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## Prioritizing Violence Prevention

An evaluation of the implementation of a school-based initiative to prevent violence in Sweden

*Rebecka Vikström*

Supervisor: Wahlström, Mattias

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to evaluate the implementation of a violence prevention initiative called Northeast Free from Violence (NFFV), in a Swedish lower-elementary school. The aim was to explore how the initiative was received and implemented into the daily activities and what challenges could be identified in the process. A series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with teachers, a school management representative, and a representative from NFFV. A thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and determine themes in the material (Braun & Clarke 2006). This thesis also used theoretical concepts of balancing production logics with development logics (Sjöberg 2012; Ellström 2010) as well as the concept of resistance (Amundsdotter et al. 2015; Lindholm 2012). The main findings were that the initiative was overall well received, and that the implementation had indications of being promising. The challenges were mainly due to poor organizational prerequisites, which also manifested in difficulties to prioritize the initiative, resulting in resistance and dilemmas and a deficient integration of the initiative into ordinary activities.

#### **Key words**

Primary violence prevention, qualitative evaluation, resistance, school-based prevention, implementation

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# 1. Introduction

This is a qualitative evaluation of the implementation of a primary violence prevention initiative in a lower-elementary school in Sweden. The study is made on behalf of the social administration in the northeast district in Gothenburg, Sweden, and their initiative Northeast Free from Violence (NFFV). It appears that there have been an increased amount of various initiatives to prevent violence in many parts of the world, with focus on men's violence against women (Flood 2019). Men's violence against women is often occurring in more gender-unequal societies and there are strong associations between this sort of violence and gender roles, gender norms and gender relations (ibid). Men who perpetrate violence are socialized with certain gender unequal values, which they act upon, and on an individual level, sexist attitudes serve as important predictors for violence (ibid).

To prevent, instead of solely reacting to violence has been an approach argued for within the research field of violence- and crime prevention as well as in politics (Teasdale & Bradley 2017; Skr 2016/17:10). In recent years, 46 countries including Sweden, have agreed upon a commitment to prevent violence by signing the Istanbul convention (Ds 2012:52). Since then, Sweden has adopted a ten-year national strategy in order to meet their sixth political sub-goal of gender equality, namely that men's violence against women must end. The sub-goal constitutes a specific focus upon the relation between masculinity norms and violence. In doing this, the Swedish government highlights prevention as a key part of the national strategy in fighting men's violence against women and with long-term primary prevention approaches rather than short-lived projects (Skr 2016/17:10; Flood 2019). Initiatives in project forms are further challenging to evaluate and therefore leaves levels of uncertainty (Skr 2016/17:10).

The Swedish government highlights the program Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) (Katz 1995), as a promising program that addresses the relation between masculinity norms and violence (Katz 1995). It has mainly had its focus on high-school settings (ibid). However, it is arguably favorable for children to be exposed to violence prevention already in the beginning of elementary school, since they start early with potentially violent behavior and the internalization of norms conducive to such behavior (Flood 2019). The National Agency for Education was commissioned by the Swedish government to evaluate the implementation

of organization “MÄN”’s translation of Mentors in Violence Prevention during the time period of 2015/2017 in Sweden (Skr 2016/17:10). One of the evaluations main recommendations was that future evaluations should consider evaluating the initiative adjusted to younger students as well (Eriksson et al. 2018).

This study aims to contribute to the field of violence prevention evaluations of MVP-inspired interventions in a Swedish context, especially interventions of primary violence prevention that target younger students. There seem to be few, if any, implementations and evaluations conducted on a lower-elementary school in Sweden, since previous evaluations have been performed upon implementations in upper-elementary, and high-school settings (see for example Gottzén et al. 2021; Eriksson et al. 2018; Bruno et al. 2020). This study hopes to contribute with valuable knowledge on the implementation-process in a lower-elementary school and the challenges surrounding it. Such knowledge is also valuable for initiatives such as NFFV regarding how they can adjust their initiative and to enhance the chances that their work with violence prevention becomes sustainable and integrated.

### **1.1 Aim and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the implementation of a violence prevention initiative by Northeast Free from Violence in a Swedish lower-elementary school. The aim is to explore how the initiative is received and implemented into the daily activities and what challenges can be identified in this process.

The following questions were set to guide the analysis:

- How is the content of the initiative perceived?
- What strategies are used to implement and integrate the initiative into the daily activities of the school, and what role do NFFV play in that process?
- What dilemmas can be identified and how are they being expressed?

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Northeast Free from Violence**

The social administration in the northeast district of Gothenburg has written a project plan (2021) for working with violence prevention between the years of 2020 and 2030. It provides background information of the initiative Northeast Free from Violence. It is an internal document that was shared with the author for the purpose of this evaluation. This document will be used as reference throughout this section (if nothing else is specified) when describing the background of the initiative and will be referred to as (NFFV 2021).

In the project plan, the social administration means that various kinds of violence constitute the ground of many of the problems the district faces and aims to prevent. Of all the cases regarding children and youths that are reported to the social administration, domestic violence constitutes the most common, where the most common type of violence is violence committed within close relations as well as honor related violence (NFFV 2021). The administration claims that the district has the highest number of cases in the municipality (ibid). In the project plan, they also highlight a high presence of criminal groupings and related occurrences such as robberies, shootings, and silence cultures.

With the background in the high prevalence of different forms of violence, the administration writes in the project plan (2021) that they felt a need to collectively mobilize against these issues, which resulted in overall initiatives to prevent violence, both within different departments of the administration as well as different societal functions within the district. Further, the project plan anchors the initiative in a local plan for the northeast district to prevent violence in close relation and men's violence against women, written in 2016 where social mobilization against violence constitutes as a sub-goal.

The initiative aims to act against several types of violence with an emphasis upon men's violence against women. They write that this issue should be targeted in several societal sectors and at all levels. This includes interventions directed at schools with primary prevention aiming to decrease violence and enhance gender-equal attitudes. Their work takes off from three principles of change involved in violence prevention that they write about in

their project plan (NFFV 2021, p. 1-2):

- “Increased awareness of the relation between mild and serious violence.”
- “Increased awareness of the relation between destructive gender norms and violence.”
- “Increased knowledge of active bystanders and intervention strategies.”

To follow these principles, they claim to work with different methods such as using a pyramid of violence. The origin of this model is difficult to determine, and it is not claimed to be scientifically proven (Make Equal, 2017). It aims to illustrate a relation between mild violence and serious violence and a normalization process of violence (ibid). Mild violence refers to violence such as silence culture but also offensive pictures, jokes as well as degrading looks. Serious forms of violence refers to pushing and harassing, battery, rape, and murder. The relation between these different forms is not suggesting that a normalization of violence culture automatically will lead to more serious forms of violence (Make Equal 2017). For every normalized step of the pyramid, it becomes easier to move up to the next step, and interventions to prevent milder forms of violence have shown to prevent more serious violence, according to “A Municipality Free from Violence” (Ljung Aust, 2020). Other methods used are various forms of education targeting separate groups such as parents, adolescents, students and staff of different institutions within the district (NFFV 2021).

The overall vision with the whole initiative is that citizens of the district will have an increased awareness and understanding of violence and its causes, as well as knowledge of strategies to interfere with violence before, during and after it occurs (NFFV 2021). Ideally, they hope that this will lead to more self-reflectiveness regarding citizens' own perpetration of violence and further, hopefully reduce their own violent behaviors (ibid). Long-term expectations are also stated in the project plan. They expect that increased knowledge will lead to a decrease in violence over time (NFFV 2021). Short-term expectations are that they expect several organizations and sectors in the district to work systematically with new methods in order to prevent violence for their specific target group, leading to violence prevention being part of the daily activities (ibid).

## **2.2 Preventing Violence in Lower-elementary Schools**

This section refers to information provided in another, independent project plan (2021), (referred to as IPP 2021 in the text) which was written more specifically to inform about the initiative at the current school that is being evaluated. This project plan also constitutes an internal document that was shared with the author for the purpose of this evaluation.

NFFV has within the framework of this initiative worked in close cooperation with a local initiative called “Equal in School.” It is an independent initiative by MÄN Gothenburg, which in turn is a local association of the national organization MÄN. These organizations will be described further in the section 2.3 “MVP: Mentors in Violence Prevention in Sweden” while this section will focus on further descriptions of the background of the school-based initiative.

The school-based initiative started during fall 2021 and stretched over the whole school year until summer 2022 (IPP 2021). In the project plan, the initiative is described to be constituted by education and tutoring for teachers and personnel, face-to-face classes with students and an aim (if COVID-19 restrictions were allowing it) to establish contact with caretakers. They highlight that the content of all interventions in the school are guided by knowledge regarding violence, norms, and gender equality (IPP 2021). Further, the stated purpose of the initiative is to target a wide range of violence-related issues. This includes actively counteracting macho-culture, preventing recruitment to criminality, decreasing occurrence of violence within the school and increasing the student’s psychological well-being (ibid).

