

CONCIENCIACIÓN SOBRE ESTUDIANTES GLBT EN AMBIENTES ILE (INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA)

AWARENESS OF LGBT STUDENTS IN AN EFL ENVIRONMENTS

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RESUMEN

El aula se ha convertido en el campo de batalla para combatir la disparidad de género y la identidad de género: el proceso pedagógico en la herramienta apropiada; la estrategia metodológica en la estrategia de concienciación; los recursos (leyes, códigos, declaraciones internacionales) en el escudo que protege; y la evaluación en la destrucción de la discriminación y el afloramiento de la equidad

de género y orientación sexual. Esto es un gran problema cultural, educativo, social e histórico. En esta revisión de literatura se incluyen los procesos sociales a nivel global emprendidos con el objetivo de alcanzar la igualdad de género pero sobre todo elevar la conciencia de los involucrados en los procesos educativos a enfrentar de manera directa, sin tabúes y mucho menos discriminatoriamente, las orientaciones sexuales y de género que los estudiantes deciden asumir, las cuales generan conflicto de aceptación, bullying y hasta en casos extremos el suicidio. Docentes y autoridades del Sistema de educación ecuatoriano debemos abrir espacios de diálogo a todo nivel dentro de la comunidad educativa y superar modelos mentales sociales arcaicos o conservadores en extremo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: <IDENTIDAD DE GÉNERO> <ORIENTACION SEXUAL> <DISCRIMINACIÓN> <ESTRATEGIAS DE INTERVENCIÓN> <CONSEJERÍA>

ABSTRACT

Classroom have become into the battlefield to combat gender disparity and gender identity: the pedagogical process in the appropriate tool; the methodological strategy in the awareness strategy; the resources (laws, codes, international declarations) in the shield that protects; and evaluation on the destruction of discrimination and the outpouring of gender equity and sexual orientation. This is a great cultural, educational, social and historical problem. This review of literature includes global social processes undertaken with the aim of achieving gender equality but above all raise the awareness of those involved in educational processes to face directly, without taboos and much less discriminatory, the sexual and gender orientations that the students decide to assume, which generate conflict of acceptance, bullying and even in extreme cases suicide. Teachers and authorities of the Ecuadorian Education System must open spaces for dialogue at

all levels within the educational community and overcome archaic or conservative societal mental models in the extreme.

KEY WORDS: <GENDER IDENTITY> <SEXUAL ORIENTATION><DISCRIMINATION> <INTERVENTION STRATEGIES> <COUNSELING>

INTRODUCTION

Gender issues have been historically part of the Human Kind development. From the Primitive Community up to the Socialism, men and women have played a designated role. In most of the cases this role had to do with the women's submission before men. The role of men as oppressor and decision maker has been impressed in all the activities. Language for instance has been notably influenced by gender roles.

Language has been used to transmit not just the legacy of any given social group, but the social patterns and behaviors regarding gender issues. The role of women as passive and the one responsible for children education, was strongly combated at the beginning of eighteen century. Social movements like the Feminist Movement, took place along with the Industrial Revolution. Peterson & Runyan (2010) state that: "the field of gender [...] has substantially grown since the early 1990s" (p. xv). It means that during the last two centuries, those roles have been under constant change. And the perception about gender issues also has meaningfully and positively increased too.

Feminist Theory is one of the major contemporary sociological theories. "It analyzes the status of women and men in society with the purpose of using that knowledge to better women's lives. Feminist theorists have also started to question the differences between women, including how race, class, ethnicity, and age intersect with gender" (Crossman, 2014, p. 1). Sex and gender always have had a connotation of power.

According to Millet (2014)

If one takes patriarchal government to be the institution whereby that half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male, the principles of patriarchy appear to be twofold: male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger. However, just as with any human institution, there is frequently a distance between the real and the ideal; contradictions and exceptions do exist within the system. While patriarchy as an institution is a social constant so deeply entrenched as to run through all other political, social, or economic forms, whether of caste or class, feudality or bureaucracy, just as it pervades all major religions, it also exhibits great variety in history and locale. In democracies, for example, females have often held no office or do so (as now) in such minuscule numbers as to be below even token representation. (p. 2)

Within all these aspects to be considered and all the ramifications of this topic, there are so many conflicts that can be derived from sex, gender and identity. According to Riencourt (1974), "The acute consciousness of a predicament in the relations between sexes is probably the most significant element in the overall crisis of contemporary civilization, because it subsumes all the others. (p. 26)

This research paper will try to provide insights into the field of education and change of attitudes regarding gender issues in an English Language Teaching (ELT) environment. Although those processes of change in social patterns through education have taken complex forms, this document will describe how teachers, parents and students may modify their attitudes. Although it is possible that traditional sex role differentiations are breaking down, most of the changes seem to be affecting attitudes rather than preferences or standards. (Seráfica &

Rose, 1982)

EDUCATION AND GENDER ROLES

Education has universally one premise *equity*. It is to provide all the members of a learning community the same rights, duties and treatment. So the questions which arises is: To what extent should teachers know students who show gender differences and treat them in a differentiated way?

