CHANGING STEREOTYPES AND BREAKING TRADITIONS

Gender equality in early childhood education and care
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Summary

In this report we have mapped the legislation and national curriculums steering early childhood education and care (ECEC), studies made related to gender equality and ECEC during 2010–2021 and practises and tools to promote gender equality in preschools in Nordic countries including Åland, Greenland and Faroe Islands. It can be seen that the force of the legislation and national guidance to promote gender equality affects how systematic the gender equality work in ECEC is. There are a lot of projects done around gender equality in ECEC and often the problem is the lack of longevity. On the other hand, there are also examples where sustainable and systematic work is achieved. In the end of the report we list 8 tips based on the Nordic experiences to support gender equality work to be sustainable, effective and long-lasting. The suggestions include for example making norms visible, education, strong support from legislation, curriculums and administration, gender equality planning, preventive work towards violence and harassment and involving children and custodians. Below you can find summaries from each country’s legislations, curriculums, studies and reports, and good practices.

Norway

According to the Preschool Act, the work has to be based on and promote equality. Children’s gender has to be taken into account. The Equality Act makes public authorities responsible of active and systematic efforts to promote equality and prevent discrimination. Teaching material and teaching have to support the purpose of the Equality Act. Gender equality planning is compulsory in ECEC. According to the Equality Act all public authorities have to issue an annual statement on what they are doing to convert equality and non-discrimination principles, procedures and standards into action and an assessment to what has been achieved as a result of these efforts, and outline expectations with regards to future efforts in this area. Equality is seen as a core value that has to be taken into account in all pedagogical activities also in the national curriculum. One aspect of equality is gender, gender identity and gender expression. The curriculum mentions the aims of equality and what it requires from the staff.

Norwegian research about gender equality and ECEC addresses topics such as children’s development and gender, ECEC staff’s perceptions of play, environment and gender as well as male employees in ECEC. Several reports are conducted on evaluating gender equality in Norwegian preschools during 2010–2019. The latest report suggests that ECEC, schools and teacher education need more knowledge and support material about gender equality and norm critical thinking. Reports about gender segregated education, school performance and education call for counteracting stereotypes already on the preschool level, more equal pedagogical practices and recruitment of men to work in ECEC.

The practical gender equality work in ECEC in Norway has gone from focusing on recruiting more men to ECEC to being more about norm-critical work with gender and gender equality in pedagogy. In the past, there were many investments in
recruiting male employees to preschools and preschool teacher training and in getting men to stay in education and in the field of ECEC. Some pre-schools still have the recruitment of men in focus, for example the Kanvas Foundation, which is presented in the section with practical examples. Some municipalities have worked with gender equality for several years, but have not continued the structured work after the funded projects have ended. Some of the preschools in those municipalities have continued the gender equality work, while others have not done so systematically without having a requirement and assignment from the state administration. Rosa kompetanse within the Association FRI - The Association for Gender and Sexuality Diversity trains preschool staff in matters of gender and sexuality.

Sweden

The Education Act defines equality as one core value that has to be taken into account when planning education. The act used to include a compulsory plan for the equal treatment but the requirement was removed in 2017. The Discrimination Act prohibits harassment based on seven different aspects including gender, gender identity and gender expression. Education providers’ active work to prevent differentiated treatment have to reach for example admission and recruiting procedures, teaching methods, assessment of student’s performance and study environment. Both Acts require active measurements preventing harassment and one such activity is a plan to prevent offensive treatment. In the plan the education provider has to investigate the existence of any risks of discrimination, reprisals or other obstacles of equal rights, analyse the causes of any risks discovered, take prevention and promotion measures and evaluate and monitor the previous actions. The plan has to be made in cooperation between the education provider, students and employees and have guidelines and routines to prevent harassment. Also these actions need to be documented. The plan has to be documented annually in writing. The aspect of gender equality is also very strong in the national curriculums. The meaning of gender equality for children and the ECEC’s responsibility to promote it is defined in length in the curriculum for preschools. The curriculum also has several objectives towards the development of children and directives for the principals, teachers and other staff on gender equality. For example, the whole staff is responsible to be active and aware about promoting gender equality and to inspire and challenge children to broaden their abilities and interests beyond gender stereotypical choices. The preschool director is responsible for including gender equality in systematic work on quality.

Gender equality and ECEC in Sweden have been extensively researched. Few subjects out of many include teachers’ gender stereotypes and attitudes towards gender, science and gender, power and norms, male ECEC-staff’s status, gendered practices and learning, heteronormativity, preschool environments and gender inclusion, and effects of gender pedagogy. The Swedish School Inspectorate’s report (2017) examined 36 preschools’ and 24 principals’ work with gender equality. The report shows that gender equality work is still rather unsystematic and there is a risk of passing stereotypical gender norms and gender structures to children.

Sweden is a pioneer when it comes to gender equality and norm-critical work in ECEC. Many municipalities have employed gender equality developers who work to
promote gender equality and equal treatment in several or all of the municipality’s preschools, for example Umeå and Eskilstuna municipality, which are highlighted in the report. Uddevalla municipality also works with all the municipality’s preschools to integrate gender equality in the preschool’s work with a focus on violence prevention work and children’s personal and physical integrity. The preschools Nicolaigården and Egalia in Stockholm have long had gender equality as a basis in their entire functions. They are the first LGBTQI certified preschools in Sweden.

**Iceland**

Promoting equality is mentioned as one objective in the Preschool Act but gender equality is not specifically mentioned. The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender prohibits gender-based harassment in all educational institutions and the prohibition has to be noted in education as well as in working methods and in other daily activities. The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender has an own section for education and schooling stating that gender and equality mainstreaming should be taken into account in all policy-making and planning. Pupils shall receive knowledge about gender, gender stereotypes, gender-based choice of education and occupation and matters concerning people with disabilities and queer people. There is also a gender equality counsellor working in the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture that pursues the provisions of the Article and advises relevant parties on gender equality issues. Preschools do gender equality planning where gender mainstreaming, (gender) equality education, learning materials, guidance, and the directives and prevention measures on harassment are taken into account. The plan has to be reviewed yearly and updated when needed. The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Preschools defines equality to be one of the six fundamental pillars of education. Gender is mentioned as one aspect of equality. Equality education refers to the content of education, study methods and learning environment.

Recent research about gender equality and ECEC has been conducted on gendering in preschools, monitoring a development project about gender equality and fairy tales, and preschool-children’s knowledge of literature and popular culture in free play. The Directorate of Equality follows gender equality planning by surveys and looking through the gender equality plans. According to the survey made in 2018 and recent research, preschools in Iceland need more education and a high level of support on gender equality issues.

In Iceland several preschools have gotten funding for projects where they develop the staff’s knowledge and daily practices in their preschool from the point of view of gender equality. The funding has been brief and sporadic. It can be seen that promoting gender equality needs structures to work actively in daily life. In Reykjavik long-term support in equality issues is guaranteed by a full-time employee who works in support of local preschools, schools and leisure centres on equality issues including gender equality.
Finland

Promoting equality and gender equality are mentioned as one objective in Finnish legislation about ECEC and schools. The Equality Act prohibits harassment based on gender, gender identity and gender expression. Gender equality is to be promoted in an age appropriate manner. Teaching, research and learning materials have to support the implementation of the Equality Act. It is compulsory to make gender equality plans in schools and pre-primary education. Planning has to include an assessment of equality conditions in the educational institution, agreement on development areas and clear measures to promote gender equality, and a review of how measures to promote equality that have been agreed upon previously were implemented. Compulsory planning is planned to be expanded also into preschools in the near future. The age of the national curriculums is comparative to the amount of mentions gender equality gets in them. The national curriculum for pre-primary education (2014) is the oldest one and has few mentions about promoting gender equality. In the national curriculum for ECEC gender equality is seen more frequently and it is stated that ECEC has to be gender sensitive. The newest curriculum for the trial for two-year pre-primary education (2021) takes gender equality into account the strongest. It states that also pre-primary education has to be gender sensitive. It mentions gender equality in several parts of the curriculum giving requirements on gender equality to the staff, learning environment and working methods.

Recent research about gender equality and ECEC in Finland include topics such as child-adult relations and governing, agency and materiality, power relations and play and gender equality discourses in local planning. One report has been made about gender equality and ECEC in Finland by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in 2016. According to studies and reports there is a need for more concrete guidance for planning, implementation and evaluation of gender sensitive pedagogy in Finland.

Several NGOs have been working towards promoting gender equality in ECEC. Projects have focused on in-service training and lately on creating tools for gender equality planning. Sporadic funding makes the work uncertain and fragmentary. Folkhälsan has worked to promote gender equality in ECEC since 2007. It started as a project and is now a permanent position with one employee who works to promote gender equality and equal treatment.

Åland

The Education Act prohibits harassment and demands a right to equal early childhood education despite gender, gender identity, gender expression and other features. The Finnish Equality Act stands in Åland as well. The national curriculum for pre-primary education mentions gender equality as one core value of education. Daily activities have to be assessed from the norm critical point of view. Pre-primary education has to offer children a chance to develop their interests and skills in an equal manner and without gender stereotypes. Gender perspective is taken into account in chapters about children’s rights and adult’s responsibilities as well as in chapters about different school subjects. At the moment the curriculum also stands for ECEC where applicable.
All preschools on Åland worked to promote gender equality in preschool in the years 2010–2012 as an assignment of the Åland Provincial Government. After the project, the provincial government handed over the responsibility to integrate gender equality in the preschool’s activities to the municipalities. Mariehamn was the only municipality that systematically continued the work and still works, among other things, with a joint equal treatment plan as a basis for the work.

**Denmark**

The Preschool Act doesn’t mention gender equality. The Equality Act promotes gender equality and prohibits sexual harassment and harassment based on gender. The Equality Act doesn’t mention education separately but the Act also obligates education providers. In the national pedagogical curriculum equality and democracy are seen as a base for all activities in ECEC. Children have to have a possibility to participate and have an influence on daily activities despite different features including gender. Pedagogical environment has to support children’s development and their friendships regardless of gender. Gender is also one of the aspects that adults can use to challenge children’s play.

A Danish Ministry of Education’s report from 2016 points out three gender equality questions in ECEC: the amount of men working in ECEC, the stigmatizing special rules some preschools have for male staff and lastly the gender stereotypes children may encounter in ECEC and their effect on children’s future. Padovan-Özdemir’s & Hamilton’s (2020) analysis of a survey conducted among ECEC leaders show that the pedagogical work on diversity and gender equality is not very widespread in Denmark.

In Denmark, some preschools work to integrate gender equality into activities with a norm-critical focus. This is done in individual preschools and in a municipal project in Fredensborg municipality. The preschools have the opportunity to receive a quality label on gender equality and equal treatment, the *Prismecertifikatet*, which is described in the chapter on Denmark.

**Greenland**

One objective in The Preschool Act is to prepare children for a life in a free society in a spirit of peace, understanding, gender equality and other qualities. When children are chosen to preschool from a queue the gender and age balance of the group has to be secured. The Equality Act prohibits gender based discrimination and gender based and sexual harassment. The Act does not mention education. The national education strategy or the government curriculum do not mention gender equality.

Unfortunately, neither recent research nor practices promoting gender equality in ECEC were detected for this report from Greenland.
Faroe Islands

The Preschool Act mentions that ECEC has to develop children to freedom of expression, tolerance, equality and democracy. The Equality Act ensures equal treatment despite gender. According to the Equality Act all learning material in education and raising children has to implement the Act’s purpose and the teaching methods have to support equal opportunities to make educational choices. The Ministry of Culture has published national pedagogical objectives that however are not obligatory to follow. According to the objectives ECEC should be based on gender equality. Gender equality should be seen in the pedagogics of the preschools. Girls and boys should have the same opportunities to be seen and heard and participate in all daily activities. The staff needs to think about their own and society’s attitudes towards girls and boys, so that gender wouldn’t limit anyone’s possibilities.

There is no recent research published about gender equality and ECEC in Faroe Islands. Fortunately, a dissertation is in the making about how gender discourses affect children’s opportunities to act and participate at home and in ECEC. Despite our efforts, good practices to promote gender equality in ECEC weren’t detected for this report.
Sammanfattning


Norge


Det praktiska jämställdhetsarbetet i förskolorna i Norge har gått från att fokusera på att rekrytera fler män till förskolan till att mer handla om ett normkritiskt arbete
med kön och jämställdhet i pedagogiken. Tidegare fanns det många satsningar på att rekrytera manliga anställda till förskolorna och förskollärarutbildningarna och för att få män att stanna kvar inom utbildningen och inom småbarnspedagogiken. En del förskolor har fortfarande rekrytering av män i fokus, till exempel Kanvas stiftelse, som presenteras i avsnittet med praktiska exempel. En del kommuner har arbetat med jämställdhet i flera år, men inte fortsatt ett strukturerat arbete efter att de finansierade projekten tagit slut. Några av förskolorna inom de kommunerna har fortsatt jämställdhetsarbetet, medan andra inte gjort det systematiskt utan att ha ett krav och uppdrag från statsförvaltningen. Rosa kompetanse inom Föreningen FRI – Foreningen för kjøns- og seksualitetsmangfold utbildar förskolepersonal i frågor om kön och sexualitet.

**Sverige**


Island


Ny forskning om jämställdhet mellan könen och småbarnspedagogik har genomförts om könsbestämning i förskolor, där man övertäckt ett utvecklingsprojekt om jämställdhet och sagor, och förskolebarnens kunskap om litteratur och populärkultur i den fria leken. Jämställdhetsstyrelsen följer jämställdhetsplaneringen genom undersökningar och tittar igenom jämställdhetsplanerna. Enligt undersökningen som gjordes 2018 samt ny forskning behöver förskolor på Island mer utbildning och mycket stöd i jämställdhetsfrågor.

Finland


Ny forskning om jämställdhet och småbarnspedagogik i Finland omfattar ämnen som relationen mellan barn och vuxna och styrning, aktörskap och materialitet, maktrelationer och lek samt jämställdhetsdiskurser i lokal planering. En rapport om jämställdhet och småbarnspedagogiken i Finland gjordes 2016 av social- och hälsovårdsministeriet. Enligt studier och rapporter finns det ett behov av mer konkreta riktlinjer för planering, implementering och utvärdering av genussensitiv pedagogik i Finland.


Åland


**Danmark**


En rapport från det danska utbildningsministeriet från 2016 pekar ut tre jämställdhetsfrågor i småbarnspedagogiken: antalet män som arbetar i småbarnspedagogiken, de stigmatiserade specialreglerna som vissa förskolor har för manlig personal och slutligen de könsstereotyper barn kan stöta på i förskolan och hur de påverkar barnens framtid. Padovan-Özdemirs & Hamiltons (2020) analys av en undersökning genomförd bland chefer inom förskoleundervisningen visar att det pedagogiska arbetet med mångfald och jämställdhet inte är särskilt utbrett i Danmark.

I Danmark arbetar en del förskolor med att integrera jämställdhet i verksamheten med en normkritisk inriktning. Det handlar om enskilda förskolor och ett kommunalt projekt i Fredensborgs kommun. Förskolorna har möjlighet att få ett kvalitetsmärke om jämställdhet och likabehandling, Prismecertifikatet som beskrivs i kapitlet om Danmark.

**Grönland**


Tyvärr hittades varken någon nyare forskning eller metoder som främjar jämställdhet inom småbarnspedagogiken från Grönland till denna rapport.

Det finns inte någon nyligen publicerad forskning om jämställdhet och småbarnspedagogik på Färöarna. Lyckligtvis finns det en avhandling som är på gång om hur könsdiskurser påverkar barns möjligheter att agera och delta i hemmet och på förskolan. Trots våra ansträngningar hittade vi inte några bra arbetsmetoder för att främja jämställdhet i småbarnspedagogiken för denna rapport.
1. Introduction

The Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality and LGBTI (MR-JÄM) has decided to focus on equality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) to discuss various issues and challenges arising from the introduction of a gender perspective within ECEC in the Nordic countries.

This report is the result of a survey conducted in the Nordic countries and their autonomous territories to determine the equality- and gender-related competence available in the preschool environment. The report deals with legislation and policies, studies, practical examples from preschools, organisations and municipalities, as well as the tools developed for gender equality in preschools in the different countries. The survey provides an overview of the scope of efforts and studies regarding gender and equality in preschools over the past decade. The goal is to increase the understanding of and insight into work focusing on gender and equality in preschools.

During the project period covered in this report, the Nordic Council of Ministers published two reports dealing with similar assignments: one in 2013 and another in 2016. While both of the previous reports dealt with school and preschool, this report focuses on the duties and practices of preschools alone. The previous reports have been used as a starting point for the latest survey.

As pointed out in the 2016 report Nordic Gender Equality – Promising Nordic Practices in Gender Equality Promotion in Basic Education and Kindergartens, gender equality in schools and preschools has received a great deal of attention in the Nordic countries in recent years, and this has created a need to update equality legislation and policies. As legislation and policies call for the adoption of a gender and equality perspective at work, they also drive professionals within ECEC to develop their operations. This, in turn, creates demand for competence in gender equality work. Many laws and policies have been updated since the report was published, but in some countries, gender and equality is still not mentioned.

This report begins with an overview of each country’s legislation concerning gender equality and ECEC, as well as of the curricula steering ECEC. The message delivered by the state on how to promote gender equality in ECEC lays the foundation for the following chapters, which deal with the work material, methods and projects related to equality in ECEC.

The 2013 report on long-lasting gender equality work in preschools and schools in the Nordic countries (Hållbart jämställdhetsarbete i förskolan och skolan i Norden 2013) set out to determine whether a Nordic model for gender equality work in preschools could be identified. The conclusion was that no common model exists: “The results of the study show that the gender equality work differs depending on the Nordic country and that no common Nordic model can be said to exist for best promoting gender equality in preschools and schools.” This survey and report indicate similar results.

We have chosen to highlight several practical examples of gender equality work in the Nordic countries and the autonomous territories. We describe various models adopted for a structured, long-term approach in entire municipalities or
organisations, as well as smaller projects and individual preschools striving to promote gender equality in their operations. A great deal of gender equality work is conducted in ECEC, and the present report is by no means a comprehensive analysis. We have done our best to include several different models.

In Sweden and Norway, many gender equality projects have been carried out, targeting entire municipalities as well as individual preschools. A project encompassing all of the Åland Islands has also been carried out. In Denmark and Iceland, activities have mainly involved preschools working individually or with another party to promote gender equality locally. A few projects have been conducted in Finland, while no practical efforts to promote gender equality in preschools have been organised in the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

We have compiled a list of studies of gender equality in ECEC that have been published in the Nordic countries and autonomous territories since 2010. We cannot vouch for the list being complete, since there may be studies we have missed. We have categorised the studies based on their thematic focus, including gendered practice in ECEC, the ideas and attitudes of adults, children’s opportunities for action, stereotypes of the environment and material, as well as the recruitment of men in the sector.

We also present examples of tools and methods prepared for the purpose of promoting gender equality in ECEC. Some of them are free and can be downloaded online, while others are available for a fee. We have chosen to also introduce commercial material since good tools are important for equality work. None of these lists are complete.

With travel restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have conducted our interviews with participants and experts by email or phone or at online meetings. Project reports and websites were also used as material for the descriptions of practical work in preschools.

In this report, we use the word preschool as a synonym for early childhood education and care. The Nordic countries use different terms for the concept, some of which may be politically coloured (förskola in Sweden, daghem/päiväkoti or småbarnspedagogik/varhaiskasvatus in Finland, barnehage in Norway, børnehave in Denmark and leikskóla in Iceland).

This report is one of two activities specified in the goals of the Finnish Presidency. The other activity is a Nordic webinar where teachers, decision-makers, researchers and NGOs can discuss the survey results, present new findings and exchange experiences of gender and equality in ECEC. The webinar was organised in the autumn of 2021 by the Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality and LGBTI (MR-JÄM).
2. Legislation and curricula

The obligation to promote gender equality under legislation governing early childhood education and care differs depending on the Nordic country. For example, the Icelandic equality act includes a comprehensive section on education, while the Danish act governing early childhood education and care does not include provisions on equality nor does the country’s equality act include provisions on ECEC or education. ECEC units in Sweden and Norway, as well as preschool education providers in Finland are required to present documentation on the measures adopted to prevent discrimination and/or promote equality. Equality plans for ECEC are also prepared in Iceland.

The terminology used in the context of ECEC differs in the individual Nordic countries. The terms used in Finnish legislation are småbarnspedagogik/varhaiskasvatus and förskoleundervisning/esiopetus. In Sweden, provisions on ECEC are issued in the education act (Skollag), with the term förskola used for ECEC and förskoleklassen for preschool education. The term used in Danish legislation is dagtilbud, in Åland barnomsorg, in Norway barnehage, in Iceland leikskóla, in Greenland førskole and in the Faroe Islands dagstovnar or dagrek. For the sake of consistency, the terms early childhood education and care, or ECEC for short, and preschool education will be used for all countries in this report, and the names of acts and curricula will be provided in the original language.

The countries also differ in the way they describe gender – as a binary or non-binary identity. Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish legislation prohibits discrimination based on gender, gender identity and gender expression. The Icelandic equality act, updated in 2020, encompasses women and men, as well as a third gender for non-binary people, which was introduced through a legislative amendment in 2019. The notions of girls and boys and equality between the two genders are still dominant in many acts and documents in the Nordic countries.

This chapter examines legislation regulating ECEC and gender equality in the Nordic countries, including the Åland Islands, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland, as well as national curricula, with an eye on gender equality.

2.1. Norway

In Norway, gender equality in ECEC is regulated in the act on early childhood education and care as well as in the act on equality and non-discrimination. There is no compulsory preschool education in the country, but compulsory school attendance begins at the age of six. Under the act on early childhood education and care, the Ministry of Education and Research is required to prepare a framework plan with more detailed guidelines on the content and duties of ECEC. This framework plan forms the basis for the local plans prepared annually by ECEC units. The local plans contain descriptions of how the overarching goals and content of the national framework plan will be implemented in the local setting. In their plans, the units also describe their development efforts and evaluate their pedagogical practices.¹

¹. Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017, 38
The **act on early childhood education and care** (*Barnehageloven*) mentions gender once: as something that must be taken into account in ECEC in addition to the age, functional ability and other characteristics of the child. Equal treatment (*likeverd*) is mentioned in the act as one of the fundamental values of ECEC. ECEC must promote gender equality (*likestilling*) and prevent discrimination. Gender is not specifically mentioned in the act.²

The goal of the **act on equality and non-discrimination** (*Likestillings- og diskrimineringsloven*) is to promote gender equality and combat discrimination based on gender, pregnancy, parental leave, ethnicity, religion or other belief, functional impairment, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age or another individual characteristic. The authorities are required to actively foster equality and prevent all types of harassment, including sexual and gender-based harassment, as well as fight against stereotypes. Every year, the authorities must record the measures adopted to promote equality and prevent discrimination. They must also assess the results of these measures and draw up plans for future measures. In 2021, the authorities, including education and ECEC providers, were required to publish a report on the documentation and assessment of gender equality work for the first time. There is a separate section on education and educational material with provisions that require all education and educational material in ECEC, schools and other educational institutions to comply with the act on equality and non-discrimination.³ The implementation of the act on equality and non-discrimination, as well as the reporting of gender equality work, are supervised by the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud.⁴ Norway also has an Anti-Discrimination Tribunal⁵ that handles complaints based on the act on non-discrimination. Provisions on the operations of these bodies are issued in separate acts⁶.

**The framework plan for ECEC** (2017, *Rammeplan for barnehagen*), describes gender equality and equal treatment as the fundamental values in early childhood education and care, which must be emphasised in all pedagogical operations. This means that ECEC providers must promote equality and non-discrimination regardless of gender, functional ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, ethnicity, culture, social status, language, religion or other belief. ECEC providers must base all operations on the principles of equality and anti-discrimination. The staff must reflect on their own attitudes to best work in favour of equality and non-discrimination. Everyone must have the same opportunities to be seen and heard and receive encouragement to participate in joint ECEC activities. The staff must provide children with the same opportunities, promote gender equality and prevent discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes and racism.⁷

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2. *Barnehageloven* 2005, chapter 1, sections 1–2
3. *Likestillings- og diskrimineringsloven* 2017, chapter 1, section 1; chapter 4, sections 24 and 27
5. https://www.diskrimineringsnemnda.no/spr%C3%A5k/1230
7. Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017, 7, 10, 56
2.2. Sweden

In Sweden, provisions on gender equality in early childhood education and care and in preschool education are laid down in the education act and in the non-discrimination act. The government decides on the national curricula and the National Agency for Education prepares related proposals. The national curricula are binding, and preschool, including the compulsory preschool education starting at the age of six, must be based on the goals set out in the curricula. This is the education provider's responsibility, but teachers must also ensure that instruction takes place in accordance with the goals in the curricula. Local curricula are not drawn up in Sweden.

The education act (skollagen) steers the Swedish school system from preschool onward. Under the act, fundamental democratic values and human rights, including gender equality, must be taken into account when planning education. The education act refers to the non-discrimination act as regards the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of gender, gender identity and gender expression, as well as the obligation to promote equal rights and opportunities in education, irrespective of these or other individual characteristics. The education act mentions planning as an example of active measures to combat behaviour in breach of these principles. However, the requirement concerning equal treatment plans was removed from the act in 2017. The education act issues provisions on the plan against offensive treatment, which includes measures aimed at preventing the offensive treatment of children and young people, descriptions of the measures taken, as well as an assessment of the measures carried out in the previous year. Gender equality is not specifically mentioned in the instructions for the plan.

The efforts against offensive treatment are supervised by the Child and School Student Representative at the Swedish Schools Inspectorate.

The discrimination act (diskrimineringslagen) specifies seven grounds of discrimination: gender, gender identity and expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation and age. Education providers must not discriminate against anyone on these grounds. Moreover, they are under a specific obligation to investigate and adopt measures against harassment. Education providers must actively combat discrimination in recruitment, teaching methods, provision of education, assessment and study environments, as well as prevent harassment and sexual harassment. The active efforts to prevent discrimination must also be documented annually. The documentation must indicate any risk of discrimination, reprisals or other obstacles to equality in education, analyse the reasons for the risks identified, as well as describe and assess measures to prevent harassment and promote equality. In addition, the documentation describes the education provider’s guidelines for preventing harassment and sexual harassment and a depiction of how education provider collaborates with pupils and employees when preparing the guidelines. An assessment of all these aspects is also included in the documentation. Compliance with the discrimination act is supervised by the Equality Ombudsman.

8. The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018; 11
9. Equality Ombudsman
10. Skollag 2010:800, chapter 1, section 5; chapter 1, section 8; chapter 6, section 8
11. https://beo.skolinspektionen.se/
12. Diskrimineringslag, 2008: 567, chapter 1, section 1; chapter 2, sections 5–7; chapter 3, sections 2–3 and 16–20; chapter 4, section 1
In the 2018 curriculum for the preschool (läroplanen för förskolan), gender equality is part of the fundamental values: everyone working in preschool is required to actively promote equality between women and men, girls and boys. In the context of fundamental values, it is also prohibited to discriminate against anyone based on their gender, gender identity, gender expression and five other grounds. Discrimination must be actively opposed. The preschool must actively and consciously promote equal rights and opportunities for all children, regardless of their gender. The preschool must also do away with gender roles that restrict children's development, choices and learning. Preschool activities must be organised so that children can mix, play and learn together, as well as test and develop their abilities and interests, with the same opportunities and on equal terms, regardless of gender. In the section on the preschool's tasks, the curriculum specifies that the preschool environment should inspire and challenge children to broaden their abilities and interests without being constrained by gender-stereotyped perceptions.

