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## How Schools Deal with Expectations of Gender Equality<sup>1</sup>

Regula Julia Leemann\*

### 1 Introduction

For more than a decade now, national and supranational actors have been formulating expectations that educational institutions align teaching to greater gender equity and encourage girls and boys to develop skills and career orientations less confined by traditional gender stereotypes (European Commission 2010; OECD 2011). In Switzerland, the most important national gender policy initiative to this end has been the “Decision on Vocational Education and Training 2” (2000–2004; *Lehrstellenbeschluss 2*), which involved funding for a variety of projects in the field of school and vocational education.<sup>2</sup> National Daughters Day is one of the projects launched by the Swiss Conference of Gender Equality Delegates within the framework provided by the “Decision on Vocational Education and Training 2.”<sup>3</sup> This article investigates how schools as organizations deal with expectations of educational reform and equal opportunity policy geared toward gender equity as they organize activities to implement “National Daughters Day” in a selected canton in Switzerland.

Neo-institutionalist approaches in organizational sociology argue that organizations are embedded in an institutional context of social expectations and beliefs (e.g., gender equality). Organizations must take these institutions into account in the decisions they make and action they take in order to be considered rational and legitimate actors. At the same time, educational reforms are generally not very

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2 Art. 4, para. 3 of the decision of the Federal Assembly on measures to improve the availability of apprenticeships, 2000–2004 (Bundesversammlung 1999, 30).

3 The program is still supported through federal funds and in the meantime has been further developed to become “National Future Day – Girls and Boys Switch Sides” (*Nationaler Zukunftstag – Seitenwechsel für Mädchen und Jungs*; <http://www.nationalerzukunftstag.ch/>). National Daughters Day/ Future Day takes place annually since 2001 (on the second Thursday of November). The majority of German-speaking cantons and Ticino officially participate although in most cantons schools are not explicitly obliged to do so. The target group are students in fifth to seventh grade. The current centerpiece of the program is to accompany a parent to the workplace or attend an organized visit of an institution that is involved in gender-untypical areas of activity. Schools are furthermore required to discuss and work with students on topics concerning gender-specific choice of occupation and career and life planning during, in preparation of, and in following up on the day. Throughout Switzerland, companies are asked to open their doors to youths.

sensitive to gender issues and typically fail to address gender inequality (Hilbrich et al. 2011). Besides, studies on how schools respond to an environment demanding progress toward greater gender equity point out that actors in educational organizations (including education administrations and teacher education) do not necessarily perceive policymakers' expectations of reform in a positive light only, but may also display resistance, voice criticism, and attempt to avoid change (Paseka 2008; Seemann 2009). Organizations therefore have some discretion in how they act and react in view of external demands and cannot be assumed to simply conform to outside expectations.

Moreover, if we think of the prevailing discourses on "gender difference and equality," "diversity and intersectionality," or "whether girls or boys are discriminated against in school," these expectations appear to be neither homogeneous nor completely devoid of ambiguity. This leads us to the question – to be addressed both theoretically and empirically – how schools as organizations respond to these heterogeneous and conflicting expectations.

The theoretical approach of the sociology of critique and justification (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006), rooted in French pragmatic sociology, provides the epistemological and methodological tools for our inquiry into how organizations deal with diverse structures of expectation (Jagd 2011). It directs attention to actors in organizations and the demands they face to publicly account for their actions and decisions. The theory assumes a limited number of orders of justification, which actors rely on in meeting demands for evaluation and coordination. This theoretical framework of various orders of justification is a useful means to conceptually grasp and interpret the different, competing, and conflicting organizational modes of dealing with the demands of gender equality.

Section 2 will provide the theoretical foundations for addressing the question of how actors in organizations respond to expectations of gender equality in their environment. Section 3 describes the study and its methodological approach. The findings on the various orders of justification that actors in school settings refer to are presented in section 4. Section 5 embeds the approach and findings in a wider framework of debate.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Gender equality as a myth and a requirement for the legitimization of organizations

The requirement to make schools and the processes of learning therein realms of greater gender equity and to move gender to the center of professional activities for at least one day of the school year provides an interesting occasion to study how schools as organizations deal with expectations of reform in their environment. In

a neo-institutionalist theoretical framework, gender equality can be described as a social institution or myth (Meyer and Rowan 1977), as a socio-cognitive structure of expectation, or as a belief that has gained acceptance worldwide over the past century (Ramirez 2001). Schools now have no other choice than to direct organizational action toward promoting greater gender equality in order to be perceived as legitimate actors – i. e. as rational, innovative, and fair (Hasse and Krücken 2005, 23; Müller 2010) – and receive social recognition and resources (Koch 2009, 126). The question is, how precisely do schools as organizations respond to these environmental expectations? Do they merely go through the motions by staging efforts toward gender equality as a façade of rationality without engaging the internal processes of the organization accordingly (e. g., the settings of teaching and learning, continuing professional development of teaching staff) as Meyer and Rowan (1977) suggest in their thesis of a loose coupling of structures and activities? Our research asks whether National Daughters Day serves as such a façade of rationality, propped up for one day, allowing the organization to otherwise continue business as usual.

