

## Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

# Slovak Republic case study report 4 Gender Sensitive Education with Boys

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The EPASI project is a programme of analysis of educational programmes in fourteen European countries, designed to address various forms of social inequality. The project analysis was conducted in the period 2007 – 2009. This report is part of the overall project, details of which are at <http://www.epasi.eu>.

The analysis is intended to be used within the overall framework of the EPASI programme.

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The EPASI project was conducted by the following institutions:

- The Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University (UK) (Coordinator)
- Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West-Vlaanderen (Belgium)
- Univerzita Hradec Králové (Czech Republic)
- Montpellier III - Université Paul Valéry (France)
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The project *Model of Gender Sensitive Education* is a long-term project and also one of the main reasons why the organising institution, civic association of EsFem exists. Gender sensitive education and feminist pedagogy is the key instrument to eliminate gender stereotypes and to promote gender equality. Through many projects, being assisted by some donors and partners, EsFem tried/tries to develop a balanced approach of educational practice, research, theoretical studies, teachers' education in teaching methodology etc. in the field of gender issues.

Lectures were realised within projects *Together Against Violence*, *Elimination of Gender Stereotypes*, *Day of Health at Electrotechnical Secondary School* and *Model of Gender Sensitive Education of Boys*, which were supported by ETP Slovakia, Ekopolis, NPOA, NOS-OSF, Foundation for Children, and Slovak-Czech Women's Fund. Due to the interconnection between the projects *Model of Gender Sensitive Education* and *Model of Gender Sensitive Education of Boys* this case study comments on both these projects.

### **Model of Gender Sensitive Education**

The project *Model of Gender Sensitive Education* started on the basis of pedagogical experience of the EsFem, in the year of 2005. At its beginning the project focused work with children at school. There was a choice of lectures/interactive workshops that might have been incorporated directly in lessons of Ethic Education, Civic Education, Social Science, and Religion. The lectures/interactive workshops aimed to make gender stereotypes in society a visible issue, to strengthen children's ability to identify these issues, to be sensitive to the gender stereotypes. They focused mainly on violence prevention in pair relationships, food intake disorders caused by the beauty myths, partnership strategy support, and so on. Every lesson included activities for increasing children's awareness of legal matters, especially *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*.

The EsFem work included from the very beginning even research activities. Already the first project featured a short survey in the school which the project organisers chose. The school curriculum and textbooks were monitored at the same time, too. The monitoring results for sexual education textbooks can be checked on the website under the title '*Men and Women According to Textbooks*'. The project also contributed to the report on *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*, which presents the main findings. Students in their final year papers, in particularly, were motivated to pay attention to gender role, gender equality questions in education. Some of the diploma thesis can be also accessed on the Internet (EsFem website). Research aims do not focus only directly on the institutionalised education, but follow gender stereotypes consequences, too, such as gender conditioned violence and gender misbalance in the job market.

In the effort to intensify the impact of the EsFem activities, Esfem decided to pay more attention to both pre-graduate and in-service education of male and female teachers. For this reason there were developed some teaching methods that were given at their disposal. Other institutions which specialise in teacher training were contacted for further cooperation.

The key outcomes of the project (the organising association EsFem's estimate: 1,420,571 SKK) comprises of:

- 1) creation of methodical handbook for male and female teachers (Bosá and Minarovičová 2005),
- 2) 174 lectures/workshops realised from the beginning of the project,
- 3) high number of participants: There were 3,546 children participating in lectures, workshops from the beginning of the project,
- 4) increase in people's awareness of the gender issues,

- 5) positive appreciation of the project: Information Forum of Council of Europe in 2000, taking place in Bratislava under the name “Human Rights of Girls and Women” classified EsFem’s style of work with children and young people as a recommended way of gender stereotypes elimination.

### **Model of Gender Sensitive Education of Boys**

This project was realised as a pilot project in lessons of Ethic Education at Electrotechnical Secondary School in Prešov, by the association of EsFem within the wider and long-term project *Model of Gender Sensitive Education* (see above). The project *Model of Gender Sensitive Education of Boys* started on 1st September 2005 and lasted 15 months, till 31st August 2006. The project was financed mainly by Slovak-Czech Women’s Fund (149,600 SKK/yearly costs). As stated in the project’s title, the project deals with gender issues in education. Special attention is paid to the gender sensitive education of boys. The target group is one class of a secondary school within the vocational preparation in the field of electrotechnics (see above).

