Kingdom. All the reports are available at: European Commission, *Gender Training in Education*, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/tools/good-practices/review-seminars/education_en.htm [access: 08.05.2013].

2. Gender and education in Poland – a rough relationship

A good example of a current approach to gender issues in Poland is the discussion about signing the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence*. The Minister of Justice, relating to the concept of gender included there, said that it was an expression of feminist ideology, a threat to traditional family values, and a way to promote homosexuality by challenging stereotypical gender roles. Catholic bishops supported the minister's point of view³. This case illustrates well the attitude of a part of Polish society to the gender and feminist agenda, which is marked by fear, suspiciousness, distance, and hostility. Feminist scientists, when describing Polish discourse, use such expressions as “the lack of reflection, marginalization and inability to deal with gender issues”⁴. The reasons for such a reaction can be associated with different factors. Jolanta Brach-Czaina points out the tradition of the Catholic Church and the legacy of the communist era in Poland. These factors, she claims, contributed to the unification of social behavior, repressing individual choices⁵. It is worth mentioning that, during the communist period, Poland officially declared itself to be a country of sex equality, so the problem of discrimination formally ceased to exist. Moreover, we were almost totally cut off from the feminist movements that shook the Western world in the 70s and 80s. Lucyna Kopciwicz also notices one of the most important elements of Polish culture, which is a deep gap between the public sphere (official, but remaining on a declarative level) and the private sphere (really existing). Poles commonly share the opinion that real life takes place in the non-public sphere or *somewhere else*. The public sphere was, in the post-war era, only a *pseudo-life* and, in this situation, the importance of family increased, having been strengthened by Church teaching. Women's roles of a wife, a mother, and a housewife sacrificing their lives for their families are so natural in Polish culture that trying to reflect on them critically meets with strong opposition, let alone challenging them in the process of socialization⁶. The fall of communism in Poland, although connected with absorbing various political and philosophical trends, cannot be linked to a welcoming of feminism. On the contrary, not only in

³ K. Wiśniewska, *Konwencja zwalcza przemoc, a biskupi konwencję* [Convention Combats Violence and Bishops Combat Convention], “Gazeta Wyborcza” [Electoral Gazette], 10.07.2012, p. 3.

⁴ L. Kopciwicz, *Polityka kobiecości jako pedagogika różnic* [Women's Policy as Pedagogy of Differences], Kraków 2003, pp. 89–90.

⁵ J. Brach-Czaina, *Progi polskiego feminizmu* [Thresholds of Polish Feminism], “Kwartalnik pedagogiczny” [Pedagogical Quarterly] 1995, No. 1–2, pp. 343–357.

⁶ L. Kopciwicz, *op.cit.*, pp. 88–90.

Poland, but also in other newly constituted states, one could witness the emergence of antifeminism⁷, which was influenced by various factors depending on the country. The situation in Poland, as mentioned above, was strongly affected by the values promoted by the Catholic Church. To a great extent, they filled the ideological gap that appeared after the transformation of 1989 and resulted in the revival of the traditional vision of female and male roles, strict abortion laws, limited access to contraceptives, and a lack of real sex education at schools.

All in all, in Poland, before we were able to know and experience waves of feminism and discuss the gender issues, they had become the synonyms of something dangerous and strange. This attitude is visible in the general socio-cultural context and is diffused into education in a natural way. Due to the reasons listed above as well as the constant political shifts that resulted in changes of ministers of education, no consistent gender policy has been worked out so far. Moreover, the 2005–2007 period, when Polish education took a very conservative path, still influences the perception of gender questions. The educational climate of that time was marked by openly expressed homophobia, the perception of gender as a highly dangerous topic, an emphasis on the importance of socializing boys and girls into traditional sex roles, and by blocking the debate on gender equality and human rights generally. In 2008, the core curriculum reform was a chance to introduce gender equality issues. Unfortunately, this was another wasted opportunity. Magdalena Środa describes Polish school as a conservative institution which conveys prejudices, emphasizes stereotypical traditional sex roles and promotes patriarchal society where male domination is considered natural⁸. This point of view is shared by other authors who conclude that Polish school doesn't recognize its negative role in the process of ingraining stereotyped gender models and its contribution to gender inequality in that way⁹. Without critical reflection, educational

⁷ G. Weiner, *A Critical Review of Gender and Teacher Education in Europe*, "Pedagogy, Culture and Society" 2000, No. 2, Vol. 8, p. 239, www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14681360000200091 [access: 08.07.2013].

⁸ M. Środa, *Wstęp* [Introduction] [in:] *Ślepa na płeć. Edukacja równościowa po polsku. Raport krytyczny* [Gender Blind. Equality Education in a Polish Way. A Critical Report], A. Dzierzgowska, E. Rutkowska (eds.), Warszawa 2008, pp. 4–7.

