**Abstract**

This study presents an interpretive analysis of teacher training programs from a gendered perspective. I examined training programs based on the official websites of six teacher training institutions, and held interviews with 15 employees at four institutions. The study addresses a number of questions: What are the social and gender characteristics of the field of teacher training? How do teacher training professionals justify and explain the absence of gender as a topic in their training curriculum? What are the challenges and courses of action for promoters of the gender issue who are working against the current?

The first chapter characterizes the fields of teaching and teacher training as both disadvantaged and highly gendered. In the face of the teaching crisis and the gendered nature of the teaching sector, teacher training institutions are attempting to market the teaching profession and present it as an attractive one. These institutions employ a liberal discourse that guarantees self-realization, contribution to society, and job security, while disguising the conservatism, low position, and lack of prestige that characterize the professions of teaching and teacher training. Moreover, the study reveals the blurring and concealment of the gendered nature of teaching and teacher training in the institutions’ pages, as well as the alienating discourse directed at the majority of women working in these fields. The institutions’ pages describe the contribution of teaching and its impact on society in general. At times they indicate democratic values and the adaptation of the training to suit trainees with different ethnic and religious identities, as well as to students with different characteristics. On the other hand, they make no mention of gender content, gender differences among teacher trainees and students, or an agenda promoting gender equality. Although the field is characterized by a clear female majority and the profession is seen as feminine, both are presented as devoid of female or gender characteristics and interests. The disconnection from women, femininity, women’s needs and interests, blurs the funneling of a particular demographic group (based on class and gender) into the profession. The study insists that this practice stems from the conservative and disadvantaged status of teacher training institutions. Moreover, this separation is a practice that enables institutions to market training as attractive to all, by erasing the relationship between the teaching crisis and the gendered nature of the teaching sector, all the while alienating the identity and interests of teaching and training employees and renouncing responsibility for reproducing gender-based power relations through teaching.

The second chapter deciphers the central discourse used by teacher trainers and identifies their main justifications for the exclusion of a gender lens from the training. The study reveals the gap between abstract attitudes that support gender equality (which characterized all of the interviewees) and the failure to take responsibility for promoting actual change in teacher training. Furthermore, the study identifies a phenomenon I have called “conservative consciousness”: The fundamental recognition, stated good intent, and the few expressions of the gender lens are perceived as sufficient in themselves, whereas in fact, they preserve the exclusion of the issue from the curriculum or its relegation to the margins. The exclusion of the gender perspective relies on four major justifications: liberal viewpoints, conservative viewpoints, fear of confrontation with the teacher trainees, and the assessment that gender inequality is a problem of low importance. These barriers reveal the boundaries of hegemony in teacher training and make it clear how gender equality promotion is still considered nebulous, provocative and dangerous.

Chapter Three shows that teacher trainers working against the mainstream justify their work by addressing the target audiences who will benefit from assimilating the gender perspective: students, teacher trainees, and society as a whole. The perceptions that motivate them to promote gender change are based on a number of feminist approaches - liberal, cultural, radical feminism, postmodern feminism and multicultural feminism. Subsequently, their commitment to promoting the issue is linked to a commitment to other social issues. In addition, according to these interviewees, raising the gender awareness of the teacher trainees equips them with a world of concepts, perceptions and sensitivities to inequalities that make it easier to analyze additional arenas of inequality.

Chapter Four reveals the difficulties and possibilities that characterize the work of internalizing the gendered perspective within a conservative field. Those who try to assimilate the gendered lens are trapped within the “paradox of internal change”: On the one hand, in order to change existing teacher training, practitioners must work within existing institutions, oppose discriminatory concepts and practices, and promote alternative ones. On the other hand, in order to work in the training institutions, these practitioners must adapt to existing procedures and norms. Their work is characterized by a constant tension between compromise and struggle, as well as by negotiating with themselves, with the trainees and with the institutions’ administrations about the place given to the gendered perspective on teaching. Their work entails a critical and creative process of trial and error and the creation of alternatives stemming from ongoing confrontation with objections.

The study also reveals that the particular difficulty of assimilating a gender perspective in a feminine and liberal environment. The female majority in training institutions, the representation of women in management positions therein, and the combination of marginal gender content and the academic freedom of the lecturers, all produce the false image that teacher training is a female space that facilitates the promotion of gender equality. This misrepresentation makes it difficult for change agents to garner support for deep change. The study shows that the initiatives that have been accepted and sustained over time are ones that integrate into existing ones and that maintain the existing priorities. In the training institutions I examined, this limitation marks the glass ceiling of internalizing the gender lens.

When agents of change in this arena teach their courses, their efforts focus on embedding a gender lens in the teaching content and teaching methods. The key challenges they face are a) providing equal training for teaching trainees when social dynamics and the academic canon are shaped by gendered relations, and b) establishing trained teachers as agents of gender change, given the circumstances of gendered teaching and the teaching crisis. I have characterized two key strategies of dealing with these challenges: “Persistent perseverance” in assimilating a gender lens in training and “compromise for progress.” In addition to these strategies, the study shows that the agents of change tend to empathize and even identify with the objections of the teachers-in-training: specifically, their objections to adopting a gender perspective and to taking responsibility for promoting gender equality through education. The empathy and identification demonstrate their critical class and gender awareness, deep understanding of the difficulties involved in adopting a subversive position in general and in the education system in particular, and the difficulty of being in-the-flesh agents of change.

Subsequently, the study shows that assimilating a gender perspective in teacher training involves what I have called the “dual responsibility dilemma.” On the one hand, the agents of change are committed to preparing the teacher trainees for professional integration in schools; on the other, they are committed to professionally and ideologically preparing them for teaching that promotes change in the field of education and through education itself. Critical teacher training that promotes gender equality endorses a teaching style that makes it very difficult for new teachers to integrate into and remain long-term at schools. If they do, the new teachers will have been endowed with the “internal change paradox,” and this will reflect the successful efforts by agents of gender change. In light of this, agents of change take into account that the teacher trainees may not always be able to express what they have learned in their training, or that they are likely to contend (on their own) with numerous objections from students, peers, school administration and parents. Thus, the study shows that the processes of gender assimilation in teacher training exist and are possible; yet as long as they remain solely under the responsibility of individual teacher trainers acting as a local agents of change, the inclusion of gender perspectives takes a high personal toll from these individuals and makes it difficult to successfully implement the training of tomorrow’s teachers.