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Challenges and areas of interest when developing gender mainstreaming teaching

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In 2011, the Swedish National Agency for Education initiated a national project to test and try out teaching methods that focused on achieving gender mainstreaming in preschools and schools in Sweden. With a mandate from the Swedish government, preschools and compulsory schools could apply to enhance gender equality in their institutions. The participating preschools and schools were required to cooperate with colleagues and other school staff in order to try out different methods aimed at achieving gender mainstream teaching. The national project was mainly carried out during the spring of 2012 and the project was completed that autumn. This paper presents the results from this national development endeavour and reflects on the educational, gender related challenges such a project raises. The aim of this paper is to show what a national project can achieve, and what effects a relatively short project can hope to have, in terms of teaching and teachers' level of knowledge concerning gender mainstreaming.

The aims of the national project reported here were several. The overall aim of the national project was to provide each child and student, regardless of gender, with equal opportunities for achieving their educational goals. This is how it was formulated in the different national curricula. Concerning the more precise aims for the project, the purpose was to start to introduce and implement gender mainstreaming at schools by finding methods for gender mainstreaming that could be tried and used locally. As a consequence, a further aim was to develop examples of best practice in teaching that would promote gender equality at schools.

This paper presents the results of the project, including some examples of approaches and practices that schools and teachers used. The results of the project vary a lot, which shows that the level of knowledge within the area of gender equality is very context related. There were great differences concerning how teachers and schools understood the project's focus. This, I claim, can be understood as a consequence of considerable differences between teachers and schools regarding knowledge of how to work with gender equality within changing organisations. This also made it hard to generate examples of best practice or to find out what methods are useful when practicing gender mainstreaming.

Not much has been written, in an academic context, on gender mainstreaming with empirical examples from schools as a basis for an analysis. This paper examines both how a national project on gender mainstreaming at schools was



received, and how the concept of gender mainstreaming was interpreted by the teachers and schools that took part in the project (see also Hearn, 2012).

The project on gender mainstreaming

The intention of the national project was that teachers, working together with one or more colleagues through a form of peer learning, would examine and develop working methods and practices that promote gender equality through gender mainstreaming in their school. Participating teachers around the country were formed into groups. Teacher groups in the same region formed one group and, for each group, the National Agency hired a facilitator whose job it was to coordinate and lead the group's meetings and drive the process forward. The purpose of the regional meetings was to provide an opportunity to exchange experiences and provide support for the work done by teachers. A final seminar was held at the end, with the aim of sharing experiences from the project.

Gender mainstreaming as a general method for gender equality

Sweden, amongst other countries, has followed an international agenda where gender mainstreaming is the main method used for the promotion of gender equality (Hearn, 2012). In Sweden, gender mainstreaming has been adopted as the main method to achieve gender equality in society, and this has been manifested through the production of several brochures and documents that have been widely distributed (see, for example, Gender mainstreaming manual: A book of practical methods from the Swedish Gender Mainstreaming Support Committee; Swedish Government Offices, 2007; Gender equality in public services: Some useful advice on gender mainstreaming: A book of ideas for managers and strategists from the Swedish Gender Mainstreaming Support Committee, 2007; Just progress!: Applying gender mainstreaming in Sweden!, 2006). These publications have, in different ways, contributed to strengthening the general level of knowledge around gender mainstreaming. The extensive body of gender research that is produced in Sweden has also contributed to this (Lykke, 2009).

Despite this, we can see great differences in the level of knowledge around gender mainstreaming and in actual practical changes aimed at achieving gender equality in society in general. Gender mainstreaming, as a method, is time consuming and requires solid foundational knowledge of how gender processes work in society and in different contexts – schools and education being one.

In Sweden, gender equality is well regulated by law. But there are several areas in society which, in practice, do not show gender equality. Policies and laws support gender equality, but, in order to achieve the gender equality that is expected, there is still much that needs to be changed. And the question that needs to be raised is – whether it is ever possible to achieve gender equality, since gender equality can be seen as the expression of an individual's subjective feeling in an ever-changing society. Maybe the more precise question would be – what kind of gender equality can we achieve?



