

Vol. 24, Nº 1 (Febrero, 2020)

ISSN 1138-414X, ISSNe 1989-6395

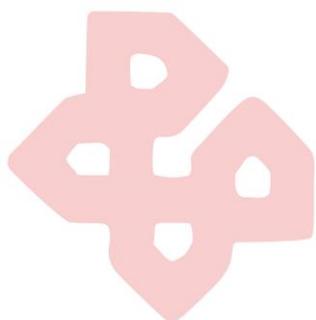
DOI: 10.30827/profesorado.v24i1.8237

Fecha de recepción: 18/11/18

Fecha de aceptación: 21/01/20

GENDER PERSPECTIVE AS A DIMENSION OF DEMOCRACY IN SCHOOLS

La perspectiva de género como dimensión de la democracia en las escuelas



Jordi Feu Gelís y Paco Abril Morales
Universitat de Girona

E-mail: jordi.feu@udg.edu ;

francisco.abril@udg.edu

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1395-2409>

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7843-7163>

Abstract:

Otherness, the recognition of the non-hegemonic other, is one of the dimensions to focus on in the construction of democracy in schools. In this article, we analyse the relationship between sex and gender, and democracy, based on case analysis of five preschool and primary education centres in Catalonia. In each centre, democracy figures prominently in the educational project. The main finding emphasizes that in these centres, where democracy is a cornerstone, the dimension of gender perspective is seldom considered. Therefore, gender equality policies, though increasingly present in the guidelines and legislation of educational administrations, have little impact. However, in one of the centres analyzed, the democratic project is linked to social transformation, where, in addition, gender relations are cultivated and included. This is an example of implementation, from the bottom up, based on thoughtful reflection and participation of the entire educational community.

Key Words: coeducation; democracy; diversity; gender; gender discrimination

Resumen:

La alteridad, el reconocimiento del otro no hegemónico, es una de las dimensiones a trabajar en la construcción de la democracia en las escuelas. En este artículo analizamos la relación entre sexo y género, y democracia, a partir del análisis de casos de cinco centros de educación preescolar y primaria de Cataluña. En cada centro, la democracia ocupa un lugar destacado en el proyecto educativo. El hallazgo principal enfatiza que, en estos centros, donde la democracia es una piedra angular, rara vez consideran la dimensión de la perspectiva de género. Por lo tanto, las políticas de igualdad de género, cada vez más presentes en las directrices y la legislación de las administraciones educativas, tienen poco impacto en ellos. Sin embargo, en uno de los centros analizados, el proyecto democrático está vinculado a la transformación social, donde además se trabaja e incluyen las relaciones de género. Este centro es un ejemplo de implementación, de abajo hacia arriba, basado en la reflexión y participación de toda la comunidad educativa.

Palabras clave: coeducación; democracia; discriminación de género; diversidad; género

1. Introduction

This article is based on the results of a wider research initiative. The research took a fundamentally qualitative approach, with the objective of deepening understanding of how schools interpret and implement democracy.

The construction of democracy in schools, from a critical and comprehensive perspective, is done by working in at least four main areas: a) *governance*, which addresses government-related bodies and decision-making processes; b) *inhabitation*, referring to the structural and environmental conditions that make students, teachers and families feel comfortable in the centre and facilitate 'school success' for all; c) *ethos*, a set of civic values and virtues that are experienced, as a matter of course, in the daily life of the centre; and d) *otherness*, which has to do with the recognition of the non-hegemonic other in all its manifestations and complexity. It is precisely this last dimension that leads us to reflect on the main theme of this article: the diversity of gender identities. To be more exact, our interest focuses on the arguments of the different members of the educational community (management team, teachers, families and students) regarding otherness, in particular relating to gender and sex, and the specific practices developed.

The article is based on a case analysis of five preschool and primary education centres in Catalonia (Spain) in which democracy and participation occupy a prominent place, both in the educational project of the centre and in the focal points of school practice. By way of introduction, we can affirm that the diversity of gender and sex identities has become increasingly prominent in a short space of time in the Spanish educational system. In 1990, the education law LOGSE (General Organic Law of the Educational System 1/1990 of October 3) established for the first time the idea that *education can and must become a decisive element in overcoming social stereotypes associated with gender*. This is also the same law in which the principle of coeducation appears in the school curriculum. In Catalonia, in 2015, the Government of the Generalitat of Catalonia approved the Gender Equality Plan of the Catalan

Educational System (PIGSEC). This plan includes specific measures for gender equality in diverse educational settings.

Thus, coeducation, and policies aimed at gender equality are increasingly present in the guidelines of educational administrations as well as in the philosophy of many centres. However, the applicability of administrative principles, and the philosophy of non-discriminatory and emancipatory treatment of diverse gender and sexual orientation, does not always correspond to practice.

The main contribution of this article lies in emphasizing the importance of working from bottom to top in schools when tackling matters of gender equality. We also stress the importance of critical observation and analysis of specific practices, as well as rethinking educational strategies and the results of such action.

2. Otherness: Gender in school

Otherness can be defined simply by referring to people on the margin. Against this simplification, there are those who add 'binary opposition' (Coombes & Danaher, 2006), that is, the contrast between groups, understanding one of them as standard, normalized or hegemonic. Using this model, identity is built on the basis of difference with another identity, for example, the rich with respect to the poor, or man with respect to woman. Generally, this dualisation is also hierarchical, rendering one of the two identities with greater power than the other and / or over the other (Coombes & Danaher, 2006).

