Teaching for gender justice: Free to be me?

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Abstract

In this paper, we present case study data from research that sought to evaluate the implementation and impact of a Respectful Relationships in Education (RRE) program. The program is part of the Victorian state government's school-based response to ending violence against women and their children. It advocates a liberal feminist aligned 'gender lens' (of equitable gender access, representation and participation) within six areas of a whole school approach. The paper illustrates how this lens informed the understandings and practices of educators at one of the primary schools in the research. We explore the deployment of an affirmative and non-affirmative gender politics within the context and goals of the RRE program. Identifying the potential and problematics of this deployment in working to support the goals of gender justice, we offer a theoretical framework – the status model – as a way forward. The status model supports a critical engagement with *all* relations and knowledges (i.e. within dominant *and* subordinate cultures) that oppress and marginalise. It thus supports the deployment of a critical affirmative and non-affirmative gender politics that reflects capacity to transform the underlying power relations and structures that generate gender-based violence.

Introduction

I had a kid last year ... he had a "loveheart" as one of his shapes for something we were doing. And he said, "I can't have that. That is a girl's shape." And then a couple of weeks later, he came to me and started wearing hair clips in his hair and he came up to me, "I just really like wearing hair clips in my hair. I don't know why people say they are for girls [but] I am *free to be me*." (female member of leadership team)

At Blue Hills Primary School, the 'free to be me' motto was created by staff and students to support expressions of gender diversity. The motto was seen as reflecting the inclusive ethos at the school in relation to children's freedom to explore their gender (or other) identities. It was also seen as productive in refusing gender labeling and disrupting the gender binary. Many of the children enthusiastically embraced this motto to challenge gender stereotypes, as this opening vignette illustrates. The school was also supporting gender inclusivity through trying to be more gender-balanced in their resourcing, attention and language use. As part of their participation in a new Respectful Relationships in Education (RRE) Program, educators had gained a critical awareness of how their practices

and resources tended to privilege boys and masculinity and they were keen to rectify this through a greater focus on girls and femininity.

This paper explores these approaches within the context and aims of the RRE program at Blue Hills Primary School. RRE is Victoria's school-based response to ending violence against women and their children. It was one of the recommendations arising from the Royal Commission into Domestic Violence in Victoria in 2016. The whole school approach recognises the significance of six factors in effectively implementing RRE including: School Culture, School Leadership and Commitment, Professional Learning, Support for Staff and Students, Teaching and Learning and Community Partnerships. A 'gender lens' is advocated in the program's materials with the aim of supporting schools to engage critically with these six areas to identify how they might reproduce but also transform binary understandings of gender. Like similar programs seeking to end violence against women, gender-based violence (GBV) within the RRE materials is understood as perpetuated by gender inequality and sexism with a continuum of manifestations from unconscious gender bias to overt gender oppression and violence (David 2017).

Consistent with a liberal feminist definition of GBV, the 'gender lens' of the RRE program is focused on strengthening positive, equal and respectful relationships through challenging gender stereotypes and roles, promoting women/girls' independence and decision-making and challenging the condoning of violence against women/general violence (Hall 2015). In this paper, we illustrate how such framing informed the understandings and practices of the educators at one of the primary schools that participated in the research. We explore the deployment of an affirmative and non-affirmative gender politics within the context of the RRE program. Recognising the enduring tensions associated with gender categorization that have haunted the field of gender theory (see Francis and Paechter 2015) and the ongoing challenges teachers face in translating feminist theory into practice (see Ollis 2017), we examine the potential and problematics of this deployment in working to support the goals of gender justice. Along the lines of a strategic essentialist approach (Spivak 1987; Atkinson and DePalma 2009), we articulate the utility of Nancy Fraser's (2009) status model as a way forward. This model recognises the utility of both an affirmative and non-affirmative identity politics in working to transform the concrete arrangements that impede parity of participation for girls and women (Fraser 2009).

