

Marta Rosàs

Coeducation

An opportunity for
self-discovery



Col·lecció
"Reflexions
en veu alta"

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Acknowledgements

To Carme Giralt i Rosés, for all her work on coeducation over the years and because this book sprang up out of the conversations and thoughts shared with her.

To Ester Rosàs i Cortada, for willing to write a better world.

Prologue

The road to equal opportunities for men and women is a long process, and is now considered irreversible.

This process involves many factors, including work, family and social relations. In many cases, the measures taken have to be corrective, because things have become blatantly unjust and need to be redressed.

However, there is one area on which those of us committed to the task of equal opportunities for both sexes want to lay special emphasis, namely the education of children and young people. The reason is quite simple: in principle, there is no need to take action to repair injustices, but to convey values and attitudes that seem entirely logical and necessary.

We refer to education that takes these values and attitudes into account as "coeducation". This coeducation does not mean, by any means, merely sitting boys and girls down in the same room together. Rather, it means an active approach involving recognition and assessment of equal opportunities and the contribution made by differences, not only in gender, but in knowledge, sensibilities, capabilities for expression, etc.

Children and adolescents receive education in three very specific and clearly defined environments, as well as other, more diffuse ones. The three clearly defined environments are the family, school and leisure-time groups. In each one, children and young people see role models and express different and complementary behaviours. Of all three, the school is the only one that is legally structured. The other two embrace a broad range of models and activities.

It is very stimulating to find an institution such as Escoltes Catalans proposing what might be termed the style guide for leisure-time coeducation, or at least in the leisure activities of Catalan Scouting and Guiding, which has held, and continues to hold, a pre-eminent place in leisure activities promoting coexistence, knowledge of Catalonia, respect for the environment, personal improvement and teamwork.

As the book itself quite rightly stresses, these activities also oblige Scouting and Guiding leaders to conduct themselves in the same way they expect the boys and girls under their tutelage to behave. These leaders are the forerunners for the new men and women that today's children and young people will become.

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Is coeducation an issue?

It is relatively plain to see how society conveys clearly defined and different roles to boys and girls. As shall be seen below, statistical evidence points to a social reality where inequalities based on gender still exist. Among other matters, it is clear that men hold most positions of responsibility and, despite efforts made in recent years, this is true in most contexts.

In view of this situation, many educational associations have long since seen coeducation as one of their main work tools. These institutions include Escoltes Catalans, the lay¹ association of Catalan Scouting and Guiding, one of whose main objectives is to build a fairer and freer society where men and

1. In Scouting and Guiding, the adjective *laic/laique* has been used since the beginning of the 20th century in French-speaking countries to refer to Scout and Guide associations where education in spiritual matters includes an active attitude of in-depth study and understanding of the religious beliefs of members, though it does not include the practice of any specific belief. When these concepts were adapted by Catalan Scouting and Guiding movement, the French terms *laic/laique* were translated into Catalan as *laic/laica* and *laïcité* became *laïcitat*. But translating these terms into English as *lay* and creating the word *laicity* may lead to confusion, given that *lay* is generally used to refer precisely to non-religious matters. However, in keeping with the French use of the term, in this text *lay* has been used in a spiritual sense.

women do not suffer any type of inequality, including sexual discrimination.

But how does the coeducational option fit into the 21st century after the changes that have taken place in society in recent decades? Can the current situation be changed through education of children and young people?

It is very hard to find anything new in the field of sexism in the 21st century. A great deal has been written on this subject and many people believe that there is nothing new to be said, but fresh strategies must be sought to help improve the world. That is why this document aims to analyse the current situation and suggest possible measures, concentrating particularly on the education of children and young people.

Another aim is to demonstrate the validity of coeducational work, not based on a traditional approach, where the main goal is to mitigate the injustices that women have suffered throughout history, but by focusing on the right of any individual - whether male or female - to develop freely. This book also suggests that social changes may be achieved by educating children and young people, and stresses the important role leisure-time educational associations can play in this process, due to their special characteristics, particularly Scouting and Guiding.

This book is targeted mainly at educators, particularly those who work in leisure time, i.e. Scout and Guide leaders; accordingly, the work proposals are designed

for this group, who operate within the framework of so-called non-formal education. But it is also intended for another audience: those directly or indirectly responsible for educational policies. It thus sets forth a number of ideas and thoughts on the need to act against injustices that arise in our society, and proposes the education of children, based on equality, as the best solution.