Gender mainstreaming has first and foremost become a tool for practitioners to use in their daily work for gender equality. Hearn defines gender mainstreaming as *part of a dynamic and ongoing interaction between feminist policies and practices* (Hearn, 2012, p. 13). Over the last seven years, the Swedish government has spent more than 250 million Swedish crowns (around 30 million euro) on initiating projects to achieve gender mainstreaming in society.

For preschools and schools, gender mainstreaming has become a new way of approaching gender equality, despite the fact that there have been regulations around gender equality in the Swedish school system since the late 1960s (Wernersson, 2011). In practice, gender equality at preschools and schools has been considered only as an issue of school values, seldom related to what children and pupils are able to actually learn (SOU, 2010, p. 99). Gender mainstreaming at preschools and schools is, therefore, said to be “didactic thinking with a gender perspective”. This means that teachers in their everyday didactic work also should include gender as a perspective in the didactic decisions and choices they constantly make (Paechter, 2007).

Anne-Charlotte Callerstig, Kristina Lindholm, Karin Sjöberg and Lennart Svensson (2012) have shed some light on the theoretical background to gender mainstreaming in Sweden. In Lindholm’s book (2012), several papers give a well formulated background to Sweden’s work on gender mainstreaming, which can be considered authoritative. Callerstig, Lindholm, Sjöberg and Svensson (2012) highlight the term ‘sustainable’ as significant for the understanding of the rationales behind gender mainstreaming as a general idea. According to Callerstig et al. (2012), sustainability is the focus for all gender mainstreaming in organisations. It takes time to implement gender mainstreaming with the purpose of contributing to the organisation’s way of handling gender related issues in such a way that both employees and customers find themselves included in the work of the organisation. This is also the case for preschools and schools that work with gender mainstreaming. The overall purpose for implementing gender mainstreaming in a school organisation would be to live up to the aims formulated in the national curriculum, namely that all children and pupils, independent of gender, should be able to feel included and free to express themselves unrestricted by gender norms.

All who work in the preschool should uphold the fundamental values that are set out in the Education Act (2010:800) and in this curriculum, and should clearly dissociate themselves from anything that conflicts with these values. The ways in which adults respond to girls and boys, as well as the demands and expectations imposed on children contribute to their appreciation of gender differences. The preschool should counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles. Girls and boys in the pre-school should have the same opportunities to develop and explore their abilities and interests without having limitations imposed by stereotyped gender roles. (Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 98 Revised, 2010, p. 4)

In a paper in Lindholm’s (2012) anthology, Hannes Frizen and Johanna Sjons (2012) describe developmental work undertaken in the city of Gothenburg that aimed to mainstream gender into municipal services. They discuss two different ways of dealing with the same kind of gender dilemma, one where a preschool’s



way of promoting gender equality became the removal of what they called symptoms of a gender dilemma, while the other school worked on how to understand the cause of certain symptoms related to gender in the school.

Frizén and Sjons (2012) call the solution models chosen by the schools to handle their dilemmas *customs track* and *change track*. The customs track meant that while handling the dilemma, they only highlighted what *actions* they wanted to change in order for the dilemma to disappear. This is what Frizén and Sjons (2012) call “not about how to alter the structure”. The change track meant that more time and effort was put into trying to figure out why the dilemma had arisen. The change track also included finding a solution that not only tried to change a pattern of behaviour but also included getting everyone to work together and find ways forward. This applied not only to individuals with so called ‘bad’ behaviour.

Frizén and Sjons (2012) describe a preschool where teachers discovered that only boys played with the bikes in the yard. The girls did not do that at all, which meant that, after a period of discussion, the staff initiated ‘the boys day’ and ‘the girls day’ with the bikes, so the girls could also get access to them. By doing so, they adapted a prevailing power structure, only addressing the symptoms of a dilemma, without finding out what the real cause of it was and the reasons why the situation occurred in the first place. This is, then, a typical example of *the customs track*.