Everyone working in the preschool must help children of all genders extend their experiences and perceptions of their opportunities. The curriculum also contains specific goals and recommended measures for achieving them. One of the goals mentioned in the chapter on norms and values is helping children develop an understanding of the equal value of all people and of human rights. Teachers are responsible for incorporating the gender equality perspective in activities so that all children have equal opportunities to broaden their perspective and choices, regardless of their gender. All personnel are responsible for working consciously and actively on gender equality. One of the requirements set out in the chapter on care, development and learning is that all preschool personnel should seek to inspire and challenge children to broaden their abilities and interests in a way that goes beyond gender-stereotyped choices. The chapter on participation and influence of the child requires everyone working in the preschool to ensure that all children, regardless of their gender, have equal opportunities to influence and take part in preschool activities. As specified in the curriculum, one of the responsibilities of the preschool principal is to ensure that equality is integrated into the unit's systematic work on quality.

The curriculum for the preschool year (läroplanen för förskoleklassen, 2019) is part of the curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare. The first two chapters of the general curriculum, which specify the fundamental values, tasks, goals and guidelines of education, as well as chapter 3, which deals specifically with preschool education, are applied in the preschool environment. Equality between women and men is one of the values mentioned in the curriculum. It is prohibited to discriminate against anyone on grounds such as gender, gender identity and gender expression. Xenophobia and intolerance must be addressed with knowledge, open discussion and active measures. The school must actively and consciously promote equal rights and opportunities for all pupils, regardless of their gender. The school is responsible for combating gendered norms that restrict the pupils' learning, choices and development. One of the school's tasks is to promote equality by supporting cooperation among pupils, regardless of their gender, and by supporting the pupils' ability to critically examine gender patterns and the ways in which such patterns can restrict people's life choices and living conditions. As part of the common work methods, teachers must take responsibility for ensuring that all

13. The Swedish National Agency for Education 2018, 5, 7–8
14. The Swedish National Agency for Education 2018, 12–13, 15, 17, 19
pupils have equal opportunities to influence and participate in education, regardless of their gender. All the school personnel are responsible for promoting interaction among pupils of all genders, and for ensuring that neither the gender nor the social or cultural background of pupils restricts their study and career choices. The principal is responsible for organising education so that pupils meet and work together regardless of their gender, and that interdisciplinary competence areas, including equality, are taken into account. The section devoted to preschool specifies the aim and core content of the preschool year. Gender roles are mentioned as a vital question in connection with the core content of preschool education, the content and significance of which should be discussed with the pupils.

2.3. Iceland

In Iceland, provisions on gender equality in early childhood education and care are issued in the preschool act and the equality act. There is no compulsory preschool education in Iceland, but compulsory school attendance begins at the age of six. Based on the preschool act, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has drawn up a national curriculum guide, which specifies the goals for early childhood education and care, and the role of ECEC in upbringing and education. Using the national curriculum as a basis, ECEC units prepare local curricula and make detailed plans concerning the measures required to implement the goals of the national curriculum.

The preschool act (Lög um leikskóla) defines equality as a goal steering operations in ECEC, but equality between women and men is not specifically mentioned in the act.

The objective of the act on equal status and equal rights (Lög um jafna stöðu og jafnan rétt kynjanna) is to prevent gender-based discrimination, establish and maintain gender equality and equal opportunities in all spheres of society, and change traditional gender images and work against negative stereotypes regarding the roles of women and men. The term gender is specified to mean women, men and persons whose gender is registered as neutral. All forms of discrimination, including gender-based discrimination, are prohibited in schools, other educational institutions, activity centres, and sports and leisure activities. The prohibition must be observed in teaching and studies, training, working methods and daily communication. Employers, organisations and the directors of institutions must adopt special measures to protect the personnel, students and clients against gender-based violence, harassment or sexual harassment in the workplace, organisation or school. The act includes a section on education that requires gender and equality mainstreaming to be observed in all policy-making and planning in schools and educational institutions. Pupils and students at all levels must be provided with appropriate information about gender, equality, gender stereotypes, gender-based choice of education and work, as well as matters concerning people with disabilities and queer people. All educational material and textbooks must be designed so that they do not discriminate against any gender. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for ensuring that gender equality is
safeguarded at schools and in teaching. The gender equality counsellor, employed by the Ministry, supervises the provisions issued in the section and provides advice on equality.  

The Directorate of Equality (Jafnréttisstofa) provides instructions concerning ECEC in equality plans and supervises the quality of the plans. In ECEC and schools, a gender equality plan must be prepared, detailing how the school or kindergarten will implement sections 14–15 of the act on equal status and equal rights, as well as section 10 of the act on equal treatment regardless of race or ethnic background. The plan deals with equality mainstreaming, gender and equality education for pupils, educational material and textbooks, guidance, as well as ways to prevent gender-based violence and harassment and sexual harassment. The plan also describes how to address violence and harassment. In addition, the plan must discuss ways to prevent discrimination based on race or ethnic origin in education and work methods as well as ways to ensure that educational material and textbooks do not discriminate, insult or humiliate anyone based on race or ethnic origin. The plan must be reviewed annually and updated, if necessary.

Gender equality is one of six fundamental pillars of the curriculum guide for preschools (2011, Aðalnámskrá Leikskóla). Equality refers to a number of features and characteristics, including age, class, nationality. In the context of the curriculum, equality means providing all individuals with the opportunity to develop on their own terms, nurture their talents, and lead a responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, broad-mindedness and equality. Equality education refers to the content of education, as well as the study methods and the learning environment. With reference to the act on equal status and equal rights, the curriculum states that pupils at all levels of education must receive equal preparation for both family life and the labour market. Education must focus on ensuring that none of the genders face obstacles in the activities, content and work methods in ECEC. Discrimination on multiple grounds must be addressed in ECEC.

2.4. Finland

In Finland, provisions on gender equality in early childhood education and care and preschools are issued in the act on early childhood education and care, the basic education act and the act on equality between women and men. Preschool education is part of ECEC, but it can also be provided at a comprehensive school. Compulsory preschool education begins at the age of six. A pilot project trialling a two-year preschool beginning at the age of five was launched in 2021. The core curricula prepared by the National Agency for Education are binding. Education providers use them as the basis when preparing local curricula and providing early childhood education and care.

The act on early childhood education and care (varhaiskasvatuslaki) specifies ten goals for ECEC, the sixth of which deals with equality: the goal of ECEC is to provide all children with equal opportunities for early childhood education and care, promote parity and gender equality, and help the children develop their capacity to

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18. Lög um jafna stöðu og jafnan rétt kynjanna 2020:150, chapter 1, section 1; chapter 2, sections 5 and 14–15; chapter 3, section 21
19. https://www.jafnretti.is
20. Directorate of Equality 2021
21. The act on equal status and equal rights, updated in 2020, no longer treats gender as a binary feature.
23. Finnish National Agency for Education 2016, 10; Finnish National Agency for Education 2019, 7–9
understand and respect the general cultural heritage and each other’s linguistic, cultural, religious and ideological background.24

Provisions on preschool education are issued in the basic education act (perusopetuslaki). If preschool education is provided at kindergarten or in family-based day care, the act on early childhood education and care is also applied to it. Under the basic education act, one of the objectives of education is to promote civilisation and equality in society. No specific reference is made to gender equality.25

The objective of the act on equality between women and men (laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta – known as the equality act) is to prevent discrimination based on gender, gender identity and gender expression, to promote equality between women and men, and to improve the status of women, particularly in working life. The act has a separate section on education and training, under which the authorities, education providers and other bodies providing education and training must ensure that everyone regardless of gender has equal opportunities for education, training and professional development, and that teaching, research and instructional material support the objectives of the act. Equality must be promoted, taking into account the age and level of development of children. The act also contains provisions on a gender equality plan that all educational institutions are required to prepare at least every three years in cooperation with the staff and pupils or students. The gender equality plan must include an assessment of the gender equality situation within the institution, the necessary measures to promote gender equality, and a review of the extent to which measures previously included in it have been implemented and of the results achieved. Special attention must be given to pupil or student selections, the organisation of teaching, learning differences and the evaluation of study performance, as well as measures to ensure the prevention and elimination of sexual harassment and gender-based harassment.26 The requirement to prepare a gender equality plan for preschool education has been in place since 2015. There is, as yet, no requirement to draw up a gender equality plan in ECEC, but an amendment related to this is being prepared in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The implementation of the equality act, including equality planning, is supervised by the Ombudsman for Equality.27

Equal and equitable treatment is one of the fundamental values of the National core curriculum for ECEC (2018). Equity, equality and diversity are listed among the underlying values. The goal of ECEC is to promote equality and provide children with opportunities to develop their potential and make choices free of expectations related to gender or other grounds. Moreover, ECEC personnel are required to create an environment that respects diversity. A separate subheading has been dedicated to participation, equality and equitable treatment in the guidelines for developing the operating culture of ECEC. All three aspects must be promoted in ECEC activities, which are described as being gender-sensitive. The personnel must encourage children to make choices free from gender-related expectations or other expectations related to individual characteristics, as well as pay attention to how equality and attitudes to gender and diversity are reflected in speech and behaviour.28

The 2014 National core curriculum for ECEC was updated with matters related to

24. Varhaiskasvatuslaki 2018:540 chapter 1, section 3
25. Perusopetuslaki 1998:628 chapter 1, sections 1–2
26. Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta 1986:609 section 1, sections 5–5a
gender equality on 7 December 2015, when the gender equality plan became a compulsory local plan for preschools under the act on equality between women and men. The curriculum refers to the Constitution, under which no one should, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of gender or other reasons concerning their person. The promotion of gender equality is mentioned as one of the requirements steering the provision of preschool education. The underlying values for preschool education also include providing an environment that supports equality among children regardless of their opinion and gender, as well as promoting children’s opportunities to develop their potential and make choices free from preconceived ideas and restrictions related to gender.29

The curriculum for the trial two-year preschool education 2021 is a pilot curriculum drawn up to steer the trial two-year preschool education, which will be carried out in 2021–2024. The curriculum will remain in force during the trial period. The two-year preschool education trial will be carried out in a few municipalities, where some of the children will participate in the trial. The curriculum for the trial places more emphasis on equality than the 2014 National core curriculum for ECEC. Participation, equitable treatment and equality are highlighted as one of the themes steering the development of the operating culture and an aspect that must be promoted in all operations. In order to develop the operating culture, it is important to discuss attitudes to equality and equitable treatment in the workplace community. The personnel should also consider how attitudes to aspects including language, religion, disabilities, gender and gender diversity are reflected in speech, gestures, actions and behaviour. Preschool education is defined as being gender-sensitive. The personnel must be aware of their preconceived ideas and encourage children to make choices free from role models and expectations related to gender or other characteristics related to the individual. The learning environments must be planned and developed to promote involvement, equitable treatment and gender equality. This enables the eradication of stereotypical gender roles and models. As for working methods, the curriculum underlines that the personnel is expected to participate in, guide and enrich children’s play, following a pedagogical and gender-sensitive approach. Gender-based assumptions and the diversity of genders and families must be discussed with the children.30

2.5. Åland Islands

On the Åland Islands, provisions on gender equality in ECEC and preschool education are issued in the act of Åland on preschool and basic education (landskapslagen om barnomsorg och grundskola) and in the Constitution of Finland. Åland has its own act with provisions on the application of the equality act of Finland, and education is not specifically mentioned in this act.31 Preschool education is provided in connection with early childhood education and care. There is no specific curriculum for ECEC, but preparations for one are currently underway, and the new curriculum will enter into force in 2022. The curriculum for preschool education also steers ECEC, as applicable. All ECEC units must prepare an action plan, describing the activities and goals, and the practical implementation of the requirements in the curriculum for preschool education.32

29. Finnish National Agency for Education 2016, 9, 12–13, 15
30. Finnish National Agency for Education 2021, 7, 27, 30, 36, 47
31. Landskapslag om Tillämpning i landskapet Åland av lagen om jämställdhet mellan kvinnor och män 1989:27
32. The Government of Åland 2013, 2
The act of Åland on preschool and basic education (Landskapslagen om barnomsorg och grundskola) includes a prohibition of discrimination: all children and pupils have the right to equitable preschool and basic education without being harassed and bullied regardless of gender, sexual orientation, transgender identity or expression, disability, ethnic origin, religion or other belief, or other grounds. According to the provisions on basic education, one of the goals of activities is to promote democratic values, gender equality and equitable treatment, but as concerns ECEC and preschool education, the act does not mention the promotion of gender equality, apart from the prohibition of discrimination.\(^{33}\)

The curriculum for pre-primary education in the Province of Åland (Grunderna för undervisningen för barnomsorgen i landskapet Åland) (2013) serves as a curriculum for preschool education and for ECEC overall. Gender equality is mentioned in the curriculum as one of the underlying values of preschool education. Related to the values, the curriculum requires preschool education to be assessed from a norm-critical perspective. Related to both the values and tasks, preschool education is required to offer girls and boys the same opportunities to develop their interests and abilities without being restricted by gender roles. Both girls and boys must be given equal opportunities to influence and take part in activities. Adults, in turn, must acquire knowledge about gender questions and consciously adopt an attitude of actively promoting equality between boys and girls. Gender equality is also reflected in the central themes concerning preschool education. As regards language and interaction, both girls and boys are encouraged to express their opinions and use language to express their feelings and interact socially with others. In mathematics, all girls and boys must be given problems that they can solve so that they form a positive attitude to mathematics and gain self-confidence as problem-solvers.\(^{34}\)

2.6. Denmark

In Denmark, provisions on ECEC are issued in the act on early childhood education and care and the act on equality. While there is no compulsory preschool education in Denmark, at the age of six, children attend the compulsory 0 grade, which is part of primary school. Our survey also encompasses the pedagogical curriculum (2018) used as a basis for local curricula.\(^{35}\)

Gender equality is not mentioned in the act on early childhood education and care (Dagtilbudsloven).\(^{36}\) The purpose of the act on gender equality (Ligestillingsloven) is to promote equality between women and men and combat gender-based harassment and sexual harassment.\(^{37}\) The act does not make specific reference to education or ECEC, but it is also binding on education providers.

In accordance with the strengthened pedagogical curriculum (2018, Eng. 2020, Den styrkede pædagogiske læreplan), ECEC builds on equality and democracy, which must be reflected in all pedagogical activities so that all children have the opportunity to participate in activities and be heard regardless of their background, gender, age or culture. In the section on communities of children, the curriculum

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\(^{33}\) Landskapslag om barnomsorg och grundskola 2020:32, chapter 1, section 5; chapter 3, section 5
\(^{34}\) The Government of Åland 2013, 2–4, 6, 10–11
\(^{35}\) Ministry of Children and Education 2020, 3, 9
\(^{36}\) Dagtilbudsloven LBK 2020:1326
\(^{37}\) Ligestillingsloven LBK 2020:1147, section 1
requires ECEC to provide opportunities for children to establish friendships unrestricted by age, gender and culture, as well as to prevent bullying. Social development is one of the six curriculum themes. In the context of social development, adults are encouraged to use gender aspects as a way to challenge children’s play. In connection with the theme of nature, outdoor life and natural phenomena, the outdoor setting is described as a way to provide children with more opportunities regardless of their age, gender, culture and interests. Under the theme of culture, aesthetics and community, the learning environment is described as a place that enables all children to take part in decision-making and provides all children with the opportunity to realise their full potential irrespective of their gender, social background, age, and so on.  

2.7. Greenland

In Greenland, provisions on gender equality in ECEC are issued in the act on pedagogical development of childcare for preschool-aged children and the act on equality between men and women. Compulsory education begins at the age of six; compulsory preschool education is not organised in Greenland. The national plan for education is updated annually and it covers all levels of education from ECEC to higher education, with a separate subchapter allocated to each level. The initiatives laid out in the plan must be implemented in activities during the following year.

One of the objectives of the act on pedagogical development of childcare for preschool-aged children (Inatsisartutlov om pædagogisk udviklende tilbud til børn i førskolealderen) is to prepare children to live responsibly in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality and friendship with all nations, as well as ethnic, national and religious groups. The act also contains provisions on the selection of children from the waiting list for ECEC, according to which the selection must be made in such a way that the age distribution is reasonable from a pedagogical perspective and that the groups of children comprise equal numbers of girls and boys in all ECEC units.

The act on equality between men and women (Inatsisartutlov om ligestilling af mænd og kvinder) prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of gender, as well as gender-based harassment and sexual harassment. The implementation and compliance with the equality act is supervised by the Gender Equality Council, which also serves as an advisory body. One of the Council’s areas of expertise encompasses the rights and opportunities of children and young people.

The Government’s education plan (2020, Naalakkersuisuts Uddannelsesplan II) is based on the education strategy (2015, Uddannelsesstrategi), with objectives stretching up to 2024. A new education strategy for 2020–2030 is under preparation, but it has not yet been published. In Greenland, ECEC and basic education are steered at the municipal level. The Government’s education plan sets the framework for operations but does not bind ECEC providers. Gender equality is not mentioned in the 2020 education plan nor in the 2015 education strategy.

38. Ministry of Children and Education 2020, 8, 21, 38, 44, 46
39. Inatsisartutlov om pædagogisk udviklende tilbud til børn i førskolealderen 2012:16, chapter 1, section 2; chapter 2, section 9
41. Inatsisartutlov om ligestilling af mænd og kvinder 2013:3 chapter 1, section 2; chapter 9, sections 26–28
42. Ministry for Education, Culture, Sports and Church 2020, 10–11.
2.8. Faroe Islands

Provisions on equality in ECEC are issued in the act on early childhood education and care and in the equality act. Preschool education is provided as part of school education. There are no national, binding curricula on the Faroe Islands. Instead, the municipalities draw up their curricula based on legislation.

Under the **act on early childhood education and care** (*Løgtingslóg um dagstovnar og dagrøkt*), ECEC must provide children with opportunities for development so that they learn to freely express themselves and contribute to a tolerant, equal and democratic society. No specific reference is made to gender equality.

The **equality act** (*Løgtingslóg um javnsteðu millum kvinnur og menn*) is based on the Danish equality act of 1994 but has not been updated to reflect current Danish legislation. The objective of the act is to guarantee equal treatment regardless of gender. The equality act has a subchapter on educational material. Under the act, material used in education and daycare must comply with the equality act, and educational theories and methods must support equal opportunities for both genders in the choice of education.

In 2016, the Ministry of Culture published the **pedagogical objectives for ECEC** (*Námsfrøðilig stevnumiðfyri dagstovnar*). The document is not binding. According to the objectives, ECEC activities must be based on equality and equality must be reflected in ECEC work. Children must learn to function and interact in an equal society. Girls and boys must have the same opportunities to be heard and seen. Girls and boys must be encouraged to participate in all activities organised in ECEC. The personnel must also reflect on their own and society’s attitudes to girls and boys to ensure that the children’s opportunities are not restricted on grounds of gender.

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44. *Løgtingslóg um javnsteðu millum kvinnur og menn* 1994:52, chapter 4, section 7
45. *Mentamálaráði* 2016, 11
3. Gender equality work in Norwegian preschools

In 2010, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research commissioned a survey to determine how Norwegian preschools dealt with gender equality and with the recruitment of men. The resulting report indicated that gender equality was a topic that many people were familiar with on a general level, but that their knowledge was often based on personal experience. Moreover, people's perceptions of their own actions often did not match their actions in real life. According to the report, there was a lack of competence concerning practical gender equality work in preschool. Few preschools had systematically dealt with gender equality. Half of the preschools had strived to recruit more men. As a result of the report, in 2011–2013, the Ministry of Education financed nationwide training in practical equality work in preschools through a collaboration involving all county governors. A handbook and value game were also developed in connection with the training. Both were updated in 2017 to reflect the new curriculum, which now mentioned gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation alongside gender.  

A survey commissioned by the education council and conducted in 2014 found that even though the preschool sector had been actively working on the gender equality perspective, the work had not been of a systematic and long-term nature and had not been carried out in all of the country's preschools.  

Gender equality work in Norwegian preschools has long focused on recruiting more men to preschools. Both the 2004–2007 plan of action for gender equality in preschool prepared by the Ministry of Children and Families and the 2008–2010 plan of action for gender equality in preschool and basic education prepared by the Ministry of Education focused mainly on recruiting more men to preschool and on increasing the share of men working at preschools to 20%. After the latter plan of action, a website called “Menn i barnehagen – MIB” was set up for the parties working to attract more men to preschool and preschool teacher education. The Lekeressurs cooperation was also launched as a result of the action plans in 2009. Its goal is to make preschool work more familiar to boys in secondary school by giving them the opportunity to serve as “play buddies” for preschool children after school and during school vacation. 

Apart from proposing to boost knowledge among employees, the Government's 2014 action plan for gender equality (Likestilling 2014 - regeringens handlingsplan för jämställdhet mellan könen) also focused on raising the share of men in preschools to 20% of all employees and on finding a better balance in the gender distribution of preschool teacher students. One of the measures was to establish gender equality teams in all regions to concentrate on recruiting more men for preschools and ensuring they remained there.

46. Hoel, Johansen, & Renolen 2010
47. Opheim, Waagene, Salvanes, Gjerustad & Holen 2014
48. Ministry of Children and Families
49. Ministry of Education and Research 2008
50. http://www.mennibarnehagen.no/
51. Emilisen, Lauritzen, Johannesen, Ljunggren & Olsvik 2017
52. Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion 2011
During the past few years, gender equality work in Norwegian preschools has increasingly focused on gender and gender equality in pedagogy and less on the recruitment of men. This section will discuss a few projects that encompassed entire counties, as well present the Kanvas foundation and activities of the national organisation for gender and sexual diversity (FRI), which provides education related to gender and sexuality for preschools around the country.

3.1. Preschools in Vestfold and Telemark

In 2009, the governor of Vestfold invited other municipalities to join a common project focused on gender equality in preschools. The municipalities of Tønsberg, Horten and Larvik came on board to work on a joint model for operations.

The project, led by the governor, was to include all 14 municipalities and some 255 preschools. The first part of the project was carried out in 2008–2010. It started with a field trip to Reykjavik to get acquainted with local preschools working with gender equality. Another field trip was made to Stockholm, in Sweden, where the participants also met with Kajsa Svaleryd, a gender equality strategist, to gain insight into the nature of gender equality work in Sweden. The Centre of Equality, in Norway, was also invited to participate in carrying out the project.

The project’s first part ended in 2011, and a workbook on equality and diversity (“Urettferdig! Jenter og gutter med like muligheter – om likestilling, likeverd og mangfold”) was published and distributed to all preschool personnel in Vestfold, cooperation partners, representatives of parents and municipal leadership. The knowledge compiled into the workbook was implemented in the preschools in 2011–2013. This also gave rise to several microprojects on gender equality in the municipalities. The gender equality work led by the authorities in Vestfold and Telemark ended in 2014. Many preschools have continued their work on gender equality since, but without guidance or quality assurance from state officials.

Objectives

The objective of the project was to establish systematic gender equality work in every preschool in the municipalities. Previously, such work had only been carried out at a few local preschools whose personnel were deeply interested in the topic. The main focus was on the attitudes of personnel. The goal was to link the efforts to policies and curricula and to produce a handbook that would encourage discussion and inspire other preschools to work on gender equality as well.

Gender equality was to be made the foundation for all learning and educational activities in preschools. The main goals were to ensure that the learning environment of preschools promoted equality between boys and girls, as well as to achieve a better gender distribution in educational and career choices and among preschool employees.

53. Official Norwegian Reports 2019, 103
54. Vestfold Governor 2011
55. Hadzic 2021
56. Vestfold Governor 2011
**Implementation**

The first part of the project involved developing models for gender equality work in the preschools of the municipalities. Five preschools, both private and municipal, worked out methods to be presented to other preschools. In 2008–2011, a large annual gender equality conference was organised to all the personnel of municipal and private preschools in Vestfold and Telemark. At the concluding conference in 2011, the workbook "Urettferdig! Jenter og gutter med like muligheter – om likestilling, likeverd og mangfold" was presented, and the five preschools described their own and other possible approaches to gender equality.\(^{57}\)

In 2013, the governor of Vestfold organised a conference on diversity and gender equality for all municipal employees and private preschools in Vestfold and Telemark in order to inspire gender equality work in preschools. The conference was attended by 1,350 participants. Kristina Henkel, a gender equality consultant, was one of the speakers. The following year, a five-part course on gender equality and diversity was organised for 30 teachers, with a focus on digital tools for gender equality work.\(^{58}\)

The objective of the workbook was to inspire and increase the awareness of the personnel, as well as to provide material for reflection and discussion. Gender equality work was divided into six stages. Each stage had a specific theme and related questions for reflection, and the idea was that every member of the personnel would complete each stage. The participants first reflected over their own attitudes and approach to girls and boys. Then they turned their attention to preschool operations, systems and routines. In the third stage, children were invited to take part in discussions about boys and girls. The fourth stage dealt with gender balance among employees, as well as the importance of employee diversity and the recruitment of men to preschools. In the fifth stage, parents were involved in the process through reflection and discussion at parental meetings. The last stage focused on making changes to promote gender equality and equal treatment in everyday activities and on anchoring the work in the annual plan for preschools.\(^{59}\)

**Experiences**

According to Selma Hadzic, head of department, who was in charge of carrying out the gender equality assignment, work does not continue automatically without demands and quality assurance from above. While some of the preschools have continued their efforts after 2014, many others would like to be given an express assignment by the state officials. Although many members of the personnel have completed gender equality training, there is also new personnel joining the workforce who do not have the same competence.

Hadzic believes that the personnel’s own attitude and its development are of key importance in gender equality work. After the personnel at the pilot preschools had dealt with their own attitudes, they began to devise ways to engage the parents and children in the work, and that was how the idea for the "Urettferdig" workbook emerged. A question that came up at the beginning of the project was: “Do we do what we think we do or what we say we do?”\(^{60}\)

The project was found to increase the personnel’s awareness, which in turn influenced preschool activities. Even though the project ended in 2013, it set into

\(^{57}\) Hadzic 2021  
\(^{58}\) Vestfold Governor 2014  
\(^{59}\) Vestfold Governor 2011  
\(^{60}\) Hadzic 2021
motion processes that continued in many preschools thanks to the personnel having gained more competence and inspiration.\textsuperscript{61}

According to Anita Schjelderup, HR manager in the Tønsberg municipality, the dialogue cafés with parents worked very well. Questions and statements heard at these events included, for example, “Can’t girls be girls and boys be boys any longer?” and “There are biological differences, you know.” However, during the discussions, many participants agreed that we often make too many choices for children by offering different things to girls and boys. Parents began to question whether they really offered equal opportunities to girls and boys and began to reflect on their own expectations and treatment of children.\textsuperscript{62}

According to Mona Bjørnstad Aalvik, programme leader at the Department of Early Childhood Education of Oslo Metropolitan University, big differences could be detected in the personnel’s motivation and engagement. The preschools that had expressed an interest in participating in the project were also the most motivated ones to promote gender equality. In addition to the personnel gaining greater awareness of gender issues, situations that they had not given much thought to earlier were brought into the open and discussed at personnel meetings. According to Aalvik, a greater focus was placed on the learning environment, and the personnel became better at providing equal opportunities to all children, regardless of their gender.\textsuperscript{63}

\subsection*{3.2. Kanvas}

Kanvas is a non-profit organisation that runs 67 preschools in Norway. It has worked with gender equality in various ways since 1997. One of the Kanvas preschools was a pilot preschool in the gender equality project in Vestfold and Telemark.

