ALIGN REPORT

Educating means questioning and taking risks: teacher training and gender equity in Colombia

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About the Universidad de los Andes, Colombia

The Universidad de los Andes, also known as Uniandes, is a private university whose main campus is in Bogotá, Colombia. It was founded in 1948 by Mario Laserna Pinzón and today is one of the leading academic institutions in Latin America. In 2024, the QS Rankings for Latin America and the Caribbean (Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings) ranked Uniandes as the sixth best regional university and the first in Colombia. Uniandes has an excellent reputation in terms of its academic performance, its web impact and its recognition by graduate employers.

With modern facilities and a highly qualified faculty, Uniandes is a benchmark for education in research and interdisciplinary teaching. It is highly recognized for its comprehensive approach to education. Its students graduate prepared to face contemporary challenges with tools such as the promotion of ethical values, digital capabilities, responsible citizenship, innovation, social responsibility, critical thinking, autonomous learning and teamwork.

The Faculty of Social Sciences at Uniandes is a centre for the creation of knowledge and for the training of skilled professionals and critical citizens. The faculty maintains a strong vocation for interdisciplinary and collaborative work, with local, regional and national impact, through various disciplines: Anthropology, Political Science, Philosophy, History and Geography, Psychology, Language and Culture. The work of academics and researchers has an impact on public policy and reaches a broader public through various pedagogical strategies. In all departments of the faculty, and in those throughout Uniandes, teaching and research in gender studies is provided, including an undergraduate and a master's option, as well as various specialized courses.

Acknowledgements

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ALiGN

Acronyms and abbreviations

ADE   District Education Workers' Association

AUC   United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia

CEDAW   Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

FARC-EP   Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army

ICBF   Colombian Institute of Family Welfare

IDEP   Institute for Educational Research and Pedagogical Development

JER   restorative school justice

KIX   Knowledge Innovation Exchange (Center)

LAC   Latin America and the Caribbean

LGBTIQ+   lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, and other non-normative sexual orientations and identities

MEN   Ministry of National Education

MOVA   Teacher Innovation Center

PESCC   Sexuality Education and Citizenship-Building Programme

PETIG   Education Plan for Gender Equality Mainstreaming

PrNES   National Sex Education Project (of the Ministry of National Education)

PTFD   Territorial Teacher Training Plans

REDEG   Capital District Teachers' Network for Gender Equity in Education

SED   District Secretariat of Education

STEM   science, technology, engineering and mathematics (subjects)

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFPA   United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

UNP   National Protection Unit

Executive summary

General context and objectives of the report

This report analyses teacher training in gender equity in Colombia, exploring the pedagogical practices and the structural, political and social challenges faced by teachers in this area. It offers key recommendations for improving teacher training around these issues. The Colombian context presents a paradox: although there are important legal developments and strong social activism in favour of gender equity in education, there is also growing opposition that seeks to halt these advances. In this scenario, women teachers have assumed a crucial role in the struggle for gender equity in schools, developing innovative pedagogical strategies despite the risks and resistance they face.

The report starts from a central premise: teacher training in gender equity should focus on the pedagogical practices already in place in schools, recognising the situated knowledge and strategies developed by women teachers in their specific contexts.

Methodology

The report combines a desk review, interviews with key actors, focus groups with teachers and insights from a pedagogical forum for the collective construction of a working agenda. An activist approach was adopted in which the researchers established trusting relationships with teachers' collectives, promoting a horizontal and participatory dialogue.

The focus groups were held in Bogotá, Medellín and Barranquilla, with the participation of 45 teachers, mostly women, who form most of teachers in Colombia. They shared their experiences about their pedagogical practices, the challenges they face in promoting gender equity and their expectations regarding teacher training. The pedagogical forum, which was attended by 40 people, including teachers, mothers, students, civil servants and researchers, was a key space to collectively build a working agenda to influence public policies related to gender equity in education.

Main findings

Innovative pedagogical practices

One of the most relevant findings of the report is the identification of a number of pedagogical practices led by female teachers that seek to transform gender relations in schools. These practices, developed mostly without clear institutional backing, are highly creative and deeply connected to local realities. Among the most prominent strategies are:

Questioning gender stereotypes through activities that promote critical reflection among students, such as the revision of educational materials with a gender focus or the redesign of classroom dynamics to promote equity between girls and boys.

Comprehensive sexuality education, implementing programmes that are not limited to a biological view of sexuality, but address issues of gender identity, sexual and reproductive rights, and respect for diversity. These initiatives have had a significant impact on the formation of students who are more aware and respectful of gender differences.

Prevention of gender-based violence, creating safe spaces of mutual respect. Some of these practices include the incorporation of playful and participatory activities that encourage dialogue

on equality and respect for diverse gender identities, as well as the implementation of protocols for attention and prevention of this type of violence.

Teacher training

The report reveals important limitations in teacher training on gender and sexuality issues in Colombia. Although the country has a legal framework and public policies that recognise the importance of gender equity in education, teacher training on these issues is still incipient and often faces challenges, regardless of the modality in which it is offered.

Initial training: teacher training programmes in universities and faculties of education do not consistently include content on gender and sexuality. Only in recent years has there been a timid advance in the inclusion of these topics in the curricula, and they are usually only present in preschool education or social sciences programmes, or as elective subjects. This means that most teachers do not receive adequate training in gender equality during their initial training, which limits their ability to address these issues in the classroom.

In-service training: In-service training programmes offered by the Ministry and the Education Secretariats are often disconnected from the day-to-day reality of women teachers. Often, these trainings are delivered by external experts with no direct classroom experience, leading to a disconnect between theory and practice. In addition, participation in these programmes is largely dependent on the personal interest of teachers, placing an additional burden on those who already face multiple responsibilities.

Peer-to-peer training: One of the most effective forms of gender equity training has been the creation of networks and collectives of women teachers who share their knowledge and experiences. This type of peer-to-peer training allows teachers to support each other and develop contextually relevant strategies to promote gender equity in their schools. Networks such as Red Divergentes or REDEG - Capital District Teachers' Network for Gender Equity in Education, have been instrumental in strengthening these initiatives.

Risks and challenges for women teachers

The report documents a number of risks that women teachers face in promoting gender equity in schools, both in urban and rural areas. These risks are presented:

In the school environment: Women teachers often find themselves in conflict with institutional norms that perpetuate gender inequality. The lack of clear support from school authorities means that pedagogical initiatives on gender and sexuality are viewed with suspicion and even opposition by colleagues or management. This can lead to the marginalisation of teachers who promote these issues, and even to censure of their teaching practices.

In the community and families: Resistance also comes from students' families and from certain sectors of the community. In some cases, teachers who address gender and sexuality issues are perceived as a threat to traditional norms, which can trigger conflicts with families and generate situations of harassment or verbal violence.

In contexts of armed conflict and socio-political violence: In areas controlled by armed groups, female teachers face additional risks. Armed actors often see gender equality initiatives as a threat to their social and territorial control over communities, which places women teachers in a vulnerable position. In some cases, female teachers have been targets of intimidation or violence by these groups or criminal actors affecting the school community.

Anti-gender mobilisations and education as a field of contestation

The report discusses in depth the impact of anti-gender mobilisations in Colombia. These mobilisations, which have gained strength in recent years, oppose the inclusion of gender equity in education policies and have directly affected the work of female teachers in schools.

A prominent example is the case of the 2016 protests against the alleged imposition by the Minister of Education of 'gender ideology' in the manuals schools use to express their regulations and educational projects. Although these protests were based on false information, they succeeded in hindering the implementation of educational materials promoting respect for gender diversity and prevention of discrimination. Since then, the environment around gender and sexuality education has become more hostile, leading many teachers to limit their initiatives in order to avoid conflict. Women teachers committed to promoting gender equality face an increasingly restrictive environment, where any initiative that addresses these issues is viewed with suspicion and may be targeted for criticism or attack.

School for life

The report includes a section dedicated to analysing the process of collective construction of an agenda for education with gender equity. This process was developed within the framework of a pedagogical forum. It focused on creating a vision of the school that those of us who are part of the educational community dream of, a school in which all the challenges and risks previously exposed are confronted. As a central finding, the proposal of a 'school for life' emerged, a school that places life at the centre. To place life at the very centre of educational practices implies promoting knowledges, activities and relationships of care and nurturing towards one another and with nature. This vision implies epistemic, political and pedagogical transgression of the school's hierarchies in order to build an educational space with a gender perspective.

Public policy and education recommendations

The report presents a series of recommendations for improving teacher training and creating a more favourable environment for the promotion of gender equity in education, addressed to key actors:

Ministry and Secretariats of Education

Strengthening in-service training: In-service training programmes should be reviewed to ensure that they are contextualised and adapted to the realities and needs of practising teachers, as well as to schools and the wider education community. The active participation of teachers in the design of these programmes should be encouraged, ensuring that they reflect the challenges and demands they face in their specific contexts.

Institutional support: It is essential that the state and in particular the Minister and Secretariats of Education provide clear and explicit support to women teachers who promote gender equity. This means protecting them from resistance and threats they may face and ensuring that their initiatives are valued and supported by school authorities.

Follow-up on the implementation and updating of existing regulatory frameworks on this issue: it is necessary that both the Ministry and the Secretariats of Education regulate gender and sexuality education, both in the school curriculum and in resources, training strategies and accompaniment. In addition, it is essential that existing plans are updated.

Networks of teachers and communities

Strengthening teacher networks: These networks have proven to be a powerful tool for training on gender and sexuality, and should be supported and strengthened by providing resources and spaces for teachers to share experience and develop collective strategies to address challenges they encounter.

Community participation: It is essential to involve families and the wider community in gender equality education processes. Awareness-raising and community education campaigns, plus schools for parents and caregivers, can help reduce resistance and generate greater support for teacher-led initiatives.

Universities and initial training

Review of teacher training programmes: Faculties of education should review their curricula to ensure that they include content on gender equality and sexual diversity as an integral part of initial teacher training. This will enable trainee teachers to gain a thorough understanding of these issues and be prepared to address them in their future teaching practice. This is essential both at the undergraduate level and in the postgraduate training programmes that teachers must undertake in order to move up the career ladder.

Development of research on gender and education: Universities should promote and continue research on gender teacher training and gender issues in schools, providing more and better evidence to support pedagogical initiatives and public policies oriented towards gender equity. It is also important to organise regular academic events with the participation of teachers from all levels of education to share meaningful experiences.

International cooperation

Exchange of good practices: International cooperation is key to learning from successful experiences in other countries. Colombia can benefit from the exchange of good practices on gender equity in education, adapting models that have proven effective in other contexts, as well as sharing how it has addressed its own challenges with other nations.

Developing joint programmes: International institutions can collaborate with the Colombian Ministry of Education and universities to develop joint teacher training programmes on gender and sexuality, ensuring that teachers receive high quality training adapted to the local context. These programmes must be aware of the significant presence of women as teachers in Colombia and apply a perspective that considers gender differences in teaching staff in schools.

Accompaniment in the protection of female teachers: Given the findings of the research, it is suggested NGOs and international cooperation support female teachers facing threats. In addition, it is proposed to include a specific indicator on the risks faced by female teachers in the periodic CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) evaluations.

Conclusions

Despite the many challenges, Colombian teachers, in particular women teachers, have demonstrated a continuous, meaningful and creative commitment to promoting gender equity in schools. However, their efforts require greater institutional support to overcome the resistance they face both in the school environment and in the community. This report underlines the importance of strengthening teacher training on these issues, recognising the knowledge that women teachers have produced and accumulated throughout their pedagogical practices.

1 Introduction

> There is nothing more transformative and irreversible than education.
> There is no public policy, there is no court ruling, there is no law, there is no
> government that is more transformative than education. So, if you hinder
> education with a gender focus, you are hindering the advancement of the
> rights of these historically marginalised groups.
>
> Gender expert, non-governmental organisation (NGO) founder

This section presents the context of the research, pointing out the contradictory situation in the Colombian case in terms of important legal developments and social protests around the study, but increasing actions against such developments. The objective of the report and its perspective are also outlined.

1.1 Context

We are living in a contradictory moment in Colombia in terms of education and policies on gender and sexuality. On the one hand, there is a long tradition of initiatives to promote gender equity in education, as result of strong social mobilisation and legal changes that cover areas such as school coexistence and violence prevention, access and permanence of girls and adolescents in the education system, as well as education on sexual and reproductive rights. Gender, both as an analytical category and as a strategy for action, has been incorporated into these issues in a gradual, slow, inconsistent and even contradictory manner. Gender equity issues have been subordinated in sexuality education policies. The legislative frameworks that address gender issues are not brought together in a specific policy and, as will be developed below, gender education in schools is facing strong resistance and opposition.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, committed teachers have been concerned with how gender norms affect school environment, working conditions of female teachers, and the role of education in the reproduction of gender roles and stereotypes that perpetuate inequality and inequity in the education system (Arana, 2001; García Suárez, 2004). In the 1990s, gender studies schools in universities, developed strategies to train teachers and trainee teachers on gender issues. By 2000, there were already networks of teachers working in this area, such as the Capital District Teachers' Network for Gender Equity in Education (REDEG). With the support of education authorities at the regional or local level, these networks initiated processes of educational innovation to promote reflection and action for gender equity in mainly public secondary schools. Also, and partly due to the demand of new generations of students and teacher trainees, universities have incorporated gender and sexuality issues in their curricula through courses and seminars. There is nowadays a new generation of trainee teachers committed to feminist agendas and to sexual and gender diversity, who demand a different kind of education.

Colombia has various laws and policies aimed at achieving gender equity and equality in education, promoting changes in gender relations through educational processes, and implementing sexuality education strategies in schools and training teachers to do so. Sexuality education policies, created in the 1960s, maintained a biological approach (Pacheco Sánchez et al., 2007). They also focused mainly on birth control, with little questioning of gender issues in education. This changed in the early years of the 21st century with the incorporation of gender as a conceptual principle in the Sexuality Education and Citizenship-Building Programme (PESCC), created and validated between

2006 and 2008 by the Ministry of National Education and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). However, such policies and programmes have not always been implemented in a sustained manner or accumulated progress, and they have varied according to the interests of each government.

In parallel to this diversity of initiatives, anti-gender protests have gained strength and public presence in Colombia and Latin America, with education as their main battleground (Corrêa, 2018; Serrano Amaya, 2021). A significant example was the demonstrations that took place in Colombia in 2016 as a reaction to the alleged publication of educational materials by the Ministry of National Education that, according to opposition groups, promoted homosexuality and 'gender ideology' in schools (Rodríguez Rondón, 2017). These materials actually responded to a Constitutional Court mandate following the suicide of an adolescent and were intended to prevent bullying.

The reaction of parents' groups, who arranged protests and called for legal action if gender issues continued to be discussed in schools, has led teachers committed to promoting gender equality, most of them women, to limit their initiatives. They have also faced risks and threats to their initiatives, as will be amply illustrated in this report. Thus, it seems that schools today prefer not to address these issues at the risk of being accused of promoting 'gender ideology' and facing legal action. This paradox is jeopardising decades of struggle and progress on gender equality issues and paralysing possibilities for change.

1.2 About this report

In this context, the aim of this report is to analyse teacher training in relation to gender equity, from the perspective of the knowledge teachers have built up in their pedagogical practices. In Colombia, since the 1980s, and with the help of the Pedagogical Movement, the Federici Group and the Group for the History of Pedagogical Practices have vindicated the political and epistemic role of teachers as producers of knowledge situated in school practices[1] (Jiménez, 2021). This knowledge results from their reflection and transformative practice on the role of the social, political, economic and academic context in the construction of a pedagogical relationship with their students. This pedagogical knowledge (Tardif, 2014) differs from theoretical knowledge, as it is based on experience and understanding of school complexity.

Starting from the knowledge built in pedagogical practice implies understanding that teacher training on gender issues cannot be limited to transmission of new information or coaching, as if it were neutral content to be implemented in a standardised manner. This research argues that teacher training should be based on existing practices in schools and on the constant reflection of teachers on their work.

Approaching training from practices implies taking into account both the socio-cultural context that enables or restricts these practices, as well as what these practices reveal about the way in which teachers face daily challenges and give content to their efforts to transform inequities and injustices. This report documents the pedagogical and didactic initiatives on gender equity and equality developed by teachers in Colombian schools and identifies how they are facing such a complex

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1   The Pedagogical Movement was a social and trade union movement that emerged in the late 1970s and was consolidated in the 1980s. This movement, led mainly by teachers, had as its main objective the defence of public education and the transformation of pedagogical practices in the country.
The Federici Group was a group of Colombian intellectuals and academics who, in the mid-20th century, made fundamental contributions to the renewal of higher education in Colombia. Their influence extended beyond the classroom, leaving an indelible mark on pedagogical thought and university reform.
The Group for the History of Pedagogical Practices is a research group dedicated to studying the history of education in the country through the analysis of pedagogical practices. This group, made up of academics from various institutions, has established itself as an expert in the field of educational research in Colombia.

scenario, in order to offer elements for a working agenda. We hope that the document will contribute to discussions on the role of the school in promoting gender equity and equality from the perspective of a central actor, such as teachers, and that it will offer new perspectives for understanding teacher training.

Prioritising pedagogical knowledge in teacher training alternatives aimed at transforming gender relations in schools, implies recognising that training should not be exclusively theoretical, but should include a reflective practice that allows teachers to build their own pedagogical knowledge (Gorodokin, 2006; De Tezanos, 2010). This knowledge is built on previous knowledge, classroom experience and reflection on practices. In this sense, teacher training cannot be limited to training or the mere transmission of content, but must encourage continuous learning and critical reflection on one's own practice.

The report is organised in six sections:

1.   General introduction.

2.   A brief conceptual review to situate the discussion and the perspective of analysis.

3.   Research methodology.

4.   The legal and policy framework for gender training in Colombia.

5.   A description of how anti-gender protests are impacting the handling of gender issues in Colombia, particularly in schools.

6.   The main research findings in four sub-sections:

      3.   practices of teachers in transforming gender relations

      4.   training that allows such practices to emerge

      5.   risks faced by teachers when promoting gender education

      6.   strategies to create a different kind of school.

7.   Conclusions and some recommendations for policy and research progress on this issue.

2 Teacher training and gender regimes in schools

The way in which schools produce, reproduce or reinforce inequitable and unequal gender systems has been the subject of extensive research and debate both in academia and in public policy in Colombia and Latin America (García Suárez, 2004; Madrid, 2011; Sánchez Sáinz, 2018; UNESCO, 2021). Although teachers are often portrayed as part of the reproduction of these systems, they are in fact key actors in their transformation. Education plays a strategic role in the fight against gender inequalities, as indicated by various international conventions, agreements and programmes. However, the type of teacher training, the content and the objectives to be pursued remain issues of constant debate.