Frizén and Sjons (2012) describe the change track using an example from an elementary school with grades seven to nine. It was discovered, when mapping the school, that the girls there felt more unsafe than the boys did. For example, the space with table tennis that the school provided was used by boys more than 90 percent of the time. The girls mentioned that they did not feel safe in those spaces. What was the gender jargon at the table tennis tables? The school began to listen seriously to students' ideas about leisure materials. The recreation staff also realized that the leisure materials they bought were not consciously chosen, and favoured the boys' interests. By changing the procedures for purchasing leisure material, they could also change the structures regarding who had access to what and whether it was gendered or not. By changing the activities, they managed to change, rather than adapt to the current structures, and everybody was able to feel both safe and included in leisure time activities.

Methodology

In this paper, an analysis of a web based questionnaire is combined with a discourse analysis of the final documentation of a national project concerning gender mainstreaming in Swedish preschools and compulsory schools undertaken in 2011-2012. The term ‘school’ is used to describe both preschools and compulsory schools. The results of the analysis are presented in three parts, where the first two parts concern the analysis of the questionnaire and the third part concerns a discourse analysis of the final documentation. Through analysing the way participants describe the work they have conducted in the course of the project, the discourse analysis focuses on finding the ways they understood gender mainstreaming (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). The descriptions of the work the participants conducted is seen as a way of



understanding what they considered both as needed to be done when doing gender mainstreaming, as well as what methods are to be used. The analysis focuses, therefore, both on what content they have aimed at changing, and on what methods they have used.

One hundred and seventy six teachers and 44 principals from 32 Swedish municipalities participated in the project. In total, 57 schools participated; some municipalities had more schools represented than others. Five process leaders led fifteen groups of between four and twenty teachers in each process group. Teachers from all grade levels participated, but most teachers who attended came from preschool classes to grade three (41 percent) and grade four to six (34 percent). Grade seven to nine teachers accounted for 19 percent of the participating teachers and nearly 30 percent of the participating teachers came from the high school.

In this project, teachers worked together with their colleagues on how education was designed (Kress & Selander, 2010), what different designs mean for girls and boys, and how teaching can be improved when gender is mainstreamed. Questions that teachers were given to keep them focused on gender issues during the project were, for example: Is there a difference between interest, attitudes, performance, the way a question is answered or asked? Are there gender differences in treatment or in education? Were they giving different time and attention to the boys and girls during lessons? The teachers worked with these issues by talking to one another, visiting each other's lessons and analyzing and identifying the differences. The aim was for them to develop and test new approaches and methods for teaching with gender mainstreaming in focus.

Fifty four groups of teachers completed their final documentation. Fifty four final documentations have been analysed in this paper. Each piece of documentation was between three and twenty pages. The final documentation all had the same textual structure, which came from the Swedish National Agency for Education and was provided to every participant group. Teachers did not write individual documentations, but wrote together with colleagues.

After a final conference held for the participants in September 2012, the Swedish National Agency for Education carried out a web based questionnaire consisting of 20 questions. This was sent to the participants. Ninety five individuals completed the questionnaire and the response rate was 69.3 percent.

In the following part of this paper, the results of the analysis will be presented. The results of the analysis are presented in three parts; the first two parts concern the analysis of the questionnaire and the third part consists of a discourse analysis of the final documentation. The presentation of the results starts with a presentation of how the work was organised. This is followed by a presentation of how the participating teachers experienced the focus areas of the project and, finally, the result presentation will focus on what was actually done.



1. Results concerning school organisations and changing practices

In order to achieve gender mainstreaming, the school organisation had to show a willingness to change in terms of, for example, commonplace talk about girls and boys, of expectations regarding girls and boys and of teaching methods – on the whole, the didactic reflection (that was mentioned earlier). Raising knowledge is one method often used as a first step to achieve this, as shown later in this paper.

One of the questions in the questionnaire was concerned with how the project was organised locally, that is, if participating teachers were given time for joint planning and evaluation by the school's management. An established and clearly defined local organisation has been shown to be crucial for the achievement of long term, sustainable change towards gender equality (Heikkilä, 2013).

