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The fast globalizing gendered construction of teacher education: A critical feminist research policy analysis of the contemporary reform movement

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Gendered narratives of teacher education often rely on research studies that examine the living contradictions of practice in a fast globalizing educational reform ensemble. Here, I argue that it is equally important for women in the academy of teacher education to conduct critical feminist research into the gendered construction of teacher education in macro policy landscapes to reveal, challenge, and change the new hegemonic masculinities at play in higher education in contemporary times. In this study, I conduct a critical feminist scrutiny of this macro policy problem, structures, strictures, and cultural symbols that increasingly contain the gendered construction of teacher education in an ecosystem in higher education imbued with patriarchy and elite conservatism. I selected for scrutiny two recent OECD policy texts, concerned with the problem of inclusion and the framing of gendered relations. A critical feminist discourse analysis of the policy documents in relation to the problem of gender justice shows that the gendered construction of teacher education in this fast globalizing reform ensemble fails to trouble a new consciousness for egalitarian gender relations. The study found that constraints and failures can be explained, if not fully, by the privileging of new hegemonic masculinities in the framing of teacher education at the macro policy level. My argument is centered on a reflexive view of teacher education as an academic and ethical study of human development and change that needs to foreground egalitarian gender relations for emancipatory practices that can offer hope and solidarity in transformative ways that can inspire deep learning and deep democracy.

KEYWORDS

teacher education, gender, policy analysis, feminist < theoretical perspectives, critical, democracy, reflexivity

Introduction

While gendered stories and narrative inquiries of teacher education often rely on research concerned with questions positioned in the living contradictions of practice settings, in this study, I argue that it is equally important to critically interrogate the framing of problems in macro policy landscapes. While many teacher educators and researchers decide to work in liminal and threshold spaces, to enhance the discipline of education and to offer a complex, embodied and entangled view of productive pedagogies, they are increasingly swimming in dangerous waters. [Kitts \(2023\)](#), drawing from Freirean philosophy, argues that without paying

attention to the structures and symbols inherent in its methods and modes of colonization and domestication, there is little or no chance of mapping the contours of the macro policy reform ensemble accurately. Without this accurate mapping, there is far less probability of raising the stakes for women in teacher education to secure education as an emancipatory practice requiring equitable and egalitarian gender relations for the common good of humanity and the planet.

In contemporary times, teaching and teacher education are often regarded, in reports from globalizing influencers such as the *World Bank* and the *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD), as a feminized profession of mostly women teachers and teacher educators. This is often stated using deficit discourses that suggest a lack of clarity and coherence (Moreau, 2019, 2020). *Education at a Glance* (OECD, 2021a,b) shows that “on average across OECD countries 70% of teachers are women in all levels of education combined” (398). This strong positioning of women in teacher education has not succeeded in curbing new forms of hegemonic masculinities in higher education and the prevalence of gender-based and symbolic violence in the neoliberal university. Gardiner and Finn (2022) show how hierarchical cultures “resist those women leaders who think and act differently” (p. 1) from masculinist norms and procedures.

Nowadays, feminist researchers work in a new third wave of feminism where there is a real opportunity to interrupt and disrupt this patriarchal stranglehold in the academy of teacher education policy—expressed for the most part in calls for heroic and competitive individualism and institutionalism. In the first wave of feminism, gender was recognized as a social construction of binaries/dualisms that needed to be interrupted and dismantled (first wave). In the second wave of feminism, there was an acceptance that women and girls were being left behind in the wider social world and needed to be given access to far better life chances and opportunities through a redistribution of resources (second wave). In the current third wave of feminism, there is a growing understanding that the policy research task in hand for educational researchers needs to focus on critical scrutiny of the framing and representation of social scientific problems (Fraser, 2010).

