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Ensayos

Nociones de género y empoderamiento de las niñas y las mujeres en la escuela. Conceptos y reflexiones*

*Notions of Gender and Empowerment of Girls and Women in School.
Concepts and Reflections*

*Noções de gênero e empoderamento de meninas e mulheres na escola.
Conceitos e reflexões*

Sorangela Miranda Beltrán**

Universidad Externado de Colombia, Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación
Colombia

sorangela.miranda@uexternado.edu.co

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0886-2647>

Resumen

El presente artículo enfatiza sobre la relevancia de potencializar el protagonismo social de las niñas y las mujeres, así como la superación de las barreras, los estereotipos y las diferentes formas de discriminación asociadas a la condición de género, que dificultan su plena participación en condiciones de equidad e igualdad de oportunidades, categoría que al ser retomada como una construcción social, posiciona a la escuela como un escenario propicio para el empoderamiento, la participación y el fortalecimiento de la cultura democrática.

Palabras clave: cultura democrática, empoderamiento, escuela, igualdad de género.

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Abstract

This article emphasizes the importance of girls and women enhancing their social role and overcoming the barriers of stereotypes and the different forms of discrimination associated with gender that hinder their full participation in conditions of equity and equal opportunities. By resuming the category of *gender* as a social construction, it positions the school as an auspicious setting for empowerment, participation and the strengthening of democratic culture.

Keywords: democratic culture, empowerment, school governance, gender equity.

Resumo

Este artigo enfatiza a importância de meninas e mulheres valorizarem seu papel social e superar as barreiras dos estereótipos e das diferentes formas de discriminação associadas ao gênero que impedem sua plena participação em condições de equidade e igualdade de oportunidades. Ao retomar a categoria de gênero como construção social, posiciona a escola como espaço auspicioso para o empoderamento, a participação e o fortalecimento da cultura democrática.

Palavras-chave: cultura democrática, empoderamento, escola, igualdade de gênero.

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Introduction

The fifth objective of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations [UN], 2018), outlines a set of actions aimed at equality among human beings, with a firm commitment to empowering girls and women. women to enhance their individual and collective leadership and leadership capacities, in order to overcome all the disadvantages associated with gender, through the promotion of participatory processes, taking autonomy, decision-making and recognition of their interference as references in the different social spheres.

The elimination of the barriers that prevent girls and women from experiencing human rights as a fundamental basis for democratic life has acquired an important place in the world arena. Empowerment has been positioned as the route for breaking stereotypes and has given rise to a reflective, critical and transformative vision that must be the constant to

revalue the meaning of life, the contribution and the struggle of women for their emancipation (UN, 2018).

Making girls and women strengthen their possibilities of power and independence in all dimensions of social and human development is a task that involves, among other aspects, eradicating the forms of violence that exist against them, harmful practices that threaten their well-being and integrity and the elimination of discrimination that puts them at a disadvantage in economic, cultural, political and public terms (UN, 2018). For this, it is necessary to implement actions that contribute to guaranteeing full participation in equal opportunities, access to quality education and greater visibility in the economic, participatory field (Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura [Unesco], s. f.).

In this context and in the face of this challenge, which involves the coordination of said actions, wills and efforts of the different social actors, this article proposes to reflect on two specific aspects: the notions of the concept of gender prevailing in society, which continue being decisive in the attitudes, ideologies and thoughts associated with femininity and masculinity, as well as the conception of the school as a territory where stereotypes are legitimized that condition the possibilities of participation for girls and women, but also, where they can be raised experiences that enhance citizenship, democracy, diversity and inclusion that contribute to empowerment and reaffirm the leading role of women in societies.

The concept of gender as a social construct

The gender category is broad, complex, and multi-faceted. Normally, it is assumed as a social and cultural construction regarding sexual differences (Montecino, 2007 cited in Moreno, Soto, González and Valenzuela, 2017). Thus, it configures different ideas, practices and representations and accounts for differential aspects between men and women, which, in the words of Moreno et al. (2017), leads to the symbolization of what is inherent in men (masculine) and women (feminine). In this sense, recognizing the symbolic character of the concept of gender implies understanding how it is part of the culture and the significance it acquires in interactions and in the various fields of social and human development.