As public employees, the teaching staff and school administrators are under scrutiny, both in-house and by an outside public, as to how they implement National Daughters Day and pursue the principal idea of gender equality while they also must be able to justify their decisions and actions. The project day as such receives media attention and is well known throughout the population and in the business world. Students, parents, school boards, fellow teachers, school principals, and local media all observe the events and have expectations. We are interested in how teachers and school administrators, but also the initiators at the cantonal level, perceive the project day, and the goals of gender equality that it is supposed to promote, and the reasons they give for their views.

## 2.2 Gender equality as a heterogeneous and conflicting structure of expectation

Over the past two decades, new models of governance have led to addressing educational institutions as independent actors and reorganizing them accordingly. They are required to be responsive to social developments – including expectations of gender equality – in their proximate and extended environment and to develop a profile of their own in the process. A brief look at academic discourse on issues of gender, gender (in-)equality, and equal opportunity<sup>4</sup> testifies to change, multi-dimensionality, and struggles for the power of definition. It seems fair to assume that the expectations and requirements relating to gender equality that are brought to bear on the educational field are neither devoid of ambiguity nor free of inconsistencies.

<sup>4</sup> Instead of many, see Nentwich (2006) for a brief overview of approaches to equality, difference, and the construction of gender and diversity, Cornelißen (1988) on the early attempts to systematize the concept of equal opportunity, Barrett (1987) on the concept of difference, Cordes (2010) on the demands on gender mainstreaming, and Weaver-Hightower (2003) on the current dispute about whether boys are the new disadvantaged.



There is already evidence for this if we merely look at the name given the event. The project day was initially launched as “Daughters and Fathers Day.” It soon became “National Daughters Day,” was again renamed in 2010, and is now called “National Future Day. Girls and Boys Switch Sides.” Each change of name has also had programmatic implications and can be interpreted as the consequence of criticism directed against treating the genders differently (or unequally) in carrying out activities on this day.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, schools face an environment holding an array of expectations while having only limited resources and routines at their disposal to meet them. This raises the question of how teaching staff and school administrators read, interpret, and handle these manifold and conflicting expectations in their daily work in the school setting.

### 2.3 Gender equality in different orders of justification

To get a theoretical grasp on the positions and justifications of the actors mentioned above, we employ the theoretical framework of the sociology of critique, which is rooted in French pragmatic sociology (see Diaz-Bone 2011a, 18 ff. for the history of this theoretical approach). This approach is well-suited to describe the coexistence of competing rationalities in organizations (Jagd 2011).<sup>6</sup>

Our point of departure is the assumption that actors face many situations where they must renegotiate the line of action to be pursued and decisions to be made. Situations of this kind occur, for instance, when a working group is confronted with a new requirement or cannot continue business as usual and is forced to make changes. The requirement to carry out National Daughters Day can be seen as such a “critical moment” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 359), which questions established routines and other taken-for-granted assumptions in schools and necessitates renegotiation. In the discussions and disputes that this involves, the

5 The program initially intended for daughters to accompany their fathers to work where they were to be given the opportunity to talk to designated people about possible models of life while the boys were supposed to stay in school where they were to discuss issues of masculinity and male conceptions of life. Later on, the program was modified so that other persons (e. g., the godfather) could take the girls along to work as well. Today the boys also go to visit companies.

6 Jagd (2011) provides an overview of the issues in organizational sociology that have been addressed so far using this approach. However, none of the studies mentioned by the author has applied the concept of multiple orders of justification to analyzing how organizations deal with social inequality. The compilation of empirical studies of organizations based on justification theory scheduled for publication in 2014 is no exception in this respect; it, too, contains no study on inequality (Knoll 2014). Imdorf (2011; 2012), on the other hand, employs this theoretical approach to explain the emergence of educational inequality in school and vocational training from an organizational perspective. Imdorf and Leemann (2012) investigate a new organizational form of vocational training for its potential to improve allotment of training places based on achievement and thus to reduce inequality. Both Derouet (1989; 1992) and Peetz et al. (2013) rely on the justification-theoretical framework to analyze educational institutions in the context of change and reform.

teaching staff adopts positions, voices criticism, and seeks solutions for the school to reach an agreement (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 360).

Discussion and decisions of the kind that we have investigated in our case study are not of a private nature but occur in the public sphere (Wagner 2004, 438). An important feature of such a critical moment therefore is that the persons involved are subject to an imperative of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 360). They must give reasons for their views and criticisms of the issue under consideration, also in light of the opinions of others. Another feature is that these justifications must follow rules of acceptability, that is, the justifications have to be valid and comprehensible to both sides and must be applicable in the same way in other social situations as well.

The basis for this is the principle of equivalence: objects, subjects, and processes must be related to some common measure to clarify what they have in common (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 361) and arrive at a socially shared and commonly comprehensible assessment. They must hold up to the measure applied, i.e. they are assessed against the measure and ranked according to their worth (*grandeur*).

The demands of evaluation and coordination that arise in social situations are governed by a limited plurality of principles of equivalence, which Boltanski and Thévenot (1999, 365) also refer to as “worlds” (*cités*).

