Gender Equity as Policy Paradigm in the Irish Educational Policy Process

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Abstract: The construct of policy paradigm is used to analyse how the proposition that Irish education is a gendered phenomenon has been conceptualized, communicated, reflected in educational policy and acted upon in practice. Intersubjectivity is conceived as a realm of political action in education and the article seeks to excavate it more comprehensively than its usual "glossed" treatment in educational policy analysis through the schematisation of the construct of policy paradigm. The gender equity paradigm is analysed in terms of this schematisation highlighting its construction, dominion, systematisation, response to counter interpretations of gendered education and possibilities for change.

I INTRODUCTION

In this article I describe how the proposition that Irish education is a gendered phenonemon has been conceptualised, communicated, reflected in educational policy and acted upon in practice. It is a case study of the interaction of under-standing and action and of how educational policy is shaped by the meanings that come to be shared by those who influence policy. It is derived from an ongoing research project on the cultural politics of Irish education from the 1950s to the present. In this, intersubjectivity is conceived as a realm of political

action, and cultural phenomena such as language, classifications and theories are treated as resources in the advancement of particular kinds of educational change. Existing references to this realm of the policy process in Irish educational studies "gloss" it as conceptually and procedurally uncomplicated. An essential prerequisite, therefore, was that the cultural dimension in educational policy be theorised to allow for its components to be mapped and disentangled. It was for this purpose that the construct of policy paradigm was developed.

The need to identify and schematise the construct of policy paradigm arose from attempting to analyse the cultural dimension in educational policy making in such substantive areas as the link between education and the economy, religion and equality. In the Irish experience, to speak of cultural issues in educational policy is to be interpreted as referring to the target areas or the content of decision making, be they normative (Irish language and heritage) or aesthetic (the "arts"). Culture considered as intersubjectivity or shared meanings as a factor in educational policy across the full range of educational issues would be acknowledged and it is not uncommon for commentators on educational change to speak of the need for, or existence of, "paradigm shifts" or "conceptual leaps", or of how values and ideologies predispose policy makers to favouring particular lines of educational action. If pressed, there would be an acceptance that cultural products such as symbols, narratives or spectacles can be used as resources in negotiating the policy process. But that is as far as the exploration goes, or indeed can go, due to the conflation of meaning, people and social structure, not to mention their individual components, in existing policy analysis.

The fact that the cultural domain as a site of contestation receives scant attention owes much to the absence of a mapping of its terrain of a kind that is suitable for educational inquiry. Archer (1996, p. 1) rates culture as displaying "the weakest analytical development of any key concept in sociology" and notes the absence of a "ready fund of analytical terms for designating the components of the cultural realm corresponding to those which delineate parts of the structural domain". Unless the shared meanings that feature in directing educational policy along particular lines are capable of being subjected to a conceptual apparatus that facilitates their delineation and makes possible a description of their domain, character and impact then the "glossing" of this dimension of the educational policy process will continue, be it in the form of the agenda setting/"mobilisation of bias" (Schattschneider, 1960) tradition of behavioural political science (Ó Buachalla, 1988) or of the endlessly shifting defensive, and increasingly inaccessible, conceptual armoury of the cultural politics school of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1997; Gore, 1993; McLaren, 1995).

The "glossed" application of culture to education is not unique to Ireland. A recent analysis of an educational lobby group in Canada decried the absence of detailed cultural analysis in the educational policy process in North America

generally and sought to address the deficiency by drawing on frame analysis from social movement theory (Davies, 1999). This is a welcome addition from educational studies to earlier calls to "bring culture back in" as a factor in the study of policy change. Indeed, the application of Goffman's (1974) concept of framing to social movement research was itself instigated by the "glossing" of the role of ideas and sentiments in research on the mobilising practices of social movements (Snow *et al.*, 1986). Yet, recent surveys of this field have concluded that "frame analytical methods remain undeveloped" (Benford, 1997) and remark on "a lack of conceptual precision in defining what we mean by 'framing processes'", pointing out that it has come to mean "any and all cultural dimensions of social movements" (McAdam *et al.*, 1996, p. 6). This is despite the wide use of the term "framing" in social movement research. Furthermore, whatever analytical construct is developed to interpret the cultural dimension of the educational policy process, it will need to accommodate meanings and understandings that are less knowingly tactical in their use or specifically named and codified in their communication than the ideational mobilisation strategies of social movements.

Since the most striking feature to emerge from an analysis of official Irish educational thinking from the 1950s is its insulation from competing/contesting viewpoints, and the associated mechanisms such as those of editing, filtering or excluding discordant meanings through which the orthodoxy of its understandings was maintained, Kuhn's concept of paradigm suggested itself as a suitable starting point. The concept of paradigm was the core construct in his widely influential study of the development of scientific thinking and was conceived of as a regulating and normalising framework of thought incorporating a particular vision of the world, definitions of appropriate research issues, the existence of a community of believers, the regulation of intellectual inquiry, and mechanisms of legitimation and exclusion (Kuhn, 1962). In the event, it contributed less than expected to the development of the construct of policy paradigm: no more than a number of suggestions for exploration, particularly arising from Kuhn's emphasis on the boundary maintenance function of a paradigm, together with a succinct label for the construct. This is reflected in the following working definition of a policy paradigm:

> Policy paradigms are cultural frameworks that govern the policy process. They embody linguistic, epistemic, normative, affiliative and procedural dimensions. They regulate what is to be defined as a meaningful problem, how it is to be thematised and described, what is to be considered worthy as data, who is to be recognised as a legitimate participant, and with what status, and how the policy process is to be enacted, realised and evaluated.

From that point the schematisation of the construct of policy paradigm was experientially grounded. Throughout, the test of the construct's elaboration, in terms of its delineation and description of its components, was the extent to which it served to clarify and refine the description and interpretation of the cultural component in the process of shaping educational policy in real life, political contexts. Far from being a matter of imposing a theoretically-derived set of concepts on data, the schematisation of the construct arose from issues in the cultural politics of Irish education from the 1950s. The process was one of ongoing abrasion between concept and data in which concepts were used to enter and chart newly-identified features of educational reality and were in turn accepted, extended or rejected depending on how adequately they classified, named and explained these dynamics. A consequence of this process of honing the conceptual apparatus in the light of the Irish educational policy process was that concepts and perspectives from the broad family of the social sciences, some with conventional, others with variable meanings, were used with a contextually-specific meaning and function. The result is theoretically eclectic and utilitarian while seeking to avoid the sociological depthlessness to which theoretical pluralism is vulnerable. The ongoing nature of the schematisation also means that it continues to evolve, as is indicated by earlier published versions (O'Sullivan, 1989; 1993) according as further substantive applications suggest the need for additional units or features, refinements or deletions.

