

An Early Educational Approach to Gender Inequalities

Susana Leah de las Nieves Stoner

(Department of Didáctica y Organización Escolar, Malaga University, Spain)

Abstract: This presentation is going to make an approach to the concept of gender, in order to go within its aspects of gender roles which come into play at an early age. With this work, we pretend to select sketches from their first experiences with the objective of making visible the way in which our gender relations begin to forge at an early age. Our pretensions are to visibilize the invisible threads which constrain all of our relations. We want our society to make progress towards equality.

It starts by analyzing the current setting of gender, the concept of gender, and early experiences from our children, related to the topic and it finishes with conclusions about the importance of working gender starting in the person, from his own needs to be able to break our mental squemes which are already obsolete.

Note that our actual education system has incorporated inclusive topics, which is a progress, nevertheless, gender although it is addressed, it still needs more presence and attention in the education field.

Finally, we would like to comment a relevant study from the Columbia Británica, in Canada, which relates the fact of seeing both parents doing domestic chores with the election from their daughters of less stereotyped careers.

Key words: inequality, gender, roles, early education, power

1. Introduction

This lecture will address the concept of gender, that gives an insight into aspects such as gender roles that affect our children, at very early ages. It is intended to collect outlines of their first experiences with the aim of making visible the way in which our gender relations begin to be forged at very early ages. Our intentions are to make visible the invisible threads that constrain our relationships of all kinds. Trying to achieve that our society progresses towards equality.

Our current educational system has incorporated themes such as inclusiveness, which is a progress, however, gender, although also addressed, still needs more presence and attention in the educational field. In fact, Capitolina Díaz Martínez, in recent conferences at Malaga University on “Gender equality in university teaching as an innovative educational element” states that it is a current priority and reveals how to incorporate her review into our classrooms, enabling innovation in order to change reality

In addition, in recent years important mental changes are taking place due to media actions and we can appreciate it reflected in all types of series, movies, songs, news. At this moment we find ourselves that gender and its rights are a priority that our entire society has begun to pursue. The most striking aspect is that singers of

all types, including those male ones have joined with the lyrics of their songs like “Let her dance”, and actions, such as stopping a concert in Mexico to expel a man who was mistreating his wife, to that cause. Therefore, it is the society that claims such changes. We begin with the real needs of our society, men, women and/or people with some other type of defined sexual identity, who commence to demand changes to the society as a whole. In fact, nonbinary sex identity has already been recognized in the United States as a possible option allowing us to break the dichotomies of feeling in one of the two binary genders, such as the masculine and the feminine

The gender difference assesses the differences between women and men (attitudes, interests, behaviours, knowledge, perspectives and preferences of changes in our society) which are influenced by race, class, age, marital status and religion” (UNESCO, 2015). It will be important to ensure that our way of seeing reality resembles the aspects mentioned to reduce our differences as well.

First of all, I analyze the current gender framework and the roles and experiences in order to identify the most relevant aspects where work is necessary to achieve a real “equality.

2. Current Gender Framework

The gender mainstreaming approach, translated as “gender mainstreaming”, started after the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995. As a result of the background in international development institutions, it became the official policy in the European Union and after that it was implemented in other places too, including Latin America. Gender mainstreaming, translated into Spanish as “transversalidad,” can be understood in several ways:

as a strategy where all social actors are involved in searching for gender equality, or as the description of certain tools for gender analysis.

Next, we analyze the evolution of the different approaches of gender as the basis for gender mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is achieved after some historical milestones such as (WID) or promotion of women in development, the first world conference of women in Mexico in 1975 and the declaration by the United Nations Decade of women from 1976 to 1985. WID was analyzed as an approach that did not incorporate the multiple roles of women, which was not such an important step forward.

Therefore, in the late 1980s, GAD arises to eradicate differences uses a more holistic and practical perspective, whose focus is to improve relations between men and women. During 1990, gender equality perspectives had been achieved through the international development agenda, including education for all (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs). We focus on the approach (GAD) to detect the short and long-term needs of men, women, empower women, transform unequal and power relations, and get men and women to share decision making and power (UNESCO, 2015, p. 21).

Such mainstream current through the approach (GAD) is what has contributed to enrich our gender analysis and make sense of our practical approach.

Gender is a construct that comes mainly from the sex assigned to us at birth. The effects of consigning ourselves to a gender, usually binary, feminine or masculine, have a strong impact on forging our person, as well as our emotions, feelings, thoughts and behaviours. This gender is influenced by the way of seeing reality and by some values that surround us, allowing various aspects to emerge in each of us, male, female. Therefore, we find some fairly sharp fine lines, which define what is “appropriate” or “inappropriate”, although within those very marked lines are, in turn, a range of possibilities, a spectrum of ways of seeing, feeling and expressing ourselves in a unique way. They are therefore canons such as: heterosexual, masculine and white, the most valued by society.