*Here the concept of world emphasizes objectivation: the process of action and linking of things and people by means of evaluation creates an objectivity in its own right, which acts of justification can make reference to. The reference made in action to objects and the social apparatus creates (re-/produces) and stabilizes through action “objects,” “qualities,” and “categories” as well as the connections between them, which subsequently appear as “naturally given” (“naturalized”) and as a network and create the impression of an “ontology” in social reality and, in this way, appear to actors, as “world” and, as such, as situationally evident. (Diaz-Bone 2009, 240 – translated from German)*

Each of these worlds is characterized (1) by an orientation toward a particular common good, (2) by the worth (*grandeur*) of objects, subjects, and processes in relation to the common good, and (3) by a model for testing the worth of a particular investment formula and the “natural” relations among objects, subjects, and processes (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 140 ff.).

Each of these principles of justification claims universal validity (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 365). The principles can therefore not replace one another; rather each retains its own order of worth when they face off in dispute. Especially in ambiguous situations that require renegotiating the validity of different orders of worth, transformation and change is possible. In such situations, it is conceivable that one of the orders of worth prevails because of its greater legitimacy in the eyes of those present. However, oftentimes compromises between different orders

of worth are made in order to come to an agreement, in which case two or more measures of worth may stand side by side in a relation of equilibrium (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 374).

Individuals have the basic ability to reflexively apply orders of justification to problems of evaluation and coordination of action in social situations (Diaz-Bone 2009, 236). The questions posed above as to how the teaching profession interprets gender requirements, what position they adopt on the issue, and how they argue their views can now be cast into theoretically more precise terms. We start from the hypothesis that interpretations, positions, and arguments make reference to legitimate orders of justification pertaining to “school worlds” (Imdorf 2011) or, to give it a different twist, that the myth of gender equality must prove its worth in the various “school worlds.”

Three of these worlds are of key significance to our object of research: the civic, domestic, and industrial world. Although we also find elements of the market and the inspirational/creative world in the school setting (Derouet 1992; Imdorf 2011; Peetz et al. 2013) – and hence in our analyses as well<sup>7</sup> – they play an only minor role for the issue of gender equality.

In the *civic world*, National Daughters Day and its stated aims are judged by whether they seek to achieve equality, serve the common good by exercising solidarity, give primacy to the collective, and are free of particularism (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 185 ff.). To serve the common good, individuals submit to the social contract and restrain action based on self-interest. Not the individual is important but the collective, the sovereign, the general interest, and solidarity. The principle of equivalence is equality. Social processes are first and foremost governed by law.

The notion of common good that is operative in the *domestic or familial world* (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 164 ff.) is based on the recognition and preservation of traditions and the willingness to place oneself in a situation of dependence. Individuals submit to authority (father, superior) and invest in group life. The principle of equivalence is tradition. Relationships are governed by hierarchy, closeness, and descent. In this world, the project day and gender equality must contribute to group life and respect traditions.

In the *industrial world* (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 203 ff.), efficiency, and expertise are highly valued. They provide the measure for subjects, objects, and processes. Expertise, planning, and methods are the means of coordinating social situations. Providing for the common good is defined functionally as making a productive contribution to the welfare of all and bringing action in line with available resources. The project day and gender equality are

7 The world of reputation/opinion is probably also gaining importance as autonomy becomes a more significant requirement.

judged by how efficiently they can be implemented and whether and what kind of expertise is required.

In our empirical analysis, we ask what orders of justification the actors refer to in adopting a position and look for conflicts and compromises between such orders.

#### 2.4 Gender equality between justification, love, and violence

In response to criticism that their theoretical framework cannot explain all modes of social coordination of action, Boltanski and Thévenot have developed additional regimes of action. The latter are not part of the regime of justification so that decisions and actions in these realms do not have to be accounted for in the public sphere (regime of love, regime of violence) or are grounded in routine or taken-for-grantedness (regime of adequacy/familiarity, *justesse*) (Wagner 2004, 437 f.; Jagd 2011, 346). The affective regime of love, which coordinates close social relationships in the private sphere, does not require negotiating claims of equal validity. To the contrary, the parties involved in such relationships tend to push issues of equivalence aside. The regime of violence knows no levels of justification either. The parties are not on a par, and it is not a matter of the better argument. Emotional conflicts can be expected to arise especially at the borderline between a regime of action that attaches importance to measuring equivalence and a regime of action that aims to dismiss such measurements (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 362).

For our analyses, this means that the participants in the discussions about the project day and gender equality can invoke the principles of different worlds within a regime of justification and relate them to one another. On the other hand, there is always the possibility of switching or slipping from the regime of justification into that of love or violence (Wagner 2004, 438). As a consequence, actors have to reconcile such action outside the regime of justification with the collective action in which they take part (and which always involves hypothetical demands for justification), which is a task of utmost complexity both for actors and for sociological analysis (Diaz-Bone 2011a, 29). In our study, we ask in which situations the boundaries of the regime of justification are transgressed and what reasons are given to justify this.