Table 1 outlines the current schematisation of the construct of policy paradigm. From this it can be seen that it allows for the description of a policy paradigm along the following dimensions: its epistemic, discursive, social and psychological components; the extent and depth of its dominion; and the nature and character of its experience of change.

The differentiating components of a paradigm are constructs to facilitate the description of a paradigm's features and to allow for their classification and delineation. They are not the substance of a paradigm but rather the tools of

Table 1: *Policy Paradigm: An Analytical Schema*

	Differentiating Components				
Concepts/Language		Themes/Texts/ Performatives/Discourse		Associative Forms Authorities/Identities	
		Dominion			
Framing		Cultural Penetration		Political Penetration	
		Change			
Expansion/ Contraction	Intensification/ Simplification	Systematisation/ Diffusion	Merging/ Factioning	Mutation	Rupture

discrimination. The conceptualisation/language nexus provides a paradigm with the scaffolding for the delineation, classification and labelling of reality and its analysis benefits from a range of theories including those of structuralism and post-structuralism on the relationship between language, thought and reality. Themes are what can be meaningfully spoken of in a communicative encounter and texts their expansion and elaboration through narrative, analysis, imagery and performance. Performatives are proposals for action. The analysis of a paradigm's discourse can usefully draw on a number of traditions from the Greek notion of rhetoric or persuasive communication with its repertoire of figurative speech to Foucault's discourses, understood as expressions of power in the context of specific varieties of knowledge.

Associative forms address the social configurations of the agents who constitute a paradigm's intersubjective community, the extent and nature of their affiliation (e.g., atomised, diffuse, social movement, primary etc.) and allows for a consideration of how they become membershipped to the paradigm. A paradigm's authorities are those within these social configurations who legitimate the meanings of its texts as real and proper and are available to be called upon in their defence or arbitration. Identity recognises the psychological dimension in an individual's engagement of a paradigm and acknowledges that subjectivities can be constituted through paradigmatic membership and indeed experience fracture and fluidity through multiple and shifting membership as well as through paradigmatic change.

The dominion of a paradigm is a function of how weakly or strongly framed are its boundaries (Bernstein, 1971), the nature and range of the cultural phenomena it penetrates and where within the policy making process it is dominant. A doxic paradigm is the ultimate in dominion in that not alone does it penetrate all aspects of life and all agents but there is no awareness of another reality outside of it.

Policy paradigms are always changing even at times when they appear to be static and beyond question. Here the work of Archer (1996) on cultural change was found to resonate theoretically with what emerged practically from the analysis. As a paradigm expands it incorporates a wider range of reality within its remit. A wider realm of ideas, discourse, people are incorporated within its influence. This can take the form of additional themes taking their flavour from the paradigm, previously unconvinced groups sharing its meanings, and gaining a foothold throughout the policy community. Conversely, a contracting paradigm will be seen to concede aspects of ideational, discursive and collective life. Unlike expansion, intensification results in more dense policy paradigms. It refers to a process of "filling in" rather than "filling out". The result is a complex socio-cultural phenomenon, a developed network with interconnections and inter-linkages. This elaboration of a policy paradigm occurs within its components as

well as in the character of the relationship between them. Intensification is produced by a more specialised set of agents than those who fuel the expansion and contraction of a paradigm. Its currency is research findings and theoretical developments. In a reversal of intensification, simplification results in a sparse paradigm. Theories are reduced to assertions, the language becomes sloganised and there is a paucity of legitimation. Where a paradigm experiences continuous expansion and intensification it begins to take on the features of a system. In expanding it will have infused a greater swathe of reality that is meaningful to educational decision making; in intensifying, the interconnections between various features of a paradigm will be articulated and refined. Through these joint processes of "filling out" and "filling in", a paradigm systematises. This can be observed when it begins to exhibit such features as strong framing, protective strategies and reproductive mechanisms. Mutation also involves expansion/contraction of the components of a paradigm. But in this case the change does not take the form of incremental additions or subtractions. The defining characteristic of mutation is the reworking of an element of a paradigm to the extent that it facilitates the emergence of a new paradigm. The emerging paradigm is experienced as an outgrowth from the base paradigm. In merging, paradigms gain through the act of partnership. In a reversal of this process, paradigms may subdivide and form two or more autonomous structures. The rupture of a paradigm signals its demise as a coherent force in the shaping of the policy process. In reality, even in the more explicit and codified domain of science, as Archer (1996) points out, any theory can be saved from patent falsification. Even more so with meaning, diversity and pluralism are more likely than elimination.

It is not the purpose of this schema to posit culture as the master plan from which educational planning and change is directed. As well as internalising culture, people act to maintain or change it and they do so within social structures that are themselves both the product and consequence of agential/cultural dynamics. What prioritising of culture occurs is by way of seeking to identify a cultural dimension to the social and individual facets of educational policy making and to construct a conceptual apparatus for its more precise description and analysis. Culture, in other words, is accorded prominence as a research issue rather than as a social force. The construct of policy paradigm schematised along these lines has been used to analyse a variety of policy issues in Irish education including educational financing, the marketisation of education and the role of the Roman Catholic Church (O'Sullivan 1992, 1992a, 1996, 1999a) as well as the processes of educational reconstruction in Central Europe (O'Sullivan, 1996a, 1998). In this article I treat gender equity as a policy paradigm and analyse its construction, influence and experience of change within the Irish educational policy process.

II GENDER EQUITY AS POLICY PARADIGM

The proposition that the Irish educational system has a "gender problem" is a product of recent decades. Drudy (1991) concluded, in a review of developments in the sociology of education in Ireland between 1966 and 1991, that "the relationship of gender and education was totally absent from published work on both sides of the border in the 1960s and 1970s". My own experience in 1970 of seeking models and sources for the section on sexual inequalities in education as part of an undergraduate course on Education would further suggest that gender had yet to figure in any systematic way in the teaching of sociology or education in Irish third-level institutions at that time. Being thus able to set parameters of time and place to the conceptualisation of Irish education as a gendered phenomenon, it becomes all the more remarkable to record the normality achieved by this conceptualisation within the Irish educational policy process in no more than a decade or two. This analysis of the construction, dominion and dynamics of the gender equity paradigm charts this achievement.