It is important to emphasize that when we talk about otherness we are not necessarily talking about majority groups in contrast with minority groups. We can find several examples within institutions in which a group that started out being quantitatively a minority, as is the case of women in education, became the majority with the passage of time. Whether or not a group started as a minority and became the majority, or remained a minority, we can observe that hierarchical classification is still present and is a cause of inequality. Nor is difference motivated by the spatial distance between two groups; rather, it is the lack of contact that makes the different identities feel strange (Bauman, 2005; Nash & Marre, 2003). This gives us one of the keys regarding the work to be done in schools. The challenge is not to eliminate the aspects that make us different, that is, to homogenize; rather, the challenge is to ensure that differences stop producing inequalities and discrimination. The inclusion of the gender perspective in education is a factor of innovation and educational change that has been made possible by the contributions of feminism (Rebollo, 2013). Several authors have also stressed that feminist pedagogy proposes constant reflection on pedagogical practices and power relations in the educational field. This pedagogy is key to strengthening legislation and gender equality in education (Ylöstalo & Brunilla, 2018).

As a final element, analysis of reality leads us to observe, especially in schools, that the work currently implemented with respect to otherness focuses on non-

hegemonic groups, which, in turn, are identified as vulnerable. Taking European anti-discrimination legislation as a reference (Council Directive, 2000/43/CE; Council Directive, 2000/78/CE; EU Minorities and Discrimination Survey, 2009), these are groups that are susceptible to discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic or national origin, ideology, religious beliefs or any other personal situation. Therefore, the key elements that help us to identify the characteristics of the groups to work with are people on the margin, binary opposition, hierarchical classification, alienation and ignorance between identities, and situations of vulnerability. In practice, a partial view of these elements has led to a common error in some schools, this being to focus work on otherness mainly as cultural diversity (Ramos, 2008). Although it is true that sometimes the cultural variable intersects with others, such as social class, country of origin or gender, these other elements rarely become the central focus of work and analysis.

The recent highlighting of cases of bullying (Carbonell *et al.*, 2016; Cornell *et al.*, 2013) in schools has led to the fact that, among the elements listed above, work on otherness in schools has now become relevant and is addressed to those groups that are in a situation of inequality motivated by the exercise of power that others exert over them (Agius & Tobler, 2012; Díaz-Aguado, Martínez & Martín, 2013; Save the Children, 2015). In this sense, without being the only ones, gender and sex become urgent elements to work on. Girls, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people, as well as boys who do not respond to the hegemonic model of masculinity, are invisible and / or unrecognized by society. People that are identified with these other identities are also those who most often receive harassment (Flecha, Puigvert & Rios, 2013; FRA 2013; Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2008; Meyer, 2009). On the other hand, school policies and practices that aim at the "safety" and "inclusion" of "marginalized" students often seek to achieve these goals primarily through regulating and punishing individual behaviour, rather than changing the institutional conditions that produce gender-normative systems (Meyer & Keenan, 2018).

Following the concept of 'doing gender', coined by West and Zimmerman (1987), at this juncture we are interested in questioning how gender is currently 'being done' in schools. According to these authors, gender is a system of meanings, a way to make sense of actions that are oriented to create and maintain a certain social order of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 2009). In short, in our way of relating to—and of interacting with—other people, gender identity helps us to organize these interactions, giving them meaning and direction. Thus, in schools there is recognition of diversity, including gender diversity. Hence, the school can play a dual role, either contributing to the valorisation of these identities and reinforcing otherness or obscuring and / or assigning an inferior value to this otherness (Ramos, 2008).

According to Meyer (2010), queer theory offers an opportunity to question and reformulate education through a queer pedagogical lens. On the one hand, it challenges educators to analyze how they teach, how they reinforce gender practices in schools and how they support traditional notions of heterosexuality. On the other

hand, this allows for the reduction and eventual elimination of all forms of discrimination in schools and fosters diversity.

If we look back, different authors (Acker, 1994, 2003; Lather, 1992) have warned of the role played by schools in reproducing attitudes with respect to gender relations. History shows us how sex has been used in school as an argument to justify the segregation of men and women. In Spain, for example, the establishment of the dictatorial regime plunged the educational system into inequality at different levels, including gender. An educational model was implemented that differentiated between boys and girls and placed them in separate classes. Moreover, as the academic level increased, women had greater difficulty in gaining access, with a minority of women entering secondary school and even fewer with access to university studies (Flecha, 1996; Scalon, 1982). It was not until 1970, with the General Law of Education, that mixed schools were established in Spain. Even so, it would be 20 years for the educational reform of the LOGSE (General Organic Law of the Educational System 1/1990 of October 3) to establish for the first time the idea that education must be a *decisive element for overcoming social stereotypes assimilated to difference by sex*. This is also the same law in which the principle of coeducation appears.

Using the case of Spain as an example, we see how at the formal level, understood as legislative, the establishment of coeducation has a short trajectory. And taking Acker's (1994, 2003) analyses as a reference, we find that in this short trajectory this work, in many respects, has remained on the theoretical plane; in practice it has yet to fully permeate the climate of schools. When students become part of the school, they are labelled, as male or female; this results in differentiated treatment following hegemonic models of masculinity and femininity. However, this gender transmission also occurs at the institutional level, where girls and boys observe daily practices of sexual division of labour among teachers. There are sexually differentiated responsibilities as well as curricular material that reproduce sexist stereotypes and obscure certain sexual identities. All this contributes to the reproduction of the patriarchal social order. Taking effective action to combat this is difficult, as there is often resistance to anti-sexist initiatives from teachers and even families. In part, this is due to the failure to identify problems in this regard (Lingard, 2003).

Some studies carried out in Spain indicate that the most important obstacles to implementing equality plans in educational centres are the climate existing in the centres, the lack of training and the existence of numerous stereotypes in the mentality of teachers. The curriculum is built on the basis of the dominant ideology—it is predominantly male. Existing work carried out by teams of teachers on coeducation and sexual-affective diversity is still scarce and is not put into practice systematically. The issue of equality continues to generate controversy and is still perceived as highly ideologized; this is part of its problem for real insertion in the classroom (Díaz de Greñu and Anguita Martínez, 2013).

