

Gender Inclusive Approaches to Tackle Gender Stereotypes, Prevent Violences and Promote Caring Masculinities

(The authors would like to thank the researcher Tiago Rolino(CES) for the support during the KINDER Project and inputs to this article.)

Tatiana Moura¹, Sofia Gonçalves²

¹Coordinator and Researcher Project Kinder, Co - coordinator of the Observatory Masculinidades. pt
Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra (CES - UC) PORTUGAL

ORCID iD
0000 - 0003 - 3189 - 4046
Email: [tatiana\[at\]ces.uc.pt](mailto:tatiana[at]ces.uc.pt)

²Project Kinder Researcher, Coimbra Superior School of Education (ESEC - IPC), Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra
(CES - UC) PORTUGAL

ORCID ID
6418 - EEDA - C7B5
Email: [sofiagoncalves\[at\]esec.pt](mailto:sofiagoncalves[at]esec.pt)

Abstract: *Gender - inclusive programmes are a crucial tool in combating entrenched gender stereotypes, preventing gender - based violence and promoting caring masculinities. These programmes seek to address gender inequality by recognising and challenging traditional notions of masculinity and femininity that have long persisted in society. First and foremost, these programmes focus on education and awareness - raising. Through education, they seek to empower people to understand and challenge gender stereotypes and their negative impacts. Gender equality awareness is promoted from an early age, instilling values of respect, empathy and equity in the younger generation. Prevention of gender - based violence is another key objective of these programmes. By challenging traditional norms of masculinity that often perpetuate violence, they work to reduce the incidence of gender - based assaults. It fosters a culture of consent and mutual respect, which contributes to the prevention of violence. In addition, it seeks to promote caring masculinities, which involve men actively in parenting, family care and emotional support. This not only benefits women by sharing the burden of unpaid work, but also enables men to develop healthier and more meaningful relationships. Gender - inclusive programmes (such as the KINDER Programme) are an important step towards building a more equal and just society, where people are free to be themselves without being constrained by gender stereotypes. Their impact is felt in interpersonal relationships, in the prevention of violence and in the creation of more positive and compassionate models of masculinity.*

Keywords: masculinities, gender equity, stereotypes, childhood, pedagogical resources, training.

1. Introduction and Objectives

Why do we still need to tackle gender stereotypes?

Gender stereotypes are characteristics which are generally considered natural (adopting an essentialist view) for both women and men. These preconceived characteristics are taught from birth to boys/girls by the toys they play with, by the colours they wear, but also by the messages that television, advertising, social networks, schools and families transmit every day. In the case of boys/men, they are placed from birth in what some author called the Masculinity Box (e. g. Heilman, Barker & Harrison, 2017) and will grow up adopting behaviours that fit expected gender norms dominant masculine ideals so that society clearly identifies them as men (Courtenay, 2000).

In 1995, Connell made a clear difference between masculinities, publishing some research about hegemonic masculinities (Raewyn Connel, 1995). They adopt reckless courage, aggressiveness, risky behaviours, feel the need to be the family provider, among others. Hegemonic masculinities that, as Miguel Vale de Almeida (2018) refers, determine the subordinate status of the feminine and the masculinities that are subaltern to them, such as non - violent and caring masculinities. In fact, gender and gender

relations are structured on the idea of power relations not only between masculinities and femininities, but also among masculinities themselves. The hegemonic ones, arising from the patriarchal power and corresponding to the characteristics of a reduced number of men, are in a position of supremacy in relation to the masculinities that are subordinated to them and to the femininities (Vale de Almeida, 1995).

Knowing that the concept of gender is, as Gisela Bock (1989) states, a social, cultural and historical construction and as such is present in all components of our lives, the stereotyped views of gender are part of our daily lives.

The role of Gender Transformative Programs and action research projects

Gender differences and hegemonic masculinities contribute to violent trajectories of life. In this sense, we need to focus on research - action projects that change the paradigm, namely the transformation of behaviors towards caring, equitable and non - violent masculinities.

When we look at past experiences carried by the team, we can identify some changes in attitudes and behaviours. We can give the example of the EQUI - X, where young people

Volume 12 Issue 11, November 2023

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(specially boys) changed their attitudes, in the applied post-test based on the internationally tested GEM scale by responding that they did not agree with the following statements: a man needs to be "tough" (61.1% to 80.6% and 74.1% to 92.6%, for boys and girls), boys who behave like girls are weak (63.9% to 83.3% and 88.9% to 100.0%, for boys and girls); and agreeing with: 'I don't need to use force to defend my reputation' (44.4% to 61.1% and 74.1% to 88.9%, for boys and girls) (Santos & Rolino, 2019: 26). These projects can contribute to improve public policies to prevent gender based violence and interrupt intra ad intergenerational transmission of violences.