One of the overall goals set in the project plan is to lower the threshold for schools to start working with gender equality and violence prevention in their daily activities (IPP 2021). Another more concrete goal of the intervention is that the school should receive enough support and training in gender equality and in working with violence prevention (ibid). They state in the project plan that hopefully students will have increased positive attitudes regarding gender equality and a reduced risk of using violence (ibid). They expect that by the end of school year 2021/2022, teachers will have a clear perception on how to continue the violence prevention work independently and have more ideas on how to practically implement it (ibid).

The project plan further describes the structure of the classes. The structure is aiming to provide the students with skills related to gender equality, norms, and violence prevention and also to provide the teachers with specific practical examples on how they can work with these issues with different ages (IPP 2021). NFFV therefore expects that teachers and other concerned staff and personnel should be present during the classes with the students (ibid). To enable this, it emphasizes that the school management needs to be clear on motivating teachers that the work with gender equality and violence prevention is something that should be prioritized (ibid). The teachers of the lower-elementary school classes are also expected to conduct exercises between the occasions and this is something that NFFV provides through manuals and instructions (ibid). NFFV claims in the project plan to be aware of the challenges regarding translating theoretical knowledge from a training opportunity into practical work in daily activities, and therefore every step of the intervention is thought through in order to enhance and simplify the starting point in working with these sorts of issues. An increase in opportunity for transferring inspiration into practical activities (ibid).

The content of the interventions, especially those directed to younger classes (1-3) has its roots in a primary violence prevention program called Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) co-founded by Jackson Katz in the early nineties (Katz 2018). This program has been transferred and implemented in Sweden before and will be described further in the section below.

### **2.3 MVP: Mentors in Violence Prevention**

This section will briefly account for the logic of the Mentors in Violence Prevention Program and the Swedish adaptations with a focus on Equal in School's (Jämt i skolan) own development of the program. Equal in School is an initiative that provides professional activities in schools to promote gender equality by working with violence prevention (MÄN för jämställdhet 2022). It is an independent branch from the local association MÄN Gothenburg, which is a part of the national organization MÄN (ibid).

The expression "MVP" is referring to sports culture "Most Valuable Player" and was adopted to "Mentors in Violence Prevention" due to the implementation's origins, which were in a university athlete setting in the United States (Katz 2018). One of the aims of the program is

to inspire men to take a leading role in fighting men's violence against women by using a bystander approach (Katz 1995). In this approach, non-violent men are placed in a position of being a part of the solution rather than perceived as a perpetrator, which can work as a strategy to engage boys and men into working against men's violence against women (Gidycz et al. 2011; Flood 2019). It refers to individuals who observe violence in a position of either being a passive-bystander or an active-bystander (Flood 2019, p.214). Such an approach can work as a strategy on primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention levels (ibid). The MVP program is one of the early interventions that emphasizes this sort of approach, and the approach has become increasingly popular within the field of violence prevention (Flood 2019).

The MVP program has been implemented in various university, sports and high school settings in America and other countries worldwide (Katz et al. 2011). It has also been adapted and implemented in a Swedish context, mainly in settings that are equivalent to high-schools through organization MÄN and Botkyrka municipality (MÄN för jämställdhet 2022; Botkyrka Kommun 2022; Gottzén et al. 2021). The Swedish government highlights the program Mentors in Violence Prevention, MVP (Katz 1995) as a program with promising results regarding changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors (Skr 2016/17:10, p.145).

Organization MÄN are a non-profit organization that provides education and support for schools that want to start working with the program (MÄN för jämställdhet 2022). Their adaptation of Mentors in Violence Prevention is mainly focusing on upper-elementary school and high schools (ibid). Within their translation of the program, the bystander-approach remains as a main focus when working with different scenarios to enhance skills to intervene before, during and after violence occurs (ibid). However, they have shifted the focus from educating pupils or peers to be mentors, and instead working mainly with teachers and other school staff (ibid). Their local association MÄN Gothenburg and the independent initiative Equal in School have developed further adaptations to specifically fit younger students and lower-primary schools. This adaptation with a focus on younger students has been brought into Northeast Free from Violence and the content of the interventions that this thesis is evaluating. This focus on younger students differs from the other Swedish adaptations and school-based violence prevention in general.

### **3. Previous Research**

This chapter will account for previous research regarding violence prevention and previous evaluations of initiatives targeting violence prevention within schools. A brief description of the field of violence prevention will be made in the section below, followed up by common approaches within violence prevention. This will be followed by a section presenting some insights regarding primary prevention in school-settings and thereafter a brief account for insights regarding sustainability when implementing such interventions. The last two sections account for the importance of organizational prerequisites and lastly, findings from previous evaluations regarding experiences of MVP-like or inspired content.

In “Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention” (2019), Michael Flood provides an extensive and critical overview over the field of interventions aiming to prevent men's violence against women, with a special focus on interventions aiming to engage men and boys. The author accounts for different models and approaches that are common in the work with violence prevention (Flood 2019). Within the field of prevention, both in crime and in other social problems, public health models are commonly used when aiming to prevent violence against women. Such an approach has shown to be valuable as a blueprint since such models emphasize prevention, social factors, evidence-based programs, interventions with a multi-level approach, coordination, and evaluation (Flood 2019). The public health approach in prevention has its roots in an ecological model that addresses predictors on a multi-level (ibid). This model also relies on further assumptions regarding how interventions work as chain reactions. An example of such a chain reaction is the assumption that affecting and changing gender norms will have an effect on people's behaviors (ibid).

#### **3.1 Feminism and Theories of Change**

The initiative by NFFV is framed by a feminist theoretical approach. This approach shares a lot of common grounds with the public health approach but the former frames the issue as a symptom of underlying gender inequalities rather than viewing violence as a public health issue (Flood 2019). A feminist approach is essential in preventing violence since it contributes to valuable understandings of how gender-related factors serves as causes behind

violence (ibid). Flood (2019) claims that successful interventions must rely heavily on feminist theories to be effective.

Gender-transformative approaches are more successful than other approaches that seek to change attitudes and norms that support violence (Barker et al. 2007; Flood 2019; Gavine et al. 2016). However, many interventions rely on assumptions that their interventions will lead to a change in behavior without addressing how such gender-transformative processes are expected to occur (Jewkes et al. 2015; Flood 2019). Knowledge about the subject, and general knowledge about transformation work are both prerequisites that need to be considered when planning to conduct some sort of gender equality work (Callerstig 2012). As much as it is necessary to have a feminist, gender-transformative framework, it is also necessary to have a solid theory of change in preventing violence. One contribution to the field on how to achieve change is to be found in a general crime prevention model, highlighting how mechanisms serve as explanatory for how certain means create a specific crime-decreasing effect (see Björge 2015). It may be difficult however to challenge and change norms that are already established (ibid).

### **3.2 Primary Prevention in Schools**

In the scientific field of crime- and violence prevention, the interventions are commonly classified into distinct levels. One of these are interventions on a primary level (also called universal prevention) (Sahlin 2000; Flood 2019). Primary prevention aims to prevent future problems from occurring and is targeting whole populations rather than specific risk-groups (ibid). Such interventions can thus be suitable to be implemented at an early stage in life, before specific situations or individuals are identified as “problematic” (Sahlin 2000, p36). Interventions on this level often aim to challenge norms, attitudes and behaviors that enable violence and has gained an increased attention aiming to prevent violence against women (Crooks et al. 2019; Flood 2013; Flood 2019; Skr 2016/17:10).

The school is an institution that provides opportunity for socialization, giving an opportunity to implement interventions that aim to prevent violence through affecting individual’s attitudes and norms (Stanley et al. 2015). The school is thus identified as a critical setting to prevent violence, since a lot of society members attend school from an early age and continue to attend for several years (WHO 2019). Given that the intervention is implemented

successfully into the school's daily activities, teachers have the opportunity to on a daily basis target unwanted social and cultural norms that tolerates violence (WHO 2019; Crooks et al. 2019). It provides a great opportunity to form attitudes and norms at an early age, reaching a high number of individuals at the same time and providing a possibility to work with violence prevention with longer duration (WHO 2019; Crooks et al. 2019; Flood 2019).

There is a significant amount of research made on the effectiveness of primary school-based violence prevention (example for overviews, see: WHO 2010/2019; Barker et al. 2007; Flood 2019; Gavine et al. 2016; Hahn et al. 2007; Crooks et al. 2019) but there are, however, challenges regarding determining primary prevention effectiveness due to lack of robust evaluations (WHO 2019; Flood 2019). However, even if evidence of effectiveness needs to be further established among different primary violence prevention interventions in general and in schools, some valuable insights have been made. Some of these insights will briefly be accounted for below.

### **3.3 Long-term Initiatives and Sustainable Development Work**

Long-term programs are more likely to be sustainable and to have a significant effect on preventing violence, and this is more likely to be achieved if a whole-of-school approach is used (Flood 2019, p.185). A whole-of-school approach indicates a systematization of the violence prevention initiative, creating lasting change in both students and teachers' attitudes, beliefs and work processes (ibid). Such an approach includes changing organizational practices and is supposed to be implemented in line with the school's existing value-based work (Flood 2019).