⁹ See also: *Płeć i rodzaj w edukacji*, M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha (ed.), Łódź 2004; L. Kopciwicz, *Edukacja jako praktyka dominacji. Udział szkoły w wytwarzaniu kapitałów rodzajowych uczniów i uczniów* [Education as the Practice of Domination. School Participation in Producing Students' Cultural Capital] [in:] *Koniec mitu niewinności? Płeć i seksualność w socjalizacji i edukacji* [The End of Innocence Myth? Sex and Sexuality in Socialization and Education], L. Kopciwicz, E. Zierkiewicz (eds.), Warszawa 2009, p. 13; G. Mazurkiewicz, *Kształcenie chłopców i dziewcząt. Naturalny porządek, nierówność, czy dyskryminacja?* [Boys' and Girls' Education. Natural Order, Inequality or Discrimination?], Kraków 2005, p. 129; M. Ślusarczyk, *Trening socjalizacyjny. Wybrane zagadnienia kształtowania*

institutions deliver different gender models according to an asymmetric pattern in which boys are selected for other (more dominating) roles than girls (more submissive)¹⁰. At the same time, school is a place of widespread gender-based violence. NGOs research shows that 86% of the examined students admitted that they had encountered cases of peer-to-peer sexual harassment, in which in 93% of cases, boys were the perpetrators. The research also revealed the frequency of violent incidents, which take place on a daily basis, according to 77% of responders¹¹.

3. Poland and other post-communist countries against European background – differences

Analyzing the reports from 16 European countries, the visible division in the approach to introducing gender in education lies between post-communist countries and countries with a long history of gender equality debate. The areas of difference that emerge from the reports cover such topics as social perception of gender issues, discrepancy between official legislation and practice, cooperation with educational authorities, textbooks contents and attitude to sexual education.

The social perception of gender issues and feminism seem to be the major difference between post-communist countries and the rest of Europe. As explained above in relation to Poland, the words *gender* and *feminism* often trigger suspicion and fearful reactions. The situation in all post-Soviet countries described in the reports is similar. Not forgetting each country's specific situation, the explanation lies both in associating these two expressions with the views rooted in communism and the revival of traditional, religion-related ideas and attitudes. As the author of the Czech report claims, the concept of gender was refused in her country "as lefty ideology of unhappy and sexually frustrated women". Thusly, it was condemned and perceived as dangerous¹². Another reason that explains the unwillingness to undertake gender issues, apart from what was above mentioned, is perceiving male and female equality as something already existing and achieved. Such attitudes lead

ról płciowych w procesie edukacji [Socialization Training. Chosen Problems of Creating Sex Roles in the Process of Education], "Kultura i edukacja" [Culture and Education] 2011, No. 2, pp. 19–35.

¹⁰ A. Gromkowska-Melosik, *Edukacja i (nie)równość społeczna kobiet, Studium dynamiki dostępu* [Education and Women's Social (In)Equality. The Study of Access Dynamics], Kraków 2011, p. 41.

¹¹ A. Wołosik, E. Majewska, *Napastowanie seksualne. Głupia zabawa czy poważna sprawa?* [Sexual Harassment. A Silly Play or a Serious Problem?], Warszawa 2011, pp. 53–54, 264.

¹² I. Smetackova, *Gender and Education*, European Commission, *Gender training...*, op.cit., p. 5.

to an underestimating of gender-based problems and seeing it as mere academic and theoretical questions¹³.

Another element distinguishing West and East European countries is a significant discrepancy between official legislation and practice. Poland can serve as a good example to illustrate the problem, because, like other European countries, we have international commitments related to promoting gender equality in education, such as *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* or the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. CEDAW obliges governments to present a report on the measures taken to implement gender equality, including in the education field. The picture that arises from official governmental reports is surely comforting and proves that gender equality is promoted in Polish schools in accordance with the European regulations to which the country is committed. However, this point of view is strongly criticized by teachers' trade unions (ZNP) and NGOs in their own reports (so-called "shadow reports"). The authors of these shadow reports indicate that there gender-sensitive content is lacking in textbooks, core curriculum, and teacher training programs, all of which neglect scientific research in this field. Another problem is a limited access to sexual education in Polish schools. The situation presented in the official and shadow reports differ one from another, something that is typical for other post-communist countries¹⁴. It seems that the authorities in post-communist countries are still stuck in the old times, when official declarations did not reflect reality and their only purpose was to fulfill bureaucratic requirements.