The results indicated that it is more likely for time to be found to devote to this kind of project if there is already work with gender equality in place at the school. The survey responses showed that, among the participant schools, there were examples where gender work permeated the whole school, but there were also schools where this type of work was completely new. Many comments in the questionnaire also showed that there were many teachers and schools who did not address gender issues, or that this was done on a very small scale and with little organisation. In those schools, it was hard for the participating teachers to work with gender mainstreaming and find sustainable methods.

The principal's role in the project

The survey responses showed that the principal had a crucial impact on how the work progressed and how participants perceived the project. The responses range from the comment: "The principal is always sympathetic and also proud of our work," to: "The principal has not given us the backing we had expected".

Other comments showed the principal's important impact on this kind of value-based work. The example below shows how important and critical his or her attitude and opinion on development work is:

It's been okay to employ substitute teachers when I have been going to the meetings, but there has been no extra time for writing or reflection. The principal has just been happy that someone else is responsible for the area.

This means that, although the principal provided economic resources to pay for substitute teachers while the project was running, this support has been limited. The comment also shows that this participant has felt that the principal has handed his/her responsibilities to the individual teacher.

The principal did not want me to go!

This principal has clearly shown how unwanted this work has been. If a principal does not support an endeavour of this kind, it is most likely no change will



happen. One teacher's interest cannot carry out the change of an organisation (Heikkilä, 2013).

2. Results concerning the project's impact on education, and on teachers' knowledge on gender

The participants in the national project were asked different questions in a web based questionnaire. The results of the participants' answers are presented here, in order to discuss the possible impact a short project can have on teaching and gender equality.

Thirty four percent of the participants believed that the project contributed significantly to the teacher's ability to work with gender issues at schooling in new ways. The vast majority, 55.3 percent believed that the project contributed to this to some extent. Ten percent of the respondents indicated that the project very much had contributed to them working at new ways of teaching. Some of the respondents indicated that the project would be pursued and evolve further during the following year. Participants also responded by saying that they had a more focused attention on gender stereotypes occurring in teaching, for instance, when something is seen as 'girly', why is that so? Teachers also claimed that they discussed more gender issues with their students, and that they have become more critical of their own gender approach. They mentioned that they would not dare to claim, anymore, that they are gender aware in their teaching.

One teacher, who was at the beginning of her/his career, reports that s/he used to take academic gender classes while s/he was studying to become a teacher. S/he stressed that the project has given her/him the opportunity to channel his/her commitment into teaching and also receive advice from more experienced teachers, and thus relate to colleagues with the same interest in gender issues. Another aspect that was raised in the questionnaire was the importance of understanding that gender engaged teachers are not alone. Many answers in the questionnaire showed the importance of finding 'allies' and building networks with others.

Ninety two percent of the respondents believed that participation in the project affected how they will work in the future. Some of the comments concerning this were as follows:

My whole teaching role has changed. I hope to have more time set aside in my post for overall gender work at school.¹

Yes, but there will be no drastic measures. You have to change your behaviour, and it is often the details that should be carefully thought through.

¹ These are comments from the final documentation that was sent to the National Agency. It is, therefore, impossible to trace back who could have said these things. These quotations will stand for themselves.



In different ways, these two teachers showed how they were affected by the project and what awareness raising and knowledge development they have been part of.

According to the responses from the survey, the project also helped to increase the participants' understanding of the significance of gender in education. Fifteen percent of participants indicated that this had occurred to a very high degree, and 30 percent to a high degree. The fact that nearly half of respondents indicated that this only occurred to some extent can be explained by the fact that many chose to comment on this in the open answers. Some reported that they already had a good knowledge of gender issues but that they had not previously been able to work practically with them, and that this was the project's major contribution. However, there were some answers that showed the widening of participants' knowledge. The following quotation may serve as an example: "I am more aware that gender should not play any role in the daily work. Unknowingly, I have though thought that girls cannot do certain things. But of course they can." This teacher shows that, to some extent s/he has reached a kind of gender aware reflection, and s/he also dares to reveal mistakes s/he thinks s/he has made. This shows that the project has encouraged new thoughts.

