

Towards a gender violence prevention curriculum: Contributions from teacher education

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Gender and domestic violence constitute a flagrant social problem with severe consequences to all society and cannot be ignore when discussing Curriculum. One of the chore ways of implementing gender violence prevention in schools is through teacher education.

We present the experience of UMAR, that with a partnership with FPCEUP, has been implementing and developing teacher training courses in gender violence prevention in schools and addressing forms of dealing with and flagging violence.

Theoretically we reflect upon the role of the teachers in preventing primary and secondary violence but also we focus on the need for these professionals to be trained on forms of acting when facing and detecting violence within their work context.

Our 50 hours certified and accredited training course provides the necessary theoretical models and tools to implement a systematised and structured program for violence prevention by using the transversal components of each subject and by creating and articulating teacher networks.

We include core dimensions from feminist philosophy and practice in order to train the professionals in the deconstruction of the structural and cultural components of violence, and in order to provide a framework on which teacher can base their work on.

We apply a methodology that reinforces the need to put together and implement in schools curricular projects of violence prevention in their working contexts by requesting as a final essay a pilot project to be implemented by the trainees.

For each course, the trainees have to implement an integrated intervention with specific activities adapted to a theme of their choice, within the themes of violence prevention. These essays have to go beyond the individual subject taught by each teacher and must include a transversal perspective, in a way that it comes articulated with the school curriculum, but not limited to it nor excluding its guidelines, hence creating an innovative and integrated form of working, using clarity, precision and intentionally planned sessions specially created for violence prevention.

Our purpose is to analyse the final essays and projects provided by the teachers that attended 2014's course in order to assess and evaluate the implementation of the gender violence prevention teacher training course and the ways in which they implement the protocol of disclosure and flagging violent situations in the school context.

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We also want to assess how the contents are being explored and if the core dimensions, adequate pedagogical conditions and methodologies are being adapted to contents and objectives of a gender violence prevention program and evaluate the results obtained by each group of teachers.

From these results we can better evaluate the impact of the network of teacher we have been training since 2005 in order to establish the guidelines for building a curricular project for teacher that includes set themes, topics, coherence, planning and guidelines that can be implemented transversally through school subjects and throughout the community.

We aim to establish some guidelines in order to contribute with knowledge for building a gender prevention curriculum to be included in the national curriculum.

Introduction: Domestic violence, children experiencing domestic violence and protecting children

Gender violence is prevalent in Portugal and constitutes a social problem with severe consequences. In this framework Domestic Violence and Femicide present themselves as evidence, as following data can show. Only in 2014 in Portugal we had 27 317 denunciations to the police and, according to the data from Portuguese Internal Security System annual report, RASI (2004), the higher number of victims comes from intimate relationships (present or past) being 81% of victims women and 85% of the perpetrators are male.

Regarding femicide, in 2014, 43 women were killed and 49 suffered murder attempts. 81% of these women were in an intimate or family relationship with the perpetrator. 56% of these murdered women had reported and were flagged as domestic violence victims, which did not prevent their death (OMA-UMAR, 2014).

Regarding children who witness violence data from RASI (2014) reported that 38% of the times police intervened there were minors present. This consists in a very high exposure of children to domestic violence. These numbers, however, lack in giving a full perspective because they consider only the presence of minors when the incident occurs, which corresponds to a narrow perspective where witnessing domestic violence consist in being present, ignoring that children can hear, see the consequences of violence after the attack, feel the emotional distress, etc. Also, by limiting their presence to one specific moment, this information is blind to the fact that domestic violence tends to obey to a prevalence in time, to the existence of a violence cycle and escalating violent attacks (Walker, 1991).

Sani & Cardoso (2013) describe these, and all children who witness violence in their family environment, neglected, hidden, unknown or silent victims alerting to how society irresponsibly continues to ignore the victimization of extremely vulnerable populations and do not consider the deep consequences of living in a violent environment for the child adjustment and henceforth in school. One of the reasons for this, is a set of beliefs based on a view of family as a safe haven of protection and care. However, the numbers indicate that family is, in fact, the environment where violence situations take place, and aggression exists.