Teaching about gender-based violence

The highly varied ways in which different gender and feminist theories inform and shape education practice are well recognised (Gore 1992; Davies 2000; Blaise 2005; Enns and Sinacore 2005; Paechter 2007; Francis 2010; Francis and Paechter 2015; Renolds 2018; Ringrose 2012). Research into the relative efficacy of particular theories and practices for generating greater gender equity and justice through schooling is expansive and ongoing. It

remains, however, worthwhile to continue examining this issue of efficacy especially given the recent renaissance of a focus on gender and, in particular, gender-based violence in schools in Australia (and other western contexts). This examination is significant given ‘the complexities of the [current] cultural moment seemingly characterized by a multiplicity of (new and old) feminisms which co-exist with revitalized forms of anti-feminism and popular misogyny’ (Gill 2016, p. 610). Amid this cultural moment, the shocking statistics and enormous impacts and social costs of gender-based violence endure as do our efforts to remedy them. Initiatives such as Victoria’s Respectful Relationships Program which advocates a gender lens in teaching about gender-based violence, is one such educative remedy that is currently being rolled out in Victorian state schools.

What remains an enduring problem in this space are ‘the challenges teachers face in translating feminist theory into practice in the context of contradictory discourses about girls, gender, sexuality, and violence’ (Ollis 2017, p. 2). Teachers are continuing to grapple with the gender theory and feminist politics that might inform initiatives such as RRE (see David 2017). The concept of gender-based violence or gender-related violence is not clear cut. Different discourses inform how it is understood by educators and how teaching about it plays out in schools and classrooms. The work of Jones (2011) provides a useful framework for examining these different discourses. She identifies 28 discourses within four orientations – conservative, liberal, critical and postmodern – within sexuality and relationships education that construct and relay to students particular understandings of gender, power and sexuality.

The identification of these 28 discourses in terms of their varied political agendas and their differentiation in translation to practice indicates the complexity and contention of teaching in this space (Jones 2017; Ollis 2017). Certainly, the discourses within a conservative orientation will play out pedagogically in vastly different ways to those within a liberal paradigm or within a more progressive critical or postmodern orientation. Each will define and approach gender and gender-based violence differently. As noted earlier, the RRE program referred to in this paper resonated with a liberal feminist ‘gender lens’ in its focus on challenging gender stereotypes and roles, promoting women/girls’ independence and decision-making and challenging the condoning of violence against women/general violence (Hall 2014). This lens deploys a narrow concept of gender-based violence where the focus is on male perpetration and female victimization – i.e. challenging men’s and boys’ violence against women and girls (David 2017). Pedagogically, this gender lens plays out by ensuring equity and access in relation to representation and participation for women and girls in terms of, for example, incorporating women’s issues and identities positively within the curricula and extra-curricular space and centring girls’ concerns and needs (see Jones 2017). This tends to promote an affirmative gender politics that seeks to recognise and value the specific contributions of girls and women. However, it also tends to reify binary

understandings of gender difference, subsume gender diversity and leave the underlying power relations and structures that generate gender-based violence intact.

In contrast, a critical paradigm would actively challenge the structures and practices seen as leading to gender inequity and violence. It would question and seek to provide alternatives to the heterosexist, heteronormative and transphobic values that privilege particular gender and sexual identities (Harrison and Ollis 2015; Jones 2017). Pedagogically, this gender lens might play out in the form of facilitating critical dialogue and student-centred action research based curricula that challenges traditional accounts of gender and sexuality (see Sundaram et al. 2016; Jones 2017; Coll et al. 2017; Renolds 2018). This paradigm tends to promote a non-affirmative gender politics that proliferates alternatives to the fixities, normativities and value ascriptions of the gender binary (David 2017). It would deploy a broad concept of gender-based or gender-related violence that challenges:

...all inequalities and attends to power differentials across all forms of social difference (race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation) and with social theory that emphasizes the intersectionality of gender with class and ethnicity (David 2017, p. 99; see also Brah 1992; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1993).