### 3 The study

To answer these questions, we analyzed data that we collected as part of an evaluation project in 2010–2011 on the implementation of National Daughters Day in a specific Swiss canton (Leemann et al. 2011). The canton introduced National Daughters Day as a mandatory event in schools starting 2006 based on a concept called “Gender Day,” which had been developed by the cantonal education administration and

office of equal opportunity.<sup>8</sup> The objective of the evaluation was to investigate the implementation of the project day in terms of degree of institutionalization and quality. For this purpose, we conducted separate interviews with the three project initiators (cantonal education administration, office of equal opportunity, and office for vocational education), three group discussions with school administrators of lower secondary schools (grades 6 to 9), and four group discussions with selected teaching staff of four schools (Flick 1999, 132 ff.).<sup>9</sup> All interviews were about an hour long and were fully transcribed.<sup>10</sup>

The interviews with the initiators were conducted using a detailed interview guide because we were also interested in background information and understanding the developments in recent years. The round table discussions with school administrators (five per interview and a roughly equal proportion of men and women) took place following a presentation, to which they were invited, of the first findings from an online survey. The online survey had asked all class teachers about their views on and experiences with National Daughters Day as part of the evaluation. The facilitator provided initial input based on the partly conflicting findings of the survey. She asked the school administrators to discuss and interpret the findings.

Among the four schools selected were two that were known to lean more to opposing the event and two that were more open to it. The teachers to participate in the group discussions were selected by the administrators of the four participating schools so as to represent a wide range of different positions. Each group of discussants consisted of four to five persons and included both men and women. The discussion sessions began with the facilitator providing initial input to prompt argumentation and discussion concerning the project day and matters of gender equality (e.g., "To what extent do you experience Gender Day as a good opportunity to address gender issues in class and in which respects do you take a more critical stance").

The action-theoretical grounding of the theory of justification with its roots in pragmatism (Diaz-Bone 2011b, 48) allows applying a procedure of data analysis in accordance with the three steps of analysis in grounded theory. First, the transcriptions were coded. We developed the coding system inductively based on the topics

8 The schools in the canton are officially required to participate, but there are no real sanctions in place if schools choose not to do so. What precisely schools are expected (or allowed) to do is also only vaguely defined. There is no predefined sequence of events for Gender Day to follow. The program merely provides thematic landmarks and sets guideposts for orientation for the four grade levels involved. To assist in organizing the day, the initiators, but also teachers and school administrators, have compiled a wealth of ideas and best practice examples, which are available as printed matter or can be accessed online.

9 Since the focus of data collection in the three group discussions differed due to the nature of the evaluation project underlying this study, a satisfactory comparison of the three groups (initiators, school administrators, and teachers) is not possible. We will thus refrain from a comparative analysis.

10 The interviews were conducted in Swiss German. The interviews quoted in this paper have therefore been translated into English.



raised in the discussion and drawing on the theoretical framework for sensitizing concepts (concepts of gender equality, neo-institutionalism, and worlds of justification). Second, we specifically analyzed fields of tension, e. g., situations where the discussion became controversial, the interviewees explicitly took a stance, and criticized or supported the project day and the requirements involved. For this purpose, we analyzed these sections for justifications and further elaborated the coding system and explored the relations between its categories. In a final step, we determined the main orders of justification and the dynamics observable between them.

In presenting our findings in the next section, we will generally refrain from disclosing the gender of the interviewees and discussants. This is for epistemological reasons. The advocates of a new pragmatic sociology reject Bourdieu's structuralist approach and, unlike Bourdieu, do not trace the causes of complexity and conflict in the social coordination of action to the affiliation of actors with groups of different social status and the struggles and conflicts of interest between them but to pragmatic processes of negotiating plural logics of action.

## 4 Orders of justification in the field of gender equality

### 4.1 Expertise

The teachers repeatedly point out that they lack expertise in matters of gender:

*It's simply that at the parent-teacher meeting I am quickly at a loss when parents ask me to explain what a typical female profession is and how that works. I am really not quite sure myself.* (Teacher)

The interviewees call attention to gaps in professional preparation and continuing education in this respect and are at unease because there are no teaching materials available to fall back on. Some of the school administrators believe that many teachers overestimate their abilities even though, as one of the former put it, "they don't have a clue." Particularly teachers in the natural sciences – as opposed to German teachers, for instance, who are used to "teaching that way" – are assumed to be unfamiliar with the topic.

*Well, I believe that at our school there are simply people who don't know what gender is and who also fear anything new, and perhaps the issue is also just too troublesome.* (School principal)

The orientation toward professional expertise is an element of the industrial world. The teachers who possess worth, in the sense of Boltanski and Thévenot, are those who feel at ease and display great confidence in dealing with the subject matter and invest in continuing education. Appropriate textbooks and teaching materials provide assistance in preparing classes efficiently and in accordance with required

standards. Such books and materials are not available for Gender Day, which bears the risk of raising doubts as to the worth of teachers.

Various researchers have emphasized that teaching and learning in the field of gender and gender equality is no easy task since it involves not only cognitive knowledge but concerns and challenges the whole person, his or her life history, and social positioning in relation to others (Dölling 2005). Gender is furthermore embedded in the patterns of interpretation and stocks of knowledge that underlie the theory and practice of teaching and must first be reflected upon (Lemmermöhle 2001).

Reference to the disciplinary background of teachers (cultural versus natural sciences) testifies to this: In the industrial world, the topic of gender is not suitable for all school subjects. In the teachers' view, a requirement is that the subject explicitly covers social issues. And not least, the pedagogical task of sensitizing children to gender issues and providing gender-adequate support (e. g., being aware of a child's gender without reducing the child to this aspect only) involves conflicting demands, which cannot be resolved based on some standard recipe (Lemmermöhle 2001).

