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Reimagining Teacher Training for Gender Equity and Active Citizenship

Abstract

This article examines how teacher education can serve as a transformative tool to challenge deeply rooted gender norms and encourage active citizenship in schools. Focusing on the Portuguese context, it reviews the design, implementation, and early results of two European projects, KINDER and EMiNC, which incorporate gender-sensitive strategies into teacher training. The analysis highlights how these initiatives aim to develop inclusive pedagogies, providing educators with methods to address gender inequalities and promote democratic participation in classrooms. Methodologically, the paper relies on project documentation, training materials, and initial evaluation reports, enabling a critical discussion of both successes and challenges. Findings suggest that gender-aware teacher education can lead to meaningful changes in professional practices, though obstacles remain in sustaining long-term impact and aligning with broader policies. By linking micro-level teaching practices with systemic educational policies, the article argues that coordinated efforts are crucial to integrating gender equality into teacher training. Ultimately, it calls for ongoing evaluation and more substantial policy alignment to sustain progress and expand the transformative potential of gender-sensitive teacher education.

Keywords: Gender-responsive pedagogy, Teacher education, Active citizenship, Nurturing masculinities, Educational equity

Introduction

Despite increasing efforts both internationally and locally to promote gender equality, deeply rooted gender stereotypes still persist within educational systems. These stereotypes are evident not only in curriculum content and teaching methods but also in classroom interactions, expectations for student behavior, and long-term career goals. Often unconscious, gender biases continue to shape how teachers engage with students, how students approach learning, and which opportunities they believe are available to them. These stereotypes are especially harmful in early childhood education, where rigid ideas of masculinity and femininity tend to form before children have the chance to critically examine them. Research shows that teacher expectations can be biased, significantly affecting student performance, self-confidence, and interest in particular subjects. For instance, girls may be subtly discouraged from excelling in STEM fields, while boys might be pushed away from the humanities or feel less comfortable expressing emotions, thus reinforcing limited gender role stereotypes (Subrahmanian, 2005; Kollmayer et al., 2018). Teachers themselves often feel unprepared to address these issues, partly due to limited formal training on gender equality and missed opportunities for using education as a tool for social change. Resolving these systemic issues requires more than good intentions; it calls for a structural approach through initial teacher training and ongoing professional development focused on promoting equity and inclusion. Implementing gender-responsive pedagogies can help transform educational cultures by challenging assumptions, increasing diverse role models, and promoting inclusive classroom practices. Such approaches can also foster a more democratic and participatory school environment where all students, regardless of gender, feel recognized, valued, and capable of contributing meaningfully to their communities.

This article examines how teachers and health education can challenge gender norms and build the foundation for promoting active citizenship. By analyzing two European projects, KINDER and EMiNC, it shows how gender-sensitive training programs can prepare educators and health professionals to foster more equitable and democratic classrooms. The main research question guiding this study is: How can teacher and health training be designed to advance gender equality and promote democratic participation among students from an early age?

Despite growing international and domestic efforts to promote gender equality, deeply ingrained gender stereotypes still persist within educational systems. These patterns are evident not only in curriculum content and teaching approaches but also in classroom interactions, expectations about student behavior, and long-term career goals. Gender biases – often unconscious – continue to

influence how teachers engage with students, how students approach learning, and what opportunities they believe are attainable. These stereotypes are particularly damaging in early childhood education, where rigid notions of masculinity and femininity start to develop, often before children have the chance to critically evaluate them.

Research indicates that teacher expectations can be biased. They greatly impact student performance, confidence, and interest in certain subjects. For example, girls may be subtly discouraged from excelling in STEM fields, while boys might be pushed away from the humanities or feel less comfortable expressing emotions, which perpetuates limited gender role stereotypes (Subrahmanian, 2005; Kollmayer et al., 2018). Teachers may also feel unprepared to address these issues due to limited formal training on gender equality and missed chances to use education as a tool for social change.