Teachers describe the experiences that they had while working within this project concerning gender issues at schools. One teacher noted that s/he sees that the children are much more aware of the categorization girl - boy than s/he thought, and that they have well informed gender-related discussions on such topics as that boys can have pink sweaters but they do not read books about horses. Another teacher also described how, through the project, she started to involve students more in the everyday work, and that this has been very rewarding, with regard to the climate in the classroom where more pupils seem to feel more included and safer. One teacher chose to film her/him self as a method to observe the 'real' practice and to see the mistakes s/he believed s/he did. S/he also chose to see the filming as a learning opportunity in how s/he 'did gender'.

Some other teachers described how they became aware of how educational materials and different textbooks unthinkingly highlight men and masculinity. Another teacher discovered how many of her/his colleagues were unaware that there was inequality in schools and classrooms. One comment demonstrates this:

The literature that we offer at schools could be one step in some gender promotive work, and we should make sure school textbooks are gender neutral, and also remember the importance of always making sure that 'every second is a woman' in the teaching situation, for instance as a general rule in the examples used.

This teacher reflects how gender mainstreaming can be carried forward by promoting awareness in relation to school text books and how gender neutrality can be a way of obtaining gender equality through gender mainstreaming.



Several teachers also described how they caught sight of their different expectations regarding girls and boys and how they manifested themselves in the work of the school. One teacher's way of putting this is as follows:

When my colleague and I compared our assessment of the students we realized that we actually had considered the results differently and that this could be deduced from the student's sex. A real eye opener!

Another teacher described how, at her school, they investigated how the linguistic space in the classroom was distributed and thus saw how unevenly distributed the verbal and linguistic space was.

3. Results concerning ways of understanding gender mainstreaming, and how it turns into practice

In this project, 'gender mainstreaming' has spawned into a variety of ways of understanding and interpretation, which becomes subtly visible in the project. Gender mainstreaming can be different things in different practices, relating to the needs of the user. In this part of the paper, I will present a discourse analysis of the participating schools' final documentations, including: discourses with regard to gender mainstreaming were found in the final documentations; how gender mainstreaming was understood by teachers; and what ways teachers worked with their educational practices in order to achieve gender mainstreaming.

It has been possible to unravel four categories of understanding from the documentation. The categories that emerged, after analysing how teachers and schools interpreted what gender mainstreaming at schools in practice could mean, were:

- **Gender Mainstreaming with a *focus on content***

Gender Mainstreaming has been understood as being about the content in the subject taught. The participants tried new and different ways to include gender perspectives in the content of their teaching. Awareness raising was a major method that time was spent on.

- **Gender Mainstreaming with a *focus on language***

Some participants included language development, writing, and reading assessment as a focus for gender mainstreaming. Language development, generally speaking, was seen by some as an important tool to ensure that both girls and boys were included in the teaching and to ensure that girls and boys developed nuanced language skills.

- **Gender Mainstreaming with a *focus on inclusion***

Some participants developed an inclusive approach to gender mainstreaming. They found that gender equality in teaching was about forming teaching, both the content and structure of teaching, so that everyone could participate and be



included in the classroom and in learning. They then focused on examining general teaching methods.

- **Gender Mainstreaming as the *teacher's attitude***

Some projects focused on the teacher's attitude and how the teacher's different thoughts and expectations with regard to boys and girls were always towards equal teaching and gender mainstreaming.

How were these modes of understanding and interpretations of gender mainstreaming formulated into concrete projects by the teachers at the different schools? The analysis of the final documentation shows three methods regarding how to achieve change. Adopting three methods - (1) training and awareness raising; (2) systematically improving the quality of teaching and (3) by discussing the boys' school dilemma - the participating schools thought they had changed to become more gender mainstreamed in their schooling. This was done either by focusing on course content, language, inclusion or the teacher's attitudes, that is, the categories developed earlier in this paper. These methods and approaches show, in different ways, how the teachers and the schools changed these interpretive categories into practical gender equality promoting work. Each method will be exemplified below with a way of working in practice.