In this study, my aim was to reveal how the framing of the problem of the gendered construction of teacher education is being constantly re-shaped by policy influencers at the macro policy level. The policy process in teacher education involves multiple levels and interacting layers of policy enactment, such as the macro level of transnational policy actors (e.g., OECD, World bank, and the Global Education Ministries), the meso level of the nation state (state-mandated policies that find expression in teacher education reforms and regulations), and the micro level of practice settings. While it is not intended to delve deeply into the intricacies of this policy process, it is important to note there are different worldviews. Mainstream policy studies assume a linear rational process of policy implementation, while the reflexive stance in this study suggests that policies are always intelligently and ethically interpreted and contextually enacted in practice within processes that are highly complex, contextualized, embodied, and nuanced.

In this way, policies in teacher education that are concerned with the framing of gender can be defined in the direction of emancipatory, equitable, and egalitarian gender relations, and/or in the direction of reproducing conservative/oppressive and dominant gendered relations of power and privilege. In a short timeline, the problem of

equity in education policy has moved from a former liberal view of “equality of opportunity” for the most deserving, to the contemporary neoliberal framing of gender and intersectionality as about “inclusion” where the teacher is charged with delivering a bespoke product to each individual student in highly contextualized and differentiated ways. In this study, I argue that the framing of gendered relations as “inclusion” while necessary is not sufficient for an emancipatory and transformative view of education.

We live in a utilitarian age, where teaching and teacher professional learning are increasingly geared toward the realization of a SMART (self-regulated, motivated, adaptive, responsible, and technologically competent) student tied to entrepreneurship, scientificity, and a political project of new management (Connell, 1990, 2009, 2021; Lynch, 2007, 2022; Moreau, 2019, 2020). When teacher education is reduced to a project of new management, all that is required of senior leaders, in universities and schools, is to manage reporting lines and calculative systems of self-accountability, with clear divisions of labor and distribution of tasks according to available talent. There is no space or requirement in this political project of new management for dialog, for the discussion of hard questions in relation to gender justice and gendered relations, for securing the messiness of practice, for a pedagogy of struggle for deep learning and deep democracy. There is less concern for educators’ localized autonomous judgments for appropriate risk-taking in preparation for a future of uncertainty (Todd, 2014; Mooney Simmie and Moles 2020).

Drudy (2008) shows how this new reconfiguration of teacher education toward a state center performance management system represents “the masculinisation of teaching as both an activity and an organisational structure” (314) and a move away from the inclusion of the feminine and the necessary flexible, embodied, and entangled pedagogies of struggle for human emancipation and change (Weiler, 1991; Greene, 1997; Fawns, 2022).

If Parker J. Palmer is right, and we teach who we are, then clearly within the constraints of any gender-neutral construct we will fail to bring our wholesome embodied selves to our practices (Palmer, 2017). Today, this disembodied policy impulse is found across all aspects of intersectionality, including the social construction of gender, imbricated within and beyond policy efforts. Whenever a gender-neutral policy is enacted in teacher education, and policy is encased in a new inclusive view of higher education as a closed ecosystem, the danger is that the (re)positioning of women in teacher education goes underground and may simply default to biological determinism.

In contemporary higher education institutions, gender-based violence, sexism, and stereotyping do not stop. Instead, it merely morphs into new normalizing modes of micro-aggression within strict divisions of labor and workload models disproportionately affecting women teacher educators who are allocated highly demanding service work. This frontline care work in education is increasingly undervalued, and not recognized in an organizational culture, seeking survival through constant comparison within a calculus of international research rankings (Clegg, 2008; Butler, 2017; Gardiner and Finn, 2022).

Shulman (1989), who is regarded as one of the founding fathers of the systematic study of teaching was deeply concerned that policy impulses toward raising the standards of the profession might fall into a push toward standardization and a search for coherence that was in danger of damaging the profession and causing education “to lose its soul” (p. 20). It is this loss of soul that is at the heart of this study and

my concern that any gendered construction of teacher education today that assumes the language of the neutral and objective (e.g., policies of gender neutrality) will deny women teacher educators their rightful place in the academy of education and will assure conservative and reproductive relations rather than making explicit the pedagogy of struggle needed for equitable and egalitarian gender relations that carry transformative possibilities (Mooney Simmie, 2023a,b).