In the case of the EQUI - X project, this project contributed to improve public policies in the area of gender equality with the resulting Manual for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Nonviolent Masculinities, which is one of the recommended resources for the discipline of Citizenship and Gender Equality, in Portugal. The second is the fact that, based on this project, the work on masculinities was included as an indicator in the Action Plan for Equality between Women and Men (PAIMH) of the National Strategy for Equality and Non - Discrimination (2018 - 2030).

In the case of the PARENT project, another European funded project to promote fatherhood and caring masculinities, the handbook and respective toolkit are fundamental contributions to public policies promoting conciliation of professional, personal and family life and gender equality. This is part of Strategic Aim no.5 of the Action Plan for Equality between Women and Men (PAIMH) of the National Strategy for Equality and Non - Discrimination 2018 - 2030, and is also Measure no.20 of the Programme for Conciliation of Professional, Personal and Family Life - 3 EM LINHA and Measure no.9.46 of the 2020 Activities Plan of the National Commission for Human Rights.

All these scientific and action oriented knowledge resulted in the creation of the Observatory masculinidades. pt (www.masculinidades.pt), which has as one of the main objectives monitor concrete and transformative actions in this field. From several projects, partnerships and national and international collaborations developed from the Centre for Social Studies (CES), this Observatory constitutes itself as a link between research on masculinities and the analysis of the main actions that, in Portugal, mobilize this field.

Moreover, it intends to go beyond the work already done and the systematisation of projects currently in progress on this theme. The aim is to develop new forms of interdisciplinary involvement of researchers, professionals from different areas (education, health, studies for peace and on violence, arts, culture and media) and different publics in initiatives that contribute (in knowledge and practices) to intersectional dialogues and to a critical reflection on masculinities, as structural expressions of the gender order and social relations, contributing to the promotion of inclusive and innovative anti - discrimination public policies.

In its specific axes - research, training and communication of science/involvement between science and society - the Observatory contributes to the development of transformative programmes of conceptions of masculinities and the analysis and construction of public policies and interventions based on empirical research with social impact and promoting close relations between science and civil society.

Research

- Developing diverse approaches to debates about masculinities through empirical, multi - and interdisciplinary and collaborative research.
- Articulating research with regular and systematic observation of initiatives and policies committed to impact on training and professional practices (e. g. in education and health).
- To contribute to the formulation of public policies, namely through monitoring and production of guidelines focused on the following thematic areas: Public policies; Childhood and deconstruction of stereotypes; Youth; Fatherhood and care; Global health and masculinities; Media and masculinities; Art, culture and urban powers; Masculinities, peace and violence.

In all our action - oriented projects we aim to engage children's families in the process of designing a comprehensive methodology. Involving the family is a way to promote a more egalitarian, democratic and participatory education, and their roles are even more central in current times. For example, in the case of the KINDER project (<https://kinder.ces.uc.pt/>) the main objectives were: 1) Targeting the potential reproduction and transmission of gender stereotypes by professionals in kindergarten and elementary schools at national level; 2) Promoting changes in attitudes towards gender stereotypes and sexism from an early age in and outside schools; 3) Developing and creating pedagogical material for teachers and other education agents on gender - sensitive pedagogy to promote gender equality and combat gender stereotypes; 4) To provide teachers with knowledge, skills and attitudes for a gender responsive pedagogy (while promoting a behavioural change of the still prevalent transmission of gender stereotypes by these professionals); 5) To promote an individual attitudinal change of the teaching staff; 6) To develop in a participatory methodology tools that can be used by schools.

The KINDER project as a case study

The education system is a key institution in promoting gender equality, combating sexism and gender stereotypes. Gender inclusive and gender transformative methodologies for youth have received substantial support during the last decade at global and EU level. However, effective gender - responsive and pedagogical tools targeting early ages face more challenges in terms of acceptance and integration, and are therefore a major gap in Europe.

To address this gap, the KINDER project developed inclusive methodologies based on Gender Responsive Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education. This refers to teaching and learning processes that pay attention to the specific needs of girls and boys, as well as to their specific contexts and backgrounds (e. g. migrant background,

disabilities, special needs, etc.). The methodology encompassed a gender approach in the processes of lesson planning, teaching, classroom management, and performance assessment. This means that education staff need to think about the socialisation of children and the cultural conditioning of their activities. This includes reviewing the language and approaches used in classrooms that can reproduce and reinforce negative gender attitudes.

