

# Building Citizenship through Coeducation



This article addresses the essential role of gender equality in any process of transformative education and in the goal of achieving global citizenship. Having made clear its importance, it analyses how to integrate this commitment in a transversal way in the educational processes through co-education. In order to do, it establishes what we understand by co-education, and offers clear guidelines on how to integrate this approach from different types of curriculum and educational axes concerning any type of social-educational centre or space.



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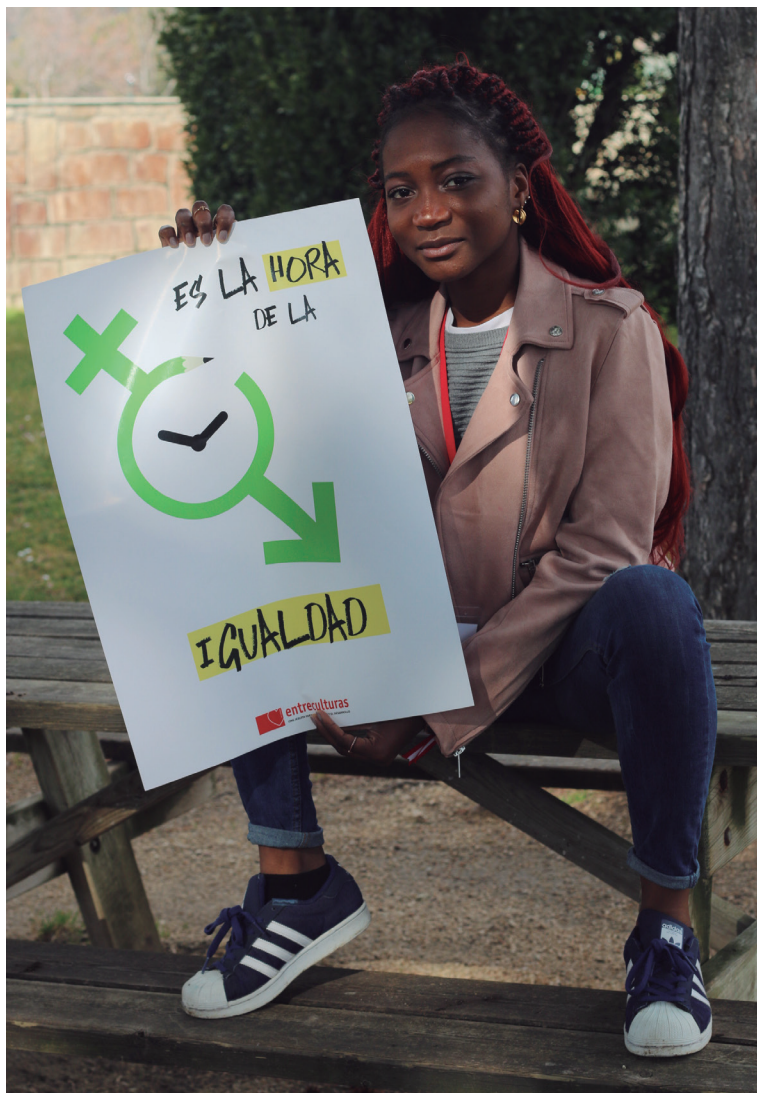
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«I believe the best contribution to offer women, so that they have the same possibilities as men, is, first of all, to offer them an education in equality.» IRENE is a young participant in the Youth Solidarity Network, a program of the Entreculturas Foundation

From nearly all the areas of citizen participation, we have been claiming for centuries that education should be the process to face the global challenges of our time. In the different reflections and conversations, personal and in groups or academic, we usually reach the conclusion that education is one of the key areas for laying down the foundations for developing the processes for citizen leadership for social transformation.

However, it would be a mistake to just accept this conclusion, since, if we have identified education as one of the keys to empower citizens to critically, actively and in an implicated way face the global

issues that challenge us today, the question we need ask ourselves should be, what kind of education must we promote?

Education is not the key, since an education that does not evaluate itself and opts for a clear transformative purpose that is reflected transversally in all the axes of its educational approach, will end up reproducing and transmitting traditions, beliefs and stereotypes that support inequality and violence.