Getting down to the school level, the main documents regulating its functioning are the *Official Core Curriculum* and the *Act on the School Education System*. As Anna Dzierzgowska puts it, they are both "gender blind"¹⁵ and, as far as equality is concerned, they only refer to general notions of human rights and universal ethics without addressing gender issues directly. This method, practiced in other post-communist countries as well, lets the authorities claim that equality in educa-

¹³ T. Kmetova, *Transferability to Bulgaria of Good Practices on Gender in Education*, European Commission, *Gender Training...*, op.cit., p. 1; I. Smetackova, op.cit., p. 7; M. Pogorzelska, *Poland – Policy Context and Transferability of Good Practices*, European Commission, *Gender training...*, op.cit., p. 3; V. Pilinkaite Sotirovic, *Gender Education in Lithuania: Context Analysis and Possible Future Development*, European Commission, *Gender Training...*, op.cit., pp. 5–6.

¹⁴ See: M. Pogorzelska, op.cit.; I. Trapenciore, *Gender and Education*, European Commission, *Gender training...*, op.cit.; I. Smetackova, op.cit.

¹⁵ A. Dzierzgowska, *Ankieta na temat gender mainstreamingu w szkołach-próba opracowania kwestionariusza* [Gender Mainstreaming Survey at Schools – An Attempt to Work out a Questionnaire] [in:] *Ślepa na płęć...*, op.cit., p. 30, 58. See also: *Brak misji na wizji i wizji w edukacji* [No Mission Visible, No Vision in Education], J. Piotrowska (ed.), Warszawa 2009.

tion is fully assured. In reality, absence of gender sensitive policy is clearly visible in educational materials (guidelines on curriculum, textbooks) and practices within hidden curriculum (lack of gender equality policies at school, teachers' attitudes, gender-based violence and harassment)¹⁶.

Generally, what can be concluded viewing the situation in post-communist countries is that their progress in legislation, forced by the accession to EU, has not resulted in real efforts to promote e-quality. Facing the resistance and lack of political will, the ministries of education of these countries have become quite passive in implementing the commitments their governments have undertaken and tend to underestimate the existence of gender inequality in schools. In all the countries mentioned, much of the obligations that should be fulfilled by the education authorities were taken over by NGOs, which are actually the main actors in promoting gender equality. It is the NGOs that do the research, publish the manuals and organize trainings for teachers, school management, and students. However, it is commonly believed that the impact of NGO activities could be much more powerful if education authorities were willing to collaborate. The country with different history but quite similar in underestimating gender mainstreaming in education is Cyprus. In spite of legislation promoting gender equality, the "absence of real political will or dialogue to implement gender equality, the lack of coordination and synergies between all actors involved... often result in initiatives and strategic objectives not materializing into concrete policies"¹⁷.

The country that can serve as an example of a contrasting attitude is the Netherlands, which has a special equality department within the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science. Keeping gender as a core issue, the department promotes relevant awareness-raising projects for teachers of all types of schools, often realized with the involvement of parents¹⁸. Another country worth mentioning is Portugal, where the Ministry of Education initiates gender equality projects and validates materials that mainstream gender equality into education. The gender agenda has been incorporated into citizenship issues and it is a cross-curricular topic. The ministry also encourages schools to undertake gender projects¹⁹.

¹⁶ See the reports from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia: T. Kmetova, op.cit.; I. Smetackova, op.cit.; I. Trapenciere, op.cit.; V. Pilinkaite Sotirovic, op.cit.; M. Pogorzelska, op.cit.; J. Cvikova, *Gender and Education*, European Commission, *Gender Training...*, op.cit.

¹⁷ S. Lesta, *Gender Training in Education in Cyprus*, European Commission, *Gender Training...*, op.cit., p. 3.

¹⁸ E. Smiths van Waesberghe, *Gender in Science and Engineering Education*, European Commission, *Gender Training...*, op.cit.

¹⁹ P. Botelho-Gomes, *Guides for Education Gender and Citizenship*, *Gender Training...*, op.cit., pp. 3–4.

Other countries that emphasize the importance of top-down (ministries to schools) gender mainstreaming in education are Belgium, United Kingdom, Spain, and Iceland²⁰. Of West European countries, Denmark seems to be a kind of exception, falling behind other Scandinavian countries with their highly-developed gender policies. It is the only Nordic country with no legal measures to prevent gender stereotypes²¹.

If we assume that school is one of the most powerful sources of socialization, it is obvious that textbooks, apart from subject knowledge they deliver, are the educational tools that teach learners “social roles, accepted behavior typical for each sex as well as models of manhood and womanhood”²².

