Theoretical Challenges in Anti-violence Practitioner Training: Defining gender-related violence

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Gendered, normative, sexualized and homophobic banter and abuse is increasingly recognized and problematised amongst young people (e.g. Phipps and Smith 2012; Sundaram 2014). Practitioners working in educational and youth contexts are ideally placed to challenge these kinds of dynamics of everyday peer group interaction either through their spontaneous challenges or their planned educational activities. They are therefore an ideal group to provide training for to think critically about such forms of violence and to identify resources to support educational activities and interventions.

This paper will reflect on the definitional issues that emerged in a project that provided training to teachers and youth workers to help them better challenge ‘gender-related violence’. The project aims were to increase awareness of violence, improve support of those children and young people affected by it and their referral into appropriate victim services. It aimed also to extend the problematization of violence to that inherent in normativities, and to forge a theoretical link between interpersonal violence/domestic abuse and homophobic and transphobic abuse. This wide target made perfect theoretical sense to academic researchers, but raised two types of problem in practice. First the theoretical links may not be evident to practitioner-trainees. Second the breadth of issues to be tackled can become overwhelming to practitioners and either this or of lack of shared politics might mean that radical practice for equalities is not developed. The former highlights the fact that the training sought educational change from a training format and so prompts reflection on this distinction and its implication for the professional development of educators. The latter raises questions about the degree of autonomy different professional groups have in relation to their work with young people.

These issues will be explored through an analysis of the definitions of gender-related violence that compares practitioners’ statements from before and after training. A comparison between the definitions and discourses of gender violence of the UK and the Spanish trainees will be discussed although matters of translation complicate and limit this somewhat. A challenge for training lies in the theoretical integrity of such a programme and in the degree of diversity of theoretical positions that can be tolerated within it.

References:

Sundaram, V (2014). Preventing Youth Violence: Rethinking the Role of Gender and Schools.
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