In Latin America, although significant progress has been made in reducing gender inequalities that limit the access of adolescent girls and women to education, there are still limitations to their permanence and the achievement of pedagogical objectives (UNESCO, 2021). Although there is across countries on the importance of achieving gender equality and equity, and there are countries that have made significant progress, different factors hinder the achievement of these goals. Political tensions, discontinuity in public policies and limitations in the legal frameworks that guarantee their implementation, among other factors, have curtailed efforts to combine gender objectives with educational objectives or impeded their achievements (ibid.).

In Colombia, women's access to higher education has improved significantly, with women consistently outperforming men in several educational areas. In 2021, women accounted for 53.4% of total enrolments, leading at the diploma and master's levels, where the 297,225 female graduates accounted for 56.6% of graduates (MEN, 2023). In basic and secondary education, male dropout rates exceed those of females in all indicators. Although dropout rates decreased between 2015 and 2020 for both genders, the decrease was slower for males (MEN, 2022). In 2020, the annual dropout rate for females at the university level was 7.3%, while for males it was 8.9% (MEN, 2023).

However, differences in academic performance between girls and boys persist in Colombia, as well as in immediate access to higher education between men and women. Boys score higher than girls in key areas such as mathematics and science. While there are some regional differences, in Colombia overall, boys tend to score significantly higher than girls   in those subjects (Abadía and Bernal, 2016). Despite the fact that girls and young women stay longer in the education system, the reasons why they drop out reflect structural gender inequalities.

According to the Ministry of National Education (2022), the main reasons for women dropping out of school are, generally:

1. having to take care of household chores

2. lack of interest in or enjoyment of study

3. pregnancy.

In turn, the main reasons for dropout by age are as follows:

1. Pre-school (5 and 6 years old): parents consider that they are not yet of school age.

2. Basic primary education (7 to 11 years): change of residence.

3. Lower secondary education (12–15 years): lack of interest in studies.

4. Secondary education (16, 17 and over 18): having to take care of household chores.

Gender gaps increase with the level of education. In doctoral studies, only 41.5% of students are women, and in higher education, women represent only 39.8% of teaching staff, despite their predominance at earlier levels of education (MEN, 2023).

This scenario implies concrete challenges for schools and how to address gender inequalities there. Multilateral think tanks such as the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) point out that, 'Gender-sensitive teacher education and training is of utmost relevance for a change in relationships within schools, which in turn could have an impact on the gender patterns that children and young people adopt in school, as well as outside of school. At the same time, training and capacity building can provide teachers with tools to address gender inequalities within educational spaces' (KIX LAC, 2023: 22). This vision coincides with the central role assigned to schools in the formation of citizens committed to democracy, equity, participation, respect for diversity, human rights and a culture of peace (UNESCO, 2015). Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals requires teacher training that promotes the necessary learning to achieve gender equality and equity (Pérez Betancourt and Betancourt Rodríguez, 2019).

Even though teacher training on gender issues is recognised as fundamental to achieving equality, its concrete implementation remains insufficient. A survey conducted in 12 countries in the region in 2012 revealed that 81% of education professionals at the basic and secondary levels felt that there was inadequate training in their country to integrate gender equality into their teaching practice (KIX LAC, 2023). This report also points out that many teachers may be unintentionally transmitting and reproducing stereotypical gender roles because they lack specialised knowledge and do not know how to teach differently.

Therefore, it is essential that teachers receive ongoing training on gender and sexuality and that the educational institution promotes spaces for ongoing training (Abadía and Bernal, 2016). Taking into account the importance of education to promote new gender relations in terms of social justice, and the centrality of the role of teachers in this, some scholars suggests defining teacher training as the training of 'public intellectuals', who 'need to have the opportunity to rethink themselves as sexed subjects, to engage in critical discourses that allow them to develop pedagogical practices in the future that aim to build more democratic social relations' (Morgade, 2011: 66).

Some institutions and research on the subject consider that ignorance is the main reason why gender and sexuality issues are not adequately taught (Morgade, 2011; Acosta et al., 2013). For Cruz Galindo, 'misinformation [on the part of teachers] about these core issues causes ignorance and the reproduction of heteronormativity, which affects everyone regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation' (2020: 8). Authors such as Bautista Rojas (2016), assert that misinformation, coupled with the silencing of sexual diversity issues, feeds back into hate speech and results in a scenario of ignorance. For Péchin, the silencing of sexuality and gender issues is partly explained by the fact that teachers only address these issues when there is a controversy about them, that is, when it is strictly circumstantial and necessary: 'sex-gender differences in schools are only addressed when they present a certain degree of conflict, which leads to the invisibility of other gender identities and expressions' (2014: 201).

Since the end of the last century, Latin American academics have promoted reflection on the importance, needs and challenges of teacher training with a gender and sexuality perspective. Colombia, together with Argentina, Mexico and Brazil, have led the academic output in this area, in a strong and constant connection between questions about sexuality education and gender issues. From there, and with perspectives that connect gender and sexuality issues with their political and citizenship dimensions, there have been constant calls for attention to the need to change what is taught, how it is taught, the practices of those who teach and the logics from which they do so, since it is here where the inequities or inequalities that are intended to be changed are often reproduced (Acosta et al., 2013; Cruz Galindo, 2020; Péchin, 2013; Morgade, 2017; Molina, 2015; Pérez Gómez, 1995; Scharagrodsky and Southwell, 2007). An example of the above is the permanence of a medical-biological model in the curriculum that ignores other dimensions of sexuality and gender, such as the psychological, social, cultural and emotional dimensions and perspectives of diversity, difference, autonomy or human rights.

Thus, in 1999, Deborah Britzman invited reflection on one's own experience of sexuality as a starting point for the design of training plans (Britzman, 1999). Gender training has been seen as part of comprehensive pedagogical training (Pérez Betancourt and Betancourt Rodríguez, 2019: 19) and as a primary factor in combating educational exclusion generated by gender and sexuality norms (Pilligua Chiliguano et al., 2023). These authors argue that teacher training must be understood 'as a permanent process [that] must adjust to the changes that time and society bring, it must adjust to the diversities and needs of all students, providing safe and respectful spaces' (Pilligua Chiliguano et al., 2023: 373).

From this perspective, the emphasis on ignorance, invisibility and silence, or on the lack of training policies, runs the risk of reducing the response to the problem to the simple transmission of information, the creation of primers and didactic manuals, or the implementation of formal and informal training plans. Although these efforts are necessary, they do not recognise that there are already knowledge, practices and experiences in the teaching profession that seek to transform gender relations, as will be analysed in this report.

It is also necessary to consider what is currently being done in schools in parallel or even in contradiction with institutional plans and initiatives. In many cases, initiatives to transform these gender relations emerge from the school itself, often led by teachers committed to mitigating inequities and inequalities among their students and turning the school environment into a safe, protective space that promotes gender justice. This is the starting point for this research.

3 Methodology

This report answers the following questions:

- What aspects of public education policy favour or hinder teacher leadership in promoting gender equity?

- What actions are universities taking to include gender equity issues in the training of new teachers? How are these actions implemented in the curriculum and the training process for new teachers?

- What initiatives are teachers implementing in schools to promote gender equity?

- How are teachers dealing with the resistance generated by anti-gender protests in education?

- How can we collectively build an agenda for gender equity in education and teacher training?

The research problem that underpins this report is formulated in the following terms: gender and sexuality education has been matter of intense regulation and policing for decades in most westernised countries. There has been intense policy work and social mobilisation to make schools a key place for achieving gender equality. However, its implementation in Colombian school settings faces many challenges and resistance from increasingly broad sectors of society that perceive these initiatives as a threat to more traditional forms of life and social organisation. In this context of tension, various pedagogical-political practices have emerged, mostly implemented by female teachers who, as part of their pedagogical work, promote educational processes with students, colleagues and families.

This research is inspired by activist research. This approach proposes a form of science that is sensitive to power relations (Haraway, 1995), in which not only normalised social and cultural arrangements are questioned, but also commitments and responsibilities are made to the actors involved in the research process. It includes building relationships of trust that resist academic extractivism and promoting a situated knowledge that is sensitive and relevant to the environments in which it is deployed (Fulladosa-Leal, 2014). The research design sought to forge this type of relationship with the people and collectives that contributed their reflections and learning, through horizontal and peer-to-peer dialogue activities, as well as spaces for the collective construction of a work agenda that enables advocacy actions in public policy.

Four methods were used to answer the research questions:

3.1 Documentary review

Legal frameworks and public policies at the national level and in three target cities (Bogotá, Barranquilla and Medellín) were analysed,[2] in order to identify milestones and key moments in the

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[2]   The cities were chosen for several reasons. According to the 2018 census, the four most populated cities in Colombia are Bogotá (7,412,566), Medellín (2,427,129), Cali (2,227,642) and Barranquilla (1,206,319) (El Tiempo, 2021). Each of these represent different cultural contexts in the country and show diverse developments in terms of public policies on gender and education. Given that Colombia has a highly centralist tradition of legislation and public policy, a comparison with cities such as Barranquilla is useful to identify differences in the handling of these issues. Each of the cities also has important, though different, traditions of teacher activism on these issues. Due to the limited scope of the study, it was not possible to include all four cities, so it was decided to focus on Barranquilla rather than Cali in order to explore what is happening in the Caribbean region of the country, a region with significant socio-cultural differences compared to the other two cities. These differences will become evident, for example, when the research describes teacher training policies or the different effects of the socio-political conflict in Colombia.

institutional management of the issue. The curricula of educational faculties were also reviewed to determine whether gender training is incorporated into their curricula.

3.2   Interviews with key actors

Interviews were conducted with 10 people selected for their expertise on the topic from research, activism or institutional management. The interviews focused on their perceptions of gender teacher education, their knowledge of teaching practices, and their understanding of the current context in terms of the relationship between gender, school and teacher education. Annex 1 provides more details about the participants and other methodological aspects.

3.3   Focus groups with teachers' collectives

A total of 9 face-to-face focus groups were conducted with teachers' collectives: in Bogotá, five groups with a total of 24 participants; in Medellín, two groups with a total of 11 participants; and in Barranquilla, two groups with a total of 10 participants. A total of 45 people participated: 40 women, three men and two non-binary people. All ranged in age from 19 to 66 years old, had a master's degree, and were predominantly from the middle socio-economic strata.

The focus groups focused on identifying the participants' pedagogical practices, the reasons that led them to organise, their experiences in teacher training, the challenges they faced and the expectations they had about working on gender issues in schools. The teachers' collectives, mostly composed of female teachers, were identified because of their public presence in leading discussions on the topic and by snowballing strategies. In Bogotá, they were contacted through the networks and contacts of one of the co-researchers of this study, who is also a practising teacher in a public school in the city and belongs to one of the teachers' collectives. In Medellín, the collectives were accessed through the publications of the Ministry of Education and MOVA (Centro de Innovación del Maestro or Teacher Innovation Center). In Barranquilla, since no teacher collectives could be found through institutional channels, the regional teachers' union facilitated access to relevant networks and collectives. The groups that participated in this phase of the research are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Focus group participants

Network/collective	Description
Red Nacional de Maestr@s Divergente	Support network for teachers working on gender and sexuality issues. It focuses on peer-to-peer training based on dialogue and reflection on their practices. It is located in Bogotá, with the participation of teachers from other municipalities in the country.
REDEG	The network's work focuses on advice and advocacy on public policy related to women and gender equity in Bogotá. In 2014, it participated in the formulation of the cross-cutting education plan. In 2015, it was recognised as a consultative body for the DistrictEducation Secretariat (SED).
Red de Maestros y Maestras por la Equidad de Género	Led and managed by the Women's Secretariat of Medellín, this network promotes the collective construction of knowledge based on the experiences and knowledge of teachers.
Red de Mujeres Jóvenes del Atlántico	Created within the framework of the political and community agenda of the Casa de la Mujer in the southwest of Barranquilla, this initiative has an agenda for women's empowerment, entrepreneurship and public policy advocacy. It was initially financed with international cooperation funds.

Red Sur	Composed of neighbourhood collectives and financed by international cooperation, this network works on education, capacity building, socio-political training and human rights with a gender perspective, targeting populations affected by the armed conflict.
Confluencia de Mujeres para la Acción Pública	National feminist organisation made up of a diversity of women from urban and peasant sectors, with the aim of dignifying women's living conditions. It seeks to improve women's political participation, strengthen their organisations and promote political advocacy.
Trainee teachers from private universities	Students from different semesters of undergraduate programmes in education, belonging to two private universities in the city of Bogotá.

3.4 Pedagogical forum

All those who participated in the interviews and focus groups were invited to a pedagogical forum in the city of Bogotá on teacher training in gender equity, with the aim of collectively building a working agenda for teachers' gender training. The event was attended, both in person and remotely, by around 40 people. The analysis of the information gathered sought to maintain the dialogue with the teachers' collectives, as key actors in this research and the main protagonists of the topic. The knowledge presented here is their knowledge, the result of a historical accumulation of pedagogical-political practices from which they produce alternative realities that resist epistemic, cultural, symbolic and physical violence.

3.5 Limitations of the study

The research team identified the following limitations:

- This is qualitative research, with a sample adjusted to the research objective. Quantitative methods that could provide access to more representative samples were not applied.

- The study did not include teachers who disagree with or are opposed to gender equality education in schools.

- The research was carried out under time and resource constraints. It is an exploratory study, the relevance of which is that it serves as a basis for more in-depth research projects in the future.

4 Gender and sexuality training as a policy issue in Colombia

Colombia has a variety of legal frameworks aimed at achieving gender equality and equity, dating back to the early 1980s. These frameworks are the result of sustained social mobilisation around the issue, commitments made by the Colombian state to the international community, and the way in which the state has adapted to social, economic, political and cultural changes.

In Colombia, the 1991 Constitution recognises multiple rights related to respect for gender diversity and equality, as well as sexual and reproductive rights. In addition, several international treaties, which form part of the Colombian constitutional order, complement these norms and together provide a broad and enduring framework for understanding the issue. Even instruments without legal status, such as the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, and the Beijing Platform for Action, have served as conceptual and operational frameworks for different education sector policies and for social mobilisations.

Such frameworks have direct and indirect implications for education and the role of the education community, particularly its teachers, in achieving this goal. However, the commitment to guaranteeing the rights to gender equality and equity in and from school has not always been translated into sustained action, sufficient resources or adequate political will. This situation affects the training of teachers, as there is a gap between the growing tendency to guarantee rights from the constitutional level, the limited implementation of national and local legal frameworks, and the growing assignment of responsibilities to schools, particularly to teachers.

These policies have suffered constant discontinuities due to changes in government and the political climate, preventing the accumulation of advances and even generating setbacks. Moreover, opposition to these policies has come from civil society organisations, some churches, parents' associations, conservative parties or religious groups represented in the Senate, as well as from governments that have defunded and dismantled the institutional design that sustains them. This situation is aggravated in the current context of advances in the struggles of social movements and their confrontation with counter-movements, especially anti-gender movements, as will be analysed in the relevant section.

To understand the environment in which teacher training initiatives on gender equality issues are taking place, it is necessary to consider three related but distinct fields of law and policy: (1) gender and sexuality issues in education policy; (2) education issues in gender policy; and (3) teacher training policies on gender issues, particularly in the three cities studied.

4.1 Gender and sexuality in education policy

Gender equality and equity issues in education policy have developed mainly in two areas: guaranteeing the right to gender-sensitive education and sexuality education.

Laws related to guaranteeing the right to education seek to address structural issues that produce inequalities. Colombia has a long tradition of laws aimed at transforming gender inequity and inequality in schools (see Annex 2). These laws have focused on two main areas: on the one hand, eliminating gender-related barriers to access and guaranteeing the right to education; on the other hand, eradicating violence that occurs in the school environment, where the gender dimension is fundamental.

While the former regulations address structural issues, the latter have mostly arisen from legal protective measures brought by students whose rights have been violated by various forms of violence, including gender-based violence. The latter have been instrumental in motivating change in school life regulations affecting gender issues.

In sexuality education policies, a gender approach has been gradually included, especially in relation to changes in behaviour and relationship patterns. Although gender issues have a place in education in various normative frameworks, there is no legal or public education policy framework that integrates them. This has important implications for the planning, monitoring, evaluation and sustainability of actions undertaken to ensure gender equality and equity in schools.

In the Colombian case, sexuality education policies have gradually included and developed discussions on gender issues. These policies have gone from a mere description of gender as a dichotomous and descriptive category, as in the policies of the 1990s, to the incorporation of perspectives that recognise gender diversity, its social construction and its relevance in the formation of citizenship, as in the policies of the 21st century. However, gender education issues have been subsumed in sexual education policies, without having developed their own approach.

There have been three main approaches to sexuality education policies in Colombia:

1. Biological approaches, characteristic of the 1970s and 1980s, which focus on teaching reproductive functioning, aspects of sexual and reproductive health, and birth control.

2. The sexual and reproductive rights approaches of the 1990s, with a less medicalised and more rights-based approach.

3. Sexuality and citizenship approaches, which broaden the understanding of sexuality without neglecting sexual and reproductive rights, connecting them to issues such as citizenship rights, community life, diversity, among others, and which have been implemented in the 21st century. Annex 3 provides a more detailed description of these policies.

It could be argued that gender issues have been implicit in these different approaches. The Behaviour and Health Manuals used in secondary education, typical of the early approaches, presented information in a strongly biological heterosexist and binary way. In the policies of the 1990s, issues such as the right to decide, specific to sexual and reproductive rights, raised questions about how gender inequalities differentially influenced decision-making. The Sexuality Education and Citizenship-Building Programme (PESCC) of 2006, for example, explicitly introduced gender equality issues using language that promoted equality and human rights.

This process has not been progressive or cumulative; on the contrary, it has been marked by debates and problems of implementation and continuity. The 1991 National Sex Education Plan received little institutional support, especially from the education sector, and the government of the time showed limited political will to promote it (Morales, 2010). The implementation of the 1993 National Sex Education Project (PrNES), which promoted teacher training, faced multiple obstacles. These included administrative and political difficulties in both intra- and inter-sectoral coordination, as well as limitations in technical and financial cooperation with international organisations, and even disinterest on the part of state institutions in charge of education and youth policies (ibid.). The programme also faced strong opposition from conservative and religious sectors, which was further complicated by the government's lack of commitment to defend the project in the face of these attacks. Thus began a long tradition of organised political opposition to sexual and gender education policies, which has endured to the present day, as will be noted below.

In parallel, there has been a history of teacher activism that has pushed for legal changes, developed initiatives with or without institutional backing, created alternatives to promote gender justice in schools, and trained on these issues, independently of the existence or not of institutional support, as will be presented in the findings section and as shown in Illustration 1.

