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# Orientamento scolastico e uguaglianza di genere: un binomio virtuoso\*

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## Scholastic guidance and gender equality: a virtuous combination

### Abstract

*In the recent guidelines coming from European Union Resolutions and Reports of international organisations (OCSE, OECD), school guidance is interpreted as a strategic lever for the development of economic, educational, cultural and social policies marked by ideals of mobility and equity. Likewise, it is seen as a pivot for changes affecting not only society in general, but specifically equal opportunities in the world of work and education. After a survey in the European and international context, the contribution investigates whether, in our country, national directives on school guidance take the principle of gender equality into account. Finding that they do not, the paper proposes theoretical and educational paths to activate «gender-sensitive» guidance paths, highlighting the positive repercussions both in strictly educational terms and for sustainable social development.*

### Keyword

Educational choices, gender segregation in education, education, gender stereotypes, school guidance

Nelle recenti indicazioni che provengono da Risoluzioni dell'Unione europea e da Rapporti di organismi internazionali (OCSE, OECD), l'orientamento scolastico viene interpretato come leva strategica per lo sviluppo di politiche economiche, formative, culturali e sociali improntate ad ideali di mobilità e di equità sociale. Parimenti, viene inteso come perno per i cambiamenti che riguardano non solo la società in generale, ma nello specifico le pari opportunità nel mondo lavorativo e formativo.

Dopo una ricognizione in ambito europeo e internazionale, il contributo indaga se, nel nostro paese, le direttive nazionali in tema di orientamento scolastico tengano conto del principio della parità di genere. Riscontrandone l'assenza, il paper prospetta piste teoriche ed educative per attivare percorsi di orientamento "gender sensitive" evidenziandone le ricadute positive sia in termini strettamente formativi che per uno sviluppo sociale sostenibile.

### Parole chiave

Scelte scolastiche, segregazione formativa di genere, educazione, stereotipi di genere, orientamento scolastico

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## 1. School guidance and gender equality: guidelines from the European Union

The opportunity to implement the promotion of gender equality and, at the same time, the need to combat gender stereotypes in education were both clearly expressed some time ago in the *European Parliament Resolution of 12 March 2013 on the elimination of gender stereotypes in the European Union*. In the preamble to the Resolution, in the thematic area dedicated to “Education and training”, we find some landmarks which are still very topical and deserve being highlighted.

First of all, it stresses that gender stereotypes regarding the educational and professional opportunities available to women contribute to perpetuating social/economic inequalities, since they lead to women being placed at a disadvantage on the labour market in the form of less socially qualified and lower-paid jobs (point Q); a second key point concerns the fact that education and training systems, instead of acting as correctives to gender inequalities, tend instead to become vehicles of stereotypes themselves, encouraging girls and boys to follow traditional school and training paths (with particular reference to technical-scientific paths “encouraged” only for the male gender) (points Q and R); a third key point of the Resolution concerns the field of guidance: it is noted that, although many European countries have career guidance initiatives that take account of the gender dimension, such measures are generally aimed at girls with the aim of encouraging them to embark on careers in technology and science, while there are no initiatives to encourage boys to consider careers in education, care or the humanities (point S).

Based on these premises, the document calls for awareness-raising actions aimed at breaking down sexist stereotypes through targeted educational/training actions centred on guidance. In particular, it stresses the “need to set up specific vocational guidance courses in primary and secondary schools and in higher education institutions, in order to inform young people about the negative consequences of gender stereotypes and encourage them to undertake study paths and professions that in the past were considered typically masculine or feminine” (point 19) and notes that “although most EU countries have adopted gender equality policies in the field of higher education, almost all policies and projects focus on girls” (point 24); Member States are therefore asked to “develop comprehensive national strategies and initiatives against gender stereotypes in higher education and targeting boys” (point 24).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) - has renewed specific attention to the issue of gender equality in education with the publication of the report *The ABC of Gender Equality in Education. Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence* (OECD, 2015). The “ABC of Gender Equality in Education” allows us to focus on some of the reasons for the differences in performance between 15-year-old boys and girls (the data are derived from the PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment – survey).

As the report reveals, girls’ and boys’ attitudes towards school and aspirations for the future are still strongly marked by gender stereotypes and this has a major impact on their decisions to continue their education and their future career choices. In six out of ten countries, boys continue to perform better in mathematics than their female peers; girls – even those who perform very well – lack confidence in mathematics; two out of three girls (compared to one out of two boys) report that they are often worried that they will struggle with mathematics; four times as many boys as girls plan a career in engineering or computer science; and parents are more likely to expect their sons to work in science, technology, engineering or mathematics.