Our suggestion of education as a response is an Education for Global Citizenship (EpCG), understood as an education that aims to form citizens well informed, critical and committed, and who know the global reality of their times, who are active agents of social and political transformation of injustice taking a stand against inequality. Through the EpCG we seek to promote an interconnected citizenship with persons and groups around the world, who through their interconnection with the global environment, are able to build on local environments and networking a transformative society in which fair and equitable global relationships are established.

This type of education is reflected internationally in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the Sustainable Development Goal 4, referring to the quality of Education and, more specifically, to goal 4.7 aimed at "promoting education for a sustainable development and the adoption of sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, the promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, world citizenship and the value given to cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to sustainable development, among other means".

Over and above, the Sustainable Development Goals take a very strong stand against violence, and places gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a central element for achieving sustainable development, specifically in SDG 5, but also in others such as 10 (Reduction of Inequalities), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) or 16 (Peace, Justification and Solid Institutions).



This article aims to underline the impossibility of developing this model of transformative education, without placing gender equality under a coeducation approach within its vertebral axis.

### Gender Equality and Coeducation as Fundamental Pillars of Education for Global Citizenship

The gender approach is the essential element for the creation and implementation of an educational process that seeks to empower citizens to generate relationship that are just, equitable and sustainable if we want it to be truly transformative. The magnitude, the global effects and consequences of violence and gender inequality throughout the world and its centrality as a global challenge of our time, prevent us from developing an educational approach that aspires to empower citizens to participate actively in the defense of human rights and social justice, without placing gender equality at the heart of its educational approach and practice. Gender equality places us directly at the heart of human rights and social justice. Therefore, it is essential to take it into account in the co-education approach, as one of the essential requirements of any EpCG process.

Education is, at the same time, a privileged area when it comes to addressing equality. Inequality between men and women is learned from childhood. Classrooms, as the first socialization context in which girls and boys learn to relate to their peers, are a privileged space to question and stop reproducing the system of beliefs, customs and social practices that we learn during the process of socialization, and that perpetuates gender inequalities, discrimination and violence, in order to construct an egalitarian society.

To assume the responsibility that the educational system has in the socialization of young people and to act against the culture of inequality, it is necessary to go for a transformative education that incorporates the gender approach in the classroom. In this way, the school becomes a socio-educational space where,



from childhood, future generations learn to question gender discrimination building others models of relationship based on mutual respect and equality.

### How to integrate the gender approach in educational process? Coeducation as an answer

«For me the main change would be education. If we receive a bad education, we cannot contribute with great ideas, and make the changes we want.» OLGA DOHERTY, young participant in the Generation 21+ Network

When facing the challenge of placing equality at the center of educational process, we find coeducation as a tool. Coeducation is the educational approach that integrates the gender perspective as a transversal axis to all the elements of the learning process. Unlike a mixed school, in which children and young people simply coexist in the classrooms, the coeducational school reconfigures all the elements of the teaching-learning process, so that the principles of equality and non-discrimination reign because of gender.

In this way, the option for the co-education approach configures a type of education committed to the construction of an egalitarian and peaceful environment, through:

- The adoption of critical perspectives on gender relations, rejecting discriminatory and stereotyped social practices and stereotypes roles.
- Free and integral development of the capacities, interests and abilities of



## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

To begin a diagnosis on how gender inequality is seen in the educational environment and the possible actions that can begin to promote or prevent them and act on them, we propose the following activity: "The map of Coeducation". This activity can be carried out, either separately with teachers, students and families, or together with all members of the educational community. The activity consists of drawing a map of the educational center and its surroundings, which reflects all its spaces (classrooms, courtyards, bathrooms, teaching staff rooms, sports facilities, corridors, parks, nearby establishments, etc.).

Once the map is drawn, the participants, divided into subgroups or in a large group, must identify the inequalities and discriminations based on gender that according to their experience occur in each of the spaces, writing each one of them on a small red flag, which will be pinned in each space. This exercise will give us quickly a good general idea and a good perspective of the discrimination and violence that are reproduced in our centers and surroundings, encouraging the members of the educational community to do an exercise of identification and self-awareness about them.