One major concept that had emerged is the difference between gender and sex. While sex refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex; Gender refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex (APA Council of Representatives, 2011, para. 3) These differences are difficult to be understood by certain social groups due to their beliefs, traditions or simply by lack of knowledge and awareness of this issue.

Biological differences as well as culture establishes gender roles. When one's gender identity and biological sex are not congruent, the individual may identify as *transsexual* or as another *transgender category*. (Gainor, 2000 in APA Council of representatives, 2011, para... 5)

Sacks (2005) in his book gives opposing viewpoints and analyzes the biological conditions suffered by few people who had a biological element to be considered as intersexual. In his article he answered Fausto- Sterling's position of considering five different sexes and points out that 1.7 % of human births are intersex. (Fausto- Sterling & Sax, 2005, p. 87)

THE TACT OF TEACHING

The most relevant aspect lays in the role of educators to guide students in their attitudes regarding sex, but not in their preferences.

“While teachers are becoming more and more aware of the interrelatedness of such factors as self-concept with academic achievement, peer relations, and behavior problems, they often do not detect the students who may have a low self-concept”. (Heck & Williams, 1984, p. 43).

Learning is basically a process of human interaction. That interaction means to relate boys and girls and provide them a common space to share, grow and modify their attitudes among them. Their sex could be visible detected, but their gender could not. Teachers have to be tactful and try to identify gender preferences if the case deserves it. That means if the scholar success of an individual is at risk of failure. “The personality of students may be affected by gender-linked treatment in the classroom. It has been observed that in a class situation, girls become dependent and acquiescent, while boys show motivation and independence” (Anderson & Hayes, 1996, p. 93).

LAW AND GENDER EQUITY

Beyond the legal support that emerged from the combination of the first and fourteen amendment, the U.S. Constitution, guarantees the freedom and equality, therefore “the right to be out has emerged today as a strong and multifaceted legal imperative...” (Biegel, 2012, p. 104)

The resources and tools that Ecuadorian teachers have to deal with this topic are many. First of all, The Political Constitution states in its article 27:

“Art. 27.- Education will be based on the human being and it will guarantee its holistic development, inside the frame of human rights’ respect, the environment and the democracy; It will be participative, obligatory, intercultural, democratic, inclusive and diverse, of quality and charming; it will promote gender equity, justice, solidarity and

peace; It will stimulate critical thinking, arts, and physical education, individual and communitarian initiative, and the development of capacities and competencies for creating and working. (Republica del Ecuador-Asamblea Nacional, 2008, p. 8)

The General Education Law in its article 2 literal I mentions “Gender equity. Education must guarantee the equality of conditions, opportunities and treatment among men and women. Positive action are guaranteed to execute the right to education without any kind of discrimination” (Republica del Ecuador-Asamblea Nacional, 2012, p. 23).

It means that from the legal point of view as teachers, Ecuadorians can consider gender issues inside their action plan to prevent and guide in an appropriated way, any student who has a differentiated gender preference.

TEACHER’S ABILITY TO DEAL WITH LGBT QUESTIONS.

Manes (2004) describes these teachers’ abilities like *-pedagogical understanding-* which requires of sensitiveness and this is reached through listening and observing our students behaviors, also it demands of a non-judgmental understanding, they should be develop and analyzed to become them into educational understanding (p. 29).

Many programs for teachers in training treat this question from a heterosexual point of view. They portray gender from a basic point of view; just boys and girls, no intermediate positions. In the second edition of the book the authors limited their vision about gender differences to the male and female differences in the classes, leaving aside any possibility to accept another category in terms of gender, sex or sexual preferences. This takes into account that many programs like the one mentioned above are

considered essential in pre-service teacher education (Kauchak & Eggen, 2005). According to Biegel (2012): “The spirit of community that accompanies a positive school climate can be particularly important for students of color and LGBT students who may have self-image issues and may see themselves, incorrectly, as not capable or less capable than others” (p. 104).

PROACTIVE STRATEGIES FOR LBGT INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITIES INSIDE SCHOOLS

In the United States there are hundreds of organizations which have developed educational programs for parents, and have provided counselling to teachers that basically promote the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons. Unluckily this is not the same in Ecuador. The inexistence of any kind of governmental program which tries to reduce the negative effects of exclusion or discrimination against LGBT members is a reality. It has reduced the effort of non-governmental organizations because the lack of support to develop a change at the national level. These organizations have developed social strikes in favor of the equalitarian marriage, but they have no any proposal to interact or help educational institutions yet.

Founded in 1972, the non-governmental organization *Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays* PFLAG is the U.S. largest organization of this type. It is made up of parents, families, friends, and straight allies united with people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, it is committed to advancing equality and societal acceptance of LGBT people. Through its threefold PFLAG mission of support, education and advocacy is worthy to observe (PFLAG, 2014). It has over 350 chapters and 200,000 members and supporters crossing multiple generations of American families in major urban centers, small cities and

rural areas in 50 states (PFLAG, 2014). This is the best example to contrast the relevance of this issue between USA and Ecuador. While here the action has spread in different directions. In Ecuador it has been limited to the civil rights struggle, which is something good, but it has not advanced to the next level.