This book attempts to develop these topics, draw conclusions and provide possible solutions, either indirectly or with specific work proposals. In no way does it purport to be a secret recipe for successful coeducation, or to preach the absolute truth; rather, it aims to take readers along the path of reflection through a series of experiences and questions, while introducing new views and approaches to coeducation.

I hope that all Scout and Guide leaders and people who work in education and read this book opt for coeducation, and not just as an ideological framework, but as an educational model to be put into practice, because, although considerable progress has already been made, we still have a long way to go.

How things stand: roles

The current situation in statistics

The latest report published by the UN on the status of women in the world (September 2000) includes a number of rather chilling statistics. Although inequalities between the sexes are increasingly slight in Western society, the same is not true in the rest of the world.

The report states that 1 in every 3 women in the world has been beaten up, forced to have sex or abused at some time (1 in every 4 suffers abuse during pregnancy); every year, 2 million girls between the ages of 5 and 15 are drafted into the commercial sex market; 200 of the world's 300 million unschooled children are girls; every year, 2 million female circumcisions are performed on girls to prevent them from enjoying their sexuality, with many of them dying as a result of infections stemming from the operation.

These figures demonstrate that women's role is merely trivial and one of inferiority to men in many countries. Although it might seem strange and hard to understand, there are situations where women have no decision-making power in their lives, and many have not been able even to consider building a better life. Living in a country of this sort is a major challenge, often ending in the tragedy of women seeing their basic liberties curtailed.

In the West, the situation is generally quite different. The new social structure has liberated women and given them access to university, employment, certain rights, etc., so they now seem to have the same opportunities as men. People, regardless of their sex, live in theoretical equality with respect to the law and have equal rights; but a close look at the reality reveals that something is amiss, because there are actually many situations where this balance is lacking.

Modern-day Western culture has inherited a situation where women's responsibilities and functions have always been subordinated, which means that all efforts to improve women's situation faces considerable resistance from tradition. Although legislative measures have been introduced to redress these differences, they prove hard to eliminate in practice, because changing people's mentality is a long and complex process.

In Catalonia, in 1996, university graduates aged between 20 and 34 comprised 66,423 women and 53,335 men, whereby female graduates accounted for 9.2% of this entire age group, and male graduates, 7.2%. This situation is apparently favourable to women, but a closer look at these figures shows that there are strong trends in subject selection based on gender. While most male students choose technical subjects, their female counterparts opt for care- and service-related studies. All this leads to differences in salaries, purchasing power and responsibilities between men and women.

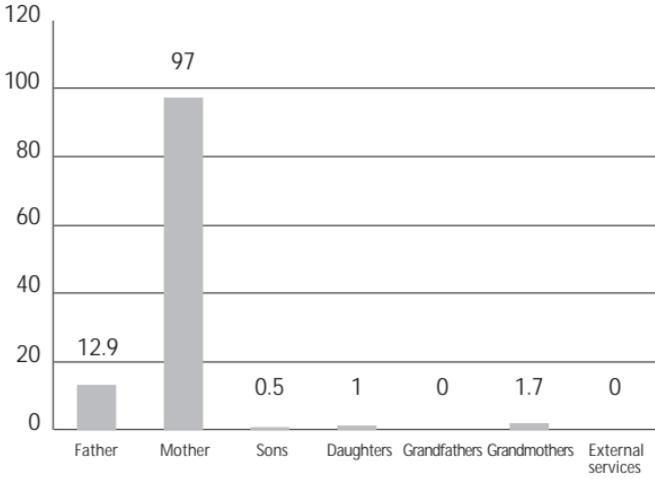
This situation is reflected in a report recently commissioned by the European Union and included in

the newsletter of Barcelona Provincial Council's European Integration and Solidarity Department (February 2000), according to which female European scientists hold very few decision-making positions. In countries where discrimination is lowest, such as Finland, France and Spain, women account for only 13-18% of university professors. In the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, this percentage falls to 6.5%. In Spain, only one of the 60 university rectors is a woman.