Considering these different paradigms brings to light the shortfalls and tensions associated with gender categorization that continue to haunt the field of gender theory – of and ‘between agency and determinism in gender identification, and that [of and] between gender deconstruction and gender analysis’ (see Francis and Paechter 2015, p. 776). Gender identification deploys an affirmative gender politics. Even when it is pluralised (as in the work of Connell 1995 and others who propose multiple, contextual and hierarchical masculinities and femininities), this politics tends to reify gender as if it were the same as (dualistic) sex, and to understand gender in relation to (binarised) constructions of masculinity and femininity (Francis 2008; Francis and Paechter 2015). Gender deconstruction, on the other hand which deploys a non-affirmative gender politics, poses a challenge to the feminist project. Doing away with gender categories fails to recognise and address inequalities of power between men and women and their adverse implications for women and girls. In relation to working to address the enormous impacts and social costs of gender-based violence, normative gender categories are imperative in creating policies for practical action (Connell, 2010). As Francis and Paechter (2015, p. 784) argue:

If we are serious about fighting entrenched sexism wherever it is found, we need to be able to recognise it, and this requires us to be able to recognise and record differences in the treatment of men and women, boys and girls ... At the same time, the very act of categorisation required for such documentation reproduces precisely those gender binaries which we may, perhaps, wish to deconstruct.

Amid these tensions and complexities, there has been ongoing concern expressed about teachers' lack of knowledge about how to approach issues of gender identity and diversity in their schools and classrooms (see David 2017; Ollis 2017). Pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development rarely supports learning in this area. Thus, it is not surprising that teachers generally feel ill-equipped and lacking in confidence in teaching about issues of gender identity and gender-based violence (David 2017; Ollis 2017). There is thus, a 'gaping need' for 'training on gender-related violence ... and for ongoing support to improve professional practice' (David 2017, p. 118). In light of the enduring uncertainty around what might constitute a productive gender lens, we consider in this paper the utility of Fraser's status model. We present the model as useful for making explicit and evaluating the potential and problematics (for gender justice) of the different schools of thought and practice in this area (Jones 2017).

Fraser's status model (2009) resonates with the critical paradigm mentioned earlier. Fraser advocates for a critical theory of gender recognition. Rather than simply assuming gender or 'femininity' to be a marker of privilege or marginality, she argues for a focus on transforming the social arrangements that impede women's and girls' parity of participation – i.e. their capacity to participate as full partners in social interaction with others. The emphasis here (as articulated in her 'status model' approach) is on addressing the specific nature of specific oppressions (including but not limited to gender identity) at specific sites to support greater parity of participation for all (Fraser 2009). Along the lines of a strategic essentialist approach (Spivak 1987; Atkinson and DePalma 2009) this model recognises that identity labels might sometimes be necessary or useful in supporting parity of participation while at other times, they might not.

Research context and processes

The paper reports on data generated from a broader evaluation of the implementation and impact of a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) in ten Victorian primary schools. The evaluation follows up similar research in the secondary context that highlighted the significance of this whole school approach (Kearney et al 2006) with a particular focus on RRE in the early years (namely, Years 1 and 2). Part of this evaluation involved research in three case study schools to provide an in depth account of RRE. In this paper, we focus on the experience of implementation at one of these schools, 'Blue Hills Primary School'.

Blue Hills Primary is located close to a large Australian inner city. It has a student population of 355 (Foundation to Year Six) and a staff population of 25 (mostly young and female). Students and staff tend to be from Anglo-Australian, middle class backgrounds. Reflective of its local community demographic, the school is recognised as socially progressive. It

performs well on external measures of assessment. The parent body is very involved in and supportive of the school.

The school appears to be a cohesive professional community that is highly committed to the RRE program and to pursuing gender equity. The leadership team in particular is passionate and enthusiastic about RRE. The program is well-resourced and all of the teachers seem to be fully on board. The school's inclusive and progressive philosophy and the professional values of teachers fit with the ethos of RRE and there are structures in place to support ongoing professional collaboration and learning that are linked to whole-school change. In this respect, there is a strong willingness to engage in critical reflection on how the school can be more inclusive and respectful in relation to gender. Many staff members commented on their concerns about the gendered behaviours at the school. Common to most schools and borne out in our observations in classrooms, these behaviours were largely associated with the dominating behaviour of particular boys in their take up of playground space and teacher time and attention.