2.1. Demands regarding work on gender in the context of democratic schools: beyond the classical conception of coeducation

Most work on otherness within the framework of democratic schools¹ places special emphasis on those groups in situations of exclusion. In this respect, Apple (2012) emphasizes that the work against exclusion in the framework of democratic schools must incorporate those groups that are marginalized and silenced. These would be, in relation to what we have already discussed, all non-hegemonic oppressed groups that are, therefore, in situations of vulnerability. A review of the scientific literature in the context of schools leads us to identify the following strategies: inclusion, recognition, respect, visibility, positive valuation and breaking with social stigma (Taylor, 1994; Kanpol, 1997; Knight, 2000). There is also emerging research that is looking at the experiences and challenges faced by transgender, non-binary and creative gender learners in schools (Beemyn 2015; Martino and Cumming-Potvin 2016). If we jointly analyze these strategies and experiences, we can highlight the importance of enhancing the strengths and experiences of oppressed groups, helping them to understand the social structures that oppress them and enabling them to transform that reality.

In turn, we identify two main areas of work to carry out this task. The first broad area concerns the daily life of the centre and in many respects is comparable to the school culture (Viñao, 2002) or school grammar (Tyack & Duncan, 2001). This area includes everything from the curriculum to the norms governing relations in the centre, through the pedagogical and informational materials displayed in different parts of the school. The second more concrete area refers to democratic participation, also termed governance in our theoretical model (Feu, et al., 2017). In a study on Andalusian public education, it was found that, despite the existence of parity between men and women, management positions are mostly held by men and the intellectual representation of women in books is lower than that of men, concluding that the patriarchal culture is still present in these educational centres (García Pérez, Quiñones Delgado & Espigares Pinazo, 2013).

Democratic participation refers to a set of instruments and dynamics (formal and informal) whose purpose is to make decisions that affect the centre, and which are incumbent upon one or more parts of the educational community. Democratic governance that respects otherness must ensure the presence of the diversity of identities present in the centre and that this participation occurs under equal conditions (Booth & Ainscow, 1998).

Finally, the social system of schools leads us to identify three levels of 'doing gender': the socio-cultural, interactive and individual levels (Crawford & Chaffin,

¹While it is true that Spanish legislation does not explicitly recognize the term democratic schools, the different norms of a certain range (the organic laws) refer to them. The regulations as well as pedagogical renewal movements and educational actors committed to democratic schools emphasize two key ideas: the participation of the educational community and inclusion of minorities.

1997; Keddie & Mills, 2007; Lingard, 2003). The socio-cultural level refers to the role of gender in regulating access to resources, social positions, power, relationship models, etc. Work on this level affects the distribution and use of space in the school, curricular content, materials that are used, the allocation of academic positions, and so on. The interactive level is based on gender as a construction—in relation to the other people that surround us in everyday life—on the significance attributed to different identities. Therefore, work on this level involves analysis of the interactions that are established between the different agents present in the life of schools: students, teachers, family and other educational agents. These interactions are analyzed especially from the point of view of the stereotypes that are transmitted and the relationships that are established—conflicts, competitiveness, cooperation, etc. The individual level includes gender as an expression of personal identity in which interests or expectations are manifested. In schools, work on this individual level focuses primarily on academic performance and the different options that students must decide on throughout their academic trajectory, such as the choice between different types of baccalaureate.

Therefore, considering the questions: *with respect to whom and how*, the work of gender otherness in the framework of democratic schools has surpassed the classical conception of coeducation. The idea of coeducation was conceived to defend mixed and egalitarian education—that is, for boys and girls to share the same space and the same curriculum content—with the intention of balancing inequalities between men and women. However, this inequality could not be overcome with coeducation alone; hence, the concept of coeducation was expanded to the point of surpassing the purely formal aspects of exclusively physical equity, and incorporated into its discourse the idea of fighting for the transmission of values of equality that seek the comprehensive development of individuals regardless of their sex (Ballarín, 2011). In this context, as pointed out by Suberviola (2012), coeducation involves a revision of sexist patterns of society and especially of educational institutions, ending the non-voluntary transmission of sexist values through hidden curriculum (Fernández & González, 2015). The configuration of today's society requires us to go beyond the binary conception of gender and sex, and not consider coeducation as equalization and homogenization of the sexes. Rather, difference must be shown from conditions of equality, and from this difference each individual must be enabled to construct their social identity in a positive way. It is in this context that otherness in the school, in having a place to defend difference on an equal footing, plays an essential role (Fernández & González, 2015; Puigvert, 2001; Suberviola, 2012).

Continuing with this approach, a type of coeducation is proposed that distances itself from the myths and errors perpetuated over time. This includes a commitment to coeducation based on principles of visibility, transversality and inclusion. Here, visibility refers to the contributions of different gender identities to the development of societies based on non-discriminatory language, and analysis of existing injustices and the persistence of inequalities. Transversality entails that coeducation is present in all the actions of the educational centre. Last, inclusion directed at the whole of the educational community is demonstrated by actions aimed at both girls and boys,

following the idea that the consequences of segregation can be overcome through inclusion (Ainscow, 1995; Suberviola, 2012).

Coeducation must overcome the challenge of being treated in an ad hoc and anecdotal manner and work transversally at the school level. It is crucial, then, for it to be present in the day-to-day classroom and at all academic levels, since it is a basic value for the achievement of social justice (Suberviola, 2012, Keddie, 2008, Fernández & González, 2015), taking everyone into consideration. Coeducation must also meet the challenge of going beyond the binary conception of gender and project its work on all marginalized identities that find themselves in situations of vulnerability, as well as dealing with the problems that derive from the exercise of power over these identities, as is the case of bullying in school.