I am aware of many tensions and contradictions in moving beyond some grand narrative and, at the same time, needing to scrutinize the gendered construction of teacher education at this macro level of policy influence (OECD, 2021a,b, 2022). This is a challenging critical feminist lens for the study, especially given that feminist studies normally concern themselves with the personal and the particular in contextual settings. Here I assert that scrutinizing the framing of the problem at a macro policy level is equally important. After all, it is the complex interplay between policy levels that reveals the ethical dilemmas, multiple tensions, and cultural complexity embedded in all reform efforts (Mockler and Sachs, 2011). The study makes a case for a complex, expansive, ethical, embodied, and justice view of teacher education (policy), where educators become translators and interpreters in the policy work of enactment rather than as functionaries of a system of externally provided criteria (Mooney Simmie et al., 2019a,b; Mooney Simmie and Moles, 2020; Mooney Simmie, 2021a,b, 2022, 2023a,b; Mooney Simmie and Sheehan, 2022).

In this critical feminist scrutiny, there appear to be vital pieces missing from the contemporary ontological and epistemological puzzle that is teacher education, including a reflexive gaze toward the self (for living an ethical life project) and a critical gaze on the wider world (for the inclusion of the ethical–political). This deficit in intentionality toward the personal and the political in the gendered construction of teacher education gives rise to the key question under scrutiny in relation to interrogating two OECD policy texts in relation to inclusion and diversity. The study uses critical feminist discourse analysis by Lazar (2007) as a theory and a method to scrutinize the multiple ways the academy of teacher education continues to assure new hegemonic masculinities. The power and ideology at play foreground the service-related positioning of the workforce for a majority of women teacher educators, wherein the relations needs of students produce non-recognition, while women teacher educators are constantly working to deliver measurable outcomes for gender-blind performativity. I argue that the identified hegemony re-positions teacher education in higher education as affective labor in a datafied system that disproportionately affects the thriving of women in the academy of teacher education through assumed normative and empirical discourses of gender neutrality, inclusion, and sustainability.

I have structured the chapter as follows. First, I draw on critical feminist perspectives to provide the study with an overarching theoretical framework that serves the twin purposes of (a) letting the reader know my reflexive positioning and (b) acting as a powerful explanatory framework when conducting the critical feminist discourse analysis of two policy texts. Second, I share the methodological approach of critical feminist discourse analysis, how it works to critically scrutinize the framing of the problem, and my justification for the selection of these specific two OECD policy texts (Lazar, 2007; Fraser, 2010). Third, I then use critical feminist discourse analysis as a theory and a method to scrutinize the two OECD policy documents and to interrupt the problem of the gendered construction of teacher education in this fast globalizing reform ensemble in

contemporary times. Finally, I summarize the insights arising from the study and put forward some new critical questions for further research and consideration.

Critical feminist perspectives

Critical and feminist perspectives in the academy of teacher education have done much to widen the framing of teachers' work practices for women and men, while asserting that the personal is political and that egalitarian care relations in teacher education matter and have a rightful place as important public goods (Lynch, 2007, 2022; Lynch and Crean, 2019; Kress et al., 2023; Mooney Simmie, 2023a,b).

Contemporary Freirean philosophers and existentialist philosophers alike, continue to theorize the importance of achieving a new activist imaginary in the gendered politics of teacher education directed toward emancipation and agentic (transformative) possibility rather than a discourse of closure, colonization, and domestication (Biesta, 2002; Brady, 2022; Gardiner and Finn, 2022; Kress et al., 2023). Biesta (2002) reminds us that education aspires to nurture an inner (soul) life as well as learn how to live well in a material and social world. Brady (2022), taking an existentialist perspective, in dialog with Jean Paul Sartre, considers teachers' being and becoming beyond a contemporary technicist view of delivery, strategic thinking, and management. Kress et al.'s (2023) edited collection of Freirean perspectives from critical pedagogues speaks to the deep humanizing, ethical, and care discourse of education and how this discourse is currently eroded through an architecture of knowledge free-floating from the (moral) knower and the danger inherent in the framing of the social foundations of teacher education, in the direction of individualism and institutional dominance.