The Kanvas management has encouraged, trained and inspired their preschools to work on gender equality, but the preschools have been free to choose how much they want to invest in such work and what direction they take, as long as they follow the common goals. Some have chosen to focus on the recruitment of men to preschools, while others have placed more emphasis on gender equality in educational activities. Around ten of Kanvas’ preschools have actively promoted gender equality in preschool.

\textbf{Objectives}

The objective of the gender equality work carried out by Kanvas was to provide children with more opportunities and greater space for action. Another goal was to give more room for children’s gender identity and expression.

As in the past, the objective continues to be to have men represent 30\% of the personnel. All preschools are expected to work towards this target. One of the purposes of Kanvas’ operations is to contribute to improving children’s growth and the daily life of parents. This is one of the reasons why Kanvas decided to participate in gender equality work by recruiting more men to preschools and by focusing on gender equality among children.

\begin{footnotesize}
61. Skaug 2021
62. Schjelderup 2021
63. Bjørnstad Aalvik 2021
\end{footnotesize}
Implementation

The first input into gender equality at one of the Kanvas preschools involved recruiting three men to the same preschool unit to see whether their work with children, parents and one another differed from that of women. In 2004, after a few years’ break, Kanvas again began recruiting more men, inspired by a plan of action concerning men in preschools released by the Norwegian government. The government’s two following plans of action to recruit more men to preschools encouraged Kanvas to continue its efforts and led to the establishment of the MIB (“menn i barnehager”) network. Two of the Kanvas preschools initiated efforts to determine whether they treated boys and girls differently. They sought inspiration for their work from Kajsa Svaleryd’s book on gender pedagogics (“Genuspedagogik”) and Kristina Henkel’s book on providing opportunities to children (“Ge ditt barn 100 möjligheter istället för 2”).

Subsequently, Kanvas has organised training, lectures and get-togethers to help the personnel become aware of gender norms related to their activities and treatment of people. A film on the gendered teacher was made for internal use.

Kanvas has cooperated with Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education (QMUC) and with the Centre for Equality by jointly developing a course (“Søt eller tøff, et fritt valg?”), organised since 2013 for preschool personnel in all of Norway’s counties. The three also prepared a handbook of the same name, which was revised in 2020, and a value game for equal pedagogy, which was revised in 2019 to encompass gender diversity. Kanvas and the Centre for Equality have jointly organised training to help preschools find ways to promote friendship between girls and boys. They collaborated with QMUC and Oslo Metropolitan University to ensure that male students had male supervisors and that male students were placed in the same groups rather than being spread randomly into different groups.

Some of the preschools carried out surveys to examine interaction with children, interiors, materials, toys and literature from a gender perspective. They focused on the impact of gender on the preschool, children and personnel.

Experiences

The preschools that engaged in practical work on gender equality and carried out surveys noticed many gender-normative aspects in the preschools. They observed that the less conscious the personnel were of their own expectations concerning boys and girls, the more gender-normative was their treatment of children.

In one of the preschools, the personnel noticed that they held girls in their lap much longer than boys during acclimatisation. Some of the results indicated that boys had less freedom to express themselves. It was easier for girls to act “boy-like” than for calm and cautious boys to be accepted. “Tomboys” gained clearly more respect than “girlish boys”. The personnel was also found to give boys much more attention, and that girls were asked to be quiet while it was more acceptable for boys to be lively and noisy. Moreover, some of the wild games and pretend quarrel that boys engaged in were not appreciated as highly or considered to be as good educational activities as the girls’ doll-playing or drawing.
The surveys were not systematically documented, but their results were discussed among the employees and at joint events with other teachers at Kanvas. 64

3.3. Preschools in Hedmark

A development network was established among five preschools in the county of Hedmark in 2011–2012. Some of the preschools had participated in a prior project in 2010. The project was financed by the governor of Hedmark. The participating preschools were Drevsjø barnehage, Engerdal barnehage, Sømådal barnehage, Utsikten barnehage and Jønsrudløkka barnehage.

The project was launched in connection with gender equality training that the Ministry of Education and Research organised for all preschool personnel in Norway. Gender equality work has continued in Hedmark after the end of the project, in the form of annual training for the personnel.

The Hedmark county has been part of the county Innlandet since 2020.

Objectives

The goal was to increase knowledge about gender equality among preschool personnel in Hedmark and to promote gender equality in operations.

The focus was on providing information about gender, promoting an equal learning environment, developing work methods, providing tools for reflection and preparing a report.

Implementation

Three network events were organised for preschools. The Centre for Equality took part in the events. In between the events, the Centre supervised preschools in their work on gender perspective and provided a common knowledge base for all personnel.

The methods employed in the project included observations, practical reports and literature analyses. For example, observations were made of children’s use of spaces and of how gender influenced how children were dealt with. Practical reports involved writing a short description of daily preschool routines that portrayed interaction among children, adults or children and adults. This was followed by a reflection of the role, if any, that gender played in the situation, whether gender restricted the children’s opportunities for development and whether something could have been done differently. The children took part in the work by discussing gender and gender norms in literature.

After the end of the project, preschool personnel in Hedmark have been offered many different training opportunities. In 2016–2018, they were offered a course on using books in gender equality work in preschool and in 2018–2020, four courses were organised on gender, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. Both courses were offered by the Centre for Equality. Courses on violence and child abuse were offered in 2020–2021, and courses on the same topics are being planned.
for the coming year. The county governor of Innlandet has been granted government funds for recruiting men to preschools. Approximately 10–15 preschools will adopt the “Lekeressurs” model this year, which means that boys from comprehensive school can work in preschool after the school day and during school vacation.  

Experiences

The project group found that the network meetings and supervision worked well for gaining more knowledge and guidance for work and for sharing experiences with others. They also supported the participants’ motivation and helped counter opposition among the personnel.

The practical reports were considered to be a good method for examining one’s own actions and for firmly establishing the role of gender equality work among the entire personnel.

3.4. Rosa kompetanse preschool

Rosa kompetanse is a unit within the national organisation for gender and sexual diversity (FRI). It provides training related to gender and sexuality in various fields. In 2017, Rosa kompetanse launched activities related to preschools, and this field has been growing the fastest ever since. There also appears to be a great need for knowledge in the field.

In 2021, the activities focusing on preschools have been handled by one full-time and one part-time employee. They are partly financed by the Norwegian Directorate of Health.  

Financing is channelled through the Government’s sexual health strategy (“Snakk om det! Strategi for seksuell helse (2018–2022)”) which forms the basis for operations.

Through its steering group, the Rosa kompetanse preschool project has engaged in cooperation with leading professional organisations in ECEC, preschool personnel and experts in gender diversity and sexual orientation.

Objectives

The goal is to contribute to a healthy and safe preschool environment, where everyone can express themselves as they choose and be the person they are, and still feel safe and included in the group.

The Norwegian curriculum for preschools (rammeplan for barnehagen) published in 2017 emphasises that preschools must promote gender equality regardless of gender, gender identity and sexual orientation. Preschools must also address the diversity of families and ensure that all kinds of family compositions are present in activities. According to Sunniva Jarmann, director of the Rosa kompetanse preschool, this is a good starting point for work.

65. County governor of Innlandet
66. Johannesen & Renolen 2012
67. The Norwegian Directorate of Health corresponds to the National Board of Health and Welfare in Sweden and to the Institute for Health and Welfare in Finland.
Implementation

The work that Rosa kompetanse carries out in preschools is professional and focuses on disseminating information and knowledge, not politics. The goal of its norm-critical approach is to inspire preschools and initiate reflection processes that lead to changes in operations.

The organisation provides training of approximately three hours to the entire preschool personnel. The training includes concrete tools and exercises. The parental perspective is also an important element. The organisation offers tools for interacting with rainbow parents and explains what it might be like to be a parent to a child that does not adhere to gender identity or sexual norms.

Rosa kompetanse also provides training at conferences and on other platforms. In 2020, the organisation carried out assignments in nine of the country’s 11 counties. It also gives lectures in many preschool teacher education programmes. In 2021, the goal is to train 2,750 preschool employees and teachers, students and parents, as well as organise 55 training events.

Experiences

According to Jarmann, Norway has succeeded in including gender diversity and sexuality in policies and legislation, which provides a good starting point for implementation. What is challenging, however, is reaching every corner of the country. Thanks to the increased popularity of digital training, Rosa kompetanse has this year managed to provide training in areas that would have been geographically challenging in previous years. Rosa kompetanse has received very good course feedback. Over the past year, more than 98% of the participants have found the course content to be useful and relevant to their work.

According to Jarmann, there is great interest in and demand for their training in the field, and that facilitates operations. The cooperation partners in the steering group are extremely important to operations, as is the excellent cooperation established with other players in society. The financing received from the Norwegian authorities has also been crucial to operations. It would be impossible to run operations of this kind on a voluntary basis. It is a question about quality assurance. Another strength that Jarmann mentions is that the operations are part of a larger organisation, in this case, the FRI, which has a good network and a big team with broad-based competence and professional fields.
3.5. Work material and methods


Kanvas, DMMH, Likestillingssenteret: Verdispill. For likestilt pedagogisk praksis og kjønns Mangfold.


https://rucforsk.ruc.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/62223287/
Final_antologi_nordiske_maend_til_omsorgsarbejde.pdf

https://genustest.no/ En nordisk webbsida som ger verktyg i att utmana traditionella könsnormer i förskolan och i barnlitteratur. Sidan är finansierad av Nordiska Ministerrådet och Det Kongelige norske barne-, likestillings- och inkluderingsdepartement.
4. Gender equality work in Swedish preschools

Sweden is a forerunner in gender equality work carried out in preschool. Many of the preschools discussed in this report have made study trips to Sweden to become acquainted with the various models adopted in different preschools.

Despite many Swedish preschools focusing on gender equality, there are many others that do not engage in systematic gender equality work. In 2015–2017, on assignment by the government, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate audited the quality of Swedish preschools and their achievement of the goals set. One of the audited areas focused on gender equality work in 36 preschools in 18 municipalities. The results indicated that gender equality was not an inherent part of operations in most of the audited preschools. The work was often linked to equal treatment and lacked a clear gender perspective.

In most of the audited preschools, many aspects were in good shape from a gender equality perspective. The personnel strived to provide girls and boys with equal opportunities to test and develop their skills and interests. Interaction between the personnel and children was equal regardless of the children’s gender. The personnel’s body language and acknowledgement of the child were the same for girls and boys, and both genders received the same amount of help and support.

Only one-fourth of the personnel stated that they had adequate competence and knowledge to carry out the gender equality assignment. According to the results, the majority of preschool heads and directors did not allocate enough time and adequate resources for gender equality work and that such work was not included in systematic quality work or pedagogic leadership.

The Schools Inspectorate’s conclusion as to the measures required to promote quality was that preschool directors should provide the personnel with opportunities for training and for learning about research and proven methods so that they could develop systematic gender equality work that meets the demands of the curriculum. 69

The curriculum for preschools was revised in 2018. The new curriculum contains several items related to gender and equality – including transgender identity and expression. The curriculum requires preschool principals to make gender equality work part of systematic quality work. 70

Many Swedish municipalities have engaged in systematic efforts to promote gender equality in preschool. In this section, we discuss some of these projects and activities, as well as a violence prevention project in Uddevalla, which focused on the integrity of children, two preschools in Stockholm that have systematically worked with gender equality for the past 20 years, and activities related to LGBTQI and gender equality certification.

69. Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2017, 5–6, 11–15
70. Skolverket 2018.
4.1. Preschool units in Majorna-Linné

In 2013, a gender equality project was launched in four preschool areas located in the Annedal, Haga and Änggården neighbourhoods of the Majorna-Linné district in Göteborg. The preschool personnel had already shown an interest in the topic and had experience of working with compensatory pedagogy. A norm-critical approach was adopted for the work in 2013.

Today, 16 preschools in the area have received a certificate, and work on gender equality continues. Gender and equality from the basis for the work, which also focuses on male violence against women and equality.

Objectives

The goal of operations was to make gender equality work a long-term activity, integrated into operations through a structured method of work and continuous monitoring. The goal was to provide the personnel with more theoretical and practical knowledge about interacting with children from a norm-conscious gender perspective.

Implementation

The activities are led by preschool principals. In addition, a steering group, comprising the four principals and two preschool teachers per area, has also been involved. Each preschool has a gender equality delegate, who meets regularly with the steering group to support their colleagues and ensure that the work progresses.

The personnel's attitude to children was considered an important way to offer children more opportunities for development and learning. Therefore, activities first focused on the personnel. All teachers and directors participated in the same basic training, which dealt first with gender and later discussed other grounds of discrimination and a norm-conscious attitude.

They carried out surveys to determine the state of gender equality in their own preschool with the help of observation templates, for example, on speaker space, materials that children play with, and gender analyses of books and songs. The teachers and directors jointly developed concrete work methods and prepared a common gender equality plan.

The teachers in the different preschools met regularly and also took part in steered discussions where they could jointly concentrate on the processes. Gender equality training was provided to new personnel.

The personnel encouraged children to play with children other than those they usually played with and to sit next to different people, for example, by asking children whose name started with a specific letter to change places with each other. By making changes to group compositions, it was hoped that children would find it easier to test different roles. Changes were also made to the facilities: toys and other resources were mixed, and as a result, children broadened their way of playing.

The preschools have had access to the revised MakEQuality, an electronic tool developed by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, for monitoring activities and being certified for their gender equality work. ⁷¹

According to principal Birgitta Berndtsdotter, gender equality work continues in the

⁷¹ Lorentzon 2017
16 preschools. The steering group is still active, as is the gender equality delegation with at least one representative from each preschool. They assess the work and determine any needs for development.

Each term, new personnel are introduced to the structure of operations. The gender equality plan is monitored on a monthly basis, and operations are reviewed annually to ensure they comply with the curriculum goals and the plans against discrimination and offensive treatment. The focal area in work changes every year. In 2021, the emphasis is on uncovering female-coded aspects in operations. Gender equality certification has also continued.

**Experiences**

According to Berndtsdotter, challenges arise when personnel who have been on board for several years leave work, and the new employees don’t have the same level of competence and experience. Another challenge comes from parents and guardians questioning the methods and operations, which can affect motivation. After working with gender equality for many years and attending topical lectures and reading literature, it is sometimes difficult to find new perspectives, methods of work and knowledge. According to Berndtsdotter, the work has increasingly shifted from gender equality to a broader view of equality.72

The fact that the directors were involved and steered the work was an important factor contributing to success. Other positive aspects include the involvement of the entire personnel, which ensured that everyone got the same theoretical foundation, and that the work was carried out simultaneously in several units, as this enabled people to support one another and share their experiences. The steering group, which communicated with the preschool personnel and addressed their needs, was also experienced as a positive element.

Participants benefited from focusing on their own learning and from making observations in their preschools. The involvement of parents in the work also contributed to success. The work is felt to have led to profound changes in preschool operations and to the gender equality perspective being integrated into operations and decision-making.73

### 4.2. Umeå municipality, Hedlunda preschool

In the Umeå municipality, gender equality work has been carried out more or less systematically in preschools since 2014. However, planning began much earlier. In 2007, the preschool and basic education board decided to conduct a survey to determine what a new gender-neutral preschool could be like. The idea was that the gender equality work carried out in the municipality could be made more systematic through the establishment of a preschool that could serve as an example to other preschools.

**Objectives**

The new Hedlunda preschool started operations in 2014 as a gender-neutral preschool offering research-based activities. The goal was to make the preschool
both ecologically and socially sustainable. The low-energy building was constructed according to the Reggio Emilia approach, which emphasises the perspective of children and children’s opportunities for creativity.

The Umeå municipality’s 2020–2023 action plan for preschool and school sets the following goal: “A norm-critical perspective to equality work must be applied in all operations in order to focus on the norms and power structures linked to grounds of discrimination. Focus must be placed on activities emphasising the equal value of all people, and all forms of offensive or disparaging treatment must be clearly condemned and prevented in all operations. Hedlunda preschool will serve as an example for all of the municipality’s preschools as concerns work related to the fundamental values of preschool, the focus being on gender.”

Implementation

A year after Hedlunda preschool opened its doors, research-based financial support was cut, and as a result, the research assignment was discontinued. Many members of the personnel also left the following year, and operations could not continue as planned. In 2018, the preschool adopted a systematic approach to gender equality work.

Hedlunda preschool has continued to serve as a model and guide for the municipality’s other preschools, providing examples of how gender equality can be promoted based on the 2018–2022 action plan for preschool and basic education. In cooperation with the Department of Applied Educational Science of Umeå University, Hedlunda preschool has mapped the competence that employees need for gender equality work.

In 2018, a working group was set up, comprising a principal from each school district in the Umeå municipality, a preschool strategist, a gender equality strategist and the unit director of Idéan. Hedlunda preschool and the working group have jointly prepared material for support and inspiration, which has been used as the basis for systematic and continuous gender equality work in the community. The work is treated as an ongoing process.

The material highlights Hedlunda preschool’s educational policies, such as the personnel’s attitude, language use, literature, song and music, film and images, activities and projects, as well as the environment and materials. Practical examples of these include introducing systems that ensure everyone an equal speaker space in led activities and refraining from complimenting children on their clothes or looks. The personnel use children’s first names and instead of referring to children as boys and girls, they talk about pals. They also strive provide children with a norm-conscious broader range of books, songs, music videos, films and pictures on walls. Stereotypical norms and comments are discussed with the children.

Diversity is also highlighted in other material and traditions, and these are inspected from a norm-critical gender perspective. The personnel support and encourage children to test new activities and encourage them to play with different friends. The environment is also planned to offer variation and encourage transgender play.

74. Preschool and school board, Umeå municipality
75. Hamrud & Qvarford 2019, 50–52
76. Umeå municipality 2019, 4
77. IDEAN is Umeå municipality’s educational centre for competence development for preschools and schools
The municipality’s preschool personnel have participated in a study circle led by the municipality’s gender equality strategist. The activities have been based on a book about gender equality in preschool by Lisa Andersson Tengnér and Mia Heikkilä ("Arbeta med jämställdhet i förskolan").

The goal of the study circle was to offer teachers a common knowledge base and the opportunity for discussions about working methods, gender and norm criticism. Hedlunda preschool launched a gender group to supervise the work and draw up checklists for new employees, inspect the material purchased and prepare norm-critical questions for the personnel. The other municipal preschools in Umeå have been offered lectures and study visits to Hedlunda preschool. In 2019, all of the municipality’s preschools were required to engage in obligatory gender equality work based on the revised curriculum, Lpfö18. This involved teachers filming one another’s attitude to and treatment of other people and analysing the resulting material from a gender perspective.

Experiences

According to the working group, gender equality work must be conducted systematically by formulating the objectives of work and incorporating the activities in the preschool’s annual plan. In the working group’s experience, successful gender equality work calls for continuous reflection about the gender equality process among the employees so that they can reach a common view of the assignment and a shared knowledge base.

4.3. Preschool district 1 in Stockholm, Nicolaigården and Egalia

Nicolaigården preschool in Stockholm launched its gender equality work back in 1998 when a new curriculum was published for Swedish preschools. Among other things, the curriculum required preschools to counter traditional gender patterns and stereotypical gender roles.

Structured gender equality work is now a natural part of activities at Nicolaigården and Egalia and has also been adopted by the district’s other eight preschools. Both Nicolaigården and Egalia are also LGBTQI-certified and are currently in the process of renewing their certificates for the third time. They were Sweden’s first preschools to be LGBTQI-certified.

At first, their work sparked controversy in Sweden, but today they are supported by various policies, with the curriculum, education act and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child all requiring gender equality work in preschools.

Objectives

Respect, responsibility and professionalism are the keywords of operations. The goal is to expand children’s environments so that everyone has access to all the activities, games and play, emotions, and the chance to play different roles. All children should have the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities.
Everyone must feel welcome in an activity and everyone must be able to be the person they are. The goal is to achieve operations free from insult, abuse and discrimination.

**Implementation**

Gender equality and equal treatment are fundamental in preschool activities and are included at every level of operations. Operations are based on a document with ten points aimed at providing a full living environment and an LGBTQI action plan. The focus is not only on gender equality but also on anti-discrimination and efforts to counter all forms of insult and offence. Among other things, this means using equal, inclusive and diverse language, encouraging children in many different ways, refraining from making assumptions, using diverse material and literature, learning to express and deal with emotions, and teaching responsibility to all children. It also means giving visibility to all children, letting them speak and be heard, while helping them learn to wait for their turn and listen to others.

Gender equality is a permanent point on the daily agenda in all situations and circumstances. Gender equality work is not a project with a beginning and end, but the foundation for all operations. The personnel always analyse, from a gender equality perspective, how they meet and interact with children. They evaluate themselves and others critically and ask others how they thought and reacted in different situations. They consider whether everyone has been given space, whether any stereotypical elements are to be found and whether anyone is excluded.

New employees do not need to be knowledgeable in gender pedagogy, but they are expected to show an interest in it. Every time a new person is employed for any position in the preschools, the principal goes through the 10-point document promoting a full living environment and the LGBTQI action plan to lay the foundation for work. New recruits are also shown an introductory film. Everyone working at the preschools, including those who are not teachers, must keep to the ten points. According to Lotta Rajalin, the principal for the district, employees find the points very helpful. They have worked well for a long time, with only minor adjustments required over the years.

The preschool teachers do not talk about girls and boys but rather about friends, or then they use the children’s names. The children do not focus on gender either, but on friends. According to Josefin Sjölund Larsson, who works at Nicolaigården, inclusive language is the most important thing. This means that stereotypical toys are not a problem either, since children have not learned to link toys to gender. If someone says or does something that is experienced as being normative or restrictive, the person who notices it says “prosit” (Bless you!) to make the other person aware of it. This might happen, for example if someone uses a gendered word or chooses a gender-normative image.

At the moment, the preschools are conducting a development project on space in preschool, inspired by Mia Heikkilä, associate professor in preschool pedagogy. The project deals with conscious choices on how the digital environment and spaces should be designed so that children are not restricted by the toys and facilities created.
Experiences

Sjölund Larsson believes that including the gender and equality perspective in all activities and the management taking it seriously have contributed to success. In her mind, it is also positive that the pedagogy is not about opposites, girls are not expected to do masculine things and boys feminine things, but instead everyone has the right to be themselves. It is important not to restrict children – not to take anything away but just offer room for more.

Challenges have arisen from parents having their own views of the gender perspective and from the simple fact that preschools cannot change society overall. Children have other norms at home, even though many parents agree with the preschools’ principles. It is sometimes difficult to involve the parents.

According to Rajalin, there are many hidden structural norms in society that sometimes emerge in the form of racism or other forms of abuse. Nevertheless, a great deal of progress has been made in the past decade, and this can also be seen in preschool.

The personnel have obtained excellent results from their activities. One study compared children attending Nicolaigården and Egalia with children from other preschools that did not work as systematically with gender equality. The children from Nicolaigården and Egalia played more frequently with children of another gender and exhibited fewer gender stereotypes than children who attended preschools that had not adopted the same degree of norm-critical pedagogy.  

The personnel have also received feedback from schools to which children from their preschools have continued, in which the school personnel say they note a difference in the children from Nicolaigården and Egalia compared to children from other preschools. The children who attend Nicolaigården and Egalia appear to have better self-esteem, express their opinions more readily, and find it more natural to play with all children and things. They seem to defend others more and point out that others also have the right to be themselves. However, as Rajalin mentions, if gender equality efforts do not continue at school, the children gradually adapt to another way of being. Nevertheless, Rajalin believes that the children carry with them the fundamental notion that they can be what they are and want to be.

4.4. Uddevalla municipality

"Hålla i, hålla ut, hålla om och hålla bort" was launched in 2009 in the Uddevalla municipality. It began as a series of network meetings for preschool teachers, led by the municipality’s school developer and special education teacher. Those of the preschool teachers who were passionate about gender equality questions were the ones who took part.

In 2015, Siren Linde came on as the municipality’s school developer and continued with a systematic approach to development, focusing on gender. There was a need for clear guidelines from management, so Linde and the special education teacher drew up a purpose and goal for gender equality aspects. As of 2017, all preschools were represented in the network of gender equality guides. The principals appointed at least one guide suitable for the assignment from each preschool.

83. Shutts, Kenward, Falk, Ivecran & Fawcett 2017
84. Rajalin, 2021, Sjölund Larsson 2021
In 2018, a steering group was established, comprising four principals, one special education teacher as well as Linde, the school developer. The group conducted a large survey, which resulted in a strategic gender equality plan. Implementation of the plan continues to this day.

In late 2018, cooperation was initiated with the Hälsokällan organisation, part of the Fyrbodal joint authority, with a project focusing on the integrity of children in preschool ("Barns integritet i förskolan"). Jessica Svensson, who works with violence prevention at Hälsokällan, became the project manager and Siren Linde the developer. The project now has a steering group and working group that promote development efforts, in addition to which the principals work together in teams of three to four. In 2018–2019, half of the municipality’s 24 preschools were involved in the project, and since 2020, all the preschools are now on board. In one region of Uddevalla, a preschool, school and a school-age educare centre also launched cooperation.  

**Objectives**

The goal of the project was to lay bare gender norms, break stereotyped norms and distribute power between women and men, as well as teach children about their rights, linked to their individual and physical integrity. According to the vision in Uddevalla, everyone must be treated as an individual based on their needs instead of their gender, gendered power structures must be addressed and male violence against women must be stopped.

The project’s short-term goal was to increase the awareness and level of knowledge of every employee in municipal preschools and educare, as well as children, parents and guardians, concerning gender equality, the right to integrity and the right to grow in an environment free of violence. The long-term goal has been to: “Integrate gender equality work in all daily activities so that it becomes part of systematic quality work that will contribute to society’s resources being distributed equitably”, as formulated in the strategic gender equality plan for Uddevalla municipal preschools.

**Implementation**

There was an understanding of the consequences that gender inequality has for girls and women, but not of the consequences that is has for boys and men. Linde therefore wanted to shift the focus from girls to boys and organised an inspiration lecture, where Marcus Svensson lectured on masculinity norms, macho cultures and patriarchy. This led to everyone, including the principals, understanding that they required more competence. It was considered important that the entire 250-strong personnel obtained a common knowledge base from the outset. Therefore, all the principals, special education teachers, psychologists and other employees took part in all training events on integrity, gender equality, and violence prevention, interspersed with workshops and follow-ups in the units and in the steering and working groups. The managers also received training in male violence against women. One of the municipal preschools received financing from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions for the development of gender equality.