After the theocentric paradigm, which was dominant in official Irish educational policy commentaries up to the 1950s, the gender equity paradigm exemplifies the most comprehensive set of features of a systematised paradigm to be found in recent thought and action in Irish education. These include:

- an unambiguous guiding belief system;
- explicit implications for action over a wide range of phenomena incorporated in the performatives of the discourse;
- integrated into the state apparatus through its structures and discourse;
- instruments for articulating correct practice and guidelines;
- mechanisms for monitoring behaviour and action, and for arbitrating on doubt, dissent, tension or threats be they in the form of individuals, events or counter texts;
- arrangements for its reproduction over time.

This systematisation has been achieved despite a lack of intensification as indicated by its simple uncomplicated beliefs, verities/truths undisturbed by intellectual doubt, unelaborated conceptualisation and an undifferentiating use of language. As with the theocentric paradigm, which was similarly theoretically simple in its infusion of social policy, systematisation was made possible by their achievement of a doxic status. Because of this, comparisons with aspects of religious belief systems will be found to be illuminating and instructive.

The base conceptualisation of the gender equity paradigm is most clearly articulated in the declaration on the elimination of discrimination against women adopted by the general assembly of the United Nations on 7 November, 1967. Not alone did Ireland vote for this declaration but the Report of the Commission

on the Status of Women (1972) appealed to it by way of legitimating its analysis of gender equality and recommendations for action and legislative change, and its provisions in Article 10 on education were later used by the state to monitor Irish progress on gender equality in education (Department of Equality and Law Reform, 1997). The key concept of sameness of treatment (in terms of curriculum, teaching staff, examinations, qualifications, etc.) is the central moral construct in Article 10. Of its eight provisions three do not specifically refer to sameness of treatment, yet it is implied in two of these, one requiring the elimination of stereo-typed concepts of male and female roles and the encouragement of coeducation, the other advocating the reduction of female drop-out rates. Only one provision, relating to access to information on the health and well-being of families including family planning, does not appear to target the disparity of provision between men and women in education.

As the "sameness of treatment" construct entered Irish conceptualisation it immediately mutated to "sameness of experience". This is reflected in the recognition of the need for special treatment in the form of intervention programmes to ensure that female students would collectively experience the same curriculum, have the same aspirations and later experience the same levels and varieties of career, civic, political and cultural success in life as males. Throughout, the norms were those of male subject choice, career aspiration and life-course experience. None of this was made explicit, in line with the non-discordant nature of mutation. Such is the dominance of the "sameness of experience" construct in conceptualising the issue of gender in equality discourse on Irish education that it can be realised by a number of signifiers that otherwise might be expected to have different meanings such as equity, equality, disadvantage and even feminism. These have been repeatedly used over the past two decades in Irish discourse on gender and education in an inter-changeable fashion. This failure of the semantic field surrounding equality and gender to be more differentiated, despite the availability of a varied vocabulary that should have shaped and delineated separate and distinct meanings of gendered education, is a feature of the simplified (as opposed to intensified) nature of the gender equity paradigm. This can be attributed to the predominance of performatives in its texts and the failure of conceptual debate to disturb its unitary meaning of sameness of experience. To avoid any misunderstanding in this article I am using gender equity to more aptly represent the "sameness of experience" construct.

From its introduction to Irish educational ideas in the early 1970s, gender equity has successfully realised a series of themes that have remained remarkably stable over the intervening years. A convenient illumination of this is provided by comparing the educational themes generated by the two commissions on the status of women, the first reporting in 1972, the other in

1993. Despite the more extensive treatment of education and gender equity in the 1993 Report, it contains no thematic additions to the 1972 Report apart from the acknowledgement of reservations about the benefits of coeducation for girls and the related topic of the hidden curriculum. Rather, what has been experienced by the gender equity paradigm is its expansion throughout the educational system. While the 1972 Report contained no more than four recommendations and two suggestions, the 1993 Report, with minimal thematic change, lists 41 recommendations. Substantively, expansion is reflected in the manner in which the implications for practice are outlined in considerable detail, specifying what action needs to be taken in each of the different levels of education — pre-school; primary; post-primary; third-level; adult and second-chance education. It can be seen in the detail provided in the recommendations for interventions designed to achieve gender equity which have implications for classroom interaction, text-books; learning materials; the formal curriculum; the hidden curriculum of practices; attitudes; role models and hierachiaries; parent behaviour; school management and staffing; and teacher formation. Likewise, there are recommendations regarding legislative change, monitoring mechanisms and data collection. What has happened to the gender equity paradigm is that an unchanged principle of sameness of experience has been more rigorously applied to an increasingly wide range of legal, institutional, collective and individual features of education. In its reach and perception of its relevance, the penetration of the gender equity paradigm leaves no facet of educational life untouched, yet its message remains unchanged. In short, the performatives of its text have experienced expansion while its theorisation remains sparse.

The fact that gender equity was to achieve such a high level of systematisation despite a sparse theorisation can be explicated by reference to some features of its dominion in Irish society — its successful achievement of a doxic status for its core tenet, its incorporation within the liberal reformist ideology and strategies of the Irish women's movement and, relatedly, its penetration of the state to the depth of its corporatist structure.

III DOMINION

The concentration in the 1993 Report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women on performatives, on how, when and in which of its dimension, gender equity in education should be advanced, suggests that the principle of gender equity itself had achieved, at least culturally, a general acceptance as a principle that required assent from all but the most disaffected and eccentric. All one finds of a legitimatory discourse is by way of asserting the career benefits for girls in opting for non-traditional subject choices. It is clear that the doxic status

of gender equity had been established in Irish society. What is even more remarkable is that as early as the 1972 Report of the First Commission on the Status of Women, while it does employ a number of legitimatory strategies, they are of a largely non-intrusive nature and suggest that it did not anticipate any noteworthy dissent from its proclaimed principle of gender equity. The explanation of the non-discordant realisation of the principle of gender equity is to be found in the manner in which it was culturally produced through an expansion of an existing normative construct. The report used the universalistic concept of equality of educational opportunity as the stem concept and, in a process that can be likened to grafting, sought to include gender, along with social class and geography, within its semantic remit.