Warin and Adriany (2017) in their theorization of the gendered construction of *Early Childhood Education* showed how the social construct of gender becomes deeply constrained within assumed conservative gender relations, that mostly work to reproduce the status quo. Their study asserts that gendered relations can be enabled within equitable and egalitarian gender relations. Moreover, they assert that equitable and egalitarian gender relations require teacher educators' acquisition of a new gendered consciousness, including willingness to proactively role model alternative forms of masculinities and femininities, the valuing of a mixed gender workforce, and the enactment of gender flexible pedagogies. Their insights are central to this study and show the importance of continually troubling the gendered construction of teacher education.

Teacher educators' identities and practices are not fixed and stable but are always evolving, contradictory, and crosscut by gender and other intersectionalities (Butler, 2004). However, Hooks, bel, (1994, 2000) asserted that not all women are equal when it comes to social standing and that any universal notion of women quickly unravels given that women experience intersections differently. While this greatly complicates the gendered construction of teacher education at all policy levels, it does not remove the problem of women teacher educators' sub-ordinated positioning in the academy of teacher education (Tronto, 2013; Connell, 2021).

An academy of teacher education is increasingly "blind to the importance of other-centred work arising from our interdependences and dependencies as affective relational beings" (Lynch, 2007, p. 550). The adoption of a neoconservative turn in higher education (re)

frames teacher educators' identities and practices as new data-driven managerial performances with wholesale "erasure of the gendered, classed, and raced nature of the labour of educating" (Moreau, 2019, p. 826). In this way, the policy reform ensemble in teacher education appears to be increasingly informed by gender-blind approaches and deficit essentialist views of women teacher educators. Mockler (2011) warns of the inherent danger in privileging the detached and the technical-rational "over the 'human' in conceiving of teachers' work and identity" (518).

Patriarchy enabled through a project of management

In a comprehensive study of gender over a long timeline, Connell (1990, 2009, 2021) shows how a state-centered system of patriarchy operates in a multiplicity of ways, but especially through reducing every problem to a political project of new management, with rules, roles, responsibilities, reporting lines, and statutory obligations. Connell (1990) showed that patriarchy is deeply embedded in procedures: "it locates sexual politics in the realm of social action, where it belongs, avoiding the speculative reductionism that would explain state action as an emanation of the inner nature of males. Finally, it opens up the question of the state apparatuses" (p. 517).

The system of teacher education is a state apparatus. This means that the state, and increasingly transnational policy actors have a keen interest in the social and economic (re)framing of the individual, teacher, educator, worker, and citizen. Althusser (1971/2014) showed how this preferred model is connected to the immediate needs of the economy and politics. The state apparatuses function in the education system, in two parts that act separately, but more often than not in sync: the ideological state apparatuses (e.g., education, media, religion, culture, and politics) and the repressive state apparatuses (e.g., government, law, police, and prisons). In the last decade, education systems across fast globalizing policy landscapes have seen increasing levels of the juridical rule of law and disciplinary powers (statutory frameworks) imposed on all aspects of teacher education.

Moreover, the emotional labor and the relational care work of teaching are highly problematic, precisely because it is increasingly worth(less) than the time and attention of policymakers taking a conservative gender-neutral positioning (Lynch, 2007). Gardiner and Finn (2022) point to the "difficulties women leaders experience in trying to enact institutional change," within higher education institutions whose "organisational 'ruling relations' are inherently gendered, making the ability to effect organisational change more difficult." They argue that "a neoliberal culture maintains a gendered hierarchy that resists those women leaders who try to enact transformational change" (p. 12). Lynch and Crean (2019) show that care is perceived as cheap "in the patriarchal capitalist calculus..... defined as worthless, part of nature rather than society. This was achieved through the equation of care labor with femininity and womanhood. As women were exploitative things, then by default their caring 'nature' was exploitable" (p. 2).