In this way, it is inferred that the gender category contains a broad social burden and a significant interference in the ways of proceeding and acting of individuals, configuring the

ways in which both men and women relate and proceed, to starting from social patterns that adhere to existing beliefs, languages and prejudices against gender; In short, they generalize behaviors and ways of proceeding and relating (Flores, Espejel & Martel, 2016).

The behaviors and forms of relationship materialize the stereotypes that are had about gender, reflecting in unequal treatment based on the sex of the people, from reasoning that associates elements of the public and private sphere with the masculine and feminine roles, respectively. Girls and women socially start from a disadvantaged position with respect to their counterpart, conceptualizations that have been interwoven in the historical-social evolution (Hernández and Treviño, 2016) to demonstrate how gender perspectives or elements of religion, ideology, economic conditions or racial characteristics, mainstream the understandings of this social construct (Moreno, Sepúlveda and Restrepo, 2012 cited in Flores et al., 2016).

In addition to the above, the problems of a social, economic, cultural, educational nature, among others, evidenced in the conditions of poverty, lack of political recognition and vulnerability of girls and women, perpetuate the imaginary that restrict the possibilities of development and full enjoyment of rights, which reaffirms the assumptions that configure the various relationships that are established in spaces and environments, which place girls and women in subordination, which makes it impossible to overcome the gaps that for centuries have characterized aspects related to gender, political violence and other social dimensions (Lena y Restrepo, 2016).

From this perspective, inequality is widely reflected in the existing prejudices towards girls and women, where stereotypes and discriminatory elements prevail (Guzmán, 2017), which reaffirms the visions that have historically been built around gender and that account for the dissimilar way in which opportunities are provided, without recognizing the non-existent equitable nature in political, cultural and social settings, which translates into the subordination to which girls and women are subjected from a perspective that denatures and it makes their possibilities as political subjects invisible.

The above, as expressed by Flores et al. (2016), permeates cultural values, behaviors and ways of relating, reproducing actions framed in sexism, violence and the various aspects that directly affect the belief of the gender role assigned to sex or the biological characteristics that lead to perpetuate stereotypes to such a degree that any possibility of questioning the way in which, from the social sphere, the girl and the woman are invalidated, reducing them

considerably, which reinforces the existence of barriers for them to play an active and empowering role Social.

These aspects referring to women in the framework of the gender perspective have been incorporated into the political agendas of the world in recent decades. The reflections on this topic have acquired the relevance they deserve, positioning themselves as a central theme in world political and educational debates. Since 1975, when the World Conference of the International Women's Year was held, to date, important efforts have been made by governments and various social actors to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls and boys. women; Since then, progress has been made on relevant topics regarding gender equality, trying to end all discrimination practices, based on a political scenario aimed at providing legal tools and strengthening educational processes to eradicate all forms of violence. that have prevented girls and women from fully developing (Guzmán, 2017).

This last aspect, referring to educational processes, identifies that the family and the school are relevant agents of socialization that contribute to forging values, codes and the different sociocultural constructions from which roles and stereotypes are assimilated and transmitted from of which the concepts of man and woman are conceived and configured (Santos, 1997; Flores, 2005, both cited in Flores et al., 2016). It is a process of legitimization of the notions of gender at a symbolic, value and belief level.

Regarding the role of the school as an agent of legitimation and a scenario full of possibilities of empowerment and emancipation for girls and women, the following discussion will be presented below.

The school: forms of legitimation and possibilities of empowerment for girls and women

According to Flores et al. (2016), school is one of the reproduction devices in ways that show inequalities, violence and the invisibility of girls and women, a reality that is manifested in the daily life of the school environment, in the relationships that are they establish in the classroom, the rites and beliefs that mainstream the organizational culture and the way it is taught and learned in formal and informal moments.