The research involved two (two day) visits to the school at two key junctures during implementation (pre- and post- intervention of the program, seven months apart). Interviews were conducted at pre- and post- junctures in focus groups with 1) the leadership team responsible for RRE (which was all female and included the assistant principal and two welfare leaders), 2) teachers grouped together in year levels, Foundation to Year 6 (a total of 11, mostly female teachers) and 3) ten parents (again, mostly female, interviewed as one group). Two female project staff (from the Department of Education employed to support the implementation of RRE at the school) were also interviewed. Such participant selection reflected a purposive sampling approach that was designed to gather a broad range of perspectives about the implementation and impact of RRE at Blue Hills Primary.

Both pre- and post- interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each and sought to explore the role of school leadership, individual and collective understandings of the respectful relationships initiative and their connection to gender equity and the primary prevention of violence against women and children. The interviews also sought to examine teacher readiness and practice, student engagement and knowledge, community collaboration and the perceived barriers and enablers to whole school change. Observations of classroom practice were conducted during the second visit. Within three Year 1/2 classes we observed one of the lessons in the RRE curriculum on gender-based violence. Our focus in these lessons was largely descriptive however we were interested in how gender-based violence was defined in light of the gender lens advocated in the program, thus our note-taking was directed to this issue.

The data presented in this paper are from our post-visit to the school. The selection of voices in the following sections is not meant to represent the many issues and 'findings' generated from the broader study. Rather, these voices bring to light concerns around gender theory that were significant for many of the teachers and leaders upon their reflection about their participation in the RRE program. These concerns resonate with the enduring tensions and ongoing challenges teachers face in translating feminist theory into practice noted earlier (Ollis 2017). We thus draw attention to key moments in our interviews and observations that illuminate these concerns.

In so doing, the data analysis for this paper sought to highlight the potential and problematics for gender justice reflected in the approaches deployed at Blue Hills Primary. We were concerned here with identifying and examining the deployment of an affirmative and non-affirmative gender politics. We defined gender justice along the lines of participatory parity – where justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate on par with others, as peers in social life (Fraser 2009). Our analysis of the data drew attention to the efforts at the school to support gender justice through 1) greater recognition and valuing of females and the feminine thus creating more equitable patterns of gender recognition (an affirmative gender politics) and 2) refusing gender labels and thus the damaging effects of gender differentiation (a non-affirmative gender politics) (Fraser 2009). Our analysis also drew attention to the risk in these approaches to undermine gender justice and in this respect, we consider the utility of Fraser's status model (explained in more detail later in the paper) which deploys a critical theory of recognition that can shape how these affirmative and non-affirmative politics might work coherently to support gender justice. This analytic scaffold frames the following sections of data presentation and analysis.

An affirmative gender politics

One of the key conditions seen as imperative to increasing the capacity of school staff to deliver RRE was a greater awareness of gender. For the leaders and teachers at Blue Hills Primary, the program encouraged them to think differently about gender, as one of the teachers commented 'the program has been really good. I didn't think about gender [before]. It's really opened my eyes', while another spoke of all staff now as being 'actively mindful' about gender in their planning. This enhanced gender awareness led to changes in practice. Recognising that their resources and attention tended to privilege the boys, these changes involved the teachers deploying an affirmative gender politics to support a greater focus on the girls. The following teacher comments exemplify this deployment:

... as staff, we are thinking [about] "gender" roles... differently. So everyone is being a bit more ... actively ... mindful about the sort of situations ... (for example) when you do

your planning, you go, "Okay, we are choosing a book for book club. Female author; female protagonist". Like, let's just be mindful of - you know, because we had one year, where it was all male, across the board. You wouldn't have thought about it back then.

Yeah, very day-to-day, just behaviour management of the class as well, how - you know ... it is not always girls cleaning up the library shelf or something like that.