The task of many women teacher educators then becomes about holding the affective structures of higher education in place, tending disproportionately to the "front of house" relational and service needs of students for which there is non-recognition, while constantly

working to deliver measurable outcomes for gender-blind performativity (Moreau, 2019, 2020). Gardiner and Finn (2022) recognize that leading in a relational manner, in the deep masculinist culture that is higher education, carries more risk and sacrifice than reward, given the embedded misogynistic institutional practices and the individual calculus of performativity involved in progression.

The critical feminist perspectives here make the case for foregrounding egalitarian gender relations in teacher education policies at the macro level in ways that recognize the necessity for pedagogies of struggle that go beyond the contemporary concept of inclusion supporting the status quo and patriarchal relations of conservatism.

Methodology

The research design uses a *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* of two OECD educational policy texts in 2022 and 2021 advocating a new conceptual framework for the problem of inclusion and gender within a complex of intersectional differences, including the social construction of gender, and the playing out of a new audit culture in teacher education (Lazar, 2007; Mockler, 2022). A discourse analysis is concerned with revealing hidden assumptions in the way power and ideology play out in policies. The discursive analysis reveals what is "sayable" and (politically) legitimated, and what is more often "unsayable," forgotten, silenced, and/or suppressed. A critical and feminist lens can, therefore, foreground the gendered construction of teacher education policies and reveals the power and ideology at play in the practices of women teacher educators.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis studies are not simply about textual deconstruction (e.g., studies using thematic content analysis), but are instead more about the material and phenomenological consequences for women and men working in teacher education. The problem here is to scrutinize the teacher education construct of inclusion for often the hidden ways in which it may work to "sustain a patriarchal social order: this is, relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women as a social group" (Lazar, 2007, p. 5).

The discourse analysis works with and against the grain of policy texts to avoid taking an essentialist/dualistic stance while making the case for foregrounding gendered relations in egalitarian ways rather than in re/productive and conservative ways in the politics of teacher education. There are multiple readings that can be taken, and it is important to pay attention to the hidden curriculum and assumptions deeply embedded in teacher education policies. Taking a text apart for a close discursive reading aims to reveal the (political) legitimation for the reform; the hidden assumptions underpinning the text; the evidentiary and accountability claims made and the particular interests served.

The study undertaken here scrutinized how and in what ways the two OECD policy texts at the macro policy level were concerned with framing the gendered construction in (teacher) education. These are timely questions, especially for women in teacher education, given that the social construct of gender is more often framed in conservative, subtle and insidious ways, while "gender relations and identities in representations and interactions are institutionally embedded and framed" (Lazar, 2007, p. 141).

Fast globalizing context

In a fast globalizing world today, there are increasing concerns, on the one hand, with a populist Far Right authoritarianism, and the subsequent slow suffocation of democracy in public life including in teacher education (Mooney Simmie and Moles, 2020; Mooney Simmie, 2021a,b), and on the other hand, with the limits of scientific reason found in the Western project of modernity with its new overemphasis on data analytics (McIntyre, 2021). These are equally interesting times, as new research findings from fields, such as neuroscience and psychology, have begun to reveal the importance of embodied cognition in the education of the whole person (Macrine Sheila and Fugate Jennifer, 2022). Findings provide a rich evidence base to suggest that disembodied and essentialist views of learning can no longer be justified.

While reform policies of inclusion and diversity play out in the politics of teacher education, there is an increasingly pressing need to scrutinize how this intersectional construct is grasped and how such reforms might simply work to reassert the gendered reproduction of sexist stereotypes and dominant tropes rather than interrupting gendered inequalities and allowing new knowledge and the yet-not-thought to emerge (Butler, 2017). Santoro (2017) refers to the suppression of the ethical concerns of women teachers in the United States as Cassandra's madness, the ancient Greek goddess whose warnings were ignored simply because she was a woman.

Within this backdrop, the concept of "inclusion," and the related concept of "sustainability" provide a useful way of reading and (re)reading the selected policy texts from the perspective of the gendered construction of teacher education. I will, therefore, briefly consider these two concepts of "inclusion" and "sustainability."