The CEDAW convention ratified by Poland in 1980 obliged our state to verify and change the sexist contents of the school textbooks until 1990 for primary schools and 1995 for secondary schools. Although there is some progress in this field²³, textbooks still perpetuate gender stereotypes and, as Mariola Chomczyńska-Rubacha puts it, “are the arena of patriarchal indoctrination and intolerance to differences”²⁴. According to schoolbooks, men are active and independent, their jobs are diverse and attractive, and a significant part of their lives is devoted to interests and hobbies. On the other hand, the world of women is centered around the private sphere of home and family with social roles being defined through

²⁰ M. Maerten, *Gender and Education in Belgium*, European Commission, *Gender Training...*, op.cit.; G. Weiner, *Gender Policy and Practice in Education in the UK*, European Commission, *Gender Training...*, op.cit.; T. Gonzalez, *Online Training Courses: “Coeducation – Two Sexes in One World”*, European Commission, *Gender Training...*, op.cit.; G. Gudbjornsdottir, *Exchange of Good Practices on Gender Equality*, European Commission, *Gender Training...*, op.cit.

²¹ C. Norgaard, *Gender Training in Education*, European Commission, *Gender Training...*, op.cit.

²² D. Pankowska, *Obraz systemu ról płciowych w polskich podręcznikach dla klas początkowych* [The Image of Sex Roles System in Polish Textbooks for Early Education] [in:] *Koniec mitu niewinności?...*, op.cit., p. 29. See also: E. Kalinowska, *Wizerunki dziewczynek i chłopców, kobiet i mężczyzn w podręcznikach szkolnych* [Images of Girls and Boys, Women and Men in Textbooks], “Kwartalnik pedagogiczny”, op.cit., pp. 219–253.

²³ M. Ślusarczyk notices that in last years girls presented in the textbooks have become more active and self-efficient, boys more caring, both sexes perform more diverse activities, M. Ślusarczyk, op.cit., pp. 19–35.

²⁴ M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha, *Wstęp* [Introduction] [in:] *Podręczniki i Poradniki. Konteksty. Dyskursy. Perspektywy* [Textbooks and Guidebooks. Contexts. Discourses. Perspectives], M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha (ed.), Kraków 2011, p. 10. See also: M. Pawłęga, M. Chustecka, *Analiza podręczników i podstawy programowej – przedmiot język polski* [Analysis of Textbooks and Core Curriculum – Polish Language] [in:] *Wielka nieobecna – o edukacji antydyskryminacyjnej w systemie edukacji formalnej w Polsce* [The Great Absent – On Antidiscrimination Education in the System of Formal Education in Poland], M. Abramowicz (ed.), Warszawa 2011, pp. 116–158.

maternity. If women work outside, they usually do jobs of lower social prestige²⁵. In the books, boys are more dynamic, intelligent, and ingenious while girls are more submissive, caring, and warm²⁶. The textbooks presenting such images pose a problem not only in Poland. According to the authors of other reports from our region, their textbooks and teaching methods perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices in the same way as it takes place in Poland²⁷. The countries that have done the most to eradicate gender stereotypes from their books are all Scandinavian states. Most textbooks in Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden instead of training pupils into stereotypically ideal male or female patterns deliver much more diversified images of two sexes.

The controversies around sex education at schools are the next most common topic in all post-communist countries. Again, the situation in Poland is representative for other East European countries. Although the subject that could cover sex education does exist in the curriculum (called Preparation for the Family Life), its officially obligatory status is undermined by parents' right to withdraw children from these lessons. Thus, depending on the source of data, these classes are attended by 30% (NGOs data) or 50% (Ministry of Education data) of all students. At the same time, Preparation for the Family Life is the subject where religious-based ethic permeates textbooks so that they present a conservative view of family life and stereotypical perception of male and female roles²⁸. Strong objections to introducing gender sensitive and ideological-free sexual education in schools have been voiced in Poland for over 20 years, which resembles the situation in Czech Republic, Latvia, and Lithuania. In the two last countries, efforts to adopt a Danish book on gender roles for kindergarten educators was met with fierce protests fuelled by religious circles. It was argued that gender education for children

²⁵ D. Pankowska, *Obraz systemu...*, op.cit., pp. 59–62. See also: G. Mazurkiewicz, op.cit., pp.45–79; M. Cackowska, *O wybranych problemach społecznego rynku książek dla dziewczynek i chłopców w Polsce i na świecie* [On Chosen Problems of Social Market of Books for Girls and Boys in Poland and in the World] [in:] *Role płciowe. Kultura i edukacja* [Sex Roles. Culture and Education], M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha (ed.), Łódź 2006, pp. 55–73.

²⁶ M. Pawłęga, M. Chustecka, op.cit., pp. 116–158. See also: D. Pankowska, *Wychowanie a role płciowe* [Education and Sex Roles], Gdańsk 2005, pp. 93–98; M. Karkowska, *Socjalizacja rodzajowa dziewcząt i chłopców a ukryty program edukacji szkolnej* [Gender Socialization of Girls and Boys and Hidden Curriculum] [in:] *Role płciowe...*, op.cit., p. 124.