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85. Linde & Svensson 2021  
86. Uddevalla Municipality.
The development work was based on policies, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the strategic gender equality plan. Support and guidance was also sought from the books "Normkreativitet i förskolan" by Salmson and Ivarsson as well as "Arbeta med jämställdhet i förskolan" by Andersson Tengnér and Heikkilä.

During the second year, more emphasis was placed on support for implementation and follow-up, but training and competence development events continued to be arranged nevertheless. From the very beginning, there was a plan for involving parents and guardians. They have received training and information about the activities at parental meetings.

During the project, interviews have been conducted among focus groups, and an idea bank, concrete work material, films and other material have been developed. The children have learned about the meaning of consent, their own and other people's personal boundaries, how to resolve conflicts by interpreting other people's signals, communicating and listening to one another’s needs and wishes. Svensson emphasises that practice is an important part of work to help prevent violence later. The personnel have also learned through practice, for example to involve children, create mutual understanding and teach about good and bad secrets. Much of the concrete work is based on preventing violence and abuse or discrimination of children. The personnel have conducted deeper analyses based on various theories and have come to understand how mild violence is linked to severe violence and how violence prevention can be incorporated into preschool work. Since playing is of key importance to children, the personnel have also examined it from the perspective of gender and violence prevention.

**Experiences**

According to developer Siren Linde and project manager Jessica Svensson, one of the success factors comes from the project participants having different professional backgrounds and entry into the project but everyone worked towards the same goal. In Linde's opinion, cooperation with Hälsokällan, focusing on children's right to physical and personal integrity, took gender equality work to a different level. When Svensson from Hälsokällan came on board and share her perspective, it became clear to everyone how gender equality, children’s integrity and violence are linked to one another. This was an eye-opener for many. The preschool curriculum highlights the importance of respecting children’s personal and physical integrity, and Linde believes this development project is a good example of how things can be done in practice.

Children are treated as competent individuals and actors. Joint training and learning has been important for the personnel. The equality work conducted in preschools has become a systematic activity that is no longer linked only to individuals passionate about gender equality work.

According to Linde and Svensson, the principals’ involvement and important role in the project is another success factor, as this has enabled the principals to create better resources and conditions for the personnel to develop activities in the preschools. It has been important that noble words have not remained such but have been carried out in practice. Svensson emphasises that both the personnel and the children have moved from theory to practice. The personnel have increased their knowledge and deepened their understanding. The children also gained more knowledge, which is visible in their playing, conversation and care situations as well
as their conversation with parents and guardians. They have learned new words and concepts, gained new skills and been involved in activities. The impact on children also has to do with the teachers learning new skills and becoming more competent and aware. The personnel have learned to understand what children want to express verbally or non-verbally and to take children seriously.

Svensson emphasises the importance of the personnel being well prepared so that children dare talk about violence, knowing that someone is listening to them and taking them seriously. It is also important for the adults so that they can react to what children tell them. One of the goals was to provide all children with safe games and environments for play. In the personnel’s experience “pretend quarrel” often morphs into violence. By identifying different types of game and play and maintaining zero tolerance, they have been able to address pretend quarrel.

According to parents and guardians, the children have obtained new tools and have better insight into the themes than their siblings who were not involved in the project. Cooperation between the preschool and school indicates that the work carried out in preschool has good effects and gives a sense of security, which can be seen, for example, in cooperation during breaks.

A common platform for communication and close cooperation between the web editors of the preschool and school has proved to be crucial for the work to succeed in the best possible way.

4.5. Eskilstuna municipality

After six-month planning, gender equality work at municipal preschools in Eskilstuna began with a joint kick-off in August 2019. The participants included the two preschools, comprehensive school and upper secondary school that were to serve as the pilot schools. Since gender equality was considered to be important in the Eskilstuna municipality, the chair of the local government was also present at the event. The work carried out at the preschools is not a project, but is instead integrated into the regular operations, within budgetary limits. It is a process that will run for several years.

According to plans, the Berga and Hållsta pilot preschools will devise models for how the municipality’s other 53 preschools can work with gender equality and highlight the things that were successful and the ones that did not work well. They are testing methods, ways of working and materials to achieve their objectives. Their experiences will be disseminated from autumn 2021 onward through a group that includes the principals of all the municipality’s preschools.

The work was launched after the Eskilstuna municipality had employed a model provided by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions to determine how the preschool had integrated gender equality work in its systematic quality work. The results indicated that further input was required to achieve the goals.

87. Linde & Svensson 2021
88. Klintberg 2021
Objectives

The objective of the efforts has been to integrate gender equality into systematic quality work. The work has aimed at providing all children with the opportunity for development, choice and learning without being restricted by stereotyped gender choices. The efforts are expected to improve the teachers’ competence in gender equality issues and increase their awareness of how their attitude influences children’s opportunities for development, choice and learning from a gender equality perspective. Another objective has been to help the principals increase their knowledge about integrating gender equality into systematic quality work and supervising the efforts. The pilot preschools will create material for surveys of the present state as well as observation and reflection templates for systematic gender equality work.

The preschools also have individual goals, which are based on their views of how they need to improve. For example, this year Hållsta preschool has focused on game and play for the younger children and on integrity for the older children. Another goal is to ensure that children do not need to assert themselves but can feel safe as they are.

Implementation

Other preschools in the municipality also work with gender equality issues. However, contrary to Berga and Hållsta, they are not tasked with devising models or carrying out systematic work. As planned, the pilot preschools will share the experiences and knowledge they have gained with the principals of the municipality’s other preschools, who will then initiate work in their unit. After this, all preschools are expected to engage in gender equality work. Competence-raising inputs will also be required, and the plan is to have external lecturers contribute to this. The municipality’s preschools have been divided into seven areas, and the preschools in each area will work jointly on the gender equality process. The goal is that the work will become systematic in all preschools and that gender equality will be integrated into all curricula.

Eighteen months into the process, the principals of the pilot preschools, Maria Christenson and Frida Boman, received support and guidance from Mia Heikkilä, Associate Professor in Early Childhood Education. Berga also bought further education for all its personnel from Heikkilä. One of the themes discussed was the environment, how to create learning environments keeping in mind the gender perspective. The personnel at Berga felt that the learning environment did not benefit all children, and the goal was to create an environment that was not designed for specific games and play. They based their planning on the 12 tips from Heikkilä’s book on preschool spaces (“Rum i förskolan, för barns lek och lärande”).

The pilot preschools have carried out various surveys, including the templates provided by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, to make norms visible. They have filmed various situations – groups, mealtimes, hallways and free playtime – and have analysed their interaction with children using question templates to determine whether they behave differently with boys and girls. Co-workers have also observed one another as well as playtime from a gender perspective. The surveys have been...
discussed at development days, where time has been allocated to reflecting on the results.

During the last guidance event with Heikkilä, the preschools received help with questions the principals had collected over a longer period of time, such as how to formulate objectives and how to work with different forms of opposition. Both preschools have chosen to continue filming. Every employee films themselves twice a term in various situations, such as mealtimes, group activities or playing outdoors.

Experiences

According to the two principals, Christenson and Boström, the process was successful because the participants received training and gained knowledge, and put in systematic work that made gender equality and norm criticism an inherent part of all operations and an item in the local action plan. What has also been important is that the personnel had time for reflection and for the work itself. In Christenson and Boström's experience, it was good to involve two preschools, since they have been able to support one another. The process takes a long time, and it is important to give it that time. In their mind, it was very beneficial to get training and supervision from Mia Heikkilä. It made it easier for the preschool personnel to develop their work and themselves. In fact, supervision would have been useful from the very beginning.

According to Christenson, we often think we are more equal than we actually are. Surveys have demonstrated that there is plenty of room for development. In her opinion, the surveys required a lot of time. They also call for courage and clarity, and it is important that managers take part and share their own struggles and weaknesses. Video filming has enabled the personnel to analyse themselves, what they do and what they say. Team reflection and discussions have been important for making progress. Thanks to the surveys, the personnel at Berga and Hälssta noticed hierarchies between boys and girls and even between boys. They came to the conclusion that it was linked to what is later called macho culture, and that it forms a common theme throughout all the stages from preschool to upper secondary school.

The personnel also concluded that they should be more present in free playtime and that they should be required to increase their competence to be able to be a playmate and to find the right balance between playing, teaching and caring in daily preschool activities.

The principals of the pilot preschools have found that the personnel catch themselves out more often if they do not behave equally. Teachers are more observant of themselves and their colleagues and are generally speaking more aware. Children, in turn, no longer seek attention for being good or doing well. The environmental efforts have also influenced children. Thanks to the facilities being more flexible, new group compositions have emerged. Both teachers and children have adopted a norm-critical perspective to books, professions and role models, for example.

The challenges that principals have had to deal with include finances and opposition. Greater financial resources would have enabled greater inputs. Change work requires people to change themselves, their thoughts and their values. It is difficult and often involves opposition. Some opposition and questioning is also expressed from the parents' side. To date, COVID-19 has made it impossible to engage with parents and guardians.
Christenson and Boström have also found it difficult to supervise the work. The learning process has required a great deal of time. Despite the work being difficult, the principals have nevertheless enjoyed it.  

### 4.6. Certification, LGBTQI and the “På lika villkor” label

Since 2008, RFSL (The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights) has certified various operations, including nearly 30 preschools and open preschools around Sweden. Certification continues to date, and it means that the personnel obtain increased knowledge about LGBTQI questions to be able to develop their interaction with children and parents or guardians, as well as the preschool environment. It also means that the preschool communicates outward that it is working strategically to make visible and challenge norms related to gender and sexuality. According to the RFSL’s education agenda 2030, certification implies an intersectional perspective that covers all grounds of discrimination, despite the main focus being on LGBTQI people.

The gender equality label “På lika villkor” (on equal grounds) was launched in Falun in 2006, as an EU-financed project. After a few years, the EU project came to an end, and preschools were required to pay for the gender equality label process. Around 40 preschools attended training, and 20–25 applied for certification during the period of EU financing. When the training became fee-based, interest in it began to wane. Preschools in the Falun municipality and nearby municipalities have received a gender equality label. The activities also target comprehensive schools and upper secondary schools.

The activities are based on the curriculum and its requirement that preschools and schools must combat traditional gender patterns, as well as on the discrimination act. To obtain the certificate, the preschool’s entire personnel and principal must complete the process. Preschools that have obtained the certificate get a sign saying “på lika villkor” that they display in their facilities. This enables them to demonstrate to outsiders that they work systematically with gender equality.

### Objectives

The goal of LGBTQI certification is to ensure that employees gain more knowledge about norms and LGBTQI questions and that they work for an inclusive work environment that takes into account the LGBTQI perspective. Another goal is to make the personnel’s attitude and behaviour more norm-critical and inclusive.

The objective of “På lika villkor” is to increase knowledge about the significance of gender association in operations, as well as to provide the personnel with methods to analyse, develop and change their activities. The goal is to integrate gender equality work in all pedagogical activities.

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90. Christenson & Boman 2021
91. RFSL Agenda 2030
92. Falun
Implementation

The process for LGBTQI certification is supervised by a trainer from RFSL and lasts for approximately five months. It comprises training in four parts for all employees as well as joint change work, during which the participants prepare an action plan for their own activities. The action plan is prepared for three years, and certification remains in force for the same period of time. After that, there is an option to attend a recertification workshop to update the action plan and renew the certificate.93

The “På lika villkor” gender equality label includes training stretching over three terms for the preschool’s entire personnel. In between the training periods, the participants complete independent studies and carry out observations in their preschool. During the last term, the preschool personnel jointly draw up an action plan for gender equality work at their preschool. Each preschool appoints two process managers who ensure that the work progresses. The process managers receive regular support from the supervisors of the “På lika villkors” project.

Preschools are granted certification for one year at a time. Before the certificate can be renewed, the preschool’s operations are audited by an external party. Every other year, the external party visits the preschool to see how it deals with gender equality in practice, and every other year the party reviews the preschool’s updated equality plan.94

Experiences

According to Tina Jensen, business developer in charge of the gender equality label, success is more likely if the preschool principal promotes the topic and gender equality work. If the principal prioritises the work and allocates time for it, the project is more likely to succeed. If the principal is not convinced and does not act as the driving force, the work is vague overall.

According to the feedback that Jensen has received from participants, many people have experienced the process as a revolutionary one. At first, the participants did not notice that they began looking at children and power play in a different way. This often became apparent only when they began working in a new place or with a new co-worker who had not participated in training on gender pedagogy. It was not until then that the participants noticed how much they had progressed in the questions.

For example, in one preschool, the photo shoots of children took place the same way, with the same photographer during the first and third term of the training. After the third-term photo shoot, the personnel reported that they had paid attention to the photographer treating children in a gender-normative way and differentiating between boys and girls. Presumably, the photographer had behaved exactly the same way the previous time, but since the teachers and other personnel had developed in this respect, they now paid attention to it.

Ever since preschools have been required to pay for the gender equality label, interest in it has waned. It is not a question of priority. The municipality is making plans for another kind of strategy in the future. They plan to contact the principals and ask how they are working with gender equality to meet the requirements of the curriculum. If the principals do not have a plan or do not engage in systematic gender equality work in preschool, Jensen will offer training leading to the gender equality label.

93. RFSL training for LGBTQI certification
94. Falun
equality label. She emphasises that the main point is to encourage principals to be involved and work with the question.

4.7. Work material and methods


Heikkilä, M 2015: Lärande och jämställdhet i förskola och skola. Liber.


Henkel, K. & Tomicic, M (reviderad utgåva) 2017: Ge ditt barn 100 möjligheter istället för 2. Om genusfällor och genuskrux i vardagen. Olika Förlag.


Odenbring, Y. 2014: Barns könade vardag: om (o)jämställdhet i förskola, förskoleklass och skola. Liber.


Jämställt: www.jamstallt.se Jämställt arbetar med och utbildar i jämställdhet, mångfald och normkritik. På finns tips och material för arbete med jämställdhet i förskolan.
5. Gender equality work in Icelandic ECEC

The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Preschools (2011) defines equality to be one of the six fundamental pillars of education. Gender is mentioned as one aspect of equality. The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender prohibits gender based harassment in all educational institutions and the prohibition has to be noted in education as well as in working methods and in other daily activities. Gender and equality mainstreaming shall be observed in all policy-making and planning and pupils in all levels of education system shall receive appropriate information on equality and gender. Preschools do equality planning that is advised by the Directorate of Equality.

The Directorate of Equality follows equality planning. The last follow-up of equality planning in preschools was done in 2019 via a survey and a call for gender equality plans. 71% of preschools submitted valid equality plans, when in a previous follow-up four years earlier 80% of preschools submitted the plan. 60% of preschools responded to the survey. According to the survey, employees are guaranteed equal opportunities regardless of gender but the knowledge of gender mainstreaming is lacking in many places. The vast majority of respondents call for increased education on gender equality issues and a pedagogical approach so that such education can be implemented in all the preschool's work.

There is some recent research about gender equality and ECEC in Iceland. Pálsdóttir’s & Jóhannesson’s (2020) study points out positive examples of gender equality work in six preschools, but overall gender equality education proved to be scarce and not preplanned. They come to a conclusion that it is vital for municipal and other authorities to assume institutional responsibility for gender equality education. Furthermore, the preschools need a high level of support for enhancing gender equality in practice.

In this chapter two projects that got funding for their gender equality projects are introduced. Alongside these projects there is also the municipal example of The Equality School in Reykjavík. It is a city funded position, where a project manager supports educational institutions’ work in promoting equality and preventing harassment.

96. Jafnréttisstofa 2019
5.1. Jafnréttisskóli Reykjavíkur – The Equality School, Reykjavík

The Equality School Reykjavík was established in 2013 in the Department of Education and Youth in the City of Reykjavík. The Equality School employs one person: Kolbrún Hrund Sigurgeirsdóttir who has been working as the project manager of the school since 2016. The project manager works closely with Reykjavík’s Human Rights’ Office. The project manager’s job description is quite vast being responsible of educating and supporting staff working in ECEC, primary school and leisure centres about equality but also working with equality plans, gender budgeting, gender mainstreaming and working as a head of a team dealing with sexual harassment in education in Reykjavík. Reykjavík has approximately 170 educational institutions that are the target group for The Equality School.

The initiative to establish The Equality School was made by members of the city council. Even though human rights and equality are one of the main pillars of national curriculums, the city council was worried that teachers don’t have enough knowledge to implement equality. The position of the project manager and The Equality School were established to educate teachers about equality. 97

Objectives

The aim of the Equality School is to create a platform for equality education in ECEC, primary school and leisure centres. In Reykjavík’s Action Plan for Equality and Human Rights in 2019–2022 the Equality School is defined to be responsible for equality education in schools (including ECEC) and leisure centres. This objective includes two persistent actions: 1. to establish and maintain jafnrettistorg.is –website providing knowledge about equality and 2. to support educational professionals work with children and youth with democracy, equality, equity and human rights. The third action is for the years 2019–2020: to establish a project in collaboration with the University of Iceland about analyzing school grounds’ and playground equipment’s relation to gender and possibly other factors. So, there are few persistent goals the Equality School is working with through the years and several short-term projects with smaller goals. 98

In practice

Jafnrettistorg.is is a website that distributes knowledge about equality and shares concrete tools and practices to promote equality for educational institutions. The website has been in active use among educational professionals. Unfortunately, the website was hacked and destroyed and is now under construction to be opened again. Meanwhile the Jafnréttistorg’s Facebook page 99 and Reykjavík’s education policy website 100 substitute for the closed page.

Educating and supporting staff working in educational institutions about equality is one of the basic tasks of the project manager. The training is mostly targeted at the staff but sometimes the youth or parents as well. The Equality School works closely with the University of Iceland and lectures are held for the teacher students as well. The topics of lectures, seminars and workshops are vast from human rights, LGBTQ+ children, sexual rights and preventing sexual harassment to privilege and discrimination. Every year a lecture about Gender Equality 101 is held and also a few

97. Sigurgeirsdóttir 2021
98. Mannréttinda-, nýsköpunar- og lýðræðisráð Reykjavíkurborgar, 10, Sigurgeirsdóttir 2021
100. https://menntastefna.is/
workshops for staff who have recently started working in education in Reykjavík. During 2020 the Gender Equality School held 19 trainings about equal education. Training reached over 700 education professionals out of which 240 were working in ECEC. The Covid situation had an effect since normally training has reached about 400–500 people working in ECEC yearly.

Through the years the Gender Equality School has carried out various projects and some have been focusing more on ECEC than others. For example, there has been a project about recruiting more men in ECEC and a project deconstructing stereotypes towards occupations. During the latter one concrete tools like a memory card game were created to help the staff to bring up discussions about stereotypes and diversity with children.

In 2019–2020 the project about designing school buildings and playgrounds was conducted with an architecture student and a social studies student. The Equality School and Reykjavík’s Human Rights Office trained the students about gender mainstreaming and diversity. The students conducted a handbook to instruct how to design inclusive school buildings and playgrounds.101

At the moment the Equality School is part of a working group including headmasters, students, a ECEC teacher and a manager of a LGBTQ+ leisure club. The group evaluates and collects together teaching material that is used to teach about equality in ECEC, schools and leisure centres in Reykjavík. They also collected knowledge from teachers if they have had enough training and knowledge to teach about equality, do they have good enough material for the teaching and what kind of support they need in order to do better. They are also interviewing students about the quality of the equality teaching they receive at schools and what they feel they are still missing. When the results are in the group will present ways to improve the equality education and materials.

The project manager of the Equality School works as the chairperson of the team that develops knowledge of sexual violence, provides education and counseling and supports the educational institutions of this topic when needed. The team is composed of representatives from all the city’s service centers and representatives of school nurses. The need for the team was noted when the Equality School started getting lots of requests for help from educational institutions about sexual harassment cases. Since the role of the Equality School is not to deal with individual cases the decision was made to establish a consulting team.102

Recent years sexual harassment, pornography and sexual rights have been in center of the Equality School’s work due to #metoo and local events in Reykjavík. For example, VikaSex that originates from Denmark, is a theme week organized every year to support schools to address sexual rights. The theme of the year is decided together with the students. When the theme was emotions and communication also ECEC participated by addressing questions about boundaries with the children and the staff working in ECEC. This year the theme was sex and the material was directed more to the schools and leisure centres.

The Equality School has been applying for funding together with operators from Denmark and Finland to implement Prisma Certificate to local ECEC. So equality work with ECEC will hopefully be one of the core projects of the Equality School in the future.103

101. Gunnarsdóttir, Sigurgeirsdóttir & Santanicchia 2020
102. Skóla- og frístundasvið Reykjavíkurborgar 2020, 36–37
103. Sigurgeirsdóttir 2021
Experiences

Working vastly with the staff from ECEC, schools and leisure centers is an advantage when looking at the big picture of equality work. For example, when educating staff working in ECEC the project manager is able to raise up equality issues that come up when working with schools and teenagers and point out how important it is to deconstruct harmful stereotypes or behavior already in ECEC.

The project managers vast work assignments haven’t been evaluated as a whole but assessment is collected after training sessions. The assessment is very positive. The education professionals are insecure about topics relating to equality and are overall very content to get more knowledge and concrete tools to work with the topic.

The project manager has also seen a change in the ECEC. The change has occurred in the ECEC environment: the amount of stereotypical toys and books have clearly decreased during the last years. But the challenge is still to reach the staff’s gendered ways of thinking. Stereotypes can still be seen and heard in the interactions and attitudes of the staff.\textsuperscript{104}

5.2. Leikskóli Geislabaugur: Nú skal segja... -project 2011–2014

The preschool Geislabaugur is situated in the suburbs of Reykjavík where it began operating in 2004. Geislabaugur’s motto is respect, joy and creativity and they pursue it with Reggio Emilia’s ideology. The staff of the Geislabaugur were motivated to work on a systematic development project and were eager to participate when a developing project on gender equality in ECEC was brought up. They got a three-year funding from the Preschool Development Fund and started the project Nú skal segja... in 2011. At the beginning the staff of Geislabaugur looked into the laws and regulations about gender equality in Iceland. According to the National Curriculum Guide, legislation and Reykjavík’s Human Rights Policy gender equality should be promoted in all ECEC and school levels in Iceland. The message was clear: the role of teachers is important, which means teachers have to explore their own attitudes and evaluate how those affect the children. Geislabaugur’s project was also inspired by the work done in Sweden and for example the book En rosa pedagogik.\textsuperscript{105}

Objectives

The objectives of the project focused on two things. The first one was to increase the teachers’ awareness of the importance of equality in ECEC pedagogy, their own attitudes and how they are communicated by words and actions. The second one was to examine if learning opportunities given to children are gender equal and how Geislabaugur meets the needs of girls and boys. They also wanted to examine how children talk to each other and analyze attitudes towards girls and boys perceived in the children’s communication.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{104} Sigurgeirsádóttir 2021
\textsuperscript{105} Jónsdóttir & Eyfells 2015, 4-6
\textsuperscript{106} Jónsdóttir & Eyfells 2015, 7
In practice

At the beginning a steering group was formed to direct the project. It was hard to figure out where to start the extensive project, but goals and three stages for the project were decided on. The first stage focused on gathering information. In the second one the staff worked with children. The third stage was about processing the collected data and preparing a gender equality plan and a gender equality checklist.

At the first stage the staff focused on their own attitudes and actions. They observed communication and play from recorded videos. They also made lists of the toys, categorized them to masculine, feminine and neutral and observed what toys the children were playing with. They also observed the songs, books, images and the overall impression about boys, girls and gender stereotypes in daily life in Geislabaugur.

The staff noticed that the toys and other material that appealed more to the girls were related to appearances. After this notion they cleaned out material that focused on appearances and stereotypes such as princess and superhero costumes. Instead they provided material and plays that offer many possibilities such as blocks of different sizes, role-playing on playgrounds and materials from nature. Observing the children's play and what activities they chose, it was revealed that boys preferred more construction play while girls preferred art activities. The playground was chosen more often by boys and they controlled the play there. The reading area appealed to girls and boys, although boys chose it more often. After these observations the staff started to encourage boys to choose the art area and find projects that would appeal to them. They also realized they needed to introduce construction sites better to the girls. It was decided to start each preschool year dividing the children into groups where they would get to know certain play areas better.

The main conclusion from the work done during the first stage was that the project was not given enough time. It was therefore decided in the second stage to dedicate one week per month to the project work with the children. Each month a different theme was chosen in which all the departments in Geislabaugur focused on. The adults explored children’s thoughts and attitudes through interviews, art and creativity with each theme. The theme weeks focused for example in occupations, books, toys and families. With the help of the themes adults initiated conversations with the children about genders and stereotypes. For example, a difference in age and play was detected during the project weeks: the youngest children played in different groups and with all the toys. When recording older children, it was noticeable that the boys didn't want to play with “girls toys” or especially with “girl costumes”. On the other hand, the girls were open to all materials.

One project was a skirt day. The project was initiated after a discussion in groups of children about how strange it was that adults were always in control of what colors children should choose, what toys they should play with and what clothes they should wear. Based on this discussion, the department decided to have a skirt day and the parents welcomed the idea. The idea was also influenced by the observations made by the staff that it is important for children to have role models who cross gender boundaries. The skirt day was organized in one department where everyone who wanted came to the preschool in skirts. Those who did not have a skirt could loan one from Geislabaugur. Most of the children participated, dressed in skirts.
and went about the day as normal.

At the third stage they continued the theme weeks. On top of this, the staff focused on processing the data gathered from the previous stages and started to plan a gender equality plan and a checklist for the staff to make them more aware of equality issues and equality education.\textsuperscript{107}

**Experiences**

Considerable changes took place during the work on this project. When recording the videotapes in Geislabaugur the teachers became overly aware of the camera and made an effort to speak “correctly” and behave gender equally. This was seen to have a lot of positive consequences. Teachers became more aware of how they were behaving with children and there was a lot of discussion in the teaching group about whether and how they were making different demands on boys and girls. Discussions about equality increased greatly. The teacher is still considered to be the most important tool in equality work. Working for greater equality requires creative thinking and the ability to seize the opportunity when it arises. Working with equality must be reflected in all the activities of the day and in all the projects that are carried out. This requires teachers to examine their attitudes, participate in discussions about equality and be trained about discrimination in society. It is therefore very important to create a forum for discussion on gender equality among the teaching staff. The equality plan for 2015–2016 can still be found from the web page of Geislabaugur but it seems it has not been updated since\textsuperscript{108}.