Addressing these systemic issues requires more than just good intentions. It demands a structural strategy through initial teacher training and ongoing professional development programs aimed at promoting equity and inclusion. Implementing gender-responsive pedagogies can help transform educational cultures by challenging assumptions, increasing diverse role models, and fostering inclusive classroom practices. Likewise, such pedagogies can foster a more democratic and participatory school environment where all students, regardless of gender, feel recognized, valued, and able to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

This article explores how teachers and health education can challenge gender norms and build a foundation for promoting active citizenship. Through an in-depth analysis of two European projects, KINDER and EMiNC, this paper investigates how gender-sensitive training programs can prepare educators and health professionals to create more equitable and democratic classrooms. The main research question guiding this study is: How can teacher and health training be designed to advance gender equality and encourage democratic participation among students from an early age?

Research Problem and Aim

Clarifying key terms is crucial. “Gender bias in the classroom” refers to the unequal treatment or expectations of students based on gender, often leading to disparities in learning opportunities (Subrahmanian, 2005). “Masculinity” is described through Connell’s (2005) idea of hegemonic masculinity, which promotes dominance, emotional suppression, and the undervaluing of caregiving roles. “Active citizenship” includes civic engagement, critical thinking, and in-

volvement in democratic processes (Hoskins, Mascherini, 2009). Finally, “gender-responsive pedagogy” involves teaching and health strategies that recognize and address gender inequalities within curricula, interactions, and institutional culture (UNESCO, 2015).

Table 1. Key Concept Definitions

Concept	Definition
Gender bias	Unequal treatment or expectations of students based on gender often leads to disparities in learning opportunities and outcomes.
Masculinity	In this study, socially constructed ideals of male behavior are defined through Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, emphasizing dominance and emotional restraint.
Active citizenship	The ability and commitment to participate critically, responsibly, and democratically in social and civic life.
Gender-responsive pedagogy	An educational approach that recognizes, addresses, and challenges gender inequalities in curriculum design, classroom interaction, and institutional culture.

These ideas are interconnected. Challenging gender stereotypes requires educators to understand how classroom interactions influence identity and civic behavior. By adopting gender-responsive teaching, educators empower students to help create a more equitable society.

The aim of this article is twofold: to explore how teacher training can challenge gender bias and foster active citizenship, and to assess how the KIND-ER and EMiNC projects accomplish these objectives. The article relies on both quantitative and qualitative analysis of project documents, workshop feedback, and policy frameworks, including the National Strategy for Citizenship Education (ENEC), Essential Learning (AE), and the Student Profile at the End of Compulsory Education (PASEO). The focus is on Portugal, although both projects are part of larger European initiatives and programs.

Although the data are mainly qualitative and interpretive, the article highlights areas where more empirical research is needed. Workshop evaluations and training feedback are the main data sources, focusing on participant outcomes, thematic curriculum modules, and documented institutional responses.

Methodology

Teacher Education and Training Workshops: Citizenship, Equality, Care, and Fatherhood

Teacher education has long been a key focus in educational research and is viewed as a crucial factor in teaching quality and teachers' professional growth (Flores, 2017; Zeichner, 2010). Schools, as social institutions, play an important role in promoting citizenship and gender equality. Therefore, teacher education must incorporate these principles from the start of professional training (Ponte, 2020; Santos, Pereira, 2019). The increasing autonomy and social responsibility of schools call for a renewed view of the teacher's role in society. As Alarcão and Tavares (2007) state, schools need to critically assess themselves and commit to educational quality. In this effort, both initial and ongoing teacher training should prepare professionals with flexible pedagogical approaches that adapt to social change, including promoting gender equality in educational practices (Moreira, 2021). This concern is reflected in key Portuguese educational policy documents, such as the PASEO (Project for Autonomy and Curricular Flexibility), the Essential Learnings, and the National Strategy for Citizenship Education (ENEC), all emphasizing the cross-cutting nature of citizenship and equity in education. The shift from knowledge transmission to competence-based teaching calls for innovative methods in teacher training (Bidarra, 2002, 2004). If teachers are to promote inclusive and fair education, initial training must address citizenship and current social challenges (Flores, 2017; López, 2018). PASEO and the Essential Learnings highlight the importance of cross-disciplinary skills that foster reflection on social justice and gender equality from early schooling. Professional development is a dynamic process. Korthagen (2010) notes that bridging theory and practice remains a persistent challenge in teacher education, calling for reflective and collaborative learning models. In this regard, ongoing education is essential for updating teachers' knowledge to meet emerging issues like gender equality (Sanches, Carvalho, 2022). ENEC supports this view by promoting innovative teaching methods and lifelong learning focused on active citizenship and gender equity, fostering intercultural skills and critical thinking. The early years of teaching are crucial for shaping teachers' professional identities (Flores, 2002, 2012; Huberman, 1992). The induction period should be organized to provide adequate support and mentorship for new teachers, helping them develop inclusive and socially just practices (Ribeiro, Martins, 2009). According to Estrela (2014), the ethical and relational aspects of teaching must be prioritized in teacher training, encour-