²⁷ T. Kmetova, op.cit.; V. Pilinkaite Sotirovic, op.cit.

²⁸ M. Chomczyńska-Miliszkievicz, *Edukacja seksualna w społeczeństwie współczesnym. Konteksty pedagogiczne i psychospołeczne* [Sexual Education in Contemporary Society, Pedagogical and Psychosocial Contexts], Lublin 2002, pp. 29–31; D. Pauluk, *Kontrowersje wokół wzorców socjalizacji kobiet w podręcznikach do wychowania seksualnego – próba poszukiwania kompromisowych rozwiązań* [Controversies around the Models of Socialization of Women in Sex Education Textbooks – Trying to Find a Compromise] [in:] *Role płciowe...*, op.cit., pp. 154–155.

at such an early age damages natural development, makes boys and girls identical, or transforms boys into homosexuals²⁹.

The specific features of the debate on gender in education in the East European countries that I have just outlined by no means implies that the rest of Europe is an area of widespread gender sensitive policies and equality with no trace of discrimination. My purpose was to show that, on the long way to gender equality, there are some regional, historically conditioned factors that influence the educational discourse and the speed of changes.

4. Poland and other post-communist countries against European background – similarities

In spite of regional differences in the debate on gender in education, there still are issues common for most European countries. The analysis of the reports reveals some of them, such as teachers' awareness and attitudes, gender gap between boys and girls in scholastic achievements, segregation in vocational choice, and the feminization of the teaching profession.

To a great extent, gender socialization at school takes place within *hidden curriculum*, which includes unconscious and unplanned messages that are transmitted through unwritten rules, everyday interactions, and the organization of school life and space. Teachers' awareness and attitudes are another element of hidden curriculum, which is particularly important when we discuss training for gender roles. Teachers, in the process of socialization translate biological differences into social roles and are deeply convinced that they act in accordance with natural law³⁰. As a result, in many teachers' minds, boys behave in a naughty and aggressive fashion, but, at the same time, they are creative and talented, so the teachers devote more quality time and attention to boys. Girls, perceived as good, kind, and quiet tend to be neglected, unnoticed, or invisible³¹. As a result, tasks given to boys need self-efficiency and technical skills, whereas girls' assignments often limit their independence and are less challenging³². The researchers also draw attention to the

²⁹ V. Pilinkaite Sotirovic, op.cit., p. 6. See also: I. Trepenciere, op.cit., pp. 3–4.

³⁰ A. Gromkowska-Melosik, op.cit., p. 49.

³¹ M. Ślusarczyk, op.cit., pp. 19–35. See also: A. Gromkowska-Melosik, op.cit., pp. 46–47; M. Karkowska, op.cit., p. 122.

³² A. Gromkowska-Melosik, op.cit., p. 44. See also: D. Pankowska, *Wychowanie...*, op.cit.; L. Kopiciewicz, *Edukacja jako...*, op.cit., pp. 20–22.

different ways of addressing girls and boys by teachers and organizing classroom space in order to get control over boys' aggression with the use of girls as pacifiers³³.

These problems are present in the Polish and European debate. And, we find its reflections in the reports from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Spain, the United Kingdom, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. The authors of these reports point out that although teachers are formally obliged to teach in a gender sensitive way, not all of them have enough knowledge to do so³⁴. One of the reasons for teachers' attitudes described above is the lack of proper gender-related courses, both for teaching candidates and in-service teachers, who are supposed to develop their teaching skills. Polish research on the offer of development teachers' centers reveals very limited opportunities of getting acquainted with the concept of gender³⁵. Again, as in the case of teachers' behavior and attitudes, it also pan-European problem.

Some researchers mention a "fear of feminism" in teacher education, which is viewed as being a controversial and politicized topic, causing divisions, possible backlash, and implying an anti-male attitude. Reluctance to deal with feminism may also be the consequence of associating it with a theoretical issue that has no application in real life³⁶. Moreover, introducing a gender perspective in the teacher training courses is challenging, as it requires critical insight into the views deeply rooted in people's minds. The need for changing them inevitably arouses resistance from students and other members of teaching staff alike³⁷.

Another common gender-related educational problem, highlighted in the reports from different countries, is the underachievement of boys who are sometimes

³³ E. Bochno, *Stereotyp płci czy płęć języka? Szkolne interakcje komunikacyjne nauczycielek z uczennicami i uczniami* [Stereotype of Sex or Sex of a Language? School Interactions between Female Teachers and Male/Female Pupils] [in:] *Koniec mitu niewinności?...*, op.cit., p. 188. See also: G. Mazurkiewicz, op.cit., p. 103; M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha, *Metaanaliza badań nad osiągnięciami szkolnymi i ustrojem rodzajowym szkół* [Meta-Analysis of the Research on Scholastic Achievements and Gender System of Schools] [in:] M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha, *Płęć i szkoła. Od edukacji rodzajowej do pedagogiki rodzaju* [Sex and School. From Gender Education to Pedagogy of Gender], Warszawa 2011, p. 123.