At the end of the project it was agreed that the main focus in the future should be in the education of the staff. Equality should be a guiding light in all work and integrated into daily tasks. If it is to succeed, teachers must be constantly aware about gender stereotypes. Continuous training and dialogue within the staff is seen as very important for maintaining knowledge and skills.\textsuperscript{109}

In 2021 the effects of the projects can still be seen: the teachers who participated in the project have adopted a gender equal approach and the new employees have reported that gender equality can be seen for example in the way adults speak to children and what kind of books are being read. Gender equality is taken into consideration also in the teaching materials and posters and other pictures that are on display. The gender equality plan has not been updated since the project because the teachers who originally steered the project are not working in Geislabaugur anymore. Gender equality training has not been organized for staff after the project but a training session for teachers is planned to be organized next year.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{107} Jónsdóttir & Eyfells 2015, 7, 9–11, 14–15, 19, 23–24, 29
\textsuperscript{108} Jónsdóttir & Eyfells 2015, 9, 14, 24, Geislabaugur
\textsuperscript{109} Jónsdóttir & Eyfells 2015, 34
\textsuperscript{110} Jónatansdóttir 2021

Heilsuleikskólinn Krókur received a grant to fund the project “Snemma beygist krókurinn. Úr stöðluðum kynjahlutverkum í kynjajafnrétti” (“The hook bends early. From standardized gender roles in gender equality”) from Sprotasjóður. The Ministry of Science, Education and Culture grants money through Sprotasjóður to ECEC, primary and secondary schools. Krókur was opened in 2001 and is a private preschool in Grindavík. The preschool’s main focus areas are health promotion, environmental education, positive and constructive communication and free play in the spirit of democracy. The group of 24 persons that took part in the Snemma beygist krókurinn –project consisted of principals, assistant principals and department heads, preschool teachers, supervisors, support staff and kitchen staff.

Objectives

The main objective was to integrate gender perspectives into all of the preschool’s activities as well as to have specific measures promoting gender equality. A strong education of staff and children were seen as a key element for this. The aim was to make the preschool staff better equipped to analyze gender differences in the preschool’s discourses and provide education about gender equality. The staff was given an opportunity to evaluate accepted customs and stereotypes about gender, put on gender glasses and integrate gender perspectives into the preschool’s learning and working environment. Through a change in thinking and a strong education of staff, another goal is to deconstruct the children’s standard ideas about gender, open up more possibilities for them and at the same time equalize the positions of girls and boys. The skills that children acquire in targeted equality education will prepare them for active participation in a democratic society.

In practice

Four main ways were chosen to work towards the goals: staff training, project work, the establishment of a gender equality team and surveys that assess people’s attitudes and knowledge of gender equality. The education, project work and surveys were supervised by the project manager Svandís Anna Sigurðardóttir, a sexologist and gender equality representative from the University of Iceland.

The first educational meeting held with Krókur’s staff was in September 2013 and the last in April 2014. Five educational meetings addressed six main themes: introduction to gender studies, women’s rights struggle, images and advertising, masculinity, communication and gender mainstreaming, privilege and diversity. The training of the staff included reading articles (academic and discussion articles), watching videos, looking at the representation of genders in advertisements and appearance requirements made especially for women, looking at how to talk to girls and boys, prevailing ideas about gender, children’s play, the privileges of certain groups, the status of minorities and much more.

The project works were carried out both at the educational meetings and in the work with the children. Through a photography project staff evaluated the children’s play twice a day for one week. The observation gave a good idea of the gender divisions

111. Sigurðardóttir & Jóhannsdóttir 2014, 4, Heilsuleikskólinn Krókur
112. Sigurðardóttir & Jóhannsdóttir, 2014, 4
among the children. The staff was also asked to think about their own use of words and for example talk about strong girls and hardworking boys as well as talk about men and fathers in parenting and household chores. During a story project the staff were asked to change gender roles in children’s stories so that for example female protagonists were in the role of the hero and male characters were rescued or they were in the supporting role. In the final project the staff were asked to use the knowledge from the training sessions to create a project at their work that would potentially deconstruct gender roles. The final projects were diverse including a puppet show based on a story with flipped gender roles, football for girls etc.

The equality team of Krókur was established in the winter of 2013–2014 and was composed of four employees. Its’ role was to monitor and promote equality work within the preschool. The team aimed to establish a strong action-oriented gender equality plan for the preschool before the end of the year 2014.

At the beginning and the end of the project surveys were conducted for the staff with the aim of assessing the (change of) staff’s attitudes and knowledge of gender equality issues as well as the equality work done during the project. When asked if it was important for their work to receive equality education, there were proportionally more respondents who thought it was very important and fewer who said rather important in the second survey. In general, the staff were happy and positive about the equality education they received. A large majority said that the education had affected them as a preschool teacher or employee. The answers indicated that many had adopted a new way of thinking. It was clear that many considered equality important in their work.113

Experiences

The grant provided by Sprotasjóður was lower than anticipated and due to that the project wasn’t able to carry out all their planned activities. More time for equality work would have been needed to ensure the integration of gender perspectives in daily practices. For example, the preparation of the gender equality plan was suspended. There was a lack of expertise on the gender equality team to be able to draw up a strong plan, which in turn was linked to a lack of resources to be able to pay a specialist for involvement in the plan. In other aspects, the project went well: there was a lot of support from the preschool’s management and the staff took an active part in the project.

The main and most important benefit of the project was raising awareness and changing the mindset of the staff, as can be seen in the results of the second survey. Staff’s knowledge of gender equality issues increased significantly. The staff gained a whole new understanding of the gender system and its effects on children and adults. Many of the staff members gained a new or changed perspective on their work, a new understanding of the gendered messages that children receive and how to spot and change stereotypes. As a result, there was an increase in discussion on gender equality issues within the staff, which can for example be seen in the employee discussion forum where gender discussions took place without being initiated by the project. The enthusiasm and energy of the staff in the preparation of their final projects showed the project had a very positive effect.114

The effects can still be seen seven years after the project. The main reason for that is the equality and democracy team whose aim is to implement the school’s equality

114. Sigurðardóttir & Jóhannsdóttir, 2014, 7–8
policy so that everyone in the preschool enjoys equal rights regardless of gender, race, religion, origin, disability and/or sexual orientation. Today in Krókur there are several teams working with different components of the preschool’s policy. The teams are formed of staff and teachers across departments to ensure that every department works with the different aspects of the preschool policies. At the beginning of each school year, the teams present projects everyone will be working with during the following year. The teams set goals and provide study material and methods to reach the goals. The equality and democracy team organize 2-4 theme weeks a year where the whole preschool does projects like flipping characters’ genders while reading books or deconstructing stereotypes when talking about occupations with children.

For 2020–2021 the equality and democracy team has goals towards children, staff and parents. Children’s gender stereotypes about toys, plays, occupations and house work ought to be challenged. Children will get knowledge about sexual health to prevent gender-based and sexual harassment. With the staff the equality checklist is used to evoke discussions. Parents will be educated about the importance of equality in communication with their children and about gender representation in the movies. The staff will have a “call dad” –project where they focus on direct communication to both parents.

The staff also take a questionnaire about gender equality once every two years. They work in 4-5-person groups and answer questions for example about books, environment and communication with children from the gender equality perspective. Every teacher has the floor for a few minutes where others are not allowed to interrupt them. The group work around the questionnaires challenges teachers to think about gender equality and analyze their work but also gives them a chance to learn from their peers. After the project there has been one seminar about gender equality for the staff and the next training session is planned to be organized next year.

Promoting equality through a team has proven to work well. The interest in gender equality will not be lost at the work place if the one teacher who was interested in working towards it leaves. Also, the role of the preschool principal is crucial. In Krókur equality work has been going on for years because of the support from the management and the active work of the equality and democracy team who challenge the whole preschool regularly to work with the gender equality questions.

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115. Jóhannsdóttir 2021
5.4. Tools and methods


Menntastefna Reykjavíkurborgar: https://menntastefna.is/ Reykjavík’s Education Policy’s Toolbox (search with “jafnretti”).


Verkfærakista Kennarasambands Íslands: https://www.ki.is/ A toolbox to gender equality made by the Icelandic Teachers’ Union for different education levels.
Promoting equality is mentioned as one objective in Finnish legislation about ECEC and schools. The requirement to provide gender sensitive education can be seen in national curriculums. In pre-primary education and in schools it is compulsory to make a gender equality plan. Making gender equality planning compulsory also in ECEC is mentioned in the Finnish government program and the legislation change is on its way.  

Gender equality planning in ECEC has been discussed for several years in Finland. In a Nordic report about promising practices promoting gender equality in ECEC and schools Mervi Heikkinen brings up that extending gender equality planning to different education levels has been seen as a way to reinforce long-term, systematic promotion of gender equality in Finnish government. Heikkinen also brings up the question of gender equality and teacher training that has been a target of different projects for a long time. There are no professional qualifications related to gender equality required from the staff working in ECEC in Finland. Voluntary courses about gender equality are offered in the educational institutions but it is the responsibility of the student to obtain knowledge on gender equal pedagogy despite several projects trying to integrate gender equality viewpoint to teacher education. The need for in-service training is increasingly acute and important after the reinforced mentions of gender equality in national curriculums and will be more so after the obligation of gender equality planning will be extended to ECEC.  

One report has been made about gender equality and ECEC in Finland by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in 2016. It points out that despite the objectives in legislation the national curriculums do not define gender equality or give concrete guidance for promoting and assessing it. The national curriculum for ECEC has been updated since, but the latest update for the curriculum for pre-primary education is from 2014. Gender equality planning is brought up in the report as a tool to promote gender equality in a systematic and goal-directed way. In Finland there is some recent research done about gender equality and ECEC. Eskelinen ja Itäkare (2020) noticed that in local curriculums in Finland gender equality discourse is quite strong but the ways working towards it are ambiguous and unspecified. According to them, there is a need for more concrete guidance in planning, implementation and evaluation of gender sensitivity. 

In Finland gender equality in ECEC is often promoted in projects that are run by NGOs rather than municipalities or ECEC institutions. The last two projects introduced in this chapter are run by sporadic funding and both projects mainly reach individual ECEC professionals. Even though The Feminist Association Unioni has done long-term work promoting gender equality in ECEC the work is completely dependent on external funding. At the same time Folkhälsan, introduced in the first example, is able to permanently employ one person who has been able to work with...
Folkhälsan's own preschools and schools and gender equality systematically for years. Folkhälsan also trains other swedish-speaking schools and preschools than the ones working under Folkhälsan.

**6.1. Folkhälsan**

Folkhälsan is a not-for-profit organisation active in the field of social and health services that strives to promote health in Swedish-speaking Finland. Folkhälsan runs 18 preschools around the country. The organisation has been working actively with gender equality in early childhood education and care since 2007. It has done so through its own preschools, by providing training for the personnel and parents of other municipal and private preschools as well as for students, Sara Sundell, specialist in gender equality, has led the efforts from the beginning.

In 2007, Folkhälsan cooperated with the Blaue Frau theatre group and their play called *Prins Enok och prins Sessan* for preschool-aged children. Folkhälsan prepared working materials for the play and organised five seminars linked to the play around the country, as well as a lecture on gender equality for preschools. At first, Folkhälsan's equality work was inspired by the experiences and studies published in Sweden. In 2008, Folkhälsan organised a seminar on gender equality and daycare ("Med ett jämställt daghem som mål – Seminarium om en jämställd småbarnsfostran") in cooperation with other organisations, such as the Feminist Association Unioni, with Kajsa Wahlström, a gender equality consultant as the main speaker.

The seminar focused on why the gender equality perspective is required and what daily life at preschools and elsewhere looks like from a gender perspective. There was a clear need for Finnish experiences and studies. Therefore, the next step was to carry out a survey of the situation in Folkhälsan’s own preschools and provide the personnel with concrete methods to help them continue their work with the equal treatment of children and equal preschool environments. In 2009–2011, a pilot project on gender equal preschool (“Ett jämställt dagis”) was carried out in Folkhälsan’s own preschools. Gender equality work in preschools has been an inherent part of Folkhälsan’s activities ever since. The work is based on a norm-critical approach, and in addition to equality between women and men, it has come to encompass other grounds of discrimination as well.

**Objectives**

The purpose of the equal preschool project was to determine how the personnel in Folkhälsan’s preschools behaved with children and how the preschool environment fulfilled the goal of ensuring equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities to all children, regardless of gender. The goal was to provide children with the opportunity to develop a wide range of resources and skills for the future, regardless of gender.

Currently, the purpose is to make preschool personnel aware of any restricting, excluding or unequal norms in preschool, and to integrate gender equality into operations with the help of an action plan.
Implementation

The equal preschool pilot project involved two of Folkhälsan’s preschools from different cities. Training and guidance in three parts, led by gender equality consultant Kristina Henkel, was organised in both cities. The training was offered to all the personnel of both pilot preschools, as well as to anyone else interested in the topic. To get more out of training, it was recommended that several people from the same preschool attend the events. In between the training events, the participants completed tasks and Henkel provided guidance to the pilot preschools. The project followed a norm-critical approach. Folkhälsan also produced a report on equal preschool as material for the preschools.

In addition to personnel training, the pilot project included surveys and observations using, for example, video cameras, guidance, literature for the personnel, and informative events for the parents. The experiences gained from processes in the pilot project served as a foundation for later operations.

In 2010–2019, gender equality was a theme that Folkhälsan’s own preschools could choose in their internal certification process (“Hälsofrämjande daghem”). The process stretched over a full year and included training for the personnel, surveys conducted in the preschool, guidance and the preparation of an action plan. Sara Sundell, Folkhälsan’s gender equality expert, videoed activities at the preschools and analysed the films with the personnel in order to develop methods for making operations more equal. In 2013, Folkhälsan devised norm-critical flash cards (“Vidga leken, bryt normen”) with a gender equality perspective, which were distributed for free to preschools.

Folkhälsan continues to organise training for personnel at Folkhälsan’s preschools and the preschool network, but it also trains other preschool personnel in Swedish-speaking Finland, if requested, as well as students of ECEC at the University of Helsinki and universities of applied sciences. In 2021, Folkhälsan prepared new norm-critical material for online discussions (“Tänk om”), with photos and descriptions of people who break norms. The new material deals with gender equality and equal treatment, focusing on various grounds of discrimination.

One of the pilot preschools, Kastanjen in Turku, has continued its systematic gender equality work as an integral part of its operations. The personnel have carried out various surveys in the preschool and developed activities based on the results. For example, the personnel acknowledge children without showing attention to their clothes or looks. They show their interest in the children by asking them questions and listening to them. The personnel and children have practised using different methods to ensure that everyone gets a turn to speak (“speaker stone”) and that children do not interrupt one another (“stop hand”). Everyone gets the speaker stone in turn, as well as a stop hand that means “Hold on, I will listen to the end of this discussion and then listen to you”. This helps children wait for their turn. There are also “choice days”, when children can choose among different activities. This has led to children testing new games and play with new playmates. The personnel at the Kastanjen preschool have bought and borrowed books describing different kinds of gender norms and diverse types of families.  

119 Forsblom-Sinisalo 2021
Experiences

The equal preschool project received a great deal of attention in the Finnish media. Based on the experiences from seminars and training, many preschool employees were interested in working with the questions, even though they did not consider it necessary at first.

According to Paula Forsblom-Sinisalo, director of Folkhälsan’s Kastanjen preschool, the personnel initially considered that their preschool was an equal place and that they treated all children equally, regardless of gender. After working on gender equality for a few years, they realised this was not the case. Systematic work was required to change routines, treatment and attitudes and make operations more equal.

To uncover unconscious norms, attitudes and patterns, the personnel at Kastanjen have found it useful to observe one another, make notes and video others. It has also been important to organise joint discussions where the personnel have analysed what, in their minds, has worked well and what has been challenging. According to Forsblom-Sinisalo, cooperation with parents and guardians has been an important part of the process.

One of the observations made from the video material in all of Folkhälsan’s preschools is that, as a group, boys receive more attention overall than girls. This applied to group activities, crafts and art, as well as to hallways where children were getting dressed. According to the experiences, quiet, obedient children may have to wait for their turn and often receive little attention, while loud and wild children get a lot of attention from the personnel. When this was brought up in the videos, the personnel often reacted strongly and became interested in developing methods for sharing their attention more equally and for acknowledging all children whether or not they requested attention.

The norm-critical picture material that Folkhälsan produced in 2013 was well received, proving that there was a demand for practical discussion material in both Finland and Sweden. Back then, the material focused on equality between women and men, but since equal treatment has since taken on a more important role in operations, there has lately been a need for material offering a broader perspective, which is offered in the new electronic material for online discussions.

The author, Sara Sundell, is in charge of gender equality and equal treatment activities at Folkhälsan.

6.2. The Feminist Association Unioni: The Gender Equal Early Childhood Education – project

The Feminist Association Unioni has been running The Gender Equal Early Childhood Education -project from 2006 onwards. During the years and different state fundings the project has worked with various aspirations. During the first years the project didn’t have funding and was run by volunteers. They participated for example

120. Forsblom-Sinisalo 2012
in organizing a seminar with Folkhälsan and the Council for Gender Equality from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health about gender equal ECEC in 2008. In the seminar lectures were held by experts from Sweden among others.

In 2010–2011 the project got its first state funding for a pilot project to study the ways gender equality and inequality appear in the practices of early childhood education in Finnish speaking preschools in Finland. During the pilot project and the following project in 2012–2014 the daily life in preschools in the Helsinki metropolitan area were observed by video recordings. The project also created and assembled tools for ECEC professionals to observe gender equality and exercises to develop more equal practices. A self-study webpage was published during a project in 2012–2014 based on research and the observations made via video recordings \(^{121}\). The website includes a checklist, observation tools, and various practical resources to promote gender equality in the context of ECEC. In 2014–2016 the project focused on providing information and tools to promote gender equality for ECEC professionals and students. A guidebook was published to support participants to spread the knowledge to their colleagues and workplaces \(^{122}\) and collection of texts to give concrete examples of gender sensitive education \(^{123}\). The project was funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The project collaborated with a municipal preschool Tonttula in Helsinki in 2010–2011 and 2012–2014. Through the video recordings the project manager observed the adult’s behaviour from a gender sensitive point of view. The videos were used as a base for development meetings with the staff and the project manager.

From 2017 onwards the project has focused solely on in-service training. The in-service training projects in 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 were funded by Finnish National Agency for Education. \(^{124}\)

**Objectives**

During the last funding in 2018–2019 the objective was to strengthen the ECEC professionals’ skills with gender equality work and gender equality planning. As a result, children have wider opportunities to develop their interests and skills. The aim was to give the professionals tools to observe and develop the daily activities of their workplace from the point of view of gender equality.

**In practice**

In 2018–2019 The Gender Equal Early Childhood Education -project had its last state funding. During the project a 4–6-week long web course was built up. The course was carried out five times during 10 months. The web course included theory and short lectures, observation tasks the participants needed to perform at their workplaces, if possible, together with their colleagues and a final essay that included gender equality planning. Participants were from all around Finland and 50% worked as ECEC teachers and 25% as child care workers. Others worked as directors, in family daycare or in different positions in open early childhood education, for example in

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121. [www.tasa-arvoinenvarhaiskasvatus.fi](http://www.tasa-arvoinenvarhaiskasvatus.fi)
124. The Feminist Association Unioni
Lutheran congregations. The diversity of the participants was benefited by group discussions where they were able to share their experiences as well as good and bad practices. During 10 months the web courses reached 130 participants from all over Finland and 100 of them finished the entire course. During the project the project manager also wrote a guide book for gender equality planning in ECEC.125

Experiences

The feedback from the web courses was excellent. The participants enjoyed the possibility to deepen their knowledge in a long web course. The practical tasks performed in participants’ workplaces gave them concrete knowledge on how gender equality or inequality is produced in daily practices. On the other hand, a long course was difficult to finish for some due to a very busy schedule at work or at home. One of the difficulties that rose up regularly was the lack of support from colleagues. Some of the participants’ colleagues didn’t understand the need for promoting gender equality and were resistant to having discussions about the theme and the working culture around their workplaces. The participants who had this kind of colleagues felt alone in their efforts to work towards gender equality and often chose to wait for the retirement of such colleagues or to work towards gender equality by themselves.

In the project the web course was found functional form to reach the target group. It was easy to reach professionals around Finland with a course that didn’t require live attending. At the same time, it was clear that it would be important to reach more people from the same work places to support a real change in the preschools’ work cultures. Also, it is important to reach the professionals who don’t yet have enough knowledge about gender equality and therefore are reluctant to work on the theme. Moreover, in-service training for the directors of the preschools are needed so that the staff willing to work towards gender equality are not left alone with their efforts on gender equality work.

Due to the lack of state funding Unioni has offered paid in-service training during 2019–2021. The project got new funding in the spring 2021 from the Finnish National Agency for Education. The free of charge web courses about promoting gender equality and gender equality planning will continue for ECEC staff later in 2021.

The preschool Tonttula, who collaborated with the project in 2010–2011 and 2012–2014, participated in Sara Åker-Harju’s thesis in 2016 about the effects of the project. An anonymous questionnaire was sent to the staff working in Tonttula and nine out of thirteen staff members answered the questionnaire. From the answers it was clear that most of the staff members thought the video recordings helped them in their work to either give them positive reinforcement or help them critically observe their own actions. Some of the participants felt like the daily life in the preschool was somewhat changed by the project even though the turnover of the staff complicates the change. Others thought that no change was detectable since gender equal practices were already in use. The staff who started working in Tonttula after the collaboration felt like they didn’t get enough introduction about gender equality. Getting to know gender equality demanded proactivity from the new staff even though there was discussion about the theme among the staff.126

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126. Åker-Harju 2016, 26–28, 30
In 2021 the work towards gender equality in Tonttula has been affected by the Covid situation. At the moment gender equality is kept in mind in daily activities, but there are no resources for development work or having active, ongoing preschool-wide conversations. The last development day was held in the winter 2020 before Covid where Sara Åker-Harju held a workshop for the other staff working in Tonttula. Åker-Harju has been working in Tonttula as a preschool teacher from 2016 onwards and has been active to promote gender equality in the preschool’s daily activities.

In the spring of 2019 Åker-Harju held a study group about gender equality that met a few times a month. One person from each team in Tonttula participated in the study group. The participants were responsible for spreading the knowledge for their teams. Åker-Harju is also responsible for introducing the new employees to the practices and working methods of Tonttula. Åker-Harju’s thesis from 2016 pointed out that new employees felt alone in getting knowledge about gender equality and that’s why the introduction to Tonttula’s working culture today also includes strengthened information about gender equality issues. The checklist for a gender sensitive educator is visible in every teams’ space and helps to keep important questions in mind. Åker-Harju also uses gender equality planning as a development tool in her own group.

The preschool director Kirsti Alanko thinks it is important that promoting gender equality is mentioned as obligatory in the national as well as in Helsinki’s local curriculum. In Tonttula’s own action plan for 2020–2021 there are five goals for equal ECEC: 1. gender equality is to be promoted by encouraging children for diverse play, 2. Learning environments and materials are available and shared with everyone, 3. Adults encounter children as individuals, 4. Adults bring friendship, considering others and respecting other’s point of view into discussions with children and 5. Children are equal to participate in the planning and assessing the daily activities. Unfortunately, these goals are not monitored or assessed at the moment due to the lack of resources. Besides Covid and lack of resources also the turnover of employees comes up as a challenge. Changing colleagues make it difficult to develop gender equality work further when the same conversations often have to start from the beginning.

The effects of working together with the Gender Equal Early Childhood Education –project can still be seen. The staff is proud of the work done in the preschool and tools and materials promoting gender equality have been in use after the collaboration. During recent years the point of view has been more intersectional and themes like the language and the cultural background of children have been in the focus. It has been important to have a director who facilitates discussions around gender equality and a teacher who is interested and devoted to promoting gender equality for the work to continue. In the future Alanko and Åker-Harju want to see gender equality better integrated in Tonttula’s own local curriculum. They also eagerly wait to have preschool-wide conversations, reflections and assessment about gender equality again. 127

The author Nea Alasaari has worked as a project manager in the Gender Equal Early Childhood Education –project since 2018 and been part of the project as a thesis student and a steering group member since 2012.

127. Alanko & Åker-Harju 2021
6.3. Rauhankasvatusinstituutti (RKI) – The Peace Education Institute

The Peace Education Institute (RKI) runs diverse projects and in-service training for educators about peace, democracy, equality and equity. For them, peace education in practice means strengthening and building reliance and trust in society, encouraging active and participatory citizenship, as well as solving everyday life's conflicts in a nonviolent manner. It is also about making power structures and privileges more visible and recognising, managing and transforming hate speech, racism and exclusion in educators' work. The work focuses on three main themes: global citizenship education, anti-racism, and equality & equity.

Tasa-arvokompassi – The Gender Equality Charter Mark GECM 2019–2021

RKI is part of the international project *Gender Equality in Schools* funded by Erasmus+. In the project nine partners from nine different European countries participated in building The Gender Equality Charter Mark (GECM). GECM is a framework that can be adopted by schools to help them look at influencing and informing their leadership, curriculum, physical environment, and the attitudes and relationships of both the students, staff and wider community in relation to gender equality issues. RKI have formulated GECM for ECEC, primary and secondary schools in Finland.

Objectives

The project aims to challenge the negative and damaging norms, stereotypes and expectations by using GECM to provide a framework for instilling a whole-school approach to gender equality in schools across Europe. As a result positive change in the approach to gender equality is encouraged and a culture where children engage their critical thinking skills to understand, question and challenge gender inequality and violence is developed. There is a change in widening subject and career choices made by pupils and reductions in harassment and gender-based violence in schools and wider society. With the GECM learning institutions can formulate an equality plan and follow up their equality work. GECM also helps with evaluation.

In practice

In practice the project has been about building up a GECM that has the same content internationally but is adapted to each country’s ways of working. RKI is responsible for developing a working GECM to Finnish ECEC as well as primary and secondary schools. The Finnish GECM is a document with five different themes: Governing and Leadership, Pedagogical Activities, Environment and Equipment, Attitudes and Interaction and Custodians and Community. Each theme has 3–4 goals such as "staff will participate in and get training of equality and non-discrimination work." "There will be enough time reserved to equality and non-discrimination work in the pedagogical activities in the ECEC." "The staff will support children's grouping and friendships gender sensitively and non-discriminatively."

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128. The Peace Education Institute
129. The Gender Equality in Schools -project
130. The Gender Equality in Schools -project 1 & The Gender Equality in Schools -project 2
131. The Peace Education Institute GECM
Experiences

The international project has suffered a lot from the Covid situation since the nine participants from the nine countries have not had a chance to meet and share their experiences in person.

Tasa-arvo toimintakulttuurin keskiöön – Equality at the Core of Educational Environments 2020-2021

Since the Erasmus+ project didn’t include a possibility to train educators about GECM nationally RKI applied and got funds to organize training from Finnish National Agency for Education.

Equality at the Core of Educational Environments is an in-service training project for educators working in ECEC, primary and secondary schools. The training focuses on equality planning and how to implement GECM in action. 132

Objectives

The purpose of the project is, in brief, to advance knowledge-base and understanding about equality and equity within different educational settings. The aim is to provide tools and ideas for equality work by putting GECM into practice in Finnish context. 133

In practice

The trainings were open to educational professionals across the country and eight trainings in seven municipalities were carried out. RKI benefitted from its national networks in recruiting the participants. In many cities the training was included into the city’s official course calendar. In some municipalities/cities it has been strongly advised or even made compulsory that at least one person per educational institution from the municipality participates in the training. 134

Each training includes two sessions about a month apart from each other. At the first one the focus is on theory and broader contextualization and background of equality work. The training follows the five themes of the GECM. Between the sessions the participants work independently planning how to implement equality in their work. The second session focuses more on practice and the material bank is introduced to help finding ways to work on the five themes of GECM. In the material bank RKI has collected different materials made by other projects, government and associations below the five themes of GECM. The material bank includes topics such as gendered language, equality planning, segregations, norm critical pedagogy, gender and sexual diversity, learning material and communication, physical and social accessibility, antiracist education, prevention and interference of harassment and custodians and equality work. 135 The trainings are organized online between autumn 2020 and spring 2021. Together the trainings reached 150 participants from which 42 worked in preschools and 10 in pre-primary education. Even though the project has ended, further training is still needed. RKI is applying funds to continue in-service training. 136

132. The Peace Education Institute 2, Okkolin 2021
133. Okkolin 2021
134. Okkolin 2021
135. The Peace Education Institute's material bank
136. Okkolin 2021

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Experiences

In the city of Lappeenranta the participation in the training was strongly advised alongside a notion that equality should be visible in preschools’ local plans. Tuula Kylliäinen, a deputy director working in preschool Lappee, participated in the two training sessions held in autumn 2020 by RKI. Mikko Syren, an ECEC teacher from the preschool Lappee, did not participate in the training but is a part of the team that is implementing GECM at the preschool.

