

Education without gender stereotypes in eTwinning

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Education without Gender Stereotypes: Promoting Equality in Classrooms

In the 21st century, education systems face the challenge of educating new generations on the values of equality and respect. However, a multitude of factors, including gender stereotypes, persist as barriers that limit opportunities for girls, boys and young people, especially in areas such as science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM). The report [*Addressing the Gender Gap in STEAM Education Across Educational Levels*](#) (European Commission, 2024) highlights the importance of promoting STEAM education from an early age, as the gender gap arises in the early stages of schooling and worsens over time.

In this context, eTwinning has become a key framework for addressing gender stereotypes through an innovative, collaborative approach. Through STEAM projects, the platform makes it possible to implement actions that raise awareness about the importance of promoting gender equality in the educational community. In addition, respect for gender diversity is included as a core value in the [*eTwinning Code of Conduct*](#), thereby ensuring a safe and respectful environment for all participants. This code outlines fundamental principles that include prohibiting discriminatory behaviour or behaviour that perpetuates gender stereotypes, promoting empathy and respect in all interactions, as well as searching for constructive solutions to disagreements, thus promoting tolerance and inclusion.

In addition, eTwinning reinforces this commitment through initiatives such as:

- organising webinars, including [*Teamwork in STEAM with eTwinning*](#), which fosters inclusive and collaborative methodologies
- creating [*topical groups*](#) including *Gender Know-How: Stop Stereotypes*, which provides resources and strategies to overcome gender stereotypes, and *STEAM: Designing the future of science with eTwinning* with an equitable approach to STEAM learning.

In this way, the eTwinning initiative has consolidated itself as a key tool for carrying out STEAM and co-educational projects, while highlighting essential values for educating in equality. Through the dissemination of good practices, the active involvement of families and the school community, and by overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers, it enriches students' learning and gives them the opportunity to innovate through collaborative experiences.

Equality is one of the cross-cutting themes of Spanish education law because of the need to overcome traditional gender roles that perpetuate inequalities and limit the potential for individual and collective development. As a driver of social change, education plays a crucial role in building a more equitable and inclusive society, where educational and professional choices are not influenced by gender bias.

Schools must co-educate, which is not the same as offering mixed-gender education. They are terms that are often used synonymously, but have key differences in their approach. While mixed-gender education simply refers to girls and boys sharing the same physical learning space, co-education goes beyond this and seeks to eliminate gender stereotypes and the roles associated with masculine and feminine by promoting equal opportunities and preventing the reproduction of traditional roles.

Co-education implies an intentional approach to educate in equality; it is where the school as a transformational and socialising agent plays a crucial role in people's individual and collective development by guiding students towards social, emotional and civic growth in accordance with the tools and skills they will need to live in society.

The impact of gender stereotypes on education

In the educational context, preconceived beliefs about what is expected of people based on their gender begin to be formed in childhood. It is during adolescence that gender stereotypes tend to further influence students' thoughts and behaviours, even affecting academic and vocational choices.

The [PISA 2022 Results](#) show that girls tend to underestimate themselves in mathematics and science, even when they perform at similar or higher levels than their male peers. These perceptions influence not only individual trajectories, but also the world of work, perpetuating the under-representation of women in certain sectors. They also reinforce social and economic inequalities that negatively affect society as a whole.

Strategies for inclusive education

Eliminating gender stereotypes requires interventions from the earliest stages of education. In this regard, eTwinning plays a key role through strategies such as:

1. **Teacher training and awareness:** eTwinning raises teachers' awareness of the gender perspective through groups, webinars, events, examples of good practice, and other initiatives in order to identify and challenge prejudices in teaching and in daily interactions with pupils.
2. **Inclusive educational materials:** Through its network, resources are shared that make the contributions of women in various fields visible and promote examples of good practices. According to UNESCO, revising textbooks is a key tool to ensure that educational materials represent diverse and inclusive identities.

3. In eTwinning projects, **gender equality** is not treated as an isolated issue, but is **integrated in a cross-cutting manner**.
4. **Inclusive language is promoted in eTwinning:** in line with the [European Parliament guidelines on neutral language](#), language not only reflects but also influences attitudes, behaviour, and perceptions. These guidelines propose specific strategies to ensure neutrality and equity, such as avoiding terms that perpetuate gender bias, opting for generic or collective nouns, and promoting language that makes all genders visible and treats them equally.
5. This European initiative promotes **reflection and debate**: it is important to teach students to recognise gender discrimination and to teach them how to fight against it, to foster empathy and understanding of how other people feel and how they would like to be treated.
6. **eTwinning promotes emotional education for co-educating:** According to Suberviola (2020), the differentiation in socio-emotional roles that mark gender socialisation means it is important to include emotional co-education from an early age, as this is when social and emotional development takes place. At this age it is essential to educate pupils in egalitarian practices that are free from emotional stereotypes and sexist behaviour, where there is no emotional gender model.
7. **eTwinning facilitates collaborative and interdisciplinary projects:** programmes such as eTwinning and integrated approaches such as STEAM offer unique opportunities to work on gender equality issues through intercultural and multidisciplinary experiences.

Featured projects

eTwinning projects and STEAM initiatives exemplify how to address gender equality in education in innovative and collaborative ways. The following are some outstanding examples:

- The project [“eTwinklingStars: shining together”](#) ([national eTwinning prize 2023](#)) is an eTwinning project that revolves around astronomy. It is co-educational and inclusive, promotes scientific interest in a playful way through STEAM and makes the role of female astronomers visible as a fundamental basis for equal education. These women, role models for the entire student body, inspire with their conscious thinking towards social commitment. This project promotes the dissemination of the life and work of great women scientists through the creation of a collaborative magazine. It also promotes the emotional education necessary to educate in equality through mindfulness and encourages a taste for science through playful activities and gamification.

- [The 100tificate project](#) (2024) promotes the inclusion of the gender perspective among students as a cross-curricular category in science, technology and innovation, as well as a balanced presence of women and men in all areas of the Spanish Science, Technology and Innovation System.

In conclusion, education without gender stereotypes is not only a matter of social justice, but also an imperative for building more egalitarian and sustainable societies. Evidence shows that intervening in the early stages of education can have a significant impact on our students' future trajectories, helping to close the gender gap in critical areas such as STEAM.

eTwinning promotes gender equality through collaborative and innovative approaches and its different initiatives and invites the educational community to actively engage in education without gender stereotypes.

Combating gender stereotypes in education is an opportunity to build a fairer, more innovative and diverse society. Every teacher, family and student has a crucial role to play in this process. By committing to inclusive, integrating co-education, we are laying the foundations for a future in which academic and professional choices are based on interests and abilities, not prejudices. Let us make education the engine of change that our society needs.

References

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