The perspectives associated with stereotypes permeate the relationships that are configured in the school and that, from this scenario, can acquire a natural sieve. From the symbolic point of view, education as a legitimate institution, through the curricular structure,

training processes, classroom environments, forms of interaction and the meanings given to gender: there is a reaffirmation of prejudices, mental models and ideas compared to the female and male roles, as well as the attributions that each of them is conferred (Moreno et al., 2017).

In this complexity, a school climate develops in which the different agents of the educational community promote relationships that structure their notions about gender, framed in physical, social, affective and academic environments (González, 2013 cited in Flores et al., 2016) . This situation demands the development of pedagogical actions to decentre the operational conceptions of the school as a reproducer of social discourses rooted in assumptions that pass through the annulment of the principles of equality and equity.

However, as the school constitutes a focus of legitimation and consolidation of stereotypes, also, by its very nature and purposes of forming integral human beings, it can be a transforming agent based on actions aimed at breaking sexist behaviors and thus promoting participatory spaces where reflection, critical awareness and recognition of the other are established as the fundamental basis for the experience of democracy and human rights.

In this sense, an invitation is extended to the school and all the components that make up the educational system to join forces and coordinate strategies based on alternative ways of understanding the world and that help to understand gender issues beyond stereotypes and behaviors. that have privileged hierarchization, inhibition and the perpetuation of the subordinate character of the feminine. To build joint experiences (among boys, men, girls and women) that consolidate ideas and behaviors based on dignity, recognition of the other, human rights, equity, equal opportunities and the visibility of leadership , it is necessary to start promoting ways of thinking and understanding democratic culture, based on the possibility of participating and exercising citizenship, encouraging the protagonism, emancipation and empowerment of girls and women within the educational community.

These considerations lead to the belief that breaking stereotypes and all forms of discrimination related to gender may be possible when training in citizenship and democratic culture is strengthened through emancipatory actions that guide girls and women towards recognition of diversity, the practice of human rights and participatory spaces in which everyone can be part of the decisions that bring together communities, such as the school government and its representative bodies.

The democratic base must then be one of the scenarios to strengthen the Institutional Educational Projects of the schools, directed towards an organizational climate where healthy coexistence prevails through the promotion of ways of coexistence that reflect behaviors based on respect, empowerment, elimination of sexist practices, openness to critical thinking and school leadership management. In this way, reflective looks that generate and add voices to overcome, in a forceful way, the stigmatization, beliefs and behavioral patterns associated with gender inequality can be favored.

Specifically, with regard to girls and women, it is proposed to emphasize participatory processes that, from the school environment, conceive and implement ways of intervening and consolidating the concept of empowerment, built on the idea of common interest and taking decision-making based on the well-being of all as a source of political training, consolidating a structuring project that, from the gender perspective, promotes learning where the emancipatory significance of students, teachers, managers, mothers of families is valued and strengthened and other girls and women who make up the educational community.

The school, a fundamental setting for the teaching of citizenship and the strengthening of democratic culture (Pérez and Ochoa, 2017), is a privileged place to generate discriminatory ruptures, being essential to get involved in matters that concern everyone, energizing spaces and moments from which skills are strengthened and behaviors, thoughts or attitudes are promoted to truly experience democracy, overcoming the gaps that for centuries have characterized gender-related aspects (Lena and Restrepo, 2016).

As already mentioned, it is necessary to start from educational scenarios that promote democratic culture and, within this, the ways to protect and value the rights of girls and women, generating various solutions that, from the fields of knowledge, the knowledge and comprehensive training, become the basis for overcoming stereotypes for the sake of equality and equity.

What has been said so far can be taken as part of what Bard (2016) calls the resignification of political culture. In the words of the author:

If we expand what is political beyond the state and the institutional functioning of representative democracy, and we give relevance to the various subjectivities, women - like other genders - have the same political potential

as men and even, because of their subordinate positions, have the possibility of constituting radical demands for social change (Bard, 2016, pp. 137-138).