Some authors advocate that teachers and schools be 'active in gender policy' (Lingard, 2003). This implies the identification of school as a space that can both enhance gender justice and restrict it, as well as knowing the mechanisms by which these actions are carried out. Successful action requires a great level of commitment to gender justice, not only from teachers but also from the rest of the community as well (Keddie, 2010).

3. Material and methods

The results presented in this article derive from research conducted in the framework of "Demoskole: Democracy, Participation and Inclusive Education in Schools (EDU2012-39556-C02-01/02). The main objective of this project was to study the democratic discourses and practices in early childhood and primary education centres in Spain. To this end, four axes of analysis were established, one of which we will call otherness. The axis of otherness refers to the treatment of 'the other', understanding these individuals as non-hegemonic and often vulnerable.

The focus of this article is to investigate a couple of aspects of this otherness. Specifically, we examine the treatment of gender on the one hand, and the treatment and evaluation of sexual diversity on the other.

We addressed these issues from a qualitative paradigm and we employed an observational and linguistic method (Coll & Edwards, 2006) encompassing, as we will explain later, various ethnographies, semi-structured interviews and discussion groups. The research proceeds from case analysis of five early childhood and primary education centres that were selected from an intentionally generic sample based on the variation of cases to study and considering the conditioning factors of access. All the centres are early childhood education centres and primary schools, and in all of them democracy and participation occupy a prominent place in both the educational project of the centre and the daily life of the school. The criteria of maximum variation that were taken into account when selecting the cases were as follows: size of the centre, ownership, location and composition of the student body. Selection of the centres was based on convenience factors, after the research team verified that democracy and

participation were part of the actual core of the educational project and practices. To carry out this verification, the researchers divided the analysis of democracy in the school based on the four basic dimensions—governance, inhabitation, otherness and ethos—proposed by Feu et al. (2017) which emphasizes the participation of the community in the day-to-day functioning of the school and the inclusion and integration of vulnerable groups.

Table 1
Schools that are part of the sample.

School Interview code	Basic identifying trait	Size of centre. Number of classrooms per grade	Ownership	Geographic location of the centre	Foreign students
School A, PR1	School of libertarian inspiration	Small, cyclic school. 21 students.	Private	Urban environment	13%
School B, PR2	School with a specific project to meet the needs of cultural minorities	Large, school divided by grades with two classrooms per grade. 408 students.	Public	Urban environment	98%
School C, PR3	School that has influence on governance	Medium-sized, school divided by grades with one classroom per grade. 291 students.	Public	Urban environment	22.7%
School D, PR4	Rural school with a community project	Small, cyclic school. 22 students.	Public	Rural environment	11%
School F, PR5	Learning Community	Large, school with two classrooms per grade. 429 students.	Public	Urban environment	35%

Source: Own elaboration.

The instruments and techniques for data collection were as follows: 1) observation: one per centre, five in total; 2) semi-structured interviews: fifteen in total, three per centre, addressed to the centre's management or the person to whom management delegated the interview; and 3) two discussion groups per centre: one format for parents and one for students, resulting in a total of ten discussion groups.

Apart from the instruments created specifically for the occasion, we also took into account documents elaborated by the centre—such as the School-based Education

Project (PEC) and the Annual General Program (PGA)²—that likely contain information referring to gender equality and sexual diversity.

The information derived from both interviews and discussion groups was extracted using *Atlas Ti* software. Eleven categories were previously established, one of which was identified with the name 'otherness'. This category included three secondary categories with the objective of typifying discourses and practices specifically related to gender and sexual diversity. Based on the ethical criteria of scientific research, all the information has been anonymised and, upon completion of the research process, was returned to the centres in order for them to have knowledge of the information they had provided to us.

The resulting material was analyzed under the parameters of content analysis, of an essentially functional nature (Rios Cabrera, 2001). The datasets have been analyzed through objective and systemic analysis, searching for their meaning within their context and in parallel with the basic registers of the theoretical framework (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, P., 2003).

4. Results

In Catalonia, the laws and guidelines of educational administrations point out that coeducation and the promotion of real equality between men and women must be one of the guiding principles of the education system (Law 12/2009 of Education). Starting in the 2011-2012 school year, documents on the organization and operation of educational centres established that school boards should designate a person among their members to promote educational measures that foster real and effective equality between men and women. On January 20, 2015, the Government of the Generalitat of Catalonia, in accordance with the recommendation of the Law 12/2009 of Education, approved the Gender Equality Plan of the Catalan Educational System (PIGSEC). This plan includes specific measures for gender equality in the various educational settings (ACORD GOV/ 2015). Therefore, gender equality is on the political agenda of the educational administration in Catalonia because, as the PIGSEC indicates in its introduction:

²The PEC is, essentially, the document that defines how an educational centre functions, and includes the guiding principles that differentiate it from other centres. It is adapted to the reality of the environment of its students and, in accordance with the pedagogical convictions of its teachers, it explain the lines of attention to diversity and the medium-term objectives. This document is the basis of teachers' programs and of any singular action to be carried out at the school. It is subject to inspection by the administration, in order to guarantee that, as the educational constitution that it is, it conforms to the current laws on education and general laws of the country. The PGA is a document that presents a preview of what the centre plans to do and is the result of analysis between the evaluation of the previous course, the current status of the school, its performance and what is proposed as an ideal to achieve.

(...) Educational centres, families, the school, and the educational community reproduce the unequal relations between boys and girls, through stereotyped social roles that continue to maintain inequality and gender differences among students (PIGSEC, 2015, p. 4).

One of the objectives of PIGSEC is to move towards equality by eliminating stereotypes and sexism from curricular content and materials, methodologies and classroom dynamics and in the organization of the educational centre.