However, society shares a set of social representations of childhood and family that is not compatible with this reality, and as Sani & Cardoso (2013) highlight, the direct or indirect exposure to violence within family environment reveals a dissonance between social representations of childhood and the experienced childhood of many children. And, furthermore, the lack of visibility and social tolerance towards family related behaviours of violence and child

abuse within the false belief that violence between a couple is an adult issue contributes to a failure in protecting the children from violence episodes.

Another limiting belief is that a child doesn't understand or realizes violence. This contributes to a lack of appropriate answers, namely within schools. When ignoring that children are emotionally aware of violence, that parents in a violent relationship are not available to provide for basic childcare and that exposure to violence means growing up in an insecure context where parents are unavailable and unable to protect the child. All this happens even if the child is not the direct target of violence, but by witnessing violence between the two important bond and attachment figures in a primordial context for his/her development makes him/her also a victim (Sani & Cardoso, 2013).

The consequences, damage and impact of experiencing violence in the family environment are various and severe and have an extreme impact in another socializing context: school which makes teacher education a fundamental field in order to provide knowledge and guidelines for an adequate prevention.

Continuous research has proven that children exposed to violence may exhibit high levels of emotional reactivity, threat and feelings like guilt, aggressiveness or emotional withdrawal and isolation.

In a meta-analysis of exposure to domestic violence, Evans, Davies & DiLillo, 2008 assessed the association between childhood exposure to domestic violence and internalizing, externalizing and trauma symptoms in children, and the association between childhood exposure to domestic violence and psychosocial problems in children. Their results show that mere exposure to violence between caregivers within the home is associated with an increased risk of emotional and behavioural problems during childhood and adolescence. Children exposed to domestic violence report more depressive symptoms, anxiety and worry than those who have never been exposed. Children seem to be more prone to physical aggression and have higher levels of general behaviour problems when rated by parents and teachers (Evans, Davies & DiLillo, 2008). Furthermore, there is evidence of a strong impact of domestic violence on academic results, cognitive performance and sociability. At school, teachers face these symptoms and behaviour and they don't have the knowledge or tools to understand that these are the result of exposure to violence and not a sign of indiscipline or lack of interest. Also, effects of exposure to violence in cognitive abilities and school results are sometimes interpreted as learning problems and students are included in special needs education programmes.

Regarding their behaviour, exposure to violence may result in children and adolescents exhibiting aggressive or disruptive behaviours but also passivity or isolation. This seemingly paradoxical reaction can cause problems in detecting and correctly interpreting their behaviour. Whether seeing them as undisciplined and problematic or as lacking motivation or interest in learning, these students face revictimization and punishment instead of appropriate care.

These are just examples on how misinterpretation of signs of violence exposure can lead to inadequate ways in which teachers handle and face students and the way they act which has a strong impact and severe consequences in their school results.

Regarding gender violence prevention, we have to also analyze aggression and violence in schools. Evidence shows a high prevalence of aggressive behaviours and a likelihood for children from violent homes to reproduce aggressive behaviours or to be involved in violent relationships, making it even more important for teachers to learn

how to distinguish aggressiveness and its multiple causes and origins and also find out, flagging and acting accordingly in violent situations. This urgently demands for reflexion on practices of teacher training in order to set what kind of responses we can and should provide to these professionals and how to integrate gender violence prevention in the Curriculum.

It is pivotal to train teachers in gender violence and violence prevention, in order to provide these professionals with the adequate knowledge, concepts and theoretical knowledge but also to help them construct a common framework around violence and, specifically for training teachers in the nature and implication of gender violence. As Del Toro (2012) points out, given the evidence found in research as well as work of organizations (including the UN), violence against women is "[...] an evil endemic, systemic and global which is a violation of human rights "(Del Toro, 2012: 11). In this regard, it states that this serious problem stems from power imbalances and structural inequality between men and women. In the same line of reasoning we can pay attention to considerations of El-Mouelhy (2004), which addresses this form of violence as "[...] a reflection of the socio-cultural structure of a society, the economic situation and the political context of a country." (El Mouelhy, 2004: 290).

Teachers play an important role in primary and secondary prevention of violence and teacher education is a fundamental field of work in order to provide knowledge and guidelines for adequate gender violence prevention. However, there are not many answers for their need for training in forms of detecting and acting towards violence, namely those training actions that stem from a feminist philosophy and practice in order to train professionals in deconstructing structural and cultural violence.