In Kylliäinen’s opinion the training provided good examples and enabled discussion between other participants. The GECM is a vast tool so it was decided that one of the GECM’s themes is chosen to be in active analysis for 2021 in preschool Lappee. The theme that was chosen is Environment and Equipment. Kylliäinen shared the knowledge and the GECM-tool in the assembly of the whole preschool’s staff and to the one of the preschool’s pedagogical team, the play-team, that Syren is part of.

The play-team includes one staff member from each group of children in the preschool. The play-team’s task has been to conduct an equality plan based on the GECM’s chapter about Environment and Equipment. The plan is finished in the spring 2021 and will next be introduced for the whole staff.

According to Syren the play-team’s response to the GECM has been positive. The GECM has helped them a lot working with equality planning. On the other hand, they would have wanted the GECM to dive deeper in the themes it introduces. They felt that they were already doing well in many aspects introduced in the Environment and Equipment -theme. The play-team is responsible for toys, games, books and the other learning equipment. After the equality planning -task the play-team have focused more on the themes of equity and gender equality for example when purchasing new equipment.

According to Kylliäinen and Syren the equality work is going to continue in preschool Lappee in the future. After the year with the Environment and Equipment –theme they are going to choose another theme from the GECM to work with. Equality, including gender equality, will be a persistent part of the local, yearly updated plan in the preschool.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{137} Kylliäinen & Syren 2021
6.4. Work material and methods


Esbo stad: Jämställdhet och likabehandling https://sites.google.com/eduespoo.fi/lage/materialbank/j%C3%A4mst%C3%A4lldhet-och-likabehandling Webbsida om jämställdhet och likabehandling inom småbarnspedagogiken med tips på diskussionsfrågor för arbetsgemenskapen, litteratur och metodsidor.


The Peace Education Institute’s material bank: https://sway.office.com/G5dLTY7hYvelyuVR?ref=Link The material bank for in-service-trainings for ECEC, primary and secondary schools.

Seta ry: https://seta.fi/sateenkaaritieto/ammattilaisille/opetusala/varhaiskasvatus/ Materials for ECEC professionals about gender diversity


7. Gender equality work in preschools in Åland

In 2010–2012, all preschools in Åland participated in the efforts initiated by the Government of Åland to promote gender equality in preschools. Inspiration for the activities was sought in Sweden. According to Åland’s gender equality agenda for 2019–2030, gender equality must be integrated into all fields of operation in the territory. Preschools are also expected to integrate gender equality work into their operations.  

Several preschools in Åland are working on integrating gender equality and equal treatment into their operations, but since the end of the Government of Åland’s development project in 2012, Mariehamn is the only municipality that engages in systematic gender equality work in preschools. In the following, we discuss the Government of Åland’s project for equal preschool, which encompassed all preschools in Åland, as well as an international project run by the Åland Islands Peace Institute.

7.1. Equal preschool

On assignment by the Government of Åland, a committee was established to prepare an action plan for the integration, monitoring and assessment of the gender and gender equality perspective in preschool in Åland. The action plan for equal preschool was adopted by the Government of Åland in 2010. In 2010–2012, the Government of Åland carried out development work to integrate the gender and gender equality perspective into preschool activities in Åland. All personnel in ECEC were offered the opportunity for further education and competence development, and as a result, many preschools engaged in development activities. The project was led by Kajsa Svaleryd, a gender equality strategist from Sweden.  

New training events were offered in 2015, and two units were also given the opportunity to develop and deepen their gender equality work under continuous supervision, provided by the Uppsala Antidiscrimination Bureau. The preschools in Mariehamn were the only ones that participated. In 2016, a new project was set up to offer preschools the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of gender equality and develop their activities. Three preschools from Mariehamn signed up. Mariehamn has an equality plan in place for all of the municipality’s preschools since 2019, and it is the only municipality that has continued its systematic gender equality work. The other municipalities in Åland gave up supervised gender equality work when the Government of Åland transferred responsibility for the work to the municipalities.

138. Government of Åland
139. The Government of Åland 2019
Objectives

The goal of the equal preschool action plan was to ensure that children were treated equally and that both girls and boys were offered more opportunities and more room to express themselves. According to Vivian Nikula, previously head of the gender equality unit of the Government of Åland and chair of the aforementioned committee established by the Government of Åland, the point was not to change girls and boys, but rather provide preschool personnel with knowledge, tools and methods to help them integrate a gender and gender equality perspective in their operations. 140

In 2016, the goal was to engage in long-term integrated gender equality work in the participating preschools. The idea was to link theory and research results to the participants’ own preschool activities and own reflections.

Since 2019, the goal in Mariehamn has been to engage all preschools in active work to promote gender equality and equal treatment and to combat traditional gender patterns and norms in activities with children, among the personnel and in interaction with parents and guardians. 141 Every preschool unit in the Mariehamn municipality must also set their own goals for each term. For example, the Vinkelboda preschool unit has set itself the goal of focusing on how the personnel deal with children in the hallway where the children get dressed and what systems they follow there. The unit has focused on how boys and girls are treated and helped and how they are expected to manage on their own. Another goal has been to inspect play materials, books and play environments from a gender perspective. 142

Implementation

Several lectures to improve competence were arranged for preschool personnel during the project period, which ran from 2010 to 2012. Gender equality strategist Kajsa Svaleryd was one of the lecturers. She also offered practical assignments and supervision to the employees. The personnel made observations of daily routine situations, for example in hallways, during naptime and in group activities, and tested different methods for revealing their own attitude, expectations and working methods from a gender and gender equality perspective. The goal was to make visible and change attitudes, values and norms, which led to changes in behaviour. 143

After the end of the project, further training was still offered to the employees. In 2016, preschools had the chance to deepen their skills and knowledge and develop their gender equality work under the supervision and lead of Lisa Andersson Tengnér, a gender educator. The Neptunus, Blåkråkan and Blåklockan preschools in Mariehamn took part in the training, which aimed to integrate gender equality into operations for long-term, enduring results.

Even today, preschools in Mariehamn continue to emphasise gender equality and equal treatment. The 2019 equality plan is updated every year, and every preschool in the city of Mariehamn determines its own goals and works actively to achieve them. The preschools submit a document to the director of preschool, describing where they stand, where they are heading and how they plan to continue their activities.

140. Nikula 2021
141. City of Mariehamn 2019
142. Jansson 2021
143. The Government of Åland 2019
The Vinkelboda preschool in Mariehamn has been involved since the very beginning. In addition to the teachers working on themselves and their attitudes, they examine the play environments and materials and prepare more extensive material. They talk about children, instead of girls and boys, and think carefully which of the parents or guardians they call if a child falls ill. The teachers have organised joint events with another preschool, where the participants have completed practise assessments and used various types of observation templates, for example, to survey outdoor games and play. According to Christina Jansson, director of the Vinkelboda preschool, the focus has shifted from equality between women and men towards equal treatment so as to include all the various grounds of discrimination.

Experiences

Jansson says she originally considered herself very open and equal, but gradually detected, by observing her norms and way of speaking, that this was not always true. It showed up in small details, and Jansson is now convinced that to make progress in development, you must begin by analysing yourself. It is not about taking anything away from children or restricting them, but rather about providing them with opportunities. According to Jansson, development in preschools takes place unnoticed, as gender equality and equal treatment become more tightly integrated into the different forms of operations.

When new employees join the centre, the rest of the personnel understand how far along they have come in their work. However, some new recruits are also well informed about the field. It is important to always monitor and be aware of how you treat the children, as well as follow a norm critical approach. After several years of structured work, the personnel are now much more aware than before. The more you work with gender equality and equal treatment, the better you understand how much more you can learn.

Looking back at the supervisory events with Svaleryd, Jansson recalls that the employees were asked questions such as why they helped a three-year-old boy get dressed, while a three-year-old girl had to manage on her own. Nikula recounts a time when employees asked a couple of boys who were cycling in the yard to take out the biowaste, and the boys answered that they were cycling and did not have time for biowaste. When the employees then asked a few girls, who were playing in the sandbox to do the same, and the girls said they were playing, the teachers told them to interrupt their playing for a while and take out the biowaste.

At Vinkelboda, the personnel marked the best swings with pink ribbon. At first, this led to the toughest boys no longer using the swings. The personnel also dressed children in pink vests when they were outdoors. It was difficult at first, but after a while, everyone used the swings again, and the vests were not a problem for anyone.

The reactions from parents and guardians differed at first. Some appreciated the work being launched, while others questioned the efforts. It has helped to organise lectures for parents and guardians, where they have received information about the work and have learned that the goal is to offer more opportunities to children. These days, the personnel no longer receive negative feedback on their work.

According to the employees at Vinkelboda, a lot has changed in the past decade, for example, in relation to the kind of books they read to children. The employees pay more attention to what they read and do not use normative books. They also discuss the texts they read with children, pointing out that things can look different and
asking children questions to help them reflect on norms themselves. The goal has been to broaden the material used, mix things up and inspect the play facilities. The home corner used to be a separate area, but now it has been mixed with the other areas, which has resulted in, for example, dinosaurs found wearing Barbie doll clothes.\textsuperscript{144}

Nikula emphasises the importance of language that the personnel use and the way they express themselves. What she thinks could now be included in norm-critical work in preschools is personnel training in LGBTQI aspects, work with masculinity norms, and teaching boys a language for emotions and helping them with conflict management.

The committee working on the integration of a gender and gender equality perspective into preschool education in Åland, which launched the first project, saw a need for further activities after the two-year-project. The committee made a proposal for continued work, the goal being to establish systematic gender equality work leading to lasting changes in working methods and attitudes, as well as to let municipalities take over responsibility for the work. However, the other municipalities in Åland did not continue their efforts, says Vivan Nikula. According to her, it is important to integrate projects into regular operations so that those in charge of day-to-day activities feel in charge of promoting matters.

7.2. Åland Islands Peace Institute, KID – gender pedagogy in preschool

The KID project focusing on equal opportunities for boys and girls in preschool ran for two years from 2015 to 2016 in three private preschools located in Jomala in Åland, Vilnius in Lithuania, and Kaliningrad in Russia. Regnbågen, a Waldorf preschool, was the participant from Åland. Regnbågen is a small preschool that catered to 12 children aged 1–6 during the project period. The project was run by the Åland Islands Peace Institute and financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers and Emmaus Åland. All three preschools had a supervisor to support the process. Among other things the supervisor helped the preschools draw up a long-term gender equality plan for integrating gender equality into daily preschool activities.\textsuperscript{145}

This section will discuss the Regnbågen preschool as a practical example. Ida Eriksson was the supervisor for Regnbågen. Regnbågen has continued to actively work with gender equality after the project period.

Objectives

The foundations for preschool education in Åland, issued by the Government of Åland, state, among other things, that “the adults must be knowledgeable about gender issues and consciously and actively work to promote equality between boys and girls”.

The goal of the project was to promote a gender-conscious attitude among the personnel and parents in preschool, as well as minimise gender stereotypes in communication with and the treatment of children. Another goal was to provide both girls and boys with the same opportunities to develop their abilities and

\textsuperscript{144}. Jansson 2021
\textsuperscript{145}. Eriksson 2016
interests regardless of gender.

The activities were to influence the children’s choice of game and play, playmates, materials and facilities, and to give children the feeling of having greater room for choice and action. In order to increase the personnel’s awareness of how they interact with children, an emphasis was placed on the personnel’s expectations and attitudes related to gender.  

**Implementation**

At the beginning of the project, the supervisors and personnel from the three preschools went on training visits to acquaint themselves with gender equality work in preschools in Finland, Sweden and the Åland Islands. They also attended common gender equality training.

The supervisor for Regnbågen and the preschool personnel agreed to film interaction situations between the employees and children over three different weeks at different stages of the project. The filming took place in the hallways, during group activities, at mealtimes and during playtime. Filming proved to be an effective method for determining how the employees divided their attention among the children, what they expected of them and what roles the children assumed. The supervisor and employees discussed the observations made from the films at joint events.

The personnel also made observations independently based on the model provided by the supervisor. They observed each other’s treatment of boys and girls in various situations, as well as how the teachers and children were positioned in different activities and during free play. The employees also examined the facilities from a gender equality perspective.

At parental meetings, parents reflected on gender-conscious parenting and the practical measures they could take to ensure their children receive an equal upbringing. A brochure describing the operations and equality work of Regnbågen was published as part of the project. A gender equality plan was also drawn up, and it continues to be updated regularly. The supervisor developed work material for new employees, which included a list of literature on gender equality in preschools.

The project supervisor interviewed the personnel and parents three times during the project. The interviews were conducted at the beginning of the project in spring 2015, in autumn 2015, and at the end of the project in spring 2016. The interview template was revised each time to make it more appropriate and informative, despite the original idea being to use the exact same questions every time. A different set of questions was used for the personnel and the parents. The results of the project were assessed based on the interview responses.

In 2019–2020, the Regnbågen personnel prepared a new, revised plan for gender equality and equal treatment. In addition, the employees and parents were offered a lecture held by Malin Gustavsson, equality specialist at Ekvalita. The idea was that changes in the personnel and groups of children meant that the goals and measures also had to be revised and adapted accordingly. The personnel used the goals from the previous plan in the new group and observed the situation for one week at a time. They placed each goal at a time in a visible location in the staff facilities to

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146. Åland Islands Peace Institute
147. Eriksson 2016
remind everyone to observe activities with the specific goal in mind. After the week-long observation, the employees discussed their findings as well as the measures required to advance their gender equality efforts concerning the goal in question. They continued like this until all the goals had been revised and the measures updated.\textsuperscript{148}

**Experiences**

When the project was launched, the employees at the Regnbågen preschool considered themselves to be gender conscious. In the first interview with the supervisor, they gave their gender consciousness an average rating of 8. In the second interview, their rating for the same aspect was a 7, and on average, the employees said their gender consciousness before the project had been at the low level of 6. Despite having gained a better understanding of gender after the first interview, they gave themselves a lower rating the second time and also rated their pre-project gender consciousness lower than the first time. This shows that we often consider ourselves more equal than we are if we have not gained competence in the field and have not worked with gender and norm-critical approaches.

In their responses, some of the employees observed that even though they are gender-conscious, they are also part of a gender-normative society that influences them. In their responses and discussions with the supervisor, the personnel said they had become more gender-conscious in their way of interacting with children and that they had begun to reflect more on their interaction and gender-normative assumptions and expression. According to the preschool’s supervisor, the employees’ gender-consciousness improved a lot during the project. Discussions among the teachers moved from a focus on the children’s clothes and age to their own unconscious behaviour and expectations.

The first films indicated a difference in how boys and girls expected to receive attention as well as differences in the employees’ expectations of children depending on their gender. Boys were used to receiving attention from the teachers and to being heard, while girls were used to waiting for acknowledgement and to being interrupted. Quiet girls received the least attention, even less than quiet boys, while boys overall were scolded more frequently.

Another observation was that girls and boys formed groups and played with children of the same gender and that boys and girls often played different games and used different toys. The personnel noticed that they usually called the children’s mothers, for example, if the child fell ill during the day.

During the first year, the employees drew up a gender equality plan with concrete methods to serve as a basis for systematic gender equality work in the future. Several drafts were prepared before the plan was ready to be introduced. In the first version, the focus was on age rather than gender. Gradually, the personnel identified other areas in need of gender equality measures.

Various methods were elaborated to address the problem areas indicated in the surveys. To ensure that attention was divided more equally, methods such as the speaker stick were introduced in group activities. To help the children find new playmates of different genders and ages, during cleaning and tidying places, the children drew slips of paper with a picture of the activity they were supposed to do,
and during walks, children were first asked to choose a natural object and then they were paired with another child who had chosen the same object. After some protesting, the system began to work very well.

When the preschool moved to new facilities, the personnel seized on the opportunity to rearrange the furniture and mix toys in a new way to help the children engage in new, creative forms of play free from gender roles. The employees also updated the list of contact details of parents and guardians, and began calling mothers and fathers in turn, which proved to be an effective way to include the fathers in activities. The personnel also began to address children by name instead of talking about boys and girls. Some of the parents adopted the same practice at home. Since the parents were included in the project from the very beginning, the work inspired them, too, and improved communication between the parents and personnel.

What made the process difficult was that some of the employees and children changed at the turn of the term, which meant that some of the work had to be repeated. One of the challenges, therefore, was to introduce new employees and parents into the process. 149

7.3. Work material and methods

**Government of Åland:** https://www.regeringen.ax/www.jamstaldbarnomsorg.ax

*Web page on gender equality for children and young people in Åland.*

149. Eriksson 2016
8. Gender equality work in Danish preschools

In 2017, the Minister of Children, Education and Gender Equality set up a working group tasked with identifying problem areas and proposing methods for promoting gender equality in preschool and education in Denmark. One of the goals was to give children access to all preschool activities and ensure that no one was excluded based on gender. According to the working group, preschool personnel in Denmark had to be provided with the competence required, as well as with practical tools and knowledge. There was a lack of knowledge about local gender equality projects in preschools and of the systematic exchange of experiences and knowledge.

Focus was placed on the smaller number of men, compared to women, who applied for preschool teacher training, as well as on the fact that the expectations of and demands on male preschool employees often differed from those concerning women. As one of its initiatives for promoting gender equality, the working group proposed that the government should support a legal amendment making gender, equality and diversity a required part of the pedagogical curriculum for preschools.\footnote{150. Ministry of Education 2016}

In 2020, a survey of diversity and gender equality in preschool ("Mangfoldighed og ligestilling i dagtilbud")\footnote{151. Padovan-Özdemir & Hamilton 2020} was carried out in Denmark to determine how many preschools focused on gender equality and diversity and how they went about it. The survey was conducted among the directors of all of the country's preschools. Of the 700 or so respondents, 20% said they were running a project or practical activities focused on diversity and gender equality.

The 2018 pedagogical curriculum includes two areas with a focus on gender equality and diversity. Nevertheless, the report indicates that very few Danish preschools engage in pedagogical work in the areas. Over 70% of the respondents said the implementation of the 2018 curriculum had not had much impact or no impact at all on their pedagogical work on gender equality and diversity. Nevertheless, nearly 60% said they had a strong tradition of gender equality and diversity work in preschool. According to the report, many preschool directors believe that gender equality and diversity are included in other pedagogical focus areas and therefore assume that they work with these questions even if they do not specifically focus on gender equality and diversity in their pedagogical activities. Only 23 of the 778 preschools, i.e., 3% of the preschool had adopted gender- and norm-critical pedagogy.

The report concluded that there is a need for knowledge and methods to make visible the impact that norms have on children’s development, experiences and room for action. There is also a need to make gender equality and diversity independent pedagogical areas in the implementation of the curriculum.

In the following, we present a few preschools that have worked more systematically with gender equality, as well as a project of the Fredensborg municipality and a certification process for gender equality and equal treatment. All the preschools discussed are located on Zealand, close to Copenhagen.
8.1. Prism certificate

The Prism certificate was devised based on the Nordic Council of Ministers’ recommendation in 2014 concerning a quality label for gender equality and equal treatment in preschools and schools. The Council also proposed that a survey should be carried out of the gender equality inputs in preschools and schools in the Nordic countries. The report *Promising Nordic Practises in Gender Equality Promotion in Basic Education and Kindergartens* was written in 2016 by a Nordic research group. The certification of preschools was one of the report’s proposals.

In Denmark, certification was introduced in 2018. The Prism certification is managed by Cecile Nørgaard, an educational and gender sociologist. For a preschool to receive the Prism certificate, all the personnel must complete a certification course on gender and the norm-critical approach. To date, the following preschools have received Prism certification: Børnebyen Vandværket, Jordkloden, Marthahjemmet and Tusindfryd. Børnebasionen is in the process of being certified. The colour of the certificate changes every year, and the preschools have the opportunity to renew their certificate annually.

**Objectives**

The goal of the Prism certificate is to establish systematic and structured work on gender and diversity in preschools through the adoption of norm-critical educational methods. The certificate enables preschools to show to others that they have demonstrated their competence in terms of a norm-critical approach, gender and diversity. A group of Nordic researchers and practitioners are seeking financing to help expand the certificate to Sweden, Finland and Iceland.

**Implementation**

To receive the Prism certificate, preschools must complete training comprising a half-day workshop, a six-week online training course, including practical assignments, and finally draw up an action plan for gender equality. The certification includes a newsletter published four times a year and the opportunity to receive weekly supervision by phone. To maintain quality and develop activities, the certificate is reviewed and renewed annually. New goals are set in this connection. An annual conference is organised for the certified preschools and other interested parties to provide them with new knowledge and inspiration in a group of other parties who have completed the certification process.

**Experiences**

The certified preschools found that the process was very instructive, offered new inspiration and helped develop professional activities in a more norm-critical and gender-conscious direction, in addition to raising the quality. The personnel at Martha Hjemmet appreciated the chance of working on gender equality in a concrete way at their own preschool and at their own pace so that the work and methods suited their own daily routines.

According to the personnel at Børnebyen Vandværket, the training helped the employees reflect on their unconscious norms, and this has influenced their work with children. The employees have gained new tools and methods for combating
traditional gender norms, and they feel they have become more inclusive and more professional thanks to the certification.\footnote{Prism certificate}

Nørgaard believes that the preschools that have received the Prism certificate now have a collective knowledge base and a common language, along with new perspectives and competence. They have learned a norm-critical attitude and are not steered as much by stereotypes any longer. According to her, it is crucial for the results that the preschool has a strong leader who is engaged and promotes change in operations.\footnote{Nørgaard 2021}

\section*{8.2. Børnehusene Kokkedal and Børnehusene Fredensborg}

Børnehusene Kokkedal has worked on gender equality in preschool since 2012. In 2013–2015, it took part in a project financed by the Ministry of Children, Education and Gender Equality ("Et attraktivt arbejdsfelt for alle"). The work continued in 2016–2018 with a joint development project on gender equality in learning ("Ligestilling i læringsmuligheder – normkritisk kompetenceudvikling på tværs") which also involved Børnehusene Fredensborg.

The project followed a norm-critical approach, focusing on the ways in which gender norms mould the educational learning environment. The project involved all of the 240 or so pedagogical co-workers at Børnehusene Fredensborg and Børnehusene Kokkedal in the Fredensborg municipality in northeastern Zealand. The project was financed by Velfærds- og forskningsfonden for pædagoger, BUPL, Pædagogisk Udviklingsfond and FOA Nordsjælland. After the completion of the project, both institutions continued their work on gender equality, now as an integral part of their operations.

\subsection*{Objectives}

The project’s goal was to promote gender equality, help children be girls and boys in many different ways and broaden the children’s opportunities to learn and participate in activities. Another goal was to test joint competence development with other institutions and gain experience of sharing good practices and knowledge in an effort to inspire others. In connection with the goal of ensuring an attractive work environment for everyone, a survey was conducted to determine how gender influences pedagogy and cooperation among the personnel\footnote{Voergård-Olesen & Hudecek Olesen 2015}. The goal was to achieve changes in the learning environment, not in the children, and to focus on the reflections, language use and action of the adults, with an eye on the curriculum.

\subsection*{Implementation}

Increasing the personnel’s competence was an important part of the project on equality in learning. A three-stage reflection process was introduced among all the employees to develop practically anchored norm-critical competence. The project involved consultants in the norm-critical approach who provided further training, workshops and leadership training. Informative events were also organised for the
parents. A joint working group with a representative from each preschool provided inspiration and support for the employees and supervisors.

In addition to training, the project also included practical assignments. The personnel reflected over their language use and actions and used an iPad to film their interaction with children. After the project, both institutions integrated gender equality into their regular operations. For example, Børnehusene Kokkedal has adopted a norm-critical approach in leadership. This year, the preschools' traditions will be surveyed from a norm-critical perspective.  

Experiences

The project showed that preschools do not become equal automatically. The personnel realised that much of language and daily preschool activities is influenced by outdated gender norms. For example, when the personnel filmed their interaction with children, they noticed that there were differences in how they treated girls and boys.

It proved useful to engage in comprehensive work involving several preschools and areas. Creating safe facilities for joint reflection was an important part of the project. The employees found that it was enriching to hear about the other participants' experiences and share their own reflections. At the end of the project, the employees and supervisors found they had become more interested in the children's own resources and interests, thanks to more expansive norms.

One of the challenges in the project was to convince teachers that while they could live by other gender norms in their private life, as professionals in the preschool, they are required to reflect on the impact that gender norms have on the opportunities, comfort, learning and development of girls and boys. Preschool teachers must be able to differentiate between the private and the professional, comply with the demands of policies and promote the goals set for educational activities in preschool. As shown by experience, this is easier when dealing with questions related to, for example, health and politics, but in the field of gender equality and gender norms, many insist on working according to their own view of gender.

8.3. Martha Hjemmet

Martha Hjemmet in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, caters to some 165 children. It has worked goal-orientedly to bring out gender norms in pedagogy and among teachers since 2016. The work has revolved around developing pedagogical practice, and the personnel have studied themselves and their understanding of norms.

The project on gender and diversity in the educational context (“Køn og mangfoldighed i en pædagogisk kontekst”) received financial support from Velfærds – og Forskningsfonden For Pædagoger, Marthafonden and Erasmus+. As part of the project, all permanent preschool employees participated in study visits to Iceland and Berlin in 2017. They became acquainted with the Hjalli model in Iceland, which involves compensatory pedagogy, and used it as the starting point for further

155. Hudecek 2021
156. Hudecek 2018
157. Avenstrup & Hudecek 2021
development. The project has ended, but Martha Hjemmet continues to work with gender equality and a norm-critical approach to integrate them into operations.\textsuperscript{158}

**Objectives**

The goal was to introduce the norm-critical approach into all operations and planning and make it an integral part of all activities. To achieve lasting gender equality work in all operations, the personnel included norm criticism in every point in the pedagogical curriculum and continue to do so. The goal is to ensure that every child can experience and gain access to all activities regardless of their gender. The teachers’ own gender norms are brought up, and the goal is to avoid the teachers’ gender steer their behaviour.\textsuperscript{159}

Another goal involves the personnel developing norm awareness so that pedagogy is based on research-based knowledge about gender instead of the employees’ own assumptions and attitudes regarding boys and girls.\textsuperscript{160}

**Implementation**

The norm-critical work carried out at Martha Hjemmet included Prism certification, education for the personnel and parents, study trips to Iceland and Berlin, the allocation of working time for learning more about the theme, as well as the publication of a book ("Giv alle børn flere muligheder").\textsuperscript{161} The personnel have also filmed and observed one another.\textsuperscript{162}

For example, the personnel have analysed stories from a norm-critical perspective, focusing on aspects such as looks, gender stereotypes and expectations. They have wanted to teach children to challenge and be critical about traditional norms. They have also devised a policy for gender equality and diversity displayed in the facilities to serve as a reminder of norm-critical values to the personnel and parents.\textsuperscript{163}

Martha Hjemmet has adopted the Icelandic model of hanging up collages of images depicting people breaking gender norms, such as women as pilots and men as nurses. Norm are kept in mind when purchasing books, games and toys. The personnel inspects the environment and does not furnish the facilities according to gender stereotypes concerning play and activities. The employees show by example how to break gender norms when they take part in games and play.