...oh, my God, it is the self-reflection that's going to catch us in the end, that is going to stop us ... [in one lesson] I realised that I [had] spent this entire lesson ... talking to that side of the room, where it just so happens some of my difficult boys are sitting. And ...I said, "I'm so sorry, I have just ignored this side of the room completely." So then I made a point of moving my physical body (away from those boys).

These familiar scenarios of ensuring equitable female representation in curriculum content, equitable treatment in terms of behavioural expectations and equitable teacher attention to boys and girls reflect an affirmative gender politics geared toward being more gender fair or balanced.

While understanding this affirmative approach as important for gender equity, the teachers expressed concern about *how* this approach played out. One of the teachers spoke of grappling with the idea that in naming gender or gendered behaviour with her students, she was further 'polarising' gender. As she explained: 'one thing that we definitely discovered is that it's really hard to get gender equity without re-enforcing other stereotypes'. She spoke of the new gender friendly storybook resources the school had acquired that were 'great in challenging gender stereotypes', as one book stated, 'Some girls like dolls and cats; and some girls like loud noises and smashing things'. For this teacher, however, this book inadvertently reproduced stereotypes because it failed to acknowledge the diversity and complexity of gender. As she stated: 'I'm like, "What about me? I love pretty things *and* smashing things. Why can't it be 'some girls like both'?"

Another example of gender polarising was evident in our observation of one of the Year 1/2 lessons on gender-based violence. In this class a form of gender-based violence as social exclusion was explained by the teacher as occurring when the labels of boys and girls are misused. Being called a boy if you are a girl and a girl if you are a boy was presented as a 'bad' or 'hurtful' thing. The insinuation here was that using the 'correct' or 'right' label of gender to the sex marker girl or boy is paramount rather than challenging the valuing of the label (for example, that being called a tomboy might be positive but being called a tomgirl tends not to be). The children in this class seemed to take up this interpretation. They agreed that being called the wrong gender label is bad and hurtful and that the most important thing is getting the gender right (i.e. aligned with the sex category).

These scenarios bring to light the familiar but enduring pitfalls in teachers attempting to engage in feminist pedagogies (see Jones 2017; Ollis 2017). The affirmative politics reflected in these examples are reductionist, reinforce a gender binary and deny the complexity and diversity of gender (Fraser 1997). They can, as one of the teachers pointed out, simplify girls to be either gender stereotypical or disruptive rather than recognising the possibility that one girl can be both. Perhaps more importantly, as these scenarios illustrate, this politics fails to acknowledge and critique the power inequities and value ascriptions associated with gender markers and the impact of cultural processes that gender bodies. Affirming difference and equity leaves the hierarchies of masculinity and femininity that generate gender injustice intact (see Connell 2000). Consistent with the framing of the RRE program, this approach reflects liberal feminist discourses where gender discrimination is understood as a product of gender stereotypes that push women into passivity and underachievement. 'Corrective strategies' here involve promoting greater access and participation for girls and women within existing systems and institutions rather than changing or abandoning these structures. Within education, as the examples from Blue Hills Primary illustrate, liberal feminist pedagogy involves increasing girls' and women's (positive) representation in classroom materials, treating females and males equally and promoting equal opportunity (see Jones 2017).

Against this backdrop, the teachers expressed a sense of confusion about what might constitute productive change through a 'gender lens'. The teachers tended to agree that they needed a 'set of beliefs' to be able to teach RRE with 'any sort of conviction' and that there were moral imperatives that teachers needed to ascribe to in the effective teaching of RRE. However, as the previous comments illustrate, the complexity of examining gender meant that this conviction of beliefs or moral imperatives (beyond gender awareness and a commitment to disrupting restrictive stereotypes) was not well or consistently defined.

A non-affirmative gender politics

With these issues in mind, the teachers and students at the school came up with the motto 'free to be me'. As noted in the introduction, the motto was seen as reflecting the inclusive ethos at the school in relation to children's freedom to explore their gender (or other) identities and refusing the limitations of gender labeling. The 'free to be me' motto was viewed by the teachers and leadership team as gender 'fair' and 'empowering'. It supported the students to 'pull' people up when they used gender stereotypes and it was seen to fit in and be integrated with the school's existing gender respectful and inclusive culture. There were many instances relayed to us that highlighted children's challenging of gender stereotypes and roles by drawing on this motto, as the following examples from two teachers in the early years illustrate:

I know the Year 1s did a lot of work on that last year ... they really talked about, like, "inclusivity" and really went with the "free to be me" tag that they sort of came up with; and they talked about "how boys can do whatever they want; and girls can do whatever they want."