Whole-school approaches further include educating teachers and staff and providing training and tools to prevent violence as well as involving parents or caretakers (ibid). In that way, they can reinforce prosocial attitudes and prevention messages, which is helpful in ensuring and enhancing long-term work (Flood 2019; WHO 2019). Findings from previous evaluations of violence prevention programs suggest that the program should be embedded into schools' ordinary activities and curriculums (Williams & Neville 2017). There is a risk that working with the aim of developing an organization in relation to gender equality (further also referred to "development work" in this thesis) can become a sidetrack. This was the case in a case study about gender mainstreaming in an organization (Sjöberg 2012). The

work was framed as a project and the organization internally hired a project leader and externally hired gender equality consultants (ibid). Even if they conducted several activities within the framework of the project, the further work on gender mainstreaming faced a risk of vanishing when the project was over (Sjöberg 2012). Neither the project leader nor the consultant had enough authority to fully work with the issues and when the project was over the consultants left and were no longer available as resources, this was also the case for the project leader (Sjöberg 2012, 51). To connect developmental work with ordinary activities turned out to be an effective strategy to implement the change on a general level, making it more long-lasting (Sjöberg 2012).

### **3.4 Organizational Prerequisites**

Institutions such as schools need to have enough resources to properly implement initiatives to prevent violence (Flood 2019). To enhance the probabilities of sustainability and successful implementation, systems, structures, and decision-makers, both within the school as well as surrounding it, must support the implementation (ibid). One of the first qualitative evaluations of Mentors in Violence Prevention was done in Scottish schools and the researchers found that school readiness was key for successful implementation and in enhancing chances for long-term work with prevention (Williams & Neville 2017). Equivalent findings were also found in Sweden. The National Agency for Education explored the effects of the program Mentors in Violence Prevention in Swedish schools (Eriksson et al. 2018). The evaluation was conducted almost parallel to the introduction of the program, which might have an effect on the findings in that study (ibid). The program was, however, still presented as promising when it came to its implementation in Swedish schools, given that some recommendations were considered for further implementations. One of these recommendations was that school management has to provide organizational and practical prerequisites for properly implementing the program (Eriksson et al. 2018).

In a more recent evaluation conducted in a Swedish context, the need for proper organizational support was once again highlighted as a prominent element for successful implementation (Bruno et al. 2020; Gottzén et al. 2021). In one of these studies the informants gave a united image that the school management's engagement in the work with the program played a key role in implementing and maintaining it (Gottzén et al 2021). Two case studies that explored the implementation of gender mainstreaming initiatives in Swedish

municipalities found that the managers' active ownership of the development work was crucial for sustainable and long-term effects (Sjöberg 2012). Managers who engage and own the project also make sure that the issue of interest is prioritized and that time and resources are available (ibid). In order for new knowledge to spread and reach the whole organization, the support from the closest manager plays a key role (Sjöberg 2012, 51). However, it is also needed for active participation from co-workers and personnel, and one strategy to do this is to use equality coaches who could work as bridges between management and co-workers (Sjöberg 2012, 51)

The evaluation by the National Agency for Education also recommended that a second manual should be developed prior to the implementation, to address, and clarify expectations and criteria for successful implementation (Eriksson et al. 2018). This regards expectations on practical, and organizational prerequisites as well criteria for education and expectations on the school management (ibid). Clarifying the expectations on the management and the school as a whole could lead to a better prepared school to take on the initiative and provide the time and resources needed, improving the organizational conditions to implement such program into the daily activities of the school (ibid).

Both teachers and people in leading positions in the evaluations were experiencing a lack of time for preparations and a lack of time with the tutoring (Gottzén et al 2021; Williams & Neville 2017). The importance and necessity of proper time for preparations, as well as reflection and evaluation after classes was highlighted and recommended (Gottzén et al. 2021; Williams & Neville 2017; Eriksson et al. 2018). Indeed, resources such as time when working with school-based initiatives seem to be key since there is often a lack of it, and so is the lack of continuous evaluations to follow up the work (Flood 2019). Previous research is emphasizing the need for more robust evaluations of school-based interventions (Eriksson et al. 2018; Flood 2019; WHO; Williams & Neville 2017; Gottzén et al. 2021). Continuous evaluations of the program were further highlighted as a recommendation and that future evaluation also should consider younger students as well as students born outside of the Nordic countries (Eriksson et al. 2018). Williams and Neville (2017) also suggest the need for both qualitative and quantitative evaluations. Qualitative evaluations can contribute to a deeper understanding of the complicated processes of implementation of interventions, as well as deeper understanding of the experiences surrounding it (ibid).

### **3.5 Experiences of Manual and Program Content**

In the Scottish evaluation of MVP, the teachers and staff had overall positive experiences of the program and its theoretical approach (Williams & Neville 2017). In Sweden, teachers sometimes experienced difficulties with the program, both in terms of the pedagogical model as well as the feminist theoretical framework (Bruno et al. 2020). Consequences of this were that teachers sometimes conducted the classes contrary to the purpose of MVP and did not follow the manual as intended (Bruno et al. 2020; Gottzén et al. 2021). This creates a dilemma since addressing feminist theories within the curriculum content can sometimes be challenging due to disagreements and ideological differences, and sometimes occasionally even hostility against feminism (Flood 2019). Such values can be found both among teachers, and other school staff as well as among the students (Bruno et al. 2020; Flood 2019; Gottzén et al. 2021).

### **3.6 Summarizing Notes**

In most of the evaluations accounted for here, the conclusion was that the implementation of programs such as MVP in a Swedish context was promising (if adjustments were made following the recommendations of the evaluations). Organizational prerequisites are necessary to consider, and teachers need extensive training and education. Further, more evaluation is needed, both more robust and methodologically strong outcome evaluations as well as qualitative process evaluations in order to deepen the understanding for complex processes. Proceeding from this, the current evaluation aims to contribute with knowledge on the process and the prerequisites needed for a successful, and effective implementation in schools by highlighting what went well and what was less successful. If the initiative does not get implemented successfully, it will also complicate further outcome evaluations. Also, following the recommendation by the National Agency of Education' evaluation (Eriksson et al. 2018), this evaluation also has the opportunity to give further insight on experiences surrounding initiatives implemented among younger students.

## 4. Theory

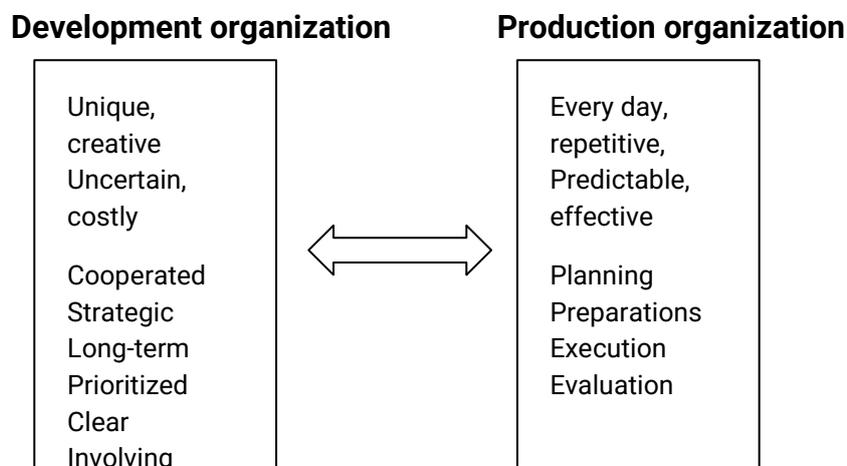
This chapter will account for the theoretical concepts and frameworks that were used as analytical tools when analyzing the data. The theories are an *integrated development- and production organization for sustainable development of organizations* (Sjöberg 2012). This theory has its conceptual origins from Ellström (2010) and is further developed and elaborated by Karin Sjöberg (2012). The second theory used in this thesis is *resistance within equality work*, with understandings of the concept both from Katarina Lindholm (2012) and Eva Amundsdotter with colleagues (2015). Resistance will further be addressed in relation to Amundsdotter et. al. (2015) model, which aims to illustrate the different forms of resistance when working with issues related to gender equality. These are *repressive, pastoral* and *regulating* resistance, and originate from Foucault's conceptual apparatus regarding power and resistance (ibid).

### 4.1 Sustainable Work for Organizational Development

One of the goals of NFFV's initiative is to lower the threshold for schools to start working with gender equality and violence prevention in their daily activities and that teachers can continue the work more independently (IPP 2021). Therefore, the distinction between production and development are suitable for the analysis since the initiative to work with violence prevention is here understood as development work, and what is considered as the school's ordinary activities is understood as production.