In the light of these findings, the report reiterates that gender disparities in performance do not result from innate attitudinal differences, but rather from socio-cultural variables, such as, for example, students’ attitudes to learning and their behaviour at school, how they choose to spend their leisure time and the confidence they have – or do not have – in their own abilities as students in certain subject areas (with particular reference to the dichotomy technical-scientific subjects/humanities).

Also the most recent OECD report, *Working it out. Career Guidance and Employer Engagement* (OECD, 2018) makes continuous references to the theme of gender equality:

Career and education decisions are amongst the most important young people make. Gender, ethnicity and socio-economic factors all strongly affect these choices. Career guidance is both an individual and a social good: it helps individuals to progress in their learning and work, but it also helps the effective functioning of the labour and learning markets, and contributes to a range of social policy goals, including social mobility and equity” (p. 4).

Guidance – in a Lifelong Learning perspective – is therefore interpreted as a pivot and strategic lever for the development of economic, educational, cultural and social policies marked by ideals of mobility and social equity. The report's emphasis on the social and family influences that act early on in childhood and have a marked effect on the perception of professions that are "suitable" for both genders and on the different (presumed) "aptitudes" of girls and girls, girls and boys, is interesting (Francis et al., 2003; OECD, 2017). In particular, recent studies show the impact of gender stereotypes assimilated in the family on the ability to solve mathematical problems (Gunderson et al., 2012; Hyde et al., 2006; Rozek et al., 2015); stereotypes that the school itself fails to eradicate but rather tends to reiterate (Dickhauser, Meyer, 2006; Cvencek et al., 2011). The stereotype according to which "boys are better than girls at mathematics" is therefore internalised by females already from childhood and negatively influences mathematical skills and learning because it affects the perception of their own abilities: if in males the adherence to the stereotypical conception increases the consideration of their ability, vice versa in females it negatively affects it, devaluing it (Passolunghi et al., 2014).

## 2. Gender conditioning in educational choices: not just a female issue

In the above-mentioned documents there is constant reference to so-called "educational gender segregation" which can be defined as a sexist subdivision, inherent in our school system, which leads pupils of both genders to be channelled into courses considered 'male' (technical-scientific subjects) and the others into 'female' courses (the humanities, with particular reference to the educational and care fields). This dividing of male and female study paths towards divergent goals can be interpreted as a litmus test of the gender inequalities still present in our school and academic system. With respect to this phenomenon, there is a wide international literature (Halpern et al., 2007; Milam, 2012; Unesco, 2014; Unesco, 2017) that most often focuses on positive actions aimed at closing the distance of girls from the area of "STEM" (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

Suffice it to mention the periodic reports *She Figures*, drawn up every three years by the European Commission since 2003, which present indicators on women's participation in science and research and offer tools to assess the steps taken towards gender equality in this area and to monitor the imbalances still present. *She Figures* investigates the representation of men and women at different career levels (from PhD programmes to top positions) but also gender differences in scientific research in terms of salaries, working conditions and success in obtaining research funding. In the recent *She Figures 2018* report (European Commission - Directorate General for Research and Innovation, 2019), it is pointed out that, in the European context, the increase of women undertaking university studies is not yet matched by proportionate access to academic and research careers. This circumstance entails "a significant loss of educational and human potential, well indicated by the metaphor of the leaky pipeline, the pipeline that loses precious resources, from the moment of graduation to the access to PhD positions until the achievement of a professional career in scientific research. Not only that: within the research professions, another metaphor, that of the glass ceiling, an invisible and yet present barrier, supports us in reading the still too meagre data on the presence of women in top positions in academic, scientific and research careers" (Avveduto, 2019, p. 5).

More rarely do international policies on gender equality focus attention on the other side of the coin of educational segregation: the distance of the male gender from the humanities and in particular from those fields of study that have as their job outlets the educational and care professions. Yet since the beginning of the 2000s, within the academic research on gender studies - and in particular within the theoretical framework of men's studies - we find a lively debate on those new forms of masculinity that have been effectively defined "caring masculinities" (Elliott, 2015). It should be noted that initially this debate focused mainly on the care provided in private, family contexts, thus interpreting it as "paternal care": this strand of studies can be found both in the international literature (Dermott 2008; Featherstone 2009) and in the Italian context (Deriu, 2004; Zajczyk, Ruspini, 2008; Murgia, Poggio, 2011; Crespi, Ruspini, 2016). More recent, but providing many inklings, is instead the debate on the contributions that a renewed male presence could bring within the educational and care professions (Sargent, 2000; Buschmeyer, 2013; Scambor et al., 2013; Joseph, Wright, 2016; Bernacchi, Biemmi, 2018; Biemmi, 2019; Ottaviano, Persico,

