



Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Gender training in education

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Gender training in education

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1. Description of the main elements of the good practice

1. *The children's book on gender roles and educators' guide:*
The first example of good practice from Denmark is a children's book and an accompanying guide for educators. The children's book targets 5-6-year-old girls and boys in kindergartens. The prior aim is to challenge different expectations of how girls and boys should behave, and secondarily breaking down traditional gender stereotypes.
2. *The magazine + film/CD for girls and boys about body confidence and "porn chic" + teachers guide*
The second good practice example from Denmark is a magazine + film/CD for girls and boys and an accompanying guide for teachers on the issue of the so-called "porn chic". The project targets 14-16-year-old girls and boys at school. It debates how differently girls and boys perceive their own body and how differently they are influenced by soft-core pornographic symbols and codes mainstreamed through the mass media.

For both initiatives independent background research studies have been produced on which the material is based.

1.1 Background and general policy context

Gender equality in Denmark

According to the efforts for gender equality, Denmark has been a pioneer by European standards but falling behind the countries we normally compare ourselves with like Norway and Sweden.

Firstly, Denmark was in front with legislation for women's rights: In 1915 it became possible for women to vote at elections, in 1976 Denmark adopted the law on equal pay for men and women and in 1978 a law on equal treatment in labour market (both extensions of EC directives) was adopted. 1999 was the year when Denmark had the first minister of equality and the year after, in 2000, a law on gender mainstreaming was accepted. There has been no major legislation on gender equality since 2000.

In 2011, The Danish Social Democrats won the election and formed the incumbent government (after 10 years of liberal policy) with our first female Prime Minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt. And the present minister of equality, Manu Sareen, is the

first man in this chair. He has just adopted and implemented a new law that allows homosexual couples to get married in the church. The legislation of equality in Denmark has moved from a focus on the need of women's rights, to equality towards ethnicity and now sexuality.

How gender affects and shows itself in education in Denmark

In the past few years there has been an enormously focus on boys' nationally as well as internationally poorer scholastic achievements – in the public debate as well as in the field of research. The most frequently occurring explanations are anchored in boys' biology on one hand and the so-called feminization because of the majority of female teachers on the other hand. However, there is in the field of research a growing awareness of special terms for boys in schools in relation to traditional gender perceptions. Special terms as different and lower expectations towards boys because of biological related explanations as "boys are not as good as girls to concentrate and sit still in school". In a sociocultural perspective culture, (teachers, parents) creates these gender specific problems. And if we get educated, we will be able to meet every child before gender and not vice versa.

Research-based gender-perspectives are not part of the structure and content of the teaching in schools in Denmark. It is not part of the curriculum neither for pupils nor teachers' education. So when it comes to knowledge about how gender stereotypes become both co-players and opponents in relation to ensuring children equal opportunities for participation in schools, the professionals are largely left to their own immediate concerns and experiences.

This result was also found in 2005 in a large Nordic comparative study on "Sex, Gender equality and School 1990-2004" launched by the Nordic Council of Ministers¹. This has been repeated in a follow-up report from 2010². The research showed that the organization and content of the teaching in the Danish classrooms was structured according to traditional perceptions of sex. Many teachers, who normally make an effort to promote each child's potential for learning and development, tend to argue from a biological perspective, when it comes to sex/gender relations: Boys and girls are often expected to have completely different needs, abilities, desires, dreams and challenges. In the classroom the girls are paired with boys to keep them quiet, pupils are divided by sex in activities, and boys are met with lower expectations of capacity for concentration and contemplation - solely because they are boys. The researchers found that the Danish conditions were the least innovative and the most conservative compared to the other Nordic countries. Moreover, Denmark is the only Nordic country that has no legal measures to counteract gender stereotypes, aim for equal opportunities and gender equality in the curriculums of the educational system.

¹ Reisby & Knudsen (2005).

² Nystrøm (2010).

The lack of research-based knowledge on the widespread biological approach

A Danish cognitive neuroscience researcher Christian Gerlach has made a comparative study of several international studies and he defines the brain as plastic:

"To put it simple, it means that the brain takes shape after what is put in it: In fact the brain is like a cornucopia of links. It is the environment that determines which compounds survive. Therefore, if you treat your daughter and son differently, they will become different, because of the brain taking shape of what is fed in it. If the girls are being praised for cleaning up and the boys for being wild boys, that is the way they will turn out."³

He adds to his arguments and agrees with other Danish researchers in the field:

"Girls' brains are more different from each other, and boys the same – than boys and girls' brains are different from each other."⁴

Differences within each gender category are therefore more striking than the differences between the sexes. In other words, one can expect that children with different body signs (biological boy or girl) potentially can be more alike and learn in more similar ways than children with same sex.

