

**United Nations
Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
in collaboration with UNICEF
Expert Group Meeting
Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence
against the girl child
UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre
Florence, Italy, 25-28 September 2006**

Prepared by *
Fatuma Chege

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations

Introduction

Exploring teachers' gendered lives and how these influence teacher-learner relationships and pedagogical practices offers valuable insights into the broader understandings of how schools could play a meaningful role in empowering not only girls, but all children and young people in establishing violent-free relationships within and outside formal educational environments. In doing this, it is important to examine closely how teachers talk about their experiences as women and men generally, how they interpret their professional lives and how they perceive their relationships with their female and male colleagues and with the learners in gendered ways. Such exploration would enable us to understand how teachers, as gendered beings construct non-cooperation between the genders, thus enhance or reinforce sexism, which provides fertile grounds for gender-based violence against girls and women in particular. Using various studies in countries of the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR), the author contends that professional behaviour –including that of teachers- is determined not just by institutional cultures and contexts, but also by a person's life history and experiences that are continually and variably transforming Self and Other through dialogue, within and outside their places of work (Maclure 1993, also see Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 102). It is in this context that Shotter (1985) argues that:

To understand ourselves we must examine how currently we account for ourselves in our everyday self-talk, the procedures and practices we routinely use in making sense of our activities to one another (p. 172)

Instructively, while the biographical perspective of teachers' gendered lives has attracted research interests in Western countries, including Australia and New Zealand since 1970s, it is only in the late 1990s that researchers in sub-Saharan Africa began asking questions about how teachers perceived their careers as gendered and sexual beings, and how their perceptions shaped their responses to changes in the expectations of their professional roles as men or women in relation to the girls and boys placed in their care and tutelage.

Constructing polarised gender divides among teachers

Common stereotypes about what women and men *can* do have continued to emerge as important material with which teachers negotiated their gendered identities. Studies by this author in countries of the ESAR show that teacher identities were constructed in explicit ways that provided powerful models of femininities and masculinities for both the female and male learners to emulate in ways that placed femininities as relatively less powerful and open to labour exploitation as well as sexual violence, and abuse (see Zuberi, 2005). According to Flax (1997), the processes of gendering identities are often directed by the interests of men from their position of control over women, sexually and otherwise as is demonstrated in several of the research referred to herein.

In one of the Kenyan primary school located in what is popularly referred to as 'slum area' (informal poor settlements), mixed-sex group discussions with teachers in key positions – including one female and one male deputy head teacher- revealed how men teachers (more than the women teachers) used division of domestic work as the point of departure in polarising gender in oppressive ways. Using popular local metaphors, the male teachers negotiated versions dominant and sometimes oppressive masculinities in a 'matter of fact' way that reflected their

hierarchical positions of authority within a gender regime that characterised the school's gendered establishment. As demonstrated below, it is striking to note how, for instance, the male deputy head teacher constructed his identity as the powerful and violent Ministry of Defence and compared this with the Ministry of Agriculture which he allocated to the female deputy head teacher who was his equal, professionally.

Barasa (male deputy head-teacher): (Promptly) Me... I'm... I'm for division (instant laughter from the other participants) with the belief that specialisation brings about efficiency (...) If I'm given defence (that is, the Ministry of Defence) and then somewhere... hehehe... (laughing) thieves break in, I'll now have to look... questions will have to be put, and I'll have to look for answers. And if somebody is in the Ministry of Agriculture then we go hungry, somebody has to explain.

This construction of male teacher identity in violent/armed power (Ministry of Defence versus Ministry of Agriculture) contrasted with that of female teacher identity in food production (Agriculture) in ways that appeared to influence how the male and female teachers related within the school and not the least, the relations of power that was played out and observed by their female and male students.

Disempowering girls through models of violent masculinities

As demonstrated by the teacher discourse in schools such as the Kenyan one described above, masculinities were not just constructed as powerful modes of being men but also as violent versions of manhood. Notably Pattman and Chege (2003) as well as Chege (2001) found out that girls and boys constructed teachers, particularly male teachers, not just as powerful male figures but also as bullies who abused children, physically and emotionally, and who selectively beat the boys more than the girls. They were also accused of sexually abusing girls. This was often in contrast to female teachers, whom, many of the students presented as caring and 'motherly'. Apparently, none of the young people constructed male teachers as 'fatherly', suggesting that to them, the concept of fatherliness was perhaps inconsistent with that of care, or parenting.