Also, since there is a lack of training dedicated to act in schools, strategies set for implementing these themes and no appropriate spaces for creating and developing curricular projects in violence prevention, our aim in providing teacher training courses is to grant our trainees tools and knowledge to create, plan, implement and evaluate gender prevention projects at schools by developing an integrated intervention with a transversal perspective with specific activities within the themes of violence prevention.

Also a part of the methodology, teachers work together in preparing and planning sessions with the purpose of intentionally and clearly provide a gender violence prevention framework, activities and adequate pedagogical moments that are set exclusively for violence prevention activities. In this way, by allowing participants to explore basic contents and core dimensions they are able to apply the adequate pedagogical conditions and methodologies, by adapting contents and objectives and evaluating the processes. Therefore, teachers can effectively act on gender violence prevention and set forth in their daily practices the foundations and mechanisms of change for their students, which will reproduce in their families, communities and society in general.

The experience of UMAR

Since the very beginning UMAR has dedicated itself to training and it is recognized as a certified training institution by the Portuguese national qualifications institute, DGERT (Direction for Employment and Work Relations).

Nowadays we count with a wide experience in training qualified professionals and agents against Gender Violence. Amongst others, we have developed and implemented an accredited teacher training course in Gender Violence Prevention in Schools and Family (developed in partnership with the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Porto).

Gender violence is the main focus of this 50 hours training course, aimed at the production of intervention and prevention projects in schools, mobilizing participants in, and for pedagogical action.

From the pedagogical point of view, we intend to build mechanisms and methodologies to identify, understand and combat the phenomenon of violence in schools and make explicit, power cultural and gender differences, in everyday school education.

We are conscious that gender stereotypes continue to model and shape the school curriculum and the educational and pedagogical practices. They are present in the formation of various educational agents, and in the various types of teaching and learning materials. Intending to change this reality we work with the professionals in an articulated theoretical and practical base to present and introduce the subject of gender violence so that educational agents get in touch with essential information about the problem, analyze and debate the theoretical references of the proposed themes and elaborate strategies focused on professional practice are used as well through a methodology that favours participation, that holds on a critical and active questioning position.

The course methodology includes alternating theoretical and practical sessions, giving priority to the experiential dimension of the training process, performing a daily job discussion and sharing. We intend for teachers to build an intervention program for research and action, addressing and discussing core concepts in the field of gender violence prevention.

From the pedagogical point of view, we intend to build mechanisms and methodologies to identify, understand and combat the phenomenon of violence in schools, to make vivid and explicit power differences, cultural and gender in school education everyday, and to provide the guidelines and theoretical framework for teachers to implement pilot projects in their schools in order to create and implement a systematized and structured program where gender violence prevention is integrated in the core components of subjects.

The course includes the deconstruction of violence, violences and gender violence at school and from the school; conceptualising gender and domestic violence and conceptualising its impact in schools; sets forward protocols on how to intervene in schools and presents UMAR's pedagogical prevention programme; analyses language, culture and power as constructions and social practices and spaces and times for a construction of women's citizenship and; finally the curriculum as a place to defy and imagine change.

The objectives, aims and main aspects of these courses are designed to obtain impact for social, economic, political contemporary changes in redefining public and private spheres and its consequences in school environment, taken in consideration:

- School as space of construction of discourse that legitimises inequality and power and creates spaces of violences;
- Language and culture as a construction and social practice that includes power structures;
- How the curriculum can be appropriated in order to put forward change and give visibility to silenced voices;
- Impact of changes in school ethos in order to empower victims and put responsibility in the perpetrators;
- How to create a climate of dialogue, respect and non-violence in schools;

- Devise actions and educational strategies to promote thought on the social construction of gender violence; Develop projects in research and innovation centred in gender violence prevention and gender equality;
- Unfold hidden differencing mechanisms;
- Develop and implement the construction of a citizenship of women at schools;
- Create dialogue and spaces of reflection for professional, discourse and educative processes and where professionals can train basing on their own experience;
- Practice analysis, research, intervention and evaluation as to become active creators of training processes for non violence, gender equality and gender violence prevention and elaborate pedagogical instruments that allow to intertwine schools and community.