In its first paragraph on education, the report refered to the 1969 statement by the Minister for Education in a booklet for parents (Department of Education, 1969) on the centrality to the state of the social and educational objective of equality of opportunity, and sought its application to gender: "he was not speaking specifically of the equality of educational opportunity between boys and girls but this equality clearly must come within the ambit of the general education objective" (p. 201). It went on to claim that "it is probably true to say that there is, in general, broad agreement that women should have equal status as men, that they should have equal opportunity to develop their intellectual and other capabilities to the fullest extent and that they should be allowed to take their place on an equal footing with men in the economic, social and other aspects of the life of the country". It sought, promptly and without fuss, to normalise this position by going on to assert that the problem is rather "… one of ensuring that this broad agreement is translated into practice" (p. 201). It denied credibility to any counter positions by giving possible objections limited attention: in fact, it acknowledged and sought to counter only one possible objection, the argument that investment in the education of girls, relative to the education of boys, would be largely a wasted investment because of the early termination of their careers by girls on marriage. Indeed, the only feature of the report that suggests that this was a path-breaking, innovative document is its general tone of hesitancy in making recommendations for practice. It is probably because of this that it sought to appeal to the United Nations declaration on the elimination of discrimination against women mentioned earlier and reminded its readers that Ireland had voted for this declaration. It would appear that at that time gender equity was already well on its way to achieving a doxic status, putting it beyond serious contestation and from the point of view of its advocates requiring no further elaboration. An indication of the doxic standing achieved by gender equity is its successful inscription within democracy, the paradigm having no need for the themes of personal conscience or opting-out entitlements that would have prevailed even in the theocentric

paradigm's dominion in education. An acceptance of gender equity became an obligation of democratic life. Such was the success of its inscription within democracy that, at times, it seemed to operate independently of other principles of equal opportunity as a distinct moral construct. Where this occurred, the semantic range of "equality issues" or "equality officers" within educational discourse could be so narrow as to be limited to gender equity. This limited meaning of equity is particularly pronounced in the 1992 Green Paper on Education which individualises social, economic and cultural inequalities in benefiting from education in terms of pupils "at risk", "needing particular care" and having "particular educational needs" (Department of Education, 1992, Chapter 2). This exemplifies semantic raiding, followed by factioning and, periodically, dominance.

This cultural change was taking place within the context of more explicit and public political action seeking to advance the interests of women in Irish society. The dominant ideology and strategy of this activity helps to explain the nature of the dominion of the gender equity paradigm. Commentaries on the emergence of the women's movement in Ireland in the 1970s (Fennell and Arnold, 1987; Mahon, 1995; Connolly, L., 1997; Galligan, 1998) speak of how a disparate set of tactics, agendas, interests, ideologies and personalities quickly gave way to one dominant approach to advancing the cause of women in Irish society. That has been described as liberal reformist or state feminism, its tactic being to turn "… the State into an activist on behalf of feminist goals" (Stetson and Mazur, 1995, p. 1). However paradoxically it may have appeared for feminists to seek to achieve their aims through state sponsorship, it is clear that there were advantages in working co-operatively within state structures (Mahon and Morgan, 1999). The gender equity paradigm exemplifies this. In operating within the state its penetration was all the more effective and deep because of the corporatist structures and activities that were available to it in the form of national agreements between the "social partners", consultative arrangements with the professional bodies within education, and the expanding engagement of interest groups within the policy-making process for education, as well as a centrally-regulated educational system that provided immediate, comprehensive and extended access to the formation of young people through curriculum change, targeted projects, policy initiatives and the orientations of their teachers. When we analyse representative discourse on gender equity in state policy (Programme for Action in Education, 1984; Department of Education, 1992; Programme for a Partnership Government, 1993), among bodies within the central state apparatus (Employment Equality Agency, 1983; Joint Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights, 1984) and throughout the organisations engaged within its corporatist structure (Programme for Competitiveness and Work, 1994; Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland, c. 1994; Joint Managerial Body,

1999) we are presented with a thematisation that is seamless and unified in its realisation of gender equity as a guiding principle for changing a gendered educational system. Along with this unity in cultural meaning and imperatives, the discourse is highly prescriptive in articulating the implications for practice. This consistency and diffusion throughout state activity will appear remarkable only to those who succeed in suspending their engagement with the gender equity paradigm. Once it is perceived as a dimension of the democratic ideal it ceases to be surprising that it should have achieved such a level of political penetration.

During the period of this discourse, non-discursive confirmation from within the state in the form of intervention projects, promotional activities and dissemination exercises became more frequent and public of which the Girls into Technology/FUTURES Project, GEAR (Gender Equity Action Research) and TENET (Teacher Education Network) are no more than recent and high-profile examples (see Department of Equality and Law Reform, 1997). These communicated the meaning of gender equity through performance (Barthes, 1972) and rite (Durkheim, 1976) and in this manner succeeded in reaching a wider audience in education and beyond than would otherwise be accessible to the discursive activity of policy makers, the state and the corporatist sectors. In its penetration of social action it enhanced the normality of gender equity as the only thinkable principle of intervening in a gendered educational system and rendered unremarkable the provision of special treatment for female pupils in the pursuit of sameness of experience.

Gender equity succeeded in achieving this dominion by working through the state and in making liberal reformist demands in line with the dominant approach of the women's movement. It did so without the necessity of theorisation. In fact, in its discourse the theme of gender equity scarcely exists in its own right independently of the performatives in which it is embedded. As with the 1972 Report of the Commission on the Status of Women, the thrust has been to translate an indisputable principle into educational practice. The unquestionable status of gender equity is assumed throughout and any deviation by females from a sameness of aspiration, opportunity and attainment to that of males is responded to in a fashion that mirrors the treatment of deviations from other doxic positions: agency is only acknowledged in conformity. Indeed, in a manner reflective of the religious construct of an informed conscience, the 1993 report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women recommended positive intervention measures "… in order to overcome the cultural bias which militates against women making an informed choice" in relation to the take up of non-traditional courses of study at third level (p. 281).

Because of this, the principle of gender equity did not require isolation and naming, much less defending. Having achieved the taken-for-granted status of

doxa, and penetrated all levels of state activity as it relates to educational policy and practice, legitimation would have been assumed to be superfluous. In the absence of public dissent there was no need for the gender equity paradigm to reposition itself theoretically through a process of reconceptualising, differentiating and clarifying in a manner that would have advanced its intensification.

IV SYSTEMATISATION

As the gender equity paradigm expanded it infused educational policy and practice at all levels and in all its aspects and, albeit sparsely theorised, it went on to assume many of the features of a system. These included monitoring mechanisms, dissemination exercises, and differentiated roles for the tasks of representation, advocacy, legitimation and membershipping; in fact many of the features of what Foucault (1980) refers to as "regimes of truth".