#### 4.2 Which school subject is responsible for gender issues?

Taking this a step further, we observe justifications, probably constitutive of the secondary level, based on teachers defining themselves as teachers of content knowledge and not as teachers of gender issues. "I studied German, French, English, and history – and not gender," as one teacher pinpoints the crux of the matter. Providing gender-adequate support to students is implicitly not perceived as part of the content knowledge that the teacher considers himself responsible for – the subject taught appears to be unaffected by social relations. Perception of the teaching profession along disciplinary lines can be explained historically and institutionally since teachers at the secondary level have traditionally received their education at universities where they studied and specialized in certain (school) subjects. Upon the introduction of the so-called Curriculum 21<sup>11</sup>, to be implemented in the near future in Switzerland's German-speaking cantons, there will likely be changes in this respect, at least at the programmatic level, which can be expected to challenge this pattern of justification.

Reference to disciplinarity and the task of conveying general canonical knowledge can be seen as a formula for compromise between the industrial and civic orders of justification. Emphasizing expertise is complemented by the importance attached to reliance on true knowledge (*vrais savoirs*), which the disciplines make available in a concentrated and ordered manner (Derouet 1992, 87 ff.). In this civic world, schools have the task of enabling the clear separation of school and life, for instance by imparting abstract knowledge (*savoirs abstraits*). «L'école prépare à la

11 Curriculum 21, currently subject to consultation, incorporates gender and equal opportunity as crosscutting issues that are an integral part of the entire school curriculum (see Geschäftsstelle der deutschsprachigen EDK-Regionen 2010, 22).



vie en tournant le dos à la vie » (Chateau 1962, cited in Derouet 1992, 88), which is diametrically opposed to the aims of Gender Day.

The increasing trend toward interdisciplinarity, threatening the traditional understanding of profession, is manifest in the continuous expansion of the responsibilities and tasks of the teaching profession:

*We are mediators, we are family therapists, sometimes we are prevention officers, event managers, cultural interpreters, career counselors, gender experts, virtuosi in flexibly adapting behavior, IT specialists, media communication experts, coaches, and, in the course of budget cutbacks, also special education teachers. (Teacher)*

The statement makes the thrust of criticism based on expertise and responsibility limited to certain areas of content knowledge even clearer. The separation of school from life in the civic world is breaking down due to an intruding domestic world. Of course the domestic world's patterns of social order – social relationships between teachers and students, the centrality of the individual, emotionality, and integration – have always been part of the school setting – although less so in France's laicist system compared to other education systems (Derouet 1992, 95 f.). The long stable compromise between the two worlds is now beginning to crumble as the conventions of the familial world are rapidly becoming more dominant.

This aspect leads to the critical question raised in school contexts as to what set of tasks schools should be responsible for.

#### 4.3 The mission of schools

The participants in the interviews and group discussions repeatedly lament that the steadily increasing tasks and responsibilities of schools can hardly be met anymore given the available resources. Especially the time and effort required in preparing, carrying out, and evaluating Gender Day is a target of criticism. The logistics involved, for instance, in finding families for the whole class for the day to be spent visiting different households is also described as a problem. These criticisms conform to the observations made in various studies of working time during the past two decades, which testify to the increasing variety of tasks and the high workload in schools. In the industrial world, attending to equality issues in society interferes with smoothly and efficiently running the program for the school year.

*I'm employed as a teacher here. I want to have some kind of curriculum. It's not that I want to, I feel that it's my duty to teach a curriculum. (Teacher)*

The question whether schools are really responsible for these issues is a recurrent theme. As teachers, they perceive themselves as having a *professional* mission to accomplish and limited time and resources to do so. "We are under great pressure, simply because of the curriculum, and new issues constantly come up that we are

also expected to address at school,” says a principal who is still involved in teaching. The theme in this figure of justification is to defend a generalized corpus of knowledge that has been negotiated and agreed upon in society and has resulted in the system of subjects and the curriculum as an institutionalized form of true knowledge (*vrais savoirs*). As Derouet (1992, 91) notes, schools must draw a line in the civic world against the so-called *savoirs chauds et proliférants*, i.e. local and politico-indoctrinating interests.

*I'd like to mention in this context that we cannot expand the mission of schools at will as the zeitgeist demands or politicians desire.* (Teacher)

#### 4.4 No ideologies – no conversions

With the institutionalization of school as compulsory education has come secularization (Fries 2010). From the separation of church and state, upon which the civic model of school rests, derives the rule that prohibits teachers from advocating their own ideological agenda in the classroom.

Calling on teachers to address issues of gender inequality in class therefore raises questions in the civic world. One of the teachers expresses his unease in this respect:

*Now it can't be our job to convert the boys: "Hey, you guys all have to become beauticians now," and all the girls have to become truck drivers. (...) I don't want to convert people or anything like that. That's the part about this whole thing that seems strange to me.* (Teacher)

In referring to the metaphor of conversion the teacher indicates that he is arguing from the perspective of the civic world. Here justice is not achieved by teachers attempting to persuade girls or boys into pursuing a career typically associated with the other gender. This would be an act of encroachment, and the teacher would be leaving the regime of justification and entering that of violence. Conversion amounts to violence since it leaves no room for weighing the worth and aims of Gender Day and no opportunity for voicing dissent or seeking compromise.