The Institute of Social Research in Denmark (SFI) has made a Danish study in 2010, which concludes that there is:

"... solid evidence that teachers in their behaviour helps to determine the boys and girls' identification and acting possibilities. It also shows that the teachers have difficulties seeing a number of other differences between children, because they focus too much on the difference between boys and girls."⁵

What does this lead us to? It seems clear that teachers and other professionals involved in the Danish educational system are not qualified for the challenge of counteracting gender stereotypes and thus not prepared for new ways of working towards gender equality. It is not expectable and maybe not even desirable to have teachers making practice-based efforts without a research-based knowledge.

1.2 The goals and target groups of the good practice

1. *The children's book on gender roles and educators guide:*

The primary target group was 5-6-year-old girls and boys and the secondary target group was the kindergarten educators.

³ Gerlach (2011).

⁴ Gerlach (2011), Søndergaard m.fl. (2005).

⁵ Jacobsen, V. (2010).

The project aimed to:

- Give children equal opportunities to choose what and with whom they want to play.
 - The project was based on the ideology that it is not desirable to make girls and boys the same, but to give them equal opportunities to develop their skills regardless of their sex/gender.
 - Adults must leave entrenched expectations of girls and boys and meet the children where they are and also present them to a wide range of possibilities to choose from.
 - Inspire educators and others working with children to integrate gender perspectives in their daily work – e.g. as part of the educational curricula.
2. *The magazine + film/CD for girls and boys about body confidence and “porn chic” + teachers guide*
 The primary target group was 14-16-year-old girls and boys. Secondary target group was teachers in the older school classes.
 The project aimed to: Start a debate to enable girls and boys to be critical of the images and messages of gender and porn that they encounter through the mass media.

1.3 The legal and financial provisions to implement the good practices

The legal provisions to implement the two examples of good practice are as described in the section 1.1 about the Danish conditions for gender training in education. This means that it is legally possible to implement new practice as the examples described – but it is doubtful whether the ambitions can be redeemed as the teachers lack research-based knowledge about sex/gender.

1. *The children’s book on gender roles and educators’ guide:*
 Financed by the Minister for Gender Equality for a total cost of approx. 800.000 DKK = 115.000 €.
2. *The magazine + film/CD for girls and boys about body confidence and “porn chic” + teachers guide*
 Partly financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Danish Ministry for Gender Equality. The amount has not been informed.

1.4 Institutional arrangements and procedures of implementation

1. *The children's book on gender roles and educators' guide:*

The project was initiated and financed by the Ministry for Gender Equality. Furthermore, the Ministry functioned as project leader heading the three different steps of the production of the book (?): 1. Research studies in three kindergartens, 2. The teachers' guide was based on the findings of the studies, and 3. The children's book was written by an author/journalist. A reference group was established with a clear mandate: to follow the project, to ensure the quality of the project and to ensure necessary inputs from all relevant actors (including experts, researchers, organisations, representatives from ministries and so on).

The material was distributed nationally and sent by post to all kindergartens accompanied by a letter from the Minister for Gender Equality and the chairperson of the union of kindergarten teachers encouraging them to use the book and guide. Also, the material was uploaded to the Minister's website http://www.lige.dk/koensroller_i_boernehave.asp. The implementation began in 2008 and continued the following years.

2. *The magazine + film/CD for girls and boys about body confidence and "porn chic" + teachers guide*

As part of the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers on the theme of the so-called "porn chic" tendency, the Danish Ministry for Gender Equality decided to initiate a project for schoolchildren.

The initiative consisted of two separate projects:

1. A crosscutting Nordic research study run by the Nordic Institute for Gender Research on the "porn chic" tendency (- which covers the fact that soft core pornographic symbols are mainstreamed into the public sphere through commercials, music, fashion and so on).
2. A national youth conference for Danish pupils in the age group of 14-16 years followed by an elaboration of a teachers' guide, a debate magazine and a film/CD.

The school material was distributed nationally and was sent by post to all schools in Denmark accompanied by a letter from the Minister for Gender Equality. Also, the material was uploaded to the Minister's website <http://www.lige.dk/ungeogpornografi.asp>. For English articles and info: http://www.nikk.no/English/Subjects/Youth_Gender_and_Pornography/

The Nordic Institute for gender research arranged for their part an international conference presenting the findings of the study. The implementation began in 2006 and continued the following years.