Illustration 1: A teacher changes national policy

A teacher changes national policy

In 1992, the Colombian Constitutional Court issued a legal measure or tutela* with significant implications and long-term effects for the creation of comprehensive sexuality education policies at the national level. This case demonstrates the long history of teacher activism, mainly led by female teachers, to demand concrete policy actions from the State and achieve significant transformations. Lucila Díaz, a teacher originally from Ventaquemada, a small municipality in rural Boyacá, was expelled from her job for teaching sex education classes to her elementary school students. As a result, she filed a tutela action claiming for the protection of her rights. Her request led to the Constitutional Court to request the Ministry of Education to promote comprehensive and sustained sexual education programmes in schools (Decision No. T-440/92).

The Court held that the prohibition of sex education through sanctions violated the right to freedom of education and affirmed that sex education is compulsory in educational institutions, and that the State has the responsibility to guarantee it. It further ordered the Ministry of Education to conduct a study on the most appropriate content and methodology for the provision of sex education at the national level. The ruling led to the Ministry of Education designing one of the first sex education policies in the country.

A tutela ruling is a judge's response to a tutela action. The tutela action is a protection mechanism that any person can use to turn to the judicial authorities and safeguard their fundamental rights when they feel threatened or violated.

4.2 Education in gender policies

Existing laws on gender equality and equity in Colombia include measures for transforming gender relations through formal and informal education. These frameworks, directly or indirectly, assign tasks to the education sector, and in particular to teachers. An example of this is the laws on gender-based violence, which require educational institutions to implement mechanisms for early identification, prevention and reporting of sexual abuse against students, both inside and outside educational establishments (Law 1146 of 2007, Childhood and Adolescence Code). They also state that teachers have the obligation to report any conduct or signs of violence or sexual abuse against their students (Law 1146 of 2007).

In these cases, teachers have a responsibility that requires them to have up-to-date and specialised knowledge, for which they require training. As that legal framework states: 'Teachers in charge of the sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health programme in official and private schools must be qualified professionals, trained in this field in order to detect and handle any case of sexual abuse of their students' (Law 1146, Article 13).

This implies an allocation of tasks and roles in relation to the promotion of gender justice that goes beyond curricular and teaching issues, and includes responsibilities with legal implications. The connection between these responsibilities and teacher training is not always obvious or easy to trace, which creates a contradiction: as the tasks related to gender justice increase, so do the training needs, while there are still gaps in training provision and a lack of clarity about the incentives for such training commitments and their concrete value for teachers' careers.

4.2 Legal and policy frameworks for teacher training

The need for and importance of teacher training for the gender education can be traced back to the first sex education policies, such as the National Sex Education Project (PrNES) of 1993, which promoted training through diplomas in sex education in public and private universities (Resolution 3353 of 1993, Article 5). This type of public policy, in which teacher training is provided through a public and private offer of courses, diplomas and master's degrees based on pedagogical expertise offered by universities, is still in place today. The 2006 Sexuality Education and Citizenship-Building Programme (PESCC) also emphasised the need for ongoing training for practising teachers, understanding them as 'co-managers' in the making of a new country (MEN, 2008: 7).

These early initiatives revealed the problems of teacher training policies limited to sporadic training, focused on knowledge acquisition activities, and without a sense of process or connection to daily practice in the school or clarity about the incentives that training can offer to teaching teams. Some criticisms of the teacher training dimension of the programme point out that teachers are required to do continuous reflection and research on how to implement sexuality education in their circumstances, but this implies an additional burden for teachers, which may be difficult to fulfil given the variety of other activities they already carry out. At the same time, teachers may require a higher level of support to fulfil the functions required by the programme, as not all of them received comprehensive sexuality education during their training, and the prejudices they have adopted may compromise their ability to continue training on the subject (Perdomo and Rodríguez, 2022).

The General Law on Education (Law 115 of 1994) that restructured the education system in the country, mentions in several sections issues related to gender equity and sexuality education, although not necessarily using the language of gender or equality that is used today, nor establishing a direct connection between these issues and the need for teacher training in them. Thus, the law states that a common objective of education at all levels is 'To develop a healthy sexuality that promotes self-knowledge and self-esteem, the construction of sexual identity with respect for gender equality, affectivity, mutual respect and to prepare for a harmonious and responsible family life' (Article 13(d)).

Article 14 establishes that the teaching of sexuality education would be fulfilled as one of the 'pedagogical projects' common and transversal to all areas of knowledge, without necessarily being assigned to a particular class, teacher, timetable or as part of student´s regular assessment evaluation load. While this approach sought to address the issue in a comprehensive manner within the framework of educational freedom, it has also led to the dilution of responsibility for its implementation and to the blurring of the subject in the curriculum.

In relation to teacher training, Law 115 of 1994 establishes that 'The State shall permanently attend to the factors that favour the quality and improvement of education; in particular, it shall ensure the qualification and training of educators, teacher promotion, educational resources and methods, educational innovation and research, educational and professional guidance, inspection and evaluation of the educational process' (Article 4).

The law gives the Secretariats of Education the responsibility to establish district and departmental education policies and plans, to promote research and innovation in curriculum development, and to programme teacher training activities (Article 151). This aspect is fundamental because, as the ministries are autonomous in defining their policies within the national legal framework, not only does the way in which they understand and implement teacher training vary, but also their commitment to issues that continue to be the subject of debate, such as gender issues.

Education Secretariats, the local and regional institutional body to lead education, must formulate the policies, programmes and plans through which their teachers are trained. The Territorial Teacher Training Plans (PTFD) are instruments designed to 'promote and evaluate the training and updating

of teachers, in accordance with curricular and pedagogical developments, and to facilitate access to training for public teachers linked to educational establishments in the area under their jurisdiction' (Law 60 of 1993, Article 4). Ongoing training programmes for teachers seek to strengthen their research capacities, both in the institution and in the classroom (Osorio and Univio, 2015), through a continuous process of broadening and strengthening their conceptual horizon, the qualification of their pedagogical practice, and their mastery in the field of knowledge (Jaimes and Rodríguez, 2015).

At the beginning, these programmes provided salary improvements, as they helped to move up the teaching career ladder. However, with the entry into force of Decree 1278 of 2001, this recognition was eliminated, promoting instead postgraduate training. For example, in the case of Bogotá, the District Education Secretariat has created agreements with different faculties of education, in which it covers up to 80% of teachers' tuition for master's and doctoral programmes (Osorio and Univio, 2015). Other training exercises, such as refresher or in-depth courses on a specific subject, for instance, those on gender, do not receive this type of recognition. Since this implies allocating time for a training that could be devoted to other matters and without clear recognition of the value of this training in terms of salary or career, gender training depends on the personal interest of a teacher in taking it.

The formulation of these plans is in line with the development plan established by the governing administration in each city, which means that they vary according to their priorities and strategies for policy-making. In the case of Bogotá, for example, the current Teacher Training Plan is the education sector's response to the implementation of the Public Policy on Women and Gender Equity of the Mayor's Office of Bogotá D.C. 2020–2023. This public policy has been implemented since the early years of the 21st century and has had a clear focus on education, with special attention to schools and teachers. In this case, there is a strong connection between two policy frames – women's equity and education leading to concrete actions in term of teachers' gender training.

Implementation of teacher training policies in Bogotá, Medellin and Barranquilla

A review of 13 Territorial Teacher Training Plans (PTFD) in Bogotá, Medellín and Barranquilla from 1999 to 2023, carried out for this research, found that gender-related issues are mentioned in seven of them. The review found significant differences in the plans of the three cities: from plans with a long and sustained presence of gender and sexuality issues in teacher training, as in the case of Bogotá, to plans with more recent and emerging mentions, as in Medellín, and plans with more sporadic actions,[3] or in which gender issues are addressed mainly in relation to 'diversity' issues, as in the case of Barranquilla.

Bogotá was the first city to introduce a 'gender perspective' or 'gender approach' in a teacher training programme for in-service teachers in 2006. This programme aimed to build a diverse and inclusive educational community. The programme mentions the creation of a course with a gender focus, entitled Pedagogy and Social Inclusion for Full Citizenship, offered by the National University's Institute for Educational Research under the category of training in diversity. Other training plans in the city (2009–2012) have pointed out that quality education requires training teachers to respect and tolerate diversity, inclusion and integration.

In Bogotá's 2020–2024 Plan, the interest continues, including the development of training programmes to strengthen the perspective of women's rights, among other populations, to promote inclusion and equality from a gender perspective. In the case of Bogotá, the association between the themes of gender, diversity and inclusion is striking, since it is based on these axes that the training initiatives offered, or to which the teaching staff can have access, are developed.

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3   For this research, a right of petition was sent to the Secretary of Education of Barranquilla regarding the city's teacher training plans, but with no response at the time of finalising this report.

Illustration 2: An example of gender inclusion in teacher education

The Education Plan for Gender Equality Mainstreaming (PETIG), Bogotá, 2014–2024

The PETIG aims to influence the organisational culture of the District Secretary of Education (SED) (of the Mayor's Office, Bogotá) and transform educational content, pedagogical practices and school environments towards greater gender equity. This is done from a differential approach based on women's and gender rights, with the purpose of training teachers and developing affirmative actions. Among its main strategies, the PETIG promotes the linking of teachers to postgraduate programmes that include content on gender and education, the incorporation of a gender focus in postgraduate programmes, the strengthening of networks, the dignification and recognition of the work of female teachers, the analysis of violence against women in the work environment of schools, and the creation of protocols to address these types of violence.

The Direction of Teacher Training and Pedagogical Innovations of the Secretary of Education of Bogotá has implemented the PETIG 2014–2024 through 10 programmes, organised into three lines of action: (1) ongoing training programmes; (2) postgraduate training programmes; and (3) the Espacio Maestro programme.

Teacher training programmes. These programmes aim to provide pedagogical, didactic or disciplinary updating in areas of interest to teachers, or in strategic lines of public policy. They are optional programmes that contribute to the personal training curriculum. So far, eight programmes have been carried out, including seminars, diploma courses and one course, with durations of between 40 and 100 hours of training. Of these eight programmes, four have been virtual, three blended and one distance learning. The topics addressed include spaces for debate and knowledge creation from an intersectional gender perspective, the mainstreaming of the gender equity approach at the curricular and pedagogical level, the promotion and appropriation of the approach and the LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer and other non-normative sexual orientations and identities) Public Policy of Bogotá, and new perspectives on gender diversity for teachers.

Postgraduate training programmes. These programmes are designed to strengthen the pedagogical, didactic, disciplinary, innovation, research and leadership skills of teachers and managers. They include specialisations, master's degrees and doctorates. The Bogotá SED has funded three such programmes, organised by universities: a Master's degree in Inclusive and Intercultural Education, a Master's degree in Gender Equity, and a specialisation in Education for Diversity in Childhood. To date, 169 teachers have participated in these programmes.

Espacio Maestro **programme.** This is a free and autonomous virtual environment that facilitates the exchange of knowledge and experiences among teachers through learning communities and asynchronous virtual courses. So far, there have been two programmes oriented towards training in gender and sexuality. One of them is Vivamos la Escuela con Equidad de Género (Let's Live the School with Gender Equity), which aims to 'strengthen knowledge and competencies among teachers that contribute to the implementation of public policy on women and gender equity in schools, from a gender and differential approach and critical feminist pedagogies' (SED Bogotá, 2012). The other programme is Juntas y Juntos para Prevenir las Violencias Sexuales en la Escuela (Together and Together to Prevent Sexual Violence in Schools), which seeks to ensure that teachers 'understand sexual and reproductive rights as the fundamental principle for the prevention of sexual violence against children, adolescents and the community' (SED Bogotá, 2024).

Source: The Education Plan for Gender Equality Mainstreaming 2014–2024 and response to a right of petition sent by the District Education Secretary.

In cities such as Barranquilla or Medellín, although interest in teacher training in sexuality education has existed at least for the last decade, it is only recently that gender training has started to be mentioned as a specific topic in their PTFD. Medellín's 2020–2024 Training Plan, for example, points out that educational institutions not only reproduce structural gender inequality, but also play a key role in generating critical reflections that contribute to eradicating it. And to implement the necessary transformations to achieve equitable relations, teachers need to be prepared.

Since 2016, when the implementation of the public policy for teacher training began in Medellín, some training strategies have been developed, such as a diploma in inclusive education and differential approaches, as well as workshops on updating coexistence manuals, inclusion in the educational and social environment, and raising awareness about inclusion. However, unlike in Bogotá, the Medellín Departmental Secretariat of Education has not implemented training programmes. Nor is there any mainstreaming of these issues as a public education policy within the framework of a district public policy. In Medellín, gender and sexuality subjects and the needs of female teachers, end up being the responsibility of the Women's Secretariat, an entity that has made efforts such as the Diploma in Gender Perspective in School. However, no specific body has been identified within the Departmental Secretariat of Education that oversees teacher training with a gender and sexuality focus.

The examples of Bogotá and Medellin are relevant in pointing out how institutional design, with clear responsibilities, sufficient resources and inter-institutional articulation, is fundamental for the creation and sustainability of teacher training actions on gender and sexuality issues. Coordination between policies, such as the collaboration between the District Education Policy and the Public Policy on Women and Gender Equality, is another critical factor in guiding and sustaining training actions, as demonstrated by the contents of Bogotá's Teacher Training Plan.

In general, the plans promote gender-sensitive training for teachers, including training in women's human rights, respect for diversity and difference, and critical reflections aimed at the elimination of gender-based violence. They also include mention of sexuality education and sexual violence prevention and care. The plans usually link gender and sexuality education with the promotion of school coexistence, cross-cutting pedagogical projects and the mechanisms defined by Law 1620.

5 Anti-gender protests and education as a field of contestation

The case of Sergio Urrego highlights education as a key space of conflict around gender issues. Sergio, an eleventh-grade student at Gimnasio Castillo Campestre in Bogotá, was in a homosexual relationship with a classmate. A teacher at the school discovered this relationship after confiscating a student's mobile phone, reviewing her photos and finding an image in which Sergio and his partner were kissing. The school initiated disciplinary proceedings against Sergio, accusing him of sexual harassment towards his partner and suing his mother for alleged abandonment (Constitutional Court of Colombia, 2015, Sentence 478). During this process, Sergio committed suicide. After his death, the school released personal information about him, in response to which his mother filed a *tutela* to protect Sergio's rights to privacy, good name, equality, non-discrimination, free development of personality, education and due process (Constitutional Court of Colombia, 2015, Sentence 478).

The Constitutional Court found the school authorities had engaged in systematic discrimination against Sergio because of his sexual orientation, which directly influenced his suicide and violated his fundamental rights. The Court also reiterated that sexual orientation and gender identity of students are protected by the rights to equality, dignity and free development of personality, and that educational institutions may not intervene in them, nor consider them grounds for disciplinary sanctions.

The Court affirmed that this prohibition is particularly important because children have the right to be educated in democratic and pluralistic environments. It also noted the existence of a structural deficit of protection against bullying on grounds of sexual orientation, since neither the Ministry of National Education (MEN) nor the Departmental Secretariat of Education (SDE) applied the regulations designed to prevent and address these situations, as established in Law 1620. On the contrary, the MEN and the SDE limited themselves to imposing sanctions on the school by taking away its license for a few days, but did not initiate a process of training of young people and teachers or of protection and restitution of rights.

In view of this, the Court ordered the MEN to thoroughly review the coexistence manuals of all school levels in the country. The coexistence manuals are documents that contain the rules that govern the daily life of schools. They establish the prohibited behaviours and disciplinary mechanisms to deal with failures. They also establish protocols for school operations. The revision was ordered to ensure the manuals respect the sexual orientation and gender identity of each student, promote diversity and human, sexual and reproductive rights, and encourage peaceful resolution of conflicts in the school environment.

To this end, the MEN, in collaboration with organisations such as Colombia Diversa, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), produced the booklet School environments free of discrimination: Sexual orientations and non-hegemonic gender identities at school, which contained recommendations and guidelines for the revision of textbooks and provided guidelines for the protection and training of teachers in sexual and reproductive rights.

However, in August 2016, a comic book with pornographic content allegedly included in the material began circulating on social media. This fake news sparked a wave of outrage among parents' organisations, teachers, political leaders and religious organisations, who called for protest marches claiming that the educational materials contained a 'gender ideology', which would 'impose a homosexual lifestyle' on students. They demanded the withdrawal of the materials and the dismissal

of the Minister of Education, Gina Parody. The minister denied the information and stated that the material was not yet in circulation in educational institutions.

The marches took place in the context of a referendum on the peace accords between the Colombian Government and the former FARC–EP guerrillas (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo), generating an association between the supposed 'gender ideology' in the primers with the gender focus present in the peace accords. The polarisation caused by the endorsement of the peace accords and their gender focus was compounded by the fact that the Minister of Education, Gina Parody, had made public that she was in a lesbian relationship (Esguerra, 2017), which sparked a series of sexist and lesbophobic reactions to her role as minister. During the marches there were misogynist and homophobic messages and even incitement to sexual violence, with participants arguing that there was an agenda to end the family and the right of parents to educate their children according to their convictions (Rodríguez Rondón, 2017). There were also messages connecting these alleged agendas to the negotiation of the Peace Agreement with the FARC.

In the face of protests, Minister Parody was summoned to a political control debate in Congress, and subsequently resigned. President Juan Manuel Santos, under pressure, met with Cardinal Rubén Salazar and the apostolic nuncio to Colombia, Ettore Ballestero. After this meeting, the president ordered the withdrawal of the materials and gave a public speech in which he assured members of different religious groups that the national government did not promote 'gender ideology' (Rodríguez Rondón, 2017). Yaneth Giha took over as Minister of Education from Parody and declared that the gender focus in education was no longer a priority for the government (Esguerra, 2017).

This had concrete effects on schools. Although the obligation for schools to update their coexistence manuals remained in place, the MEN did not provide guidelines or training to school principals or school staff in general to carry out the process (Estrada Chauta, 2019).

The arguments escalated in the public debate against the Peace Accord, bringing the issue of 'gender ideology' into discussions against the referendum to be voted on 2 October 2016. The referendum to endorse the agreement obtained a vote of 50.21% against and 49.78% in favour. While no direct or causal relationship has been found between the 'no' vote and the groups driving the debate on 'gender ideology' (Beltrán and Creely, 2016), these groups did have a presence in the renegotiation of the agreement and pushed for the idea of 'expurgating' 'gender ideology' (El Tiempo, 2016). The end result was a reduced gender focus in the Final Agreement published on 24 November 2016, which included the elimination of the LGBTIQ+ movements' peace proposals (Serrano Amaya, 2023).