Well-rehearsed mantra of inclusion

We have seen how gender as a social construction is attempting to change and be framed differently in this early part of the 21st century. The gendered construction offered by essentialism, with its call for scientific reasoning and the linear rational orients gender as a dualistic boy/girl or man/woman issue/thing. All that is needed for inclusion to be assured is for more women to be brought into what were traditionally male-dominated fields from which women were formerly denied access. The solution can be deemed a success, a type of window dressing in a statistical tally showing the increasing number of women working in what was a formerly male-dominated role, e.g., senior leadership in the academy of teacher education. This can be depicted as answering the need for greater equality of opportunity. However, the problem here is not about systemic or cultural symbolic change, neither is it about humanizing the discipline and taking into consideration the necessary pedagogical struggles in teacher education about whose knowledge matters (Giroux, 2013), rather it is about reinforcing the status quo and doing sufficient tweaking to allow some small measure of improved access.

Upstream of equality of access, we now have the concept of inclusion. The need to provide an inclusive learning experience for all students in teacher education is listed as a highly desired outcome (Mooney Simmie, 2022; Mooney Simmie and Sheehan, 2022). It is, therefore, crucial to scrutinize the macro policy landscape in relation to the framing of the gendered construction of teacher education to

widen the problem, and to reveal where the impulse for policy change is coming from and who appears to benefit.

Few would argue against the notion of inclusion in teacher education. However, using the theory and method provided by critical feminist discourse analysis, it is possible to see that the term "inclusion" can be differently framed depending on worldviews/stances. In this discursive analysis, I foregrounded gendered relations while bearing in mind the deeply intersectional nature of education across several domains all at once, such as social class, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, color, (dis)ability, and gender and where lack of material resources and social class can often override other issues (Hooks, 2000).

While structures in universities and the academy of teacher education remain increasingly managerial and hierarchical (the antithesis of democracy), it is hard to see how egalitarian relations of gender can become normalized in preference to stereotypical and flexible conservative relations of gender without interrupting and disrupting taken-for-granted assumptions. Egalitarian relations where affective tasks, including the emotional labor of care and service in teacher education, become equally shared by men and women for a view of society beyond patriarchy and hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 2021). It is recognition of the spaces for authentic dialog, for pedagogies of struggle, and the ethical-political dilemmas inherent in teacher education that will provide the vital signs, and the important first step in the policy framing of teacher education for egalitarian relations of gender for deep learning and deep democracy (Mooney Simmie, 2023a).

Sustainability: What is in a name?

Whatever is happening in the fast globalizing education reform ensemble there can be no denying the increasing "datafication" of higher education institutions, including programs of teacher education. Tan (2014) shows how education policies today, at all levels, are framed with human capital theory as a good enough model of who we are as humans and what we need to do to thrive in a complex and highly competitive world.

The human is positioned as someone who needs to access social, cultural, and economic capital in a systems view of an organization. Few would argue against the notion of working toward a sustainable future given the existential threat to the survival of humanity and the planet. However, what one means by the term "sustainability" in teacher education becomes important for the role of women in teacher education and in a wider social world. Sustainability is often associated in teacher education policy with a moral (apolitical) project of care and compassion for others and for the future of the planet. This meaning making can position sustainability as a way of developing obedient civic-minded and caring persons who will work to adjust individual habits according to the latest scientific evidence but who will neither challenge the bigger questions of social change nor the reproduction of the status quo.

From the perspective of the biological science of ecology, the notion of sustainability speaks to the balancing harmonious energies and synergies found in a healthy system (e.g., institution) between the rate of death of living organisms and the rate of birth. The inherent danger in drawing from this language is the difficulty it represents in the (re)positioning of women in teacher education in a move that can best be described as back to future. When sustainability is understood

in this way, it might simply represent a framing of humanity based on biological determinism and deep gender conservatism.

In contemporary times, we appear to be, indeed, swimming in dangerous waters, and to be at risk of fast globalizing policy measures driving the notion of women in teacher education underground within a gender-neutral language that fails to recognize women in teacher education. *Education at a Glance* (OECD, 2021a,b) showed that “on average across OECD countries 70% of teachers are women in all levels of education combined” (p. 398). We may soon be in danger of driving the vexed issue of gender underground and erasing it entirely from the teacher education policy reform ensemble at the macro policy level.