In seeking to translate its policy intentions into practice, monitoring and reporting procedures were extensively used. Even more important than their incidence was the form they took. A number of mechanisms operated. Bodies were established to report on progress in the implementation of recommendations, government departments were invited to give details of what action had been taken in relation to specific proposals and the state itself reported on progress to international bodies such as the UN on the extent to which the provisions of inter-governmental agreements were being realised. The discursive character of the different mechanisms was similar: the recommendation/provision was listed without comment or elaboration and the reported action that had been taken in relation to its realisation was then described. These could be extensive with supportive descriptive, statistical and evaluative detail as in reports to inter-governmental organisations such as the EU or UN (Department of Equality and Law Reform, 1997) or more cryptic and dutiful when the audience was local (Women's Representative Committee, 1976; 1978). Be the reports extensive or cryptic, these monitoring mechanisms sought to assess the implementation of recommendations, not to question their underlying rationale. Their target was the orthodoxy of behaviour, not the orthodoxy itself which was further enhanced through remaining unquestioned.

A feature of these monitoring arrangements was their "normalisation" of gender intervention in education as indicated by the setting of standards and criteria for appropriate practice in the form of targets and quotas. Working from the ideal of sameness of experience as proper practice, the intermediate phases in the realisation of the norm were calibrated and operationalised. In this manner a new set of behaviours and practices were isolated and named, and submitted to standardisation, measurement and surveillance (Foucault, 1991).

In the appropriate social contexts, usually characterised by educational policy-

making activities and normative teacher professionalism, engagement with the gender equity paradigm was mandatory as proof of one's entitlement to participate. This is likely to have cultivated a public orthodoxy that disguised ambivalence and non-alignment with gender equity as well as more radical feminist interpretations. The doxic status of gender equity served to relegate any dissenting understandings to the limbo world of hidden, furtive, shameful and discrediting thought. Through a process of self-regulation as much as social control its effect was to maintain cultural silences alongside individual voice. Accordingly, it is rare to find disengagement from the gender equity paradigm in professional and policy-making contexts. Where there are attempts to modify or theorise its features they incorporate strategies designed to evade a disruption of communication and cultural exclusion. Examples include seeking to neutralise the attribution of idiosyncrasy, in an early questioning of the use of male norms of behaviour, choice and success in the gender equity paradigm (O'Sullivan, 1984a), and claiming nodal points of common meaning (Public Policy Institute of Ireland, 1993).

Beyond the sites of policy making, questioning and dissent among teachers was more public and explicit, even in equal opportunities projects (Drudy *et al.*, 1991). Interventions designed to more comprehensively membership teachers to the gender equity paradigm were top-down and high-control. They exemplify what has been described as "teacher-proofing" educational practice — seeking to determine the character of schooling independently of teacher agency. Gender equity was made an obligatory topic on all approved summer courses for primary teachers resulting in gender equity modules on such courses as horticulture and first aid. The content, methodology and resource material of these modules were prescribed by the Department of Education (Department of Equality and Law Reform, 1997). The presenters of these modules — the teacher/trainers — were provided with specific directions on how to respond to itemised objections and alternative understandings of gender and education (Department of Education, 1996). These features are reflective of the legalism, prescriptiveness and low-trust membershipping practices within education and beyond of Roman Catholicism until recent decades (Inglis, 1998; Kenny, 1997).

A consequence of these mechanisms for monitoring and membershipping was the creation of a number of roles with responsibilities for promoting gender equity within education. These included equality officers, teacher/trainers, school inspectors, education officers and project leaders and workers. At the very least, their subjectivities will not have remained unaffected by the texts they contributed to by way of discourse or performance. This in turn will have been confirmed by the public nature of these activities within the profession and by the membership checks that operate in the process of career advancement to the extent that they will inform their personal sense of identity. Nonetheless, as

I shall argue later, a fluidity in the subjectivities and paradigm membership of these role incumbents is one of the more likely sites of change within the gender equity paradigm. Among these roles, those accorded the status of intellectual deserve special attention. This is because of their capacity to speak with authority on the truthfulness and validity of the paradigm's meanings. Yet, those best positioned to successfully challenge the gender equity paradigm, be it by way of questioning the existence of gendered education or in the form of more radical feminist critique, are intellectuals who can claim legitimacy for other under-standings of how the construct of gender might be used to interrogate and change educational practice. The nature of knowledge production and legitimation on gender and education by intellectuals is therefore critical.

However, if we examine the research activity of independent academics and researchers on gender and education it is found that the major projects have been commissioned from within the state and its corporatist structure. This is the case with the path-breaking studies from the Economic and Social Research Institute on gender and subject choice (Hannan *et al.*, 1983) and coeducation (Hannan *et al.*, 1996) and with widely-quoted studies on gender differences in promotional patterns within primary teaching (Kellaghan *et al.*, 1985) and gender issues in primary education (Lewis and Kellaghan, 1993) by the Educational Research Centre. The effect of this pattern of knowledge production is that the major research studies on gender issues in education from the two independent social and educational research institutions in the country operated within the gender equity paradigm. Relatedly, in this process the gender equity paradigm acquired for itself paradigm intellectuals whose activity strongly determined the extent of its intensification and who functioned as agents of legitimation and arbitration. In fact, one of these studies *Coeducation and Gender Equality* (Hannan *et al.*, 1996) was itself a response to a threat to the doxic status of one of the beliefs of the gender equity paradigm, the superiority of coeducation over single-sex schooling as a form of educational experience for young people. This had come to a head with the dissemination of the findings of Hanafin's 1992 study of sixteen schools in the Limerick region which found that girls' examination performance was significantly better in single-sex than in co-education schools. Since changes in the truth claims and truth-determining criteria of the gender equity paradigm in relation to coeducation contribute to the only example of paradigm intensification that I can identify, it is instructive to trace this facet (albeit one of many) of the coeducation text.