This complex organisation and escalation of events must be read in the broader and long-standing context of mobilisations against advances in gender equity and equality that have taken place at the international, regional and local levels. During these protests, education has been one of the most contested areas and the stage for many of their debates (Corrêa, 2018; Kuhar and Zobec, 2017; Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018). The presence of anti-gender protests in Latin America and Colombia can be traced back as far as the 1990s, with the reactions of the Vatican, some countries and organised groups against international agreements and conventions on sexual and reproductive rights (Gil Hernández, 2020). These mobilisations are led by both religious groups and conservative political parties. Sectors on the left or considered progressive have also supported them, as in the case of former President Rafael Correa of Ecuador, who was one of the first presidents to employ the term 'ideología de género' – gender ideology, in his political debates (Serrano Amaya, 2017). The strategies employed by these mobilisations include the creation of counter–arguments and discourses, such as that of 'gender ideology', which seek to generate a negative reaction against rights and proposals to transform gender relations, as well as legal actions and advocacy in international bodies (Moragas, 2020).

Teachers interviewed for this research agreed that these mobilisations and the scenario described above have impacted the way gender and sexuality issues are addressed in schools. In the interviews,

such impacts are associated with setbacks in the advances that had been achieved up to now in terms of making gender equality a topic to be addressed; difficulties in making it a matter of concern; and finally, with a politicisation of the issue that deviates from the objectives of equity or equality. According to one interviewee, a researcher and policy-maker, since the protests against the school materials, no government in Colombia has undertaken to develop a comprehensive education policy on these issues. On the contrary, some groups that oppose gender issues have managed to influence the spaces for discussion on sex education and gender equality in public education and state institutions:

> When I worked in public policy in Medellín, I used to hear the employees of the mayor's office say things like, 'Oh no, we can't talk about "families" but about "family", because the faith-based organisations won't allow it'. How can they not allow it? Are they the authority? These faith-based organisations exert a lot of pressure, and they need to be reminded that they don't have the right to tell the government what to do.
>
> Professor and researcher at a public university, who worked with the SED in Medellín

The presence and influence of these anti-gender groups has made the discussion of gender and education in political spheres and among decision-makers even more contingent on the political costs and benefits of those in favour or against. For some, this may mean risking losing political support because of the negative effects of being seen as representatives of 'gender ideology'; for others, it represents a gain by presenting themselves as protectors of the family and children. As one interviewee points out, the result is a lack of progress and a 'freeze' on gender and education issues, which few seem willing to take on board:

> I think it is necessary to be much more at the political forefront or willing to confront reactionary sectors to work on this issue. Now, any accusation of promoting gender equality is standardised under the idea of 'gender ideology', as if we want to change the natural order. That is the discussion that always arises. Unfortunately, that debate has been negative and, above all, has led to a failure to act.
>
> Policy-maker and researcher

However, these oppositions also reveal the transformative and destabilising power and potential of gender education, as perceived by some of the interviewees. As mentioned above, teaching applying a gender perspective or questioning gender norms and orders puts women teachers at risk. Such counter-reactions show that gender education is not limited to content or biological-reproductive aspects, but involves a questioning of gender norms that are considered untouchable. It also represents the beginning of important transformations, such as a greater empowerment of young female students in relation to the current state of affairs:

> The real concern is that when you educate with a gender approach, you not only educate students, but you also question the order of things. You question who is in power, you question power relations, you question inequalities, and you promote freer and more autonomous decision-making. And by questioning, you promote a mobilisation to change the way things are. And that, for some, represents a threat to their status quo, their privileges and their power.
>
> Gender expert and NGO member

ALiGN

6 Findings

This research on teacher training in gender and sexuality has focused on the pedagogical practices around these issues that are being implemented in schools. The aim has been to investigate, in the context of what actually happens in schools, what types of teacher training have given rise to the emergence of these practices. This shift in the object of study has required diverting attention away from training plans, and rather directing it towards the voice of practising teachers[4] who are deploying political and pedagogical resources to transform the school in relation to gender and sexuality issues.

The findings emerge both from the review of secondary sources and from interviews and focus groups in the three cities (Bogotá, Medellín and Barranquilla) that were considered in this study. The fieldwork found wide differences in the educational circumstances of these cities, as well as in their policy frameworks, as noted above, and in the organisational and training processes that are carried out in relation to the gender approach.

While in Bogotá there is a broad effort to make visible teachers and advocacy groups that work on these issues in schools, in Medellín it was necessary to approach these groups through the training and articulation processes carried out by the Mayor's Office, through the Secretariat of Education, the Secretariat of Women's Affairs and the Teacher Innovation Center (MOVA). In Barranquilla, on the other hand, we did not have access through the city government but worked with community education processes[5] in which teachers from educational institutions also participate.

This difference in degrees of visibility has also influenced the deployment of pedagogical practices, training strategies and types of organisation. It also implies different relationships and understandings of the socio-cultural contexts in which the practices emerge, constituting three very interesting places of analysis of teacher education in this study.

In the following chapter, we will first discuss the themes and objectives of the teaching practices encountered, as well as the types of teacher training that have led to their emergence and consolidation. Then, we present the different degrees to which these teachers feel at risk due to the pedagogical practices they carry out in their institutions. Finally, we will demonstrate the fictional narratives teachers use to deploy pedagogical-political statements to transform school spaces.

6.1 Pedagogical practices

Research on teacher training from this perspective has shown that there is a variety of practices on gender and sexuality education. The question of which are the teaching practices that transform gender relations in schools implies considering their status as scenarios of and for teacher training, and not only as the ways in which specific content is taught. In this integration of the issues in the daily life of the classroom, the school or the educational community, exercises for awareness raising, reflection, discussion or questioning of one's own experience are carried out, which respond to the particularity of teaching on these issues. Teaching on gender and sexuality issues involves teachers in a direct and personal way, which affects their individual and collective position as gendered and

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4   The term 'practising teachers' refers to those who are working in the classroom with a university degree already obtained. It is used to differentiate this group of teachers from those who are in the process of training, who are referred to as 'trainee teachers'.

5   'Community education' is understood to mean all training that takes place within the framework of the work of grassroots social organisations, which receive support both from the state and in terms of international cooperation. In this context, we refer to the work of three social organisations that address gender issues with marginalised communities and in which practising female teachers participate.

sexualised subjects (García Suárez, 2007). Thus, practices are both what is done and what makes teachers, students and the educational community become sexualised and gendered subjects.

It is also important to consider that practices are not neutral or standardisable, nor are they tools that can be applied in a decontextualised way. While the issues are becoming increasingly visible in what authors such as Castelar and Lozano García (2018) call 'the contemporary school', which can foster coexistence and a different management of conflicts, this must be done in a reflective and responsible manner – as they can also have negative effects that reinforce discrimination and social exclusion.

Moreover, recognising the importance and value of practices should not lead to ignoring the fact that the gender inequalities that schools deal with are structural in societies and do not always change at the expected rates. As Val Flores points out, 'it is not easy to reverse the accumulation, on our skin, of centuries of patriarchy. And there will be no manuals or recipes that can automatically channel the overcoming of naturalised violence. Hence the fundamental importance of insisting on processes of deconstruction and demystification, of making visible what is constructed as absent or deviant, of enabling plural gender and sexual cultures' (Flores, 2013 and 2016, in Páez 2021).

In this context, although it is not part of the scope of this research to characterise the pedagogical practices identified,[6] is the aim of this section to show the themes and perspectives proposed by some teachers in the different cities considered in this study. A table detailing the context, category and description of the practices analysed here can be found in Annex 4.

Challenging gender stereotypes and roles

A recurrent theme in the practices is the questioning of stereotypes associated with gender roles. On this issue, a teacher in Bogotá has proposed an initiative called 'Boxes, houses, things and cases', which seeks to challenge students' memories through objects that refer to identity, gender roles, stereotypes and the places women inhabit at school.

Another teacher in Bogotá proposed the creative project 'Specular layers: bodies between the mirror and the screen', which uses various elements such as mirrors, poetic writings, lights, screens, drawings and sounds to deepen reflections on gender and the place of sexed bodies in school scenarios and social networks.

In another school in Bogotá, a teacher organises a pedagogical project called 'Desprincesamiento' (which translates to 'de-princessing'), which proposes a series of practices that invite students to discuss the stereotypes they received in their upbringing through toys, songs and images from magazines.

In these experiences, teachers encourage situated and embodied reflection on students' own memories, practices and conceptions of themselves. Through a variety of objects, teachers propose activities that allow students to reflect on themselves and the ways in which they have learned to be women and men in the culture, to relate to each other, and to make plans for their lives. This approach to gender roles resonates with the proposals of Tajer et al. (2019) and Barrientos et al. (2022), where the production of collective and situated knowledge seeks to reflect the specific realities and challenges of the educational environment, such as the visibility within the classroom of gender inequalities and abusive situations in relation to personal history and lived experience.

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6 The notion of 'pedagogical practices' refers both to the actions that teachers carry out and to the processes of reflection, conceptualisation, and ethical and political positioning that underlie these actions (Díaz Quero, 2006). Due to the complexity of this notion, it would be pertinent to carry out a future research process focused on this category.

> **Illustration 3: Sexuality and citizenship education**
>
> **A success story in sexuality education and citizenship building**
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> Since 2010, Luis Miguel Bermúdez has worked in Bogotá as a middle school teacher at the Gerardo Paredes School (which offers pre-school, elementary, middle school and high school education), implementing a pedagogical model focused on sex education or sexual citizenship. In 2014, he developed a curriculum that incorporates a sexual citizenship perspective, as well as a differential and gender approach, with the aim of providing relevant and context-specific education. This curriculum seeks to facilitate students' access to sexual and reproductive health services, foster a school environment that respects differences, address sexual and gender-based violence, and reduce adolescent pregnancy.
>
> The implementation of the Sexuality Education and Citizenship-Building Project is based on constant research and a differential approach that recognises the interests and needs of students and includes autobiographical storytelling methodologies. Bermúdez's work seeks to generate an environment of trust-based communication, where students can ask their questions without fear of judgement or taboos. This pedagogical innovation, which began with his seventh graders (11 to 13 years old), has produced important results in school coexistence, particularly in cases of bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It has also fostered a culture of reporting to prevent abuse and sexual violence, achieving a 90% reduction in early pregnancy (Bermúdez Gutiérrez, 2020).
>
> In recognition of his work, Luis Miguel received the Great Teacher Award from the Compartir Foundation in 2017 and was selected as one of the 10 best teachers in the world by the Global Teacher Prize.

Comprehensive sexuality education

Linked to the experience of questioning gender roles, two other themes stand out in the teachers' pedagogical experiences: sex education for coexistence and the prevention of teenage pregnancy. In terms of comprehensive sex education, the experience of a teacher who uses autobiographical stories to talk about sexuality and involves families in the prevention of teenage pregnancy stands out. Along the same lines, Luis Miguel Bermúdez (see Illustration 3) integrated sexual citizenship into the curriculum using a differential and gender approach. Along the same lines is the project of another teacher who invites her students to question the dynamics of relationships in the classroom, as derived from the available concepts of romantic love and myths of sexuality (see Annex 4).

These projects rely on a hypothesis that is repeated in several of the experiences, namely that many of the problems of coexistence in schools are linked to the available notions of gender roles, sexual orientation and romantic love practices that are reproduced in society and culture:

> What we call 'sorority' is something I have worked on with the students, because the problems of coexistence are stronger among girls than among boys. I start talking to the girls about sisterhood among women; I explain to them how in masculine relationships, boys have the brotherhood complicity, but girls' relationships are based on envy, gossip, competition, rivalry. So, I tell them that this ends up affecting them and that they need to learn to build support among themselves, even if they are not blood sisters. I tell them, 'Even if you're not blood sisters, you are sisters!' That began to resonate, because it is precisely from there that coexistence improves, because many of the conflicts start with the girls.
>
> Focus Group Red Divergentes

Gender-based violence

The problems of coexistence are also manifested in another of the central themes among pedagogical practices: gender-based violence. This approach not only links the discussion on school coexistence with the gender perspective, but also requires recognising all forms of violence that have become naturalised in school and family spaces (Pérez Betancourt and Betancourt Rodríguez, 2019). This includes denouncing to the relevant authorities all forms of physical, sexual, psychological and emotional violence suffered by students for reasons of gender or sexual orientation. Reporting these kinds of violence has found in the current developments on restorative school justice a very interesting niche, as it has involved reflecting on the pedagogical actions that can be carried out in the school environment to understand individual and collective responsibilities in the wrongdoing and to build alternatives oriented towards reparation.

Restorative school Justice (JER, by its initials in Spanish) is a pedagogical and political strategy implemented by Bogotá's District SecretariatSecretariat of Education (SED), derived from the signing of the Peace Agreement in Colombia, with the aim of teaching society to resolve conflicts peacefully in the school environment. This initiative seeks to overcome the traditional approach of punishment and sanction, offering an alternative based on restorative justice, which promotes the reconstruction of the social fabric affected by various problems at school.

JER is structured around three fundamental principles:

1. the active role of victims and the responsibility to address their needs

2. the collective responsibility of the community, to encourage its participation in reparations

3. the restorative responsibility of the people causing harm, as well as their restorative potency.

Given that much of this gender-based violence stems from family environments, female teachers have been developing actions to work with mothers, fathers, caregivers or guardians, considering them allies in the process of change. An outstanding example is the case of a teacher who created a school for fathers and male guardians in Bogotá in 2018, with the aim of involving them in issues of care and questioning hegemonic forms of masculinity. Likewise, all actions aimed at pedagogically addressing gender and sexuality issues with guardians and caregivers are incorporated:

> I think one of the most important things we have taken into account is working with parents. When a student expresses something to us or we notice a change, we always organise meetings or schools for parents. We don't start educating a parent by saying: 'This is just the way your child is'. Instead, we offer general workshops where we talk about the hormonal and physical changes their children may be experiencing.
>
> MOVA teacher

This MOVA teacher highlights that there are different purposes for the parenting schools that are implemented in many educational institutions in the three cities studied. Some focus on available discourses on masculinity and seek to subvert them by challenging traditional gender roles in parenting. Others adopt more medicalised approaches to gender and sexuality, addressing issues with caregivers from the notion of developmental stages, physical and hormonal changes, and ways of supporting these processes.

Another approach to gender and sexuality, one that is much more technical and scientific, is found in the experiences that focus on the incorporation of these issues in the curriculum. This is the case of the 'Mariposas de Acero' project (which translates to 'Steel Butterflies' project), which seeks to strengthen the leadership abilities of female students through training, education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects), and the management of spaces for student and citizen participation. With this same commitment to creating spaces for women in science, a teacher has developed the project 'PrinCiencias: Science is a Girl's Business', which aims to encourage and motivate girls and young women in secondary education to enhance their skills and competences in STEM, encouraging more female students to decide to study careers in these fields. Along the same lines, another teacher focuses her activities on exploring literature produced by women scientists, with the intention of making their work visible and generating other female-centred references for students. These experiences resonate in UNICEF's STEM Girls programme, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) For Women in Science programme, funded by L'Oréal, and in the commemoration of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science on 11 February, decreed by the United Nations General Assembly (Resolution A/RES/70/212).

The variety of experiences on gender and sexuality found in this research shows that pedagogical practices are developed at three levels: (1) in the classroom, in the teacher–student relationship; (2) in the school, through pointing out and questioning of the relational dynamics between teachers, directors and other students; and (3) at the community level, in the relationships with guardians and caregivers. These three levels of practice, the classroom, the school and the community, show the complexity from which a proper reading of the context emerges in these actions. It is not simply a matter of proposing the usual range of conceptualisations of gender and sexuality in a classroom, but to call attention to the relational dynamics between school and the diverse actors who are part of those pedagogical practices.

Teachers' own readings of the environment incorporate a particular knowledge that involves a situated understanding of issues related to gender and sexuality at school. This understanding is also sensitive to the power relations implicit in these issues. This situated and sensitive understanding is the origin of pedagogical practices, a pedagogical knowledge that manifests itself in reflective actions on the part of teachers that involve conceptualisation and ethical and political positioning. What kind of teacher training fosters these kinds of understandings and actions will be discussed below.

6.2 Teacher training

In order to talk about teacher training in gender and sexuality, it is necessary to distinguish between the three types of training mentioned by the participants in the interviews and focus groups carried out in this study:

1. **Initial teacher training**: This occurs within the framework of the curricula in the different faculties of education in the country, where all teachers were trained.

2. **In-service training programmes**: These are proposed by the National Ministry of Education or by the departmental or municipal Secretariats of Education. Some of these programmes were described in Section 4.3, Legal and policy frameworks for teacher education.

3. **Peer-to-peer training**: This is carried out by networks, advocacy groups or social organisations of teachers.

Initial training

Regarding the first type of teacher training, initial teacher training, the in-service teachers point out that universities offer a very limited number of courses addressing these issues. Most of them state that they have not participated in any academic space in which the topic of gender or sexuality was addressed. In the case of the trainee teachers, the participants reported that it is a subject that has been emerging over the last ten years in universities. There are at least some mentions of courses on these issues, but they tend to depend on the field of expertise of a few professors and are not mandatory in the training plan:

> I understand that the university has courses on gender and sexuality, but they are only electives. I took one called Women and Knowledge, and it did address issues of gender, ethnicity and the experience of being a woman. However, it was never a subject that was emphasised in our programme from a pedagogical perspective, it was more general, and it was only an elective.

La Salle University student

At the national level, the curricula of 299 undergraduate programmes in education in 72 public and private universities were reviewed. We found 52 courses offered in these programmes whose titles include gender, inclusion, diversity and sexuality. They are distributed across 28 universities: 14 public and 14 private, as specified in Table 2.

Table 2: Courses on gender, sexuality, inclusion and diversity

	Diversity	Diversity and inclusion	Gender	Sexuality	Inclusion
Number of courses	29	9	8	5	1

In a preliminary observation, 'diversity' and 'inclusion' seem to have become umbrella terms to encompass not only gender and sexuality, but also issues of race, functional diversity and, in general, transformations in the school to make it a more inclusive, safe and protective space. It is striking that there are only eight courses whose titles explicitly mention gender issues. In the courses where it is mentioned, 'gender' does not appear as an individual topic, but is associated with concepts such as education, conflict and culture, equity, social justice, identity and memory, or family, community and school. This suggests that gender is considered relevant to teacher education but does not justify its inclusion in the curriculum on its own. Also notable is the emergence of topics such as 'queer pedagogies', which offer other approaches to both gender and sexualities.

Most of these courses on diversity, inclusion, and gender and sexuality are found in teacher training programmes that address social and community issues, such as the degrees in Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Social Sciences, Community Education and Human Rights, Arts and Humanities, and in programmes aimed at peasant populations and ethnic groups, such as the degree in Peasant and Rural Education and the degree in Ethno-education and Interculturality.