...especially last year in Foundation, after we had been doing the program for a little while, every now and then you would hear a kid say something off-hand, "Like, that is a girl's toy," or whatever; and another kid would say, "Oh, I am free to be me"

The use of this motto was also evident in our observations of RRE lessons where children examined notions of gender and gender-based violence. In these lessons students were actively involved in defining and discussing different forms of violence as physical, social and emotional. In one Grade 1/2 class, the teacher elicited comments from the students defining gender-based violence as 'being offensive to people and not letting them do something because they're a girl', 'when someone says girls can't play soccer', when 'boys are teased' when they cry or when 'girls are excluded from playing basketball'. The 'free to be me' motto was a common idea that children gave when asked how they would respond to these scenarios in non-aggressive ways.

What we can see here is the intention to do away with gender categorization and difference. Boys can have paper hearts and wear hair clips (as stated in at the beginning of this paper), boys and girls and 'do whatever they want'. They are 'free to be' themselves. There is, as we noted earlier, great potential for pursuing gender equity through such non-affirmative gender politics. Although at Blue Hills, this motto sometimes reproduced gender essentialisms in its use as a form of counter-narrative, the intention behind it, of eschewing gender labels, is productive for gender equity in proliferating alternatives to the fixities, normativities and value ascriptions of the gender binary (David 2017). However, as noted earlier, the eschewing of normative gender categories can compromise the feminist project in failing to recognise and address inequalities of power between men and women and their adverse implications for women and girls. The following examines the utility of the status model in working through some of the problematics arising from these gender affirmative and non-affirmative approaches.

A critical theory of recognition – the status model

The key ways teachers at Blue Hills Primary tried to disrupt the gender binary as we have illustrated were in their attempts to 1) be more gender-balanced in their resourcing, attention to students and language (by deploying an affirmative gender politics) and 2) do away with the categories of gender so that the children are free to be themselves (by deploying a non-affirmative gender politics). Both are potentially productive for gender equity, the former affirmative strategy is useful in recognising and re-valuing females and

the feminine thus creating more equitable patterns of gender recognition. The latter non-affirmative strategy is useful in proliferating alternatives to the fixities, normativities and value ascriptions of the gender binary (David 2017). However, if used uncritically, there is an obvious risk in both these approaches of undermining gender justice. As is well recognised, an affirmative politics essentialises gender, polarizing difference and the inferior position of femininity while a non-affirmative politics of doing away with gender categories fails to recognise and challenge the gender specificity of oppression and disadvantage. Both approaches do not challenge the underlying power relations and structures that generate gender inequity characteristic of violence against women (Fraser 2009). What is missing here is a critical theory of recognition that can shape how these affirmative and non-affirmative politics might work coherently to support gender justice. Rather than doing away with either approach, arguing the efficacy of one over the other or pointing to their incongruence, we argue that both can be productive and useful in response to particular unjust social arrangements.

In unpacking this critical theory of recognition in relation to gender, Fraser's notion of participatory parity is helpful. To elaborate on our earlier explanation, Fraser explains (2007, p. 27) justice as requiring:

...social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. On the view of justice as participatory parity, overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction.

The 'institutionalised obstacles' the teachers are attempting to dismantle in this paper are predominantly cultural (Fraser 2009). They are focused on changing the gendered social patterns that devalue and trivialize women and girls on the basis of cultural misrecognition. In working through some of the problematics involved in pursuing social justice through an affirmative or non-affirmative identity politics, Fraser offers a 'status model' approach. Rather than recognising gender as an identity category that is either privileged or marginalised, the status model treats gender recognition as a question of social status (Fraser 2009). Fraser explains this (2008 p. 137) as allowing for a:

...range of possibilities depending on what precisely the subordinated parties need in order to be able to participate as peers in social life. In some cases, they may need to be unburdened of excessive ascribed or constructed distinctiveness; in others, to have hitherto under-acknowledged distinctiveness taken into account ... In every case, the status model tailors the remedy to the concrete arrangements that impede parity.