aging teachers' social commitment to diversity and equity. ENEC and PASEO guidelines emphasize the need for teacher education that equips professionals to handle modern challenges of inclusion and cultural diversity. Therefore, teacher training should incorporate principles that prepare teachers to promote active citizenship and address inequalities, especially by challenging gender stereotypes (Torres, Silva, 2023). Programs must include social justice and equity components (Perrenoud, 2020). Portugal's Ministry of Education frameworks, such as the Essential Learnings and ENEC, provide a solid base for implementing innovative and equitable teaching practices. Involving schools in designing professional development is key to making continuous education relevant and impactful (Campos, 2004; Ponte, 2004). This process should be research-based and foster teamwork, helping teachers build both technical skills and a critical, ethical commitment to society (Tejada, 2000; Gewirtz et al., 2009). ENEC calls for stronger partnerships between schools and universities to develop contextualized teaching projects that influence both initial and ongoing teacher training. Thus, both pre-service and in-service teacher education must be seen as a dynamic, evolving process focused on cultivating inclusive teaching practices rooted in democratic and equality-driven values, which are essential for educational quality and social change. The frameworks of ENEC, PASEO, and the Essential Learnings are vital for shaping policies that promote equity and active citizenship, preparing teachers to meet today's societal challenges. Context-based teacher education is an ideal space to bridge theory and practice, allowing both pre-service and in-service teachers to reflect, adapt, and innovate through real school experiences. In the workshops we have organized, undergraduate and master's students in education work with practicing teachers in collaborative settings that promote debate and cooperation, which are key to advancing citizenship, opportunity equality, care, and active fatherhood. The workshops are structured into three interconnected parts: (1) theoretical input based on recent OECD, UNESCO, and academic studies; (2) practical classroom activities such as lesson observation, micro-teaching, and intervention projects; and (3) reflection sessions involving sharing experiences, joint analysis, and feedback. This structure aligns with global evidence showing that effective professional development is long-term, centered on real teaching issues, and based on peer collaboration, observation, and feedback (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner, 2017; OECD, 2024). Collaboration between experienced teachers and student teachers creates valuable synergies. Experienced teachers bring deep contextual knowledge and awareness of classroom challenges; student teachers offer fresh perspectives informed by recent research and theory. The constructive exchange of these viewpoints drives professional growth, encouraging critical reflection,

adjustment, and transformation of established practices. Biesta (2011) argues that education as a democratic practice thrives precisely within such spaces of dialogue and negotiation, where different worldviews, educational values, and professional expectations meet.

Workshops focused on citizenship highlight skills like active listening, critical thinking, empathy, and participation. We also create projects with students that explore local realities socioeconomic inequalities, gender issues, and human rights encouraging lived citizenship. On the topic of equality of opportunity, we implement strategies to identify and reduce educational barriers: curriculum adjustments, differentiated teaching methods, inclusion of students with special needs, and support for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Contemporary research emphasizes that promoting equality depends on institutional structures resources, policies, and school culture rather than just individual goodwill (UNESCO, 2022; OECD, 2024).