Gender-specific courses appear in three bachelor's degrees in Social Sciences Education, two bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood Education, one bachelor's degree in Ethno-education and Interculturality, and another bachelor's degree in Community Education and Human Rights. They also appear among the courses offered from a bank of elective subjects in the field of pedagogical knowledge. The two examples suggest a concentration of the subject in teacher training in social

and community issues, with fewer references to this type of content in the natural sciences and mathematics education programmes.

The limited presence of gender issues in teacher education has also been documented by other research projects. Although little inclusion of these issues has been found in regular training courses, including those in the social sciences, there is a growing interest in the topic, evidenced by the steady increase in the number of graduate theses that address various aspects of gender, including its relation to education (Guzmán and Parra, 2022).

Currently, there is even a demand from students to address these issues, which is leading teachers, not without resistance, to recognise the importance of training in these issues in their careers without this having to depend on personal concerns, as was found in a study carried out with teachers of Dance and Physical Education in Argentina (Páez, 2021).

Despite the growing interest in incorporating such courses in training programmes, there is still limited gender mainstreaming in the planning and training process, beyond some course content or specific courses (Guzmán and Parra, 2022).

In one of the focus groups with trainee teachers, the importance of the 'Semilleros' (which translate as 'research seedbeds')[7] for training on gender and sexuality issues was highlighted. Although these spaces are not part of the training programmes, they allow trainees to complement, broaden or deepen topics of interest. One of these workshops is understood as a space that encourages interdisciplinary work and collaboration between different areas of the university in favour of diversity, thus strengthening an inclusive perspective and contributing to comprehensive, multicultural and diverse professional and human training:

> There is a seedbed for inclusion, and it is a good space. I know about it because some of my friends are in it and they take part in events, as well as organising activities for people to recognise the different types of disabilities and other situations that tend to be normalised or not taken into account. However, I haven't seen many courses dedicated to this topic in the curriculum as such.
>
> La Salle University student

However, this student is reiterating an argument made above: training on gender and sexuality issues depends on individual will and not on a formal commitment to training on the subject, placing the burden of responsibility on those who show interest.

The focus group highlighted how student-created initiatives also make it possible to discuss issues related to gender and sexual diversity and to develop alternative educational processes. However, these initiatives are fragile, depend on the training course for each student, and are not necessarily passed on between generations of students. Their vulnerability is exacerbated by external factors, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

What seems to happen in training is an accumulation of silences, limited and partial approaches, and a handling of the subject mainly in informal spaces. However, this leads to the recognition of the importance of talking about gender and training for it. One of the participants points out that this type

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7   A 'research seedbed' is an academic space where students, under the guidance of teaching or research staff, meet to develop research projects in a specific area of knowledge. The name derives from an analogy with the process of sowing because, like a seed, the aim is to cultivate students' interests and research skills from the early stages of their academic training.

of training, whether during her career or in her professional practice, should not depend on individual interest, but should be explicit, structural and permanent:

> It would definitely be very useful if attendance at such gender forums and classes were mandatory. It should be clear in these classes that issues are being addressed from a gender perspective, explaining why and analysing related aspects. Sometimes, if it is not explicitly presented or is not a constant theme, it is simply overlooked. However, it is crucial to understand that these issues are fundamental to defining and constructing our reality. The lack of an explicit focus on gender can cause us to fail to recognise the importance of these issues in our daily lives.
>
> Los Andes University Focus Group

In-service teacher training

Regarding in-service teacher training, the second type of teacher training mentioned by the participants, the vast majority of the participants from the three cities report having participated in courses, diploma courses and workshops offered within the framework of the training plans being developed by the Municipal or Departmental Secretariats of Education:

> I am starting a course at IDEP on art, gender and education. I hold a degree in chemistry, and I have been an in-service teacher for almost 20 years. During my training, we didn't focus on these subjects; I considered them to belong to other areas, such as social studies, for example, or other subjects. At that time, I didn't think they were necessary in my disciplinary training. As I didn't consider them important, I didn't discuss them with my students either, as I had no knowledge of them.
>
> REDEG participant

This story can be framed in the context of what is described in Section 4.3 on legal and policy frameworks for teacher training, in relation to the in-service teacher training programmes in Bogotá offered both by the Institute for Educational Research and Pedagogical Development (IDEP) and the District Secretariat of Education (SED). For two decades, these institutions have run training and innovation activities aimed at teachers in the city's public schools. This type of activities are also available in Medellín through the Teacher Innovation Centre (MOVA) and in Barranquilla through the Secretariat of Education and the Secretariat for Women's Affairs. Although assessment of these training programmes and their implementation was not part of this research, teachers in the focus groups recognise the importance of these processes, as well as their limitations, such as the accumulation of actions without evaluation of their relevance, and lack of follow-up and of incentives to make and commit to the changes that are involved:

> I think there are significant barriers in terms of the content available for teacher training and the methodologies that are used. There is a lot of material, all the booklets you want, but they are filed away; they are kept in drawers and are rarely used, they are eaten by termites. When a trainer arrives, there is resistance. It is crucial to find dynamic ways of teaching teachers, but that doesn't even guarantee success. There must be follow-up in the

> mainstreaming of gender content in the curricula. It is painful, but teachers must be helped to understand and apply these concepts. Otherwise, they won't do anything, because they have no incentive. That's the most painful part: many are no longer in the classroom by vocation, they are tired of life. So they ask themselves: 'Why should I do something different?' You have to encourage them, tell them: 'Look, you could do this, it would look like this', and lead them to experiment.
>
> Teacher and activist

The methodologies and language used when training teachers are areas that are criticised in these programmes and in general in the way in which gender and sexuality are taught. Several of the interviewees point out the importance of changing the way teachers are taught about the subject, particularly because of the emphasis on information and rationality in the methodologies used. These limitations in the language used to talk about the issue are even more complex in the current circumstances, where discourses against gender and sexuality seem to reach more audiences, partly because they use simple and more emotional language. In this regard, one of the interviewees points out that gender training seeks to appeal to rationality and judgement, while anti-gender movements, in simpler and more everyday language, use strategies that appeal to fear and misinformation:

> If they tell you that they are going to talk about a gender approach to give you the tools to make autonomous decisions, you might think, 'How boring, I don't understand, I don't know what you're talking about, I'm not going to read any more'. On the other hand, if they tell you that what they are going to do is to promote homosexuality and that this is going to destroy the family, then you share that with all your family and friends, because 'that's scary!'
>
> Gender expert, member of an NGO

Most of these courses and diplomas have also been used as a platform to set up and consolidate networks of teachers linked to these issues. In fact, it is in the context of these institutional plans and programmes that most of the networks and advocacy groups that took part in this study were created. This will be analysed in detail in the following section.

Peer-to-peer training

The teachers' networks and advocacy groups are establishing themselves as a third type of teacher training, by distancing themselves from the institutional in-service training offer and generating their own proposal based on the training needs they identify. Networks and advocacy groups have existed in Bogotá for at least a decade. In Medellín and Barranquilla, they have also existed for some years, although with less development. The reasons for this separation are explained by the participants in this study in the following terms:

> The search within our pedagogical practice leads us to understand that I don't need to wait to be an expert to work in sexuality education, because I can learn at the same time and explore how to do it. It is a process of self-learning, and that is already a gain. The issue of training and experience is very important, because the Secretariat has tried, but has failed on precisely

> that point. They have tried to bring experts into schools to teach teachers how to be teachers, and that generates a lot of resistance. When we change that perspective and say that the expert will be the teacher who lives in the classroom on a daily basis, we get teachers more interested.

Focus Group Red Divergentes

The problem with the 'voice of the expert' referred to in this quote is a cross-cutting problem in teacher education, present in all fields of knowledge. The common tendency in such training is to have experts in the respective areas, recognised for their research and academic knowledge, but not necessarily for their practical experience in the classroom. The participant cited above alludes to the gap between disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Ibarra Russi, 2010); that is, between the conceptual and methodological formalisation of science and the ways in which this knowledge becomes teachable in schools. This distance increases in the case of gender and sexuality education, because its 'teachability' is not limited to the understanding of concepts or categories but implies a way of positioning oneself in relation to one's own body, upbringing, family, emotions, the relationships in which one participates, the social and cultural codes available, the hierarchies of which one is a part, among others.

The teachers' pedagogical experiences reflect this complexity by taking place in different spaces and at different scales, but also by incorporating the teachers' own readings of the environment, the community and the relationship with institutions. This complex and situated reading, which is converted into concrete educational actions, constitutes pedagogical knowledge. Many of the pedagogical practices mentioned at the beginning of this section on findings not only demonstrate these situated readings, but also the ways in which these practices are the subject of discussion, analysis and reflection within the teachers' advocacy groups.

Peer-to-peer meetings constitute a fundamental space for training. One of the main functions of these spaces can be to discuss significant experiences during regular meetings, as in the case of the teachers of the Red Divergentes, who meet virtually once a month to share practical learning; for example, the experience of teacher Luis Miguel on the prevention of teenage pregnancy. Another role can be to conceptualise experiences to organise events in educational institutions, such as the Teachers' Network for Gender Equity (REDEG), which meets virtually twice a month to organise joint actions with the Teachers Union or the Ministry of Education, to commemorate important dates, such as the Day of Non-Violence against Women, and to offer courses and teaching materials to other teachers in the public sector. It is in these spaces where teachers learn from other teachers how to propose these discussions in the classroom, and also how to confront complex situations in everyday school life, such as sexual harassment or mistreatment of students who are transitioning to non-normative genders or sexualities.

This peer-to-peer learning, which takes place from the embodied experience of the classroom, constitutes the pedagogical knowledge that 'the experts' in the in-service teachers training offer do not have because they 'have not set foot in a classroom'. It is for this reason that the need arises for a type of peer-to-peer teacher training, where the expert is the teacher, precisely because she can speak from the embodied experience of proposing these issues in the school setting:

> At that time, there were about 12 or 15 of us teachers working with sexuality, gender and diversity, and we began to see that we were all suffering the same circumstances of persecution and harassment. During this situation, and by getting to know the projects, making them visible and sharing experiences, we understood that it was important to start building a support network.

Red Divergentes Focus Group

The persecution and harassment to which this teacher refers occurs because opening the discussion in the school setting about power relations, upbringing, hierarchies, the body, gender violence and diverse sexualities generates a multiplicity of reactions, most of them violent, as will be shown in the following section. And pedagogical violence refers not only to the violence that teachers suffer, but also to the fact that the pedagogical practice itself can be violent, as it reproduces forms of exclusion and domination. According to this teacher, pedagogical practices to address gender are perceived with suspicion and as a threat to the established order, which exposes teachers to risky situations.

The teachers who propose these pedagogical practices have needed to recognise these complex power relationships and develop strategies to persist in their work. One of these strategies is to organise themselves into networks and advocacy groups, which not only gives them visibility as a collective group before the institutions in order to legitimise their pedagogical and training practices, but also allows them to create mechanisms of mutual support to resist the violence they face due to their political and pedagogical actions in schools. Most of these networks meet periodically to follow up on the work agendas that they have collectively built to make their work visible. They also organise events, give courses and workshops, encourage teachers from other regions of the country to exchange experiences, and publish their interventions on social networks.

In this sense, this teacher training in networks and advocacy groups reveals the emergence of a form of teacher activism. In this research, the term 'teacher activism' refers to the various actions that teachers have been deploying in different settings, both at school and elsewhere, to mobilise social and cultural change around the hegemonic gender regime. These actions range from the everyday classroom (as shown in Section 6.1 on pedagogical practices), to social and union organisation, and even go as far as influencing public policy and decision-making.

It is an activism that is also organised around advocacy for and support of other teachers who, because of their pedagogical practice on gender and sexuality issues, are subject to persecution, stigmatisation and criminalisation by different sectors and groups, as will be shown in the following section. It is an activism that arises in response to the risks inherent to their pedagogical and political activity related to gender and sexuality:

> These risks are, in a way, rooted in the pedagogical violence that we teachers who position ourselves from our places constantly suffer. This pedagogical violence is not only limited to schools or to the media; it also occurs at universities. These violences have affected us, and the risks and tensions we face are based on them. This has prevented us from many meaningful experiences. That is why we advocate as a group for another type of schooling, one in which we would be able to express ourselves, because if we stand to this fight individually we will become invisible and silenced.
>
> REDEG Focus Group

Teachers face risks in multiple dimensions. By analysing these risks, we understand not only the challenges regarding gender and sexuality education, but also how this education is straining the power arrangements available in each of the dimensions to be considered: the school, the community, the institutional framework, and the social and armed conflict. In drawing attention to these risks, it also highlights the complex contextual readings that are necessary to talk about teacher training on gender and sexuality.

6.3 Risks faced by teachers in promoting gender and sexuality education

School

In order to understand the risks that appear in the school setting when proposing this type of pedagogical practices, it is necessary to begin by clarifying that the school space is ordered and codified by a discourse on gender and sexuality. That is to say, the school proposes a discourse on how people should be, behave and relate to each other within the school environment, and generates surveillance practices to ensure that people conform to these expectations. Elements such as uniforms, differentiated school schedules and spaces, the role of head teachers, gender segregation of bathrooms, and rules on hair, clothing and nails are all devices through which schools reproduce the gender regime in schools. According to Luis Miguel Bermúdez Gutiérrez, in schools 'the body has been the repository of at least three discourses or narratives. The first, compulsory heterosexuality, the second, the subordinate place of women to patriarchal power, and the third, the control of the body and sexuality as a parameter of behaviour and social order' (2020: 58).

This discourse on gender and sexuality is not explicit in the official curriculum, but is part of the 'hidden curriculum', which distinguishes between what is taught directly and what is learned implicitly (Scharagrodsky and Southwell, 2007). It is the same discourse that is challenged both by public policy on gender and by the pedagogical practices of the teachers who took part in this study. This gap between the traditional school culture and the legal regulations that teachers invoke as support for their teaching activism is what generates, to a large extent, the risks they face, as their work has focused on denouncing the forms of violence perpetuated by this school culture:

> This sex education on gender, diversity and even masculinities at school is framed by what I call tensions and resistance. By starting to work on these issues and putting them on the table, 'rotten pots' begin to be uncovered, and violence becomes visible. This is what is most uncomfortable, because it implies revealing things that had been made invisible, naturalised and normalised, and that were thought not to be present at school. Talking about sexuality means uncovering cases of sexual abuse, discrimination and harassment at school.
>
> Red Divergentes Focus Group

Denouncing cases of violence committed by colleagues, managers and parents, as well as discussing naturalised discriminatory practices in schools, created a hostile working environment for almost all of the teachers who participated in this study:

> I have been a teacher for 25 years and, unfortunately, over time one observes a lot of gender-based violence within institutions. But they say that nothing happens, they tell us not to exaggerate, and often the teachers themselves are blamed for the situations that occur, and it is completely normalised. After implementing a project, you are persecuted in the school, either by the administration or by your colleagues, who resist because they feel questioned. It's difficult, very difficult, and you have to be very brave. You must be very brave.
>
> REDEG Focus Group

This reiteration of the need to be brave reflects the daily experiences of persecution faced by teachers in the school setting. In Colombia, persecution in public schools does not translate into dismissal or threats of dismissal, because according to Decree 1278 of 2002, all public system teachers are hired by an administrative act after passing a merit-based competition. However, they do run the risk of being transferred to another school or returned to the Secretariat of Education. This situation is even more worrying when you consider all the legal obligations that teachers have regarding gender equality and sex education. Basically, they are being persecuted for fulfilling duties that they are legally obliged to fulfil.

Teachers also perceive risks from their colleagues, who stigmatise them as a threat to the established school order in the ways they talk about them to students and parents. One of the teachers reports that her male colleagues have accused her of 'anarchising the school' (Red Divergentes Focus Group), alluding to the ways in which gender-sensitive education ends up challenging the prevailing hierarchical school structure. Finally, teachers report a sense of loneliness in relation to institutions such as Education Secretariats that are more interested in their pedagogical practices to increase indicators of gender-sensitive education but are silent in the face of requests for protection measures or the complaints of harassment that they have filed over the years.

Government

There are several ambiguities in the governmental discourse on gender and sexuality education that put teachers at risk. These ambiguities stem from the gap between available laws and the institutional actions and agendas developed in recent years to ensure their implementation. Despite having legislation and jurisprudence that establishes guidelines for education in these matters, as noted in Section 4.3 (on legal and public policy frameworks for teacher training), implementation varies according to the principle of institutional autonomy. According to the Colombian Constitution of 1991 and Law 115 of 1994, the Ministry of Education establishes guidelines, the Secretariats of Education follow up and monitor the processes, and educational institutions have autonomy to create and implement their own educational plans. This creates gaps and ambiguities, blurring responsibility for teaching:

> The improvement of sexuality education in schools faces a major structural problem: academic autonomy and the absence of a mandatory curriculum. Let's take the health system as an example: everything is more vertical. A resolution or directive is issued by the Ministry of Health and all hospitals and managers comply with it without much debate. In contrast, with educational centres, we must wait for the administration to want to comply with it. And even when they do offer gender training, they may interpret it from a lack of knowledge and bias, which ends up misrepresenting it. For example, if the directive is only to talk about sexuality, but does not specify how or specify the obligations, it can be approached from a perspective of abstentionism and fear. This is why it is necessary to have a minimum consensus on which to build and implement.
>
> Education policy researcher

According to this researcher, in recent years, schools have relied on school autonomy to decide whether or not to implement current regulations on sexuality education. And several institutions that do not comply with their obligations to offer gender and sexuality education, claim that they lack the technical knowledge to do so (Acosta et al., 2013). But whether due to ignorance or lack of training, or because it is morally and politically against the focus of the legislation, sexuality education has ended

up being optional. Moreover, its implementation has been subject to misrepresentations or strategic uses that go against the transformations that these laws seek to promote.

Institutional ambiguity adds to the multiple challenges expressed by conservative sectors of society, such as the one that in 2016 stopped the dissemination of the sex education booklets that the Ministry of Education had produced to regulate the mandatory content in schools. With this precedent, and since then, any progress on this issue proposed by the institutions 'is already standardised under the idea of gender ideology', as a public policy-maker interviewed for this research points out. In the legal framework of this research, a pattern is evident where the state, under pressure from social protests and legal actions, has created progressive public policies that provoke rejection from conservative groups, leading to negotiations that slow down their implementation.

