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# Curricular planning from a new perspective: diversity, gender and textbooks

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## Abstract

The situation of women in the design and development of school curricula, and how they are presented in textbooks are very much marked by different spheres of interests such as historical context. Knowledge, sometimes biased and influenced by personal and cultural interests, has thus been embodied in legislation, in declarations, in daily life ??, in books and even in textbooks. We now have the opportunity to work in the construction of new knowledge in which we are all included. We highlight the key areas from which to work for equality between women and men, and combat a hidden curriculum of discrimination, thus making room for diversity

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*Keywords:* Curriculum, diversity, gender, textbooks

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## 1. Introduction

The situation of women in, the design and development of school curricula, and how they are presented in textbooks are strongly marked by various spheres of interest such as historical context. Knowledge, sometimes biased and influenced by personal and cultural interests, has thus been embodied in legislation, in declarations, in books and even textbooks.

We now have the opportunity to work towards the construction of new knowledge which embraces us all. We highlight the fundamental areas from to work for equality between women and men, and fight against a discriminatory hidden curriculum, thus allowing room for diversity.

## 2. Education and the hidden curriculum

Throughout history, events have unfolded in a complex framework, influenced by previous situations that simultaneously interact in different contexts. In the case of women, their situation in school, design and curriculum development, and their presence in the textbooks are very much marked by different areas such as historical context

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for the establishment and development of school systems in different countries, interests, culture, religion, ideology, etc.

In the same way as the ruling bourgeoisie and the expansion of popular participation in political decision-making and the origin of states have done, scientific knowledge has consolidated and legitimized the reigning social configuration based on the "false universal male" (universal suffrage, declaration of human rights ...). Today, we acknowledge the cultural patriarchy of that period. Now, however, the exclusion of women's contributions in academic history is also more clearly understood, in so far as it is an element of the conservation of the hierarchy of the sexes (Espigado, 2004).

Once the difference in the academic field was established, and taking this as a reference in the creation of school systems, a clear and discriminatory vision of women was formally and officially passed on from generation to generation. The presence of women in the history of humanity was masked or diluted to "protect" the patriarchal culture of society. The educational role of the hidden curriculum is illustrated in the following::

*"...whose intent is implicitly to perpetuate a body of knowledge that would not be appropriate to deal with explicitly through educational discourse such as the positioning of the center in terms of power distribution systems, alignment with a particular social class and the defense of a race, a gender, a culture and one religion over all others "* (Acaso y Nuere, 2005: 208).

Many women have published formally criticisms of this discrimination form, among which we may mention those made by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Along these lines, we believe that the theoretical foundations of history as we know it includes that need to be revised. ??

In fact, this situation was serious, and today it is troubling. The role of women in the history that we know is not complete. We have inherited biased academic knowledge, from the point of view of the presence of women and their contributions to science and the world. What we want to say here is that there are relevant women who have not been shown, nor all their magnitude. For example, Spanish textbooks in the late twentieth century alluded to Juana la Loca, Queen Isabel and Mary of Burgundy in terms of their relationships to Charles I of Spain, and not as historical figures who had made their own specific contribution (Espigado, 2004).

Women have always been undervalued in their social position, where they have been at a disadvantage to men. That inequality has been attributed to natural causes, for their poorer physical strength, as men have described them on numerous occasions, such as Aristotle in the *Politeia*, which assigned to men's the right to command and to women, obedience, while Baldassare Castiglione in *The Courtier*, who referred to an error of nature when the sex of a newborn child was female, among many other examples (Muñoz, 2004).

This inferiority really possesses cultural overtones; they cannot be justified through other approaches. In fact, the opposite occurs. Social, political and religious inequalities are explained in terms of natural causes when they really are cultural. Like the statement on the hidden curriculum, the near-invisibility of the situation is an obstacle to finding a solution or improving this form of sexism, mitigated but still present nowadays. The patriarchal culture floods, though to a lesser extent, social spheres, as different as religion, family, politics, work, etc.

Knowledge, sometimes tendentious and influenced by personal and cultural interests, was thus embodied in legislation, in declarations, in daily life, in books and even in textbooks (Torres, 1998).

It is clear that rights have been gained. What once were privileges for certain women, for scientific or economic reasons or for reasons of social pressure, are now widespread and have become rights common to all people.

## 2. Construction of new knowledge concerning equal gender opportunities

Today, we have the opportunity to work in the construction of new knowledge in which we are all included. There are three key areas from which to work for equality between women and men and to combat a discriminatory hidden curriculum:

- Socio-political: Legislation, social policies, institutional approaches, financial support
- Scientific and university: Foundations, theories, thoughts, complaints, ideologies, knowledge
- Education: The training of citizens in all its forms, especially in school and in other areas of formal and informal learning.

A socio-political analysis in Spain requires a first glance at the 1978 Constitution, the starting point of the initial foundation of the socio-political view of the nation. In the text we can identify two fundamental articles concerning the line that we are drawing regarding women and education:

*"Article 9 (...)2. It is the responsibility of the public authorities to promote conditions ensuring that freedom and equality of individuals and of the groups to which they belong are real and effective, to remove the obstacles preventing or hindering their full enjoyment, and to facilitate the participation of all citizens in political, economic, cultural and social life (...) Article 14. Spaniards are equal before the law and may not in any way be discriminated against on account of birth, race, sex, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance."*

Regarding these basic principles of Spanish society, the Organic Law 3 / 2007 for the effective equality between men and women was drawn up and developed. This law incorporates specific measures to promote and strengthen equal employment and social opportunity. Pons and Tura (2007) praise the law as a positive socio-political element and regard work-family life balance as a key component of the encouragement of equality.