Themes such as care, fatherhood, and active parenting have received special attention in our training initiatives. Modules challenge gender norms in caregiving, discuss the pedagogical and social impacts of father involvement, and enable participants to reflect on inclusive parental engagement within educational projects. Reports like State of the World's Fathers highlight that fathers' participation in caregiving improves gender equity, child well-being, and family cohesion (Equimundo, 2021). Although these discussions often provoke discomfort among both teachers familiar with traditional roles and student teachers with idealistic expectations, this discomfort, when mediated by reflective and dialogic processes, becomes a catalyst for critical learning and professional transformation. Workshops are delivered over extended periods, with regular sessions, project supervision, and ongoing evaluation. We incorporate thematic communities of practice focused on gender equality, parenting, inclusion, and intervention laboratories where participants plan, implement, and evaluate projects in schools or communities. This approach aligns with recommendations from professional development literature, which emphasizes that fragmented or short-term programs have limited impact (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; OECD, 2024). Evaluation uses multiple tools: classroom observations, reflective journals, interviews with participants, analysis of students' work, and school climate surveys. The goal is not just to measure impact but to foster professional self-awareness, institutional insight, and a culture of continuous improvement. The link between initial and ongoing education proves especially powerful. Supervised internships enable student teachers to join school-based communities of practice, follow professional development initiatives, and participate in collective improvement efforts. This integrated pathway promotes a more mind-

ful professional transition, bridges academic theory with practical teaching, and supports ongoing innovation within institutions. Investing in context-based, collaborative training workshops that address emerging topics like care, active fatherhood, and equality of opportunity means investing in democratic, inclusive, and transformative education. For these programs to realize their full potential, institutional commitment, policy support, resource allocation, and recognition of teachers' time are essential. Only with these conditions can schools truly become spaces where citizenship is learned, lived, and practiced. Collaboration between experienced teachers and those new to the profession offers a unique opportunity to develop a broader and more cohesive vision of schooling. Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize the importance of situated learning, where newcomers learn from seasoned practitioners through active participation in real-world contexts so-called "communities of practice."

The interaction between experienced and novice teachers is essential in developing reflective and integrated teaching practices. Professional learning happens not in isolation but within educational communities where sharing experiences and knowledge promotes a deeper and more critical understanding of teaching (Flores, 2017). Flores (2017) states that teacher education should be viewed as a continuous process, where interaction with experienced teachers provides vital framing for understanding real-world professional challenges. This intergenerational collaboration fosters dynamic learning environments that connect theoretical and practical knowledge, ensuring better preparation for classroom realities.

In this context, Subrahmanian (2005) emphasizes that gender equality education is a crucial part of teacher preparation. For schools to become agents of social change, teachers need to be equipped to handle gender issues thoughtfully and intentionally. Collaboration between experienced and novice teachers creates opportunities for joint reflection on inclusive and fair teaching methods. Reflective practice, as Flores (2017) advocates, is essential for professional growth. By observing and critically analyzing their own practices and those of others, teachers can identify challenges and develop more effective teaching strategies. The connection between experienced and pre-service teachers acts as a catalyst for building professional knowledge and encourages adaptable, evidence-based practices. Moreover, immersing teacher trainees in real educational settings helps reinforce their professional identity. As Subrahmanian (2005) notes, schools should be ongoing learning environments where teachers, regardless of experience, reflect on their role in promoting citizenship and equity. Mentorship and support from seasoned teachers help new teachers develop critical and socially aware pedagogical practices that address current challenges.

Within the KINDER project, this collaboration proved essential for encouraging reflection and sharing on the challenges of citizenship and gender equality education. Through an accredited workshop recognized by the Scientific Council for Teacher Continuous Education, teachers from various backgrounds and educational levels engaged in dialogue, exchanged experiences, and discussed pedagogical practices aimed at improving educational settings. This interaction not only strengthened the professional growth of future teachers but also enriched the practices of experienced teachers by challenging their perspectives with new pedagogical approaches. At a time when equity and inclusion are key educational values, such collaboration is crucial for creating fairer school environments that embody truly transformative education (Gonçalves, 2020). Intergenerational cooperation among teachers fosters innovative strategies, cultivating more conscious and effective pedagogical practices that promote gender equality. However, the project aimed to address the impact evaluation gap by using the GEM scale. It conducted thorough quantitative assessments. To advance the field, future iterations should incorporate mixed-method evaluations.

The KINDER and EMiNC Project

KINDER (2021–2023) aimed to challenge gender stereotypes among young children by redesigning teacher training. Working in Portugal, Spain, and Croatia, it developed a modular, accredited program called “Be KINDER: Unraveling Paths to Address Gender Stereotypes in Education and Early Childhood.” The curriculum included nine modules covering topics like equity, non-violence, family-school relationships, and inclusive teaching methods. Materials were created collaboratively with 3D artists and education specialists.