2020). In the Italian context, there is an ongoing pedagogical reflection that questions the possible meanings of a low male presence in educational curricula and care professions (Mapelli, Ulivieri Stiozzi, 2012) and that foreshadows a potential transformative effect of men in these areas not only for the male gender, but for the establishment of new gender relations in society, finally equal and non-violent (Deiana, 2012).

### 3. School guidance from the perspective of gender equality: a challenge for Italian school

Turning to the Italian context, we can ask ourselves if the national directives on guidance take into account the perspective supported by the European Union to incorporate the principle of gender equality as a cornerstone of school guidance policies. To this end, it is interesting to analyse the *Linee guida nazionali per l'orientamento* (National Guidelines for School Guidance) issued by Italy's Ministry of Education, Universities and Research in 2014.

In the document's preface, recalling the "Lisbon 2010" and "Europe 2020" strategies and objectives, the principle that lifelong guidance should be recognised as a permanent right of every person and as a strategic lever for the educational (but also economic) policies of the countries of the European Union is fully accepted. One reads in fact: "Guidance is no longer just a tool for managing the transition between school, training and work, but takes on a permanent value in the life of every person, guaranteeing their development and support in the processes of choice and decision-making with the aim of promoting active employment, economic growth and social inclusion".

Consulting the document, one is surprised to note that there is not even a reference to the issue of gender equality: the relationship between school guidance policies and educational policies aimed at promoting equality between male and female students is not covered. This fact is surprising since the gender variable, together with social class (Schizzerotto, 2002; Ballarino, Checchi, 2006; Romito, 2016), is still the one that has the most profound impact on the school and academic choices of young people. Intervening by means of guidance actions aimed at deconstructing the cultural and social conditioning that acts in a pervasive way on male and female educational paths should therefore be a priority objective (Mapelli et al., 2001).

The lack of specific attention to the link between guidance and gender equality produces its results: Italy is one of the European countries in which the problem – already outlined in the first paragraph – of educational gender segregation is most evident. The school system seems to be split in two: there are "female" and "male" curricula. This gap does not diminish but tends to widen in the transition to university. The latest Almalaurea data on "Graduates' profiles 2020" (Almalaurea, 2021) confirm a strong gender segregation even in academic education. Women, who have long made up more than half of all graduates in Italy, represent 58.7% of the total out of 2020 graduates. This share has tended to be stable over the last ten years.

However, there is a strong differentiation in the gender composition of the various disciplines. In first-level courses, women constitute a marked majority in the education and training (92.8%), linguistics (83.8%), psychology (81.1%) and health and medical (74.4%) groups. In contrast, they are a minority in the computer and ICT (14.3%), industrial and information engineering (25.9%) and exercise and sports sciences (33.4%) groups. This distribution is also largely confirmed within the two-year Master's degree programmes (Almalaurea, 2021, pp. 51-52). When the phenomenon of educational segregation is analysed, there is a tendency to interpret it in a one-way direction, as if gender conditions affected only the educational choices of girls. Evidently, on the contrary, these conditionings act in a specular way on the choices of boys who, in the common imagination, are automatically excluded from the educational and care knowledge and, therefore, from the professions that are linked to this kind of knowledge. We can ask ourselves: why, faced with the unprecedented possibility of drawing on the various fields of knowledge and, consequently, new professional profiles, do both girls and boys "choose not to choose", channelling themselves into those fields that tradition has always assigned to them (education and care for girls; technical-scientific disciplines for boys)? Is it really a matter of a "free choice" or is it simply the result of social and cultural conditioning that so insidiously and pervasively shapes the preferences of girls and boys as to make them appear authentic and "natural"?