We ask to what extent progress has been made in gender equality and the elimination of sexism in Catalan schools. That is, we are interested in whether these indications from the educational administration have become pervasive and essential in schools. Specifically, in this article, we focus on the analysis of five schools that, as described in the methodology section, are characterized by an ethos of democracy. In our approach, otherness includes gender perspective as an indicator of democracy in schools. We therefore understand that those centres claiming democratic development must ensure that gender equality, as a principle, is present in the educational ethos.

In the five selected centres, we analyze the distribution of gender and the extent to which discourses and practices exist to combat stereotypes and gender segregation. In addition, we look at the various strategies adopted by schools to include gender equality and sexual-affective diversity in the curriculum and in the daily life of the centre in general.

This section is divided into two parts. The results have shown that in four of the five centres, the dimension of otherness of sex and gender does not form part of the substantial elements of democracy. On the contrary, in the centre identified as PR1, significant references to sexual and gender otherness have been found which make this school interesting for a detailed analysis.

4.1. Gender equality is considered, but is not worked on explicitly

A first indicator of the inclusion of gender equality is to verify whether this is mentioned in the written documents of the centres analyzed. We reviewed the School-based Education Project (PEC) and the Annual General Program (PGA), as well as information on websites. However, this documentary analysis is partial, as we were able to access these documents in only two of the four centres. In the other two, either the documents do not exist or the centres were unwilling to provide them—in some instances because they were still being elaborated at the time of data collection. In the two centres where the documents were analyzed, explicit references to equality and non-discrimination in their PEC are only found in PR3. This centre is governed by ‘coeducational principles’ and has ‘explicit guidelines that make visible all diversities, including gender’ (PEC, PR3, p.41).

A second level of analysis, based on the information extracted from interviews, discussion groups and observations, allows us to see how each centre understands otherness and whether it is part of their strategy—in their various areas of work, school life in general and systems of participation (governance). In this regard, we were able

to verify that, in general, otherness is related to the concept of inclusion that encompasses all types of diversity, including sex and gender. Mention is made that inclusion (in relation to cultural or ethnic origin, abilities or sex) is one of the objectives of the educational centres, which consists of ensuring that no discrimination of any kind occurs:

Inclusion, I understand it above all as the antithesis of exclusion, right? The fact of not excluding anyone is already included, right?... The fact that, if they split them into groups they should always be heterogeneous in every sense, not only in terms of knowledge, but of sex and everything, and of race, and whatever you want..." (PR5, TAT1)

Gender is present as a value, 'respect for gender differences', but beyond specific work, such as talking about it in classroom tutorials, it is not addressed explicitly or systematically:

Sure, when you talk to me about values, for example respect, of course, respect is something we talk about and work on a lot. Having respect for differences, respect for the person next to you, for adults, yes. Having respect for the difference between the sexes, this is also talked about intrinsically in tutoring sessions and in the day-to-day. What happens is that it is a matter that is very much in mind, but we do not have 'respect week', as it were, if you get my point. (PR2, R: TAT1)

In relation to the three levels of the social system of the school where they 'do gender', evidence has been found in only one of the analyzed centres of a specific intervention, at a socio-cultural level, on a problem related to the use and distribution of physical space according to gender. In the PR3 centre, in one of the student and faculty assemblies, which is one of the usual tools of democratic participation, gender segregation was detected in games in the playground. It was apparent that boys were controlling the playground space to play football, and were excluding girls from the game

R: Voice5: Sometimes all the girls are talking in a corner and the boys are playing football, but after, I don't know....

R: Voice4: "In football, it's the boys that are good and in class, it's the girls, right? [Laughs] (PR3, GD)

On account of this, a decision was made to intervene and students, together with the teaching team, prepared a series of mixed games that encouraged participation and balanced use of the playground space by boys and girls. This agreement worked at first, but the participants appeared to tire of it and stopped. It was reported that the boys went back to playing football, although sometimes they included the girls in their games.

In relation to the other two levels—interactive and individual—of 'doing gender', no evidence has been found to indicate that the centres analyzed take gender

into account at these levels. Therefore, we can conclude that in these centres, which stand out because democracy is the backbone of school life, the dimension of otherness of sex and gender is neither explicitly contemplated nor is it part of the strategies of inclusion, recognition, respect, visibility and positive evaluation in school life and governance. The silence in discourse on these issues and the scant evidence we found also corroborate that the otherness of sex and gender is not present at the socio-cultural, interactive and individual levels in the centers analyzed. In this regard, legislation on gender equality and coeducation, as well as the guidelines and recommendations of the educational administration on this matter, are not permeating the life of these centers.

4.2. Reflection and (self-) observation tools

The second part of this section of results deals with the case of the PR1 educational centre. Democracy is also part of school life in this centre. Here, a type of radical democracy is implemented, where the participation of all members of the educational community is the basis of power. The voice of students, person-centred education and inclusion are core principles of the centre's ideology. This school is where we found more discourse and practice that include the dimensions of sex and gender. In addition, gender perspective is one of the pillars of how they understand democracy. It is for this reason that an analysis that differed from that which was applied to the other four centres was considered pertinent.

The PR1 educational project was born more than 10 years ago from the initiative of a group of parents from libertarian political and social movements. These parents participated in an autonomous and self-managed project linked to an occupied social centre. Over the years, the need developed to socialize their children more in line with the model of relationships that they were building and that they did not find in other schools. Thus PR1 was born, with a political vision of reality, in the broadest sense of social and life construction, and with the need to transform social relations. Its educational project seeks the autonomy and personal empowerment of children based on development of the concept of 'freedom with responsibility', community, mutual support, self-management and critical sense.

In PR1, otherness, recognition and visibility of the non-hegemonic other acquire importance as a distinctive element of the centre's philosophy. This is a strategy that appears at different levels and in different areas of work in the centre. The otherness of sex and gender is present in school life and systems of participation. In governance, for example, gender parity is taken into consideration with respect to members of the teaching team, or 'companions' as they are called. There are two male companions and two female companions. They are also aware of, and careful to use, inclusive language at all times. They talk about boys and girls, fathers and mothers. They rarely use the generic masculine form.

