

Gender and intercultural education

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Is there a gender culture in citizenship? Learning from Portuguese Young Adult voices.

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The fact that young adults are not heard enough in their lives, which implies that their cultures are not taken into account, is a crucial problem that requires schools and society to look at young women and young men in a different manner. Diverse individuals carry to school a variety of complex cultures, which are rooted on their diverse locations in specific combinations of power (Young 2002) and express what Bernstein (1996) named the “sub-voices”. Whereas some change has been introduced in school, what has been done to incorporate young adults’ expressions of femininity and masculinity in the construction of citizenship? Are young adults provided equality of condition (Baker, Lynch, Cantilon & Walsh, 2004)? In the current educational setting, influenced by competitiveness, if some teachers already make an effort to recognize and value young adult heterogeneity, educational goods that are provided do not seem to accommodate young adults’ construction of education and citizenship as a political and cultural right. Looking for cultural gender similarities and differences, this paper focuses on young adults’ expressions on school matters. I argue that school constitutes an important tool to build bridges among cultures on the path to construct intercultural views of the world supported by recognition.

Research was qualitative and interpretive, based on conversation. 31 young women and 22 young men, 17 to 19 years old, were consulted through Focus Group Discussion (mixed groups –first and second stages of the research - and according to gender and school achievement – third stage) and individual interviews (same criteria – fourth stage). Phases: i) pilot exploratory consultation in a school from the central area with similar characteristics but an average position in school rankings

– to clarify consultation strategies, instruments and establish ourselves in schools; ii) exploratory discussion in three schools from the Northern interior region, below average in school rankings – to clarify pertinent matters for discussion and gather opinions; iii) substantial focused discussion and iv) individual interviews in one of the schools from the Northern interior semi-disadvantaged area – to discuss and deepen specific matters. A questionnaire was applied to characterize the sample and the grade 12 population in the school, where the research was developed (stages 3 and 4). Narratives were subjected to content analysis through the use of inclusive categories to gather all the voices in presence – mainstream speech continuities and specificities, divergences and exceptions in the construction of citizenship and in the views about social educational policies.

Gender power relations and some traditional roles still prevail in young adult cultures and construction as citizens. In the studied region and groups, the study shows that some progress has occurred in young adult construction and assertion of femininities and masculinities. In the context of group heterogeneity, this is particularly notorious in young women, whose generational culture tends to express in greater assertiveness and awareness about what they want to do with their educational career – furthering the ones of their families, their professions – taking into account general problems of unemployment, and their future family lives – postponed and away from the traditional nuclear family. Young men's most interesting cultural change relates to the entrance in the private sphere of care.

Hence, even if some continuity(ies) can be found in terms of gender interests and complicity which brings up intra-gender bonds between young women and young men, young adults' expression of culture comes as result of the intersectionality of diverse dimensions which inform their construction as citizens. Looking for recognition, several young women and young men break the traditional gender bounds. Gender is a component of young adults' citizenship as a political and cultural right but doesn't constitute a culture in itself.