The theoretical model developed by Sjöberg (2012) is an elaboration of the theoretical concepts of *production logic* and *development logic* within organizations (Ellström 2010). Production logic refers to the work-process and how it is reproduced and conducted in the actual practice (Ellström 2010, p. 7). This might be "More or less detailed and explicit in terms of what should be achieved (goals) and how (methods), and thus provide varying degrees of autonomy (degrees of freedom) in terms of performance." (Ellström 2010, p.5). The production logic is characterized by goal-orientations, standardization, and stability (ibid).

The development logic is more about how the work-process is perceived and understood as well as performed in action (ibid). This logic has a focus on conducting practical activities as a source of new discoveries around thinking and carrying out activities and that it might lead to transforming the organization's formal work-process (Ellström 2010). This logic is characterized by risk-taking and critical reflection, as well as resources for experimenting and trying new and different ways of conducting activities or actions (ibid). Conflicts are in this context not to be considered as threats, but rather as a triggering for developmental learning processes (Ellström 2010, p.8). Sometimes a strong transformation pressure might be necessary to challenge established routines, however, in situations that can be experienced as threatening, people tend to stick with the habitual routines or if the change is too extreme, it might result in avoidance (ibid).



**Figure 1.1** “An integrated development- and production organization for sustainable development work” (Sjöberg 2012, p.44).

Sjöberg (2012) builds on this by illustrating the balance between the logics in the model above. In order for an organization to produce or conduct what the organization is supposed to, and to be effective and predictable, production logic is needed (ibid). The activity within such an organization aims to reproduce and implement already prescribed work-processes (ibid). A production organization needs to be well working because it then gives prerequisites for a well-working development organization too; otherwise the production logic tends to take focus and resources from the other (ibid).

As mentioned about the development logic, keywords are risk-taking and experimenting, critical reflection and room for uncertainty (Sjöberg 2012). Development logics requires a questioning of already established working processes and focuses on innovative ideas and innovative working processes (ibid). The balance between these logics has an impact upon however the equality work becomes integrated or a sidetrack (ibid). This separation between development work and production work can be understood as an important explanation to why the development work tends to be unprioritized and becoming a liability and additional stress (ibid).

## **4.2 Repressive, Pastoral and Regulating Resistance**

### **4.2.1 Resistance**

Resistance can be understood as a disinclination for change and can be considered to occur due to different ideas about what is in the organization's main interest (Amundsdotter et al. 2015; Lindholm 2012). Resistance as a theoretical concept can take several different forms and can be expressed as a lacking interest in gender equality or violence prevention issues, but also as in lack of economic means and other similar bureaucratic shapes<sup>1</sup> (Lindholm 2012). Resistance is not always “active”, sometimes, involved people of an organization might have conflicted perceptions towards change (ibid). This can include an acceptance and benevolence towards the idea, but perceive the implementation as difficult or stressful (ibid). It is not uncommon that resistance can emerge in relation to change associated with gender equality questions (Amundsdotter et al. 2015).

In this study, resistance should not necessarily be understood as a conscious and active counteract against the idea of development work and the initiative to prevent violence, but rather as an understanding of, and analytical tool to sort among the challenges that might occur when aiming to implement and integrate violence prevention into daily activities. The theoretical model illustrated in the section below is developed from a research- and development project called “Methods Against Resistance” (Metoder Mot Motstånd) between the years of 2013-2015 (Amundsdotter et al. 2015). The aim with the project was to work in groups together with change actors in different agencies and municipalities in Sweden, in

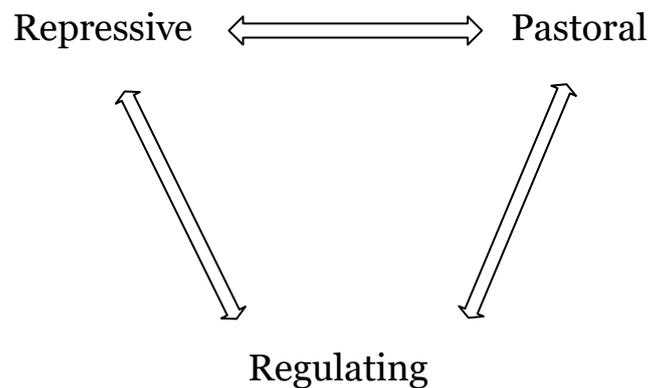
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<sup>1</sup> The author refers to Pincus (2002)

order to develop knowledge and methods that increase the chances in identifying, and meeting resistance (ibid).

#### 4.2.2 Different Forms of Resistance

The model was inspired by Foucault and his thoughts about the relation of power and resistance (Amundsdotter et al. 2015). Different forms of resistance are shaped by existing power relations, and resistance “reinforces and/or creates power relations” (Lilja & Vinthagen 2014, p.111). Foucault (1982) writes that the way forward in understanding power relations is to use: “resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used” (Foucault 1982, p.780). The resistance is not against power in itself, but towards different forms of power, or power techniques (ibid). Similarly, the resistance and the strategies that were used to cope with resistance were constantly created in relation to each other (Amundsdotter et al. 2015, p.58). The different strategies that were used in the project to cope with resistance created openings in understanding the complex relations that enable power relations to be changeable and the model highlighted the similarities of the different forms of resistance that the change-actors experienced (Amundsdotter et al. 2015, p.59).



**Figure 2.1** Forms of resistance (Amundsdotter et al. 2015 p.62-23).

The three forms of resistance were *Repressive*, *Pastoral* and *Regulating* resistance, and they are used as points of reference for the analytical model, but in reality they are often not as clearly separable (Amundsdotter et al. 2015). The model above can work as an analytical tool to sort among the resistance and strategies as well as capturing the complex relations between

power and resistance (Amundsdotter et al. 2015 p.61). Before describing the different forms of resistance further, a short background will be given on how they were inspired by Foucault's understanding of power, using these terms. *Repressive* power tends to be more destructive and can often be located easily since it is often direct and can be found in principles and decision-making (Amundsdotter et al. 2015, p.60). *Pastoral* power was described as less brutal but more effective due to its subtlety (ibid). This technique has its roots in Christian institutions (Foucault 1982). Back in pastoral societies, the ultimate aim of this power was individual salvation while today Foucault (1982) considers the "modern state" as specific forms of structures which individuals can be part of. They can only be a part of it if the individuality can be shaped, or reshaped into new forms and therefore "submitted to very specific patterns" (Foucault 1982, p. 783). So instead of religious meanings such as salvation, it can be understood as more worldly meanings such as protection, well-being and security (Foucault 1982). *Regulating* power is understood as something directed towards whole populations in terms of bureaucracy, networks, and agencies (Amundsdotter et al. 2015 p.61).

The authors were inspired by, and departed from these power-techniques to discuss forms of resistance change-actors can meet in their work (Amundsdotter et al. 2015). Repressive forms of resistance are characterized by being direct in its form and are often easy to identify (ibid). It can be expressed through negative expressions surrounding development work addressing topics such gender equality (ibid). Pastoral forms could be understood as less brutal and more subtle in comparison to the repressive forms (ibid). Pastoral forms of resistance are often highly effective because it is not always identified as resistance to begin with and it is often rationalized (ibid). It is commonly masked in good will and the change actors are often expected to "just accept that the demands are unrealistic" (Amundsdotter et al. 2015, p.62). Another common way that pastoral resistance is expressed is through referencing that the production work in an organization should be the focus or that the idea of the development work is good, but there is no time or resources to work with it (Amundsdotter et al. 2015). Regulating resistance refers to resistance that often is masked by bureaucracy as the main reason why no change is happening and a constant shift in where the power to make actual change is located (ibid).

## **5. Method**

In this chapter the methodological choices of this study are described and discussed. The choice of methodological approach is presented, including discussions regarding data collection and the challenges surrounding it, followed by an account for the method of analysis. Lastly, ethical considerations are briefly discussed at the end of this chapter.

### **5.1 Methodological Approach**

An epistemological stance of interpretivism is framing this paper (Snape & Spencer 2003). It relies on assumptions that the social world as well as all human agency are part of social contexts, therefore the researcher and what is researched, influences each other (Snape & Spencer 2003 p. 17). This study is a qualitative evaluation that explores how an initiative to prevent violence is received by concerned participants and implemented into their daily activities. Using a qualitative approach is suitable for interpretations and understandings of participant's experiences (Snape & Spencer 2003 p.3). Qualitative methods are considered as useful tools since they provide a deeper understanding of the specific context of the implementation and give knowledge of the experiences of those affected by it (Williams & Neville 2017). An implementation of a violence prevention initiative could be a complex process where quantitative measures fail to capture valuable insights (ibid). Change and development in organizations can be a conflicting issue and a qualitative approach is well suited for exploring issues that come with complexity (Snape & Spencer 2003).

### **5.2 Sample and Data Collection**

The populations studied in this evaluation are teachers and personnel affected by the initiative. The sample was therefore bound by those criteria and participants were purposely chosen (Ritchie et al. 2003). A series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with teachers, a school leader representative, and a representative from NFFV, a total of six participants. The interviews revolved around previously defined questions surrounding the research topic, but the participants were given space to freely interpret the questions and add on experiences around the initiative that was not previously defined in specific questions. The questions varied to some extent depending on what role and main tasks the informants had

but were overall following the same interview guide<sup>2</sup>. The interviews were conducted on days and settings that were convenient for the participants. All participants preferred to participate in the interviews digitally over the online meeting tool Zoom.