The otherness of sex and gender is reflected in the PR1 written documents where it is stated that there is no room for games or stories

That reaffirm certain established models of gender behaviour ... Books and toys are selected to avoid certain ideas and stereotypes that perpetuate relations of domination, for reasons of gender' (document on the foundations of the educational project of PR1, 2010, p.2)

We were able to observe how this ideology, core to the educational project, is transferred into school life, the curriculum, the materials with which they work and classroom dynamics.

In relation to the three levels where 'gender is done', it is at the socio-cultural and interactive levels where the most evidence of inclusion of sexual and gender otherness has been found. The individual level is only slightly present owing to the characteristics of the PR1 educational model, based on accompaniment in learning, and where the protagonists are the girls and boys. In addition, at the time of conducting the fieldwork, the students' age was between 3 and 10. These factors make it difficult to see what the interests and expectations are at the gender level in the expression of personal identity, since the individual level focuses on academic performance and the different options of students during their academic trajectories.

At the socio-cultural level, the otherness of sex and gender are present in the distribution and uses of spaces, in the curricular content and the assigned materials. We have already spoken of parity distribution by sex, inclusive language and the selection of non-sexist materials. To this, we must add that the principles of diversity and visibility of the non-hegemonic other permeate school life and are put into practice whenever the occasion arises to address the issue. The following excerpt, from a story about a transsexual child, is taken from the case explained by one of the companions regarding classroom work:

R: TAT2 ... For example, the other day I explained one that went like this: Júlia wants to be a girl [using the masculine form of 'a']. No, Júlia wants to be a... Júlia wants to be a boy, [using the feminine form of 'a'] I said. Of course, everyone went, "the feminine form of 'a' with the word boy? Come on!!" And it was that the girl did not identify in any way at all with what is socially defined as being a girl ... (PR1, TAT2)

At the interactive level, reflection and analysis of stereotypes and gender roles among girls and boys, families and the team of companions, is one of the features of PR1 most relevant to this research. The team of companions has reflected on this and are aware that, albeit involuntarily, they transmit and reproduce stereotypes and sexist values. They acknowledge that a constant revision, 'adult work', as they point out in the following quotation, is necessary to avoid subtle forms, and ways of speaking and addressing people, which reproduce and transmit stereotypes and sexism:

R: TAT1 ...We need to do adult work and then, the other day, we also had a very interesting meeting about this, we talked about how in essence we build gender, although not very explicitly, but subtly. Ways of speaking, of addressing one another, of thinking about interests, and

so forth... Because sometimes we see boys and girls like: some play one thing and the others another. Sometimes it happens, and we think, "but we are not telling them this here" ... But how are we building this from subtlety, right? Like sexism, no? A subtle sexism but sexism just the same, and you don't need to hit someone to be sexist, you know what I mean? (PR1, R: TAT1)

Families are also involved in this work of revision of gender stereotypes and sexism. In their discourses there are references to the need to seek coherence between the learning that occurs in the educational centre and education in the family. This topic was raised in one of the periodic assemblies between teaching staff and families. Most were willing to undertake this process of reflection. Many agreed that their sons and daughters, despite their efforts, reproduce gender stereotypes in their games. For example, when girls want to dress themselves as 'Disney princesses' and boys adopt 'very warrior-like' models of masculinity. This has led the educational community to take into account, and prioritize work on gender reflection and awareness, and to initiate a process of awareness raising and training on these issues.

What is interesting, therefore, is that the process of sensitization and inclusion of sexual and gender otherness has come about through observation (and self-observation) that has led to questioning of the social and personal parameters that construct gender identity. The work is initiated by the educators (companions) but with the involvement of families to inculcate, in turn, the daily life of the school. In this case, the implementation of gender perspectives is not based on legislation or the recommendations of the educational authorities. Rather, it occurs from the bottom up, from below, using reflection and (self-) observation as a tool that activates and involves the entire educational community (companions, families, boys and girls) in raising awareness and questioning the hegemonic parameters of sex and gender. This is, therefore, an exercise in democracy that questions hegemonic knowledge, attitudes and values based on the participation of all stakeholders in the construction, visibility, recognition and inclusion of other non-hegemonic forms in relation to sex and gender categories.

5. Discussion and conclusions

We can affirm that the diversity of gender and sex identities has become increasingly prominent in a short space of time in the Spanish educational system. Thus, coeducation, and policies aimed at gender equality are increasingly present in the guidelines of educational administrations as well as in the philosophy of many centres. There is a clear desire on the part of the educational administrations for coeducation to become a backbone of school life, eliminating the stereotypes and sexism present in the content, curricular materials, methodologies, classroom dynamics and organization of educational centres. However, the applicability of administrative principles, and the philosophy of non-discriminatory and emancipatory

treatment of diverse gender and sexual orientation, does not always correspond to practice.

The theoretical approach of this article situates otherness—referring to the treatment of the non-hegemonic 'other', often in a situation of vulnerability—as one of the pillars of democracy in schools. Specifically, we have focused on the analysis of sexual and gender otherness in five early childhood and primary education centres in Catalonia, characterized by the fact that democracy is a cornerstone of life in the school.

This analysis has allowed us to verify that in only one of the five centres studied, sexual and gender otherness is a strategy present in the different areas and levels in which they 'do gender' at the educational centre. In addition, in this school, gender perspective is one of the pillars of an understanding of democracy.