To this legislative framework we must add the role played by the authorities in promoting the prosecution of child abuse and sexual harassment, the role of the Women's Institute, and such measures as Equality Projects in schools.

>>From a scientific-university point of view // On the academic plane, ??Many individual events are taking place, such as conferences, workshops, etc.; groups with particular lines of research in this field, courses, seminars and all sorts of activities at public and private institutions; publication of research results in books, journal articles, lectures, etc. on the topic of gender equality and promotion of the visibility of situations of inequality?? And measures aimed at encouraging their disappearance. Below we cite a few that we regard as relevant and up-to-date:

- The absence of women in textbooks, compiled by Carmen Rodríguez Martínez
- Feminism as a tool for social change (I): Women Weaving historical networks, developments in the public sphere and women's studies, compiled by Esperanza Bosch, Victoria Ferrer and Capilla Navarro.
- Women and modernization: cultural strategies and social practices (18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), results of the study led by Monica Bolufer
- Studies on gender and economics, coordinated by Maria Jesus Vara.

Of course, this is only a tiny fraction of the contributions in the field of women and the struggle for real equality in Spanish society. Nevertheless, we wish to make it clear that such new knowledge, which is being forged in the academic sphere is aware of and consistent with the pressing demands and deficiencies in this subject. In education, the situation is becoming ever more promising. The awareness of schools and teachers is catching up on families and society in general. Nowadays, with the new educational proposals, teachers are making students and their parents more aware.

Based on this growing awareness, a large number of measures and materials have been implemented, including the First Plan for Equality between men and women in education of the Regional Government of Andalusia (similar measures exist in other autonomous regions), which have important implications for education. We can list some relevant resources:

- International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women held on November 25.
- Innumerable materials to support an education that eliminates violence against women, to work on the subject of women in education
- Practical guides containing specific resources, recommended books and stories.
- Women's Institutes in various public centres
- Magazines and web-sites dedicated to the publication of studies on women
- Campaigns on the role of women in education, non-sexist toys and games
- Educational units that promote co-education.

These initiatives and proposals help us to improve the curriculum in order to achieve an equal education that combats gender discrimination and will limit its hidden version in a collective effort originating in the political, scientific and educational spheres.

### *2.1. Textbooks and equal gender opportunities.*

However, in order to prevent and eliminate the hidden curriculum that played a role in Spanish classrooms, very concrete measures have been taken on textbooks, occasionally leading to disagreements regarding gender equality. Education legislation has regulated these textbooks as written references for curricular design and development (Torres, 1998). We should not forget that school influences the belief system and the way that men and women are represented. In fact, textbooks, which are teaching aids where part of the curriculum is on display, have several characteristics that make them very influential in the formation of students.

For this reason, measures that connect the previous spheres – political, scientific, and educational – have been taken. The most significant measures within the existing framework are thus the decrees and orders that have sensitised teachers to their content. We highlight the most specific of these:

Decree 51/2000 of February 7, to regulate the registration, monitoring and selection of textbooks, where we emphasize Article 3.

*All curricular materials that are available to students must reflect in their texts and images in accordance with Article 14 of the Spanish Constitution, the principles of equal rights between the genders, the rejection of all forms of discrimination, respect for different cultures, promotion of democratic behavior habits and attention to ethical and moral values.*

In Article 6 of the Order of September 2, 2005, which establishes the criteria and standards for approval of curriculum materials for Andalusian schools, the characteristics of the textbooks alluding to gender equality are highlighted:

*The proposal for the approval of those curricular materials will be made according to the following criteria, and will be applied depending on the type of material presented:*

*(...) F) Attention to the principles of equal rights between the genders.*

*Educational materials should therefore reflect:*

*- A non-stereotyped image of women and men, providing realistic models of both. These should also mention the contribution of women to the development of society.*

*g) Rejection of all forms of discrimination, respect for different cultures, promotion of democratic habits of behavior, respect for and protection of the environment, promotion of healthy habits, consumer education and attention to citizenship, ethical and moral values of students. (...)*

Also notable is the Order of 20 June 2007, which laid out the rules of aids for the development of curricular materials and of training and educational research activities aimed at the teachers in educational centres, supported by public funds, except for university teachers (BOJA 18/07/2007), which emphasizes gender equality as a requirement for subsidized teaching materials.

*"Annex III. Development of curriculum materials and teaching resources**(...) 4. Nature of the eligible activity. (...)**3. The content of teaching materials and resources developed under this Order must not include gender or discriminatory stereotypes, and should promote an equal appreciation of people regardless of their gender, race, religion and social or geographical origin. (...)"***3. Final thoughts**

Throughout the twentieth century, it was very easy to find examples in textbooks of the dominant patriarchal culture (Subirats, 1993). In fact, a sexist view was evident in these textbooks (Nuño and Ruipérez, 1997; Hernández and Fernández, 1994). We emphasize the importance of a curriculum design, whether our teaching material takes the form of textbooks, personal resources or both, which excludes all forms of discrimination. We must ensure the absence of a hidden curriculum and especially to keep in mind the question of whether our school materials:

- Provide information on the distribution of roles and contribute to the transmission of values and models.
- Collect a biased (verbal and iconic) view of reality, which can lead to erroneous thinking, if they are not dealt with adequately.
- These features have an added value that may result in a hidden curriculum, as we mentioned at the beginning, can respond to a position in line with a set of interests that are not explicitly declared.

Therefore, we understand the importance of well-designed curricular programming that brings together all the values and knowledge that we want to convey in accordance with the documentation mentioned in this text, and we encourage the search for information that will help us to make professional decisions, from our relevant social position as teachers.

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