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Gender, Pedagogy and the Postmodernist Paradigm Shift: An Exploration of Bodies from a Tacit Dimension

Firstly, “gender” signifies a range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between masculinity and femininity, thus “[…] gender is a concept that is widely used and perceived in many quarters to mean ‘women’s issues’.” (FAWE 2005, p.1) Then, it refers to socially determined roles and relations between males, females and other genders. Secondly, it serves as a category to describe phenomena of social life. As a socio-cultural construct it is based on societal norms and values that define the roles of men, women and other genders in society (ibid.). Thirdly, gender is an analytical tool helping us to understand the constitution of certain practices and appreciated knowledge domains at hand. In the following, the understanding of gender as an analytical tool will be unfolded.

It goes back to Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” (1991, 165); - here we read: “[…] mind, body, and tool are on very intimate terms. The ‘multinational’ material organization of the production and reproduction of daily life and the symbolic organization of the production and reproduction of culture and imagination seem equally implicated. The boundary-maintaining images of base and superstructure, public and private, or material and ideal never seemed more feeble.” To be private means having an idea of what it is to be public, and the other way round. The experience of meaning-making in the interdependency of public and private does not only serve the consciousness of what it means to be constituted as a body. It can also be useful for changing society. Gender is then the analytical tool to work out the concepts of labor, individuation and other discursive power-lines in a society.

To follow up this approach within pedagogy means to go against the tradition of theoretical pedagogy to read social reality as if it is a text (cp. linguistic turn); that is to say, as if ruled by completeness, closeness, unambiguity and linearity. (Cp. Wulf 2007) On the basis of this preconception, important pedagogical concepts such as “competence”, “effort”, “learning” etc., and also “gender” are put into the logic scheme of a text, respectively pedagogical
phenomena are supposed to exactly fit to the description of them, often reduced to (a kind of) “text” on norms and normativity and personal, social and political-economic demands; in this way they get standardized and, optimistically, rules for an effective practical pedagogy are formulated. In 1984 Francois Lyotard proclaimed the “end of master narratives”, such as “emancipation”, “autonomy”, “societal progress” etc. describing a paradigm shift from modernity to post-modernity. While modernity was characterized by outstanding human ideals and the normative frames, post-modernity stresses the materiality of the body, experience and history. Then, the multimodal utterances and self-interpretations of the acting persons, the contingency of social and cultural phenomena, the discursivity of all kinds of individual, social and cultural orders as well as the stage-character of phenomena is focused. That goes along with a “tacit turn” in the Educational Sciences and in the field of theoretical pedagogy (cp. Bergstedt, Herbert, Kraus & Wulf 2012). By situating the concept of gender within the “tacit turn” it is seen as an interpretative process as well as continuous social ascription (cp. Butler, Barad, Haraway and many others).

The tacit dimensions of pedagogical practices have already in the 1970s been discussed as a “hidden curriculum” (Jackson 1968). Actually they become also a central topic in ethnographical, phenomenological and poststructuralist analyses of educational processes that follow up the post-modern paradigm shift. Out of this perspective, central concepts are regarded as analytical tools helping us to understand the constitution of institutions, procedures, practices and of dominant knowledge domains at hand. Gender is used to describe discourses e.g. causing certain power relations, especially with the aim to re-signify and to change them. There is a whole spectrum of diverse applications of the term, up to the point of bringing the body into the discussion on knowledge acquisition (cp. Lund 2013).

In this contribution three theoretical frameworks for empirical research on the tacit dimensions of pedagogy will be unfolded: the “implicit knowing” concept; anthropological approaches that describe human existence by performativity, and bodily-phenomenological approaches referring to corporeality. I will make up some main points of these approaches and compare them in reference to different gender concepts. By the critique on them the fact should be stressed that there is no right, but only a limited and perspective understanding of gender in the context of the tacit turn in pedagogy.

“Implicit Learning and Knowing” is a psychological concept of a non-episodic, incidental learning that goes along with the unawareness of what is

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1 See e.g.: https://tacitdimensions.wordpress.com
learnt. Implicit knowing is supposed not to be articulable in formal and systematic language, scientific formulae, specifications, and so forth. It is thought as being abstract and represented mostly in practice. Gender can be implicit attributions of particular qualities to the member of a certain social group. Such implicit stereotypes or biases can be learned through past experiences, or they are activated by the environment. An example for a concept that offensively asserts as well as negates the implicit stereotypes of gender is that of queer. Originally, used to describe strange, odd, peculiar, or eccentric behaviour or looks the word queer was re-appropriated in the 1980ies as a neutral or positive self-identifier for not heterosexual gender minorities. Establishing community and asserting a political identity it became a programmatic term in the political sense. Today, there is the academic discipline of Queer Studies. To appear as queer is then understood as a means to discover and develop implicit as well as explicit gender discourses.