Amid these ambiguities, teachers report that there are no protocols in place that establish ways to prevent, denounce and act in cases of workplace or sexual harassment against them in schools. There are certain regulatory developments in this area, such as Law 1620, which defines 'bullying', and recognises that it can be perpetrated between students, by teachers on students, and even by students on teachers. However, it does not explicitly contemplate the possibility of bullying between teachers. Likewise, the sections in this law calling for the creation of protocols to attend cases of bullying are ambiguous, and it is not clear whether it can be activated when the victim is a teacher. With this in mind, the Educational Plan for Gender Equality Mainstreaming (PETIG) 2014–2024 has as one of its lines of action the creation of protocols for care and prevention of violence against teachers, but teachers report delays in its implementation. This perceived lack of protocols puts them in a situation of additional vulnerability:

> The Ministry of Education has requested technical roundtables to work on issues of workplace harassment, sexual harassment and gender-based violence against teachers. However, although these meetings are held from time to time, they do not show concrete progress. This became clear at the last technical roundtable, where they had to acknowledge that there are no mechanisms in place for cases of harassment by other teachers. Law 1620 addresses situations of violence, harassment or conflicts within the school, but always between students or between teachers and students, not between teachers. When these cases arise, it is necessary to go to institutions such as the Prosecutor's Office, the Comptroller's Office, etc., which also delay and do not resolve them.
>
> Secretaría de la Mujer Focus Group

In this contextualisation of risk by one of the teachers' union leaders, it is clear that work is being organised between the networks of teachers who deal with these issues and some sectors of the leadership of the teachers' unions, both in Bogotá and in Medellín and Barranquilla. This cooperation with the union has several work fronts:

1. supporting complaints, such as those mentioned in the quote above

2. teacher training in collaboration with advocacy groups, networks, organisations and schools that have explicitly requested this type of support

3. management of petitions to institutional bodies, such as the Secretariats and the Ministry of Education

4. demands on governance practices within the union.

This organisational work, which has been going on for more than a decade, highlights the multiplicity of strategies that have been developed at different levels to confront the gender regime present in the school environment. In addition to the classroom experiences mentioned at the beginning of this section on the findings, teachers have developed concerted actions with other forms of organisation, such as teachers' unions, to demand the implementation of current regulations and decisively support their pedagogical processes. These strategies are based on their role as public servants to demand that the State fulfil its duties.

However, this concerted work with the union faces another set of challenges. The governance structure of educational unionism is very patriarchal, despite (or by virtue of) the fact that teaching is a feminised profession. In other words, in terms of social and economic recognition and prestige, it is a profession that occupies a subordinate position, and that is why, for the most part, its practitioners are women (Lorente, 2004).

The patriarchal hierarchy of teachers' unionism is evident not only in the composition of the leadership, but also in the way in which the issues on the agenda for negotiation with the state are prioritised and how decisions are made. Daily, this reality is manifested in the division of tasks within teachers' unions, where women tend to take on more tasks often associated with women's roles such as caring activities, in the interruptions to women teachers' interventions in union meetings, in the low representation of women in leadership positions, or in cases of violence against women leaders within the union. In some cases, even women in positions of power adopt these patriarchal attitudes and do not question the inequalities of power in the union. According to some of the members of the Secretariat of Women's Affairs of the District Education Workers' Association (ADE), in the context of one of the focus groups, all these factors have hindered progress in public policies that defend gender equality in schools.

Community

In addition to these tensions in the school environment and with the government, there is also pressure from parents on content related to gender and sexuality education. Teachers at all levels of education report receiving pressure and threats from family members and guardians who disagree with their pedagogical practices. Parents' religious beliefs often lead to their rejection of the initiatives, leading teachers to be careful about what they say to avoid reprisals. Parents claim to have the right to educate their children according to their beliefs and are reluctant to recognise the right of children to receive sex education and to grow up in an environment free from patriarchal violence:

> There is a deep-rooted fear in Colombian society about morality, family values, public order, debauchery and the idea that to talk about gender is to promote perversion and homosexuality. This is the biggest Achilles' heel. There is a preference not to talk about sexuality, because it is thought that talking about it will make all children start having sex, and that it will take away their innocence. This is seen as something that only parents should discuss at home according to their values. It is thought that addressing gender and sexuality in education will affect conceptions of values, promote homosexuality or abortion, or confuse children about their identity. This deep-seated fear is often part of the anti-rights and right-wing agenda, and it is very strong.
>
> But as I understand it now, that discourse is a smokescreen. The real concern is that, by educating with a gender approach, you are not only educating students, but you are also questioning the state of things. You are questioning

> who is in power, power relations and inequalities. You promote freer and more autonomous decision-making, but also an attitude of questioning and mobilisation to change the status quo. This is seen as a threat to the status quo, to the privileges and power of certain sectors. Just as the advancement of women's and LGBTQ+ rights always faces resistance, because it implies that certain groups lose privileges, sexuality education materialises this advancement in rights. There is nothing more transformative and irreversible than education. It does not exist. There is no public policy, there is no court ruling, there is no law, there is no government that is more transformative than education. So, if you hinder education with a gender focus, you are hindering the advancement of the rights of these historically marginalised groups.

Gender expert, NGO founder

From the interviews it can also be deduced that the groups of fathers, mothers, guardians or caregivers, while sharing an interest in influencing what is taught in terms of gender and sexuality, are also heterogeneous and express their resistance for different reasons. As noted in the previous quote, their resistance come both from the broader understandings of gender and sexuality that they experience, and from the way in which these issues are discussed in a context of anti-feminist, anti-gender protests and the constant creation of 'moral panics'. The result, as one teacher points out, is that teaching gender equity and equality issues can, in itself, constitute a risk not only for teachers, but also for students:

> Teaching about gender in school can put children and adolescents at risk, and one must know how to do so without exposing them to that risk. The danger, in many cases, comes from their own family. For example, a boy comes into the classroom with a black eye and you ask him, 'What happened to you' and he says, 'My dad hit me because I told him he was being a macho with my mum about stuff. He told me that he beat me so that I wouldn't become a sissy, and that it's because of sissy men that women now dominate men'. Another day a girl comes in with marks on her legs. What happened to you?' 'They beat me because I didn't want to heat up lunch. I told them that this was sexist and asked why my older brother didn't do it. My mother hit me and told me that if I continued with these things she would throw me out of the house'.

Teacher

The same teacher strongly differentiates between the implications of teaching gender and sexuality issues with respect to other areas, due to the implications of handling issues such as sexual abuse or gender-based violence, which teachers have an obligation to denounce, even if they do not necessarily have the training or support to handle these cases:

> But with mathematics, no one is in danger. With sex education, yes. The students are in danger, and you are in danger because, if you discover sexual abuse, by law you have to report it. I, for example, if I am giving sex education on violence prevention and a child says to me, 'Oh, teacher, they did this and this and this', I know that it is sexual abuse, and it is my right and obligation by law to report it. And with reporting comes threats.

Teacher

The laws that require both educational institutions and teachers to protect children and adolescents from sexual violence (Law 1622 of 2013 and the Code of Childhood and Adolescence) do not contemplate this context of resistance, threats and intimidation in which teachers operate. On the contrary, Law 1622 requires teachers to report all situations that could indicate cases of sexual violence and, if it is verified that they have not done so, they are considered accomplices to the crime and legal proceedings may be opened against them.

These risks caused by education and change in gender and sexuality relations are compounded in the Colombian context by the growing public presence of anti-gender protests, as already covered in Section 5 on anti-gender protests and education as an area of contention . These interest groups, with the support of the media, create a hostile environment for initiatives to change gender relations and generate a climate of vulnerability for teachers. In addition, they have created a panic that discourages the implementation and development of government policies on sexuality education and gender equality in schools, as documented in other research in Colombia (Gil Hernández, 2020; Estrada Chauta and Castro Mazo, 2016) and as pointed out by several of the interviewees.

Although teachers perceive the risks associated with the closing of the political and social spectrum since 2016 and, as a result, the emergence of these new actors disputing the space of educational innovation, they persist in the deployment of strategic actions, such as those already mentioned about setting up parents' schools. In these political-pedagogical scenarios, they find opportunities to discuss gender roles, upbringing and different sexual orientations. This situated, permanent and close presence has created alternatives to conservative resistance.

Social and armed conflict

Social and armed conflict permeates the actions of teachers and put them at risk. With marked differences between circumstances, the presence of armed groups that control the territories has a direct impact on the perceptions that teachers have in relation to their pedagogical practices (see Illustration). Within the framework of this study, it is evident that, although the social-armed conflict is experienced throughout the country, its dynamics operate differently in the three cities explored: Bogotá, Medellín and Barranquilla. It is precisely on the basis of these territorial differences that teacher activism is organised, articulated and promoted.

Illustration 4: Risks and threats to teachers

Schools, teachers and students have also been victims of Colombia's armed conflict. Between January and June 2023, at least 7,485 people nationwide were affected by violent events in or on their way to educational establishments, of whom 7,026 were students, 370 teachers and 89 education personnel (NRC, 2023). In 2022, there were 22 nationwide attacks and threats against schools and teachers attributable to armed groups, while 10 schools were used for military purposes by those involved in the conflict (UNICEF, 2023). Attacks were persistent and even increased in the 2022–2023 period, while the occupation or use of educational spaces by armed groups is still taking place.

Teachers and students share with others events such as confinement, restricted mobility and recurrent surveillance by armed actors, and face particular victimisation because of their leadership, representativeness, public function and/or role as social agents, which can be interpreted as an obstacle to territorial and social control by armed actors, or as a reason to profile them as their 'enemies' (Chávez Salazar et al., 2016; Lizarralde, 2003).

Threats against teachers are a recurrent occurrence in Colombia. In 2010, a specific protection procedure was created for state teachers and school administrators (Resolution 1240 of 2010, Ministry of National Education). In 2022, the Ombudsman's Office issued Early Warning No. 004 of 2022, in which, by means of pamphlets, it warns of threats against unionised teachers and threats in general against university

professors who participated in the mobilisation of the national strike of 2021. Teachers at extraordinary risk or under threat from armed actors by virtue of their work are targeted by the Prevention and Protection Programme of the National Protection Unit (UNP). Between 2015 and April 2024, 1,648 teachers requested individual protection, with a steady increase since 2020.

Table 3 Individual protection requests to the UNP by teachers, disaggregated by gender as of April 2024

Gender	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Grand total
WOMEN	50	77	76	123	74	28	49	132	180	16	805
MEN	60	81	92	127	81	42	45	124	174	17	843
Grand total	110	158	168	250	155	70	94	256	354	33	1,648

Source: UNP, April 2024.

In the case of Bogotá, in the conversations with teachers, we did not find many references to risks linked to the dynamics of the armed conflict. Although the presence of gangs and armed actors in the neighbourhood is recognised as having an impact on the cases of sexual violence that reach the schools, in general, the control they exert over the schools' pedagogical practices is not so visible in teachers' accounts. This silence gives rise to a hypothesis that would be worth considering in future studies and is related to the fact that the logic behind teacher activism is that it is organised around the pressures and tensions that they perceive in their particular circumstances. We consider that the limited presence of this risk in the case of Bogotá has favoured the proliferation of networks and advocacy groups of teachers, who organise themselves around their own training, educational and research projects, and the dispute with the government.

The situation in Barranquilla is very different. Here, the armed actors who control the territories exercise surveillance and control over the norms, practices and discourses in schools:

> In the Santo Domingo neighbourhood, the principal used to tell me: 'Watch where you walk, and watch what you say, because there are more than 19 gangs here in Santo Domingo alone'.
>
> We see a lot of rapes, but this issue is very much hushed up. Sometimes the abuse comes from within the home. The mother gives the girl to the gang leader. At what cost? Giving her to the gang leader is a sexual sale, but she doesn't see it that way. The gang leader is going to support the whole household financially, so she thinks it's a good thing because the family is made up of nine siblings. When we activate the attention route in cases of violation of the rights of children and adolescents, we call the ICBF [Colombian Institute of Family Welfare], and that's when we get the death threats because often the ICBF doesn't keep the secret of who told them. I have been threatened with death many times in the Santo Domingo neighbourhood for defending a girl who I knew was being raped in her own home.
>
> Red Mujeres Jóvenes Atlántico Focus Group

This teacher explains the daily life of the social-armed conflict at schools in these territories. She refers specifically to the control exercised by armed groups over girls' bodies, the topics that are addressed in class and the places where they walk. The 'invisible borders' imposed by groups that control different areas of the territory delimit the spaces for political-pedagogical action that teachers can use. In this case, denouncing violence is a forbidden space that leads to death threats from armed actors. For this reason, the networks and advocacy groups linked to this study in Barranquilla are not organised around the school setting, but around popular and community education processes organised by grassroots social organisations. By this we refer to 'educational processes' that occur outside of the school setting, those that are managed by social organisations with different sources of funding (international cooperation, various NGOs, state funds) and that are aimed at strengthening capacities in contexts diagnosed as being in a situation of vulnerability:

> The southwest region of Barranquilla is the largest one and is affected by the armed conflict in a different way. So it is necessary to continue to strengthen and address this issue. From there, the themes emerge, such as socio-political education, with an emphasis on human rights and political participation, including the issue of gender, as we begin to connect and raise awareness about it. This issue is closely related to an ingrained culture, not only in young people, but also in their families, especially in terms of machismo and patriarchy. Many situations have been instrumentalised and, in the case of women, this has prevented their participation in political spaces, because the south-west was not safe, there were situations of violence and some of the places were dangerous, with groups on the fringes of the law. In short, there were several dynamics related to the conflict and violence that made it difficult for girls to participate.
>
> Red Mujeres Jóvenes Atlántico Focus Group

The pedagogical practices related to gender and sexuality deployed by the teachers who are linked to these popular and community education processes take as their starting point the role of the social-armed conflict in reproducing gender relations and roles. Through memory exercises on the situation of displacement of the participants, on the forced disappearance of their relatives or on the practice of extrajudicial executions of young people in peripheral neighbourhoods, gender roles and the effects of these practices on the ways of relating to and living in the territory are questioned.

In the case of Medellín, the armed actors' territorial control is linked to the dynamics of the city's illegal economies, such as drug trafficking and sexual exploitation. The dynamics of violence in Medellín are very particular, as they go beyond the logic of armed conflict in other parts of the country. This is because the main illegal actors are 'criminal gangs' and not properly recognised organised armed groups. These criminal gangs are successors of the drug cartels of the 1980s (La Silla Vacía, 2024). At the same time, they recycled the discourses and dynamics used by the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) (León Rodríguez, 2024), the main right-wing paramilitary group that operated in Colombia formally between 1997 and 2006, when they demobilised after an agreement with the government in office. In this way, these actors follow a dynamic currently known as 'neo-paramilitarism': they are 'actors with short-term objectives, without national projects, with a more subtle relationship with local powers and none with the central state. It is a more atomised phenomenon, with fewer military capabilities than before, and above all with criminal logics that take precedence over counter-insurgency logics' (Henao Pinilla, 2021).

Currently, in Medellín, it is estimated that there are more than 16 criminal gangs, made up of approximately 12,000 people. The largest is the Oficina del Valle de Aburrá, formerly known as the

Oficina de Envigado (La Silla Vacía, 2024), as well as the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia or the Clan del Golfo de Urabá, a successor of the former AUC (Palacio Roldán, 2021). These dynamics of drug trafficking and paramilitarism have an impact on social control that is reflected, especially, in the repression of disruptive discourses and practices, as in the case of sexual diversity. This is evidenced by the 24 LGBTIQ+ people killed in the city in 2023, a 311% increase compared to 2022 (El Colombiano, 2024).

The school space has also been no stranger to the social reproduction of these forms of economic organisation of the territory:

> In our time in Medellín, beautiful girls from lower-income communities were the girlfriends, mistresses and sex objects of thugs, by hook or by crook. But now, things are even worse. Nowadays, girls are not the sexual objects of the thugs, but they are one of the main economic mechanisms of criminal organisations, because they are merchandise to be sold to third parties. That's why interfering in this trade means looking for problems with all the criminal organisations. And we know that in educational institutions we have many such girls. It is very common for us to see girls involved in these platforms where they sell and do business with foreigners, and they are offering them the financial support of their families. So, these are the circumstances that a teacher must face, this is why what we do is countercultural. The question arises whether the responsibility lies with the teacher. We are talking about a society that is corrupt.
>
> MOVA Focus Group

The perception of risk in this situation is greater because, as the teacher mentions, it is not only about gangs that control the neighbourhoods, but also about large criminal organisations that operate in the city and establish armed control over bodies, identities and territories. It is for this reason that the countercultural pedagogical practices to which this teacher refers are very particular, because they confront the explicit contradiction between the offer of economic opportunities in the context of the city's sex trade and the questions proposed by this gender approach about the sexualisation and objectification of the female body. It is a counter-cultural discourse because it involves questioning the rationale that gives rise to and enables the sex trade, and all the economic and political arrangements in which it participates. In this and similar circumstances, talk of gender, equity or the need to transform the patriarchy, machismo or gender norms puts at risk teachers and students who feel challenged or motivated by such reflection and action.

In this context, we find teachers' networks that are highly connected to the city's government, to the activities that are promoted and to the public policies that are, in fact, implemented. These networks meet regularly at MOVA's premises and develop their activities in coordination with the work of the Secretariat of Education, the Secretariat of Women's Affairs and the programmes proposed by the different local administrations to address issues of inclusion and diversity.

Mapping the multiplicity of dimensions of risk that teachers face because of their activism reveals at least two major issues. First, that the pedagogical practices and political actions of the teachers in this study are the result of reflexive processes, situated and committed to the complex reality of their environments. These processes of analysis are promoted in spaces of collective construction, self- and co-training, political resistance, and have been made possible thanks to the emergence of networks and teaching advocacy groups whose expertise lies precisely in this type of pedagogical knowledge, anchored in the school experience.

Second, that discussions on the transformation of gender relations in schools have prioritised normative development and teacher training, to the detriment of the promotion of actions that make visible the structural factors at the school, community, institutional and social levels that have contributed to the reproduction of the hegemonic gender regime, as explained in detail in this section.

6.4 Fictions

In addition to pedagogical practices, teacher training experiences and the risks associated with these exercises, this research investigated the fictional narratives that have emerged in the different networks and advocacy groups. This production of fictional narratives about what might be possible aims to broaden the repertoires of understanding the real, as it involves investigating the meanings that inspire these experiences and that enunciate the hypotheses of imagined futures that run through these practices. In her work with marginalised communities in India, Veena Das develops both an epistemic and methodological notion to describe this layer of reality. For her, in everyday life, people navigate adversity through fictions that allow them to act as if everything is going to be okay (2020).