Rather than confronting the problem of the systemic nature of the gender construction of teacher education policy, organizational change may be superficial rather than meaningful. Gardiner and Finn (2022) argue that higher education institutions and the academy of teacher educators need to tackle a culture of ingrained misogyny, sexism, and broader structural inequalities. However, given many competing demands in higher education, and time-consuming nature of dialogical work that requires serious commitment—in opening what may be seen as awkward questions—many senior leaders may opt instead to simply support teacher education as a project of new management.

Critical feminist discourse analysis of policy texts at the macro level

The critical feminist discourse analysis of two OECD transnational policy texts in relation to inclusion and diversity in education revealed a framing of the problem of intersectionality, including gender as a problem of “equality of opportunity,” closing the “gender gap,” and as a more contextualized problem of “inclusion” (OECD, 2021a,b, 2022).

It was noted that countries, schools, and classrooms were becoming increasingly diverse along multiple dimensions, including gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation (OECD, 2021a,b, p. 5). There was an acknowledgment that individuals and some groups have been traditionally excluded from education and society, and from participation in mainstream political debates, possibly because of gender and other intersectional differences “it is not only a matter of human rights, it has the power to intrinsically transform the way policies are made so that they better reflect diverse societies” that leave no one behind (OECD, 2021a,b, p. 8). The notion of gender was defined as a “personal difference” that needs to be acknowledged and respected (p. 13) and was positioned within the human rights notion of equality and tolerance (OECD, 2021b, 2022).

While the conceptual framework in both policy texts was concerned with mapping and naming the problem, it positioned inclusion and sustainability within a fast globalizing inclusive reform project across interested OECD countries.

The project aimed to achieve this notion of inclusion in the classroom, school, and wider society through what it calls “an ethos of inclusion” (OECD, 2021a,b, p. 14). This was considered to require cultural change and a shared commitment “shifting the focus from the individual to the communal” (p. 14). It was thought that the curriculum needed to contain “references to gender fluidity” (p. 19) and a new focus on “participative pedagogies.” In the broader society, these changes in educational settings would

also be buttressed by human rights agenda and “broad anti-discrimination laws” (p. 19).

The policy ensemble found in both policy texts used a solution-focused approach to achieving tolerance of difference and harmonious co-existence in democratic societies through a new type of citizenship education. A citizenship education that the OECD (2022) argued needed to be broader than a social justice policy imperative, deemed as a former narrow focus on equity. Instead, the policy argued that the definition urgently needed to include a new focus on quality for socioeconomic and financial sustainability: “promoting citizenship education may be key to ensure some of the bases for inclusion, cohesion and sustainability” (OECD, 2022, p. 33).

The two policy texts under scrutiny here, with the conceptual framework provided for gendered relations, inclusion, and sustainability appear progressive and go beyond former notions of improving some equality of access and some tweaking of the existing system. How far beyond this former dualistic and essentialist worldview is questionable? The texts appear to frame the intersectional problem as human rights problem of respect and responsiveness to differences, not only gender and gender identity and sexual orientation, but ethnic and religious diversity, differences in cultural heritage and language, special educational needs, and gifted students. However, taking the explanatory framework arrived at in this study, the critical feminist lens used to scrutinize this problem, the analysis revealed new insights that the gendered construction of teacher education, at the macro policy level of the OECD, framed as inclusion while necessary is not sufficient.

A deficit discourse of gender as “inclusion” without connectivity to the personal and the political may simply lead to more firmly embedding conservative relations of gender-blind performativity. The central piece of the ontological and epistemological puzzle that was missing from both policy texts, showed that the gendered construction of (teacher) education was not aiming to go beyond the status quo of existing patriarchal procedures embedded in a project of new management. This macro policy project was not aiming to open discursive spaces and affordances for something new and possibly better to emerge in relation to gendered relations, to interrupt and disrupt existing discourses, and to develop a reflexive gaze on the personal and a critical gaze on a wider world through pedagogies of struggle. Pedagogies of struggle that recognize ethical dilemmas and multiple contradictions in constantly seeking gender consciousness and gender flexible exemplars. Instead, the framing was limited to closing “long standing gender gaps in educational attainment” (OECD, 2021a,b, p. 18) and improving the diversity of the workforce within a limited view of participation rather than the more urgent task of constantly co-constructing the world together for emancipatory and transformative possibilities.