However, it can be criticized insofar as it is dependent on the relativity of language; thus, queer tactics may initiate an undesirable implicit re-signification of gender if meeting other language games.

The idea of “gender” as performance, respectively, as a concept, gender performativity is introduced by Judith Butler in “Gender Trouble” (1990) with a tremendous influence in a variety of academic fields. Butler characterizes gender here as the effect of reiterated acting producing the effect of a static, so to say normal gender while obscuring the contradiction and instability of gender acts. This effect produces what we can consider to be true gender, a narrative that is sustained by, I quote Butler (1990, 179), “[…] the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them.” However, whereas the critique on the concept of performativity deals with the idea of a permanent identity-revolution and mimicry (Wulf & Zirfas 2007, p.30), social relations might not be that fluid and formable. Performative attitudes also do not entail a measure of their prevalence and of their individual, social or cultural value. One may thus miss ethical-philosophical meaningfulness as well as multi-levelled complexity.

**Body-phenomenological concepts** regard limits of human perception and corporeality. Bodies are not only social identities enclosed by thinking about the body, but also corporeal entities as thinking through the body. Gender can be seen as an instrumental concept of the corporeality of female and male bodies,
describing (suppressive) social relations and the institutions that support these relationships (cp. Gildeard & Higgs 2014, 21), while “thinking through the body” (cp. Shusterman 2012) unfolds diverse perspectives on corporeal or bodily existence. According to Merleau-Ponty phenomena come up as sensual impressions, not-articulable perceptions, subluminal thoughts and as the origin of speaking in silence; as our body is our, I quote Merleau-Ponty (1966, 243), “[...] natural I and as such the subject of perception”. We do not have a consciousness about our living body as we cannot distance from it, we are our body. Although we can look at our body as an object, the lived body is a kind of point zero of the orientation in an individual or situational field of seeing, acting or speaking. (Waldenfels 1998, p.22) At point zero (where we always already are) we become (tacitly) aware of the determining factors of the constitution of a phenomenon. Jagger (2008, p.29) points out the instability of gender, which, according to him, can be unravelled e.g. in educational situations where gender is presented as repetitive acts without an original that is the, I quote Jagger, “[...] fictional ideal that regulates the production of sexed subjects and identities”. That is to say, gender can be taken e.g. as a learning task. One can interpret Jagger’s proposal in the following way: By putting oneself in terms of “gender” by e.g. changing the parameters of the own gender and exploring the reactions of others on this change, one can learn about power relations and places of gendering as well as about materials, symbolic orders, polysemies etc. connected to the different gender-concepts.

However, the phenomenological approach in general is criticized for being obscurant as it binds social acts to subjective, that is lived experience. The phenomenological observer attempts to acquire categories and rules of thinking and acting as a kind of “native”, thus carrying out research in an emic2 mode. Hereby, he or she is free to use extraneous categories and rules in terms of sense.

To summarize: All three theoretical frameworks for an empirical research on the tacit dimensions of pedagogy include approaches to gender as an interpretative process as well as a continuous social ascription, and they all come to a certain limit in doing this. They thus seem to create “master narratives” themselves. The alternative could be a “non-essentialist feminist standpoint theory”, as proposed by Donna J. Haraway (1997, 305). Haraway (1995) argues for a “situated

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2 An "emic" account is a description of behavior or a belief in terms meaningful (consciously or unconsciously) to the actor; that is, an emic account comes from a person within the culture. Almost anything from within a culture can provide an emic account. An "etic" account is a description of a behavior or belief by an observer, in terms that can be applied to other cultures; that is, an etic account attempts to be "culturally neutral."
knowledge” and a fully movable thinking, in which she proposes a permanent critical reflection on the own contextual references and connections, involving also subluminal aspects of tasks, establishments and actions. She is concerned with taking a “partial perspective”, that gives, I quote Haraway (1995, 85), “[...] priority to challenge, deconstruction, passionate constructions, interwoven connections, and the hope for change of knowledge systems and perspectives.” This is a research on practices that in fact follows the post-modern agenda: It stresses and works out the multimodality of utterances and self-interpretations of the acting persons, the contingency of social and cultural phenomena, the discursivity of all kinds of individual, social and cultural orders as well as the stage-character of phenomena etc. However, to take over a “partial perspective” also means to in a way free an individual to interpret him-/herself, it means to be aware of the contingency of social and cultural phenomena etc. In terms of the topic of this contribution, gender and the tacit turn in scientific and theoretical pedagogy, my proposal is therefor to in future work on the question how to transform the modern idea of emancipation into a post-modern research on gender as tacit dimensions of pedagogy.

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