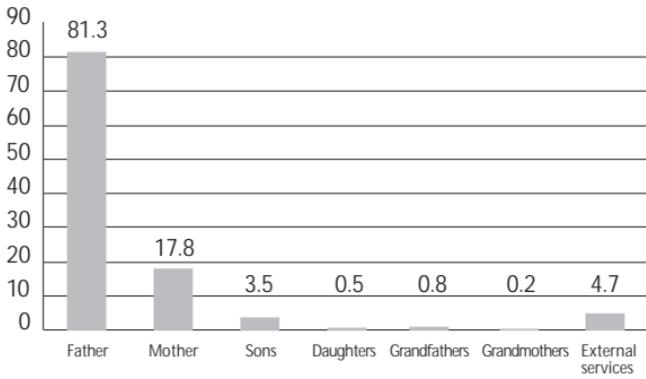
Another example of this unfair situation between men and women may be seen in the distribution of everyday household chores. The book *Les dones catalanes a la família del 2000*, published by the Catalan Women's Institute, shows that responsibilities such as cleaning, preparing meals, shopping and caring for the ill are still almost entirely the domain of women; men are, however, responsible for DIY and home security.

Some examples are listed below. For the purposes of this analysis, the survey polled 400 people, who were asked who did each of the household chores in question.

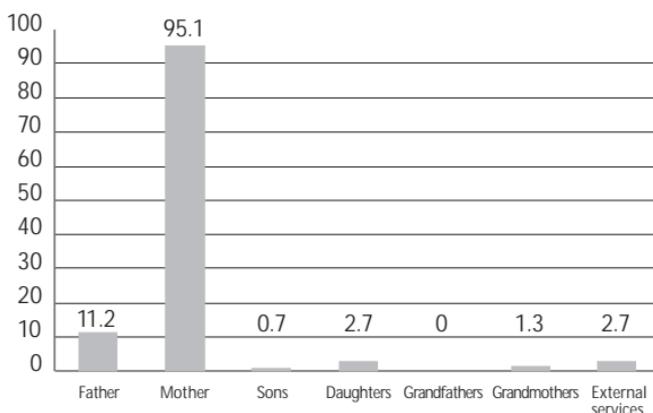
Preparing meals



DIY



Cleaning



Thus, gender discrimination still prevails, e.g. in the labour market, where men are preferred for executive positions and positions of responsibility, while women are preferred for care and service jobs. While men have an important part to play in building the labour market, women assume responsibility for the family, often in addition to work.

Stereotypes classify men and women by their assigned roles, but they also result in labour-market and social discriminations inherent to the positions held and roles played by each sex. There are inequalities in salaries, education, access to public office and positions of power, responsibilities within the family, etc.

Another example of the differences that exist between men and women may also be found in their interests. This is illustrated by the readership figures analysed by sex, included in the magazine *Anuncios*, no. 4, of April 1990.

Type of publication	Men (%)	Women (%)
General-interest magazines	70.66	29.34
Travel magazines	68.93	31.07
Motor magazines	86.71	13.29
Sports magazines	85.26	14.74
Economics magazines	75.50	24.50
Women's magazines	16.82	83.18
Gossip magazines	34.94	65.06
Interior decorating magazines	30.30	69.70
Teen magazines	34.10	65.90

As for intellectual capacity, everyday reality means women are no longer considered inferior to men, as happened at other times in history. However, in terms of character, behavioural differences are often found between the two sexes; e.g. men are defined as more aggressive, bolder, stronger and more adventurous; on the other hand, women are defined as weaker and more sensitive, peaceful and emotional.

For illustrative purposes, let's look at the adjectives men and women use to define themselves, taken from the book *Estereotips socials de la dona* (1993), published by the Catalan Women's Institute.

Adjectives used by men to refer to themselves

	Frequency (%)		Frequency (%)
Conventional	1.4	Responsible	22.0
Servile	1.4	Hard-working	22.0
Considerate	1.4	Individualistic	26.2
Warm	2.1	Adventurous	27.7
Manipulative	4.3	Intelligent	28.4
Objective	6.4	Self-confident	29.1
Traditional	6.4	Realistic	29.1
Understanding	8.5	Active	29.8
Sensitive	9.9	Aggressive	31.9
Confident	10.6	Ambitious	33.3
Vain	10.6	Practical	35.5
Creative	12.1	Materialistic	39.0
Progressive	12.1	Pleasure-lover	46.1
Logical	12.8		

Adjectives used by women to refer to themselves

	Frequency (%)		Frequency (%)
Aggressive	1.4	Warm	11.7
Conventional	2.1	Progressive	17.9
Individualistic	3.4	Pleasure-lover	20.0
Objective	5.5	Self-confident	20.7
Traditional	6.2	Realistic	23.4
Vain	6.2	Practical	26.9
Manipulative	6.9	Ambitious	26.9
Adventurous	8.3	Understanding	28.3
Considerate	8.3	Hard-working	38.6
Confident	9.0	Active	40.0
Servile	9.7	Intelligent	46.9
Logical	9.7	Sensitive	47.6
Materialistic	10.3	Responsible	52.4
Creative	11.7		

These differences between the two sexes would not be a cause for concern if they were random among people in general, because if that were true, they would make for a plural, rich and diverse society. However, this is not the case; as mentioned above, distinctions between the two lead to inequalities between the two sexes.

