

13. The Analytical Tools to Work Gender-equality Issues at the Pedagogical Practices and Formative Level

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Abstract

We will present a project developed with the support of the *Comissão para a Cidadania e Igualdade de Género*» (CIG) - Committee for Citizenship and Gender Equality which intends to study the way teachers (in the preschool and elementary school) work on gender questions with the children and the difficulties they have and feel in that work. We will also present some results from the data analysis we gathered, directly from the classes, about the children's gender representations (what is it to be a man, woman, boy and girl); the teachers and children's "good student" representations and also their implications in the boys' and girls' school performances. Based on this work we intend to build resources and analytical tools to improve gender-equality issues in pedagogical practices and in teacher training. In the workshop, we also presented how this material can help teachers' reflection about their own educative and pedagogical work.

Introduction

"Men work and women do the dishes." (Girl, 5 years old)

This is one of the differences observed in children's testimonials in the classroom and in our work in training teachers, almost always, remains without an answer because the teacher doesn't do anything about it. To learn more about this situation we started collecting data in preschool classes and in primary school classes. Children reproduce social prejudices at a very early stage, as soon as preschool. We observe that the teachers identify this problem but they do not know what to do: to select pedagogical materials; to organize the space in the classroom; to work with the group; to work with the families.

The teachers tell us that they need more training, materials and guidelines to develop education for citizenship and gender issues with children. To answer these difficulties, we organized training courses for teachers and built materials and scripts to encourage the development of gender and citizenship awareness in the pre-school and elementary school education context. In this presentation, we present the work already realized, presenting some theoretical assumptions and some data from our work. After we are going to reflect on the implications of this work for the educational practices and for the training of teachers, analysing how we can promote reflective practices concerning gender-equality in preschool and in the first years of elementary school.

Background work

Since 1997 we have been working with some colleagues of the *CIG - Comissão para a Cidadania e Igualdade de Género* - a state agency concerned with gender equality promotion. We started with participation in the *CO-Education Project [Projecto Co-educação]* a transnational project aiming to build resources for promoting gender-equality for kindergarten teachers (Coord. CIG –1997/2001). In this project we organized a publication to

analyze the role of narratives in promoting gender equality in preschool education (Silva, Ana et al./Projecto Co-educação, 2001). More recently (2009/2012), CIG asked our cooperation to write textbooks to work Gender and Citizenship issues in preschool and in the elementary school to support educational practices: <http://www.cig.gov.pt/guiaeducacao/> Our work has both a research dimension and a formative dimension, concerned with the creation of pedagogical materials to promote reflective practices concerning gender questions.

We are researching preschool teachers' and elementary school teachers' representations of *good* and *bad* students and the way they approach gender questions in the classroom; as well as preschool children and elementary school children's representations about men's/women's and girls'/boys' gender roles; and we are studying the impact of gender-equality issues on school performances.

To promote gender equality as early as preschool (3-6 years old) and elementary school (6-10 years old): the formative actions with teachers and the building of materials and guidelines (for the teachers). We can summarize our work as follows:

- Characterization of educational practices (observations; analysis during the stages; questionnaires and interviews).
- Analysis of the teachers' representations (analysis during the stages; questionnaires and interviews; meetings and workshops).
- Analysis of the children's representations (analysis during the stages; questionnaires and interviews; the results of the children's work (drawings, narratives...))

At the basis of all this work we intend to *promote reflective practices to develop gender-equality* in preschool and in the first years of the elementary school.

Some theoretical assumptions

Political discourse addresses the need to promote greater equality of outcomes, implying that the educational system must learn to integrate diversity. This is one of the major difficulties and challenges that schools face today: integrating diversity and promoting equality for all children. The way this diversity is taken into account in educational practices may condition children's social performance starting from preschool. However, any type of socio-cultural diversity has an underlying gender differentiation. The studies concerned with diversity mainly focus on socio-economic issues, but, they also need to consider research on gender and education, to research gender stereotypes from early childhood and the impact of gender on achievement (Eurydice, 2010).

Children begin to learn social roles traditionally assigned to men and women very early. In kindergarten and in the first years of school, children have already developed some prejudices about male and female behaviors, but these ideas are often ignored or devalued by the teachers. This attitude can strengthen these prejudices of children, despite a pedagogical discourse favorable to greater equality between girls and boys. These differences have an impact - for boys and girls - on social and educational performances.

Statistical data - that indicate a better student performance from girls - reinforce the stereotypical idea that girls adapt better to school. Nowadays, in most European countries, the majority of students attending higher education are girls, but, outside of school, the leadership in politics and in business continues to be mostly taken up by men. Boys are allegedly rebellious and unstructured. More than girls they are exposed to inconsequent behavior, they are unhappier at school, they don't do their homework and skip classes twice as much as girls

do (Macmillan, 2005). Besides manifesting a bigger tendency to behavior problems, boys score badly in all levels of study and in almost every course theme.

Some data from our work

In our study (50 classes of preschool; 50 classes of elementary school) we observe:

- children present different ideas about the social role of men and women or boys and girls, about the role of the mother and of the father inside and outside the household.
- the difficulty of teachers to work on these questions.

In each class, girls and boys answered the following questions:

- Which are mother's tasks inside the house?
- Which are mother's tasks outside the house?
- Which are father's tasks inside the house?
- Which are father's tasks outside the house?
- Which are the differences between men's tasks and women's tasks?
- Which are the differences between boys' tasks and girls' tasks - in school and outside the school?