In the end of the courses teacher are able to put together and implement curricular projects and an intervention programme with specific activities, adapted to this specific theme and addressing the flagging of violence and forms of dealing with violence; and including a transversal perspective into individual subjects, articulated with school curriculum, not limited to it, not excluding its guidelines.

Integration in core curriculum: a view on the implementation of gender violence prevention programmes by teachers

We selected three examples of pilot projects developed by teachers that attended the training course with the objective of illustrating how the integration in core curriculum can be developed and implemented. For each essay we highlight the theoretical framework and contents chosen by trainees and describe briefly the process and activities set forward in the sessions. Trainees had to choose and apply one or more contents of the training course and create action-research projects to be implemented with one or more classes along the school year. All projects had to be explicitly dedicated to gender violence prevention and had to be integrated in the core curriculum of the subject taught.

The first essay consisted in sessions about human rights and human dignity in order to prevent violence and more specifically dating violence. In this action-research based project teachers set as objectives assessing student's perceptions of gender equality, raising awareness to dating violence and preventing violent behaviours. The trainees chose to implement it in only one class, but sessions were developed by creating a network between three trainees from three different schools that collaboratively put forward a set of activities for the named class, for the whole school and aimed at reaching the surrounding community.

This group developed and applied a survey and a questionnaire, several group dynamics for the class and the school. After assessing student's knowledge and beliefs, the teachers developed specific sessions that culminated with the presentation of a dating violence session by the students to the school community and the preparation of an opinion court.

The second essay focused on social interaction, social roles and social structures and in the ways in which they intertwine with gender, gender roles and gender inequality, discrimination and ultimately gender violence. In this

action-research based project, they aimed at raising awareness of gender inequality, identifying gender stereotypes and promoting conducts based on gender equality in order to prevent gender violence.

This group implemented a year long project in three schools, three different subjects and three different levels in basic education and secondary education classes. All sessions were integrated in the framework from the respective core subjects, and activities were also planned and adapted to be adequate to the level and ages of students involved. The group prepared common activities and contents but for each one they developed and/or adapted materials, strategies and tasks. They also researched on students' perceptions and knowledge by applying a survey and a questionnaire and enrolled them in creating activities for the school and surrounding community by creating a campaign of deconstruction of social representations around gender roles and gendered professions inside and outside the school.

The third essay versed on human rights, family, domestic violence and as an action-research based project had as objectives assessing student's perceptions of dating violence, raising awareness of domestic violence, preventing and flagging of violence and implementing an intervention protocol for the school. In a school year, this group of five teachers from the same school organized a structured set of sessions in one class and one subject and afterwards disseminating to the whole school and community a raising awareness program that included an intervention protocol for identifying, flagging of and acting against gender violence. These teachers also put forward a pilot project for assessing and investigating dating violence within the school, by elaborating and applying a survey to the students and creating, with the help of school statistics and other teachers, the basis of a future observatory of violence in the school.

Their classroom activities, again dedicated exclusively to gender violence but integrated in the subject curriculum, included working with core concepts, debate, video projection and resulted in, writing of a news article and translation to a foreign language, collaborative building of a protocol of intervention for students and families and a poster spread around the school and the city.

This particular school also celebrated the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women with the presence of a specialist panel so that students could ask questions and share their concerns.

These three essays demonstrate how in each project teachers were able to implement gender violence prevention programmes according to UMAR's methodology integrating it in core curriculum but without reducing or discarding it nor adding another subject to it. Teachers were also able to implement protocols of disclosure and flagging of violence, going beyond our initial proposals, by adequately researching within their working environments and establishing goals and priorities that were set from within the school community and not from an outside perspective.

They were also able to create networks inside the school and/or create alliances between different schools, profiting not only from the cross subject network work but even creating activities for a network of schools.

Conclusions

In this study we aimed at providing a view on how teacher training courses in gender violence prevention are being implemented in Portuguese schools and the ways on which UMAR trains teachers in the integration of these

themes in the core curriculum. We presented examples on how teachers develop and implement pilot projects in their schools and how they enrol students to take part and act against violence.

