

MEDES PROJECT: IMPLEMENTATION OF SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION IN A COEDUCATIONAL SCHOOL

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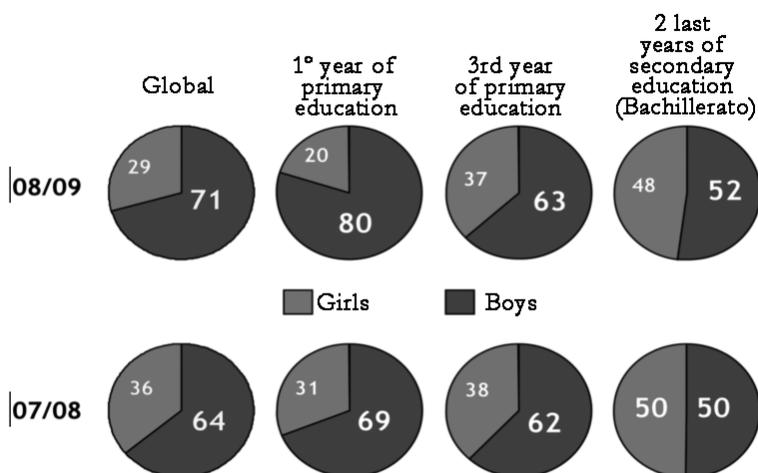
In 2009, in the Montessori School of Salamanca, we suggested to parents of students that in order to continue to improve the education program, the model should be changed to one of single-sex education. For many parents, it was a surprise that a school created in 1975 should make such a decision. In our city, there had not existed this type of school for decades. We were faced with a great lack of knowledge about the subject, and we decided to dedicate the following year to studying and disseminating the possibilities and advantages of single-sex schooling. After this period of time, we began to separate classes beginning with the first year of early childhood education (3 years of age). In the present study, we give a brief presentation of the arguments that led us to make this decision and offer the first conclusions at which we arrived regarding single-sex groups.

In spite of good academic and educational outcomes of the school, we faced extreme differences - of academic performance, attitude, and behavior – between boys and girls.

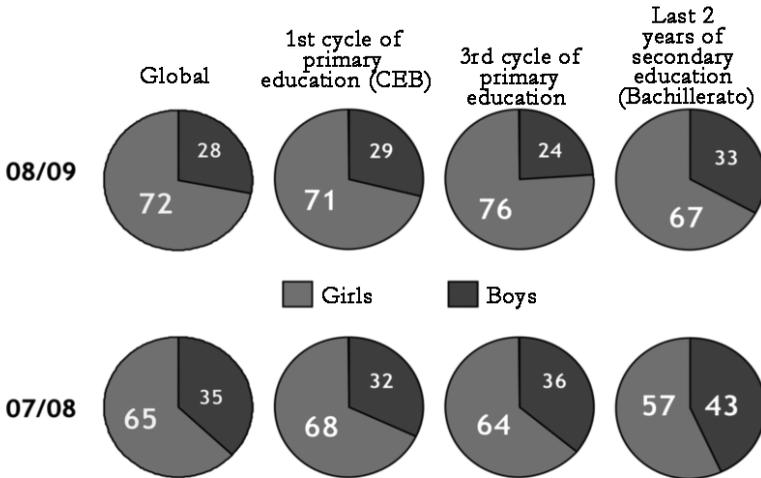
1. DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- 77% of Special Prizes (for a maximum grade) are won by girls (Mss)
- The academic failure rate of boys, 31.2%, is twice that of girls: 16,1% (CyL)
- Students repeating grades: boys : 49%; girls : 26%. Also twice the percentage of girls (CyL)
- 11 points in favor of boys in mathematics (Pisa 08, CyL)
- 24 points in favor of girls in Languages (Pisa 08, CyL)
- Of students who require speech therapy, 67% are boys (Mss)

Comparative statistics of students suspended in the 1st assessment (in %)



Comparative statistics of students with maximum average grade or excellent in the 1st assessment (in %)



2. DIFFERENCES IN BEHAVIOR

- Students with ADHD: 75% are boys (Spain). 82% in Mss
- 85% of reports of occurrences are for boys (Mss)
- 87% of punishments are for boys (Mss)
- When they demonstrate lack of interest, boys interrupt the order of the classroom. Girls speak up.
- Boys are noisy and restless. They appear not to take the teacher's instructions seriously. They frequently "don't understand" what they are told, the tasks to be carried out, including punishments. When they are criticized or receive comments that they judge to be unfair, they react brusquely.

3. DIFFERENCES OF ATTITUDE

- 73% of *Ribbons for Effort* are awarded to girls. (Mss)
- 48% of girls in primary school receive a maximum grade on 6 items of affective and social behavior, compared to 25% of boys. (Mss). Items: complete their tasks, are careful with work materials; work in teams, respect the rights of others, follow rules and treat others correctly.
- Girls are chosen for special tasks: they are more careful, attentive and calm. They don't forget what is asked on them, and work without close supervision of the teacher.
- Girls take better care of their notebooks and their work is presented better, which is interpreted as a sign of greater interest.

These differences are patent both in our school and in information about Spain as a whole (Report of the Ministry of Education & Culture) and the world at large: Pisa reports (reading, mathematics and sciences), Timss (sciences and mathematics) and Pirls (reading literacy). These are tests that have been available since 1995 (Timss) and 2000 (Pisa). They are carried out every 3-4 years. Researcher Leonard Sax concluded that: "*The school, and not drugs, is the 'new' problem for children*".