2. Results of the good practice and its impact on achieving gender equality

1. *The children's book on gender roles and teachers guide:*

An evaluation was conducted some time after the national dissemination of the project in order to establish whether the material was actually being used in kindergartens and how the educators accepted it. The evaluation pointed out that the material was generally very well received and well rated. However, in some of the kindergartens the educators unintentionally separated the guide and the book quite quickly resulting in no systematic professional follow-up. Also, interviews with the educators seemed to indicate that the subject of *gender roles* and gender-based expectations of girls and boys was difficult to grasp for some of the teachers.

On this relatively small basis it is thus difficult to conclude whether the children's book and/or the teachers' guide have had any impact on achieving higher gender equality among the participants. However, it is likely that the presentation of the books has questioned mainstreamed regularities and spurred reflections on gender and gender equality for some of the children and/or educators, which may influence the educators' gender perceptions and approaches to the children in the kindergartens.

2. *The magazine + film/CD for girls and boys about body confidence and "porn chic" + teachers guide*

The schools positively received the material, and many schools wanted more publications and films/CDs. No independent evaluation was subsequently conducted.

2.1 Key results in relation to the baseline situation and to the goals and target groups

1. *The children's book on gender roles and teachers' guide:*

It appears likely that the baseline situation has been changed somehow for both target groups. Yet, based on the above-mentioned evaluation, it is difficult to assume that it has changed from one point to another.

The primary target group was 5-6-years-old children. Despite the lack of information, the fact that the books represent different perceptions of gender than the children are used to, one can assume that the books support the aim of giving children more and equal opportunities. The books represent the idea that making girls and boys the same is not desirable, and that the aim is rather to offer girls and boys equal opportunities to develop skills regardless of sex.

The secondary target group is the kindergarten educators. As the books draw on research-based knowledge they do represent a different conviction than most educators have. Mostly it is about seeing gender as a more complex and diverse category.

As mentioned earlier, boys and girls are typically perceived differently and stereotypically in the professional educational arenas in Denmark, and teachers and educators often base their knowledge of gender on personal and cultural, common knowledge⁶. The survey on which the initiative was based also had the same findings: Academic gender studies are not mandatory in the education of educators, and they therefore often meet children through gender stereotyped glasses without being aware of their orientation⁷. The evaluation leaves no insights into whether the aim for adults rejecting entrenched expectations of girls and boys was achieved or not.

This clash between the educators' daily practice and experience-based knowledge – and these books' presentation of a socio-cultural perception of gender based on research - may have two very different outcomes:

- a) The professionals become inspired or at least they start questioning their own gender-practice that may appear as a regularity.
- b) The professionals become provoked and respond with rejection through ridicule etc.

2. *The magazine + film/CD for girls and boys about body confidence and “porn chic” + teachers guide*

The project aimed to start a debate to enable girls and boys to be critical of the images and messages of gender and porn that they encounter through the mass media. As we know the project was implemented and therefore the debates in the classrooms started. But we cannot say anything about the quality of the debates and whether the debates had the impact on both the primary target group (14-16-year-old girls and boys) and the secondary target group (teachers in the older school classes) as wished. It is likely that the clash mentioned above in the first example of good practice is the same and therefore has the same two possible outcomes.

2.2 Challenges, obstacles and constraints encountered

The crucial barrier of the good practice examples is the educators and teachers' lack of research-based knowledge about gender. The fact that it takes knowledge to meet boys and girls in gender diverse ways, and perceive and practice gender as counteracting gender stereotypes makes the possibilities of the educators and teachers to understand, implement and evaluate the best practice projects very difficult.

If you are not able to see where you are and maybe also not where you are going, you become quite disorientated. And that seems to be how the professionals feel about solving these projects. In the outcome study from the children's book and

⁶ Reisby & Knudsen (2005).

⁷ Kofoed, J., m.fl. (2008).

educators' guide, the educators give the following reasons as to why they did not include the teachers' guide:

“They rarely use inspirational materials or guides like this. They get the incentive to learn something new on courses and through demands placed upon them. The distinction is between *can* and *must*. Equality work falls into the category of *can*. They feel that they already have too many mandatory tasks and therefore they do not have the energy/resources to do something extra even though they think of it as both interesting and relevant.”⁸

The first step towards a sex/gender pedagogy must be to discern what is considered normal behaviour in the pedagogy arena and to examine whether the children are caught and held in limitations, which are not adequate for the individual as well as for the pedagogy. Often the limitations are rarely conscious to the professionals, but arise through truisms, habitual expectations and routines for how to understand what girls and boys do and say. A technique to create more diverse expectations and scope for action may be to adjust one's perspective to see when children's way of acting falls beyond expectations for what boys and girls can, should and must do. When the professional has set his/her eyes on seeing exceptions and alternatives to expectations for boys' and girls' behaviour, one can begin to act differently.

3. Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the good practice

This assessment will focus on the effects of good practice cases compared to the conditions of the legal framework in Denmark. It ranks within the research tradition that sees gender as something that is constantly created, challenged, changed and reproduced in the interaction between individual children and adults; in other words, a socio-cultural category. Both of the two good practice cases are based on the same academic tradition.

As mentioned in section 1.1, the legal framework in Denmark makes it legally possible to implement new practice as the examples described – but it is doubtful whether the ambitions can be redeemed as the educators and teachers lack research-based knowledge about sex/gender and thus lack knowledge and skills to do the work properly.

If children, as they look and read in the children's book, are supposed to be given the opportunity to put into words what they see and ask what the observed structural circumstances are about, it requires knowledge of the professionals. The professionals must be able to understand and articulate themselves. If the professionals do not have analytical knowledge, it becomes very challenging to read and give proper answers to these questions. In fact it is more likely that the professionals reproduce than counteract gender stereotypes without research-based knowledge about gender even though the aim is clearly about making more possibilities for boys and girls through counteracting gender stereotypes.⁹

⁸ Olesen, J. (2008).

⁹ Nørgaard (2008), Vittrup (2011).

Because of this very basic circumstance, it is difficult not to assess that the examples of good practice in Denmark has cost a lot of effort and contributed with few results and therefore had little impact.

Having said this, it is also my conviction that any project that can offer another perspective on gender than the constantly quoted traditional and stereotypical story potentially holds the opportunity to influence especially children's perceptions of gender norms in more diverse ways. This is also the conclusion from a new Norwegian study about some children's books functioning as an opposition concerning gender norms¹⁰.

At the same time, it is my conviction that the greatest effort for gender equality has to be done in the professional arenas around children. If society creates more possibilities for both girls and boys instead of barriers based on traditional gender norms, individuals and society will experience less gender specific problems.

In this perspective, I assess the projects as both effective and sustainable as such; but, the success of these projects completely depends on implementation of research-based knowledge of gender in the educational policies. So, if the relevant frameworks are realized in other countries, I assess the good practice examples from Denmark very transferable to other countries. The projects have the strengths, the frameworks the weaknesses. Which means that because of the lack of gender perspectives in the education of teachers and the educational system in general, it is not possible to succeed with the good practice examples from Denmark.

Much research point on the need for counteracting stereotypical perceptions and socialization of gender. New research shows, for instance, that boys' friendships end when boys become men; not because they want to, but because expectations of adult masculinity often exclude the possibility for near relationships with other men with reference to *doing* femininity and/or gayness. Boys without close relationships are particularly vulnerable and this issue seems to be one of the reasons why a lot of young men drop out of the educational system.¹¹

New European research shows that families with a high degree of gender equality are characteristic of less violence, fewer divorces and better health. Thus, more gender equality within the family leads to less domestic violence and decreases the danger with two-thirds. This finding is a clear and strong correlation across other variables such as education, divorce or bullying. The study shows how violence is linked to power rather than gender, which also means that in families where the woman/mother is in charge she is the one performing violent acts.¹²

In all, the overall point of my assessment is a call for more policy measures to spread knowledge of gender, gender issues and gender equality; especially to professionals working in the field of children and education. Research-based knowledge about gender and gender perspectives needs to get implemented in the curriculum of the educations of teachers and educators. During the recent Rio+20 Conference it was noted that gender equality is good for growth, but growth does not necessarily lead to more gender equality. That is the reason why we face an

¹⁰ Traavik, I. (2012).

¹¹ Niobe (2011).

¹² Holter & Lorentzen (2012).

urgent need for educational policy measures to ensure gender equality for both men, women, boys and girls through research-based knowledge about gender.

4. Main questions and issues for debate at the seminar

- **Educational policies based on research-based knowledge of gender?**
The Danish good practice examples show the challenge of wanting to empower the work on gender and equality without educating professionals in the field. How do we succeed in making educational policies based on research-based knowledge of gender?
- **Partnership approaches?**
Which partnership approaches, except from that of policy makers, would be most effective for achieving a more widespread knowledge of gender in the educational system?
- **How to educate teachers?**
If teachers need to act from research-based knowledge about gender - what is the most appropriate way to give gender education? Would it be best to implement a new subject in teachers' education or should the education get gender-mainstreamed?
- **How to educate children?**
There is a lot of gender research and knowledge and a lot of pedagogical and didactical research and knowledge as well. But there is not that much research and knowledge about how to educate children with/in gender perspectives. For the same reasons the amount of books about gender or gender perspectives for pupils in school are very small in Denmark. If the teachers get educated, we need more teaching materials. To which extend is it appropriate and possible to translate the existing books on the European market into other languages?

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