³⁴ B. Traunsteiner, *Gender and Education in Austria – The Present Situation*, European Commission, *Gender Training...*, op.cit.; M. Maerten, op.cit.; C. Norgaard, op.cit.; G. Gudbjornsdottir, op.cit.; G.T. Gonzalez, op.cit.; G. Weiner, *Gender Policy and Practice...*, op.cit.; T. Kmetova, op.cit.; V. Pilinkaite Sotirovic, op.cit.; I. Trepenciere, op.cit.; J. Cvikova, op.cit.

³⁵ A. Teutsch, *Analiza oferty placówek doskonalenia nauczycieli* [Analysis of Teacher Development Centres] [in:] *Wielka nieobecna...*, op.cit., pp. 71–91.

³⁶ G. Weiner, *A Critical Review...*, op.cit., pp. 242–243.

³⁷ E. Lahelma, *Gender Awareness in Finnish Teacher Education: an Impossible Mission?*, "Education Inquiry" 2011, No. 2, Vol. 2, pp. 270–271, www.use.umu.se/digitalAssets/72/72673_inquiry_lahelma.pdf [access: 08.07.2013].

referred to as the “losers of the system”³⁸. Across Europe, girls generally outperform boys in PISA school achievements tests and women outnumber men in tertiary education³⁹. These findings made some researchers claim that gender equality has been achieved and gender inequality should be reinterpreted as a boys’ issue⁴⁰. However, the picture is much more complex. In almost all European countries, gender segregation, both horizontal (related to study choice) and vertical (related to *glass ceiling*), takes place at the academic level. Women dominate in the fields of education that are perceived as feminine, such as education and training (80% of EU graduates are women), health and welfare (76% of women graduates), and the humanities and arts (about 70% of women graduates). As far as engineering, manufacturing, and construction are concerned, men are visibly over-represented in all countries (over 80% of male graduates). As for vertical segregation, although women outnumber men as high education graduates, in many countries (Flemish Community of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovenia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Norway), they are under-represented at the doctoral level and in the academic staff of universities⁴¹.

As for the gender gap in school achievements tests, the country that seems to have succeeded in dealing with this issue is the United Kingdom. The steps taken by this country to diminish the problem first included gathering and analyzing (by the government, local authorities, and schools) all data connected to gender. Subsequent enterprises comprised trainings for teachers, eliminating stereotypes from books, educational and exam materials, developing school policies on gender equality, introducing projects involving girls in science and technology, and increasing boys’ achievements. All these efforts proved effective as the United Kingdom had the narrowest gender gap in educational achievement in 2011⁴². Similar projects have also been realized in the Netherlands where encouraging young women to pursue traditionally male career paths has been the major issue in education policy actions and interventions⁴³.

The country overview I have presented does not exhaust the subject, but is just an effort to sketch the main themes in the European debate on gender in education.

³⁸ B. Traunsteiner, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

³⁹ OECD (2010) *Pisa 2009 at a Glance*, OECD Publishing, www.oecd.org/pisa/46660259.pdf [access: 15.03.2013]; *Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes: Study on the Measures Taken and Current Situation in Europe*. European Commission, A. Delhaxhe (ed.), Brussels 2010.

⁴⁰ G. Weiner, *Gender Policy and Practice...*, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

⁴¹ *Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 97–104.

⁴² G. Weiner, *Gender Policy and Practice...*, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

⁴³ E. Smiths van Waesberghe, *op.cit.*, pp. 3–4.

The debate, varied as it is, appears unavoidable if we consider the negative effects of gender-based stereotypes and prejudices. These effects commonly appear in multi-faced discrimination, which ranges from a higher unemployment rate among women than men, discrimination in different stages of the career (recruitment, reaching higher positions, gap payment), and the feminization of poverty to widespread violence against women. Gender sensitive education will not automatically mitigate the situation, but it is certain that the more educated the society is, the better equipped it is in the equality supportive mechanisms.