The project encouraged reflective practice through workshops where both novice and experienced teachers shared ideas, co-developed teaching tools, and assessed gender-related behaviors in the classroom. Participants said the training helped them recognize gendered assumptions in their teaching and modify their curriculum choices. For example, some teachers added new reading materials that feature diverse role models, reorganized group activities to promote equal participation, and revised lesson plans to challenge traditional gender roles. Launched in 2023, EMiNC (Engaging Men in Nurturing Care) builds on KINDER by addressing masculinity, the gendered division of care work, and the benefits of involving men from an early childhood perspective. Led by the Step by Step Association, it promotes male involvement at local, national, and international levels. The main goal is to incorporate a gender approach into early childhood education, with a particular focus on masculin-

ties, starting with professionals and aiming to develop European policy recommendations for cross-sector partnerships.

EMiNC redefines caregiving as a core human value, not just a feminine trait. Historically, caregiving has been culturally seen as a woman's role, associated with home life, motherhood, and emotional work. This limited view not only confines women to caregiving roles but also discourages men from developing the emotional depth and sentimentality needed for caregiving relationships. By calling care a universal human quality, EMiNC challenges the deeply rooted cultural divide that links masculinity with power, independence, and emotional restraint.

Essentially, care is the opposite of violence. While violence aims to dominate, oppress, or destroy, care focuses on building relationships, practicing active listening, and supporting others. This ideal outlines a relational ethic recognizing our mutual interdependence; our well-being is connected to that of others. Therefore, nurturing care can be seen as a radical act of rebellion against the values of domination that underpin many forms of structural and interpersonal violence. When care is diminished, societal values drift toward distance and insensitivity, fostering a culture of violence. Conversely, when care values are elevated, empathy becomes a powerful form of agency – providing protection, promoting healing, and enabling restoration.

The idea of “nurturing masculinities” promoted by EMiNC offers a powerful alternative to traditional man-of-action stereotypes of manhood. Men are encouraged to embrace empathy, vulnerability, and emotional literacy, seeing these not as weaknesses but as strengths essential to personal growth. Nurturing masculinities focus on presence instead of control, listening instead of speaking, and cooperation instead of competition. The ideal of masculinity presented here goes beyond individual change and takes a political stance. As men develop an ethic of care for themselves, others, and the environment, they challenge the emotional hierarchies that support gender inequality and social harm. This view of masculine care recognizes that strength isn't about domination but about the willingness to feel emotions, nurture others, and show mercy even within a culture that often values power over compassion.

With the promotion of nurturing masculinities, the EMiNC paves the way toward a world of greater equality a world that values care over domination as a measure of humanity. Teachers and fathers participate in sessions that challenge hegemonic masculinity and explore ways to model inclusive behaviors for children. This expands the intervention from schools to family and community settings, addressing structural barriers that marginalize men in caregiving roles.

Table 2. Methodological Framework and Evaluation Indicators

Component	Description
Research design	Comparative case study of two European initiatives (KINDER and EMiNC).
Analytical approach	Qualitative content analysis of project materials, training documentation, participant reflections, and evaluation reports.
Data sources	Project manuals, training curricula, workshop reports, feedback forms, reflective journals, and institutional evaluations.
Coding scheme	Thematic coding categories: gender awareness, inclusivity, care practices, civic engagement, and professional reflection.
Evaluation indicators	Changes in teacher awareness of gender issues; evidence of inclusive practices; participant satisfaction; institutional adoption of gender-responsive policies.
Analytical tools	Text-based coding supported by interpretive thematic synthesis; descriptive statistics from participant evaluations where available.
Interpretation approach	Integration of descriptive and interpretive findings to trace causal links between interventions and observed outcomes.

Results

Preliminary feedback from the EMiNC initiative shows growing interest among male educators and generally positive responses from parents. These early signs are encouraging, suggesting that targeted efforts could help increase gender diversity in caregiving roles and challenge traditional gender norms. However, EMiNC is still in its early implementation phase, and its long-term impact on school culture, professional practices, and broader gender equality goals requires systematic evaluation. Future long-term studies will be essential to determine if these initial trends result in lasting changes in educational settings and workforce patterns.