With the attention drawn upon them, and therefore banishing that attitude that reigns, the next exercise will be to identify the actions that we could take on each one. These actions could also be nailed, in this case in a green banner. The participants will formally communicate these proposals to the management team, the relevant institution or agency, and the map will remain in the center in a visible space, as a reminder of the dynamics identified and of the proposed actions. At the same time, some deadlines will be established, in which the educational community will meet again to review if the proposals have been implemented and how they are operating, encouraging compliance and necessary modification so that they can develop effectively.

the students, guaranteeing equal enjoyment of their rights and free development of their identity.

- The acquisition of tools for a peaceful coexistence free of discrimination and violence.

To include the coeducation approach in a transversal way, we have to analyze how we integrate gender equality into the three types of curriculum:

- Formal curriculum: is a concrete and explicit reference framework that guides the teaching-learning process. It covers the pedagogical approach, the objectives, contents, learning activities, teaching materials, evaluation criteria defined and / or assumed by the entity. Is this curriculum usually designed to incorporate a gender perspective in all aspects of the teaching - learning process? Does it include specific objectives related to coeducation and prevention and attention to discrimination, inequality and gender violence?
- Hidden curriculum: it refers to interactions and contents not formally foreseen that happen frequently in the

center. Because they are neither explicit, nor regulated, and in many cases are unforeseen, it is difficult to identify the way to initiate a systematic process of observation, self-criticism and transformation. Do we encourage qualities such as courage, sensitivity, leadership, empathy, listening, assertiveness, tenderness, cooperation or mutual care in both genders? Do we use and / or allow expressions and colloquial sexist language in class? Are the images, posters, toys and materials of the center stereotyped? Do we encourage active and equal participation in a student spokesperson or participation in class? Are the roles in class distributed equally?

- Omitted Curriculum: topics, contents, needs, interests, abilities and emotions not treated during the learning process. Is the contribution of women to the History of Humanity sufficiently represented in the curriculum of all the subjects? Does the content treated incorporate the role of relevant women and men who are not stereotyped that can be a reference for our students? Do we stop dealing with any relevant topic or student interest related to gender equality on different subjects, tutorials, etc.? Can the language we use make the presence and contributions of the girls in the class somehow invisible? Do we address the importance of mutual caring in the classroom?

To continue making inclusion real in a coeducational approach the following axes of the teaching - learning process must be integrated

- Democratic organization of the school, in which men and women are represented on equal terms, and female leadership in decision-making is promoted.
- The objectives of the curriculum with an explicit gender focus are shared among all the members of the educational community with tools for a periodic evaluation on its achievements.

- The content and teaching material: that includes the role of women in the History of Humanity, with texts and use of images and pictures in which stereotyped roles and images are not transmitted and in which there is an explicit and critical treatment of themes, skills and values related to gender equality. This approach focuses on non-discrimination due to gender and integrates an intersectional and non colonialist view so that we may address all different types of violence.
- Methodology and organization of the classroom, so that not only the contents, but also the methodology and activities that are used are designed from a gender perspective. They should be inclusive and integrate participation mechanisms using the gender approach.
- Relationships between members of the educational community, with a special emphasis on reinforcing competence and non-stereotyped work orientation.
- The different areas of the centre must be enjoyed by all without discrimination, assuring they are safe places where everybody is welcome. All members of the educational community participate in their maintenance.
- Language: use of non-sexist and inclusive language, which seeks expressions and ways of addressing all members of the educational community eliminating sexist biases, while incorporating expressions of inclusive language.
- Training of permanent teaching staff so that they incorporate knowledge, tools and skills to deconstruct their educational practices, incorporating a gender-based approach in them.
- Effective protocols to prevent and act against harassment and gender violence in educational fields and cross-sectional coordination with all the services of the area: security, health, social, juridical and educative. Giving an all-inclusive response to both, prevention and action, when facing cases of discrimination and violence and those community factors that support them.