Which leads to numerous problems on a personal, social, school and working level, in all aspects of our lives; so, by the time we distance ourselves from that stereotype, unequal gender relations and values by a society that separate one gender from the other are perceived

Regarding the variability within each gender, we want to emphasise that boys experience greater rejection and less flexibility when it comes to showing variability in relation to their gender” (Subirats, 2017), so that gender restricts their freedom and limits their possibilities.

Gender therefore divides us into two, like a deck of cards in which there are two shades, forgetting to see various realities that could give colour to that deck. If this example is transferred to the life of the classroom something similar will occur. We tend to get close to the people with whom we feel a greater affinity, boys or girls, who are likely to be of the same sex; if by chance we decided to cross the border, our gaze will stop seeing that person, in that manner, to enter to analyse it from a more sexual perspective. In this way, sex permeates relationships over and over again, especially with the opposite sex. The danger of this is that the person is objectified. That is to say, to stop seeing the person to see an object instead. To avoid this, it is important to focus on seeing the “person”; as a “person” with whom to be able to forge a friendship from which other levels may emerge, such as the sexual level. This issue is complex because sex and gender are strongly interconnected; but this vision is extremely useful as avoids hierarchical relationships, superiority-inferiority, which can lead to domain-submission relationships. Such relationships must be established based on horizontal assumptions. “Research in the United States reveals how men and women are processed differently according to their sex” (Guervais, 2012).

If gender is not something we can choose, how can we understand gender norms without falling into the trap of determinism (Butler, 1993). As we have said before, we must read reality with a more profound gaze that lets us leave behind dichotomies as male or female, which are already obsolete. We need to see other realities to incorporate the fact that within each of us there can be various female or male elements that can coexist.

If the gender were performative, an individual gets up, looks at his closet and leaves room for clothes that can vary according to how this person feels, but truly, this person cannot decide on his, her gender, since truly his existence has already been decided by its gender (Butler, 1993). Gender therefore goes beyond appearances, gender is inside our heads and exceeds our costumes, or more superficial appearance, because it is much more than that and therefore it is necessary to break with many of the ideas that constrain us and prevent us from expanding its spectrum. While it is true, that our existence has been decided by our gender as we discussed before; there are many ways to live that gender, starting by observing reality through different eyes and an inclusive view

Gender is a moldable construct, subject to change, therefore as stated in the definition of gender according to UNESCO (2015): “Gender refers to socially constructed relations between men and women. Societies decide the resources, clothing, etc. that men and women can acquire.” Therefore, “we have to deconstruct our ideas about gender in order to be able to see in the first place something that we are not accustomed to” (Butler, 1993): To look at our relationships as power relations that must be democratised. But our society is subject to leaders who are usually authoritarian, compared to others of a more democratic type. This undoubtedly affects the maintenance of power relations such as those currently in the couple. Thus, who usually holds the power is the heterosexual person, white and man. And his way of showing it is by raising his voice or using any mechanism with similar characteristics. Something that is more typical of an authoritarian way of proceeding, as opposed to arguing in a reasonable and horizontal way, more typical of democratic patterns. As long as our education continues to be full of speeches about the importance of democracy, and these speeches are not translated in a practical way in our

daily lives, we will continue perpetuating unequal relationships.

In fact, in the couple such power relations generate great emotional wear and tear for its members by a hierarchical vision of the relationship, marked by “winning the argument” to the detriment of “bringing nuances to it”. In this way our relationships resent and become aggressive, rather than peaceful.

In gender roles, we are assigned different roles in society so that the male gender is led to more technical and scientific studies, better paid and women to studies more linked to care which society in many occasions “underestimate”. The implications on the sociological level are that men, in general, are going to get better positions at an economic level, which will contribute to the differences being maintained by holding jobs of greater responsibility, etc. We must turn our attention to encourage our children to choose and want any type of study.

3. Early Experience with Gender Roles

That is why gender roles are something that we must work from education, from a very young age, not apart from sex, because they are very interconnected. “Marina’s essay explains how the first forms of sexed identity are adopted before the age of 3 and are related to gender — that is, to the cultural construct — not to the genitals.” (Subirats, 2017, p. 14). In this way, when boys and girls start with three or four years old to show that they have a male sexual organ as a game, it is necessary to raise awareness of valuing their own sexual organ. “Although these differences may seem subtle, actually they start to introduce a hierarchical relationship that begins at the age of 3 and 4” (Subirats, 2017).