A representative from NFFV assisted the arrangements of the interviews. They assisted in getting access to informants and also in establishing contact with the assistant principal of the school. The assistant principal organized the distribution of the formal invitation of participation to all teaching staff at the school. After the formal invitation was sent, the representative from NFFV assisted in an initial email being sent to a sample of teachers from every grade in order for them to get in direct contact with me. This step was taken due to lack of response to the first formal invitation. Arranging the interviews was met by some challenges due to the school being busy during the weeks of data collection. The ideal aim was to interview as many as possible of the teachers and staff that had been affected by the initiative. However, due to circumstances regarding the participants of the initiative's willingness and ability to participate in the study, it was instead requested from me to interview representatives of every grade that had been subject to the initiative. This request could not be met either due to a considerable number of teachers declined, which resulted in some grades not getting represented at all in the study.

### **5.3 Method of Analysis**

The interviews were recorded digitally with a cellphone and then transcribed. To analyze the data further, thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and determine themes in the material related to the research questions (Braun & Clarke 2006). This strategy is a useful tool in interpreting qualitative data and providing rich and detailed analyses (ibid). The aim of this study was to explore how the initiative was received and integrated among the teachers and staff of the school. It hence takes on a “realist” approach in the sense of reporting participants' *realities* rather than how realities constitutes an effect of “a range of discourses operating within society”, which would have been a more constructionist approach (Braun & Clarke 2006, p.9).

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix for interview guides

Thematic analysis is convenient and suitable for this study due to its flexible character. The process of determining themes can be conducted in a number of ways (Braun & Clarke 2006). The themes and sub-themes of this study were determined through identified patterns in the data through various codes. However, it was also guided by the overall research question of what challenges could be identified in the process of implementing the initiative. The overall approach then is floating somewhere on a spectrum between an inductive- and theoretical approach, mapping more onto the latter (Braun & Clarke 2006). In an early stage of the analysis the coding was not conducted in relation to the theoretical concepts of this study since it was not decided upon yet. Moving back to the coding of the data further into the analysis, the coding proceeded with engagement in the theoretical literature and concepts to a much larger extent.

The coding process was a process of going back-and-forth of coding and re-coding. This further resulted in codes combining into themes and sub-themes while some codes did not fit into the themes constructed. However, these codes were not fully discarded until the whole analysis was conducted and the codes were concluded to not be part of the themes (Braun & Clarke 2006).

#### **5.4 Ethical Considerations**

This study is conducted in accordance with the principles of research ethics from The Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet 2002). All participants received information about the formalities of the study through an email passed on by the assistant principal. In the email, they were informed that their participation is voluntary and their right to withdraw within reasonable time. Further, they were informed about the request to audiotape the interviews and that those files and transcription will only be accessible to the author and stored safely on the author's password protected computer. All their names were replaced with pseudonyms or codes. At the site of the interview all participants gave their consent verbally to participate. They were asked if they had received the information about the formalities of the study. Regardless, all participants were reminded with key information about their voluntary participation and right to withdraw their consent. They were also asked if they were giving their consent for the interview to be audiotaped, which also was given verbally.

Regarding confidentiality some specific ethical considerations were made. The study is on behalf of an organization, meaning that the representatives of that organization who have worked with the initiatives know of the other people within that organization and those who work at the school. Also, those who work within the school know of others within the school and so forth. This gives some limitations to the effectiveness of using pseudonyms in some cases where it is essential to present the professional role of a participant, which could reveal to involved and concerned people the identity of the pseudonym. Two actions were taken into account to minimize the potential discomfort of this. Firstly, those participants who were in a more vulnerable position were informed before the interview about this issue. Second, during the analysis and presentation of the results, careful consideration was consistently made when deciding what information about the informant is needed for the analysis and what information can remain untold or be fabricated in those cases to minimize the issue.

## **6. Analysis**

Among the participants of the study, the general perception of the initiative was positive, and it was overall well received. The representative from NFFV also reported a feeling of the initiative being well received among the staff. The majority of the participants from the school also expressed that they were generally satisfied with NFFV and the components of the initiative, including content, educational material and training occasions as well as the cooperation. There were also few, but some indications that some teachers occasionally used exercises they learned from the initiative as recess-activities. Further, the lectures NFFV had held were sometimes also reminded to the students. How the teachers and personnel did this more concretely was not explicitly expressed in the interviews. Further, in the interview with the representative from NFFV, it was clear that they did manage to conduct all the classes they intended to: “It did not work as it was planned to, but we have managed to conduct all the classes and was well-received in this by the teachers”.

However, there were some challenges identified in the analysis. That, despite the overall good experiences, may have had implications for the implementation of the initiative as well as how well the integration of it into the school’s daily activities worked. One of the major challenges for the implementation regards organizational prerequisites. In the beginning of the implementation, the school went through organizational changes, which both

representatives from NFFV and the representative from the school management acknowledged and reported as one of the major contributing factors towards the difficulties in implementing the initiative. Information about expectations on the school and its responsibilities were not clear due to this, the representative from the school management (SM) reflected upon the issue:

SM: For me, it was not clear what was expected from us as a school, it has not been that clear to me... rather not since I came into the initiative when it was already started so I didn't take part in the startup-phase and the planning of the next steps...

There were, however, also other challenges identified in the implementation-process, which are more or less related to the organizational prerequisites mentioned above. These challenges are analyzed in the two main sections: “Balancing Production and Development” and “Resistance as a Challenge in Itself.”

## **6.1 Balancing Production and Development**

NFFV’s initiative to prevent violence is here to be understood theoretically as development work while the typically everyday tasks conducted at the school are referred to as the organization’s production work, for analytical purposes (Sjöberg 2012; Ellström 2010). For the initiative and its implementation to be successful, the goal is a sustainable work for organizational development, through balancing and connecting development work with production work so the former becomes an integrated part of the production (Sjöberg 2012; Ellström 2010). In this section, the challenges regarding the integration of the two logics will be analyzed. Under “Production vs. Development”, the different understandings of the two logics will be focused upon. Further, this challenge will also be analyzed in relation to how the integration of development work into production work can easily face the potential pitfall of becoming a sidetrack, and the dilemmas emerging from this (Sjöberg 2012). This will be discussed under “Two Tracks.”

### 6.1.1 Production vs. Development

Whether working with the initiative was considered as a part of the school's ordinary activity or not was not always clear. This will now be further analyzed in terms of production work and development work. In the two quotes below, the representative from school management reasoned about balancing what they experienced to be the school's ordinary activities with working with the initiative, as well as uncertainties of how they should be prioritized:

SM: I have probably been a bit reluctant there because I also want to cherish the teacher's time to work with what's actually in our mission. And becoming good in teaching and implementing new syllabuses has to come prior to the other stuff, because that is our job to do.

SM: [...] At the same time, I also have certain frameworks given to me in relation to the school's mission so I... I simply do not know how everything fits into the school's mission.<sup>3</sup> That's my dilemma.

The quotes illustrate how the daily tasks such as teaching established subjects, i.e., production work, is described as something more important and that should be prioritized, indicating a sharper distinction between the two logics. Within this, pastoral resistance can be identified in the sense of highlighting the prioritization of working with, and improving the production work at first hand (Amundsdotter et al. 2015). The resistance becomes rationalized through referring to the "main tasks" (even if it is rather unclear what fits in that definition) and is an example of when resistance can be hard to identify as resistance (Amundsdotter et al. 2015). Despite its subtle expression, the resistance was more or less experienced by a teacher who was critical towards the clear distinction being made. Further, the teacher was critical towards the prioritizations of production over development, since the teacher emphasized development work as an important part of the school's original mission:

T1: We want to follow the curriculum, the goals set by the National Agency for Education, and the mission of preparing these students and children to become a good individual in our society, and it is our duty and obligation to educate them but also to guide them because some sort of socialization should be present here, but unfortunately not much is being done about that..

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<sup>3</sup> In Swedish: "Jag vet inte vad allting ryms i skolans uppdrag helt enkelt"

Another teacher also recognized development work as something separate from the production and something less prioritized. This teacher emphasized the development work as something necessary for the production to work properly and suggested that work with issues such as violence prevention should be more integrated but through a scheduled lecture once a week instead of initiatives such as the one from NFFV. The lecture was suggested to address norms and all sort of social interactions:

T2: It should target everything regarding the social bits because it is important. The thing is, why I want them to have the foundation is because if you do not have a calm group, you cannot conduct knowledge-based lectures, you cannot do that in a chaotic class. This foundation has to be there in order for the teachers to succeed and for the students to reach their goals.