The relationship between the belief in coeducation and *Coeducation and Gender Equality* can be likened to the relationship found where theology and science are successfully fused. The latter is recognised as arbitrating on the "facts" of the situation through the use of "state of the art" statistical techniques which in turn are integrated into belief structures that are not themselves

subjected, or considered susceptible, to such empirical arbitration or consideration. Different truth-determining criteria are at work here which must be understood in terms of shifts in the truth claims of the gender equity paradigm's text on coeducation. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights (1984) had asserted the superiority of coeducation on the basis of what "parents" and "responsible groups" as distinct from the Department of Education "know" and advocated that all new schools be coeducational. According as international reservations about the benefits of coeducation for girls had to be acknowledged a retrenched position took the form of an assumption, usually unstated, that coeducation was the most appropriate basis from which to develop gender equity, particularly in its implications for the life course of women. *Coeducation and Gender Equality* assumed that coeducation would increasingly be the norm according as schools amalgamated because of falling numbers. It did not seek to use its findings to arbitrate on the unequivocal populist legitimation of coeducation or, in its more diluted version, that coeducation represented the most appropriate starting point from which to advance gender equity. The study did not over-step the role allocated to it by the state to use empirical research, not to arbitrate on the relative merits of different forms of school organisation, but to identify how coeducation (but not single-sex schooling) might more effectively advance the achievement of gender equity. As with all research, *Coeducation and Gender Equality* is open to appropriation by diverse texts on coeducation and, to distinguish between authorial intent and discursive formation (Popkewitz, 1998), one cannot predict what texts it will contribute to in the future. At present it has facilitated a modification of the legitimatory apparatus supporting coeducation within the gender equity paradigm's text on coeducation in which populism in a number of versions has been replaced by facticity derived from demographic and economic determinism, it no longer being a matter of what people *know* about coeducation but rather what *is* or inevitably *will be* due to social and economic forces. As with the successful fusion of theology and science, the truth-determining criteria of faith/revelation are deemed to be distinctive from those of science and are agreed to address different kinds of questions: in producing the text on coeducation, "scientific" research is expected to resolve issues within the boundaries of possibility set by inexorable forces.

Systematised paradigms would normally be expected to embody many such examples of intensification as they counter oppositional or threatening interpretations of reality. However, as long as a paradigm can maintain its doxic status it is not obliged to engage in defensive theorisation of its position. This, of course, can change according as competing sites of knowledge creation gain legitimacy.

V COPING WITH COUNTER TEXTS

The establishment of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes on gender and women's studies and associated research centres, as well as the activity of avowed feminist intellectuals, testifies to the availability of themes and texts that interpret the operation of a gendered society in terms other than gender equity. Critiques of the human subject; knowledge; language; interpretations of justice; and prescriptions for educational and social action; routine in feminist discourse, represent a reservoir of sources of comprehensive paradigmatic change. A number of applications of feminist perspectives to educational practice in Ireland represent an incipient textualisation in this regard. Feminist pedagogy and interpretations of adult and community education have questioned the individualist purpose of educational activity, the role of teacher/lecturer/facilitator as expert, definitions of worthwhile knowledge and the narrow range of the self acknowledged and made salient within the learning encounter, the absence of collective affiliation and the appropriateness of the assessment requirements of existing institutions for responding to personal knowledge (Fagan, 1991; Byrne, *et al.*, 1996; Connolly, B., 1997). An analysis of gender discourse among a group of girls in coeducational schools which adopted a feminist post-structuralist position disputed the assumptions of sex-role socialisation and internalisation that are a feature of gender equity and sought to centre analysis and action on the construction of gender in social relations (Ryan, 1997). The survival of the gender equity paradigm alongside these alternative, often competing and potentially disruptive, texts may be partly explained by their failure to construct a public cultural existence for themselves of a kind that would realise meanings beyond the realms of private voice, circumscribed membership and catacombed worlds of sealed discursive communities. It must be also noted that many of these texts' prescriptions for practice — their performatives — can be accommodated within features of educational practice, such as holistic, dialogical and activity-based forms of learning, multiple intelligence theory and authentic assesment, that are not explicitly feminist. The contributors to this counter-textualisation recognise their exclusion and isolation. They remark on the persisting difficulty of bringing together the theoretical exploration of feminist researchers in the academy and the practical understandings of teachers (Ní Chárthaigh, 1998) and on how those who draw on assumptions other than gender equity such as feminist post-structuralism are most often left to do their own development on an individual basis because of the absence of teacher development programmes that draw on these texts (Ryan, 1997).

Yet, these feminists may well be underestimating the extent to which they are extending the interpretation of a gendered education particularly among

those in policy, representational and membershipping roles within the gender equity paradigm. Because of its dominion, participation in the discourse of gender equity is obligatory for those who wish to participate in the policy-making process including those who are cognitively aware of, receptive to or actively engaged with alternative interpretations of a gendered society. In such a context, multiple membership and fluid subjectivities cannot be avoided. For some this may be regarded tactically as incrementalist in the pursuit of a more sophisticated and radical feminist vision (Ryan, 1997). Others will experience ambivalence. For many it is likely to be hidden or unknown. However slight, the consequence is an easing of the gender equity paradigm's framing of its membership, conceptualisation and themes. While, immediately, this involves minimal modification to the gender equity paradigm, together with some related features of its response to other counter-texts to be considered later, it does open up possibilities for more substantial change.

In the absence of an anti-feminist text that would seek to deny the existence of female inequality in education or indeed the phenomenon of a gendered educational system, the theme of male underachievement represents the greatest threat to the very foundational conceptualisations of the gender equity paradigm. The fact that males record lower levels of educational performance than females, be it measured as length of schooling or overall examination achievement, has been frequently noted in discourse on gender and education. Yet, as O'Connor (1998, pp. 166-167) has pointed out, the failure to identify male underachievement as an educational problem requiring explanation "… is in stark contrast to attempts to explain class differences in attainment". Rather, the discourse on gender differences in educational performance realises the theme of the failure of women to capitalise on their educational performance in their subsequent careers and not that of male disadvantage. Not surprisingly, therefore, the theory of the "feminised primary school", which argued that gender differences in achievement were due to a largely female teaching profession maintaining a female ethos that was unsympathetic to male physicality, motoric activity and expressive style never achieved a cultural existence in Ireland (O'Sullivan, 1984).

Another mechanism for coping with male underachievement that does not go as far as cultural exclusion is to thematise it as a more specific problem of male underachievement in languages. This allows its non-problematising, in contrast to concerns about female underachievement in some of the science and mathematical subjects, to be explained as an example of the low status of linguistic as opposed to scientific domains of knowledge in a patriarchal society (Lynch and Morgan, 1995). At present, male underachievement in Irish schools is beginning to be conceptualised as social and skill deficit, thematised as unemployability and textualised in terms of the human capital needs of a growing, high-tech economy (IBEC, 1999). This is in contrast to England where

a pattern of early school leaving and lower examination results among males has been conceptualised as social pathology and thematised and progressively textualised as the construction of "laddish", feckless masculinities (Epstein *et al.*, 1998). In neither instance of cultural production is male educational underachievement, relative to that of females, conceptualised as injustice, much less achieving a thematisation/textualisation in terms of rights. A rare attempt at such a thematisation at the "Gender Equality for 2000 and Beyond" international conference held in Dublin in 1996 was resisted on the basis that "in spite of their educational underachievement, men still hold power and wealth and we cannot assume that the consequences of educational behaviour are the same for boys and for girls" (Ní Chárthaigh, 1998). This is an example of how a potential threat to a paradigm can not merely be negated but turned to advantage through its appropriation as a resource by means of its reinterpretation within the paradigm's conceptualisation and language.