Discussion

Insights from the critical feminist discourse analysis of two transnational policy texts in relation to the construction of gendered relations as a problem of inclusion reveal a problem with the framing (representation) of the gendered construction of teacher education (OECD, 2021b, 2022). A discourse of conservative gender-neutral relations was in evidence where understandings of gender justice for equity were considered to be outdated and limited. At the same time,

liberal discourses of “equality of access” were in evidence as well as a neoliberal mantra of “inclusion” presented as contextualized support for each individual while failing to trouble the power relations necessary for “gender-justice.” New strict divisions of labor in higher education and teacher education are disaggregating teaching from research (Clegg, 2008), lowering the status of teaching while possibly damaging the profession along the lines considered by Shulman (1989).

The OECD policy texts offer no affordances for any pedagogy of struggle and problem-posing for any aspect of intersectionality in teacher education, including gender. Neither policy text was concerned to move toward more equitable and egalitarian gender relations (OECD, 2021a,b, 2022). New hegemonic masculinities are in play in teacher education through reframing teaching as affective labor within a datafied system of procedures, a project of new management reliant on a new scientificity that speaks to evidence-based policymaking and the elision of the philosophical, the feminine, and the critical (Weiler, 1991; Tronto, 2013; Lynch and Crean, 2019; Rømer, 2019; McIntyre, 2021).

The framing of the gendered construction of teacher education fails to commit to opening a new dialogue with many awkward questions associated with gendered relations in educational policies and practices. At best it appears as a rather botched effort to overcome former dualistic binaries of boy/girl; man/woman while continuing to intentionally or unintentionally deny the corporeal and spirit raising aspects of teacher education as an embodied and gendered practice (Todd, 2014; Gardiner and Finn, 2022).

Evidence-based policymaking gives precedence to the handling of data and masks the vital and necessary problem-posing aspects for teacher educators to constantly critique and/or philosophize about the purposes of human development and change and the most appropriate ways to frame gendered relations in contemporary times (Warin and Adriany, 2017). This supports a normative and empirical consensus that denies the presence of a “hidden curriculum,” the role of the personal and the political, that is, power and intentionality. Moreover, it denies aspects of life that are upstream of the mundane, such as the body and spirit-raising capacity for transcendence, leaving spaces for the open-mindedness of curiosity, the not-yet-thought, and the dynamic nature of knowledge and ways of knowing for human development and change (Todd, 2014; Butler, 2017).

There is an urgent need to heed Shulman’s (1989) warning in relation to how highly desired and corrective policy measures may well act in policy terms to damage the academy of teacher education by denying the necessity for humanizing the discipline through

attention to the dialog, problem-posing, pedagogies of struggle, and a policy commitment to an interplay between theory, research, policy, and experiential practice.

The study reveals that women teacher educators may in near future find themselves subjected to increasing disciplinary powers while working inside a patriarchal system of organizational theory. Women teacher educators may fail to thrive while captured in competitive institutional settings, where they will be expected to forfeit the public interest value of academic freedom, and the care commitment of higher education to deep learning and deep democracy, where conservative gendered relations are normalized and where affective practices are increasingly captured within tighter, harder, and stricter juridical policy measures (Weiler, 1991; Greene, 1997; Butler, 2017).

The study raises specific concerns about the uncritical and assumed goodness associated with working toward a gender-neutral policy of inclusion and sustainability that clearly needs scrutiny, and a new commitment to interrupting the contemporary discourse in the direction of problem-posing transformative possibilities for education (Gardiner and Finn, 2022). It is a hypothesis worthy of further research and consideration.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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