The KINDER program, by contrast, has already provided participants with practical tools and strategies to recognize and challenge gender stereotypes in their teaching practices. According to the program manual, training activities are designed to help educators identify subtle biases in classroom interactions, curricular content, and teaching methods. Participants have reported that this training

has led to real changes in classroom dynamics, including the development of more inclusive activities and materials that support gender equality. Early observations indicate an increase in activities that foster cooperation and respect across genders, along with a heightened awareness among educators of the importance of equitable representation in learning materials and play opportunities.

The KINDER manual emphasizes that early childhood, especially the first five years, is critical for shaping children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Interventions during this important period can have lasting impacts on children's understanding of gender roles and social norms. The program also highlights the importance of creating inclusive school cultures by actively involving families, encouraging reflective practices among teachers, and integrating gender-responsive teaching into daily classroom routines. By promoting diversity, respect, and equity from the very start of education, KINDER aims to create learning environments where all children can succeed regardless of gender.

Taken together, the preliminary evidence from EMiNC and KINDER highlights the potential of structured interventions in early childhood settings to promote gender equality. While EMiNC shows promise in encouraging male participation and parent engagement, KINDER demonstrates practical strategies for integrating gender-sensitive practices into classroom curricula. Both programs emphasize the need for ongoing evaluation and support to ensure that these early initiatives lead to lasting cultural and structural change in education. Future research should focus on measuring long-term outcomes, including children's social and emotional development, teacher professional growth, and changes in school-wide practices related to gender equity.

Initial participant survey data suggest that approximately 68% of respondents reported increased confidence in addressing gender and care issues in their teaching contexts, while 54% expressed interest in integrating discussions of masculinities into classroom activities. Short qualitative statements illustrate this change:

“I never realized how small gestures in class reinforce gender roles. The workshop helped me rethink those patterns.” – KINDER participant, 2023

“Discussing masculinity and care as a teacher and father made me feel involved in social change.” – EMiNC participant, 2024

The KINDER program, by contrast, has already equipped participants with practical tools and strategies to identify and challenge gender stereotypes in their teaching practices. According to the program manual and feedback forms, training activities were designed to help educators detect subtle biases in classroom interac-

tions, curriculum content, and teaching methods. Participants have reported that this training resulted in tangible changes in classroom dynamics, including the development of more inclusive activities and materials that promote gender equality.

Early observations reveal a rise in activities that foster cooperation and respect between genders, along with increased awareness among educators of the importance of fair representation in learning materials and play opportunities.

The KINDER manual highlights that early childhood years especially the first five – are vital for shaping children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Interventions during this critical period can have lasting impacts on children's understanding of gender roles and social norms. The program also emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive school environments by actively involving families, encouraging reflective practices among teachers, and incorporating gender-responsive teaching into daily classroom routines.

By promoting diversity, respect, and equity from the start of education, KINDER aims to create learning environments where all children can succeed regardless of gender.

Both programs highlight the importance of ongoing evaluation and policy backing to ensure that early efforts result in lasting cultural and structural changes in education. Future research should aim to measure long-term outcomes, including children's socio-emotional development, teacher professional growth, and institutional shifts related to gender equity.

Table 3. Summary of Key Findings and Evidence Sources

Project	Main Outcomes	Empirical Evidence	Link to Research Question
KINDER	Increased teacher awareness of gender stereotypes; integration of inclusive teaching materials and practices.	Participant reflections, workshop feedback, and evaluation reports (2021–2023).	Demonstrates how gender-sensitive training fosters equitable and participatory classroom practices.
EMiNC	Early positive engagement from male educators and families; promotion of nurturing masculinities and shared caregiving values.	Participant interviews, early-stage surveys, and observation notes (2023–2024).	Shows how redefined masculinities can promote care ethics and civic participation from early education onward.
Cross-case insights	Professional reflection and community engagement are key to transforming educational culture.	Comparative thematic coding of both projects.	Supports the main question on designing teacher training to promote equality and democratic participation.

Discussion (including implications, limitations)

Gender equality and active citizenship are strongly linked. Schools act as settings where democratic values are fostered, teaching kids not just facts but also fundamental principles.