In the following, we want to explore the fictions that emerged both in the conversations with the teachers' networks and in those that are the result of a space invented to create them collectively. Beyond the demands, beyond the roundtables with the institutions, beyond the complaints about the delays in the processes of denouncing gender-based violence, beyond the strategic, we found points in common about the idea of making the school a space for life:

> I think we really need to make an educational revolution. We have a neoliberal curriculum that is convenient to the system, but when the school administration allows it, we can do many other things. What we are doing with this kind of gender training, as well as the restorative school justice training (which goes in the context of the Peace Accord and the Special Justice for Peace), and the campaigns we have launched, is valuable for life. The impact it has is impressive, and it is also impressive to see how girls, boys and young people can learn and transform themselves.
>
> Red Mujeres Jóvenes Atlántico Focus Group

Implicit in this statement is that the issue of gender in school is not just another topic or, at least, it is not experienced as such in pedagogical practices. Rather, education on gender norms has made it possible to link the daily lives of girls and young women to both structural issues in the national context and to the context of the Peace Agreement and its effects on restorative school justice (JER). By addressing issues such as school conflicts, memory exercises on the violence associated with the armed conflict or the relationship practices in the classroom from a gender perspective, the teachers are putting into circulation an idea of the school space that puts lives and bodies at the centre.

This exercise of putting life at the centre of fictions about school was reiterated in the Pedagogical Forum on Teacher Training in Gender Equity, to which the participants were invited as part of this research project. This event was attended by all the people who participated in the study, both in the interviews and in the focus groups, as well as parents, students and doctoral researchers whose theses are related to the topic. The aim was to collectively imagine other ways of being, relating and taking care of one another in school spaces based on the experiences of each one of them. Methodologically, the event took place in two stages. The first consisted of a work of fictionalisation, which the participants attended according to their own experiences and interests. This resulted in the configuration of diverse groups, composed of teachers, caregivers, students, experts and public

officials. In the second stage, the participants were asked to propose ways of cooperation that could bring us temporally and materially closer to the fictions they imagined.

In the socialisation of the work by axes, this idea of ordering the school space around life, care and the forms of relationships that make up who we are within the school came up explicitly. This emphasis on relationships was made clear through the cartographic exercise carried out by one of the groups:

Illustration 5: Mapping the school for life

The image shows three concentric circles that refer to the classroom, the school and the territory, respectively. The metaphor of the circle alludes to the Circle of the Word,[8] where deep listening and the collective construction of knowledge are at the centre. These circles symbolise horizontal relationships based on respect and collaboration, represented in the image by the hands of all participants. The central point of all the circles is life, represented by a tree leaf that asks the question: 'Who are we?'

Among the main features that the participants included in this fiction about the school, the following stand out:

• School without walls, neither physical nor disciplinary: School life is organised from everyday life, through fields of thought that respond to the needs of life and around the dynamics of the production of bodies, emotions and relationships.

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8   The 'Circle of the Word' is an ancient practice of indigenous communities that celebrates the deep connection between humans, nature and the cosmos. This ritual, rooted in spirituality and respect for Mother Earth, emphasises the union of all the elements of the universe. Through the circle, the Muisca (an indigenous community located in the Cundiboyacense highlands) recognise the importance of sacred plants and the interdependence of all living beings. This ancient practice is an example of how ancestral wisdom can offer valuable insights into the relationship between humans and the natural environment (Majín Melenje, 2018).

- Situated, cooperative, loving and caring school: School is oriented towards recognition of the other, listening, recognition of diversity, hospitality, spirituality, coexistence, flexibility and readiness to change.

- School rooted in the territory: Responsibility and reciprocity between the community and the school are promoted.

In this fiction, it is striking that putting life itself at the centre implies trying to answer the question 'who are we'. It is a question that is constantly asked in teaching practice; it is the recurrent question of girls and young women in the daily life of the school, the question of those who are perceived to be 'abnormal' in school spaces, the question that the teachers ask themselves about their own role in the school, in the education of these children and young people, physically and mentally: who are we in this gender-based school regime that produces and reproduces so much violence? What is our role?

Answering this question would seem to be the central objective of school life. What is interesting is that, for the teachers who participated in this exercise, it is discussions from a gender perspective that can contribute to addressing it. It is key to note that, in their fiction, the gender perspective is not perceived as a specific content, but as an analytical tool in epistemic, political and pedagogical terms. When they refer to the 'school without walls', they not only question the separation between community life and school life, but also the fragmentation of knowledge inherent in the disciplinary curriculum. This epistemic dimension of the gender perspective has been addressed in the field of education as a commitment to transdisciplinarity, which aims to break with the objectivist pretensions of the inherited conception of science to include voices and points of view historically marginalised from this canon (Harding, 1986/1996; Haraway, 1995; Schmitz and Nikoleyczik, 2009).

But it is also an analytical key in political terms, since it aims to break with the verticality of the school and, rather, to produce, through the image of the circle, another type of more horizontal and diverse relations, as well as concern for all differences. The gender perspective thus constitutes a reference that problematises the significant relational dynamics of power (Scott, 1986), in which bodies, opinions, practices and natures are subordinated by feminising them. Thus, proposing a loving and caring school implies a fundamental revision of established hierarchies in order to create a school space in which 'we all learn from each other'.

Finally, we find that the gender perspective is also incorporated as an analytical key in pedagogical terms: by emphasising the place of vulnerability in which the teaching bodies find themselves, these teachers deploy practices of care in pedagogical relations which, in turn, become powerful theories of change that they fictionalise.

This corporal cartography of the teaching body (see Illustration 6), which literally hurts due to the multiplicity of risks and violence in which it is immersed, shows us that it is the careful embrace of collective work that repairs and heals the wounds, while at the same time sinking its roots in school spaces. These pedagogies of care, which unfold through exercises of empathy, openness and repair, challenge the gendered school regime precisely by virtue of the vulnerability from which they understand and relate to the fragilities and violence experienced by other beings, bodies and knowledges (Butler, 2004).

Illustration 6: Mapping of the teaching staff
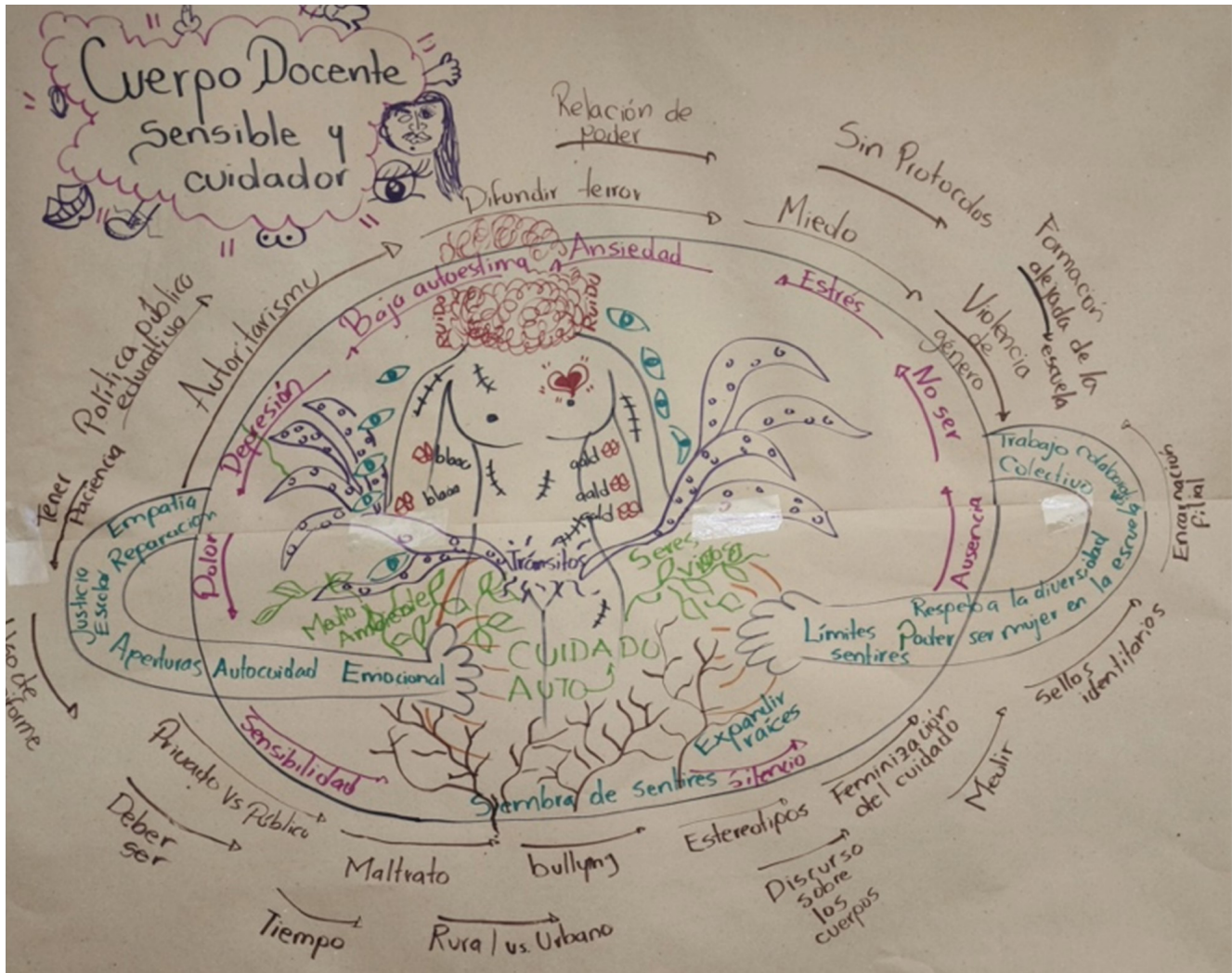
In conclusion, what is interesting about this fictional exercise is that it does not only refer to future projects, but to resources that are already present in school daily life, manifesting themselves in pedagogical practices that challenge the gender regime by sinking their roots into very different ways of understanding the school space.

7 Conclusion

This research began by questioning the usual notion that focuses on the relationship between gender, education and school, on the ignorance or lack of capacity of teachers to achieve the task of making education the priority instrument for changing unequal gender relations. On the contrary, we sought to draw attention to the practices that are already being implemented by teachers committed to the issue, and to the knowledge they possess to transform these situations.

Teacher training on gender is a complex and multi-layered issue, ranging from the need for basic and up-to-date information on basic concepts of the subject or pedagogical strategies to address it, to the professional and appropriate handling of highly sensitive issues, with direct effects on the lives of students, teachers and families. Undoubtedly, training is fundamental. However, it is not a matter of content like any other subject, reducible to simple information, but of a profound questioning of the power relations that permeate the school. Thus, those who take on this commitment face risks and threats, especially in a context of long-standing resistance from various sectors, and limited and intermittent institutional attention, as noted in the analysis of education policies on sexuality. Such challenges are actualised in the current environment, where school and education are a contested arena for protests and debates around the contents, meanings and implications of teaching to challenge gender orders that maintain, reproduce and actualise gender injustices.

From a legal and public policy perspective, Colombia has a regulatory framework that has made a variety of commitments to gender equality, as well as to eradicating gender-based violence, discrimination and injustice in schools. Many of these legal changes have come from 'below', that is, from the mobilisation of teachers and students seeking to change the reality of gender in schools. However, some of these initiatives have generated a backlash, as mentioned in relation to anti-gender protests.

As was discussed when talking about sexual and gender education policies, this legal ordinance does not always translate into specific plans and programmes that implement these commitments into reality for students, teachers and the educational community. In addition to the lack of political will to implement actions, as was observed in the case of sexual education policies, each national or municipal government decides whether to continue with the actions, given Colombia's lack of long-term policies. At the time of writing, the current Bogotá administration had 'disallowed' a document on 'pedagogical strategies designed for the inclusion and implementation of Bogotá's LGBTI public policy approach in the institutional education plans of the District's educational institutions, with special emphasis on sexuality education and citizenship education' (El Espectador, 2024). While administrations are autonomous in their policy orientation, such actions send mixed messages about the possibility of achieving cumulative and sustainable progress. Moreover, the impact on those who mobilise on these issues is high, as 'disempowering' implies a delegitimisation of these issues.

With these legal developments, schools and their teachers have been assigned tasks that include teaching these issues within the framework of rights and the constitutional order, which implies additional commitments in the implementation of other policies, such as the duty of teachers to report cases of sexual and gender-based violence. These responsibilities require initial and ongoing training, as well as sustained follow-up with sufficient and adequate resources, which is not always guaranteed.

In terms of training, this study has found that, although there is a range of courses, diplomas and graduate programmes on the subject, such training is elective and more advanced in cities such as Bogotá, which has more sustained policies, while in other cities, such as Barranquilla or Medellín, the offer is intermittent or partial. Furthermore, the training is mostly undertaken by teachers who already have an interest in the subject, as incentives to participate are limited. As for support, this has been rather occasional and focused on showing progress on indicators related to gender education. Yet

there are major lags in the implementation of the normative frameworks that regulate such support. An example of this is the lack of a national policy on education for gender equality, led by the Ministry of Education, which could combine the various isolated actions on this issue.

Despite these problems with training provision, this research highlights a wealth of initiatives led mainly by women teachers, who demonstrate their commitment to change in their daily practice in schools. Such is the case of the networks and advocacy groups of teachers who participated in this study, and who, from their activism, champion actions that range from the classroom, the school and the union to the shaping of public policies, as described in the pedagogical practices and in Annex 4. These experiences are the result of creativity, research, a constant reading of their environments, and ongoing dialogue and listening with their students. The teachers have taken on training on these issues from a teaching activism that stems from an understanding of their work as a public responsibility and a political action aimed at social transformation.

This activism becomes a pedagogical action that goes beyond the training they may have received at universities or in their professional practice by institutions. Both in the interviews and in other research, it was found that training on gender issues in curricular programmes is still limited, emerging only in recent years. It is not always part of the curricula and, when it is, it is mostly concentrated on teachers who are training for social studies subjects, with a limited presence in other subjects. Although the training provided by the government is recognised as relevant, it tends to be carried out from the perspective of experts who do not always have classroom experience. It is also conducted in languages and according to logics that do not necessarily connect with teachers, which generates a sense of distance or strangeness. As a result, in the case of both trainee and in-service teachers, training on these subjects depends more on personal interest and the resources available to each person. In other words, it ends up being a burden and a responsibility for those who feel challenged by the subject, rather than a task undertaken institutionally and collectively.

This also exposes teachers to various risks in different arenas, as follows:

1. **School**: The risk of being persecuted and criminalised for their work in denouncing situations of violence that have become naturalised.

2. **Community**: The risk of being threatened for confronting the value systems of their peers, family and community, and for teaching their students to do the same.

3. **Education system**: The risk of implementing current public policy autonomously when the institutional framework is ambiguous in this regard and does not have protocols in place to protect teachers who do so.

4. **Social and armed conflict**: The risk of being threatened or killed by organised criminal gangs, for whom the existing gender order is a fundamental part of their territorial control and economic activities.

There are important differences between the cities of Bogotá, Medellín and Barranquilla. In Bogotá, over the last 10 years, there has been consistent progress in teacher training with a gender and sexuality perspective, thanks to the implementation of public strategies such as the Education Plan for Gender Equality Mainstreaming, which runs from 2014 to 2024, as well as initiatives self-managed by teachers and promoted by various NGOs. These efforts reflect a clear institutional commitment to integrate these perspectives into teacher education. In contrast, progress in Medellín and especially in Barranquilla has been more limited. In both cities, there is no evident commitment on the part of public institutions, particularly the Secretariats of Education, to guarantee teacher training and updating on gender and sexuality issues.

In addition, sub-national armed conflict and political dynamics create a more challenging environment for advancing the gender agenda, especially for grassroots teachers' organisations operating in more popular neighbourhoods. Although throughout the country teachers promoting these activities may face risks, these risks are more accentuated in Medellín and Barranquilla, where there is greater social control by neo-paramilitary armed organisations and organised crime groups, such as the 'combos' in Medellín. This generates an additional risk factor that discourages teachers, school administrators, students and other members of educational institutions from participating in these issues.

Teaching from a gender perspective – and not only addressing issues of gender and sexuality related to reproductive behaviour, but also promoting equality and questioning roles and stereotypes – challenges established orders and implies significant changes. This is even more complex in a context such as Colombia's, where the armed conflict has turned schools into battlegrounds. Disruption of school routines is one of the first actions of armed groups, while teachers have been subjected to threats and direct violence, particularly when discussing issues of gender and sexuality. This is not only the case in rural areas, but also in urban areas where criminal groups control the daily life of communities and may perceive the teaching of gender as a threat to their control over young girls, as some of the interviewees pointed out. The risk can even reach inside the school, as teachers who address these issues are seen as a 'problem' when they denounce the gender-based violence that takes place there, exercised by their peers and other actors.

Even so, teachers working on these issues imagine, construct and propose a different school. In the focus groups and during the forum, it was possible to observe that, beyond the logic of requests, programmes or work agendas oriented towards products and objectives, the teachers are fictionalising, in the sense of expanding what is possible: a different school, a school for life based on a position and a question about gender. Such a question and positioning imply that the issue of gender in school is not just another subject to be resolved in curricula or teaching topics, but that it links both the daily life of the school and structural issues of the national context, such as the context of the Peace Accord or the violence experienced in communities. Furthermore, as fiction, it raises the possibility of ordering the school space around life, care and the forms of relationships that constitute who we are within the school.

7.1   Public policy and educational recommendations

The epistemological and ethical stance of this research also has implications in terms of relating to teachers' pedagogical knowledge as expert knowledge, with its own logic, authorship, authority and legitimacy. This implies, when thinking about further developments or areas of work, avoiding the instrumentalisation of their knowledge, decontextualising or standardising it in such a way as to deny their agency as protagonists of that knowledge and experience.

Based on the above, we propose the following areas of work that can be supported or developed by institutions, development cooperation agencies or academia:

Faculty

- Promoting spaces for reflection: Teachers can promote and strengthen spaces for reflection and dialogue for teachers, where they can share experiences, challenges and effective strategies in the promotion of gender equality and strengthen their collective action. As found in this research, working collectively, whether through groups or networks, has been fundamental as a space for ongoing training, knowledge sharing, co-creation of experiences, and emotional, professional and political support. This is especially relevant for an issue such as transforming gender injustices and promoting equitable and just relationships, given its impact on the whole

school community. These initiatives may take the form of networks, communities of practice, training of trainers or other strategies to promote collective work, and may be promoted at the local, regional, national or international levels.

- Situated research: Teachers can carry out situated research that proposes pedagogical practices that, by reading the complex organisation of the social, school, political and community environment, develop alternatives for working both with teachers who explicitly oppose gender equality issues and with parents who may pose a risk to students who question the power arrangements in their homes. This research can emerge from the graduate programmes that teachers undertake and can be considered as transformative actions in the school spaces where these teachers have an impact.

