

Prevention of gender violence in kindergarten: A look from curriculum studies

Magalhães, Maria J. (mjm.umar@gmail.com); UMAR - Projeto Art"Themis, Portugal

Teixeira, Ana M. (anamargarida_91@hotmail.com); UMAR - Projeto Art"Themis, Portugal

Dias, Ana T. (anadias519@gmail.com); UMAR - Projeto Art"Themis, Portugal

Silva, Micaela (mclslv@gmail.com); UMAR - Projeto Art"Themis, Portugal

In the curriculum there is a need to create spaces and moments in the school for citizenship development of students fulfilling one of its main dimensions, educate for a global citizenship which necessarily includes gender violence prevention (Torney-Punta, 2004). Gender and domestic violence are a worrying social problem, with its patriarchal culture, in which distinct roles in society are distinctively attributed to men and women, namely the association of men with aggressiveness and strength, and, in counterpart, women as sensible and affectionate (Barry & Barry, 1976).

Several studies provided evidence of how kindergarten is crucial for children's sex-role attitudes (Barry & Barry, 1976). Similarly, domestic and gender violence functions as double jeopardy for children in school (Silverstein, Augustyn, Cabral & Zuckerman, 2006), what demands an active role for educators concerning children's rights and the primary prevention of gender and domestic violence. Although it is not yet established that primary prevention will have an impact in lifelong terms, many authors and educators agree on the relevance of working in pre-schools many of the topics related with gender and domestic violence, in a positive way adequate to age and development of the children.

The main purpose of the Project Art Themis - UMAR is to promote gender equality and preventing gender violence, changing beliefs and attitudes towards girls and women, and other discriminated social groups, confronting prejudices like misogyny, sexism, racism and homophobia. The development of the Project consists in the implementation of fifteen sessions along the school year where the opinions and life stories shared by the children have significant place, in a way they can take the leading role in their processes of change, using artistic tools (Magalhães, Canotilho & Brasil, 2007). The Programme of UMAR has been applied to several schools since 2004 (Magalhães, Canotilho & Ribeiro 2010). Also Diana Costa (2013) applied a primary prevention programme in a primary school, but preschool children seem to have not been targeted in prevention of gender violence.

We introduced a pilot project since October 2014 in the kindergarten, applied in a group of children between the ages of 4, 5 and 6, in an Oporto school, implementing sessions with the objective of developing their self-esteem, a sense of pleasure of being who they are, how to respect differences, to recognize strategies for problem resolution in peaceful ways, and develop values, attitudes and build affectionate relationships based in peace and respect. Amongst the themes are emotional literacy, the perception of diverse types of families, and the importance of communication.

We also work more specifically the social attribution of gender roles throughout discussion, role play and artistic expression using drawings, arts and crafts, animated cartoons, children's books, educational and playground games. In this paper, we aim to present the preliminary findings of the kindergarten pilot implementation, discussing the pedagogical strategy used, following the debate of Teresa Vasconcelos (2011) about "project work" in kindergarten. The methodology will be the reflective analysis provided by and throughout an action-research based project in schools (Barbier & Fourcade 2008).

Keywords: Kindergarten; Children; Prevention; Citizenship; Art; Gender Equality

Introduction

The school is a socialization space for children where they relate to their peers and where they are building their gender. In this sense, the school emerges as the driving Education for Citizenship promoting reflective character on social and cultural issues such as Gender Equality.

The project "Art'Themis" of NGO UMAR develops an innovative methodology that utilizes artistic devices as a pedagogical tool to change behaviour and children attitudes, so that they create their own change, thus becoming the leading roles of its intervention.

Several authors argue that the prevention of Gender Violence should start early. Therefore, the "Art'Themis" in the school year 2014/2015 created a pilot project in Portugal that consisted in developing themes related to promoting Gender Equality in a Kindergarten with children with 4, 5 and 6 years.

This article explains the methodology developed and the project pedagogy based on its action-research.