Differences between men and women lead to a complex situation where the perpetuation of established roles conditions an individual's behaviour, whether consciously or subconsciously. The existence of patterns that they are supposed to follow prevents people from freely choosing their way of life, the relationships they want with others and, in short, the society they want to build.

Something apparently harmless becomes key to people's development. The perpetuation of established roles leads to pigeonholing of both sexes' characters. This pigeonholing follows certain stereotypes, which always exaggerate the truth and are mere clichés. The situation that arises is quite paradoxical: on the one hand, several factors push children towards established models; on the other, observation of people's differences shows that there are more differences between generations or cultures than between the sexes. In other words, there are differences between men and women, but no more than are found between any two people selected at random.

Thus, Western society is equipped to accept all possible behaviours and roles, but is generally not prepared to put the theory into practice; a major change of mentality is needed to redress this situation.

The environment's influence

But, where do differences between women and men originate? Are all the differences that arise between the two due to biological conditioning imposed by sex? Or are they due to the influence of the different environments that surround people? Which factors are innate and which are acquired?

Before answering these questions, a distinction should be drawn between sex and gender. Sex is the set of biological characteristics by which humans are classified as men and women. Gender is determined by societal influences on each sex; therefore, differences between the sexes are purely biological, and gender differences are created by the social environment.

Analysis of an experiment conducted at the University of Sussex (Smith and Lloyd, 1978), included in the book *Boys Don't Cry. Boys and Sexism in Education* (Askew and Ross, 1988), yields an example of how differences can arise as a result of external conditioning factors.

The authors explain how they studied various women to analyse their behaviour when an infant was presented to them as a boy or girl. The main deductions of the experiment were that, despite the child behaving in the same way, the women responded differently depending on the baby's supposed sex. For instance, when the infants were anxious or cried, the mothers would calm down the girls; however, they interpreted the need to take action with the boys, so they would play with them

or move them about. The authors conclude that this shows how children receive messages that condition their future behaviour and relationship with the environment.

Anyone can conduct this experiment by taking an infant for a walk and introducing it indistinctly as a boy or girl. When seen as a boy, people will mostly say that he is strong, funny, etc., and when introduced as a girl, she will be considered pretty, smiley, etc. When they know a child is about to be born, the first thing most people ask is whether it is a boy or girl, so the baby is immediately classified by its sex, which will have a decisive effect on its future. The conclusion will be the same as that reached by most sociologists and psychologists: namely, that some differences between men and women are the result of the environment.

There are many factors that influence children's education. The immediate environment has a stronger effect than the rest, so the family and school are considered the most important. But there are also other environments that have an effect on education because, due to their characteristics, they attract children's attention and make them much more receptive. The media has the strongest effect; but there is also children's informal environment – friendships and social interaction. Some children are also exposed to other educational factors, such as educational associations. This whole series of factors will affect children's and young people's development and will condition their personality and role in society.

Although it is now accepted that genetic and biological differences do exist, it is very hard to know where one type ends and the other begins. However, if natural distinctions other than physical ones are ever demonstrated, it will be necessary to see whether they justify each sex having its own responsibility, social participation and education. Whatever the case, inferiority or inequality based on this assumption will never be permissible, which is why this subject is not discussed in this book; what will be addressed here are the differences considered obvious for social reasons, i.e. gender differences.

Education as a solution

Education: a tool for change

The latest UN report proposes family planning and guaranteed healthcare as a solution to the world's major problems. In many environments, there is a call for a family policy that takes into account the changing family environment caused by women's access to employment. All these measures are necessary, but sadly not enough to change the situation.

On the threshold of the new millennium, in an increasingly more globalised world, a much more powerful and decisive transformation method must be sought. Sexual discrimination must be eradicated, and the best way to achieve this is to tackle the problem through **education**. If we want to build a better society, we should realise that children must develop as people rather than genders. They should be free to discover themselves, their feelings, thoughts, ideas and ways of life, etc. Through children's education, new roles and relationships can be conveyed to the growing and developing people who will ultimately build the future.

