

GENDER, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Linking theories, methods, practices and agendas

Sofia Marques da Silva*, Lucie Jarkovská** & Prudencia Gutiérrez Esteban***

In the past decades, the discussion of gender inequality in education has been developed, becoming part of the research and political agenda of democratic countries. New understandings and insights emerged. Nevertheless, equality of opportunities respecting gender has not been achieved, especially if we consider as an important goal to overcome a «citizenship of subalternity» (Araújo, 2007: 164). Together with the invisibility of women in the official curricula and gender stereotypes in textbooks, with the superficial discussions about girls' school achievement and boys' school disaffection, or with difficulties endured by women teachers to have access to decision making positions within the school structure, there is an awareness about the transversality of gender equality in education. We can find new challenges played by gender issues in new contexts and phenomena as violence in school, multiple inequalities or intercultural and migrant topics. To discuss if gender *still* matters¹ in education is a slightly ironic and unavoidable question to which this special issue of *Educação, Sociedade & Culturas* tries to answer.

There are countries with a long history of gender or non-sexist policies in education where the implementation of strategies to promote equality of opportunities have been bottom-up pro-

* CIIE – Centro de Investigação e Intervenção Educativas, Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação, Universidade do Porto (Porto/Portugal).

** Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University (Brno/Czech Republic).

*** Facultad de Educación, Universidad de Extremadura (Badajoz/Spain).

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cesses initiated by feminist movements (such as United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Scandinavia). There are other countries (such as Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Portugal) where directives from the EU have a great impact on gender equality. In both cases, gender equality initiatives have faced criticisms that they are either not needed or they do not work. To support social change, we need to understand how gender is produced and reproduced in different contexts and how different powers are produced giving space to different possibilities and pathways for action. There is also need of insightful evaluations of gender equality programs and of the collaboration between researchers and practitioners. In recent years, definitely, one of the issues more widely discussed in education has been gender studies in education. Despite changes in legislation, and investment in teachers training for non-sexist education, there is a need of producing more evidence and analysing thoroughly the «role of schooling in relation to gender justice» (Arnot & Fennell, 2008: 8).

The articles in this special issue cover different gender issues in several countries (Portugal, Spain, Turkey, United States, and Czech Republic) and analyse different aspects of gender reproduction in various sectors of education. They describe global and local actions, including several spheres (domestic, public, professional, and personal) in which authors, belonging to a diverse range of universities and professional/formative trajectories, make an analysis of the situation of women and men in higher education, of gender in children fantasies and how to reconstruct masculinities and femininities. Moreover, an experience of teachers training in gender awareness, gender violence and leisure in Spain and sex education and young people views on gender and sexualities in Portuguese schools are debated.

In the opening article, Christine Mallozzi and Sally Galman argue about the relevance of gender in educational research on teachers. By asking the question «does gender still matter in US-based education with regard to women teachers?», the authors want to stimulate the discussion on the significance of the concept of gender.

The article «Sex education and young people views on gender and sexualities in Portuguese schools» examines the school curricula, namely sex education. Sofia A. Santos, Laura Fonseca, and Helena C. Araújo attempt to understand young people's views about sex education and in particular their experiences of sexual pressure and sexual desire. They consider both dimensions as very important in gender inequalities concerning sexual experiences, and their analysis explores how education, in particular sex education, can promote values of sexual and intimate citizenship within youth behaviours, conceptions and relationships.

Traditionally, women have been the majority in schools, but at the same time were excluded from positions of decision making at the organizational level. In fact, this scenario is a reproduction on a smaller scale (with its own idiosyncrasies) of what happens in society. Inequalities of women's position in senior management in higher education is the topic of the

article «Perceptions and attitudes of senior managers toward gender in academia», written by Teresa Carvalho, Özlem Özkanlı, and Maria de Lourdes Machado-Taylor, examining and comparing the situation in Portugal and Turkey.

Eunice Macedo, in the article «(Re)constructing femininities and masculinities: Northern Portuguese students speak about their lives desires and dreams», analyses how young Portuguese construct citizenship and how they interpret educational policies. She focuses on the construction of femininities and masculinities within schools, families, and public arenas, showing how the lack of dialogue with young people may strengthen the reproduction of the social order and argues that the facilitation of dialogue may develop reflexive thinking and overcome gender norms.

Education is not just the official state educational system. In this ESC issue, the sphere of other educational activities is represented in the article «Gender violence and leisure in Spain: looking for new ways in educational research», by Tania Merelas Iglesias and Ana Sánchez Bello. These Spanish scholars demonstrate how life improvement strategies can be developed for women who have suffered gender-based violence.

The article «Reflecting on an academic practice to boost gender awareness in future schoolteachers», differs from other articles by its methodology. In their text, Barbara Biglia and Anna Velasco share their teaching experience transformed into action research. Their aim is to stimulate gender self-awareness in future schoolteachers and they describe and evaluate their effort.

Lucie Jarkovská, in her article «Gender in children's fantasies», focusing directly on school education, analyses the realities of the Czech classrooms and shows what place occupies gender in fantasies of 12 year-olds. She points out the contradictions in children's thinking that may be invisible to teachers which lead to a simplistic interpretation of gender as dualistic and uniform in its feminine or masculine form. She argues that recognition of these contradictions can help teachers to see and support the gender diversity in the classroom and reconcile (or rather overcome) the masculine-feminine dualism often considered as contradicting and irreconcilable.

This special issue gives the opportunity to understand theoretically and methodologically how gender is conceptualised and how it is worked in the educational settings. This is relevant in what concerns knowledge production, but also to analyse how gender studies have meaning and impact in educational policies and for professionals in education.

Contact: *Centro de Investigação e Intervenção Educativas (CIIE), Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação, Universidade do Porto, Rua Alfredo Allen, 4200-135 Porto – Portugal*
Email: sofiamsilva@fpce.up.pt; jarkovsk@fss.muni.cz; pruden@unex.es

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