We developed the methodology Programme KINDER¹ which consists of an evidence - based resource and was designed to be used by practitioners in their daily school activities (e. g. teaching, school management, etc.). The tools developed are easy to use and age - appropriate. The curriculum include sessions and resources for education professionals as well as families.

KINDER also evaluated its impact with regard to (1) the impact of the gender transformative methodologies targeting both education professionals and families and (2) the challenges, successes, and lessons learned from piloting for its scaling up at the European level.

As for the KINDER project training methodology, this included the design and planning of workshops with targeted schools to develop guidelines, response framework and implementation plans that address the transmission of gender stereotypes within the school context. These include training sessions with the staff of these institutions (e. g. kindergarten and primary school teachers, assistants, administrative staff, etc.) and families. To ensure its sustainability, KINDER will rely on the support of the national public authorities, namely the General Directorate of Education in Portugal, which considered it a good practice.

In addition, all our products are uploaded to an online repository where Programme KINDER and other educational materials (e. g. video) can be freely accessed, shared, and adopted internationally. The digital hub will become a global resource and connection point for education professionals.

In addition, KINDER, together with national authorities, implemented national awareness - raising campaigns. These will leverage existing national data and campaign materials to expand public awareness and gain a better understanding of the regional landscape.

In addition, existing partnerships and national authorities pursued training accreditation to enable educators trained in this curriculum to meet official professional development requirements and demonstrate additional proficiencies.

Both actions built the foundations for systemic change that will impact not only children, but also professionals, children's families and the educational institutions that influence and shape their lives. Our strategy was to build relationships and collaborate with appropriate national institutions shaping education and/or youth organisations operating at regional or national level.

¹<https://kinder.ces.uc.pt/resources/be-kinder-unravelling-paths-to-address-gender-stereotypes-in-education-and-early-childhood/>

2. Results and Discussion

The Council of Europe directs one of its guidelines to the need to "create learning contexts at school which focus on the needs and interests of girls and boys in relation to the problems affecting our societies; provide students with the means to develop and exercise democratic citizenship" (Council of Europe. Committee of Ministers, 2007), recognizing boys and girls as agents of social change. Citizenship implies the acceptance of equality of rights and duties for all; the acceptance of diversity respecting cultures, beliefs, religions and the acceptance of difference, rejecting any kind of discrimination, racism, sexism, etc.

The Portuguese Education System has been aware of these changes, responding with an educational reform that has been taking shape in several documents published in recent years - namely the Profile of the students at the end of compulsory education (ME - DGE, 2017), in the Essential Learning⁴ (ME - DGE, 2018) and in the National Strategy for Citizenship Education⁵ (ME - DGE, 2017) - , and that was pedagogically experimented through the Autonomy and Curricular Flexibility project in 2017, and extended to all schools by the Decree - Law 55/2018, of 6 July.

Education for Citizenship (EC) has been gaining importance, in Portugal and other countries, given the growing role of civil society in identifying and solving issues that affect individuals. These issues may be related to political, social, economic or environmental factors and, in order to be addressed in the best way, they imply the development of skills and attitudes. Although the path of CE has undergone advances and retreats in terms of its insertion in the school curriculum (Ribeiro et al., 2014), the main objective of CE is conscious participation is the participation of children and young people, as future citizens, in the public life of the country, through civil society institutions or defending the principles and values of democracy (Araújo, 2008). The author just quoted argues that for this, it is "necessary a process of learning, acquisition and development of civic skills" and it is this process that she calls citizenship education (Araújo, 2008, p.61).

With the entry into force of the Decree - Law no.55/2018, of 6 July, the subject of Citizenship and Development becomes transversal to all schools at national level, although some authors state that the Ministry of Education documents do not reflect a standardisation of conceptions or present "clarifying lines of how teachers can promote citizenship education in their teaching practice" (Ferreira, 2001).

Education for Gender Equality aims to encourage students to learn about the concept of Gender Equality. With that, it also seeks to promote women and girls' rights and gender equality in several levels - political, economic, social and cultural, contributing to the elimination of stereotypes. (DGE)

In view of the above, we intended to find out about actions to promote gender equality and practices to deconstruct stereotypes carried out by education professionals working in Portuguese primary schools. To this end, we asked education professionals to collaborate online by answering

17 brief questions. The online questionnaire for education professionals was composed of direct and open questions, in order to obtain the greatest number of responses from the participants.

This online questionnaire was answered by 445 education professionals, most of whom work as teachers.