Another separation – the one between the public and private sphere and the absence of state interference in matters pertaining to the (gender) division of family labor and socialization that this separation entails – results in teachers refusing to take influence on the interests and life plans of girls and boys. The aims of the Gender Day initiators are considered to be politically motivated (stemming from “feminists”) and rejected. As a teacher explains, it is important for school to be neutral.

*Recently I met a female student who said, "Say, concerning gender, what was your view on the matter when I was in your class at school? We never really figured it out." I said in response, "That's good, then I was neutral."* (Teacher)

Here, too, we can discern a fear of transgressing the boundaries of the orders of justice, especially of the civic type, were he to disclose his own political position in the matter. The civic school is committed to the public interest (*l'intérêt général*). It is achieved by rejecting any kind of particularistic interests, whether of a regional, familial, or cultural kind (Derouet 1992, 87). School must be impartial. Achieving this requires keeping a distance in teacher-student relationships. It is better to not know too much about the children and their families and to not get too involved personally to avoid sliding into the mode of either violence or love (Derouet 1992, 89 f.).

#### 4.5 Disadvantaging girls – disadvantaging boys

The discussion so far has attempted to explain the rationale of critical voices that argue their case from a position grounded in the civic and partly the industrial world. However, there are also voices that make reference to the civic order and clearly speak out in favor of Gender Day and of addressing gender issues in the classroom. The initiators, but also school administration and teacher representatives, emphasize the persistence of inequalities to the detriment of girls and women in terms of career choices and career pathways. They see schools as important players in expanding the options of girls beyond the traditional paths in career and life planning.

*There is still a lot that needs to be done in working with girls. When I see the thinking of my girls, I mean all the images (...) and what they aspire to, it really makes you think. (Teacher)*

A just recently published study shows in this respect that, even among the youngest generation, choice of occupation and career pathways in the Swiss educational and vocational system proceed along a gender divide that proves difficult to cross (Maihofer et al. 2013).

They also perceive Gender Day as a positive opportunity to address and work with the boys. The purpose and hope attached to the day is to sensitize students and teachers to gender-specific processes and to promote the institutionalization of a gender perspective as part of regular classroom instruction.

Formal equality in school is a firmly established institution. For this reason, positive discrimination is disturbing to some teachers and conflicts with their sense of justice in light of their attempt to treat all children equally and no child preferentially.

*I never could much relate to this positive discrimination of girls in 6th grade. We speak of equal opportunity and then make differences. (Teacher)*

This provides the backdrop for understanding the objection on part of teachers, but also parents, that the conception of Gender Day implies disadvantaging boys. The criticism is rooted in the differential treatment of the genders on this day, which is part of its conceptual design and where girls are (or seem to be) offered

the more attractive program because of accompanying someone to spend the day at a company. The boys, by contrast, have to stay at school and concern themselves with gender issues. The boys, so the criticism goes, are held back, "pathologized," and fall by the wayside.

*Now I do have the feeling that Gender Day is not a girls-boys day, it is a girls day for the most part, still today. And the issues that are addressed, as far as I can see, are more girls' than boys' issues. (Teacher)*

They go on to argue that boys are not only put at a disadvantage on Gender Day but generally in school. They are not given the same support as girls, the range of subjects taught favors girls, and boys suffer in their socio-emotional development. In this reasoning, girls and women are no longer discriminated against today. Major advances have been made, and the whole issue is therefore obsolete.

We assume that teachers who see Gender Day as disadvantaging boys think more along the lines of their students as individual members of a gender, whereas the teachers who acknowledge the need for positive discrimination think more in terms of (unequal) gender relations. For this reason, the latter argumentation is grounded in the principle of justice of the civic world. At the center of attention in the civic world is not the individual but the (future) citizen who is equal before the law, as a recipient of services, and so on. The lesser the significance of the individual, the singular, the more just are social relationships (Derouet 1989, 21). By contrast, reference to the need to provide special support to one gender or the other draws on the familial world where the individual and individual needs and emotions are given importance and the integration of the child in his or her milieu is a main concern (Derouet 1992, 98). Gender equity must prove its worth in the domestic world as well and must acknowledge the neediness and development of the (young) person.

All these criticisms of disadvantaging or favoring one of the genders also draw on the industrial world. This is so because arguments claiming inequality and discrimination in meritocratic schools and societies oriented toward achievement and occupational success require the measures and modes of evaluation of the industrial world.

Another objection that is rooted in the civic order of justification and seeks to shed a different light on gender discrimination altogether is directed at the priority given to gender by designating a particular day to be devoted to the issue. In this view, schools have much more significant problems to deal with, first and foremost, those of inequality resulting from social background and those arising from lack of achievement. They are perceived to be the main problems and more problematic than the gender issue. "Why don't we organize a Day on Racism, a Day on Integration, a Third World Day?" a teacher asks. "There are a pile of other social problems that would surely deserve to be offered the same prominent platform."

#### 4.6 The difference between the genders

Gender equality is an issue that also affects the teaching profession. The interviewees speak of heated debates and an explosive topic. Our theoretical framework allows us to explain this since gender equality has to prove its worth in various worlds and shifting from a regime of justification to a regime of love or violence requires giving reasons as well.