If children and young people are educated in a way that enables them to improve this situation, reality as we know it can be changed. However, to do this, all those involved in children's education must join forces to build a new society. Education does not just involve teaching, i.e. formal education; rather,

mothers and fathers, educational associations, the informal environment and the media also play a very important role in people's upbringing and should be taken into account.

It is time to break away from the idea of education as the sole preserve of a single teacher, and to diversify responsibilities for children's and young people's development, giving a more prominent role to the agents that have been most neglected. It is necessary to stimulate educational methods where children can enjoy experiences and relationships that break away from the norm, to enrich their personality and choose more freely the role they want to play in society.

Those responsible for the education of children and young people must realise just how important they are when it comes to designing the future and must play their part in accordance with the society we want to build.

Thus, a specific educational policy is needed, which deals comprehensively with the elimination of injustices and inequalities based on sex and helps engineer a genuine change in society. This entire educational task may be summarised in a single word: **coeducation**.

Coeducation: a common goal

Coeducation is an educational model designed to engineer a genuine social transformation through comprehensive development of men and women as people rather than individuals of a particular gender,

with the same opportunities for both sexes. Therefore, educational authorities should see coeducation as a tool for liberating people in a social context of sexual discrimination.

But coeducation must not neglect the environment where children are brought up. Rather, it should take into account the needs and possibilities of this environment to choose the best strategy to stimulate people's development. There are situations where it is better to work with the two sexes separately, and others where it is better to work with them both together.

In cultures where women's status is inferior to men's, any education will be very valuable if it boosts girls' self-esteem and boys' awareness about prevailing discrimination. Here, joint action will be practically impossible and, in some cases, even counterproductive. Therefore, in these environments, even if it is separately, children and young people should be educated to change the situation, first by striving for egalitarian development of both sexes. These environments need educational models that do not discriminate between people, but foster individual freedom and help build a fairer society.

However, the situation is different in the West and allows for a fully coeducational model. This model promotes balanced development of all aspects of people, giving them every possible opportunity to develop their skills. The aim is for children to choose their own personality and role within society.

In these countries, the environment allows boys and girls to be educated together, so half of the population must not be overlooked if the aim is to build a discrimination-free society. Furthermore, if only one sex is promoted because it is underprivileged, and no work is done with the other, the results in any one environment not be those expected. In other words, if boys and girls are educated separately, absurd situations can arise due to the difficulty involved in developing acquired aptitudes in everyday reality. To avoid that, education should be promoted in an environment of coexistence between both sexes and healthy relationships among all people, providing a framework for relationships that can then be transferred to any one situation.

We must contribute to children's and young people's personal growth as community members without slipping into absurd uniformity. We must remain aware of the distinguishing features between men and women, not by following the traditional cliché, with its unfair discriminatory consequences, but by accepting the differences between the two while avoiding inequalities, discrimination and lack of freedom.

Coeducation is not an educational model that involves simply mixing the two sexes; i.e. mixed education is very different from coeducation. The latter transcends coexistence between boys and girls and advocates equal opportunities for all, because simply putting the two sexes together does not guarantee equality.

The stimulus of educational associations

In order to promote education like that described above, we must find an environment where children can develop naturally, get on with companions free from social prejudices and, in short, discover situations other than those established by society.

These features have been available for a long time in educational associations: the Scouting and Guiding and other youth activity centres (*esplais*). These associations base their work on conveying values such as solidarity, responsibility and commitment, thus filling a serious gap in modern-day society. This group's educational potential is bolstered by a profound and structured theoretical framework, a methodology tailored to suit specific age groups, and continuous training for Scout and Guide leaders.

These associations include Scouting and Guiding. This worldwide movement is the largest and most important for children and young people. It has played a decisive role in the development of many children and young people since it was founded almost 100 years ago. It is worth highlighting the role played by the Guide movement in improving women's situation, particularly in countries where sexual discrimination is especially rife, where they have given girls an education in self-esteem and empowerment and raised each sex's awareness of the other's situation. Similarly, if all their potential is tapped, these movements can play a decisive role in Western society for various reasons.

Firstly, the Scouting and Guiding sees education as a comprehensive and active process for children. The Scout and Guide method stimulates and promotes balanced development of all aspects of people (physical, intellectual, spiritual, social and character-related). The aim is to give children every possible opportunity to develop their skills and have experiences through which to seek and find their own ways to define their personality and their own alternatives for social participation.