There are various reasons for embracing this second theory, which prompts the assertion that the ed-

educational choices of female students, like those of their male peers, are by no means spontaneous or deeply desired. On the contrary, they are conditioned by a sexist unconscious that dictates to females and males which paths are considered «appropriate» for their genders. This unconscious is continuously fed by messages from family, mass media, and even the school itself. In the school environment there are two parallel curricula that give conflicting messages. The first curriculum is explicit, visible, and identical for males and females, who have already achieved (at least officially) equal citizenship within the school's walls. A second hidden curriculum is imbued with implicit value messages, which often work against the educational goals that are explicitly pursued. The hidden curriculum includes «the self images of male and female students, the expectations of their families for the future of their children, often even the emotional and relational beliefs and behavior of the male and female teachers» (Mapelli et al., 2001, p. 250). Masculine and feminine social constructions are supported by a complex system of expectations that clearly distinguish, often in dichotomous terms (masculine/ public sphere; feminine/private sphere), the jurisdictions reserved for men and for women. Within this system, there is a rigid division between professions and careers that are appropriate for one and for the other gender. There is clearly a close relationship between educational segregation and work segregation, which does not so much follow a logic of cause and effect as a circular logic. If it is true that the choice of certain degrees that are differentiated by gender automatically propel boys and girls towards different areas of the workforce, then it is equally true that the perception of occupational segregation (the fact that there are segments of the job market that are reserved for women and others for men) makes the educational choices of boys and girls more readily inclined towards fields that are considered to be socially appropriate for the gender to which they belong.

#### **4. Providing incentives for good gender practice in school guidance, but: for females. On the part of the Ministry of Instruction, University and Research**

In recent years, Italy's Ministry of Instruction, University and Research (MIUR) has formulated excellent proposals for developing and supporting gender sensitive guidance practices; however, these have been drawn up taking into account the female world. Four different types will be presented below: a) funding for STEM education; b) national competitions that leverage artistic ability to create apps, videos, etc. concerning STEM subjects; c) in-depth summer STEM courses; d) tuition fee discounts for girls following a STEM curriculum.

As one can clearly see from the repetition of the acronym, these are proposals aimed at bringing girls closer to scientific disciplines, in order to solve the social and economic disparities in the world of work.

Are there specific «positive actions» to orient boys towards careers in the caring professions? As a matter of fact, there are no discounts on university fees, no creative competitions or summer schools, and no in-depth courses aimed at making them think of having training and work opportunities in the world of teaching or care. Similarly, there are no high school projects for work experiences during the academic year, internships or «PCTO» (Guidelines for «Pathways for transversal skills and guidance», MIUR, 2020) that would allow them to work directly in educational contexts to see if they have interests in this area. When we as a society and the school world seriously decide to deal with the gender order, this will be one of the first topics to be addressed: building a better link between masculinity and childcare (Biemmi, Leonelli, 2021; Ottaviano, Persico, 2020). And to do so by taking into account a research finding that challenges us: males who undertake studies and professions that are «atypical» for their gender of belonging - e.g. to become teachers - choose on the basis of direct experience in educational contexts. It is the extracurricular experiences that have seen them as active protagonists that have motivated and interested them, particularly those where they have worked as educators: voluntary work, scout camps, play centres, etc. (Biemmi, Leonelli, 2016). How the school should act to make males acquire the transversal skills needed in this area, or to make them gain experience in the field, still needs to be thought about.

The calls for «female» projects, on the other hand, are already well constructed and, more importantly, have been repeated for the time being, which means that they could become systematic. Unfortunately, the ministry websites lack more detailed information on the approved projects in the past years: not even their title is presented, only the name of the school. A database on their characteristics (objectives, content, methodology, results obtained, etc.) would be most welcome. Here is a brief presentation of four examples

of calls, helpful for grasping the variety of the proposals; it should be stressed that the first three are in any case also open to males:

a) the Summer Course *In estate si imparano le STEM. Campi estivi di scienze, matematica, informatica e coding* (You learn STEM in Summer. Summer camps in science, mathematics, computer science and coding) - from primary to high schools) (Dipartimento per le pari opportunità, 2017). The aims explicitly mention combating gender stereotypes in schooling, and the report highlights «the difficulty women have in gaining access to technical and scientific careers, even though these constitute and will increasingly constitute in the future an important pool of professional opportunities that are opening up all over the world». Two editions, for the school years 2017-18 and 2018-19.

b) Funds to reward/incentivise good university performance (MIUR, 2017). The Italian universities that applied for the Funds (not all of them did) could opt for different formulas. Two examples: for the academic year 2022-23, the Ca' Foscari University of Venice has set up an incentive plan for the best female students in the three-year scientific degrees, which consists in the reduction/reimbursement of the payment of contributions (equal to 500 euros); for the academic year 2021-22, the University of Bari devised a measure to encourage the enrolment of women in degree courses that have a female attendance rate below 30%, consisting of a 30% reduction in academic fees.