The aims of equal opportunity and equality touch on the traditions and institutions of gender difference, gender separation, and the gender division of labor rooted in the domestic world, which remains strong in Switzerland in spite of trends toward family models based on equitable partnership relationships and a stronger integration of women in the labor market (Branger 2013, 11–19). This results in conflicts with the civic world, while also making attempts to switch modes – from justice to love – are highly likely.

Talahite (2010) criticizes Boltanski and Thévenot's theory of justification specifically on grounds of how it treats the domestic world. On the one hand, she claims that the theory is gender-blind (*occultation du genre*; Talahite 2010, 190), since it fails to consider the gender differences inscribed into that world. On the other hand, the authors, in this view, abandon their own theoretical edifice in counting women among the small beings in regard to their worth and fathers and patrons among the great ones by definition. According to such a conception – and opposed to their own theoretical premises – not all human beings possess the same dignity after all in order to qualify as great or worthy in the domestic world if dignity is linked to gender.

We cannot address this “aporia” (Talahite 2010, 195) in more detail here. We nevertheless propose that the scientific validity of the domestic model of justice, as described by Boltanski and Thévenot, is questionable from the perspective of a feminist critique of science and that this conception of justice in the domestic world easily gives way to the regime of love and violence.

Some teachers view efforts aimed at achieving gender equality via school policies and projects as “crude egalitarianism”; others stress the need to accept differences. Equal opportunity must not be confused with imposing sameness.

*In my view it is not a matter of forcing it: “You [a boy] have to become a girl and you [a girl] have to become a boy.” I mean to overstate it a bit. I find it very important, and also what you said, to accept differences. To treat them as equals and not to impose sameness, I am absolutely with you there. (Teacher)*

Even the initiators of the project day share the idea of gender differences ultimately having some kind of biological roots.

*Well, there are boys who carry a considerable amount of female dispositions and girls who have male dispositions, and that they ultimately, in the course of their lives, find occupations and ways of life that fit them. That, I think, should be the goal of Gender Day.* (Project initiator)

In the discussions among the teachers and school administrators the idea of male and female dispositions surfaces repeatedly without provoking any explicit objections from other participants.

The idea that observable differences between the genders might be rooted in biological dispositions still remains a legitimate basis of justification in the 21st century, although it has yet to be clarified theoretically whether this line of reasoning abandons the regime of justification.

*If you take 50 young ones, boys and girls mixed, and you offer them a variety of games and toys, 80% of the boys will be outside playing ball after a half an hour while the girls sit in a circle and play. Then you have to ask yourself, 30 years of "doing gender," is there perhaps indeed something that is different?* (Teacher)

#### 4.7 Traditional division of roles

The traditional patterns of division of labor between the genders in work and family are also considered to be fully legitimate. The attribution of gender-specific responsibilities and the adoption of the socially assigned roles still has such deep cultural roots that the teacher cited below does not even dare to think the idea of reversing roles through to the end – it seems to be an untenable thought indeed.

*Teacher A: Yes, but, I don't know, I don't have children, sorry, I just can't imagine that I would pursue my career and my husband would do the housework. To me that would be, ooi<sup>12</sup>.*

*Teacher B: Well, you don't have to.*

*Teacher A: Well, you simply cannot invest this amount of time, that's just impossible.*

Fully in line with the traditionalism of the domestic world, the teacher below justifies her skepticism toward the aims of Gender Day. Here again the argument she puts forth is not rejected or questioned by the colleagues present. The "heated debates" in the teachers' lounge mentioned above nevertheless lead us to suspect that this orientation no longer operates in the mode of justice but has transgressed the boundary to the mode of violence, or love (depending on interpretation).

12 "Ooi" here is an interjection in Swiss German to express that something is considered so bizarre that one cannot bear to look at it or think about it, something inconceivable.



*I don't approach the issue that, as men, they [boys] must be able to run a household or that it is their duty to do so. Because I am, and I honestly admit it, a person who advocates that what has worked for 2 million years can be expected to continue to work in the future. Yes, indeed. For some reason it's like that, and I simply say, in the present, I don't expect any man and none of these boys to run a household in the future and their wife to go to work. (Teacher)*

#### 4.8 Male (heterosexual) socialization

Certain teachers interpret the act of addressing gender issues on Gender Day as a matter of lending support to ensure successful male socialization, which preferably should be placed in the hands of a male teacher. "Working with boys" then first and foremost means reinforcing and identifying with so-called male practices.

*I went to play soccer with them. To them it was the utmost thing to happen, a class teacher playing soccer with them. There they could shoot their mouths off, like, "Come on, my grandmother would have shot that goal" (...) I believe somehow, the boys, you have to connect with the boys instead of constantly discussing all kinds of concepts. And that's why I finally dropped Billy Eliot later on. (Male teacher)*

The teacher stating that he gave preference to playing soccer instead of watching the movie "Billy Eliot"<sup>13</sup> testifies to the fact that Gender Day must also prove its worth in the domestic world and live up to the task of gender (and perhaps hetero-normative) socialization. The collective experience of playing soccer furthermore represents an act of cultivating community in the domestic world, which revolves around the generations, young and old, living together.