Secondly, the voluntary nature of the activities performed in the associations - everyone participating in Scouting and Guiding does so voluntarily - means that children and all leaders are highly motivated and participate freely. This enables children and young people to enrich themselves in a fun and active way, because they are highly receptive. It should not be forgotten that these educational groups encourage hands-on education where the children or young people are the protagonists of their activities. The boys and girls learn by doing, i.e. from experience and coexistence.

Lastly, Scouting and Guiding promotes an exceptional environment of coexistence. Its method is based on educational stages where enriching experiences in age groups help socialise children. The children spend time together with colleagues of their own age as well as adults, and a complicity arises between the two, which is not usually found in other environments. Camping in the countryside for a few days, carrying out a project for the local town or participating in an international activity are examples of shared experiences provided by Scouting and Guiding.

All these characteristics - comprehensive education, volunteering, learning by doing, an environment of coexistence - make movements such as Scouting and Guiding movement a great platform for children's education. Moreover, in the specific case of coeducation, new experiences and relationships unlike those usually established in society are available, which allow for the development of different roles from those at school, in the family, on the street, etc. Thus, children and young people may take on roles that they normally would not in another environment, without this involving any type of drawback for them, which allows bringing improvements to society, because Scouting and Guiding does not ignore reality, but has a vocation to build a better world. Its aim is not to invent a parallel society, but to strive to change inequalities by making the improvements it deems fit.

This education may be the tool our environment needs to eradicate sexual discrimination and build a future society with new relationships between men and women. Therefore, educational policies must strengthen this socialising framework that develops children's and young people's values, because it could play a crucial part in building a fairer world.

In conjunction with this social support, educational associations must make an effort to adapt their work to present-day needs. Top-quality, appealing activities are required to attract the interest of children and young people and thus get them to be the actual protagonists of the project.

Voluntary work by leaders is of great qualitative value because of the motivation involved, but is also restricted in terms of time. Therefore, associations must strive to reinforce coeducational work and do even more to enhance its quality, which calls for educational programmes that incorporate coeducation and make it an exercise in continuous reflection and training.

Work proposals

Education is not an easy task that can be approached in a superficial manner. Quite the opposite, to achieve our objectives, education must be implemented carefully and conscientiously. Proposed below are several aspects that should be taken into account when working on coeducation, because they can make it considerably easier to achieve the objectives proposed in this book. All these proposals are based on the premise that non-formal education has particular features that enable it to develop roles, habits, situations, etc. unlike those usually found elsewhere in society, and which lead boys and girls to discover themselves and live together within parameters free from inequalities.

The leader's role

The fact that adults are important role models for growing children and young people is a key factor in coeducation. Children are known to take teachers as an example, so they must work as coherently as possible with the values they want to convey. The role played by the Scout or Guide leader will condition the children's view of adults. Therefore, if the aim is to portray non-sexist relationships and roles as the ideal, leaders must set a good example.

In Western society, differences in roles are often subtle and inherent, so the role of adults vis-à-vis the group of children requires considerable attention and careful analysis. The roles taken by leaders must be

chosen freely, trying not to slip into clichés or absurd, even artificial, situations. They must be roles where they feel comfortable and natural, with the freedom to express their personality, but always bearing in mind that they must do all they can to foster children's development.

Scout and Guide leaders must always bear in mind the main objective of coeducation: to educate people by enhancing their skills and creating social attitudes, indistinctly, in boys and girls. Therefore, children and young people require male and female role models to break established patterns in all respects. Children will be able to see different adult roles from those usually found in society, and shall see that there is nothing wrong with not following the patterns chosen by most people.

When evaluating the team of leaders, it is important to analyse the roles each person is playing with regard to coeducation. It must be determined whether or not the role models being presented to the children are egalitarian and can offer them anything new. For instance, there is nothing wrong with the female leader of a group of young children being the one who helps prepare the backpacks, but there is something amiss if she alone is always responsible for performing this task. Care must be taken when evaluating leaders' duties, to ensure there is a balance.

Tasks and habits

One of the main inequalities in Western society is the division of everyday tasks. Because of their nature,

activities performed in leisure-time education allow for work to be done specifically on this point. Excursions, camps and local meetings are key moments because they involve spending a lot of time with others, allowing children to experience a number of situations within a very different framework of relationships from that to which they are accustomed.