Pedagogical methodologies for preventing gender violence in kindergarten

The school as a place of socialization of children and youth is a context marked by contradictions, conflicts and divergence of interests since it is present a diversity of backgrounds, cultures and sexual orientations (Magalhães, Canotilho & Ribeiro, 2010).

It is therefore necessary to develop a curriculum that includes education for citizenship, creating spaces and moments in which students reflect on their identities and on social and cultural issues, where is included the prevention of gender violence (Tourney-Punta, 2004).

In Portugal, gender inequality is still very visible, in a patriarchal and sexist culture that is strongly marked by gender stereotypes that "(...) have been legitimise the supremacy of men compared to women in the most diverse domains of social life" (Costa, 2013: 16) and gives the man the characteristics of force and aggression and in contrast women are considered sensitive and affectionate (Barry & Barry, 1976).

Gender as a concept in social sciences refers to a set of beliefs and behaviours about social and cultural roles that society assigns to men and women defending "(...) discrimination and devaluation of women and feminine, conducting to the symbolic foundation for tolerance to domestic and gender violence" (Magalhães, Canotilho & Ribeiro, 2010: 168). Such violence is recognized as a social construction of power that maintains prejudice and stereotypes and that perpetuates the naturalized and entrenched inequalities in Portuguese society.

In this regard, education has a key role in building an inclusive society where difference and diversity are seen as something positive and the man and the woman share same rights.

Early intervention with children is crucial so that the differences are respected as well as preventing violence and reducing existing gender inequalities are effective. As Magalhães et al refer, prevention in schools are relevant

"(...) in the preparation of citizens for a world with greater equality in what respect for women and the appreciation of their contribution and participation take place" (2007: 63).

Another reason for the need for an early intervention with children is that "(...) in pre-school age children already label and categorize different activities in terms of gender (Fagote et. al. 1992 quoted by Sroufe)" (Silva et al. 1999: 11), that is to say, children already learn to distinguish the different social roles ascribed to the feminine and masculine sex in their forms of family and professional participation.

Children aged 3 and 4 years old already act according to its gender and so "The boys engage in more physical and "violent" games and prefer group activities more often than girls, who show preference for caring for babies and play with only one child at a time" (Silva et al, 1999: 12). When 4 and 5 years old, children have more general ideas about gender and begin to internalize gender stereotypes, preferring jokes considered appropriate to their gender, already choose alleged masculine and feminine colours and already have an idea of the careers they want on the basis of their genderization.

In the 21st century, we witnessed the emergence of new challenges for the feminist movement. Going back to the decades of 1960-90 of the 20th century, social movements known as feminist movements of the second wave, denounced gender inequality and discrimination and campaigning for protection rights against gender violence. They showed how this oppression was linked to gender stereotypes related to the body, sexuality and reproduction, claiming the same rights for women in an equal basis of those of men: in the workplace, access to education, in the family, and political participation in all power structures (Silva, 2002: 17). Drawing attention to the gender stereotypes, they challenged the social construction of masculinity and femininity as an opposed binary.

The Association of Women and Alternative and Answer was created in 1976, after the Democratic Revolution in the 25th of April 1974, and its aims are to struggle against women's discrimination as well as against all forms of violence and oppression against women. Following this, UMAR is a Non-Governmental Feminist Organization that intervenes in the defence and promotion of Women's Rights and Gender Equality. Their work is developed in various areas of intervention such as: gender equality, gender violence and social, cultural and political intervention.

UMAR has an extensive experience in the field of primary prevention in school context, because, since 2004, has been developing sessions in Portugal to promote gender equality with children and young people. In the area of intervention with victims of domestic violence, has service centers and shelters around the country.