To what is due this difference, if we treat the two genders equally? Either boys and girls of the same age are different, or the methodology employed is not effective to the same extent for boys and girls (which confirms that they are different). The available bibliography already allows us to explain many of the differences that we encounter every day in the classroom. According to these studies, the cause – contrary to what had been thought initially – is not the child or the culture, but rather genetic differences, and above all the nature of men and women. The unequal pace of maturity of boys and girls is undisputable. The consequence of this is that they are not equal in terms of learning conditions.

The differences that result from brain differentiation and the unequal pace of maturity of boys and girls cannot be altered. But we can work on methodologies, adapt the way of teaching, the type of activities, the pace of the classroom, the type of groupings, the arguments and activities employed to motivate children, the tone of voice, the type of demands, etc. These methodological options – most of which are possible to carry out in the classroom – have a common characteristic: they refer to the group, and for this reason they are equal for all. Once a path of action is determined, it will be more appropriate either for groups of boys or for groups of girls; only rarely will it be the best option for both.

The bibliography does not offer us ways to adapt methodologies to boys and girls, except for one case: single-sex education in all of its multiplicity and modalities. We have studied single-sex schools and coeducational schools with single-sex characteristics, from all-boy and all-girl classes in the same school.

In all of these cases, the results were satisfactory for boys and for girls. It is curious that researchers have not arrived at agreement among themselves as to whether it is better for boys or for girls; but in no case do they say that it is worse for any of the groups.

We concluded, therefore, that in face of the inequality of teaching results, or behavior and performance, that we needed to urgently explore other formulas in order to achieve EFFECTIVE equality. For this reason, we decided to implement single-sex education, beginning with children 3 years of age. Each year, a new grade is incorporated into this single-sex education plan. With the beginning of the 2010-2011 class, this is the third year, and next year we will begin with the 1st year of primary school.

The key to this entire process has been the early childhood teachers and their training. They studied the methodology in depth, are adapting it and explaining it to the families of the children who enter the school. Every year, we organize an

open-doors day during which, among other things, we explain to families the way in which we are adapting the methodology to the classes of boys and classes of girls.

After two and one-half years of work, we have arrived at some preliminary conclusions that, with the natural reservations due to the small time span with which we have to work, we submit below:

Premises:

– We don't yet know if what happens is a result of the nature of the project or of the specific groups. More time is needed. Nevertheless, it is possible to detect some common features.

– 20% of students (approximately) do not demonstrate the typical behavior of boys or of girls.

– In the case of the boys, it seems to us to be more spontaneous and “easier” to modify “most” of the methodology.

– In the case of the girls, it is also necessary to modify it, but in more complex ways, such as for self-esteem, affectivity, etc.

Girls

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

- Good, easy, and fast adaptation. They begin by being very silent, and their willingness to speak increases unstopably.
- Work environment – very good.
- Good psychomotricity.
- Little tolerance for mistakes and frustration.
- Many personal conflicts. Talkative. Much argument.
- More organized
- Girls with difficulties well-integrated.
- Fast development in reading and writing.

WHAT WORKS:

- Give them time to speak (like providing space for boys to move).

- They like drawn-out activities. In fact, they prolong them.
- They enjoy the “process”, of *the during*
- Good in small groups. Not in group behavior in large groups.
- Influence one another a great deal. They should be switched more between groups. Imitate one another very much.
- Responsibilities: very good; they appreciate them.

OBJECTIVES TO BE SOUGHT:

- Respond well to kind voices, but should, however, learn to tolerate a sharper tone
- Tolerance for mistakes.
- Strengthen self-esteem and development of their own personalities: they tend to imitate the leader of the group.
- Creativity: give them few examples, because of and by themselves they already decide to not to copy.
- Strengthen ability to speak in public. They are not daring.
- Leadership ability: taking initiative.
- Strengthen mathematical reasoning.

Boys

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

- Boys in groups of all boys, feel less pressured and happier.
- They manage conflicts better. Overprotection is much less.
- They don't feel overpowered when they make mistakes. No problem. They don't correct one another. It's indifferent to them.
- They are happy and content with what they do. They finish tasks very rapidly.

WHAT WORKED:

- Adapt to spaces.
- Work a great deal with order, with much investment in it.
- Program activities for a reduced time frame. Make frequent changes. If one increases tasks, they end up abandoning them. Provide various alternatives.
- Desk seats with springs to facilitate movement when they are nervous in order to relieve tension and make them more receptive. Takes walks, move them from one place to another, get them to do some jumps, etc. Encourage intense and short movements.
- Firmness in dealing with them: neither babying nor too excess praise. They appreciate a tone of voice that is loud and firm.
- Frequently repeat what is expected of them.
- Look ahead: continually explain to them why and for what we do things. Always explain by giving motives.
- Comply with what was agreed upon: for better or worse. For this, you need an elephant's memory.
- Make use of competition and have contests, raffles, etc. Teach them how to lose and to win.
- Computer screens: completely holds their attention and works very well with them. Nevertheless, play with objects.
- Strengthen mathematical reasoning, arising spontaneously from them, and at which they are very quick.
- The grading system is very important: play dominos, puzzles, group drawings.

OBJECTIVES TO WORK ON:

- Emotions. Strengthen good feelings. How to ask for pardon. Putting oneself in the place of others.
- Duration of activities.
- Control of movement.
- Write on graph paper: they need to be very motivated.

SINGLE SEX EDUCATION
AN OPTION IN FOREFRONT OF EDUCATION

- Reading: they must be motivated.
- Noise is constant.
- Channel creativity.
- Should not be forced when one sees that they're not paying attention.
- Review what works in each section.