REFERENCES:

- Bochno E., *Stereotyp płci czy płec języka? Szkolne interakcje komunikacyjne nauczycielek z uczennicami i uczniami* [Stereotype of Sex or Sex of a Language? School Interactions between Female Teachers and Male/Female Pupils] [in:] *Koniec mitu niewinności? Płec i seksualność w socjalizacji i edukacji* [The End of Innocence Myth? Sex and Sexuality in Socialization and Education], L. Kopciewicz, E. Zierkiewicz (eds.), Warszawa 2009.
- Brach-Czaina J., *Progi polskiego feminizmu* [Thresholds of Polish Feminism] "Kwartalnik pedagogiczny" [Pedagogical Quarterly] 1995, No. 1–2.
- Piotrowska J. (ed.), *Brak misji na wizji i wizji w edukacji* [No Mission Visible, No Vision in Education], Warszawa 2009.
- Cackowska M., *O wybranych problemach społecznego rynku księzek dla dziewczynek i chłopców w Polsce i na świecie* [On Chosen Problems of Social Market of Books for Girls and Boys in Poland and in the World] [in:] *Role płciowe. Kultura i edukacja* [Sex Roles. Culture and Education], M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha (ed.), Łódź 2006.
- Chomczyńska-Miliszkievicz M., *Edukacja seksualna w społeczeństwie współczesnym. Konteksty pedagogiczne i psychospołeczne* [Sexual Education in Contemporary Society, Pedagogical and Psychosocial Contexts], Lublin 2002.
- Chomczyńska-Rubacha M., *Metaanaliza badań nad osiągnięciami szkolnymi i ustrojem rodzajowym szkół* [Meta-Analysis of the Research on Scholastic Achievements and Gender System of Schools] [in:] M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha, *Płec i szkoła. Od edukacji rodzajowej do pedagogiki rodzaju* [Sex and School. From Gender Education to Pedagogy of Gender], Warszawa 2011.
- Chomczyńska-Rubacha M. (ed.), *Płec i rodzaj w edukacji*, Łódź 2004.
- Chomczyńska-Rubacha M., *Wstęp* [Introduction] [in:] *Podręczniki i Poradniki. Konteksty. Dyskursy. Perspektywy* [Textbooks and Guidebooks. Contexts. Discourses. Perspectives], M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha (ed.), Kraków 2011.

- Dzierzgowska A., *Ankieta na temat gender mainstreamingu w szkołach – próba opracowania kwestionariusza* [Gender Mainstreaming Survey at Schools – An Attempt to Work out a Questionnaire] [in:] *Ślepa na płęć. Edukacja równościowa po polsku. Raport krytyczny* [Gender Blind. Equality Education in a Polish Way. A Critical Report], A. Dzierzgowska, E. Rutkowska (eds.), Warszawa 2008.
- Francis B., *Education and Gender* [in:] *Education for the Good Society, The Values and Principles of a New Comprehensive Vision*, N. Lawson, K. Spours (eds.), London 2011, www.compassonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/COM0972_Education_for_Good_Society_WEB.pdf [access: 08.07.2013].
- Delhaxhe A. (ed.), *Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes: Study on the Measures Taken and Current Situation in Europe*. European Commission, Brussels 2010.
- Gromkowska-Melosik A., *Edukacja i (nie)równość społeczna kobiet, Studium dynamiki dostępu* [Education and Women's Social (In)Equality. The Study of Access Dynamics], Kraków 2011.
- Kalinowska E., *Wizerunki dziewczynek i chłopców, kobiet i mężczyzn w podręcznikach szkolnych* [Images of Girls and Boys, Women and Men in Textbooks], "Kwartalnik pedagogiczny" [Pedagogical Quarterly] 1995, No. 1–2.
- Karkowska M., *Socjalizacja rodzajowa dziewcząt i chłopców a ukryty program edukacji szkolnej* [Gender Socialization of Girls and Boys and Hidden Curriculum] [in:] *Role płciowe. Kultura i edukacja* [Sex Roles. Culture and Education], M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha (ed.), Łódź 2006.
- Kopciwicz L., *Edukacja jako praktyka dominacji. Udział szkoły w wytwarzaniu kapitałów rodzajowych uczennic i uczniów* [Education as the Practice of Domination. School Participation in Producing Students' Cultural Capital] [in:] *Koniec mitu niewinności? Płęć i seksualność w socjalizacji i edukacji* [The End of Innocence Myth? Sex and Sexuality in Socialization and Education], L. Kopciwicz, E. Zierkiewicz (eds.), Warszawa 2009.
- Kopciwicz L., *Polityka kobiecości jako pedagogika różnic* [Women's Policy as Pedagogy of Differences], Kraków 2003.
- Lahelma E., *Gender Awareness in Finnish Teacher Education: An Impossible Mission?*, "Education Inquiry" 2011, No. 2, Vol. 2, www.use.umu.se/digitalAssets/72/72673_inquiry_lahelma.pdf [access: 08.07.2013].
- Mazurkiewicz G., *Kształcenie chłopców i dziewcząt. Naturalny porządek, nierówność, czy dyskryminacja?* [Boys' and Girls' Education. Natural Order, Inequality or Discrimination?], Kraków 2005.
- OECD (2010) *Pisa 2009 at a Glance*, OECD Publishing, www.oecd.org/pisa/46660259.pdf [access: 15.03.2013].