c) The *Femminile plurale* (Plural Feminine) competition (for lower and upper secondary schools) provides a prize for the best videos, apps, graphic presentations, slides/images, short essays on thematic areas related to the relationship between women and STEM, predefined by the call. The competition, first launched on 8 March 2018, and now in its third edition, provides a prize of one thousand euros for each stimulus indicated by the call and for each order of school, to be spent on «organising training and awareness-raising initiatives in their educational institutions» about «critical reading of prejudices and gender stereotypes concerning STEM, as well as encouraging female students to study these subjects».

d) the *STEM2020. Call for Proposals for the funding of projects promoting education in STEM subjects* (from pre-school to secondary school) (MIUR, 2020). After naming «the difficulties women face in accessing technical and scientific careers», the call aims to: «counteract the stereotypes and prejudices that fuel the knowledge gap between female and male students with regard to STEM and financial subjects» Girls must make up at least 60% of the participants and each person must attend at least 40 hours of the course.

Thus, the MIUR is taking action, often in conjunction with the Department of Equal Opportunities, to address a problem that is finally being recognised in its personal implications (waste of talents and interests) and social implications (maintenance of an unequal status quo in scientific knowledge and related job opportunities, with subsequent economic imbalances and repercussions on family life).

## 5. Towards a school guidance that includes the gender dimension

Thanks to MIUR initiatives, teachers and schools can draw on resources more easily than if they were to take part in European calls for proposals, which require much more effort (building partnerships with other countries, complicated reporting, etc.). However, it should be pointed out that gender-sensitive school guidance is possible for all teachers in their daily practice, even beyond participation in calls for proposals launched by the ministry or by European institutions. This also solves the problem of official projects that, for the moment, are designed and/or activated only “for women”: in the classroom, instead, it is also possible to explore the pair, male-educational care. To be more precise: in the classroom one can deal with the most pedagogical meaning of the term school guidance: that of *education*, where in reality we do not reason about categories – girls versus STEM, boys versus care – but about subjectivities under construction. If it is understood in the sense of *education*, and with a gender reading, guidance can become a place of complexity, to be tackled thanks to numerous tools, with plural gazes, through successive but continuous stages. In fact, the definition of *training* guidance means all those intentional activities designed to help girls and boys to: formulate an authentic life project, to be pursued with commitment; know how to make critical decisions; devote themselves to the construction of their personal identity; take care of themselves (Lo Presti, 2009);).

It aims to lead each individual to become the protagonist of his or her own existential journey, in all possible spheres: training, profession, self-realisation, etc. (Lo Presti, 2009; also Mariani, 2014). As this is an ambitious objective, it can only be transversal to the various disciplines (didactic guidance: Marostica, 2011) and laid out over all years, avoiding activating it only in the junctions between one level of school and another. From a pedagogical point of view, training guidance occupies a prominent place, precisely because it is dedicated to the life project, and is made up of «training processes aimed at helping subjects take charge of their constructive responsibilities for themselves and the world, exercised in the act of choosing» (Lo Presti, 2009, p. 16). However, as we know, school guidance *tout court* intertwines the *educational* dimension with at least two other types of more *informative* activities, which concern, on the one hand, the school/university offer available and, on the other, the characteristics of the contemporary labour market (Guglielmi, Chiesa, 2021).

In theory and practice, all three of these dimensions suffer from lack of attention to gender. This does not mean just that “women and STEM” and/or “men and care” are not being dealt with enough: it means, instead, that we still do not fully recognise that each of us has grown up in a context permeated by cultural legacies about the feminine and the masculine (socially understood) and by conditioning that can curb project-building. Two examples of shared ideas that can limit young people and that can be deconstructed during school guidance are: a) the jobs considered most appropriate according to the gender to which one belongs, and the many ways in which society and families convey these expectations (narratives, language, examples of life and/or in the media, toys, spaces, etc.); b) the family roles (and their link with professional ones) assigned to women and men, and the logic of power underlying this assignment.

The scientific literature dealing in a broad sense with guidance is very much centred on procedural issues – methodologies, tests, statistical processing, etc. – and pays little attention to the gender dimension. Some theoretical contributions do exist and, it must be said with satisfaction, they are mainly pedagogical (Biagioli, 2003; Biemmi, 2012; De Serio, 2010; Mapelli, Bozzi Tarizzo, De Marchi, 2001; Ulivieri, 2015; Venera, 2014; Zuffi, 2007; etc.), but there is no reflection in the overall debate. Entire volumes dedicated to school guidance *tout-court* present a subject without a sexed history, that is to say, they present someone who imagines him/herself “as a grown up” coming from a tabula rasa, and teachers who, likewise, have no sexed history of their own. These books never talk about how gender representations act when young people envisage their future (school, work, family) and how to deconstruct them. And if they deal with guidance focusing on the connection with the labour market, they never deal with the characteristics of our present with a gender-focused reading.