The main purpose of the Project Art`Themis - UMAR is to promote gender equality and preventing gender violence, changing beliefs and attitudes towards girls and women, and other discriminated social groups, confronting prejudices like misogyny, sexism, racism and homophobia. The development of the Project consists in the implementation of fifteen sessions along the school year where the opinions and life stories shared by the children have significant place, in a way they can take the leading role in their processes of change, using artistic tools (Magalhães, Canotilho & Brasil, 2007). The Programme of UMAR has been applied to several schools since 2004 (Magalhães, Canotilho & Ribeiro 2010). Also Diana Costa (2013) applied a primary prevention programme in a primary school, but preschool children seem to have not been targeted in prevention of gender violence.

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Several studies provided evidence of how kindergarten is crucial for children's sex-role attitudes (Barry & Barry, 1976). Similarly, domestic and gender violence functions as double jeopardy for children in school (Silverstein, Augustyn, Cabral & Zuckerman, 2006), which demands an active role for educators concerning children's rights and the primary prevention of gender and domestic violence. Although it is not yet established that primary prevention will have an impact in lifelong terms, many authors and educators agree on the relevance of working in pre-schools many of the topics related with gender and domestic violence, in a positive way adequate to age and development of the children.

The kindergarten should promote personal and social education of children, since it is a socialization space that encourages the inclusion of children in various social and cultural groups and more widen, holding different characteristics of the family environment (Silva et al., 1999). Child builds her/his gender identity in family and in educational context, which highlights the relevance of the intervention in one of the first learning processes made in the peer group.

Kindergarten intervention should combine their practices already established with "(...) teaching about the diversity and equal opportunities, the parity between sexes, the diversity of cultures, the social responsibility of each person to promote a more democratic and integrative society" (Cardona et al, 2010: 59). Thereby developing a joint curriculum with the explicitness and clarity of some contents usually included in the "hidden curriculum", will lead to an "integrated intervention", borrowing the Bernstein's concept of integrated curriculum (Bernstein, 2003; Rennie, Venville & Wallace 2012). Therefore, it is necessary to find time in the activities developed with children to work through the issues of citizenship and equality.

Consequently, it is necessary to develop the project methodology that requires the involvement of all the participants and "(...) contributes to learning processes with significance, carrying meaning, involving children (or adults) in real problem solving or in search of unknown answers" (Vasconcelos, 2011: 9). This methodology, even though flexible, have in mind the sequential and consistency (Costa, 2013), important theoretical principles in curriculum theory (Alonso, 1998). It also always bears in mind that the issues must always be well articulated and so that learning is significant, the child can not be considered a "lone scientist", "(...) but an 'explorer', an investigator, an active creator of knowledge in alternative of being a passive receiver of knowledge of others." (Vasconcelos, 2011: 9)

In this way, the project also proposes a focus on heterogeneous or intergenerational groups (Vasconcelos, 2011). The adult is always a process facilitator but, along with children, is also a researcher and an actor, being an collective-researcher (Barbier & Fourcade, 2008), since "[c]ollective participation does not exist without Research-Action" (Barbier & Fourcade, 2008: 3). Thus, collective investigator is an autonomous entity and author of practice

and speech exercising different roles in moments of action and reflection, articulating research and intervention, closely combining theory and practice. Action-research seeks to raise awareness of the facts, always involving the duality between thinking and doing. In this sense, trying to solve problems in order to provide a space for participants to assert themselves as agents of change in their lives either personal or social change, inscribes themselves in the main purpose of the Action-Research.

The Project ArtThemis of UMAR develops its sessions through art, since, to be meaningful learning, along with pedagogical tools that help children develop their cognitive abilities and their creative and reflective skills (Higenbottam, 2008).

“The arts should be supported not only because research supports their value but also because they are as dynamic and broad-based as more widely accepted disciplines. They contribute to the development and enhancement of multiple neurobiological systems, including cognition, emotional, immune, circulatory, and perceptual motor systems” (Anderson, Welch & Becker, 2004: 18).