1. Training and awareness-raising

Most of the work that was actually carried out in this project focused on gender training or awareness-raising. Various forms of training and awareness-raising activities, creating school/classroom surveys and analyses of teaching became a basis for creating common knowledge regarding gender dilemmas in teaching at the school in general. In this study, the analysis of teaching materials and textbooks was seen as an awareness-raising effort. A group of teachers analyzed maths books together with their pupils, focusing on gender, and found different presentations of men and women that they had not seen before. The teacher filmed these conversations and discussions, and they were analyzed with respect to what gender norms they could reveal.

Several schools created and used questionnaires for the students. This was a way to spot students' views on gender-related issues at school and to catch sight of their opinions and thoughts about this, and then to have something to work on in teaching.

Another teacher studied her student's texts to see if the prejudices s/he herself conveyed were seen in the student's texts. Through the discussion with colleagues, this teacher realized she had an inner belief that girls wrote in a more careful way in their notebooks and that the boys did not write so carefully. Moreover, she realized she held the belief that there was a difference in the ways boys and girls wrote with regard to readability and clarity, where the girls would have finer and more legible handwriting. S/he could see, when analysing the girls' and boys' textbooks, that the performance was consistent with reality, but that there was also a reason to nuance the picture of a strong gender difference. The teacher also noted that girls generally used more words and wrote more than the boys did. S/he tried to let students use the computer to write their texts. One of the boys, who had only written a few short notes by hand, now wrote whole stories. Through this awareness raising, s/he was able



to adapt her/his teaching so that the approach used in teaching supported all the students' learning needs.

2. Systematically working on improving quality of teaching

Some teachers have been working on ensuring that gender equality would be part of their teaching systematically, and not only temporarily. They explored this way of thinking about teaching as a way to generally improve the quality of their teaching.

One teacher filmed her/his teaching by having a camera standing in the classroom. After filming, s/he looked at her/himself and analysed what s/he had done and said from a gender promotive perspective. S/he then made changes, filmed her/himself again and analyzed the results again. For her/him, this was a way to raise her/his own awareness of what was happening in the classroom, and of the teacher's control over what took place in the classroom. The same teacher edited both films, added comments on what s/he thought should be improved, and shared the films with her/his colleagues through YouTube. S/he could, thus, both improve the quality of these lessons with regard to gender equality and her/his own teaching in general, and also discuss this with her/his colleagues.

Another group of teachers started to pay attention to play patterns. They realised that the girls and the boys never played together. The play was clearly gender segregated. They wanted to find ways to influence and broaden children's play habits. The teachers' desire was that children would find a sense of security and pleasure in playing and interacting with peers of both sexes. Teachers conducted a survey among the children about what they liked to do during spare time, and then tried an idea that could broaden the children's play patterns. They tried to create a 'play lottery', where children drew a card during play time and maybe got the same play card as someone they seldom played with. Different constellations of children started to appear and, according to the teachers, the group of children became more secure with each other. The teachers saw this as improving the overall teaching practice, thereby also the quality of teaching.

3. The boys

Many teachers involved in this project have raised questions around the dilemma of so-called underperforming and/or problematic boys. Regarding this group of boys, just as with any other category described, there were conflicting pictures presented here relating to 'how boys are'. One of the group of teachers believed that boys who did not want to write with a pen and paper would want to write more if they could write on the computer. In the work they did, this group found, contrary to what they assumed, that this was not the case, and, instead the results made them think differently regarding the didactic choices that they made. (This actualises the need of examining what needs are to be covered locally. In an earlier example, letting boys write on computers was a successful method, but in this local context, it was not.) Another group worked with literature they clearly thought would strengthen the boys as a group, even though all the students were included simultaneously in the project.



