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Gender as a key element for choosing learning activities outside the school: a research with 10 and 16 years old students in Catalonia

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Abstract

Gender variables have received little attention in the field of Educational Psychology, even though some studies suggest they have an impact on the students' choices about their academic future. In this paper we present some of the results obtained in a larger project (Ref. EDU2013-40965-R) which aims to study the relationship and mutual influences between learning identity and the construction of gender and cultural identities. Specifically, we intend to investigate to what extent the gender variable plays a role on the selection of extracurricular activities and the learning experiences associated with them, in a sample of 411 students of 4th and 5th grade of elementary education (10 years) and 535 students at the end of the secondary education (16 years old) in Catalonia (Spain). To collect data we have used a questionnaire developed to obtain information about those activities, their frequency, their subjective importance for learning, the people who participate in them, and the reasons for doing so. The results show how social representations about gender that children share in their daily interactions have an impact on the selection of learning activities outside school, and through them, on the learning experiences they have built and how they view themselves as apprentices. There is a clear distinction between the election of boys and girls activities outside school based on gender stereotypes, especially in early adolescence. Conclusions point at the need to connect and critically review the learning experiences of students inside and outside school as a part of a new ecology of learning, in order to help them build a learning identity according to the personal expectations of children and their capabilities, and also reducing the effect of dominant discourses on gender in society.

Keywords: gender, learning activities outside school, subjective learning experiences, new ecology of learning.