Programs like KINDER and EMiNC show that including gender in teacher education improves civic learning. Teachers and health professionals trained to think critically about gender and masculinities are better prepared to promote fairness, respect, and dialogue in their workplaces, which are vital skills for democratic participation. However, these results depend on institutional support. Currently, gender equity is unevenly included in teacher and health education programs across Portugal and Europe.

Preliminary findings from both projects indicate that reflective pedagogical practice - when combined with collaborative, cross-sector approaches—can change teachers' perceptions and behaviors, thereby integrating gender equality into educational culture. This supports broader international research emphasizing that transformative teacher education must merge theoretical awareness, reflexivity, and experiential learning (Pérez-Torres, Sáez, 2021; Santos et al., 2024).

Simultaneously, the idea of nurturing masculinities (Hanlon, 2022; Hearn, Blagojević, 2023) offers a new way to rethink gender and care in education settings. By viewing care as a shared human ability rather than a gender-specific trait, EMiNC challenges hegemonic masculinity and opens up opportunities for men to be actively involved in caregiving and education. This redefinition supports gender justice, reduces violence, and broadens models of civic involvement that emphasize empathy and cooperation.

Nonetheless, the data presented here are still preliminary. While both projects demonstrate promising results, they lack long-term evidence and comparison with control groups, which limits the ability to determine cause-and-effect relationships. Although evaluation frameworks are improving, they still mainly depend on self-reports and qualitative data. To strengthen empirical validity, future studies should use mixed-method approaches, combining participant interviews, classroom observations, and quantitative attitude surveys.

Moreover, linking these project-level findings to national policy frameworks such as the Portuguese ENEC and Essential Learnings is crucial for expanding their transformative potential. As Flores (2023) notes, institutional support mechanisms and systemic policy alignment are essential in determining whether gender-transformative education can extend from local innovation to lasting reform.

Ultimately, the link between teacher training and civic growth seen in these projects indicates that equity-focused teacher education can act as a driver for

wider democratic engagement. When teachers adopt gender-sensitive and caring teaching methods, they become catalysts for social change rather than just deliverers of curriculum content.

The findings of this article are limited by the small amount of data from the EMiNC project, although relevant material from KINDER provides a stronger foundation. While both projects showcase innovative ideas and practical approaches, they lack longitudinal studies or control-group comparisons. Evaluation frameworks are still being developed, and dissemination has mainly stayed within pilot educational communities.

Future research should use mixed methods to evaluate student outcomes, including attitude surveys, behavioral indicators, and long-term tracking. Studies should also analyze how institutions implement gender-responsive training and incorporate these practices into national teacher education frameworks. Publishing project results in peer-reviewed journals is essential to contribute to the growing global discussion on gender-transformative education.

Table 4. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Dimension	Key Insight	Supporting Literature (2020–2025)
Gender-transformative teacher education	Teacher training programs that integrate gender reflection foster inclusive pedagogical cultures and civic competencies.	Pérez-Torres & Sáez (2021); Ailwood & Gomes (2023); Santos et al. (2024).
Nurturing/caring masculinities	Encouraging empathy and caregiving roles among male educators and fathers reshapes traditional gender scripts and promotes social equity.	Hanlon (2022); Hearn & Blagojević (2023).
Civic and democratic participation	Early exposure to equitable classroom practices cultivates participatory mindsets and democratic engagement.	OECD (2024); UNESCO (2022).
Institutional commitment	Sustainable gender-responsive education requires policy-level integration, monitoring, and long-term teacher support.	Flores (2023); Perrenoud (2020).

Conclusion

Table 5. Summary of Key Concepts

Concept	Core Idea	Implication for Teacher Education
Gender-responsive pedagogy	An approach that challenges gender stereotypes and embeds equity within curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional culture.	Empowers teachers to identify and transform gendered assumptions in classroom practice.
Nurturing masculinities	A framework that redefines masculinity around empathy, care, and cooperation.	Encourages men in education and caregiving roles to model equitable and emotionally literate behaviors.
Active citizenship	Engagement in civic life through critical thinking, dialogue, and democratic participation.	This statement links gender equality education with civic and democratic competence development.
Transformative teacher education	Professional learning that connects theory, reflection, and action to promote social justice and inclusion.	Builds institutional cultures that sustain gender equality and participatory democracy.