In the other four centres, the concept of sexual and gender otherness is not part of the substantial elements of democracy. The silence in discourse on these issues and the scant evidence we found corroborate that the otherness of sex and gender is not present at the socio-cultural, interactive and individual levels in the centres analyzed. It is mainly absent from documents, curriculum, materials, or classroom dynamics; and when it is present, it is in a very generic way as a value to be taken into account, which may be addressed on occasion, but is not worked on explicitly or systematically. In these centres otherness is focused mainly on cultural diversity. In this regard, we can conclude that legislation on gender equality and coeducation, as well as the guidelines and recommendations of the educational administration in Catalonia, are not permeating the life of the centres analyzed. Accordingly, we find that coeducation, which on a theoretical level is a commitment of Catalan educational administrations, has yet to become fully ingrained in schools.

The main contribution of this article lies in emphasizing the importance of working from bottom to top in schools when tackling matters of gender equality. In one of the centres analysed, the implementation of coeducation and the strategy of inclusion of gender perspective, is recognized as one of the axes of democratic quality. The PR1 centre has a clear commitment and political vision, where democracy is one of the cornerstones of its educational project. The freedom of students, and their capacity for decision-making and choice, as well as the participation of families, are part of a political project of social transformation, which also includes gender relations.

In this context, otherness, recognition and visibility of the non-hegemonic other acquire importance as a distinctive element of the centre's philosophy. It is a strategy in PR1 that appears at different levels and in different areas of work. The otherness of sex and gender is present in school life and systems of participation. The distinctive feature is that the inclusion of sexual and gender otherness does not come from a top-down strategy, that is, from the legislation and recommendations of educational authorities, but is a bottom-up strategy. The observation (and self-observation) of educational discourses and practices has led this community of teachers, families and

students to reflect on the need to revise, question and put into practice a model of relationships in which the non-hegemonic 'other', from a perspective of gender, is included and permeates the daily life of the school.

Thus, the conclusions of this article suggest that the formal, legislative level of inclusion in coeducation and gender awareness is insufficient for it to be established in practice in the life of schools. Reflection is necessary, based on observation (and self-observation), in order to revise discourses and practices in the different areas and levels where 'gender is done' in educational centres. An exercise in democracy that takes into account sexual and gender otherness, must question hegemonic knowledge, attitudes and values based on the active participation of all parties in the construction, visibility, recognition and inclusion of the non-hegemonic other.

However, we must recognize the limitations of the sample. Being a case study, we cannot generalize the results. It would be necessary to broaden the sample and analyze how coeducation is implemented and what vision is held of the non-hegemonic otherness in those schools where democracy is a cornerstone of life in the school.

Bibliography

- Acker, S. (1994). *Gendered education*. UK: Open University Press.
- Acker, S. (2003). Canadian teacher educators in time and place. *Journal of Research in Teacher Education*, 3-4, 69-85.
- Acord Gov/ 2015, de 20 de gener, pel qual s'aprova el Pla per a la igualtat de gènere en el sistema educatiu (2015). Recovered from http://xtec.gencat.cat/web/.content/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/0052/639685da-0e9a-4aaf-bf91-2785a5ba79bf/acord_govern_pla_igualtat.pdf
- Ainscow, M. (1995). *Necesidades especiales en el aula. Guía para la formación del profesorado*. Madrid: Narcea.
- Agius, S., and C. Tobler (2012). *Trans and Intersex People: Discrimination on the Grounds of Sex, Gender Identity and Gender Expression*. Luxembourg: European Union.
- Apple, M. W. (2012). *Can Education Change Society?* New York: Routledge.
- Ballarín, P. (2004). Género y políticas educativas. *Revista de Educación*, 6, 35-42.
- Ballarín, P. (2005). El techo de cristal de los estudios de las mujeres. *Crítica*, 923, 53-56.
- Bauman, S. (2005). *Modernidad y ambivalencia*. Barcelona: Antrophos.
- Beemyn, G. (2015). Coloring outside the lines of gender and sexuality: The struggle of nonbinary students to be recognized. *The Educational Forum*, 79(4), 359- 361.

- Booth, T. and Ainscow M. (1998). From them to us: An International study of inclusion in education. London: Routledge.
- Carbonell, S., Cantero, N., Navarro, M., & Melgar, P. (2016). Modelo Comunitario de Convivencia en Educación Primaria. *Información Psicológica*, 111, 91-102.
- Coll, C., and Edwards D. (2006). Enseñanza, aprendizaje y discurso en el aula. Aproximaciones al estudio del discurso educacional. Madrid: Fundación Infancia y Aprendizaje.
- Coombes, P; and Dananher G. (2006). From the margins to the centre: the power of transformative learning in Australia. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(7), 759-765. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.029
- Cornell, D., Gregory, A., Huang, F., & Fan, X. (2013). Perceived prevalence of bullying and teasing predicts high school dropout rates. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 105, 138-149.
- Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. Recovered from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32000L0043>
- Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation (2000). Recovered from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32000L0078>
- Crawford, M., and Chaffin R. (1997). The Meanings of Difference: Cognition in Social and Cultural Context. In *Gender Differences in Human Cognition*, edited by P. J. Caplan, et al., 81-130. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Díaz de Greñu, S., Anguita Martínez, R. & Torrego Egido, L. M. (2013). De la teoría a la práctica. Profesorado y alumnado ante el desarrollo de un proyecto de innovación sobre la igualdad de género y la diversidad afectivo- sexual en las aulas de secundaria. *Profesorado, revista de currículum y formación del profesorado*, 17(1), 111- 127.
- Díaz-Aguado, M. J., Martínez R., and Martín J. (2013). El acoso entre adolescentes en España. Prevalencia, papeles adoptados por todo el grupo y características a las que atribuyen la victimización. *Revista de Educación*, 362, 348-379.
- European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (2009). Main Results Report 2009.
- Fernández N., and González N. (2015). LOMCE on the CEDAW's light. An analysis of the last coeducation education reform. *Journal of supranational policies of education*, 3, 242-263.
- Feu, J., Serra, C., Canimas, J. Lázaro, L., & Simó-Gil, N. (2017). Democracy and Education: A Theoretical Proposal for the Analysis of Democratic Practices in