For instance, everyday life in a camp is a good time to propose new tasks to children in a shared and natural way, which can even be fun. Thus, one group of children usually washes the kitchen utensils, another prepares the food, another cleans up and is responsible for maintaining the facilities, and another fetches water from the fountain. Many leaders consider it normal for these tasks to be shared between boys and girls, but they would probably be shared out differently on most family holidays.

Tasks must be planned with special care because of their potential importance in coeducation. Therefore, care must be taken when organising work groups, because it is not merely a matter of mixing up boys and girls; rather, they must all experience sharing everyday tasks. The work done is important for two reasons: first, because children get to know all types of jobs; and, second, because they are shared out between both sexes.

Roles in games, stories and songs

As mentioned above, the role played by adults conditions children's behaviour, so they are very

important role models. However, teachers are not the only influence: other role models must also be borne in mind, such as the characters children discover through games, stories, songs, skits, etc.

These activities can be used to propose new situations in a very appealing way for children, where the characters take on roles that break away from sexist stereotypes. For example, the protagonist of a skit might be an intrepid female farmer who saves a village, or a story might tell of a businesswoman whose factory's waste contaminates a river, or a male fairy who grants wishes to save the world. Bookshops now stock all sorts of material that may be used to work on this area, but one can also use one's imagination and develop these stories. Thus, when choosing these tools, it should be taken into account that they will affect children's and young people's development and should be analysed from a coeducational viewpoint.

In this respect, children should be encouraged to experience a wide variety of situations through games, stories, songs and skits, so that they can discover where they feel most comfortable as individuals and as a group.

Sexist language

It should be taken into account when educating children that, because of content and style, the messages children receive condition their development. As mentioned above, the leader's attitude and role is essential to convey values

coherently. Similarly, the language used should also be considered carefully, because it is the main way in which people communicate. Therefore, when talking to children, we must avoid sexist language and use non-discriminatory vocabulary wherever possible.

Special care should be taken with Latin languages, by using generic terms for plurals whenever possible (people, unit, children, young people, teaching staff, etc.). By using language in a non-discriminatory way, we show that men and women can live together in a society without inequalities, because language conveys a view of society.

Applying coeducation to programmes and evaluations

Like any other value, coeducation requires a comprehensive approach to our educational work. A whole series of activities may be used to promote this value, but they will be pointless unless coeducation is also applied the rest of the time. When preparing programmes and evaluations, all the aforementioned parameters should be taken into account, including the role played by Scout and Guide leaders, the distribution of tasks, skits, and groups of boys and girls.

At the 3rd Congress of Escoltes Catalans, held in Reus in March 1999, a task group was set up to look into coeducation. The book containing the conclusions reached at this congress states that this task group's main finding was that the importance of coeducation needed to be stressed when programming and

evaluating unit and association activities and leaders' roles. The main idea to emerge was that most leaders felt that the situation in Western society had already been normalised and they therefore did not attach the necessary importance to this point. In keeping with this conclusion, we must strive to go beyond the implicit promotion of coeducation. This education should be mainly based on people's development, regardless of their gender, and it should be incorporated into programmes and evaluations explicitly and comprehensively.

Leader training

If educational associations want to promote coeducation, it should be reflected in the training of those responsible for this task. Training sessions should be coherent with the model of society we want to promote, so care must be taken with the roles conveyed by teachers and the reference documentation.

Training must be planned with the idea of comprehensive coeducation mentioned above, but specific conferences should be promoted in official education, special programmes, seminars, meetings, etc., and material should be prepared to facilitate leaders' work and reflection.

Spiritual work

The stimulus of activities related to personality development, self-discovery, reflections about people

and the world we want should enable children and young people to find their inner selves. By working on children's spiritual side, the aim must be for them to get to know themselves. If they are to develop fully, they must first know themselves and be aware of their shortcomings, hopes, challenges, attributes and, above all, what they want to contribute to society as a whole, and, thus, the role they would like to play. It is very important that people reflect on their lives and environment to avoid being mere bystanders.

Laicity¹ means that children can be offered the whole range of possibilities available to choose their thoughts and beliefs, whether cultural, ideological, political or spiritual. It also encourages children to make respect and curiosity about other people's options a way of life.

Thus, if work is done on people's spiritual side through laicity, everyone can grow and choose freely without depending on stereotypes or predetermined options. In other words, they may freely choose what they want to be and the role they want to perform in society without being pigeonholed in supposedly male or female roles. Laicity stimulates children's aptitudes and curiosity, thereby letting them find meaning to their lives for themselves.