As described in the quote above, the teacher highlights how development work is necessary for a functioning production, while another teacher emphasizes how a well working production is necessary for well functioning development work:

T3: As always, you walk around as a teacher and do not feel like you have done enough in everything since everything else always gets in the way, but we try to work more actively and focused, more integrated in the teaching but regarding how far we have gotten in that so far... yeah, no I would not say that I am satisfied in that matter [...] A lot of the time you only focus on goal orientation... but yes, I believe that has to change.

A production organization needs to be well working because it then gives prerequisites for a well-working development organization (Sjöberg 2012). The balance between these logics has an impact upon how well the equality-work becomes an integrated activity (Sjöberg 2012). As shown above, the perceptions on what counts as production and what is development is not always a shared understanding within the organization. Leading to conflicting interests in what should be prioritized and how it should be done. Depending on how this distinction is made, it may have implications upon how both logics are balanced and connected, challenging how the implementation and integration of initiatives such as the one from NFFV are prioritized and further successful.

### 6.1.2 Two Tracks

According to Sjöberg's (2012) theoretical model, when development work is not prioritized it tends to become a sidetrack. The initiative from NFFV was described as something that quickly became this according to the representative from school management, as seen in the quotes below. The second quote also illustrates how experiences of regulating resistance can be expressed through referring to how demands from higher positions complicates the process of prioritizing development work. Bureaucracy is referred to as a contributing factor to why it is not prioritized (Amundsdotter et al. 2015):

SM: Somehow, this came a bit as a sidetrack. We, the school kind of have demands upon us, a new course guide, a new school, new management, a lot of value-based work to do, new workgroups that are supposed to cooperate, get to know each other and work towards the same goals.

SM: My dilemma is time... and being able to motivate the time you put on that versus something else that is also a demand from higher management and government and such. That is the dilemma. And honestly, maybe some assistance in puzzling those pieces together, because now they have become two parallel tracks, that is my dilemma. I can honestly say that I have not had the time or ability to piece those parts together due to my working situation... unfortunately.

In the quote above, they reflect on the demands upon the school, i.e., the production work and how that is prioritized over development work, resulting in a clear separation of the two, leading to the initiative becoming a separate track to work with (Sjöberg 2012). This may result in creating even more challenges to integrate the development work since it then becomes a form of demand in itself, putting more pressure on the organization to work with this additional aspect, creating a sense of liability and additional stress (Sjöberg 2012; Lindholm 2012). In turn, a risk of becoming an avoidance to work with it at all (Ellström 2010). The separation of the two logics, and development work as a sidetrack can thus be argued to create a dilemma where the separation of the logics is reinforced, rather than well balanced.

One of the teachers also experienced how the initiative tended to become a sidetrack that fell into the background of the production (Sjöberg 2012): "You let it go a bit in order of trying to

do the... organizational stuff to survive the day... it kind of falls into the background". It was also reflected upon further in relation to the challenges surrounding the balancing production and development (Sjöberg 2012) as illustrated in the quote below:

T1: It feels more like, when NFFV visits the school, you remember it as long as they are here but when they leave... I do not hear anyone talking about it, that we are supposed to work with it because this was what was said... and it is not so strange since there is always a lack of personnel, always so much to do, you try to survive the day. You become very stressed, and you don't have the calm working-environment that enables one to sit down and reflect, not even within the units among colleagues, since it is always so much to do.

The quote above also highlights how the production work is experienced to not be well-working and how the development work can therefore not be prioritized (Sjöberg 2012). In the quote, the teacher describes the experiences of how the initiative becomes more of a project that is active only when NFFV are at site and how it is not becoming an integrated and sustainable part of the production. The teacher further reflects upon the reasons for that and refers to the organizational prerequisites, leaving the initiative as a sidetrack with focus on ordinary activities (Sjöberg 2012). It creates stress and the initiative becomes an additional liability (Lindholm 2012) due to lack of time and proper organizational prerequisites.

Continuing on the track regarding how the initiative tends to become a project, a pressure might be needed in the process of challenging established routines so that initiating developmental learning can be enabled (Ellström 2010, p.9). One teacher expressed that when NFFV were at the school, the teachers do embrace the learning opportunity, but when they leave there is no indications of continuing working with the initiative and the problem is referred to as a lack of pressure from the management: "There is not coming enough pressure, resulting in no continuous work with it". It was also requested that NFFV should take on a more active role in putting pressure upon the school as well to ensure that the initiative is being prioritized. This was by asking questions on how much NFFV are able to interfere and demand from the school. The wish for NFFV to become more active was also expressed as the quote below:

T1: First and foremost, show the seriousness and the purpose of why you exist to those higher up in the organization, and second, we need to see more from you, that you are here at site more.

However, if the situation of external pressure comes off as threatening or that the changes are too big it can result in avoidance (Ellström 2010), which in turn might lead to even stronger separations between the development work and production work, reinforcing the initiative as a sidetrack and increasing difficulties to reduce such a separation.

The focus in this section has been upon highlighting the challenges that can emerge from trying to balance and connect development work with production work. It has been shown that it easily became considered a sidetrack where integrating the development work into production could become more of a liability due to stress and tensions. The representative from the school management also reflected upon the need for assistance in such matters due to an experienced lack of ability to integrate the two logics. Further, an example on how regulating resistance can be expressed when working with this sort of development work was also illustrated in relation to how bureaucracy can be experienced as an obstacle in prioritizing violence prevention (Amundsdotter et al. 2015).

## **6.2 Resistance as A Challenge in Itself**

NFFV has a theoretical framework of a feminist perspective, addressing and challenging norms that are understood as destructive and enabling violence. So far in the analysis, resistance has been integrated as a theory to illustrate how different forms of resistance can emerge or be experienced when trying to balance and connect production work and development work. This was mainly with a focus on the expressions and actions from the representative from school management and how teachers experienced resistance when trying to navigate intra-organizational prerequisites to prioritize prevention.

In this section, resistance and how it can take different directions will be further discussed with a special focus upon it as a challenge in itself when implementing the initiative and working with norms and violence prevention. This will be conducted by providing examples with focus upon inter-organizational resistance between the school and NFFV. Further, resistance from a bottom-up perspective, i.e., the representative of the school management's

experiences of resistance from teachers. Lastly, resistance expressed from students and how teachers experience it.

### 6.2.1 Inter-organizational Resistance

Both the representative from the school management and the representative from NFFV seem to have a mutual understanding of the challenges the implementation of the initiative faced. They were both referring to the challenges mainly to the external circumstances regarding the organizational changes that took place in the beginning of the implementation. The representative from NFFV experienced a pastoral resistance from the school when they expressed that there was a good will and good intentions to prioritize the initiative, but they did not experience the initiative as prioritized (Amundsdotter et al. 2015): “They have other priorities, but a good will“. The lack of prioritizing the initiative from the school’s side then becomes a challenge for the implementation of the initiative as it was thought to be conducted. Expressed resistance directed towards the initiative was also identified in the analysis. It was a subtle expression of a less optimistic view regarding what such initiative actually can contribute to (Amundsdotter et al. 2015). One teacher did not have any expectations regarding the initiative at all, since “It is hard to break these kinds of patterns”. Here, the difficulties with changing behavioral patterns in individuals is emphasized which may also be understood as an emphasis of being realistic rather than idealistic. This is an example of how pastoral resistance can be masked and subtle (Amundsdotter et al. 2015). Resistance of this kind, being subtle and difficult to identify, might lead to challenges in motivating teachers to prioritize and work with the initiative if they do not believe in the effects the initiative may have.

Development work aims to challenge established work-processes, taking risks and experiment with different actions (Ellström 2010), which can be challenging in many ways as demonstrated so far. Resistance can be identified also within these processes. Change can be conflicting since staff might accept the idea of the new working ways but find the implementation of it difficult to actually follow (Lindholm 2012; Amundsdotter et al. 2015). One teacher felt that colleagues sometimes worked contrary to what the initiative was about when they played rap-music for the students. The teacher experienced a lack of critically reflecting upon the messages of the music and how it might reinforce norms that they tried to challenge:

T1: Today you are cool if you “becknar”<sup>4</sup>, you are cool if you fight and are violent, it is cool with cars, money and girls. But the ones who raps about it achieves that also through selling drugs on the streets, seriously. And to me then, it is a way of advocating it, even if I know that the colleagues just want to put something on that makes the students happy and then leave, but I feel like... just no.

Risk-taking and ability to critically reflect is a part of development work so that established routines can be challenged (Ellström 2010). The teacher requested more training and education from NFFV to enhance such critical thinking. This was generally experienced among other teachers as well, pointing towards the need for the initiative to be more comprehensive in its involvement of all staff as well as in the training:

T1: I would really like to sit down with adult staff and be able to hear about methods and work-process, how one can proceed because the lectures they have in the classrooms, we already know about, it is on the children's level, but we need to understand it on a deeper level.

Teachers also expressed that they need to work with violence prevention more “structured” and that “more competence for that is needed”, that they felt “left out” and that they did not feel “involved and getting updated with new tools and discussions” and “all staff should be involved in these things”. If the development work is not involving enough, the distance between idea and implementation might become too challenging. This can result in resistance against it if it creates stress or frustration (Lindholm 2012), resulting in implications for the integrating of the initiative into the production.