The analysis of the answers to the questions showed that the participants consider that although gender equality is given importance in schools, more activities promoting gender equality are developed in the first years of school, with a decrease in practices from the 7th grade onwards. They also consider that there is a big gap at the level of pedagogical tools, resources and methodologies for the development of inclusive practices in the educational context. There is an urgent need for a collaborative space that integrates practical, interactive and appealing materials for the implementation of interdisciplinary and transversal activities.

3. Conclusions and Limitations

Gender stereotypes, besides being political, are also vectors of influence in inequalities between men and women, in the interpretation of violence and in the intra and inter-generational transmission of violence. Hegemonic masculinities contribute to this, perpetuating stereotyped gender roles which refer to male superiority and female subordinate roles, and which are reflected in violent behaviours, especially among men. With an opposite role we have the action - research projects, which, intending to change attitudes and behaviours of young people towards more egalitarian masculinities, caring and without violence, are an important step towards the blurring, we dare to say, of all inequalities.

In a time of permanent change and in which challenges become a constant in our schools, it becomes more and more urgent to carry out studies/projects that contribute to reflection/action allowing equality between women and men to be seen in the world as a question of Human Rights and a condition for social justice, fundamental for societies to become more modern and more equitable. The guardianship, the state bodies and in particular the schools (educational community), have the responsibility to actively intensify the initiatives and actions in favour of equality between women and men. The Profile of Students Leaving Compulsory Education (PASEO) expects the school to instill in the students responsibility and integrity, curiosity, demand, innovation, reflection capacity, citizenship and freedom. The skills areas to be developed are of a cognitive, metacognitive, social and emotional nature, in several areas: languages and texts, information and communication, reasoning and problem solving, critical and creative thinking, personal development and autonomy, environment, scientific, technical and technological knowledge. Gender equality presents itself as an important and transversal domain, in the most varied dimensions, among others, "Humanistic basis - The school empowers young people with knowledge and values for the construction of a fairer society, centred on the person, human dignity and action on

the world as a common good to be preserved". (Martins, 2017)

It is in the light of this context, that we consider the need:

- 1) (re) think and reinforce strategies and methods applied in Schools;
- 2) to promote critical reflections and spaces for collaboration in initial and continuous training which lead to the development of transforming methodologies, attitudes and behaviours regarding gender norms and practices.
- 3) To think of opportunities for the child to experience, think, intervene, observe and make decisions;
- 4) To integrate the activities for the promotion of gender equality in contexts which respond to their needs and interests. In these contexts they learn, among other things, to build gender identity;
- 5) Work in articulation and in a transversal way this theme with pre - school children, because they will be the adults of tomorrow. It remains to leave the idea that pre - school education is central to the construction of gender identity and to obtain an attitude of equality regarding gender;
- 6) Accredited training actions on diversified themes, both in person and distance learning;
- 7) Hold Training Workshops and sign protocols with different entities, especially with CFAEs (professional training centres);
- 8) Involve other central and local administration entities, such as Ministries, interdepartmental teams, municipalities, education and training institutions, etc., in the implementation of activities to promote gender equality;
- 9) To monitor processes implemented, regarding gender equality, within educational and training institutions;
- 10) Train education professionals, more specifically operational assistants, nursery and primary and secondary school teachers;
- 11) To build new instruments and materials aimed at gender equality training for learning contexts (Pre - school, 1st and 2nd CEB) and training contexts (initial and continuous);
- 12) To disseminate and promote quality materials produced within the scope of funded projects in order to be useful resources, which can be used in the training that is given on different gender equality themes, framed within the national strategy of education for citizenship;
- 13) Promote and develop actions in an educational context, involving the children's families;
- 14) Promote gender equality in teacher training and educational contexts as a structuring basis for any other domain of citizenship;
- 15) To provide greater coordination between the School Groupings' management bodies regarding the design, implementation, development and impact assessment of projects in an educational context;
- 16) Promote spaces for reflection and discussion in schools on the theme of gender equality;
- 17) Implement projects that meet the educational projects, according to the school culture, in order to promote the involvement of the various educational players.
- 18) To create partnerships between Higher Education institutions and school groupings, with a focus on initial

teacher training, in articulation with other courses that have intervention in schools;

- 19) To create partnerships between Higher Education institutions and the CFAEs in order to promote bridges, spaces and working times in collaboration with the initial and continuous training of teachers;
- 20) Promote the dissemination of materials and good practices on gender equality and the fight against stereotypes in the most varied educational contexts, highlighting other learning environments, holding workshops, among other initiatives;
- 21) Promote active listening among teachers, in a close relationship with the community and educational policies, responding to the educational system.

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