1. See note on page 57

Some final thoughts

Until now, coeducation has focused on women's development after so many years of injustice; this is an approach that needs to be revised. The West has changed and major progress has been made in women's liberation, so this approach should be updated. Moreover, it is worth bearing in mind that men have also been victims of the role they have had to play, often without asking themselves what they are really like and whether the role they are expected to play in society is the one they want, a view that has often not been given enough consideration.

Thus, education of children and young people needs to focus on work that acts as a counterbalance to all gender inequalities; but besides new paths must be sought, particularly in terms of the approach taken to coeducation for boys.

At first glance, it might seem to be a question of all boys taking on roles traditionally reserved for women, and girls being systematically masculinised, but coeducation must go beyond this concept. The focus must be on people, on society and, therefore, on each individual that makes it up. Children must grow and be able to develop as people and not as a gender, free to discover themselves and find their feelings, thoughts, ideas, ways of life, etc. By promoting established roles, children, young people and adults are forced to take on roles they do not choose freely.

From this viewpoint, coeducation must be fully linked to spirituality, i.e. reflection and search for our inner

self; where we come from and, particularly, where we want to go, both individually and collectively, are questions we must learn to answer. By getting people to know themselves through education, they can develop their qualities to the full, regardless of their origin, gender or the role that society expects them to play.

Efforts to build a better society should go hand-in-hand with individual development. It is pointless for people to feel free as individuals unless they live in a better community. The introduction of the book where the educational objectives of Escoltes Catalans are set forth reads as follows: "...we educate (...) because we want to change this unfair society and believe that this change can only be achieved by shaping new people through comprehensive education that allows for the development of all personal skills...". The purpose of education must be perfectly clear: to build a new society. Therefore, coeducation must not be confused with the end of the road; it must be made clear that it is a path towards building a new world, so it is important that we think about the blueprint for our future society. But what should this new society be like? How can we establish these new rules?

At present, women are being encouraged to take on traditionally male posts, functions and tasks in order to change historically established parameters. However, this trend is often hard to put into practice. It is often women themselves who are reluctant to make these changes, probably owing to the heavy burden of tradition and the drawbacks of facing up to an established system, and the same usually

happens when men take on traditionally female roles. The efforts made by both to assume new roles should be appreciated, but the difficulty of people developing within parameters with which they have not been brought up should be taken into account.

In cases where it has been possible to develop this model, the results obtained have often not been those expected. Generally speaking, people who have followed this model have adopted the traditional attitudes of the opposite sex, without managing to modify the established parameters. For instance, when women have reached positions of power, they have "masculinised" in their roles rather than creating new ones.

For all the above, new attitudes must be sought that are not based merely on doing the opposite of what has been done hitherto or on positive discrimination or affirmative action. Women and men should have the same opportunities, but new roles should also be developed, based on people rather than stereotypes. Thus, it is not enough for women to enter a "man's world" and vice versa; rather, the goal must be for there not to be different worlds for men and women. New environments, rules and parameters must be developed to enable people to live in a fairer society.

However, this task is far from easy. The most interesting and effective way to redress the current situation is to produce people who are sensitive to this problem and, regardless of their sex, develop new models of relationships and ways of doing things. We must promote education that develops objective information, participation, freedom and respect for children and young people, with an open, critical and

constructive spirit that empowers them to begin the process of personal and social liberation.

Therefore, all educational agents must advocate an educational policy that develops coeducation comprehensively. In other words, we must not merely produce family or schooling policies, but establish which educational agents interact with children, and promote those that might be of use to coeducation.

If the aim is to offer new frameworks for coexistence and relationships based on certain values, there is no need to look too far afield or invent new ways to achieve this goal. Educational associations, including Scouting and Guiding, have long since specialised in this field. Their activities take place in an environment based on mutual respect, solidarity, effort, etc., a whole series of values that enable children and young people to relate to one another and develop in a way not usually found in society.

Scout and Guide groups are ready to use the Scout and Guide method, activities and educational approach to introduce a whole range of experiences that allow children to develop their personality so that they can grow up with the freedom to choose who they want to be. In short, educational associations must be a benchmark for children's education, with Scouting and Guiding at the forefront, as it has been on other occasions, because they work for a society where there is no discrimination based on sex, religion or origin, helping to develop free people ready to build a fairer, more sympathetic and, in short, better world.

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