The construction of this culture, whose base is proposed is empowerment and emancipation at school, must be nurtured in dialogue, interpersonal relationships and the different practices and actions that make it possible to understand the citizen role and how training experiences can contribute to generate political entities and overcome gender inequalities. Once this has been achieved, now yes, it is possible to make democracy a daily exercise inherent to the institutional culture that, as stated by Cubides (2017), can respond to needs and address sensitivity to the collective will, but also , which leads to generating ruptures in all forms that prevent the recognition of girls and women as valid in collective construction, social development and civic exercise. For this, the considerations that can be taken into account in the school context can focus on the following aspects:

- Place the participation of men and women in a culture and a school climate based on the principle of equal opportunities and the recognition of the other, from the perspective of individuality and its collective significance.
- Assume the ethical challenges that Nández and Capera (2017) describe as a fundamental part of the citizen training processes present in the school. On gender issues, the logic of the discourse must be coherent with the practices and concrete actions that allow the materialization in the feeling, in being and in acting of mental constructions and representations in the face of equal opportunities and equity of girls and boys. women, permeating the conceptions of the different social actors regarding participatory forms, demanding from them deep and radical transformations in the ways of signifying the social construction of genders, reflecting themselves in the collective sphere and in the democratic exercise.
- To form competencies, understood as the combination of knowledge and personal attributes that, integrated, promote characteristics, skills and knowledge that facilitate change, generating conditions that lead to stability and flexibility in different contexts (Mimbrero, Pallares & Cantera, 2017) , whose application in the gender perspective, supposes for this case, the commitment to the vindication of girls and women, promoting social practices that affect the realities to build complete and transformative visions that overcome the barriers of inequality and discrimination.

Final thoughts

In the current educational scenario, the school has important challenges to promote democratic and participatory exercises, thanks to which girls and women can break stereotypes, empower themselves and play an active role within educational communities, through the appropriation of multiple learnings that allow them to claim their voice in decision-making to overcome inequalities and foster a culture of recognition of diversity and social transformation, based on respect for difference, equity and inclusion.

In this sense, empowering girls and women in school is not only about guaranteeing their participation in decision-making in the institution, but also about identifying and critically analyzing those factors that can contribute to strengthening their critical awareness. and emancipation of their thinking through curricula and educational processes that promote social practices that generate the necessary transformations on gender issues.

Actions to implement a democratic culture, empowerment and emancipation of girls and women in school, must start from the conception of Institutional Educational Projects as guides of experiences to consolidate perspectives on inclusion, the practice of rights and the duties, as well as the interaction for personal and collective growth that, paraphrasing Osoro and Castro (2017), lead to assuming school as a space of life, in which identity, the leading role of each subject is strengthened , the possibilities of communication and collective thinking within the framework of the pedagogy of participation, culture for peace and diversity.

In this task there is a fundamental call for the school to continue resignifying itself around the construction of citizenship, participation and human rights and progress in overcoming those obstacles that hinder the fluidity of a democratic culture to continue forging paths in which empowerment, recognition of girls and women, as well as participatory experience, contribute to channel comprehensive training and contribute to productive discussion, so that inclusive perspectives continue to acquire value and are consolidated as the basis of democracy school.

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**** Sorangela Miranda Beltrán**

Postdoctora en Gestión y Administración de Planteles Educativos por el Centro de Estudios e Investigaciones para el Desarrollo Docente Cenid (México), Doctora en Ciencias Sociales y Humanas por la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Colombia), Magíster en Administración y Supervisión Educativa por la Universidad Externado de Colombia y Licenciada en Educación Especial por la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (Colombia). Actualmente, además de desempeñarse como docente en la Maestría en Educación y en la Maestría en Evaluación y Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación, ambas de la Universidad Externado de Colombia, cursa el doctorado en Ciencias de Educación en la Universidad Cuauhtémoc (México).