In South Africa, for example, young people in the group and individual interviews described their relationships with male teachers as generally hostile and detached as they reportedly seemed to 'enjoy' beating the boys and often humiliated them. In their diaries, the boys wrote a great deal about being punished and insulted by the male teachers. Notably in Botswana, although both boys and girls were subjected equally to corporal punishment, findings indicated that this was gendered and was more frequently and harshly administered to the boys. To the South African boys, corporal punishment was such a serious issue that many of them considered it an achievement if they went through one day without being beaten by the teachers. The abuse by male teachers was not just physical but also psychological with boys claiming that teachers referred to them as 'fools' who were only fit to become foremen or plantation workers. Some of them said they were made to sing in class as a way of humiliating them in the presence of girls as they produced broken croaking voices, as is natural with most adolescent boys. While many of the boys narrated the feeling of hostility towards male teachers, it is possible that the same teachers represented powerful male role models for the boys to readily emulate as they

matured into men (Pattman and Chege, 2003; also see Richter, Dawes, & Higson-Smith (eds.), 2004).

It was clear that men teachers, as a group, appeared to share identities of being violent, intimidating and detached from the learners, particularly the boys. This construction prompted expressions of animosity from many of the boys who felt that male teachers hated them but loved the girls. This was demonstrated in one of the schools in Botswana where boys complained that even when girls committed comparatively 'worse' offences, male teachers would still 'pick' on the boys for punishment while the girls were let off the hook easily and treated kindly. In a group discussion with Tswana boys, Kgosi, explained that:

Punishment is always harsher for boys than girls...we are beaten on buttocks and girls on hands. Girls are given more marks than boys. Girls are listened to and trusted. Boys are not listened and not trusted. If you are a boy, they beat you first, then ask you to explain later. Girls' mistakes are always seen as less.

Other boys in the group spoke graphically of how differently and more positively the male teachers treated girls compared with boys:

David: Male teachers usually show bright faces - he is happier assisting a girl than when he is assisting a boy. He smiles when helping a girl; when it's a boy even his mood is unpleasant.

Moruti: Boys are at a disadvantage. When a teacher is bored by something, he says provoking statements just to get at the boys. If a boy says something, trying to reason with the teacher, he is told to 'shut up', but a girl is usually given a good ear.

The apparent juxtaposed treatment of girls and boys extended to academic work whereby, in some cases boys were punished for failing to outperform girls, thus eliciting in them a sense of intellectual superiority over girls. This added to the boys' perceptions of being physically stronger than the girls as a result of the corporal punishment and humiliations they received. Spender (1982) and other feminist writers are of the view that teachers tended to experience boys as more demanding than girls and, hence, would control them during classes by providing them more space and attention – and even punishing them more. However, it is arguable that whatever the reasons that drove teachers to construct boyhood and manhood in violent and competitive ways, the effects of developing in them misogynistic tendencies cannot be ignored. Indeed, many of the boys interpreted the harsh teacher treatment of boys as a strategy of keeping the boys away from competing for girls' affection. This situation was likely to have adverse effects in transforming the boys into violent abusive men, just like their male teachers. A study in India showed that men who, in their childhood, had observed violence against women, including sexual violence, were significantly more likely to believe that husbands had a right to control their wives and to engage in physical or sexual abuse of their wives (Martin, S.L. et al. 2002).

Despite being presented as intellectually and physically inferior to boys, many of the girls portrayed themselves as empathetic with their male peers and were critical of the violent discrimination meted against them as demonstrated by Lelentle and Naledi from Botswana who expressed their disappointments during interviews:

Lelentle: They (boys) are treated differently. Some teachers, when they try to discipline a boy, they beat very thoroughly. Maybe the girl did something more wrong than

the boy did [but] they will still beat the boy very hard as if he [alone] did the wrong thing. Some teachers actually never punish girls. I don't know why. Girls are gently punished. Other female teachers favour girls, like when they are supposed to be beaten on the buttocks, they beat them on the hands, while boys are beaten on the buttocks.