If male underachievement threatened to disrupt the dominance of the theme of female inequality in discourse on gendered education, then the conceptualisation of the school curriculum as a gendered construct had a radicalising potential to introduce themes relating to knowledge and power that were routinely left unrealised by the gender equity paradigm. Within the gender equity paradigm the problem of the curriculum has been thematised in terms of role models, realising issues such as the representation of males and females and the visibility of women in materials and syllabi relating to science, history, art and literature etc. There has been a consistent and on-going textualisation of this in both academic and policy discourse (Department of Education, 1984; McGowan, 1990) since gender inequality in education was first made an issue by the women's movement in the 1970s. In this form it has been faithful to the principle of sameness of experience. It was prescribed that male and female characters should be equally visible in texts and teaching materials, that the roles they occupied should encompass a similar range of functions, skills, competencies and personality traits, and should be seen to be similarly contributing to human achievement. The epistemological critique of school knowledge, however equal its manifestation in the curriculum in terms of gender patterns of role allocation and visibility, more fundamentally argues that the knowledge selected for inclusion is itself a patriarchal construction. In this regard, Cullen's (1987) textualisation of the patriarchal curriculum was a unique cultural intervention in the Irish understanding of gender and education. Cullen argued that sexism in education cannot be said to derive solely from the sexist attitudes brought to it by students, teachers, parents and society at large and criticised the equality strategies which are based on this assumption. She was concerned with the implication that "… the actual knowledge taught and learned transcends sex and gender and is equally 'female' and 'male'". This she argued is clearly not

the case since the actual subject matter studied reflects the body of knowledge and theory passed on as part of our western intellectual inheritance which itself is "… for the most part based on the male experience and constructed within the framework of the patriarchal paradigm in human society". In this the male is seen as "… the human norm and as the active agent in the activities which they rank as the highest human achievements, intellectual and artistic creativity, political, economic and social leadership and dominance". Taking mainstream history as an example, she noted that successful feminist deconstruction "… would involve more than a simple process of adding on new information to the existing body. Major readjustments and reassessment of current judgements, rankings and periodisation will certainly follow".

Similarly discordant with the gender equity paradigm was Ó Conaill's (1991) analysis, in a paper presented at the 1990 Educational Studies Association of Ireland Annual Conference, of the issue of girls' participation and achievement in science and technology subjects. Ó Conaill distinguished between "girl friendly" and "feminine" science interventions on the one hand and "feminist' science on the other. Girl friendly/feminine science advocates teaching the existing scientific concepts and processes but using materials and examples and with a teaching style and classroom ethos designed to counteract its masculine image and make it more appealing to girls. Feminist science, he pointed out, in contrast, is not content "to dally with the style of presentation or context of the knowledge". It questions the epistemological nature of science itself, "its view of the nature of objectivity, what constitutes evidence and the views it has of the status of scientific knowledge". Ó Conaill specifically identified the opposition he was seeking to discredit and undermine in terms of its impact on educational policy: "equal opportunity is a polite approach to gender inequality, it assuages the conscience of policy makers and inhibits the development of worthwhile counter-sexist initiatives." While this is contributing to the same text as Cullen, Ó Conaill adopted a neo-marxist perspective as his macro-theory and placed patriarchal relations in that context in interpreting women's educational experience. He also adopted an anti-essentialist position on the category of women in society and sought to legitimate this understanding by reference to contemporary sociological writing in the radical and feminist traditions.

While the patriarchal curriculum is thematised in the major textbooks on education and society in Ireland, it is accorded no textualisation even on the scale attempted by Cullen and Ó Conaill. In fact, in this regard Cullen's exclusion from the intellectual discourse on gender and education invites study as a feature of "the politics of footnoting" (Bensman, 1988). Lynch and Morgan (1995, p. 544) raised the theme as follows: "achieving equality between the sexes in the curricular sphere is not merely a matter of getting women into science and technology, but of questioning the nature of the curriculum itself". Similarly, Drudy

and Lynch (1993, p. 196) observed that "the problem (of female take up rates in Mathematics, Science and Technology) is not simply with women but with the way these fields of knowledge have developed in almost exclusively male hands". But, in both of these instances the patriarchal curriculum is used to explain the alienation and detachment of girls from the more mathematical, scientific and technological subject areas, thus subsuming it within the theme of equity in subject choice. However, the discourse is macaronic in that it can be said to realise two texts. One representation remains within the gender equity paradigm and conceptualises the problem, as the Employment Equality Agency (1983) did, as capable of being resolved by making course material more interesting and relevant to girls, in effect arguing for "girl friendly/feminine science" in Ó Conaill's categorisation. This would require no more than the additions and adjustments that Cullen deems to be inadequate. Yet the epistemological critique is also beginning to be textualised in references to "… the intrinsic nature of the knowledge and modes of thinking within the disciplines themselves" (Drudy and Lynch, 1993, p. 196) and in a comment on the curriculum in general: "the focus on stereotyped images and texts is only a tiny part of a much bigger problem. If the content of what is taught is patriarchal and class biased then having non-sexist images is a small part of the solution" (Drudy and Lynch, 1993, p. 182). Macaronic discourse of this nature allows for the patriarchal curriculum to be constituted both as an impediment to female engagement and empathy and as a representation of partial culture and knowledge. The former can be accommodated within the gender equity paradigm by extending the sameness of experience principle to the domain of school knowledge and seeking to correct whatever epistemological impediments that are found to be experienced by male and female students in subject choice and attainment. The latter supersedes the gender equity paradigm by questioning the nature of western civilisation itself — seeing it, to paraphrase Rich (1979), as masculine subjectivity mas-querading as objectivity — independently of how current pupils might react to or experience its manifestations in the shape of school knowledge. Macaronic discourse thus facilitates dual membership and non-dissonant engagement with both gender equity and more radical feminist interpretations of education. Without textualisation, the thematisation of the patriarchal curriculum both in the academic and policy context of knowledge production may serve to immunise the gender equity paradigm against its more disruptive potential. However, once a theme has gained a cultural foothold, in this instance focused around a substantive topic such as the curriculum, its development as a text becomes a more manageable intellectual and pedagogical exercise.