The organisers launched the project with realistic expectations as might be seen in the following lines:

*‘As gender-related masculinity stereotypes stand as one of the main obstacles for mature self-development and self-expression, especially where partner relationships and coping with stress and aggression are concerned, ...we assume that the preventive education to eliminate the possible negative impacts has been and will be beneficial for every participating boy. It is not likely for concrete positive results meaning a significant change in eliminating the stereotypes and their harmful impacts to be clearly visible immediately upon finishing the project. These outcomes are linked to changes in social attitudes and can only be followed over a long period of time.*

*However, we shall consider the project successful if we can motivate the boys to express their opinions and attitudes to the issues in question right in the classroom (the class peers can function as a very strong social control in the peer group in relation to masculinity ‘standards’), to contemplate what their own masculinity means for them, to think about their relationships with other people and their own vulnerability and the need to be helped by other people – the mutual dependence as a part of human relationships – all these issues seen in a new light free of stereotypes, which can feel disturbing and threatening at first by its total freshness.’ (Model)*

### **Project Orientation and Its Aims**

The project was designed to eliminate gender stereotypes related to masculinity, which might be of a major obstacle on the way to the boys’ mature full-scale personal development. (Gender stereotypes arising from traditional concepts of masculinity comprise a set of complex do’s and don’ts, which, though not explicitly stated, restrict boys and men especially in the field of relationships, self-awareness and positive self-expression.

The key project aims include the following ones.

- To prepare and verify teaching methods facilitating boys’ development of personality domains that eliminate aggression and support elements of care.
- To contribute to the support for boys’ sense of care in the widest sense, to support fatherhood as a full parenthood as well as to prevention of intimate domestic partner violence.
- To motivate boys for open in-class discussion on the concerned issues.

The support for boys' sense of care in the widest sense, to fatherhood as a full parenthood as well as to prevention of intimate domestic partner violence appear to be the central topics of the project.

## **The Project Stages and the Project Course**

The pilot project consisted of three stages:

### ***1/ Masculinity Perception Survey - Project stage 1***

One of the parts that comprised the first stage was a questionnaire survey and test papers content analysis.

### ***2/ Education Module Preparation - Project stage 2***

On the grounds of theoretical premises, preceding experience and research results there was compiled a set of appropriate activities and teaching methods that might be used for direct work with boys. The selection comprised of lectures, discussion activities, role plays, cooperative activities, study materials and texts supported teaching methods etc. The key topics of the activities include: relation of sex and gender, patterns of masculinity, sexuality and masculinity, parenthood as fatherhood, emotionalism and masculinity, responsibility and care, labour market and gender equality, feminist movement and new patterns of masculinity. What followed was a cycle of lectures applying the suggested teaching methods and activities.

### ***3/ Module Testing (Realising Lectures Based on the Proposed Teaching Methodology Strategies and Procedures) – Project stage 3***

This stage of the project was realised as a pilot project in lessons of Ethic Education at Electrotechnical Secondary School in Prešov. This school was selected for more reasons:

- It prepares its male and female students for work positions traditionally perceived as primarily typically masculine.
- Boy-girl ratio is not well-balanced at the school (three to four female students on average in a class with approximately 28 students altogether). This low number of female students only accentuates and confirms the 'male image' of the school.
- Thorough knowledge of familiar surroundings and teachers' interest in the problem. The same school has also hosted Model of Gender Sensitive Education, though on a limited scale.

The project focuses direct cooperation with students. The teachers participating in the project were supplied with literature on the relevant gender issues; consequently they showed profound interest and understanding.

The project evaluation was carried out using primarily information from interviews and analysing direct feedback from the students. By setting some of the criteria as well as sources of project effectiveness evaluation data, organisers found it impossible to apply any measurable indicators.

In the year 2006, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (MPSVR SR) published a *Handbook of Gender Equality Good Practices in Slovakia ('Príručka dobrých skúseností v oblasti rodovej rovnosti na Slovensku')* as one part of a twinning project. Rachel Silver incorporated the project Model of Gender Sensitive Education of Boys in the handbook (2006) as a good way to eliminate gender stereotypes.

## References:

BOSÁ, M, MINAROVÍČOVÁ, K. *Rodovo citlivá výchova*. EsFem, 2005. Available at: [www.esfem.sk](http://www.esfem.sk) [cited 20/2/2008]

*Model. Model rodovo citlivej výchovy chlapcov (Model of Gender Sensitive Education of Boys)*  
Available at: <http://www.esfem.sk> [cited 20/2/2008]