While targeted training initiatives can empower educators and health professionals to promote inclusive, reflective, and democratic environments, lasting change requires systemic commitment. Isolated innovations or short-term pilot programs - though useful as proofs of concept are insufficient to create lasting impact on deeply rooted gender norms.

For genuine progress, national education and public health systems must incorporate gender-transformative principles into their core functions. This involves integrating comprehensive, equity-focused content into training programs for teachers and health professionals, along with ongoing opportunities for critical reflection and pedagogical innovation (UNESCO, 2015; WHO, 2017).

Ongoing professional development remains crucial, enabling practitioners to navigate complex sociocultural contexts while reflecting on their own positions and biases (Connell, 2012). Additionally, systemic reform should be supported by effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that go beyond administrative metrics to identify shifts in attitudes, behaviors, and relationships.

Gender-sensitive indicators, disaggregated data, and participatory evaluation processes are essential for accountability and ongoing improvement (Greene et al., 2015; Leach et al., 2014). Initial findings from the KINDER and EMiNC projects indicate that these mechanisms are practical when supported by collaborative institutional networks.

Education's ability to influence cultural norms and promote social equity depends on intentional, critically thoughtful, and cooperative strategies. Including gender equity and civic responsibility in teacher training is not just an educational upgrade it's a democratic essential for fostering inclusive communities.

At the same time, public health systems must ensure that schools support physical safety, mental health, and psychosocial well-being, recognizing that well-being serves as the foundation for meaningful learning and engagement.

When aligned, the education and health sectors create a strong alliance to challenge and reshape dominant gender narratives especially those about masculinity. By promoting caring, emotionally intelligent, and nonviolent models of masculinity, these sectors can break down patriarchal norms that sustain inequality and violence.

Evidence from gender-transformative programs shows that these approaches not only decrease gender-based violence and enhance health outcomes but also promote broader objectives of justice and fairness (Jewkes et al., 2015; Barker et al., 2007a, 2007b; Hanlon, 2022).

In conclusion, the combined efforts of education and health systems are crucial for promoting masculinities based on empathy, mutual respect, and social responsibility. This not only leads to individual change but also serves as a structural step toward creating societies where everyone regardless of gender can thrive with dignity and equality.

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Nowe podejście do szkolenia nauczycieli w zakresie równości płci i aktywnego obywatelstwa

Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule przeanalizowano, w jaki sposób kształcenie nauczycieli może służyć jako narzędzie transformacyjne, pozwalające podważać głęboko zakorzenione normy dotyczące płci i zachęcać do aktywnego obywatelstwa w szkołach. Skupiając się na przykładzie portugalskim, dokonano przeglądu założeń, wdrożenia i wstępnych wyników dwóch europejskich projektów, KINDER i EMiNC, które uwzględniają strategie dotyczące kwestii płci w szkoleniu nauczycieli. Analiza wskazuje, w jaki sposób inicjatywy te wpływają na rozwój edukacji włączającej, dostarczając nauczycielom metod radzenia sobie z nierównościami płciowymi i promowania demokratycznego uczestnictwa w klasach. Pod względem metodologicznym artykuł opiera się na dokumentacji projektowej, materiałach szkoleniowych i wstępnych raportach z oceny, umożliwiając krytyczną dyskusję zarówno na temat sukcesów, jak i wyzwań. Wyniki sugerują, że kształcenie nauczycieli uwzględniające kwestie płci może prowadzić do znaczących zmian w praktyce zawodowej, choć nadal istnieją przeszkody w utrzymaniu długoterminowego wpływu i dostosowaniu się do polityki odgórnej. Łącząc praktykę nauczania na poziomie mikro z systemową polityką edukacyjną, w artykule dowiedziono, że skoordynowane działania mają kluczowe znaczenie dla włączenia równości płci do kształcenia nauczycieli. Ostatecznie rekomendowane jest ciągłe monitorowanie procesu kształcenia i bardziej znaczące dostosowanie polityki, w celu utrzymania postępów i rozszerzenia transformacyjnego potencjału kształcenia dotyczącego równości płci.

Słowa kluczowe: pedagogika uwzględniająca kwestie płci, kształcenie nauczycieli, aktywne obywatelstwo, pielęgnowanie męskości, równość w edukacji