Communities and civil society

- Educational communities can involve parents' and caregivers' organisations, as well as the wider educational community, in gender equality initiatives and programmes. Although the critical positions of some of these organisations, as mentioned by those interviewed, may impede action, they also indicate their concern about these issues. While there are risks and opposition to the work of committed teachers from sectors of the educational community, this same community can act as protectors and be co-responsible in the implementation of these changes. As illustrated in one of the initiatives, parents' schools can be relevant spaces for reflection and collective training; therefore, it should be a priority of the schools' administration to promote the participation of these groups.

- Social organisations and activists working on issues of gender equality or violence against women can create citizen watchdogs[9] and other participatory bodies to ensure that the State fulfils its commitments. These organisations can collectively evaluate the actions undertaken and make explicit strategies to improve performance on these issues, particularly in relation to the protection of teachers and the development of protocols for care and prevention of violence against them.

Ministry and Secretariats of Education

- It is necessary to create a mechanism that articulates the variety of actions carried out by institutions in this regard, that contrasts them with the legal commitments acquired and identifies the areas where development or implementation is lacking. This instrument should also facilitate the necessary dialogue between public policies, as training, education and gender issues do not only appear in education policies, but also in other related policies. This could take the form of a national public policy towards gender equality in education or another mechanism at the national level that monitors progress and shortcomings in the fulfilment of commitments in this area and coordinates policies. This implies the allocation of specific financial resources and responsible and qualified personnel. In this context, and at the Bogotá level, it is vital to promote the updating of the Educational Plan for Gender Equality Mainstreaming (PETIG) 2014–2024.

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9 Citizen oversight mechanisms are participatory mechanisms through which citizens or organised groups monitor and control public administration, with the aim of ensuring transparency and compliance with laws and policies. A specific example would be a group of gender activists organising a citizen watchdog to monitor the implementation of the gender and sexuality approach in schools. This group would be in charge of ensuring that educational institutions comply with public policy guidelines, such as teacher training and the inclusion of gender equality and sexual diversity content in curricula, checking that these measures are correctly applied and reach the classrooms.

- These institutions can create incentives for research and creation in gender training or for teacher training in these areas, evaluating the   progress made by previous administrations and committed teachers. They can also facilitate exchanges of experiences between local governments and teacher networks. The Bogotá Secretariat of Education, for example, has extensive experience in these matters, which may be of interest to others if experience sharing between institutions is promoted.

- In an environment of such opposition and risk, there is a high cost to training or leading action, and such commitment needs to be recognised and supported. Teacher training schemes provided by the Secretariats of Education   can not only expand provision in these areas, but also give them recognition beyond their importance for intellectual development. Incentive schemes are needed for those who are trained in these issues, which may include initiatives already underway, such as funding for graduate programmes or recognition of the non-formal training that teachers undertake in their daily work.

- These institutions can convene spaces for collective and intersectoral work to integrate gender and sexuality education into the curriculum. Although this is a nodal aspect on which almost all the actors involved in this study converge, there is no consensus on how this curricular process can operate within the current legal framework. Here it is important to consider that it is not just another topic to be included in the form of a new subject, but that it should operate in a cross-cutting and transdisciplinary way in the school experience. It is worth noting that efforts in this area, related to the implementation of restorative school justice, are showing very interesting results.

Universities

- Universities can promote the creation of courses with a focus on gender, diversity and inclusion in teacher training programmes, both for undergraduate and graduate courses. Many of the teachers involved in this research reported having participated in these kinds of courses and derived from them research projects that they continue to develop in their schools. This commitment to undergraduate and postgraduate training can become a key scenario for boosting this approach in elementary, middle and higher education, thanks to the role it plays as an incentive for promotion in the teaching profession.

- Universities can promote or sponsor the creation of a Network for Gender Equality in Education, in which actors from the entire educational sector participate. In addition, they can organise periodic meeting activities, such as an international conference, where experiences, proposals and theories on the subject are presented. This could also serve as a national and international coordination activity.

International cooperation

- International cooperation agencies and foundations can provide funds to promote action/research/creation-oriented teacher education in countries of the Global South, where resources for and sustainability of these initiatives are limited, unstable or may even be at odds with the interests and agendas of the governments of the day.

- International agencies can propose including a specific indicator for female teachers in the periodic evaluations carried out by different organisations on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This is crucial, not only because teaching is a feminised profession, but also because of the complexity

of the violence teachers face in promoting social and educational transformation of the conditions that reproduce violence against all women. In addition to permanent monitoring by the international community, it is necessary to implement special protection programmes for female teachers who are threatened, whether by parents, teachers' managers, armed groups or criminal gangs.

- NGOs and international cooperation agencies can propose actions to provide support when women teachers are threatened. To do this, it is necessary to make the violence they face visible, generate actions for attention and prevention, and facilitate support and complaint mechanisms with the corresponding entities. In addition, NGOs can support the work of women teachers with activities in schools to talk about gender equality.

Coordination of actors

- It is essential to promote cooperation between different actors (institutions, teaching staff, social and community organisations, unions, research groups and NGOs) to advance the agenda proposed here.

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Annexes

Annex 1 Methodology

Interview participants

Profile	Institution	Position
Public policy researcher in education	District/municipal education secretary	Programme coordinator in sexuality education
Multilateral agency actor	UN System Agency in Colombia	Program Manager in education
Policy maker and researcher	District/municipal education secretary	Director
NGO Actor and Activist	National NGO	Director and founder
Activist	District/municipal education secretary	Teacher
Activist	District/municipal education secretary	Teacher
University programme manager	Private university	Undergraduate Director
Researcher	Private university	Professor
Researcher	Public university	Internship Coordinator
Researcher	Public university	Professor

About the forum

The forum was conceived as a scenario of fictionalisation as used by Donna Haraway (1995). For her, fictionalisation aims to link the capacity to imagine alternative futures and explore possibilities beyond the known, to question existing power structures, to represent the complexity and interconnectedness of social and natural systems and to envision more just and equitable futures. The aim of this activity was to explore how the pedagogical practices of the teachers are already producing new forms of schools.

The Pedagogical Forum was organised around three main axes:

- **A safe school:** for this first axis, we invited them to discuss the conditions that today pose risks at school. From there, we imagine a safe school, one in which these risks can be widely discussed to generate strategies for care and human safety.

- **Sensitive and caring teaching staff:** for this second axis, we invite teachers to discuss the conditions of the teaching staff that educate in schools today. In this discussion, we share experiences of awareness-raising with the aim of imagine a teaching profession committed to education on issues of gender, sexuality and diversity.

- **Responsible and welcoming institutionality:** for this third axis, we invite teachers to discuss the legal and institutional challenges faced by the implementation of current regulations on these issues. Based on this analysis, we imagine an institutional environment that responsibly assumes the challenges that today's schools propose.

Appendix 2

Legal frameworks

Laws	Relevance for teacher training
Law 51 of 1981 approving the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.	It recognises the responsibility of the State in transforming the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with the aim of eliminating prejudices and customary practices (Article 5, paragraph a.) and commits to guaranteeing access to education for men and women, reducing the female dropout rate and ensuring equal opportunities. Furthermore, the Law commits the State to eliminate gender stereotypes in education by modifying teaching methods and materials and providing information on family planning (art. 10).
Political Constitution of the Republic of Colombia (1991)	Relevant articles: 13 (equality before the law and non-discrimination); 15 (protects the right to privacy); 16 (right to free development of personality); 18 (right to freedom of conscience), 27 (freedoms of teaching, learning, research and professorship); 42 (equal rights and duties of family members); 43 (prohibits discrimination towards women); 44 (children's right to comprehensive education and free opinion); 67 (the purpose of education is to form citizens respectful of human rights, peace and democracy); 68 (the State must guarantee the professionalization and dignity of the teaching profession, in order to ensure the ethical and pedagogical suitability of teachers).
Law 115 of 1994, General Education Law	It regulates the Colombian general education system as a public service that fulfils a social function. Several articles address related issues: 13 (speaks of "equity between the sexes" and affirms that educational institutions must provide sex education); 14 (ordering sex education as compulsory in the country's educational institutions).
Law 248 of 1995 subscribing the International Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, signed in Belem Do Para, Brazil, on 9 June 1994.	The law condemns sexual violence perpetrated within educational institutions and recognises the right of women to a life free of violence, including the "right of women to be valued and educated free of stereotyped patterns of behaviour and social and cultural practices based on concepts of inferiority or subordination" (Article 6, paragraph b.). It is the duty of the State to promote knowledge about women's rights and violence against women through governmental and private education programmes. Likewise, "to modify the socio-cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, including the design of appropriate formal and non-formal education programmes at all levels of the educational process, to counteract prejudices and customs and all other types of practices based on the premise of the inferiority or superiority of either gender or on stereotyped roles for men and women that legitimise or exacerbate violence against women" (Article 8). (Article 8).

Law 51 of 1981, Law 248 of 1995, and Law 823 of 2003.	Legal frameworks that commit the State to carry out educational practices aimed at promoting changes in patriarchal practices and discourses and eliminating stereotypes and prejudices.
Law 581 of 2000, Law 248 of 1995, Law 823 of 2003.	Legal frameworks that commit the state to promote gender equality education and guarantee resources for it.
Childhood and Adolescence Code, Decree 2968 of 2010, Law 51 of 1981, Law 1146 of 2007, Law 1622 of 2013.	Legal frameworks on childhood that commit the State to guarantee sex education for children and adolescents, to denounce violence through adequate teacher training.
Law 1257 of 2008, which establishes rules for awareness-raising, prevention and punishment of forms of violence and discrimination against women, reforms the Criminal Procedure Code, Law 294 of 1996 and establishes other provisions.	It states that the state must take actions that "contribute to raising awareness, training and educating the educational community, especially teachers, students and parents, on the issue of violence against women" (Article 11).
Law 1620 of 2013 or School Coexistence Law	Creates the National System of School Coexistence and Training for the Exercise of Human, Sexual and Reproductive Rights and the Prevention and Mitigation of School Violence. Its purpose is to train citizens respectful of human, sexual and reproductive rights, who contribute to the construction of a participatory and pluralistic democracy. This law establishes the responsibility of educational institutions at all levels to create School Coexistence Committees, made up of directors, teachers and members of the student body. These committees must design education and prevention programmes against bullying and deal with situations that threaten school coexistence.

Annex 3

Policies on sexuality education and its relation to gender and teacher training

National public policies on sexuality education	Relevance for teacher training
National Sex Education Plan (PNES), 1991	The PNES aimed to educate in attitudes and values that promote gender equality, autonomy and responsibility, harmonious coexistence and sexual health. The policy included as a specific objective to generate reflection among teachers on their attitudes and values regarding sexuality and to increase their levels of information on the subject. To this end, a training plan for facilitators led by non-governmental organisations with experience in sexuality education was planned. The teachers who educate on the subject had to be "attentive to the participants' needs for information, clarification and precision of concepts, as well as to the importance of stimulating their skills" (p. 32).

National Sex Education Project (PrNES), 1993	This policy focused on training for responsibility and autonomy, based on affection and equality between people. One of its specific objectives was for students to assume "a critical attitude towards cultural stereotypes of both feminine and masculine behaviour" (art. 2). It established a coordination and advisory mechanism from the central level, committed to the elaboration of working guides to illustrate its implementation, and mentioned the promotion of human sexuality education within teacher training programmes.
Sexuality Education and Citizenship Building Programme (PESCC), 2006	In the programme, sexuality education, sexual and reproductive rights, as well as the right to gender equality, are understood as key aspects in the formation of a new citizenship. The PESCC "seeks to develop competencies in men and women so that they do not repeat traditional roles and build new conditions that favour equality and equity among people" (Guide 1, p. 12). The programme is based on the category of "cultural gender behaviours", which it defines as culturally constructed characteristics [that] can be modified towards increasingly equitable and inclusive forms, a transformation that should be an end in any pedagogical project of sexuality education and citizenship building" (Guide 1, p. 16). The programme has a specific gender focus in which it seeks to empower women's participation in decision-making that affects them, as well as to transform gender roles so that they are more egalitarian and less violent. "We start from a conception of women and men as free and equal in dignity and, therefore, as active social subjects of law. This conception advocates equity between women and men, free and equal beings in dignity and active social subjects of law through the development of citizenship competencies." (Guide 1, p. 12)

Annex 4

Pedagogical practices

These practices were identified in publications of the journal <u>Educación y Ciudad of the Instituto para la Investigación Educativa y el Desarrollo Pedagógico</u> (IDEP) of the Secretaría Distrital de Educación de Bogotá. The journal disseminates and socialises processes and results of research led by teachers, pedagogical experiences, educational, didactic and pedagogical knowledge. It is offered as illustrative information on the subject, without claiming to be exhaustive.

Keywords or name	Year and duration	Educational institution	Teacher	Level	Description	Ref.
femininity, stereotypes, gender roles	4 years from 2020	Carlo Federici	Ruby Eraso Symonds	Secondary	A series of practices are proposed in which students discuss stereotypes through iconography of toys, songs and magazine images to understand in depth the idea of femininity and how so-called feminine bodies should act in a society based on roles and stereotypes.	https://www.educacionbogota.edu.co/portal_institucional/noticia/ciudad-maestra-promoviendo-inclusion-desde-perspectiva-de-genero-escuela
Gender, culture of peace, conflict resolution	3 years From 2021	CEDID San Pablo (Bosa)	Yisela Pulido Velásquez	Primary school and pre-school	The project invites to reflect on gender issues from the perspective of creating a more peaceful school. It focuses on how gender affects the ways in which school is inhabited, such as the playgrounds, bathrooms and corridors, calls attention to the conflicts such divisions are creating and invite to suggest new ways to live school spaces.	https://www.educacionbogota.edu.co/portal_institucional/noticia/ciudad-maestra-promoviendo-inclusion-desde-perspectiva-de-genero-escuela

gender perspective, classroom practice, sexual violence	2 years From 2022	La Palestina School	Lorena Cabrera Rodríguez	Secondary school	Reflective and pedagogical practice that aims to combat the silences that surround sexual violence.	https://www.educacionbogota.edu.co/portal_institucional/noticia/ciudad-maestra-promoviendo-inclusion-desde-perspectiva-de-genero-escuela
school, masculinity, upbringing, gender, new masculinities	6 years Since 2018	INEM Francisco de Paula Santander School	Carlos Borja	Primary school and preschool	School for fathers and men where dialogue focuses on new masculinities according to the role of fathers in school and co-responsibility in raising children.	https://www.educacionbogota.edu.co/portal_institucional/noticia/ciudad-maestra-promoviendo-inclusion-desde-perspectiva-de-genero-escuela
Gender, female empowerment	6 years Since 2018	INEM Santiago Pérez School	Yeins Paola Mendez Prado	Secondary	Pedagogical proposal based on the empowerment of female students through training, education and management of spaces for student and citizen participation.	https://revistas.idep.edu.co/index.php/mau/article/view/2903
Gender, childhood, sex education, school	6 years Since 2018	Juana Escobar School	Kelly Johana Pulido	Primary school and preschool	The project promotes the importance of making comprehensive sex education possible at school in its different grades or levels, arguing that by integrating sex education in the classroom, the rates of teenage pregnancies and cases of sexual violations or harassment are significantly reduced.	https://repositorio.idep.edu.co/handle/001/2598
Gender, conflict, gender identity	5 years From 2019	Altamira Southeast School	Ana Paola Ortega	Primary school	The project reflects on how gender roles and prejudices affects everyday life in schools creating the idea that there are places in the school that are exclusively for women and others for men. Play is used to promote new knowledge about gender.	https://descubridor.idep.edu.co/Record/oai:revistas.idep.edu.co:articleojs-2905/Description

Education, sexuality, sexual relations, gender equality	4 years From 2020	Gerardo Paredes	Nohora Alicia Acevedo Oviedo	Secondary	This initiative aims to discuss the ways in which students relate to each other in the classroom and how these interactions refer to romantic love. It also demystifies sexuality in school, through pedagogical actions that link comprehensive sexuality education and a gender approach in education.	https://descubridor.idep. edu.co/Record/ir-001-2387
Education stem, feminism, gender, feminism, women, empowerment	5 years From 2019	Menorah School	Adriana Paola Gonzalez Valcárcel	Secondary	PrinCiencias: science is a girl thing too is a project that encourages and motivates girls and young women to enhance their skills and competencies in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The aim is to highlight the role of women in science, calling on students to do science from a young age to lead to a greater number of students determined to study STEM careers.	https://scholar.google.es/ citations?view_op=view_ citation&hl=es&user=0bwh AwUAAAAJ&citation_for_ view=0bwhAwUAAAAJ:2os0 gNQ5qMEC
Art, gender, education	3 years From 2021	Tibabuyes Universal School (IED)	Sthepanny Parra Ordoñez	Young people of different ages and academic levels	This initiative aims to enable students and teachers to approach the ideas they have about gender and how they are used in their work. It also promotes new understandings of this category that they can use in their pedagogical practices.	https://repositoriosed. educacionbogota. edu.co/entities/ publication/31dab880-3a96- 431a-bacf-e8fb1cbe2ebf
Women, science, gender, empowerment, women's studies, women's studies	3 years From 2021	La Toscana School - Lisboa IED	Adriana Lucía Alvarez Bautista	Secondary	Pedagogical proposal that emphasises the practices of science from the knowledge of female scientists to promote female empowerment and create new female role models.	https://repositorio.idep.edu. co/handle/001/2626

Serendipity: a walk among masks	4 years From 2020	Maria Cano School IED	Fanny Rueda Pacheco	Secondary	A project of artistical creation, in which several art practices such as literature, visual arts or performance are used to understand gender identity and to reflect on the categories and social roles assigned.	https://repositorio.idep.edu.co/handle/001/2626
Curricular Integration of Sexual Citizenship and the Gender and Differential Approach	11 years Since 2013	Gerardo Paredes IED	Luis Miguel Bermúdez Gutiérrez	Secondary	This project represents a pedagogical innovation in the field of Sexuality Education, designed on the interests and needs of the students. Its objectives include providing relevant and contextualised education, facilitating students' access to sexual and reproductive health services, fostering a school environment that respects differences, combating sexual and gender-based violence, and reducing teenage pregnancy. The programme achieved significant results in several areas: it improved school coexistence, reduced bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity, generated a culture of reporting to prevent abuse and sexual violence, and reduced early pregnancy by 90 per cent.	https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=dPsd_EIAAAAJ&hl=en
Boxes, houses, things and women's cases	3 years From 2021	Simón Rodríguez School IED	María Teresa Forero Duarte	Secondary	A pedagogical experience whose purpose is to stimulate the students memories through objects that generate meaning and that can question the identity, roles and gender stereotypes that impact school's everyday life.	https://repositorio.idep.edu.co/handle/001/2626

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