A group of teachers discovered that the boys in their classes thought that they did not have the capacity to solve the tasks set, and saw that the boys had an inability to assess the scale of the task and the teacher's expectations on performance. The same teacher group claimed that this was sufficient information to make them begin reviewing their didactic considerations. After this, they changed some forms of examination so that they also allowed students make presentations orally, both in groups and individually, and, at the same time, they began to be more direct in their feedback to all students. Teachers drew this conclusion about their findings and changed ways of working: "It has been easy to come up with concrete positive feedback to the students after each lesson. We have striven to give at least twice as much praise as proposals for improvement. Students have responded positively to this and a positive mood has spread in the classroom." Concerning the workload, the same teacher added: "We have spent more time than usual in giving responses, but the workload has been perceived as reasonable and we have got back some time and energy insofar as we have avoided chasing up work that students would never have done before."

Some conclusions and reflections concerning early childhood education and gender mainstreaming

In this paper, different gender related projects and different ways of trying approaches and methods for gender mainstreaming have been highlighted. Although most of the methods and approaches here have not primarily been just connected to early childhood education, I see very strong connections to education as a whole, since the experiences presented are general concerning gender mainstreaming and can be applied to almost any educational context.

Both the project and the analysis of the project's outcome have been very interesting to follow and discuss. There are many things that could be said, but only some reflections find space in this paper. In this project, training and awareness raising were the major methods used to achieve gender mainstreaming. But training and awareness raising are not any guarantee for changing practice. A teacher often needs a lot of training and knowledge in order to start changing his or her practice towards gender mainstreaming. This has become clear in this project, since most teachers were part of different projects where raising awareness has been in focus. It is also the case that the majority of the participating teachers have been pleased with the project and must have been pleased by the focus on raising awareness and developing more knowledge in this area.

In this analysis, time has emerged as a crucial factor. None of the projects that were part of this national project came to the 'end-point' in their work, and the aim of the project was thereby not fully reached. Lack of time has been analysed as a reason for this. The fact that only one school year was used for this project has been commented on as being too short a time. The discourse analysis of the final documentation also shows that more time would have been necessary when trying to change teachers' values concerning gender issues. For some participants, the process of finding gender dilemmas in the classroom has only just begun. The answers and comments given in this paper are a clear marker that teachers need both a leader and knowledge in order to start changing.



One might think that Swedish teachers are especially aware of how to do things more gender equally at schools, since the Swedish National Curriculum has regulated the responsibility for promoting gender equality since the late 1960s. Yet, it seems to be almost the opposite; since gender equality has been regulated for such a long time, teachers may think that they actually are 'doing' it when this has become a kind of myth. Somehow, the starting point and the core values in Swedish schools have become a description of reality in today's schools, rather than the aim and goals to strive for. This is a very intricate dilemma and provides a real challenge to the education sector.

The legal regulations are not the problem. They are solid and clear enough for any teacher to elaborate on. The problem seems to be the lack of knowledge about how gender operates in educational settings and collegial discussion both about how to develop teaching practice in order to achieve the goals formulated in the curriculum and also how to make them 'alive' locally.

Through the analysis carried out here with regard to gender issues generally, I have come to reflect on how starting to unravel gender differences and gender dilemmas at schools also concerns general dilemmas in the context of education and teaching practice as a whole. One conclusion can be that gender related issues are more closely related to overall didactic and educational issues than one thinks at first. Perhaps the most common way of handling gender equality at schools is to put it in a box of its own and not together with any 'normal' work with improving teaching or educational practice. Gender mainstreaming is about something quite the opposite – to mainstream gender issues in every dilemma that comes to the surface at schools.

As Frizén and Sjons (2012) showed, there are many different ways of approaching and understanding what gender mainstreaming is in practice. The results here support that. Gender mainstreaming can be understood in a number of different ways, and it seems very closely related to how much gender related work a teacher or a school has done before. In order to achieve sustainable gender mainstreaming (Callerstig, Lindholm, Sjöberg & Svensson, 2012), there seems to be need for a continuous process where open collegial discussion takes place.

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