Therefore, are used artistic tools to promote children's creativity enhancing personal autonomy and a critical spirit, allowing them to understand themselves through your body and artistic expression. The arts provide a unique pathway to self-knowledge and represents a way of building healthy respect for others and for self. (Anderson, Walch & Becker, 2004) “The assumption of arts programs for at-risk youth is, ultimately, to learn from that wisdom and generate new understanding for the benefit of the future” (Anderson, Walch & Becker, 2004:20).

Based on these principles, the sessions are spaces where are valued the ideas and experiences of each child, which makes the methodology of this project innovative.

Conclusion

The school is a context in which socially constructed representations are present in the classroom as well as in the pedagogical relationship. As stated by Magalhães et al., "Over the years the school has been considered a privileged reproductive spot of gender asymmetries, but at the same time, is seen as an important place to promote interventions and significant changes" (2007: 53).

Primary prevention plays a key role in promoting gender equality, since systematic sessions are developed based on the project methodology and allow the participants to reflect from their experiences and realities on gender representations that are rooted in Portuguese culture. In this sense, the methodology of the project "ArtThemis" is innovative as it uses art as a pedagogical tool for reflection and discussion of these issues that are present in their lives.

The Kindergartens are contexts that transmit values, attitudes and behaviours that influence the child development in relation to conceptions of gender roles. All these behaviour and values transmissions cause the school to take "(...) an active role in building identities, using stereotypical messages about each sex possibilities and constraints available" (Carrito and Araújo, 2013: 144).

With this pilot project, "ArtThemis" aimed to use this context of socialization for children to reflect and understand that all people are different and it is not the sex or gender that defines what one likes, not even the games that should play, or the colours they should use, or careers they want to develop in the future.

Thus, Kindergarten was a space in which children have developed conceptions of equality, respect and self-esteem to be able to grow without constraints set by gender roles.

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Immigrants’ families in United States with school-age children returned to Portugal

Carvalho, Elisabete Maria Costa Azevedo Martins de (emmc.esv@gmail.com); Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto, Portugal

Ferreira, Elisabete Maria Soares (elisabete@fpce.up.pt); Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto, Portugal

Correia, José Alberto (director@fpce.up.pt); Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto, Portugal

The study will focus on three northern immigrants’ families in United States with school-age children returned to Portugal. The choice to inquire families connected by the continuum historic Portuguese landmark of migration (Solar & Villaba, 2007) was to (re)collect the shared story of who come to be simultaneously local and global. They talk about overcoming obstacles, integration and mobility in the “hybrid” society that they dwell and call “home.” Telling stories is a natural part of life and all humans have stories about their experiences to communicate to others. The research puzzle focuses on the phenomenon of migration and everydayness family life bounded with school. This text intertwines curriculum place with migrant families and school (Amthor, 2013; Gjoaj, Zinn and Nawyn, 2013; Sallaf, 2013; Whitlock, 2007). Metaphorically writing each individual is an island belonging or urging to (be)long to a place. Skin, a versatile barrier that keeps in touch the brain with the outside world allowing an endless conversation between the inner self and the places we inhabit. According to Whitlock (2007) “place is a curriculum landscape that brings the particularistic into focus by allowing us to examine ourselves [...]: we can see ourselves as subjects within a particular setting” (p. 46). In this narrative inquiry (Amado, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 1991/2000, Clandinin 2013; Creswell, 2008; He & Phillion, 2008; Merriam, 2009), stories assumed different forms that were oral, written, drawn, or painted. The stories (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) were the milieu that provided the way of thinking about an experience and a (con)text to the production of knowledge. It is therefore important the triangulation of the different field texts sources taken into consideration for the writing of the narrative to reflect the authenticity of the multiplicity of voices heard and words written, as well as the multiple ways of viewing the world. Knowing that the essence of a narrative study is an intrusion in the family’s life, the questioning about power related tensions (Ludhra & Chappel, 2011) allowed the researchers to keep decisions co-composed. In this project, the researchers encountered participants that were willing to share their daily school life in the United States and Portugal and keen to find solutions for the challenges that emerged in their family daily life due