Naledi: When the teacher is disciplining, he got to discipline in one form [not beating boys in one form and girls in another]. It is very painful to be beaten on the buttocks. It is not fair for the boys; we are in the same class, and we do the same things. Many teachers hate boys. It seems the teachers suppose that the boys do not feel the same pain like the girls. If a boy refuses to be beaten on the buttocks and rather asks to be beaten on the hand like the girls, he is told that he will be taken to the staff room and be beaten there. Or he has to go out of the class. So, in the class, girls are treated with higher regard than boys... Although this is the case with the treatment of boys and girls, boys are the ones who perform better. Girls just relax, knowing that they will not be severely punished for their failure.

From the foregoing evidence, corporal punishment and psychological abuse emerge as highly problematic, not least because they mitigate against the possibility of non-violent, peaceful and friendly learner-teacher relations that are essential for healthy relations between the genders. Further, physical and emotional violence is seen as not only eliciting feelings of bitterness in boys against powerful male figures but also potentially widening the rift in gender relations where girls and women are likely to be positioned as targets of male sexist revenge as the boys mature.

Girls and boys in the studies explicitly theorised widely about reasons why male teachers were harsher on boys compared with the girls. While a few of the boys hailed the violence as a viable means of toughening boys into real men, many of them and almost all the girls, viewed the gendering of violence as an unwelcome strategy that prepared the ground for gender-based violence including sexual harassment and abuse against girls in particular.

Why teachers don't beat girls: the sexual script

The sexualisation of girls emerged as a major concern in all the research communities
l mcepl

Box 1: Anonymous note written on the back of a questionnaire

The head teacher (male) of the school from which the above citation was captured presented himself as unsympathetic to such harassment claims of sexual harassment, which he explained to have often received through the school's suggestion box. Covering up for his male colleagues effectively condoned their behaviour and problematised the girls by silencing them on

the teacher would proceed to award high marks to the girls that he liked. Reportedly, if a girl dared to protest, the teacher would refuse to mark her book and that she would 'obviously' be the 'loser'. In this particular school, the girls accused male teachers of ignoring the boys while spending school time in paying sexual attention only to the girls. According to one of the interviewees, the girls who paraded and did not

A.N.: Some (teachers) go after girls from Standard 6,7 and 8.

C.N.: Girls can get into a lot of trouble with the young male teachers.

C.W.: This teacher holds girls' shoulders. They (male teachers) are not fair to other students. They will not beat the girl as compared to others...

H.A.: You do not have to

C.W.: *Ukikataa atakupiga* (If you refuse he will beat you)

A.N.: He comes in class and straight to where you sit.

C.N.: When he holds you, you cannot struggle because we are taught to respect teachers.

H.A.: If you refuse, he does not want to see you and when his lesson comes, you feel like going out but you can't. Your work then deteriorates because he criticises everything you do.

A.N.: Some men teachers *huchuna mtu nyuma ili wasikie kama ako na bra* (pinch you from behind so as to find out if one is wearing a brazier)

C.W.: *Anajifanya anachuna* [indicating the stomach area] *hata anapeleka mkono kwa private parts* (he pretends that he is pinching then moves his hands to the private parts).

From the foregoing, it is clear that classrooms were spaces in which male teachers constructed themselves, and were also constructed, as sexual predators in ways that their female colleagues were not. Because of the sexual attention that girls received, boys perceived girls as being 'favoured', thus justifying their feelings of animosity towards both them and the male teachers. This way, the male teachers effectively sowed in the boys, negative, exploitative and oppressive attitudes towards girls and women, which were likely to develop into misogynistic tendencies. Further, we note the girls' dilemmas and sense of powerlessness in responding to sexual violence, which diminished the girls' confidence as equal human beings with dignity.