Language has also received attention at Martha Hjemmet. The co-workers have observed their own language use and that of others. Instead of commenting on the children's looks and clothes, they acknowledge the children in themselves. For example, if a girl arrives at preschool wearing a new skirt, the teacher might say: “I’m so glad to see you, and I can tell you are very happy about your new skirt”.\textsuperscript{164} Forms for parents no longer talk about mother and father but instead use the terms "parent 1" and "parent 2".\textsuperscript{165} The employees do not talk about girls and boys, or use the words he or she, but instead strive to call children by name.\textsuperscript{166}

\textsuperscript{158} Stevnhøj 2018, 9–10
\textsuperscript{159} Melgaard 2020, 45
\textsuperscript{160} Korsgaard 2018, 5.
\textsuperscript{161} Clarup, Hamilton & Padovan-Özdemir 2020, 16
\textsuperscript{162} Stevnhøj 2018, 11
\textsuperscript{163} Melgaard 2020, 45
\textsuperscript{164} Stevnhøj 2018, 11
\textsuperscript{165} Clarup, Hamilton, Padovan-Özdemir 2020, 16
\textsuperscript{166} Bøgelund Frederiksen 2018, 65
Experiences

At the beginning of the project, most of the employees believed they did not treat girls and boys differently. However, they soon began noticing situations where their language, interaction, thoughts and actions showed signs of gender stereotyping. They also realised that this restricted both girls and boys.\(^{167}\)

The personnel have gained a lot of insight during the project. Among other things, they have noticed that they used to comfort children in different ways depending on the child’s gender. Girls received more attention if they cried, while boys were often urged to get up and continue what they were doing. The employees have learned to give children the opportunity to make friends with other children irrespective of their gender.\(^{168}\) In addition, the employees noticed that often when talking to new parents, they addressed the mother when describing routines and always called the mother if the child fell ill\(^ {169}\).

Following the introduction of a norm-critical pedagogy, the preschool personnel noticed new aspects in operations, including the risk of their creating new norms. One of the teachers wondered whether families that did not comply with traditional gender norms might be valued more highly than the more traditional families. The employees therefore began paying attention to showing that they appreciated and valued diversity among families. It was important for the employees to reflect on their experiences with other personnel in order to reveal norms, learn from one another and pay more attention to their approach and how it affected the children and cooperation with the parents.\(^ {170}\)

The personnel strive to provide the same amount of support to the linguistic development of all children. The films indicated that they talked more to girls and engaged in a more nuanced dialogue with them than with boys. Relationships between children began to be prioritised over their belonging to a specific gender. Children are no longer divided into groups of an equal number of girls and boys, but instead the personnel try to ensure that the children enjoy one another’s company regardless of gender.

Based on experience, it was a good decision to use the curriculum and didactic models as tools in the process. Since gender equality and equal treatment are part of them, the personnel had to take these aspects into account in concrete activities.\(^ {171}\)

The employees have also understood the importance of dialogue with parents. An idea that came up later was that the parents who were not present at the parental meeting where specific topics were discussed could have been contacted later to discuss matters separately with them. Dialogue among the personnel has also been an important way of uncovering and challenging aspects that are considered to be self-evident.\(^ {172}\)

\(^{167}\) Korsgaard 2018, 4
\(^{168}\) Stevnhøj 2018, 11
\(^{169}\) Mølgaard 2020, 45
\(^{170}\) Bøgelund Frederiksen 2018, 66
\(^{171}\) Clarup, Hamilton & Padovan-Özdemir 2020, 16–17
\(^{172}\) Stevnhøj 2018, 11
8.4. Jordkloden

Jordkloden is a preschool with 32 children in Nørrebro, Copenhagen. It has worked with a norm-critical approach since 2013 and still continues its gender-aware activities. At the end of 2017, Jordkloden became the first preschool to receive the Prism certificate. In 2020, its certificate was renewed.

Jordkloden’s efforts to develop norm-critical operations are a continuous process that includes the assessment and updating of new methods.

Objectives

Jordkloden wants to provide different types of educational activities to children, regardless of their gender. This is hoped to provide children with greater opportunities for developing their personal and social abilities. The idea is to create an environment where children feel safe being themselves, where they can make friends across gender boundaries, and where they can express their gender, age and ethnicity in many different ways.

Implementation

Jordkloden’s work aimed at developing norm-critical activities is an ongoing process. The purpose is to evaluate the preschool’s own model and update it with new methods. In addition, the work is ongoing because it is required to support new employees, students, families and children.

Jordkloden has a policy for gender, body and sexuality, which serves as a guideline and a tool for norm-critical work. It includes concrete methods for the personnel, such as avoiding stereotypes and offering all children activities, games and toys, avoiding gender-stereotyping children, as well as letting and encouraging all children to every now and then be strong, helpful, thoughtful, and so on. The policy encourages the personnel to try activities they usually do not do, such as mounting a shelf, playing football or making a bead necklace. The employees also try to call both parents in turn and instead of making assumptions about family composition, they ask straight questions when the child is being introduced to the activities. The personnel take a critical stance on any gender-stereotyped expressions made by the children or co-workers and try to offer other manners of expression.

Experiences

According to the teachers, the Prism certification has brought many new dimensions to their gender equality work. In connection with certification, they have drawn up an action plan that contains more themes than the policy for gender, body and sexuality. The plan makes it easier to present their norm-critical work to new personnel.

In their feedback, one parent said that after the preschool began to focus on gender, gender became an increasingly invisible part of daily life. That is precisely what the work is about, say the teachers at Jordkloden: the importance of gender declines when you take a norm-critical approach to it. Jordkloden is often contacted by parents who want their child to go to a preschool free from gender stereotypes. Students and other institutions also want to hear more about their experiences.

173. Børnehaven Jordkloden
174. Stubager Bæk & Bagger Rødvig 2018
8.5. Work material and methods


9. Studies and reports

In this chapter we map studies and reports made in the Nordics from 2010 onwards. The studies brought up in this chapter have been strictly limited to ones about early childhood education and gender equality. Each study's abstract is presented here as compactly as possible. The studies are grouped together by themes, however most of the studies could be mentioned below several headlines. Despite our best efforts the list is not complete and is most likely missing several recent studies on this theme. The complete list of the studies referred to in this chapter can be found from the Annex 1 from the end of this report.

9.1. Gender equality in curriculums, governance and research

Karlson’s & Simonsson’s (2011) article explores how discourses concerning ‘gender-sensitive pedagogy’ in Swedish preschools may construct pedagogical practices and how these practices are supporting the formation of specific gendered subjects. The study focuses on two books from 2003 with guidelines which are frequently used by preschools who work with gender-sensitive pedagogy. Writers assume that these types of guidelines produce and maybe reproduce ideas about particular ways of being normal and right in this gender-sensitive pedagogy. Lappalainen’s & Odenbring’s (2019) article provides a meta-analysis of what characterises existing ethnographic research on gender and class in the context of Nordic early childhood education. The authors look at research on education and gender or social class in the Nordic countries published in Nordic and non-Nordic scientific journals as well as PhD theses published in the Nordic countries. The analysis suggests that even though Nordic countries have a reputation for being ‘role model countries’ in terms of equality and social justice, gender and especially social class have rarely been explicitly the focus of ethnographic research in the context of early childhood educational research.

Paananen’s, Repo’s, Eerola’s and Alasuutari’s (2019) study focuses on what is talked about when discussing equality in the context of ECEC and how these issues are conceptualized in local-level policies. Equality is seen for example as equal fees and equal access to services in the interviews of the local ECEC policymakers in Finland. Also gender equality and deconstructing gender norms are mentioned as important from the children’s point of view. All in all, the paper shows that commitment to equality work at the local level seems vague and unfocused.

Gender equality, equity and gender sensitive education are to be promoted in ECEC according to Finnish National Core Curriculums for ECEC (2018). Eskelinen’s and Itäkare’s (2020) article focuses on local curriculums and the different kinds of gender equality discourses that can be read from them. The main result from this qualitative research is that gender equality discourse is quite strong but the way forward towards gender equality on ECEC is still ambiguous and remains unspecified on local curriculums. Hence there is a need for more concrete guidance in planning, implementation and evaluation of gender sensitive pedagogy.
9.2. Gender equality in the practices of ECEC

Hellman’s (2010) research focuses on how gender is constructed through social processes among children in preschool in Sweden. The study explores how norms related to boyishness are negotiated among children in their everyday activities. It is concluded that the importance of belonging to a specific gender is accentuated in specific spaces, but less so in others. The study brings out the crucial importance age also has for small children in processes of negotiating and naturalizing two different sexes and the importance of being gendered to be understood and normal. In a later article Hellman (2011) explores how gender is given specific meanings in different practices in preschool among children and adults. The article discusses where and when gender stereotypes are reproduced and where and when they are given less relevance, and gives didactic suggestions in order to promote cooperative relations between girls and boys.

Odenbring’s (2012) article focuses on how gender is constructed in a Swedish preschool class focusing on episodes of boys’ and girls’ actions. The results indicate that the boy’s actions are more encouraged by the educators, while the approach to the girls’ actions is more ambivalent. In the other article from 2012 Odenbring explores how gender categorization is expressed in conversations. The results indicate that gendered categorizations have different meanings depending on the context.

Odenbring and Lappalainen (2013) explore educational practices in terms of the transition from pre-primary education to compulsory schooling based in three educational institutions in Finland and in Sweden. The data reveal particular evaluations on children in terms of their ways of acting and being constructed as ‘ideal’ and that these evaluations are often based on expectations of essential differences between boys and girls.

Hellman’s, Heikkilä’s and Sundhall’s (2014) article reveals how norms about age intersect with gender and analyses the relationship between gender, incompetence and notions of “the baby” from ethnographic material conducted over the course of two years in two Swedish preschools. The results show the importance of age for young children as they negotiate and naturalize the notions of two different genders and how important it is to be clearly gendered in order to be understood and considered normal.

Hardardottir’s & Petursdottir’s (2014) article aims to shed light on gendering in preschool. It analyzes the opinions and beliefs of preschool teachers with regard to boys and girls in one Icelandic preschool, and how gender performative acts are manifested in the preschool’s children. For the study one preschool was observed for one school year. The main conclusions suggest that “gendering” is prominent within the preschool. There is a strong tendency among the preschool teachers to classify the children into categories of boys/masculine and girls/feminine, and specific norms direct the children into the dominant feminine and masculine categories, thus maintaining and reinforcing their gender stereotypes. The children used symbols such as colors, locations and types of play as means to instantiate the “girling” and the “boying”.

Shutts’s at al. (2017) explore how early social environments affect children’s consideration of gender. They studied 3- to 6-year-old children who enrolled in gender-neutral or typical preschool programs in Sweden. Compared with children in
typical preschools, a greater proportion of children in the gender-neutral school were interested in playing with unfamiliar other-gender children. In addition, children attending the gender-neutral preschool scored lower on a gender stereotyping measure than children attending typical preschools. Children at the gender-neutral school, however, were not less likely to automatically encode others’ gender. The findings suggest that gender-neutral pedagogy has moderate effects on how children think and feel about people of different genders but might not affect children’s tendency to spontaneously notice gender.

Hreidarsdottir’s (2018) article describes action research in 2013–2014 intended to monitor a developmental project on gender equality and fairy tales in a preschool in Akureyri. The goal of the action research was to empower the teachers as professionals and further their skills to develop their own teaching methods by systematically paying attention to the project and revising it, especially the participation of the children and their contribution. The findings show that through this process the teachers became more aware of their views and ideas regarding gender equality, as well as their own teaching methods. It also became clear that it was crucial for the process that the teachers took initiative in the teaching, for instance by taking the opportunity, on a daily basis, to encourage the children and find new ways to draw attention to equality and inequality and to maintain interest and new perspectives. The findings also indicate that children’s participation in systematic discussion increased with time but this ability decreased fast if it was not maintained.

Fröden’s (2019) article further develops the theoretical concept, situated decoding of gender, by showing how the material and spatial dimension of the educational practice and the teachers’ actions contribute to establishing and maintaining this process in an early childhood educational setting. It is argued that the process emerges and is maintained by three main factors: (a) the preschool’s physical environment, (b) the regular and repetitive structure of the educational practice and (c) the consistent actions of the teachers in the everyday practice.

Meland’s and Kaltvedt’s (2019) article investigates how gender manifests itself in Norwegian ECEC based on observations made in 20 ECEC institutions by students. The results show that staff contribute to upholding traditional gender stereotypes in kindergarten. Girls and boys are treated differently; girls and boys challenge prevailing gender structures while kindergarten staff simultaneously conform to gender stereotypes.

Heikkilä’s (2020) article aims to describe and find ways to understand the practical gender equality work that is going on to promote gender equality in preschools in the Nordic countries. The material consists of 59 interviews, policy document analyses and preschool visits in the Nordic countries and autonomous territories. The results show that policy level work that seeks to strengthen the overall quality of the schools comprises aspects that strengthen gender equality. The results also show that there are hardly any examples of schools or municipalities that have systematically worked with gender equality. The effects of gender equality work in preschools are therefore difficult to evaluate. The material clearly indicates that in the Nordic countries and autonomous territories there is no standard or uniform approach or method for working with gender-related issues in preschool practice. The question can also be whether there even should be?

Pálsdóttir’s & Jóhannesson’s (2020) article explores the practice of gender equality
education in the oldest age groups in Icelandic preschools. The findings are reported in three thematic groups. The first group contains four main themes: how the children dress, role models, stereotypes about sex roles, and gender division. The second group comprises six themes: books, what appeared on the walls, blocks, jigsaw puzzles, role play, and rough and tumble play. In the third group, there are three themes that concern the preparation and situation of preschool teachers; gender equality policy, and the call for gender equality education for teachers and other staff. Although the authors witnessed positive examples in relation to gender equality work, the overall conclusion is that work promoting gender equality education in the six preschools was scarce and coincidental, and most often not preplanned. But there was a keen interest, among some teachers, in selecting appropriate play materials. It is vital that municipal and other authorities assume institutional responsibility for gender equality education. Furthermore, the preschools need a high level of support for enhancing this area of practice. This does not only apply to preschool teachers but also to other staff in the preschools who do not have professional education.

Johansen’s (coming up) dissertation in the making will give important information on gender equality in Faroese ECEC. The aim of the study is to find out how children navigate and participate in ECEC and home as the two main contexts in their lives, and to what extent gender discourse affects their opportunities to act and participate in the two contexts with adults and peers. The study has an ethnographic approach and includes participant observation and interviews with children, ECEC staff and parents in ECEC institutions and homes on three islands.

9.3. Gender, sexuality, heteronormativity and families

Rossholt’s (2012) dissertation focuses on the becoming body in a preschool context, with special reference to the youngest children. The articles include observations about a play where children pretend sweethearts, how some discourses constitute the children’s gendered bodies and how adults are also engaged in, and respond to, these processes. Adults talk “sweethearts” into existence with joy and some adults even call some girls and boys sweethearts when they see them playing together. All the children have to relate to this story made up by adults, even though they may not be involved in it themselves. The play scenes Rossholt witnessed included boys hitting girls and girls pushing a boy on the floor and trying to kiss him. Other articles focus on children’s relations as embodied and material, and show how children become material subjects through various tempos and energies, and how they learn to regulate their movements with the help of practitioners. Huuki’s and Renold’s (2015) article focuses on a short video-recorded episode in preschool play in northern Finland where three boys pile up on and demand a kiss from a girl classmate. Through this episode they analyse the complexities of children’s gender and sexual power relations. Huuki explores this theme also in the articles published in 2016 and 2018. The latter one focuses on boys and abuse of power.

Sotevik, Hammarén & Hellman (2019) discuss age-coded heteronormativity in their article where they explore how 3- to 6-year-old children (re)produce, (re)negotiate and challenge heteronormativity in a Swedish Early Childhood Education setting. Positions in the play are gendered, age-coded and played out through a
heteronormative family metaphor. The results suggest that researchers, policy
makers and practitioners need to be more observant on what children are doing and
how they create meaning and engage with norms and normativity. Being observant
on children’s positioning may hence enable practitioners to present and offer
children more and various, not only heteronormative, subject
positions. Sotevik’s (2021) dissertation investigates relations between sexualities,
children and childhoods. Children’s play and meaning-making during the school day
are studied using participatory observations. Sotevik also analyzes preschool policy
documents to investigate in what way ‘sexual orientation’ is discussed in relation to
discrimination and equal treatment, and teachers are interviewed on the subject of
working with LGBTQ+ certification and norm criticism in preschool. The results
indicate that children normalize heterosexuality by (re)producing heteronormative
family and couple discourses in their family play and wedding play. At preschool,
representations of ‘sexual orientation’ are primarily focused on families and family
constellations, rarely mentioning interactions among the children. Queerness in
relation to childhood emerges, at the same time, as something that is demanded
and questioned. The child is used as a space for negotiation of society’s values,
disguised as the question of what is good or bad for them. Queerness is
made conditional through, for instance, desexualized love and family discourses. Age
norms, in this case norms of children and childhoods, are significant for how, when
and with which arguments queerness is represented.

Hellman (2019) explores how norms and values about Swedishness are
negotiated through discourses about ‘real’ families, among three to five-year-old
children and their teachers in a Swedish preschool. Focusing on teachers’ work with
the theme ‘family’ the article draws attention to the way certain values and norms
are labelled as ‘Swedish’ and directed towards children (and their families) with
immigrant backgrounds.

9.4. Gender, agency and discipline

Odenbring’s (2010) dissertation aims to study constructions of gender in educational
institutions. Odenbring argues that the use of children as sub-teachers consists of
different functions where gender constructions emerge in different
ways. Odenbring also analyses and discusses the importance of non-verbal actions
and how the actions are important resources of how gender is expressed. The
analysis shows that the teachers’ use of gendered categorisations lead to
constructions of social hierarchies based on gender. Also, the children are part of this
in their use of categorisations in child-to-child interactions as a way of positioning
themselves. Odenbring (2014) continues to explore how the task of being a teacher’s
assistant can be critically understood in terms of how gender, discipline and order
are expressed in different duties in daily practice. The results show that both boys
and girls conform in the role as a teacher’s assistant. Another way of establishing
order and discipline is to place girls next to noisy boys. This duty
is reserved for the
girls’ only, in contrast to the teacher’s assistant task.

Hellman (2012) explores inclusion and democracy focusing in the interplay between
children. The study illuminates the complex relationships between solidarity and
gender transgressions as well as for gender stereotyping. Situations, in which gender
was not emphasized or actualized as an important category, gave children
opportunities to try out highly gender-marked positions and provided opportunities
for girls and boys to play together. The possibility to do so seems to be connected to the ability to be safe from the normative gaze of other children or adults. In order to gain democracy it will be necessary, on the one hand, to counteract normalized gender stereotypes and on the other, to work in order to promote a more inclusive environment in preschool. **Dolk's (2013)** dissertation looks at the power relations between children and adults in preschool in the context of educational activities intending to increase gender equity, social equality, and participation. The study examines democracy and the tensions and conflicts that occur in this context. The focus is on children’s resistance and on “unruly children” who challenge us to revisit and improve our educational aspirations in gender equity, social equality, and participation.

**Paju’s (2013)** dissertation analyses agency as constituting of non-human as well as human actors through a careful ethnographic study of everyday life in day care. The human body needs assistance, for example when children are not able to dress the outdoor clothes by themselves. The long hair of the girls and dresses with buttons on back require that adults help even when the girls are capable of dressing on their own. In these situations, the girls get to be close to the adults and talk with them. Furthermore, the organising of space, furnishing of the rooms and placement of toys divert children from adults and girls from boys. These all have an effect on the emotional experiences of closeness and contact with other people. **Virkki’s (2015)** dissertation focuses also on children’s agency and participation in the activities of an ECEC institution. In the research it is found out that gender-based culture is one aspect that causes inequality and limits children’s individual opportunities and choices. Traditional gender norms and gender stereotypes were seen both in the adult’s and children’s thinking. Gender defined what children wanted to do in the daycare center, what songs they wanted to sing and how spontaneous play groups were formed. Boys had more chances to affect the practices of the daycare center for example by building up their own play worlds whereas girls used more ready-made play places often associated with care. In adult’s interviews they defined their pedagogy child-initiated but they had gendered assumptions and expectations about children. They also didn’t always recognize the interactions and initiatives that children shaped the activities with. **Rantala’s and Heikkilä’s (2019)** article looks for a deeper understanding of how children’s agency is performed as a constantly gendered social activity and how this is affected by the guidance they receive from teachers. The results show how agency, gender and guidance need to be understood as relational processes when highlighting aspects of children’s social life in ECEC.

**Siipainen’s (2018)** dissertation about intergenerational relations, governing and subjectification points out that categorizing children based on age and gender is one way to govern children. One key result of the study is the “naturalness” of the age and gender categories which means for example that they were not questioned by either the children nor the adults. Gender was vastly on display both verbally and structuring everyday life of the day-care center. The adults used a lot of gendered speech when talking to children calling them girls and boys but also by other gendered terms like miss and little mister. In daily activities play groups formed mainly by gender when formed by children themselves but also when formed by adults. Adult’s assumed and expected different kinds of behavior and play from children based on their gender. **Siipainen** also discusses the meaning of gender and age in 2017’s article.
9.5. Equipment and environment

Leppänen (2010) critically analyses Finnish children’s music culture in the 21st century. Leppänen notices that often boys and men are active and have a main role in children’s songs. They have adventures around the world whereas women and girls have passive roles and they often stay at home. Songs about boys are happy and often in major key. Songs about girls are sad and often in minor key.

Thordardottir’s (2012) research took place in two preschools in Reykjavík with four- to five-year-old children. The focus was on the children’s point of view, using children’s narratives along with the children’s references to literature and popular culture while playing. Interviews with eight teachers and survey data from 81 parents were intertwined with the observation data. The findings indicate that children’s literature and popular culture include gendered descriptions of people’s attributes and practices. While children compared this material with real life experience, they made their own inferences to construct gendered knowledge and meanings. The teachers believed they contributed to equality in the classrooms by focusing on each child as an individual, independent of gender, and explained gender differences as essential. Findings from the survey indicated that parents’ choice of children’s literature and popular culture in their homes was based on their children’s gender. The problem is discussed further, focusing upon how implications of children’s gender can hinder the possibility of their working on subjects they are most interested in, but understood by them as unsuitable for their gender. Thordardottir continues to explore this theme in the 2017's article in English. Thordardottir (2015) works with the same data about how preschool-children used their knowledge of literature and popular culture in free play, including if and how such knowledge related to their gender, ethnicity and parents’ education, as well as how it affected their social status among their peers. In a broader sense the article creates new knowledge regarding how children’s literature and popular culture can serve as resources for preschool teachers who want to emphasise equality and reduce cultural and social discrimination in preschools. The findings shed light on how different access to children’s literature and popular culture at home, together with given opportunities to express this knowledge at preschool, can contribute to gender and cultural stereotypes. Girls’ knowledge seemed to be molded by stereotypical ideas of relationships and femininity, while boys’ knowledge appeared to be based more on ideas of heroism and masculinity, and boys only confirmed other boys’ contributions while the girls confirmed input from both boys and girls.

Lande’s & Arneberg’s (2013) book explores girls and power in children’s and young people’s literature. The book includes chapters studying fictional portrayal of girls but also chapters about authorship, gender studies and research history.

In Heikkilä’s & Ärlemalm-Hagsér’s (2015) chapter preschools are seen as practices that play an important part in shaping children’s identities and offering them possibilities for learning. Indoor environments at ten preschools from different parts of Sweden are analyzed based on photographs accompanied by short descriptions of the indoor environment. The analysis shows how a good childhood is constructed in preschool and in what ways gender and age - explicitly or implicitly - inform the preschool practices. Also Børve’s & Børve’s (2016) article focuses on the impact of the physical environment and construction of play culture in Norwegian ECEC. Based on a case study, the study explores employees’ perception of indoor
physical environment and children's play. The findings reveal that gender is interwoven in the physical environments and materials. Children's play practices are associated with gender and perceived as setting different requirements for physical design. These play practices are anchored to different rooms and create a connection between rooms, zones, and gender. In addition, play practices produce and reproduce the employees' ideas of gender.

Lindberg's, Schaeffer's and Heikkilä's (2018) study aims to provide further insight into the impact of contextualized and materialized norms and values in educational social innovation, using a remodeling process of preschool facilities in a Swedish municipality as a case study. The study seeks to ensure equal and inclusive play, learning and development. The study shows that the contextualized norms and values of equality and inclusiveness confront material and immaterial barriers of gender and other social factors in preschool facilities. Lindberg's, Heikkilä's, Schaeffer's & Nordquist's (2020) article continues to investigate social innovation processes of Swedish preschool remodeling that aims to enhance equal and inclusive learning and play.

Heikkilä's (2020) research aims to develop updated knowledge on how gender is done in play and how toys can be seen as having an amplifying or moderating effect on gendered relations. The analysis on what role toys play in children's gendered play reveals that the toys can be placed in two main categories – interpreted toys and interpretable toys. The study shows that what kind of toys children are using has an impact on how gender relations and play situations develop, and thereby on boys' and girls' learning boundaries.

9.6. Gender, science and technology

Hedlin's & Gunnarsson's (2014) study explores how students training to be teachers in Swedish preschools view both the technology education they themselves received during their school days and their future task of teaching technology in preschool. Many students describe a boring technology education which made them, as girls, feel marginalised. However, there were also those who felt quite at ease with their technology classes. Nevertheless, the students, regardless of their former experiences, have a positive attitude towards the task of teaching technology. The students stress that technology in ECEC should be something that children and preschool teachers explore together. Also Andersson et al. (2020) examines pre-service preschool teachers' university science education experience in two Swedish universities. The study describes the preschool teacher education program as a tension between different cultures, where there is chafing at the borders. The gender order is a significant aspect, cooperating in chafing between science and preschool culture and is in a way double present by the masculine coded science versus the feminine-coded preschool culture together with the gender of these students. An awareness of these different cultures and the chafing between them can be an asset in teacher education for all participants. If the students develop gender awareness and gain knowledge of sociocultural aspects of science, it may also help reduce chafing. Gullberg et al. (2017) report how 47 pre-service teachers during their preschool placement in Sweden identify events related to gender and emerging science. Two dominant discourse models were identified from their reflections: The Discourse Construare, where pre-service teachers assumed that children have
potential interests in a variety of subjects, and The Discourse Essentia, where children were regarded to have a stable core identity. The analysis found a connection between pre-service teachers' views of the child and whether gender stereotypes were reproduced or counteracted. The Discourse Essentia is in conflict with the goal in the Swedish national curriculum that all children should learn science. The study discusses how the different discourses affect whether children are stimulated or inhibited in their emerging science activities and interests. Based on the results, the researchers have designed a model illustrating a process for gender-aware teaching.