While the penetration of these counter-texts, with their alternative under-standings of what is entailed in gendered education and what will be required to change it, is slight, they nonetheless reveal a number of possibilities for change

within the gender equity paradigm. These centre around the easing of the gender equity paradigm's framing of its membership, conceptualisation and themes. As with the infiltration of such texts as feminist pedagogy and feminist post-structuralism through tactical engagement, multiple paradigm membership and ambivalent subjectivities, macaronic discourse renders legitimate new ways of speaking about gendered education, provides access to authorities from within these counter texts and helps to create nodal points of contact with other visions of how gendered education might be understood and countered. The likelihood of these possibilities for change being realised will now be considered.

VI POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGE

If the impact of radical feminist understandings of what challenging a gendered educational system entails has been to relax the gender equity paradigm's designation of who its members are and what can be meaningfully said by them, what of change from within the educational system itself and how, specifically, might it avail of the nodal points of change established by feminist scholarship? Gender equity is one of a number of policy paradigms at the intersection of life chances, education and morality. The most clearly framed of these are, like gender equity, universalistic in principle such as egalitarianism and christian communitarianism, and identity-based such as ethnicity (O'Sullivan, 1999). The fact that all of these contest the same moral terrain, appealing to principles of emancipation, justice, equality and fairness etc. in their advocacy of educational change, suggests the possibility of some degree of interpenetration, if not coalition at least the establishment of nodal points of mutual influence/borrowing such as language, roles/identities, performatives, legitimatory discourse etc. The nature of state discourse on equality and education, however, is not conducive to interpenetration of this nature. Official state policy on educational disadvantage has for some time aspired to an integration of approaches and prescriptions with a menu of interventions that includes early compensatory education; targeted resourcing; curricular change; prevention and rescue programmes; quotas; adult re-entry; and co-ordinated social and economic development at area level. While this has the merit of seeking a comprehensive response and coordinated use of resources, its limitation arises from the diverse explanatory texts on differences in educational achievement, such as those of constitutional limitation, personal and cultural deficit, culturally-irrelevant schooling, material condition, political economy and patriarchy, which it seeks to merge. The result is that state policy can be likened to a cultural pastiche, a configuration of knowledge and action that can scarcely be regarded as a policy paradigm so weakly framed are its boundaries. It exists as a set of textual traces that achieves a coherence only through avoidance of the contra-

dictions of the originating texts. These can differ in their understanding of what it is to be disadvantaged in education, how it originates and what the possibilities are for intervention. Material conditions, culture, social structure and individual action are credited with varying powers of social formation and change. The role of schooling ranges over enslaver, redeemer and benign mediator. Educational personnel are cast as concerned professionals, cultural dupes or collaborating activists. Human nature is variously viewed as rigid or pliable. They differ in the cultural parameters of self-realisation and in what constitutes worthwhile knowledge. Visions of an ideal society include feminism, egalitarianism, equal opportunity in an unequal society and socio-economic allocation based on a matching of personal constitution to occupational role. With such a genealogy of contestation, communication and shared meanings are made possible only through structured avoidance and depoliticisation. In such discourse, technical problems such as those of identification, measurement, evaluation and monitoring predominate.

Egalitarianism, which seeks to excavate the moral issues around the purpose of educational intervention and force explicit confrontation between the positions thus revealed, is the most ambitious in its aspiration to become the master paradigm capable of subsuming all the others (Lynch, 1994). While its core tenet of equality of condition has experienced cultural exclusion from the state policy-making apparatus (National Economic and Social Forum, 1996), it nonetheless has the capacity to establish further nodal points of influence, relating to conceptualisation, language, themes and roles/identities, with the gender equity paradigm. This opens up the possibility of shifts in such aspects of the gender equity paradigm as the dualism of its male/female construct, the semantic unity of the language of its objectives, and its expansion and intensification in accommodating moral themes and more varied objectives. Already, in relation to its unitary and dualistic conceptualisations, we find the rapporteur of the 1996 conference "Gender Equality for 2000 and Beyond" proposing a more complex and fluid classification of people (Ní Chárthaigh, 1998) and working-class feminist activists calling for dialogue on the intersection of class and gender identities in intellectual inquiry and political action (Dorgan and McDonnell, 1997). In distinguishing between equality objectives — equality of formal rights, opportunities and access, equality of participation, equality of outcome and equality of condition — egalitarianism is capable of facilitating a more differentiating use of language within the gender equity paradigm. Indeed, given the success of feminist action on language and its use, it is remarkable that the existing linguistic resources of the gender equity paradigm have not been deployed more as a resource in its critique by those who would wish to force it to discriminate within the semantic field of its objectives.

The establishment of these nodal points and the nature and degree of

expansion and intensification they facilitate will depend crucially on those who occupy key roles of advocacy, socialisation, membershipping, monitoring and representation within the gender equity paradigm. These have the capacity to instigate change from within depending on how successful they are in drawing out the implications for schooling and teaching arising from the incorporation of texts other than gender equity such as those of post-structuralism, the epistemological critique of the curriculum and more radical feminist visions for social change. Much will depend on the accommodation reached between their identity as gender equity activists and aspects of their own subjectivities already aligned with these interpretations and understandings, as reflected in their engagement with macaronic discourse and their experience of fluid or multiple paradigm membership. But there are also challenges for feminist intellectuals and none more so than in the need to textualise the feminist critique of school knowledge. Feminists who view these possibilities for change in tactical terms will no doubt recognise the dangers. Stressing difference can "cellularise" women, dissipate the identity-base of feminism, retard mobilisation and "balkanise" feminist politics, while macaronic discourse/fluid and multiple paradigm membership can become a permanent career position straddling domestication and redemption rather than a site of change. These need to be seen in the context of on-going debates on the competing claims of the ideals of assimilation and diversity, universalism and identity and the different interpretations of democratic life they demand (Young, 1990).

The intensification of the gender equity paradigm is one possible consequence of this blurring of its boundaries. Ambivalent identities, fluid subjectivities and multiple membershipping supply the dynamics for theoretical activity since the greater variety of concepts and themes that a paradigm is required to accommodate, the more elaborate will its understanding of a gendered education need to be. The mutation of its doxic status into an orthodoxy that increasingly demands legitimation can be expected. Seemingly ironic, it will be to its advantage that this will involve it validating its position in the light of counter texts that it has introduced itself.

In the meantime, the gender equity paradigm continues to enjoy dominion throughout the policy making process and, within its own limits, must be regarded as exceptionally successful in its shaping of educational policy and practice.

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