When we also see the choice of clothing, it is important to make visible that the external appearance is important for both sexes, but that it is also very important to assess our interior. If we begin to show examples where clothes are not subject to sex, our children may feel more relaxed to dress as they want because sex should not determine our choices.

“The spaces occupied when heading out for recess should be the same for boys as for girls. Games, toys should allow everyone to enjoy” (Subirats, 2017).

In relation to the series, cartoons or children's stories, which our children watch, there are very stereotyped roles that are increasingly separated from what happens in reality. We must select appropriate content where they can watch various roles that are not so contingent to sex. Sometimes it is difficult to find such content; in this case it will be necessary to provide them with critical judgment to make visible that boys and girls can be whatever they want and that there is a great variety of roles appropriate to both sexes. Some example of this is “Little Bill” in which both members of the couple share housework. A study from the University of British Columbia, in Canada, relates to the fact that the father performs this type of tasks with the choice of less stereotyped careers by his daughters (Parra, 2018).

4. Conclusion

All of the above are suggested lines of educational action to achieve real “equality” in relation to gender and make us aware as educators of some of the guidelines that should be relevant to implement. An equality that must be more related to breaking our mental schemes to achieve a violet look able to appreciate the inequalities in each area of our lives. An equality that has to do with changing power relations for democratic and horizontal ones; and gender roles for tasks shared or on basis of consensus.

Having information on gender helps us see reality differently. Gender is key to understanding that certain behaviours that are common to boys and girls should not be determined by their sex, or by the society that maintains a predetermined role, we should have the possibility to choose. We need to see reality in the gender spectrum since childhood, in relation to clothes, toys, mass media, and aspects which concern our history, economy, politics, society and culture. Which opens a wide range of possibilities, choices to any of us, and our futures.

In order to do that we need to stop seeing reality in a binary way, but more on the edge of having a feminine or masculine area within ourselves which can be exposed more or less, and which lies within us. Girls for example are allowed to exhibit a wider range of possibilities related to gender than boys, which limits them, on the other hand girl's gender places them at an unequal edge of it, which does not benefit them either.

For those reasons it is beneficial for all of us to see ourselves under that range of possibilities which will open our minds in the way of allowing ourselves to be or become who we feel. We have laws, affirmative action policies and other statements but the important aspects need to deepen more. We have a sexual view of reality, such a sexual view which is implicit in our gender, maintains certain relations, our relations concerning the opposite sex. From our early stages we need to teach our children to value whichever sexual organ they have, to dress however they feel, play with whoever or whatever they choose, and see others in terms of friendship before seeing other kinds of relationships. All of these aspects will help our relations become more horizontal, democratic and fair as stated before.

That should translate our education into providing our students with the tools to be free to choose how they want to live their lives and live them in the best possible way. A paradox if we think about the school's environment objectives, often, opposed to them we must free their minds, their souls, and help them understand that they have all the options available.

This can be done with examples of our daily lives, trying to understand what and where gender roles come from, identify them and express our emotions and attitudes towards those gender roles. Because seeing our reality from different perspectives will allow us to understand better what our current gender roles are like, and reevaluate our ideas about it. It will not be a simple path, but this awakening will impact us and make us more human, emotional and provide us with a greater introspection to be happier.

As Ramón Flecha comments: "Happiness is measured by the number of friends we have, not counting on the friends we have on Facebook, but the real ones" (Flecha, 2018).

References

- Butler J. (1993). *Bodies that matter*. USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Díaz C. (02-08-2018). Gender equality in university teaching as an element of educational innovation.
- Gervais S. (07-26-2012). "Why are women seen as sexual objects?", available online at: https://www.bbc.com/mundo/news/2012/07/120726_brain_perception_sexual_objects_men.
- Parra S. (2018) "Girls who see their parents doing housework choose less stereotyped careers", available online at: <https://www.xatakaciencia.com/psycology/girls-who-see-their-parents-doing-housework-choose-less-stereotyped-careers>.
- Mang C. and Wardley L. (2013). "Student Perceptions of Using Tablet Technology in Post-Secondary Classes/Perceptions des étudiants
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization U. (2015), *A Guide for Gender Equality in Teacher Education Policy and Practices*, France UNESCO.
- Subirats M. (2017). *Coeducation: Bet on Freedom*, Barcelona: Octahedron editorial.
- "Schools open to the community", available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8RDjNoGCeU>
- Available online at: http://www.cti.uma.es/videos/grabadowpuma.php?video=VIJornadas_2 Flecha R. (11-10-18).