Therefore, even in school guidance there is the «neutral», to which the school often seems to tend. Activities and relationships are based on a «logic of neutrality which, while wanting us all to be equal on an abstract level, does not respect diversity and produces concrete inequalities» (Gamberi, Maio, Selmi, p. 17). If diversity – of whatever kind: ethnic, religious, disability-related, etc. – is to be valued in educational contexts, then it must be seen, but paradoxically this does not happen with regard to gender. So it is not uncommon to hear teachers who adopt both these beliefs at once: «as a teacher I treat girls and boys all the same, in the same way» and «it doesn't matter whether I am a woman or a man, it has nothing to do with my profession». At school, working to develop/reinforce the transversal competences necessary for young people to make an informed educational and professional choice is very important, as long as it does not mask a desire for “neutrality” and a lack of interest in what, linked to gender, has shaped those same competences. Or in what risks leaving them unexpressed because they do not correspond to what is socially desirable.

In order to set up a training guidance attentive to gender, and link it to the theme of diversity, we can start from a definition by Domenici: «Every serious guidance activity should aim at enhancing inter- and intra-individual diversities [...] and is a decisive tool in determining individual and collective school success» (2009, p. x). Let us try to give this a gendered reading (Leonelli, 2016):

a) “enhancing inter-individual diversities” can mean that teachers should know every single student without placing them in categories, which simplify reality and are the result of generalisations that are often misleading. Let us think of female/male, a classification that extends the *same* (socially shared) characteristics to *everybody*. However, this prevents us from seeing each subject the way he or she really is. The problem concerns the (often unconscious) use of gender stereotypes at school and the use of (equally unconscious) prophecies that teachers can *casually* make come true. Thus, girls are expected to behave in a

certain way, to perform/achieve, and they have beliefs about what awaits them in the future. Only on the basis of their gender. The same, of course, applies to boys. The point is that we risk sanctioning the individual girl if she does not fit into the standard canons of the “woman” category, i.e. if, for example, she decides to enrol in a higher secondary school such as the aeronautical technical institute. This is a serious problem: the annulment of the real subject within a monolithic group, and the failure to individualise guidance activities;

b) “enhancing intra-individual diversities” can mean that attention should be paid to the complexity inherent in each individual, to his or her plural emotional, cognitive, social, etc. competences (and to their mutable intertwining), but especially to his or many social positionings. These produce many messages about gender - even discordant ones - which must be negotiated by each person, so that they do not uncritically include them in their own identity building. In fact, every affiliation can propose gender limits/boundaries, which must be recognised before they influence one’s life project. Therefore, knowing the individual’s difference is not only a goal for those who deal with guidance at school, but also for the person concerned, who must be supported in deciphering his or her own map of potential and originality. Outside any obligations linked to belonging to a gender.

As teachers we can promote and support the construction of a gender-sensitive life project and play a role as process facilitators, but when we do so, we must pay attention to our own subjectivity. Often we pretend to be «neutral». At other times it is we who reinforce the “gender cages” (Biemmi, Leonelli, 2016) that do not allow girls and boys to move away from the usual patterns. Glances, phrases, non-verbal communication: the hidden curriculum Biemmi mentioned (par. 1.3), i.e. what goes on “under the table”, can reveal many of our stereotypical beliefs about gender issues. As teachers, we have absorbed gender stereotypes throughout our lives and have a gendered view of the future of young people. Without training on gender issues we risk constructing a guidance in two versions: either in an unintentionally stereotyped or in a “neutral” way. The central issue then becomes the need for training ourselves – initially and in-service – that is able to link “gender and school guidance”, and where where, besides helping us becoming aware of how many sexist legacies still characterise schools (in textbooks, epistemology of disciplines, language, etc.), it is possible to deconstruct socio-cultural conditioning about gender (e.g.: the imagery conveyed by the media, etc.) and personal conditioning (experiences, models, encounters, stereotypes, etc.). If the aim of training guidance is to help young people to build a conscious subjectivity in a given social, cultural and historical context and a subjectivity capable of planning, the gender dimension cannot be neglected.

Neither that of the teachers nor that of the girls and boys. Only in this way will we be able to move, as a society, towards a future of equal opportunities for everyone.

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