PFLAG National created the *Cultivating Respect: Safe Schools for All Initiative* CRSAI program, which seeks to provide support, education, and advocacy to students, parents, families, friends, and educators to help them create a learning environment that is conducive to the educational success of all students.

Ten essential ways to find support, get education, and become an advocate for safe schools have been presented by this initiative. The first one is about *Learn the Facts*: Students who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender—LGBT—are at a higher risk for depression, self-harm, and dropping out of school. The second is *Understand the Language*: Using respectful and appropriate language is an important benchmark to set a tone of respect and understanding. The third is *Stop Bad Behavior*: Don't ignore or excuse discriminatory behaviors or harassment, and don't be immobilized by fear: Not taking action can endanger students and make the classroom unsafe. The fourth is *Set the Policy*: A strong and inclusive anti-harassment policy not only protects students; it also protects the school. The fifth is *Plan School-Wide Activities*: Showing films, reading books, and planning school wide activities offers opportunities for everyone to learn and participate. These programs help build community, empathy and understanding. The sixth is *Be Public*: Adults should go public with their support for diversity, and oppose bullying and harassment. Signs, stickers and other public displays tell youth that their diversity is welcomed, supported, and protected. The seventh is *Address Cyber Bullying*: Take cyber-bullying seriously. Add cyber bullying to existing

anti-harassment or bullying policies, and help provide training and education for students, teachers and parents. The eighth *Train and Educate Everyone*: It is imperative that every adult—parents, teachers, administrators—is trained to respond to bullying in ways that support every student. The ninth *Work for Comprehensive Health Education*: Youth must have a clear understanding of their bodies, and health, in order to respect themselves and their classmates. And finally *Provide Resources*: Learn more about partners and resources. (PFLAG, 2014)

IMPLICATIONS: IMPLEMENTING LGBT COUNSELLING PROGRAMS IN ECUADOR

The development of guidelines like those presented above, will require a special commitment of teachers in Ecuador, considering that, “Teachers may use negative, simplistic, and overly moralistic descriptions of lesbian, gays, and bisexual that assume the superiority of heterosexuality” (Owens, 1998, p. 85). This might be the cornerstone that sets up the beginning point of these kind of initiatives in Ecuador. These initiatives have to be focused on the teacher role, his/her attitude, creativeness, care for their students, and maturity.

The experiences learned through this research has led to the reflection about the need of implementing in the Ecuadorian educational system a carefully designed plan to prevent discrimination due gender preferences. The Ministry of Education has been promoting the involvement of teachers in programs that reinforce the holistic education of the students. Nevertheless, teachers are used to being told what should be done, and how it should be done. Most of the time Ecuadorian educators act out under request of the authorities, showing a minimal initiative for developing any program outside of the classroom and their subject framework.

In every school in Ecuador, there should be a - *living-together code- (codigo de convivencia)*. This Code: “permits a living in a community based on an agreement among all the members and requires values to be developed like love, respect, peace, tolerance, sensibility, and freedom” (Ministerio de Educacion, 2012). This can be the legal base and framework for the implementation of a Gender Bullying Prevention Program.

Epstein (2012) presents a model of scholar involvement that could be considered as a second element of this future proposal. It is the *Action Teams for School, Family, and Partnership*. This model has some components that can be considered useful for creating a *School Plan in Ecuador*. The aspects to be considered are: creating an Action Plan, obtaining funds and other support, identifying starting points, developing a three year plan, strengthening partnerships. (Epstein, 2012, pp. 192-198)

CLASSROOM APPLICATION

Even though that this proposal has an ample vision and it might require a long term process, the knowledge gained from this research, will permit modification to the researcher’s attitude towards gender preferences and include those new perspectives at a personal level. In every class to be conducted, gender issues will be addressed in an appropriated way, expressing opinions and making up well-informed decisions and implementing any curricular accommodation. Those accommodations are part of our role as active teachers. According to Herrera (2012): “In this situation, the teacher, who in many ways was ready to meet the needs of his students and families, temporarily had to regress on the spiral and return to posing question about what was happening in this specific situation and asking question about his own perspective on the issue” (p. 141). Students’ needs might have been related to their gender preference then part of

our responsibility is incorporating to our teaching practices all the accommodations regarding LGBT issues.

To accept the importance of gender preferences in the school is necessary. A teacher who is professionally committed to the hard task of education could not deny the relevance and dimension of this issue currently. To put aside old beliefs influenced by religious practices which consider the exclusiveness of men and women as categorical genders is a must. It is the challenge of educators in this millennium to face the multicultural and differentiated world of students inside every one of our classrooms. To provide a secure environment to LGBT students depends primarily on the teacher inside the classroom, later on, there should be articulated forms of prevention against discrimination and bullying at a large scale.

This attitude should be reinforced by the law, by the recognition of every human being as equal, without any mental, political, religious or gender preference discrimination, that does not permit a full exercise of their civil and human rights. The changeable feature of any social model is unstoppable. This are times for changes. Teachers have to modify their practices, schools have to change their policies, and humans have to adapt their attitudes. Being Gay, Lesbian or Transsexual is not a crime, it is not against morality, and it is not against human development.

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