#### 4.9 The community of woman and man

The principle of justification in the domestic world invokes the ideal of the genders living together in respect and harmony. It is emphasized accordingly in the school setting that Gender Day should not involve rivalry and competition between the genders but that the goal should be to develop cooperative relationships. Gender Day should not represent a battle of the genders. In this vein, the teachers pursue certain projects designed to bring the genders together. A teacher who organized a dancing course on Gender Day explains,

*They can't imagine, the boys can't, that they are going to dance here with these girls. And afterwards they are totally enthusiastic about it every time*

13 "Billy Eliot" is a boy living in Northern England who is interested in dancing and becomes a ballet dancer instead of practicing boxing as his father intends him to do. His best friend at school is homosexual.



*and go home and tell what it was like. They would never admit it but, for instance, something as simple as they were able to hold the girl without being the target of some stupid remark or without having to show off. We could dance [teacher B: "That is gender pure"] and then each one was allowed to dance with someone else and so on. They absolutely had a ball. (Teacher)*

## 5 Conclusion

Actors are not determined by institutional rules and environmental expectations but are able to apply the various orders of justification to interpret these rules and expectations in accordance with the situations at hand (Diaz-Bone 2011b, 47). Peetz et al. (2013) go on to demonstrate that actors in educational organizations show responsiveness to expectations of educational reform as they go about teaching and carrying out organizational tasks, yet that they do not simply implement reforms one-to-one but display a "mind of their own" while keeping within the framework of the socially valid orders of justification most of the time.

In our study on how schools as organizations deal with environmental expectations aimed at achieving gender equality, we found the orders of justification of the civic, domestic, and industrial world (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) to be of key significance. They are the frame of reference employed by both the advocates and critics of National Daughters Day in the interpretations, positions, and justifications concerning the activities involved in implementing National Daughters Day and promoting gender equality at schools. In order for the teaching staff to reach an agreement enabling joint decision-making and action in the school setting, in spite of the individual members' "minds of their own," they forge compromises between the orders of justification that attempt to do justice to more than one world at the same time. However, the individual teachers step outside of the regime of justification at certain points, which undermines the legitimacy of their action as public persons.

The epistemological, methodological, and practical insights to be gained by applying the sociology of critique to our object of research can be summarized as follows:

1. The requirements of legitimation that schools as organizations face in regard to gender equality do not remain vague and abstract but can be investigated empirically as manifestations of problems that the teaching profession must address in real situations – here in the context of participating in National Daughters Day. Legitimation must first be produced in processes of interaction, by referring to the different orders of justification and negotiating their social validity in the local context of everyday situations (Boltanski and Thévenot 2000, 208 f.). Since accounting for the appropriateness of action, in principle, can make reference to different orders of justification, acts of

criticizing and opposing the concerns of gender equality, or supporting and demanding it, cannot be qualified as “good” or “bad” *per se*. The worth (*grandeur*) of an action can only be judged within the frame of reference that is defined by the order of justification referred to in the act of justification. In this perspective, opposition to the concerns of gender equality is therefore not a matter of individual dispositions (as implied in conceptions of “inner resistance” [Seemann 2009] or prejudice) but the result of making reference to a configuration of legitimate social orders of justification or stepping outside of the regime of justification, which must be accounted for as well – at least in the case of teachers as public employees.

2. An analysis based on the sociology of critique allows investigating the heterogeneity of actors’ interpretations as they read, evaluate, and adopt a position toward structures of expectation. This guards against criticism launched at neoinstitutionalism for lacking microfoundations (see Knoll 2012, 55 ff.) and enables to make statements about the relationship between structure and activity of an organization. For the orders of justification provide the legitimate – and, in observable situations, through actors actively legitimated – ambiguous, conflictual, negotiable, and thus socially alterable framework within which the profession must develop interpretations, adopt positions, and make decisions (e. g., which curriculum, teaching methods, and teaching aids?) (Diaz-Bone 2011b, 48). It is this framework that teachers and school administrators refer to in their discussions with students in the classroom, with colleagues in the teachers’ lounge, with parents at parent-teacher meetings, and in interview situations where researchers are present. This framework of justification we may also call school culture, which is (more or less) loosely coupled with the formal provisions and expectations in society regarding gender equality and to which the practice of teaching is aligned.
3. One aim of the study was to shed a somewhat different light on the responses in school settings to expectations of reform, in this particular case regarding reforms to promote gender equality. As opposed to studies on school development, with their often normative designs, which perceive resistance and criticism among the teaching profession involved in projects of school reform as disruptive and detrimental to the quality of the process and lament this accordingly, we have shown that these criticisms of reform, but also the positions in support of it, are embedded in socially accepted cultural patterns of order and, specifically, in a field of tension between civic and domestic conventions. Political efforts to reduce gender inequality must thus be aware of these cultural patterns of order and the logics of action that they give rise to therein. As we have illustrated, the civic world of modernity fails to provide unambiguous and easily applicable moral guidelines that professionals in the school setting could refer to in orienting action toward achieving “equality”

or reducing “inequality” in gender relations. In the same vein, the domestic world has also undergone pluralization so that here too the socially accepted patterns of justification are much more diverse than the theoretical edifice of Boltanski and Thévenot would have us believe.

Most notably, the domestic world has become democratized. Today, a traditional patriarchic role conception hardly provides socially accepted grounds for justification anymore. Political efforts of any kind aimed at democratizing gender relations all the way into the private sphere of the family also change the cultural values and validities of the domestic world and erode the still existing foundations for justifying gender inequality.

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