In the children's testimonials in preschool, we observe, that gender-role stereotyping is obvious from a very early age, and is stronger in little girls. The gender-role stereotyping is stronger in rural children than in urban children. We also observe that gender-role stereotyping is stronger when children mention: Mother and Father's occupation and schedules; the world of grownups. For a better understanding let's look at some examples of what some children say.

About the activities inside the house, we present some of the more significant testimonies:

"Dad only sleeps but mum irons, cooks, does the dishes..." (Boy, 5 years old)

"Dad gets angry with me, has lunch and watches TV, mummy does lunch and cleans the house." (Girl, 5 years old)

"Dad sleeps and sometimes he makes dinner, mum does everything..." (Boy, 4 years old)

About the activities outside the house, we present some of the more significant testimonies:

"Dad works! He's in a truck putting traffic signs on roads" (Girl, 5 years old)

"When she leaves the house she puts the trash in the trash bin, goes to the coffee bar and goes to work." (Boy, 5 years old)

"Mum goes shopping with me, works in Santarem and walks me to the swimming pool" (Girl, 5 years old)

In the elementary school gender-role stereotypes are stronger when children mention the role of men and women in society and also when they mention the performance of boys and girls in school. Now let's look at some of the most significant testimonies (Cardona et al, 2011).

"The men speak differently. Women are more educated" (Girl, second year)

"Men work every day, and the women make dinner" (Boy, first year)

"Women may never be Presidents of the Republic because they have no authority nor can they stand the pressure" (Boy, fourth year)

"Women don't want to work and men work much, much more" (Boy, second year)

"Boys like cars and girls like makeup" (Boy, third year)

"The girls work more at school" (Girl, third year)

“Boys are more disobedient with the teacher (...) The girls worry more about school than the boys”
(Girl, third year)

Listening to the teachers shows that gender issues are clearly present in the daily life of the class. In general, the teachers identify the problem, but don't know how to intervene. The collected data corroborates other studies that reveal a conception of girls as more in keeping with the "ideal student": more driving stability; more attention; more self-control; more autonomy – more study and greater effort; more focus on work. The educational intentionality to work on gender questions begins with the organization of the educational environment. Some gender stereotypes are visible within the walls of the classroom, in the books and in the games one chooses.

In kindergarten and in elementary school, teachers recognize the importance of gender equality but don't feel able to deal with issues concerning it: didactic resource selection; space activities; activities development; group leadership; conflict mediation. We observe that, behind the difficulties in working on gender issues, in many cases, is the fear to work with conflicts - to face conflicts.

*We have to avoid conflict!
Cannot go against what they learn at home
But this may create conflicts with the families*

The recognition of the impact of these difficulties in the teacher's practice, led us to the study of conflict concept, in its multidimensionality and scope. As Xesus Jares said (2002), in our society and in school, there continues to dominate a very traditional perspective of conflict, not as a factor that naturally arises in our daily lives. The conflict approach is part of the educational practices and the way conflicts are experienced (or avoided) is relevant in personal and professional development. Conflicts are essential to promote development and learning and they can have different understandings but, above all, they have to be positively taken in a pedagogical approach in teaching and learning processes. Taking these perspectives is the basis for the development of a greater reflective capacity.

Implications for educational practices and teacher training

How can we promote reflective practices to develop gender equality in preschool and in the first years of the elementary school? To answer this question, we build and use analysis grids to support the questioning of teaching practices (Cardona et al, 2010/2011). To promote a pedagogy of diversity to counter the prejudices of gender requires a more critical and careful approach by teachers. Their interactions with children are often marked by differentiation with regard to expectations of boys and girls. Training must include a greater awareness of their attitudes and beliefs taking into account their educational practices. In working with teachers we analysed:

- situations that appear in the daily life of the class.
- situations previously planned by the teacher with the intention of working on gender issues with children.
- the organization of the educational environment: selection of educational materials, games and books; standards defined regarding the group at the level of working with families
- the analysis grids also provide questions concerning the direct observation of children's interactions, the organization of small groups and
- forms of leadership to work within the group.

- there was also a proposition to listen to the children - listen more carefully to what the child says has been a vital aspect throughout the training

Dialogue and discussion activities seem to be a privileged media for the approach of gender questions in the school context. The discussion as a strategy based on active oral interaction between the teacher and the child and/or among children between themselves, about a problematic situation. The development of activities that lead children to ask themselves is a fundamental strategy for working on dilemmas and preconceived ideas about gender and citizenship.

We also work with teachers regarding the philosophy for children as a possible direction for their educational practices, for the development of an attitude of questioning and to support the approach of cognitive conflict situations that naturally arise in the classroom. (UNESCO, 2007) We found in the philosophical process a path that goes from the imagination and questioning up to action, where the debate and dialogue have essential functions. The citizenship aspect in school should culminate in a change of action and participation in social life, not only at the level of "good" speech. It is a work that we continue to develop in the training of teachers, building materials and with the development of research.

But underlying this work there is a need to develop a new line of research on the different dimensions of conflict in education and how this can be worked on from initial teacher training on. Conflict as a way of analysis is a key resource for the work on gender and citizenship from pre-school education.

“The dilemmas concerning discipline in the classroom may bring into conflict the concept of the teacher's authority associated with traditional forms of maintenance of discipline with 'punitive' rules and the concept of a democratic authority associated with the values of citizenship.

(...) Intervene or pretend that it is not seen [?]”

Maria Teresa Estrela (2010)

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