- Schools. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 36(6), 647-661. Doi: 10.1007/s11217-017-9570-7
- Flecha, C. (1996). *Las primeras universitarias en España, 1872-1910*. Madrid: Narcea Ediciones.
- Flecha, R., Puigvert, L. and Rios, O. (2013). The New Alternative Masculinities and the overcoming of gender violence. *RIMCIS: Revista Internacional y Multidisciplinar en Ciencias Sociales*, 2(1), 88-113. DOI: 10.4471/rimcis.2013.14
- FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2013). EU LGBT survey European Union lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survey Results at a glance.
- García Pérez, R., Quiñones Delgado, C., & Espigares Pinazo, M. J. (2013). La organización escolar coeducativa. Indicadores de género y colaboración de los centros en planes de igualdad. *Revista de currículum y formación del profesorado*, 17(1), 141-160.
- Hernández, R., Fernández, C., y Baptista, P. (2003). *Metodología de la Investigación*. 3ªed. México: Mac - Graw Hill.
- Kanpol, B. (1997). *Issues and trends in critical pedagogy*. Cresswell, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Keddie, A. (2008). Teacher stories of collusion and transformation: A feminist pedagogical framework for cultural gender justice. *Journal of Education Policy*, 23, 343-57. DOI: 10.1080/02680930801923815
- Keddie, A. (2010). Feminist struggles to mobilise progressive spaces within the 'boy-turn' in gender equity and schooling reform. *Gender and Education*, 22(4), 353-368. DOI: 10.1080/09540250903289907
- Knight, T. (2000). Inclusive Education and Educational Theory: Inclusive for What? *Journal Melbourne. Studies in Education*, 41(1), 17-43. DOI: 10.1080/17508480009556342
- Kosciw, J. G., Diaz, E. M. and Greytak E. A. (2008). 2007 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York, NY: GLSEN.
- Lather, P. (1992). Critical frames in educational research: Feminist and post-structural perspectives. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 87-99. DOI: 10.1080/00405849209543529
- Ley orgánica 1/1990, de 3 de octubre, de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo de España (1990). Boletín Oficial del Estado. BOE, nº 238.
- Ley orgánica 10/2002 de 23 de diciembre, de Calidad Educativa de la Educación. Boletín Oficial del Estado (2002). BOE, nº 307.

- Ley orgánica 2/2006 de 3 de mayo, de Educación. (2006). Boletín Oficial del Estado. BOE, nº 106.
- Ley 12/2009, del 10 de julio, de educación. (2009). Boletín Oficial del Estado. BOE, nº 189.
- Lingard, B. (2003). Where to in gender policy in education after recuperative masculinity politics? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 7(1), 33-56. DOI: 10.1080/13603110210143626
- Martino, W., and Cumming-Potvin, W. (2016). Teaching About Sexual Minorities and Princess Boys: A Queer and Trans-Infused Approach to Investigating LGBTQ-Themed Texts in the Elementary School Classroom. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 37, 807-827. DOI: 10.1080/01596306.2014.940239
- Meyer, E. (2009). *Gender, Bullying and Harassment*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Meyer, E.J. (2010). *Gender and Sexual Diversity in Schools: An introduction*. Dordrecht Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-90-481-8559-7
- Meyes, E.J. and Keenan, H. (2018). Can policies help schools affirm gender diversity? A policy archaeology of transgender- inclusive policies in California schools. *Gender and Education*, 30(6), 736- 753.
- Nash, M., and Marre, D. (2003). *El desafío de la diferencia: representaciones culturales e identidades de género, raza y clase*. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco.
- Puigvert, L. (2001). *Las otras mujeres*. Barcelona: El Roure.
- Ramos, G. (2008). Hacia la democracia sexual en la escuela. *ORG & DEMO*, 9(1/2), 183-200.
- Rebollo, M^a. A. (2013). La innovación educativa con perspectiva de género. Retos y desafíos para el profesorado. Editorial. *Profesorado. Revista de currículum y formación del profesorado*, 17(3), 3-8.
- Ríos Cabrera, P. (2001). *La aventura de aprender*. Caracas: Cognitus.
- Save the Children. (2015). Yo a eso no juego. Bullying y cyberbullying en la infancia.
- Scalon, G. (1982). Revolución burguesa e instrucción femenina. Nuevas perspectivas sobre la mujer. II Jornadas de investigación interdisciplinaria. Madrid: Universidad Autónoma.
- Suberviola, I. (2012). Coeducación: un derecho y un deber del profesorado. *REIFOP*, 15(3), 59-67.
- Taylor, C. (1994). *Multiculturalisme. Différence et démocratie*. París: Aubier.

Tyack, D. and Cuban, L. (2001). En busca de la utopía. Un siglo de reformas de las escuelas públicas. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Viñao, A. (2002). *Sistemas educativos, culturas escolares y reformas: continuidades y cambios*. Madrid: Morata.

West, C., and Zimmerman, D. (1987). Doing Gender. *Gender & Society*, 1, 125-151. DOI: 10.1177/0891243287001002002

Ylöstalo, H., and Brunila, K. (2018). Exploring the possibilities of gender equality pedagogy in an era of marketization, *Gender and Education*, 30 (7), 917-933. DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2017.1376042

Agradecimientos y financiación del artículo:

I+D+I Demoskole ha sido financiado por el Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación (2013-2015) (EDU2012-39556-C02-01/02).

Como citar este artículo:

Feu, J.; Abril, P. (2020). Gender perspective as a dimension of democracy in schools. *Profesorado, revista de currículum y formación del profesorado*, 24(1), 1-21. DOI: 10.30827/profesorado.v24i1.8237