### 6.2.2 Resistance from a Bottom-up Perspective

The challenge to motivate teachers and staff to work with the initiative was also highlighted through the representative from the school managements experiences of resistance from teachers: “They have said that ‘okay but we have so much other stuff to do, are we going to do this as well?’ “. Similar experiences were also expressed when the representative from

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<sup>4</sup> Swedish slang for selling (drugs)

school management was reasoning about challenges with motivating staff to work with the initiative, expressed in repressive forms (Amundsdotter et al. 2015):

SM: There I see among the staff, 'Are we just supposed to talk?' It is more that kind of reaction. 'Okay, oh well, we have this, and we have that, and performance appraisal and we have all this other stuff, are we supposed to spend time on this now?'

Resistance was also identified as a challenge when addressing norms, claimed to be due to cultural differences between the teacher and the students, and their socialization from their upbringing:

T4: One challenge is to get them to know that it is not okay. It is common that they comment on people's sexuality, and then you notice that those opinions come from their homes, that it is not okay to be homosexual for instance. [...]. I have many Muslim-students, and when we talk about transsexuals and non-binary people, it becomes hard to meet because some of them have from their upbringing at home learned that it is not okay. That kind of cultural difference that comes from their home... They think one thing and I think another... it becomes difficult.

The quote above does not disclose particularly on how the resistance is expressed. One way to interpret it would be in relation to repressive resistance due to it being direct and it is perceived as a clear opposition towards the norms that they aim to socialize the students with, which is consistent to the feminist framework of the initiative (Amundsdotter et al. 2015). Identifying the resistance that teachers experience from their students may be helpful in highlighting another challenge with implementing violence preventing initiatives that are framed by a feminist theoretical framework. The resistance emphasizes that it becomes challenging for teachers to work with such issues if the students' parents are not involved in the initiative to prevent such behavior.

Another teacher also experienced repressive resistance from students through disrespect. The teacher reasoned that a lack of consequences contributes to this disrespect and a further normalization and reinforcement of violent behavior:

T1: When [a high-ranking colleague] visits the sixth graders and is called racist and a lot of other ugly words and stands there without taking any actions, I think that these students, when

they see that they can act that way towards them, should they respect me or other colleagues?  
[...] A student chases another student with a hammer, and you tell them that now you are  
about to go to the principal, and they are just laughing at you...

In addition to the perceived lack of consequences, the teacher also referenced socio-demographic aspects as contributing factors regarding the challenges of working with violence prevention and challenging norms:

T1: In this school we face a bit more difficult challenges and situations since we are located in a disadvantaged area<sup>5</sup> and that could be that students have difficulties in expressing feelings, a lot of the students do not know any other methods than violence, a lot of feelings are involved or the last option, that probably is most common; to present themselves as cool. They kind of want to show off, something they might not be able to do outside of the school, so they try to position themselves here, especially since they do not face any consequences.

This section of resistance as a challenge in itself demonstrated how repressive resistance was identified through some of the teacher's experiences when working with violence prevention. It was also experienced by the representative from the school management when trying to motivate teachers to work with the initiative. The resistance from the students arguably originated both from certain norms related to religious values and influences from home as well as demographic factors and a lack of consequences from the school. If the teachers lack motivation, the students encounter conflicting messages about norms and violence prevention, both in terms of different messages from their homes. Also, inconsequent strategies to cope with violence can complicate the implementation and integration of violence prevention because of resistance.

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<sup>5</sup> In Swedish: "Utsatt område". The term "Disadvantaged areas" is a concept used by the police that also has become a term used more widely in society. It is determined by the police as: "geographically delimited areas that are characterized by a low socio-economic status and where the criminals have an impact on the local community." (Polisen 2022).

## 7. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the implementation of a violence prevention initiative by Northeast Free from Violence, in a Swedish lower-elementary school. The aim was to explore how the initiative and its procedure was received and implemented into the daily activities and what challenges could be identified in the process. The research questions that guided the analysis were: how was the content of the initiative perceived? What strategies are used to integrate and implement the initiative into the daily activities of the school, and what role do NFFV play in that process? What dilemmas can be identified and how are they being expressed?

The first conclusion of this study is that the initiative and its procedure were overall well received by the participants of the study. The majority of the participants reported positive experiences regarding the idea of working with violence prevention, the cooperation between the school and NFFV and the content of the initiative. There were indications that some of the provided materials had been used as tools to prevent violence. However, there were some challenges identified that will be summarized and discussed further. Firstly, the timing of the implementation was not optimal due to the organizational preconditions and prerequisites of implementing such initiative. The school was going through organizational changes, which may have had an impact on the experiences and the implementation-process. This precondition might have had more or less a contributing effect upon the other challenges identified and discussed in this chapter. It is suggested that this circumstance should be taken into account when interpreting the conclusions of this study.

As mentioned above, the content of the initiative was generally perceived as positive. The feminist approach permeating the initiative and its content was, however, facing resistance in some cases. None of the teachers that participated in the study expressed any resistance directed towards the feminist approach, but some teachers did experience resistance from students due to this. They reasoned that this could be because of specific difficulties in relation to socio-demographic factors, cultural differences, and socialization from home, as well as lack of consequences from the school. Previous research has shown that using feminist theories sometimes can be challenging due to disagreements and ideological differences and these values have been shown to be found both among teachers and students

(Flood 2019; Bruno et al. 2020; Gottzén et al. 2021). Further, it can be difficult to challenge already strongly established norms among youths (Björgero 2015). Previous research has also shown that using a whole-of-school approach is a favorable strategy to enhance the successfulness of violence prevention initiatives. This includes training and educating staff and teachers as well as engaging parents and the students' home in the initiative (Flood 2019). However, the implementation of this initiative occurred during COVID-19, which may have complicated the possibilities to do this due to restrictions.

So what strategies were used to implement and integrate the initiative? Due to organizational challenges, and the challenges of prioritizing the initiative and balancing it with already established activities, whether it was due to the organizational prerequisites or not, there were indications in this study of a less successful implementation and integration. One of the major challenges was regarding the difficulties surrounding the prioritization of the initiative. This was expressed partly through uncertainties of perceptions regarding what is considered to be production work (ordinary activities) and what is considered as development work (working with violence prevention). Different perceptions may contribute to conflicting interests in what was considered as important to prioritize. Further, depending on how it is prioritized, it may also contribute to different perceptions and understanding of the distinction.

The findings suggested that the school tended to prioritize production, in the terms of the theoretical distinction between production and development made here for analytical purposes (Ellström 2010). Too much focus on production may have implications for the balance that is needed to create a sustainable work with development (Sjöberg 2012). This may have had implications of a less successful integration of the initiative into their ordinary activities. As stated in previous research, working with long-term primary interventions is favorable over short-lived projects (Skr 2016/17:10; Flood 2019). There were indications in the material that the experiences regarding the initiative at times resembled a project where the work with the initiative only was active while NFFV was at site. Equivalent results have been found also in previous studies where an initiative was framed as a project, the continuous work with the development faced a risk of disappearing when the gender equality consultants left (Sjöberg 2012).

The role NFFV played in this process was concluded as passive. The representative from the school management expressed a need for assistance in such matters due to an experienced

lack of ability to integrate the two logics. Also, that the expectations NFFV had on the school was experienced as unclear. NFFV did state some expectations on the school management's role of motivating staff in their independent project plan (IPP 2021), but it is unclear if this information reached the representative from school management due to the organizational changes. If it did, it is also unclear if the representative found the information as sufficient.

This is thus an example of when the timing of the implementation might have played a significant role in contributing to this challenge, since the representative came into the initiative without a proper organizational hand-over. Further, some teachers did not experience the initiative and NFFV's role in it as comprehensive enough. Some teachers expressed that more training as well as involving the whole staff was needed, and requested that NFFV should put more pressure upon staff in leading positions to ensure that the work with the initiative is being prioritized. Proper training and education for teachers are essential since then they can reinforce the prosocial attitudes and prevention messages, which is also helpful in ensuring and enhancing long-term work (Flood 2019; WHO 2019). Further, as a part of using a whole-of-school approach, the whole organization should be involved, and all teachers and staff should be engaged in the initiative (Flood 2019). Previous research has also shown that the school management's engagement in the work with the initiative is key for a successful implementation and maintenance (Gottzén et al 2021; Sjöberg 2012).

One of the dilemmas that was identified was expressed in more direct and clear manners regarding the balance between working with the initiative and working with ordinary activities as described in the section above. The dilemma was expressed via the difficulties of what logic should be prioritized, and how it should be prioritized. Both among school staff and school management. This dilemma was also expressed in lack of time and resources, sometimes in relation to the organizational changes that had taken place. Institutions such as schools need to have enough resources to properly implement initiatives to prevent violence (Flood 2019). Systems, structures, and decision-makers, both within the school as well as surrounding it, must support the implementation to enhance the probabilities of sustainability and successful implementation (ibid).