## Comprométete con la IGUALDAD

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**Enfoque educativo transversal basado en la igualdad y no discriminación por razón de sexo.**

**Parte de la necesidad de plantearnos los roles y estereotipos que transmitimos en los ámbitos formales y no formales del proceso de enseñanza - aprendizaje.**

**Identifica las desigualdades y discriminaciones fundamentadas en el género, promoviendo actitudes críticas para su superación.**



**Es una pieza clave a la hora de construir sociedades equitativas en las que todas las personas compartamos responsabilidades, derechos y oportunidades en igualdad.**

**Contribuye a que cada persona desarrolle plena y libremente sus capacidades, preferencias y expectativas vitales desde modelos no estereotipados.**

**Implica a toda la comunidad educativa y supone revisar la gestión y organización escolar, incluyendo los objetivos curriculares, materiales didácticos, metodología, contenidos de aprendizaje, relaciones personales, los espacios educativos y el modelo de participación en la toma de decisiones.**

**Revaloriza la centralidad de la expresión emocional y el trabajo de cuidados en nuestro desarrollo, fomentando su aprendizaje por igual para todo el alumnado.**

**Pone el foco en la diversidad de relaciones posible, fomentando la equidad, cooperación y corresponsabilidad en todas ellas.**

**RED ec**

Adopting a coeducation approach requires moving towards a gradual process that integrates comprehensive strategic changes in schools and socio-educational spaces. These strategic changes are generally processes by the 3 types of curriculum and axes of analyzed action, including an inclusive gender approach in formal aspects and non-formal learning process. To address effectively this transformation with a vocation for integrality, it facilitates the process through the following mechanisms:

- To understand that it is a gradual process, which we can be approached little by little, but at the same time it is absolutely necessary to configure those educational spaces as safe, inclusive and transformative areas.
- To assume the coeducational approach as an educational centered project, in which the entire faculty and management team are involved.
- To articulate processes of involvement and participation of the entire educational community, through processes of formation, dialogue and active participation of community agents, families and students, together with the educational team.
- To pay special attention to early childhood and first educational cycles, where the foundations of stereotyped identities and roles begin to develop.



- To look for means in the already established legislative and political framework, while actively contributing processes of advocacy to overcome the limitations of existing ones.

### Conclusions: coeducation, an educational approach that cannot be postponed

As we have seen during the development of this article, gender equality and coeducation as an approach to promote it have to be central strategic elements.



Spanish version

## TO KNOW MORE

BLAS GARCÍA, A. DE (2018). *71 propuestas para educar con perspectiva de género*. Madrid: Fuhem.

GARCÍA FERNÁNDEZ, J., Y MAEZTU GOMAR, C. (2017). *Un Mundo de Encuentros*. Málaga: Fundación Entreculturas. Retrieved from <https://www.entreculturas.org/es/publicaciones/un-mundo-de-encuentros>

GARCÍA, A. (2009). *Género y desarrollo humano: una relación imprescindible*. Entreculturas, InteRed, Ayuda en Acción.

Their integration, although complex and ambitious, allows us to express in practice a true commitment to equality, and is the best expression of coherence for a school that wants to be considered transformative

The magnitude of the consequences of gender inequality and violence at global level urges us to integrate this approach without delay, since there are no reasons to justify continuing to procrastinate the explicit commitment to it. As a help to what this work entails, we have very good pedagogical literature and processes that can be of great help and good educational practices, all of this will facilitate and show us clearly the way. The reasons that incite us to choose this approach are also the best refuge against any moment of doubt and difficulty that we may encounter.

After all that has been said, we are faced with an educational revolution that cannot be postponed; it gives us the opportunity to work together and together face the challenge of configuring those socio-educational spaces as key areas for the construction of a more equal society, free of discrimination and violence, allowing us to respond better to the needs of our students. This will help all the members of the educational community to commit themselves to gender equality so that it becomes not only a value or an aspiration, but a lived experience. Let us, therefore, accept and assume without further delay this necessary challenge which has been calling us for centuries from all spheres of society •

## WE HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT

**Education; global education; coeducation; equal opportunity.**

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