In the school cited above the male teachers notably used the interviews to divert attention from professional responsibility by engaging in sex talk that tended to legitimate their sexually abusive behaviour towards their female students. This kind of talk demonstrated, how men in positions of authority tend to feel obliged to speak on behalf of women and girls even when they lacked the experience of being in their position of relative disempowerment. The following teacher interview excerpt exemplifies this tendency:

Mr. Okoli: These girls are mature. The body is disturbing (sexually)... They will start doing these things (i.e. having sex). We should not blame them so much because the world is also treating them like adults.

In attempting to justify the sexualisation of his girl-pupils, Mr. Okoli continued to wonder aloud:

What kind of study are you doing when your body is disturbing you? If you are hungry and I tell you to dig? You cannot.

in adult identity formation. The approach also demonstrated that being deliberately aware of the role that gender plays in perpetuating sexual violence and abuse against girls is key to understanding how to develop young peoples skills that would enable them to participate in empowering girls against sexual violations.

Memory work with graduate student-teachers showed that though not as prominently reported as the beatings (corporal punishment) and other verbal violences, the sexualisation of girls, as a form gendered violence, was a major area of concern which was recorded in the their diaries. The documented memories confirmed findings in research with primary and secondary school students who had portrayed men teachers humiliating the boys in class as a way of reducing their self-images and emasculating them. John, a third year university student-teacher, for example, remembered how in secondary school, the male teachers ‘snatched’ their girlfriends and intimidated the girls into having sexual relationships with the teachers. He recalled that in return for the sex, the teachers would assist the girls to pass their examinations as hard boys toiled unaided. This elicited in him feelings of bitterness, which he claimed he would not wish to pass on to children in his care as a teacher.

Memories of female students corroborate those of the male regarding sexual exploitation and abuse by the male teachers right from mid primary school classes which were characterised by the onset puberty. For example, Karen remembers how in primary Standard 5 and 6 a male teacher took his time to place his hand between the girls’ thighs and then pinch the inner parts. Apparently, this punishment was exclusives for the girls as boys were punished differently for similar offences. (See Box 2).

BOX 2



He used to put his hands between thighs, caress then pinch so hard and of course he would take a long time with you...

When we were in class 5 and 6 there was a teacher who used to teach us English and CRE and his form of punishment for boys was so harsh. He would tell them to put their heads under the desks and then pull their shorts so tightly, then beat them several canes on their buttocks and should they move their hands from under the table, he would increase the strokes. He used to use these pipes for the gas cylinders and I tell you this was so painful. For the girls he used to put his hands between thighs, caress then pinch so hard and of course he would take a lot of time with you. He called you in front at his desk then pull you near him and of course the class not watching he would do that and he did this several times and being the harshest teacher in the school we could not report him and most of us never thought that was a problem at that time (Karen, memories of Standard 5-6)

Conclusion

The young peoples' voices, teachers' utterances and alleged behaviours, clearly demonstrated how schools were transformed into spaces where girls were denied equal freedoms from sexual violence and the rights to become learners and human beings equally with boys. Although it is arguable that talking about non-violence in schools while violence thrived in society, the narratives from students at all educational levels suggest that young people and children do expect school environments, particularly the teachers, to be different, thus explaining their apparent shock when they encountered general violence from the teachers and in particular, sexual violence that problematised the possibility of boys and girls developing cooperation in learning activities. While teachers were constructed as a major source of violence in schools, the need for them to act out their professional role effectively as peacemakers is critical because without that, they would continue to lack the moral authority to transform schools into non-violent places where girls and boys felt safe and dignified as human beings.

A key finding from Memory Work with student-teachers suggest that engaging teachers as well as trainee teachers in activities of self-reflexivity of sexual violence has potential in bringing adult teachers to terms with the effects that sexual violence tends to have on both the girls and the boys. Also, using research-based evidence that captures the voices of girls and boys with regard to their experiences of sexual violence would help in posing critical questions for teacher discussions and development of s Tw[ahs t TD09ai.965 0 TD0.9006 Tc0.0191 Tweends becom7(b

REFERENCES

Boland, P. (Ed). (1995). 'Gender stereotypes: The links to violence'. In Women's Educational Equity Act Dissemination Centre.' *Equity in Education Series*. Massachusetts: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. ERIC.