Andersson’s (2012) article illuminates teachers’ conceptions of gender and science and possibilities to challenge these conceptions. A group of teachers in Sweden met approx. once a month in two-hour seminars to discuss and develop their instruction in science and technology based on a gender perspective. The core group consists of three kindergarten teachers, one recreational teacher and one math/science teacher for grades 1–7. The results show that the teachers’ ideas about gender/equity and science exist on several levels, within which various conceptions are represented. On the one hand, “reasoning around similarity”, where teachers consider that both girls and boys should have the same prerequisites for working with science. In contrast, stereotypical conceptions of girls and boys occur when the teachers evaluate their activities with students, and condescending attitudes toward girls are also observed. The girls’ ways of working with science are not as highly valued as the boys’, and this outlook on children can ultimately have consequences for girls’ attitudes towards the subject. When teachers are allowed to read their own statements about the girls, they get “a glimpse of themselves”, and their condescending ideas about girls are made visible. In this way, the teachers can begin their active work towards change, which may lead to new outlooks on and attitudes towards students. Areljung, Ottander & Due (2017) explore if and how teachers combine practices of science and of preschool (children 1–5 years old) into preschool science practice. The focus is on how teachers’ talk constructs and relates to possible ways of gaining knowledge and reaching explanations of phenomena in preschool science. The analysis builds on two concept pairs often associated with gender as well as knowing: objective-subjective and logical-intuitive. The results show that several ways of knowing are possible in work with science content in preschool. These include ways of knowing more associated with subjectivity, such as ‘individual liking’ and ‘whole-body perception’, as well as more associated with objectivity, such as ‘noticing differences and similarities’. Furthermore, the results show that the teachers’ talk moves readily between possibilities associated with femininity (subjective and intuitive) and masculinity (objective and logical). This indicates that the teachers in this study have found ways to handle science in preschool that goes against presumed tensions between science and preschool practices.

In Hallström’s, Elvstrand’s and Hellberg’s (2015) article they investigate gender and technology in free play in Swedish ECEC. The results showed that girls and boys learn to approach and handle technology differently. For girls building often had a special purpose whereas for boys building was an end in itself. Teachers didn’t have an active role supporting free play involving technology nor did they give children equal opportunities to explore and use non-gender-stereotyped material and toys. One important implication was that in-service education needs to address gender issues and how teachers can create equal opportunities for boys and girls in free play. Heikkilä’s (2020) article presents an analysis of a case study in Sweden of how
teaching and learning programming in ECEC is done and the analysis elaborates on gender aspects of this. The results show both how programming creates great interest amongst the children, illustrated by children's patience and willingness to follow the content of the sequences, and also how programming risks becoming more boy-friendly in educational practice. Günther-Hanssen's (2020) dissertation aims to explore how scientific phenomena, together with other human and nonhuman agents in preschool, participate in and co-create gendering processes as well as children's emergent scientific explorations. The results show that, if and how children get to engage with emergent science is linked to if and how they manage to occupy space and co-act with different materials. The children's emergent scientific explorations are always part of larger, gendered processes. The importance of highlighting how science in preschool can be "done" in various ways is also discussed. Otherwise there is a risk that the false picture could be created that some children are more "suitable" for science, while others are created as "less suitable".

9.7. Development and gender

Meland's, Kaltvedt's & Reikerås' (2015) article discusses how 2-year-olds cope with various everyday activities as observed by kindergarten staff from a gender perspective in Norway. The results reveal gender differences favoring the girls: the girls scored significantly higher than the boys at all levels. The results showed that certain children are able to master everyday activities on their own, whereas others may achieve mastery with the assistance of others. The attitudes, expectations and participation of the staff may have influenced the recording of the observations, which may, in turn, have given the girls an advantage in mastering certain everyday activities. Meland, Kaltvedt & Reikerås (2019) continue to explore the same data in the article where they examine how toddlers cope with various play activities from a gender perspective. The results show gender differences again favoring girls in most play activities: in trying out toys, having a varied play repertoire, emerging pretend play, playing with other children, initiating play on their own, staying in play, turn-taking in play, engaging in construction play, activity in pretend play, participating in play like hide-and-seek, and getting carried away in pretend play. However, there were no gender differences found in solitary and parallel play, engagement in rule-based play, advanced construction play, and independence in rule-based play. Moser's & Reikerås' (2014) article discusses motor-life-skills in 33 month-old children in Norwegian ECEC institutions and compares the findings with the results from a similar British sample. They used The Early Years Movement Skills Checklist that consist of four distinct categories; self-help skills, desk skills, general classroom skills and recreational/playground skills. The Norwegian sample of (younger) children revealed relatively high motor competence compared to the slightly older British sample. Indications for cultural differences are possibly in line with stereotypical expectations of the Norwegian and British ECEC systems. Gender-based differences in favor of girls were documented supporting the assumption that gender differences in motor competency may be highly task-dependent.

In Stangeland's, Lundetrae's & Reikerås' (2018) study staff in Norwegian ECEC institutions observed language comprehension, word production, and participation in adult-driven language activities in 33 months olds toddlers. Significant gender
differences in favor of girls were found in all aspects explored. Children with high language scores participate more in language activities than children with low language scores, and boys are overrepresented in the last-mentioned group.

**Aunio’s, Heiskari’s, Van Luit’s & Vuorio’s (2015)** study investigates how early numeracy skills develop in ECEC-age children. The participants were 235 Finnish children and the measurements were conducted three times during one year. At the time of the first measurement, the average age of the children was 6 years. The results showed that differences in mathematics skills among children are already visible in ECEC before formal primary education in mathematics starts. In the study no significant difference in performance between girls and boys can be observed, either within the groups or across the sample. This slightly contradicts the authors’ previous study with a larger cross-sectional sample, which showed that girls had better early numeracy, especially in relational skills. **Salomonsen & Reikerås (2019)** examine gender differences in the early mathematical skills of children at risk of developing mathematical difficulties in Norway. Of a total sample of 1091 children, children who scored low at 33 months with the assessment material were observed. The results showed no gender differences in the total scores. When distributing the scores into quartiles within gender, there were gender differences in one quartile in favor of the girls. The results showed that two-thirds of the low-performing toddlers were boys.

**Drange’s & Rønning’s (2017)** article estimates effects of child care center staff composition on early child development. During the data covered years, ECEC in Oslo were oversubscribed, and slots were allocated through a lottery. This allowed the researchers to explore how staff education, experience and stability, as well as proportion of male and immigrant staff, affect the cognitive development of children whose parents initially applied for the same center(s), but where children got offers from different institutions. The results show that children who get their first offer of child care enrollment in a child care center with a higher share of male staff, perform better on tests in language and mathematics in the early years of school.

**9.8. Adult’s discussing gender**

**Moe’s & Nordvik’s (2012)** article traces how gender discourses manifest in the stories written by staff in two kindergartens in Norway. The main findings of the analysis show discourses that emphasize gender as a difference, and gender as complex. Various gender discourses provide different opportunities for children to participate in different activities in kindergarten.

**Markström’s & Simonsson’s (2011), Alasuutari’s and Markström’s (2011) and Alasuutari’s (2016)** articles focus on parent-teacher conferences in Finnish and Swedish preschools. **Markström’s & Simonsson’s** article investigates the discursive constructions of preschool girls and points to how girls are positioned, assessed and constructed by adults. The analysis reveals that gender is an important aspect of the adults’ talk and indicates that a practice like parent-teacher conferences contributes to and distributes conventional and traditional gender roles in the existing preschool context. **Alasuutari’s and Markström’s** article shows that in adults’ discussions in both Sweden and Finland gendered assumptions are classified as basic elements of
preschools institutional order. For example, expectations and requirements regarding boys and girls are produced differently and assumptions about child's peer relations and play are deeply gendered. Alasuutari's study focuses on parents’ and ECEC professionals’ discussions about what it means to be a little girl or a boy and how ECEC aims to raise children in different ways of being girls and boys. On the other hand, the discussions show that in some aspects the expectations towards children are similar but on the other hand children’s genders and gendered interpretations come up regularly.

Sandström, Stier and Sandberg (2013) asked 17 preschool teachers in Sweden to describe the situations revolving around gender issues that they have experienced. In all, 34 critical incidents were described and later discussed in groups. The study reveals that gender pedagogy can be enacted on different levels of understanding, and that there are discrepancies between rhetoric and pedagogical practices. Albeit preschool teachers are well aware of what to say about gender, they are less confident when it comes to acting in pedagogical interaction. The differences in understanding of how to work with these issues were categorized for four typical gender approaches that may exercise influence on the children’s identity process. Edström’s (2014) article aims to describe and analyse the preschool pedagogues’ constructions of work on children’s gender equality through statements and discussions in interviews and documents. The discussions revealed a number of different, even contradictory, discourses relating to gender equality work. The pedagogues position themselves as ‘lead characters’, and children as ‘recipients’ or as ‘girls’ and ‘boys’ who are to be treated either as unique individuals or as two uniform opposing groups. Emilson, Folkesossen and Moqvist–Lindberg (2016) explore what gender beliefs and gendered values can be identified in ECEC practitioner’s talk when discussing gender issues in group interviews. The study shows that practitioners mainly believe that the preschool is responsible for challenging traditionally gendered behavior and for promoting gender neutrality. However, researchers found value dilemmas. On the other hand, practitioners emphasize children’s individuality but on the other hand they have gendered beliefs for children’s behavior. Another dilemma was related to the curriculum goals. On the one hand practitioners struggled to promote gender equality and on the other hand to take the child’s perspective and interests into account.

Meland’s (2020) article explores ECEC-teachers' attitudes toward gender through a transformation of the classic fairy tale 'The Princesses and The Pea'. Findings that are based on interviews indicate that the teachers are not concerned with gender stereotypes in fairy tales. There is a lack of reflection and none of the teachers try to give children a more open-minded perspective about how boys and girls are portrayed. The study reveals that teachers have stereotypical expectations of gender roles.
9.9. ECEC-teacher education

Kreitz-Sandberg’s (2016) article provides an outlook of the praxis on selected Swedish university programmes for preschool teacher education and teachers in extended education. The article describes how gender perspectives can be systematically incorporated into university teaching through curriculum design and constructive aligned teaching. The article discusses whether the described pedagogical practices and gender inclusion in higher education have the potential to promote (preschool) teacher students’ systematic acquisition of values, knowledge and skills as a precondition for improving sustainable pedagogical practices. Kreitz-Sandberg’s & Lahelma’s (2021) article explores the rationales and practices when working with issues of gender equality in Finnish and Swedish teacher education. The comparative methodology facilitates understanding examples from two neighboring countries, illustrating different ways to develop policies and strategies. The study suggests that gender equality cannot be achieved overnight; appropriate strategies need to be negotiated constantly in specific national and institutional contexts at universities and teacher education institutions.

Hedlin & Åberg (2018) start from the notion that the number of women in preschool teacher education is seen as unmanageable and problematic. They discuss, using examples taken from Swedish preschool teacher education and preschool student teachers, how these types of ideas are important in the preschool and the preschool teacher education, and what consequences occur not only for the educators but also for the children in preschool. By highlighting different situations where the stereotypes of ‘chattering women’ and ‘fussy girls’ are repeated, the article demonstrates that these stereotypes should not be dismissed as outdated and trivial. The stereotypes are still alive and active. They diminish both women and girls, and it is therefore critical that the preschool teacher education is attentive to them. The article argues that gender stereotypes hinder the curriculum’s aim to counteract traditional gender patterns.

Emilsen’s, Lysklett’s & Nordli’s (2020) report for Dronning Mauds Minne Høgskole maps out if there is a greater number of men dropping out from preschool teacher education and gives an overview of dropouts among male students at DMMH. Three cohorts of first-year students in 2016–2018 were examined. The survey shows that the dropout rate is high and most of the students drop out during the first year of study. Slightly more men than women drop out but the difference is not significant. In the study it was revealed that men got more positive feedback on their study choice. Emilsen & Lysklett (2020) continue to explore male dropouts at DMMH in an academic article. Men quit their preschool teacher studies to some extent more often than women and the main reason given is wrong study choice.
9.10. Men and ECEC

**Hedlin’s & Åberg’s (2013)** article explores how Swedish students understand the talk about recruiting more male preschool teachers, and how they agree with or challenge dominant notions of femininity and masculinity through their understanding. The results show that gender stereotypes and common-sense phrases are both adopted and challenged in the students’ discussions. Many students, both female and male, welcome male teachers because men are expected to add something to preschools. Furthermore, male teachers are widely appreciated in a way that female teachers are not. However, other students, both female and male, highlight and question the simplification that often comes with the call for more men. These students question the one-sided focus on gender and object to the gender division that may occur in gender-mixed work groups. **Kasin’s & Vaagan Slåtten’s (2015)** article highlights the goal of 20 percent male employees in Norwegian kindergartens as a contribution to promoting gender equality. The analysis shows how male employees can be understood in several ways that promote gender equality. At the societal level, several men in kindergarten can be seen as part of a liberal policy to promote equal rights and opportunities for labor force participation. At the institutional level, gender equality depends on activities in the educational program. At the individual level equality can be understood as practices among each employee that prevent stereotyped gender understanding. The research indicates that exclusive focuses on the representation of male employees in kindergartens are likely to conceal rather than to clarify a need to develop educational practices that promote gender equality. **Peeters, Rohrmann & Emilsen (2015)** question the persisting gender imbalance in ECEC and analyze ambivalences regarding more men in the field. Based on recent gender theory, efforts and limits of strategies for more male students and workers in ECEC in Belgium, Norway and Germany are discussed. It is concluded that deeply held gendered attitudes and practices in the field of care and educational work with young children have to be put into question. More space in ECEC for embodied subjectivities is needed to overcome essentialist conceptions of differences between body and mind, women and men. **Koch & Emilsen (2017)** aim to investigate the connection between the number of men working in ECEC and the incidence of outdoor play. In addition, they explore whether outdoor activities attract more men as ECEC workers, and reflect upon whether outdoor preschools are an arena for recruiting men to the ECEC profession. **Heikkilä** has written two articles (2016 & 2018) examining seven Swedish municipalities that are working to recruit more men to work in preschools. The aim is to identify different ways of recruiting men and to effect a change in the gender imbalance among the staff in preschools. **Heikkilä’s, Isaksson’s & Stranne’s (2020)** article stresses the importance of understanding that women and men in gender-segregated programmes experience their gender minority positions very differently. The data consists of individual interviews from underrepresented students from four different programmes from a university in Sweden. One of the programmes is the pre-school teacher programme where 5% of the students were men. Being in a gender minority position means always being visible in some sense. The “visibility scale” presents how women are more likely to express negative experiences of visibility compared to men who express visibility as something mainly positive and/or report experiences.
that could be described as neutral. Heikkilä’s & Hellman’s (2016) article wants to understand how men who study preschool teaching negotiate masculinities. Semi-structured interviews showed two main themes for negotiation: “becoming and being a breaker” and “coping with sticking out”. Eidevald’s, Ljunggren’s & Thordardottir’s (2020) article looks closely at the relationship between professionalisation and men’s career trajectories by examining this aspect of men’s narratives, both persisters and dropouts. Men’s formal training in ECEC helps them gain legitimacy, although their small numbers in the university departments occasionally lead to isolation and mistrust. On the job, men stand out as a rarity, and this draws both positive attention as well as suspicion, which casts doubt on their professional functioning. Persisters explained how their work satisfaction depended on adequate professional development through positive collaboration, support from the management, and male role models.

Johansson, Hedlin & Åberg (2018) study how students perceive that the question of touch is handled in Swedish preschool teacher education through surveys and interviews. The results show that the informants felt that their interests and needs were not met. Instead, they were forced to take their own responsibility for raising the issue. The results are discussed, for instance from a gender perspective. The men in the program are more affected by the lack of a clear place for touch in the program. Åberg, Hedlin & Johansson (2019) continue to study touch based on interviews with 20 women and men who recently started working in preschools, or who are soon to graduate as preschool teachers. Building on the notion of relational touch, the article shows that concerns over touch involve much more than the physical act itself. Relations among teachers, parents, children, management and policies are actualized in the informants’ narratives that are also tied to notions of gender and gender equality. The article shows that anxiety over touch is not gender-specific. The concept of relational touch is suggested as a tool to gain a nuanced understanding of the worries that especially newly educated preschool teachers can experience in relation to touch. Johansson’s Åberg’s & Hedlin’s (2021) later study examines how future and newly graduated preschool teachers relate to touch between preschool teachers and children. The results from questionnaires and interviews show that informants’ attitude toward touch in the organization is closely linked to the participant’s gender. Males reported feeling more vulnerable to suspicions about sexual transgression, while most females found themselves protected from suspicions because of their gender. The gender differences were not significantly tested because the male group was too small for meaningful inferences to be made. The study points out that if we are to secure and safeguard professional and sensitive touch between educators and children, we must be aware of and understand the gender coding of the preschool teacher profession.

Eidevald’s, Bergström’s & Westberg Broström’s (2018) aim is to describe and analyze how men, working in Swedish preschools, position themselves in relation to pedophile discourse. The results from interviews of 25 men show two dominating positions: (1) giving up and (2) maneuvering the pedophile discourse. The study suggests that men do not have the same ability to develop professionalism in childcare as women. However, by overcoming the fear of the pedophile discourse, these men create ‘new discourses’, where men can be viewed as caregivers. Hedlin’s, Åberg’s & Johansson’s (2019) study focuses on the interaction between educators and children investigating gender-specific beliefs about male preschool teachers. The empirical material consists of interviews. The results show
that “the fun guy” and “the possible perpetrator” are two gender-specific positions that male informants are subjected to. The article discusses how men take up and resist the two positions, and argues for the need to further challenge gender stereotypes in preschools. Hedlin’s & Åberg’s (2019) study describes and analyses how preschool directors reason about the parental suspicion and concern that male educators can encounter because they are men. The empirical material consists of interviews with 10 preschool directors. The study shows that preschool directors experience that parents want male personnel to refrain from performing certain tasks in the preschool. Some of the directors take a principle-based approach and emphasise that men and women should carry out the same work duties. Other directors maintain a dialogue-based approach, focusing on conducting a dialogue with concerned parents.

9.11. Reports

Heikkilä’s (2013) report aims to spread knowledge about how teachers, preschool teachers and school staff work to promote gender equality in a number of kindergartens, preschools and schools in the Nordic countries and the autonomous territories. It also aims to disseminate good examples and give inspiration for further promotion of gender equality in preschools and schools around the region. The results show, first, that the gender equality work of the Nordic countries differs, and it cannot be said that there is an existing common Nordic model for how gender equality in preschools and schools is best promoted. It is very clear that the regulations and formulations concerning gender both in the national and local policy documents for the school plays a role in what kind of promotion work exists locally. The report edited by Heikkinen (2016) reports from the project, funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers, where participants gathered and compared data on current ‘promising practices’ relating to gender equality promotion at schools and ECEC in each Nordic country. The project identified six promising practices for furthering gender equality in education. The report includes chapters introducing legislation, education, resources and good practices from Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Sweden and Norway.

Hoel’s, Johansen’s & Renolen’s (2010) evaluation report soughs knowledge about how ECEC-institutions follow up their responsibility for gender equality in Norway. The material shows that gender equality is an area of awareness amongst ECEC practitioners and managers, and the majority of the surveyed says that equality is implemented in local plans and annual reports. At the same time, document analysis of annual reports shows that a low percentage of the reports have enshrined gender equality. Moreover, the qualitative interviews refer to a fracture in the gender equality consciousness between a structural and a practical level. In stories of everyday life in the ECEC there appears to be signs that suggest an absence of gender awareness. Regarding men in kindergartens the material shows that about half of the kindergartens in the survey have carried through actions to increase the number of men. The most widely used measure is advertisements encouraging men to apply. Opheim’s at al. (2014) report presents and discusses the results of an evaluation of gender equality in Norwegian ECEC. Evaluation is based on a survey for managers, interviews with ECEC managers and employees as well as academic staff and students at two universities and registry data about the proportion of
male employees. The results show that the main impression from interviews with managers and employees is that of gender equality as a topic that is not very active in the kindergartens' everyday activities. Gender equality seems to be a theme that to a large extent is taken for granted. Meanwhile the staff mentions several examples of situations where they have encountered gender stereotypical attitudes or behavior. On the other hand, results of the kindergarten managers’ survey indicates that gender equality has a place in the kindergarten’s daily work. The overall impression from the interviews in kindergartens and at university colleges is that of support for the goal of increasing the proportion of men in kindergartens. Both women and men want a working environment with greater gender balance than is often the case today. There is also a clear perception that children benefit from having both men and women as caregivers in the kindergartens. Although the proportion of kindergartens with at least one male employee varies in the different parts of the country, all parts of the country has had an increase in the proportion of male employees during 2009–2013. The results indicate no automated link between the higher percentage of men and greater focus on gender equality. Generally, there seems to be a perception that men and women have similar work tasks. Meanwhile, interviews reveal that tasks such as maintenance, washing and tidying, and other tasks less related to the kindergartens’ core tasks, often follow traditional gender role patterns. Norges offentlige utredninger’s newest report about gender equality challenges among children and youth is published in 2019. The report maps gender equality challenges in society including ECEC and proposes different measures and instruments to increase gender equality. The measures related to ECEC are such as establishing a Gender Equality Secretariat for ECEC and schools, strengthening knowledge about gender equality and norm critical thinking for ECEC and schools and adding more gender equality perspective and support materials to teacher education.

Reisel’s, Skorge’s & Uvaag’s (2019) literature review explores gender segregated educational and occupational choices in Norway. One chapter takes a look on how ECEC contributes to strengthening or counteracting gender-segregated choices and another chapter presents the measures implemented to influence gender-segregated vocational and educational choices from kindergarten to higher education between 2008–2018. The measures in ECEC have been grouped in three categories: (1) emphasis on gender equality in framework plan and emphasis on science skills, (2) more equal pedagogical practice among ECEC employees through courses or pedagogical tools, and (3) recruitment of men to ECEC. Norway’s public reports (Norges offentlige utredninger 2019) published a report about gender differences in school performance and education. The report states that based on research early childhood is a crucial period to counteract stereotypes – early intervention has a greater effect than compensatory measures later. Research shows that when gender differences in different skills occur before school starts, and there is little evidence that ECEC contributes to evening out these differences, there may be a reason to look at the ECEC’s content when focus is on school performance.

The report made by Alasaari and Katainen (2016) for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Finland maps Finnish legislation and other steering documents, studies and good practices in the point of view of gender equality in ECEC. The report also points out the possibilities of bringing gender equality planning to ECEC.

Padovan-Özdemir’s & Hamilton’s (2020) report presents a quantitative and a
qualitative analysis of a questionnaire survey conducted among ECEC leaders in Denmark in 2020. The purpose of the survey was to gain knowledge about the scope and content of pedagogical work with diversity and equality in the ECEC institutions. Two of the learning objectives in the Strengthened Pedagogical Curriculum imply a focus on diversity and gender equality, but the study generally indicates that the pedagogical work with this focus is not very widespread in the Danish ECEC. The survey should be used as a starting point for a larger intervention research project that examines how equality and diversity can be incorporated in the development of local evaluation cultures using norm-critical and norm-creative perspectives. Danish Ministry of Education's (Undervisningsministeriet 2016) report identifies challenges regarding gender equality in ECEC, primary and secondary schools, youth education and educational guidance in Denmark. The aim is a better understanding of gender equality in the life of educational institutions. The report raises three questions from ECEC: the amount of men working in ECEC, special rules for male staff some preschools have that are a symptom of stigmatization and suspicion of male staff and lastly the gender stereotypes children may encounter and how they affect children's future.

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen 2017) has examined the Swedish preschool’s work with gender equality. The overall purpose is to shed light on whether the children are offered a preschool activity where girls and boys get opportunities to try and develop abilities and interests without limitations based on gender stereotypes. The observations and conclusions apply to the 24 principals and 36 preschools that have been examined and thus do not intend to give a national picture of the situation. The review is mainly based on qualitative methods, such as document studies, self-evaluation, observations and interviews. The results show that the gender equality mission is not clear and well-defined in preschools and may therefore not be used in a visible way in daily work. Rather unsystematic gender equality work takes place in preschools and there is a risk that stereotypical gender norms and gender structures are passed on to the children.
10. Concluding words

A great deal of positive work concerning gender equality, gender and norms has been carried out in the Nordic countries and the autonomous territories in the past decade, and the work continues. As an inspiration for more comprehensive and systematic gender equality work, we have compiled a checklist based on the experiences from the projects and operations discussed in this report.

8 experiences and tips

**Expose** We often think we are more equal than we actually are. The less knowledge and experience the personnel have of working with gender equality and norms, the less aware they seem to be of their own gender-normative expectations and behaviour, as well as of how gender affects children’s opportunities in preschool. It is important that the personnel observe themselves and one another. Observations and surveys of material and activities in the preschool facilities expose unequal, restrictive or excluding norms. Making these visible is the first step in work aimed at making operations more equal.

**Education** Knowledge is important. Regularly increasing the competence of the entire personnel has led to good results. A norm-critical approach focusing on gender as well as the other grounds for discrimination has been found to be successful. Competence can be increased with the help of experts in the area or with the help of literature, work material and studies. A lot of material has been published in the Nordic countries, and it can be very useful in the work, as described in this report.

**Role of management** It is necessary for the management to be involved, to supervise, provide resources and lead the operations. Support from the municipality in the form of training, leadership and assignments has also proved to be important. It can be difficult for the preschool director to lead the work all alone. Joint efforts with the head of development, supervision and competence-raising inputs are effective.

**Legislation and policies** Gender equality must be a requirement, a task that legislation, curricula and policies require to be integrated into pedagogical work and that the personnel comply with. This makes work more systematic, far-reaching and widespread in preschools. It is much more than isolated, sporadic work in preschools where passionate individuals drive it.

**Gender equality planning** For the work to have far-reaching structural effects and be able to permeate all educational activities, the environment, space and materials, it is important to follow a structured approach and integrate gender equality into all operations. A project can serve as a good starting point, but continuous efforts with an action plan make the activities long-term in nature. It enables the participants to survey the present state, determine the measures required to reach the goal of gender equality and equal treatment, as well as regularly assess operations.

**Engagement** It is important to involve the children and their parents or guardians in
the entire process. If the parents and guardians have been well informed, they often have a more positive attitude to the work and can also support it in preschool and at home. Children can be involved in the process by including them in the planning, implementation and assessment of operations.

**Preventive work** Work aimed at preventing violence or focusing on personal and physical integrity, as well as knowledge-building about the diversity of gender and sexuality are considered to be good, preventive activities.

**Continuation** To achieve a greater impact, gender equality work should continue at school. If the school is gender-normative, there is a risk of the children gradually adapting to it. The work carried out in preschool can have an impact on school and children’s later choices.

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Nea Alasaari & Sara Sundell

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The Nordic Council of Ministers
Nordens Hus
Ved Stranden 18
DK-1061 Copenhagen
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