

Editorial

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Sex education: encounters and divergence

Those who work in sex education say that, rather than an education *to do*, it is an education *to be*, since it has to do with the lives of the people and their ways of being in the world. It is therefore essential that this education take shape based on the respect for individuals who must be recognized as full human beings, with their own histories and different needs. An education on sexuality is therefore a kind of education whose aims include offering tools for care rather than modeling behavior, providing students with information so they can achieve a better understanding of their bodies and the exercise of their citizenship.

However, when we look back on the history of the incorporation of sex education in schools throughout our region, or the debate on sex education in Mexico after the Mexican Revolution, it becomes evident that its social, cultural, and educational history has been a troublesome issue for our society, because when there have been attempts to include it in the curricula these attempts have been interpreted as a challenge to culture, religious tradition and its values, and even as an encroachment of the State on family life and in particular on the lives of the children, to such an extreme that there have been public demonstrations under the slogan “Do not mess with my children!”¹ The meanings assigned to and the norms determining obligations on the bodies are in dispute, as well as the representations of being a woman or a man, leading to a battle over free will. Institutions that seek to exert control over individuals see in sex education a space for confrontation, turning the history of its incorporation in schools into a thorny road.

This has also been complicated within educational institutions, because it has confronted teachers with their own difficulties, fears, prejudice, and discomfort. In many cases, they still reproduce mandates, precepts or meanings that respond to other times or ways of thinking anchored in prohibitionist positions that do not allow for an effective dialog that helps students live their sexuality freely and responsibly, without preconceptions that may hurt them or put them at risk. Thus, upholding the relevance and currency of sex education in the times we are living entails fostering a culture of peace and guaranteed human rights. It is that ambitious.

Placing sexuality as an issue of social interest, and specifically in a learning situation, means referring to a topic that was silenced for centuries. It is therefore necessary to respond against this muting by approaching its study, delving in the knowledge of what has happened and

¹ It is a citizen movement – of parents – that runs through the whole region, with greater strength in Peru and Argentina, and that is present also in Spain, as a response to proposals of incorporating sex education and a gender approach into education.

what happens today, through research work centered in this subject of research, with papers that afford us the possibility of understanding it through a historical study of this phenomenon, dealing specifically with pedagogical proposals to address it and with the resistance it faces in school environments. It is vitally important to know where positions diverge as well as which are the possible routes to achieve consensus. Which positive experiences have taken place? What have been their results?

The search of teachers and citizen organizations to place this issue in the public space throughout the twentieth century and the years that have elapsed in this one has been frontal at times and less evident but consistent at other times. Sexually transmitted disease prevention, birth control and other rights associated with the body have been some of the aims of an education centered on the individuals and their social and affective relationships.

An education on sexuality regards recognizing individuals, their bodies, and their emotions as the foundations of pedagogical work. Disciplinary outlooks and specific approaches opened for its observation and the possible explanations are diverse, because to we must also add the possibility of analyzing what takes place vis-a-vis the institutions and power, the curricula and teaching practices, their implementation in a historic perspective, education for peace, gender studies, and human rights. Thus, the possibilities for analysis are multiple.

We believe it is important to look into, among other issues, what is taking place in school environments with regard to what teachers are conveying to their students about emotions, prejudice and ideas about sexuality, because it may be the case that it is there where abuse of power, images of inequality between men and women or gender roles regarding motherhood or fatherhood are being strengthened, when they should actually be questioned in order to subvert them in search of happier, more respectful lives.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that an education on sexuality finds in the school a space that may become fundamental and vigorous to provide young students with more just and understanding self-perceptions as well as more enjoyable and equal social relationships, but this kind of learning does not correspond solely to the school. The information on sexuality and human rights and the practices encouraged must be learned in different environments throughout people's lives.

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