From the analysis of the results of one teacher training course and the assessment of UMAR's experience in implementing gender violence projects in schools, we explore how participants are provided with tools and knowledge to articulate gender prevention within the school curriculum without limiting it or excluding its guidelines, by establishing ways for teacher to work on transversal contents and examples on how teachers put forward programs articulated as curricular projects and not just another subject or isolated theme.

From UMAR's experience these teacher training courses are allowing to create innovative and integrated ways of working gender violence prevention with clarity, precision and intentionality and at the end of the courses, teachers are able to design and teach, within their core subject, contents and activities that are specifically dedicated to the purpose of gender violence prevention and eradication.

However this study has limitations, namely the impossibility to assess the impact of this course in the schools where it has been applied because it consists on an analysis of participants' essays where the only indication of impact amongst students and school is the activities implemented, number of sessions and/or articulation between students, teachers and schools. Also, being a study limited to one course, it lacks the necessary continuity to provide us with data to evaluate the impact that teacher training courses in gender violence prevention have in schools.

Nevertheless, from the analysis of the essays we can affirm that through this innovative and integrated form of work, teachers are able to present results that consist in planned sessions, developed with clarity, precision and intentionality aiming at gender violence prevention, where students are given the opportunity to work these themes and where they are given the importance and salience they deserve. Also, UMAR's methodology allows fighting cultural and symbolic violence by deconstructing the deep mechanisms of gender violence stemming from our patriarchal society and fights the invisibility of these themes in the Curriculum.

UMAR's training courses can also provide guidelines to be included in national curriculum by

establishing ways of working transversal contents putting forward a program that can be articulated as a curricular project and not another subject or isolated theme and providing teachers with tools to effectively work these themes in their classrooms, fighting their feelings of inadequacy or lack of knowledge that impedes them to teach these contents that should be transversally present in all school subjects according to Portuguese curricular guidelines.

In order to do so, in each teacher training course teachers learn how to apply integrated curriculum and to design and implement curricular projects in one or different schools articulated between them, creating and articulating networks.

In their practice they can plan, structure and put forward specific activities adapted for violence prevention themes and framework and provide students with examples of forms of dealing with, flagging of and preventing violence.

Also, teachers can work within the core curriculum and within their subjects but are able to go beyond their individual subjects and work collaboratively with other teachers in order to articulate between them and include this transversal perspective in different subjects, classes or even the whole school.

We analyzed examples on how this work can be done and how gender violence prevention can be articulated with school curriculum without limiting it or excluding any guidelines and how teachers can get students to take part of the process and get involved in the initiatives by producing materials, activities and/or events.

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Reflective practice, skills and assessment in initial teacher training

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Societies of "reflexive modernity" are evolving at a dizzying pace. Technologies change work processes, forms of sociability and connect authors to multiple social fields. For Giddens, knowledge conveyed by expert systems, the contact of individuals with experts from various fields and the dissemination of specialised information by the media have increased exponentially in the "reflexive modernity". This has allowed individuals to gain access to a variety of enriching experiences regarding their cognitive resources. As a result, the reflexive monitoring of social activity is a distinctive feature of the quotidian of individuals in contemporary societies.

In constantly changing social contexts, education research has pointed to the need for new conceptual models for teacher training. In this sense, since the eighties, reflexivity (Schön, 1987) has been seen as an essential component of teaching practice (Schön, 2000), in which the teacher is seen as a professional who plays an active role in the establishment of purposes, objectives and means to achieve in their work, and who researches the teaching practice inside the classroom, identifies problems, searches and develops intervention projects to solve those same problems, based on professional knowledge arising from their own experience (Zeichner, 1993, 2008).

Reflective practice requires not only the mobilisation of knowledge but also skills, as it appeals to the interaction of the individual's resources and the resources existing in the environment. In fact, there is a tendency in European policies for the adoption of professional skills in teacher training courses (Tuning Project, 2000; European Commission, 2012, 2013). In the last fifteen years, a large number of countries have applied frameworks of references reflecting the European effort.

This study aims to identify the skills inherent to initial teacher training courses for the 1st and 2nd cycle of basic education taught at Portuguese higher education institutions as well as how they are assessed and transferred to the training area.