This is not about recognition of gender on the basis of marginality or privilege but rather on better understanding and addressing the specific nature of specific oppressions at specific sites (Fraser 2009). In relation to an affirmative or non-affirmative gender politics, it asks

when is this politics useful and productive for gender justice and when does it work to limit, exclude and contain gender justice?

Regarding the gender issues highlighted in this paper, the status model would begin with a focus on the specific oppressions that impede parity of participation for girls. It would support both an affirmative and non-affirmative gender politics depending on 'what precisely the subordinated parties need in order to be able to participate as peers in social life'. If the issue is one of gender misrecognition in the under-representation of girls and women in story book literature or in the over-representation of time devoted by teachers to boys in classrooms, deploying a liberal feminist politics of gender balancing might be appropriate in beginning to remedy the concrete arrangements that have silenced and trivialized girls and women. Such under-representation could begin to be addressed, as in the case of Blue Hills, through the purchasing and use of gender-friendly resources (i.e. story books) and through the greater awareness of teachers' gendered practice. However, a *critical* non-affirmative gender politics would also be appropriate, indeed, necessary for gender justice. In relation to gender-friendly resources, this would involve a critical examination of the affirmative representation of females in terms of how this representation might not only value girls and women but also recognise gender diversity and complexity and challenge traditional accounts of gender and sexuality. In relation to teachers' gender awareness and, as in the Blue Hills example, teachers paying more attention to the girls when questioning and commenting on behaviour, a critical focus would similarly involve teachers examining this affirmative approach to ensure that gender diversity and complexity were valued and gender stereotypes challenged. In the example of the lesson on gender-based violence we observed where the focus was on ensuring gender labels were 'correct', a critical and non-affirmative approach would recognise the limitations of these labels (e.g. through explaining gender as a continuum) and identify the different meanings that words such as 'tomboy' and 'tomgirl' generate in relation to broader relations of gender and power (i.e. a devaluing of females and femininity).

The status model would also support the non-affirmative politics of the 'free to be me' motto. This motto can clearly support gender justice if drawn on to transform the concrete arrangements that impede parity of participation for girls. It can promote, as the examples in this paper illustrate, gender inclusive and non-binary understandings and behaviours as well as challenging views and behaviours that are sexist. As we mentioned the motto supported teachers and students to reflect on and challenge gender stereotyping which can proliferate alternatives to the reductionism and value ascriptions of the gender binary. Clearly being free to be me at Blue Hills was not about being free to be sexist, misogynistic or homophobic but rather about challenging these constructions – it reflected a critical agenda. This is a non-affirmative politics that has potential (if informed by a critical agenda) to respond to society's privileging of particular gender identities and support students to identify, question and find alternatives to values that are unjust or inequitable (see Jones,

2017). It thus reflects the capacity to transform the social inequities embedded within existing systems and institutions.

The status model supports a critical engagement with *all* relations and knowledges (i.e. within dominant *and* subordinate cultures be they gendered, sexist, homophobic etc.) that oppress and marginalise. As other work drawing on Fraser in the broader area of social justice and schooling brings to light (see author 2012; 2016; in press), such critical engagement draws attention to the dynamic, complex and contradictory ways in which privileged and marginalised cultures are constructed. In particular, as it identifies and challenges oppressions created through dominant cultural norms and structures, it also challenges oppressions generated through marginalised cultural norms and structures. While this engagement would recognise the utility of a liberal feminist politics for valuing females and femininity, it would also recognise the imperative of challenging an uncritical valorizing of females and femininity that washes out the complex and hierarchical intersections of femininity. It would reflect a broad definition of gender-based violence beyond a focus on male perpetration and female victimization. In challenging all inequalities and power differentials across all forms of social difference, this definition would encompass violence against women 'and children (not only girls); violence based on homophobia and transphobia; violence based on 'machismo' (which might include violence from men with hegemonic masculinities towards other men)' and violence associated with other forms and intersections of identity such as race, ethnicity, class and ability (David 2017, p. 99). Following this definition, as David (2017, p. 108) further explains:

...violence [is] understood in the context of and produced by inequality; intersectionality [is] important ... [and] structural and cultural levels of analysis [are] brought to the understanding of problematic behaviour

As we highlighted before in reference to the work of Jones (2017), this approach is reflected in critical or deconstructive pedagogies that broaden knowledge and perspectives and challenge students to think critically about themselves and the broader social world (see also Enns and Sinacore 2005). Such a focus mitigates problems of essentialism that occur within curricular that superficially engages with marginalised knowledges because it begins with addressing the specific oppressions that create status subordination for girls and women rather than from a politics of group identity.

Conclusion

Gender research in education is expansive in terms of the insight it provides about the efficacy of particular theories and practices for generating greater equity and justice for girls and women. Nevertheless, it is imperative that we continue to examine how schools and teachers are approaching gender equity and justice particularly given 1) the recent

renaissance of a focus on gender and gender-based violence in schools as part of respectful relationships education; 2) the 'moral panic' being whipped up by the instating of various programs that advocate a gender lens; and 3) the reality that teachers are grappling with the gender theory and politics that might inform their delivery of such programs. Such examination is all the more imperative in light of the current political moment where efforts in schools to teach for gender diversity and justice are tempered by a proliferation of polarizing gender politics and agendas (including new articulations of anti-feminism and misogyny) in the broader social world. Teachers are ill-equipped to navigate through this contentious and difficult terrain in their teaching about issues of gender identity and gender-based violence. There is, indeed, a gaping need for ongoing support to improve professional practice in this area (David 2017).

The concept of gender-based violence is not clear cut in its definition and pedagogical enactment. It is informed by different discourses and varied political agendas. The paradigm of liberal feminism tends to define gender-based violence in narrow ways where the focus is on male perpetration and female victimization, while a more critical paradigm tends to define gender-based violence more broadly to focus on challenging all inequities and power differentials across all forms of social difference (see David 2017). While the former tends to promote an affirmative identity politics, the latter tends to promote a non-affirmative identity politics. This paper has illustrated through the Blue Hills case study some of the potentialities and problematics in both these forms of identity politics in relation to pursuing gender justice. An affirmative politics can create more equitable patterns of gender recognition through greater valuing of females and the feminine. However, it can essentialise and polarize gender difference and the inferior position of femininity. A non-affirmative politics, in refusing gender identification, can ameliorate some of the damaging effects of gender differentiation through proliferating alternatives that do not ascribe to the gender binary. However, it can undermine the feminist project through failing to recognise and challenge the gender specificity of oppression and disadvantage.

Both approaches, as this paper has argued, require a critical theory of recognition in order that they challenge the underlying power relations and structures that generate gender inequity. In line with a definition of gender-based violence through a critical paradigm, this theory of recognition can shape how these affirmative and non-affirmative politics might work coherently to support gender justice. To these ends, we argued the utility of Fraser's (2009) status model. In relation to gender justice, this model supports an engagement with both an affirmative and non-affirmative identity politics on the basis of their potential to dismantle the institutionalised obstacles that impede parity of participation for girls and women. Along the lines of a strategic essentialist approach (Spivak 1987; Atkinson and DePalma 2009) this model recognises that identity labels might sometimes be necessary or useful in supporting parity of participation while other times, they might not. The status model provokes a critical deployment of the common approaches to gender equity and

justice in schools like the ones featured in this paper. Such critical deployment where the focus moves from recognising gender on the basis of marginality to better understanding and addressing the specific nature of specific oppressions at specific sites, we contend to be central to teaching for gender diversity and justice.

Disclaimer:

The paper presents research and analysis conducted by the authors. As such, any comment, opinion and position presented are that of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any persons associated with the programs or organisations featured.

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