- Pankowska D., *Obraz systemu ról płciowych w polskich podręcznikach dla klaspoczątkowych* [The Image of Sex Roles System in Polish Textbooks for Early Education] [in:] *Koniec mitu niewinności? Płeć i seksualność w socjalizacji i edukacji* [The End of Innocence Myth? Sex and Sexuality in Socialization and Education], L. Kopciewicz, E. Zierkiewicz (eds.), Warszawa 2009.
- Pankowska D., *Wychowanie a role płciowe* [Education and Sex Roles], Gdańsk 2005.
- Pauluk D., *Kontrowersje wokół wzorców socjalizacji kobiet w podręcznikach do wychowania seksualnego – próba poszukiwania kompromisowych rozwiązań* [Controversies around the Models of Socialization of Women in Sex Education Textbooks – Trying to Find a Compromise] [in:] *Role płciowe. Kultura i edukacja* [Sex Roles. Culture and Education], M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha (ed.), Łódź 2006.
- Pawłęga M., Chustecka M., *Analiza podręczników i podstawy programowej – przedmiot język polski* [Analysis of Textbooks and Core Curriculum – Polish Language] [in:] *Wielka nieobecna – o edukacji antydyskryminacyjnej w systemie edukacji formalnej w Polsce* [The Great Absent – on Antidiscrimination Education in the System of Formal Education in Poland], M. Abramowicz (ed.), Warszawa 2011.
- Ślusarczyk M., *Trening socjalizacyjny. Wybrane zagadnienia kształtowania ról płciowych w procesie edukacji* [Socialization Training. Chosen Problems of Creating Sex Roles in the Process of Education], „Kultura i Edukacja” [Culture and Education] 2011, No. 2.
- Środa M., *Wstęp* [Introduction] [in:] *Ślepa na płęć. Edukacja równościowa po polsku. Raport krytyczny* [Gender Blind. Equality Education in a Polish Way. A Critical Report], A. Dzierzowska, E. Rutkowska (eds.), Warszawa 2008.
- Teutsch A., *Analiza oferty placówek doskonalenia nauczycieli* [Analysis of Teacher Development Centres] [in:] *Wielka nieobecna – o edukacji antydyskryminacyjnej w systemie edukacji formalnej w Polsce* [The Great Absent – On Antidiscrimination Education in the System of Formal Education in Poland], M. Abramowicz (ed.), Warszawa 2011.
- Weiner G., *A Critical Review of Gender and Teacher Education in Europe*, „Pedagogy, Culture and Society” 2000, No 2, Vol. 8, www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1468136000200091 [access: 08.07.2013].
- Wiśniewska K., *Konwencja zwalcza przemoc, a biskupi konwencję* [Convention Combats Violence and Bishops Combat Convention], „Gazeta Wyborcza” [Electoral Gazette], 10.07.2012.
- Wołosik A., Majewska E., *Napastowanie seksualne. Głupia zabawa czy poważna sprawa?* [Sexual Harassment. A Silly Play or a Serious Problem?], Warszawa 2011.

The reports used in the paper were available at: European Commission, *Gender Training in Education*, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/tools/good-practices/review-seminars/education_en.htm:

- Botelho-Gomes P., *Guides for Education "Gender and Citizenship"* (Portugal).
- Cvikova J., *Gender and Education* (Slovakia).
- Gonzalez A.T., *Online Training Courses: "Coeducation – Two Sexes in One World"* (Spain).
- Gudbjornsdottir G., *Exchange of Good Practices on Gender Equality* (Iceland).
- Kmetova T., *Transferability to Bulgaria of Good Practices on Gender in Education* (Bulgaria).
- Lesta S., *Gender Training in Education in Cyprus* (Cyprus).
- Maerten M., *Gender and Education in Belgium* (Belgium).
- Norgaard C., *Gender Training in Education* (Denmark).
- Pilinkaite Sotirovic V., *Gender Education in Lithuania: Context Analysis and Possible Future Development* (Lithuania).
- Pogorzelska M., *Poland – Policy Context and Transferability of Good Practices* (Poland).
- Smetackova I., *Gender and Education* (Poland).
- Smiths van Waesberghe E., *Gender in Science and Engineering Education* (the Netherlands).
- Trapenciere I., *Gender and Education* (Latvia).
- Traunsteiner B., *Gender and Education in Austria – the Present Situation* (Austria).
- Weiner G., *Gender Policy and Practice in Education in the UK* (the United Kingdom).