The findings in the study also indicated that the initiative had become a sidetrack, which also may lead to a dilemma, that might reinforce the difficulties of integrating the initiative, and complicate the aim towards sustainability and long-term work even further. The theoretical

model presented by Sjöberg (2012) suggested that this might lead to the work becoming more of a liability and an additional stress factor and this was also the case within this study. Further, with the initiative being considered as an additional stress factor, resistance can emerge and taking different expressions of pastoral, repressive and regulating resistance (Amundsdotter et al. 2015). Also, there were indications that participants were accepting the idea of preventing violence but resistance emerged in the implementation of it (Lindholm 2012). There were also indications that this contributed to the initiative becoming a sidetrack, with the main focus upon production work, and which in turn also may reinforce the dilemma of integrating and balancing them.

A third dilemma was resistance in itself and how it could manifest in indications of the school sometimes counteracting the intention of the initiative. This has also been shown to be the case in previous evaluations but in different contexts (Bruno et al. 2020; Gottzén et al. 2021). In this study, there were indications of how some activities, such as playing rap-music, were conducted without critical reflections and also how there were lack of consequences when violent behavior occurred.

## **7.1 Concluding Thoughts**

The challenge regarding prioritizing violence prevention arguably relates to a balance between prioritization and organizational prerequisites, including enough resources. Beyond what has been discussed so far it also manifested when the data was collected. It was challenging to find informants that were willing to participate in this study. There were other things they felt that they had to prioritize, which is also consistent with other aspects that have been demonstrated in this evaluation. Indeed, schools often lack time and resources to execute evaluations of their work with violence prevention (WHO 2019; Flood 2019).

It is also of interest to discuss and problematize the relation between the theoretical choice of resistance applied to the data in this study and the actual organizational and structural challenges the implementation faced. It is worth reminding that the concept is used as an analytical tool to sort among the challenges that can occur when aiming to implement and integrate violence prevention into daily activities within an organization. The expressions of challenges regarding the organizational prerequisites and lack of resources to implement the initiative can, as seen in this study, be interpreted as resistance towards doing the work that is

needed to accomplish change (Lindholm 2012). On the other hand, it can indeed also be understood as a frustration towards the actual bureaucracy of the institution where the participants in this study are facing and dealing with lack of resources and deficient organizational prerequisites, leaving their hands tied to do the work needed to implement the initiative. Some of the examples then of situations where for instance pastoral resistance are claimed to occur is once again to be understood as an theoretical interpretation in relation to the concept, while it might just be expressions of frustrations towards deficient organizational prerequisites that are out of the participants authority to affect.

Despite the challenges highlighted in this report, the initiative and its implementation seems promising in its foundation, with some aspects of the implementation shown to be a bit more successful than others. The challenges could also be potential triggers for developmental learning processes that might lead to transforming the organization's formal work process (Ellström 2010), initiating a starting point of working with violence prevention as a part of the production. This is also to be found in NFFV's independent project plan. They hope that the initiative can lower the threshold for starting working with violence prevention (IPP 2021). The initiative may then create and contribute to opportunities for transferring inspiration to work with violence prevention into practical activities (IPP 2021). Further, with the continuous implementations of the school-based initiative, some recommendations will be addressed and the basis of them will be discussed below and then summarized.

## **7.2 Recommendations**

A recommendation is that NFFV should further develop and clarify their expectations of the school and the school management's significant role for a successful implementation. It should address the organizational prerequisites needed in order to make sure that the school is ready for working with development (Eriksson et al. 2018). The importance of proper organizational prerequisites and the crucial role the management and leaders play for a successful and sustainable implementation was just like previous research, also suggested here (Flood 2019; Williams & Neville 2017; Sjöberg 2012; Eriksson et al. 2018; Bruno et al. 2020; Gottzén et al. 2021). Further, knowledge about the subject, and general knowledge about transformation-work are both prerequisites that need to be considered when planning to conduct some sort of gender-equality work (Callerstig 2012; Björger 2015). NFFV writes in their project plan how they expect that increased awareness eventually will lead to changed

behavior (NFFV 2020). However, to cope with challenges that can occur due to resistance regarding doubts of what the initiative can contribute with, it may be favorable to also clarify this further, making sure involved participants take part of how the initiative expects change to actually occur. Such clarification may reduce disbeliefs, resistance and unmotivated teachers.

Another recommendation is that NFFV should further explore in what ways they can assist the teachers and the school management in balancing and connecting the production work with the development work. Most of the teachers that participated in the study expressed the need for more training, more educational sessions and increased competence and education as well as concrete assistance in how they can integrate violence prevention more practically. Similar aspects for a successful implementation have also been highlighted in previous research (Flood 2019; WHO 2019). It was also asked by some of the participants, both among teachers but also school management, more active participation in puzzling the production work and development work so that the teachers could be provided with proper resources to work with violence prevention more sustainable. Using a whole-of-school approach is a systematization of the implementation and is a favorable strategy to enhance the successfulness of violence prevention initiatives since the whole organization gets involved (Flood 2019). Such systematization could hopefully lead to a more sustainable prioritizing of violence prevention.

## **Recommendations**

- That NFFV further develops and clarifies the project plan with the expectations of the school and upon the crucial role school management has shown to have in order to enhance a more successful implementation and integration.
- That NFFV continues to explore and evaluate how they can take on a more active role when implementing and integrating the initiative when it comes to assisting the school and staff in working with these issues.
- That NFFV reviews how they can work to systemize the implementation of the initiative and ensure that staff receive equal education and training, as well as involving parents and caretakers.

- That NFFV continues to explore if there are specific challenges regarding resistance towards the feminist perspective in cultural-diverse areas and how already established norms can be further challenged.

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# **Appendix 1.**

## **1.1 Loose interview guide for representative from NFFV**

What is your role within the initiative and how long have you been engaged in it?

Could you tell me about how you did get in contact with the MVP-model?

How do you think that the model is working? (What do you think the interventions will result in, and how?)

What ages do you primarily work with when you work with MVP?

What, if any, difficulties is there to work with such a model in a Swedish context? (Are there any adjustments made to make it suitable for a Swedish context?)

What, if any, difficulties is there with the model in relation to younger students? (And what, if any, factors make it more favorable to work with younger students?)

How do you perceive that the cooperation with the school has been?

What do you think I should focus upon regarding this evaluation? Who do you think is important for me to talk to?

Is there anything you would like to add that we have not touched upon yet?

## **1.2 Loose interview guide for interview with representative from school management**

What is your professional role and how long have you worked with that?

Could you tell me about what your role in relation to the initiative is? How do you perceive it?

When did you first get in contact with the initiative and how come that you started to work with it?

What expectations do you have on the initiative, both regarding what effects it may have but also regarding the implementation of it?

Could you describe how you think that the initiative has worked so far? (how does it show?)

What, if any, difficulties did you detect when working with the initiative?

How do you experience that the initiative has been received among the colleagues?  
Finns det någon variation i hur satsningen tagits emot av medarbetarna?

Could you describe how you practically have done to enable the work with the initiative? (for example, did you set aside certain time on the schedules for this and so on)

How do you perceive that the cooperation with NFFV has worked? (Regarding support, prerequisites and so on)

Is there anything you would like to add that we have not touched upon yet?

## **Appendix 2.**

### **2.1 Loose interview guide with teachers and staff.**

What is your professional title?

How long have you worked with that?

How long have you been working at the school?

What ages are you primarily working with?

Could you tell me about how you perceive the extent of the violence at this school? (If there is, how is it being expressed?)

How do you resonate regarding violence among children? (What do you believe are the causes? Do you think there are differences in relation to violence among adolescents and adults?)

Could you tell me about how you experience the school's work with questions regarding gender equality and violence prevention?

What are your expectations on the initiative? (Have you noticed any differences on the extent of violence since the initiative started?)

What is your perception of the initiative? What do you think about it?

Could you describe how you perceive the NFFV's implementation of the initiative? (How do you think the processes went? )

What, if any, material did NFFV provide to you? Could you in that case tell me about how you experienced that material? (How did you perceive the content? How did you work with the material with your students? )

Could you talk about how you have done to work with the initiative with your students more concretely?

- Do you use any exercises or tools you received from the initiative?

How do you perceive the integration of the initiative into your ordinary activities?

What, if any, have been challenging with the initiative? (challenges also regarding the implementation? To work with such questions with younger students?)

How do you think that the school should prioritize violence prevention? (How do you experience the time to work with such issues?)

Could you talk about how you perceive the education/training you received from NFFV?

How do you experience that the school management have worked as support in order to implement the initiative? (Do you feel that the staff has received support and resources to implement, and integrate the initiative? Do you feel that violence prevention is a prioritized question?)

How do you experience support from NFFV?

How have you experienced the cooperation with NFFV?

Is there anything you think NFFV could have done differently to improve the implementation (or cooperation), if so, could you tell me about it?

Is there anything you would like to add that we have not touched upon yet?