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Towards a More Gender-Sensitive Early Childhood Education

Developing Critical Practice Through Participatory Workshops

Metropolia

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The aim of this thesis was to develop a workshop that creates awareness and interest to use gender-sensitive early childhood education methods. The target group was students of early childhood education.

The theoretical base for this project is theories of gender socialization, social constructionism and participatory learning. The methods used in the workshop are participatory and creative methods that support experiential learning and reflection in groups.

The objectives of the workshop were: to encourage critical reflection of the meaning of gender for the everyday life; raise participants' awareness and interest to apply already developed methods of gender-sensitivity to their own work with children; and to create interest to multiply, meaning to implement similar workshops in future study or work environment. The exercises and the guide were developed to be easily approachable and multiplied also by facilitators with limited experience.

The workshop was tested with a group of four voluntary participants. Written feedback from participants and own observations were used to evaluate the usefulness of the exercises and to make developmental adjustments to the final product, which is a workshop guide. The guide is to be used by nonformal educators and was made available to be used by our partner organization Naisasianliitto Unioni (The Feminist Association Unioni) and their "Gender-sensitivity in early childhood education – equal encounter in nursery schools" -project.

Keywords	early childhood education, participatory learning, expressive methods, gender equality, critical practice

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli kehittää työpaja, joka luo tietoisuutta ja kiinnostusta sukupuolisensitiivisten menetelmien käyttöön varhaiskasvatuksessa. Kohderyhmänä olivat varhaiskasvatuksen opiskelijat.

Teoreettisena pohjana toimii sukupuolen sosiaalistuminen, sosiaalinen konstruktionismi ja osallistava pedagogiikka. Työpaja pohjautuu osallistaviin ja luoviin menetelmiin, jotka tukevat kokeellista oppimista ja reflektointia ryhmissä.

Työpajalla oli kolme tavoitetta: kannustaa osallistujia kriittiseen reflektointiin sukupuolen merkityksestä arkipäivässä, lisätä heidän tietoisuutta ja kiinnostusta soveltaa jo kehitettyjä sukupuolisensitiivisiä menetelmiä omaan työhön lasten kanssa ja rohkaista heitä järjestämään itse samanlaisen työpajan tulevaisuuden työ- tai opiskelupiirissä. Harjoitteet ja oppaan kehitimme helposti lähestyttäviksi ja uudelleen käytettäviksi, jotta myös kokematon tai vähän kokenut fasilitaattori voisi hyödyntää materiaalia työpajan järjestämisessä.

Työpajaa kokeiltiin neljällä vapaaehtoisella osallistujalla. Kirjallisen palautteen ja omien havaintojemme avulla arvioimme harjoitteiden hyödyllisyyttä ja kehitimme lopullista tuotetta, eli työpajaopasta, paremmaksi. Opasta voidaan hyödyntää epävirallisessa oppimisessa. Opas tuli myös Naisasialiitto unionin käyttöön heidän "Sukupuolisensitiivisyys varhaiskasvatuksessa - tasa-arvoinen kohtaaminen varhaiskasvatuksessa" -hankkeessa.

Avainsanat	varhaiskasvatus, osallistava pedagogiikka, ilmaisulliset menetelmät, sukupuolten tasa-arvo, kriittinen käytäntö

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Content

1   Introduction

There is increasing awareness, personally and professionally, of the impact of gender to every aspect of our lives. There is also a far deeper understanding of what we mean by gender than was current a few decades ago. However, like all culturally constructed assumptions, beliefs about gender are something internalized and acted upon unconsciously, and therefore need to be critically reflected if their impacts want to be fully understood.

Researchers have found that pedagogues treat children in early childhood education differently according to their gender (Eidevald 2009; Odenbring 2010; Svaleryd 2002; Wahlström 2003 and Ylitapio-Mäntylä 2009), and this issue has been addressed by governmental as well as non-governmental organizations through different projects, with the most recent one being the "Gender-sensitivity in early childhood education - equal encounter in nursery schools"-project managed by The Feminist Association Unioni (Naisasialiitto Unioni ry). There is still a clear need to expand the work in this field and to promote a more gender-sensitive way of working with children.

Gender-sensitivity can be defined as the act of being aware of constructed assumptions of gender and how they impact our practice. One research at Tampere University concluded that there is a need and interest to increase gender-sensitive education for the becoming kindergarten teachers (Kettunen 2013: 87). In addition, we noticed that the current curriculum for studies of early childhood education in our own study program does not sufficiently consider the question of gender and we think this is a considerable shortcoming in the education of kindergarten teachers.

Our argument is that the current gender paradigm creates a very complex system of oppression that we all are at the same time both victims and perpetrators of. We believe that gender is socially constructed and constantly reproduced by all of us in our everyday life interactions. As child care professionals we have an impact on shaping how children view themselves and others. If we want to consider how our own assumptions affect our work with children, we have to first become aware of them and how they were learnt. In order for this to happen, we have to understand gender not only from a personal, but also from a cultural and a societal perspective.

The term "functional thesis" is commonly used at Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences and is a direct translation from the Finnish term "toiminnallinen opinnäytetyö". A more appropriate English translation is "practice-based thesis", which is the term we prefer to use. A practice-based thesis aims among other things to organize practical activity in the work field. What is important in this type of thesis is the combination of the practical implementation and its reporting with the means of research communication (Vilkka & Airaksinen 2003:9).

The aim of this practice-based thesis was to develop a workshop targeted at students and professionals in early childhood education. During the workshop, participants explore the meaning gender has had in their personal experiences in order to become aware of underlying assumptions and how they were learnt. We have chosen a participatory approach and used creative methods. The main objectives of the workshop are to raise awareness, encourage participants to be critical in their practice, become interested in and motivate others to use methods of gender-sensitive early childhood education. One central aspect of our approach is that individual and group reflection is necessary in order for self-motivated action to occur. The final product of this thesis is a workshop guide that allows the multiplication by other facilitators.

2   Gender-Sensitive Pedagogy in Finland

The idea for this practice-based thesis was our (the authors') perceived lack of education and awareness amongst students and professionals of early childhood education with regards to gender. We see this project as one way to promote gender equality. Gender equality can be defined as equal rights, obligations and opportunities regardless of gender or the expression of gender. The goal is to have a society where circumstances of our life as individuals and or our possibilities for future achievement are not pre-determined by gender (Tasa-arvo on perusoikeus, n.d.).

2.1   Finnish educational policy

There are already efforts in Finland to increase equality and gender awareness in early childhood education. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health published a government

report in 2010 about the government's gender equality policy until 2020. The report outlines that in order to promote equality, the early childhood education is in a key role (2010: 115). The students of early childhood education, both higher and lower level, and the professionals in the field should be offered education on gender-sensitive pedagogy (Valtioneuvoston selonteko naisten ja miesten tasa-arvosta 2010: 36).

The government's action plan for gender equality 2012-2015 (Hallituksen tasa-arvo-ohjelma 2012: 24-26) aims to have gender- and equality-sensitive guidance and teaching established as normal practice starting from early childhood education. A key way to promote equality is to integrate contents of gender equality into teacher education and to offer related further training to education professionals. Also the national board of education will produce support materials and approaches promoting equality, and explore the use of a guide which would concern the educational materials and gender equality. The current educational materials would also be evaluated from the gender equality perspective. (Hallituksen tasa-arvo-ohjelma 2012.)

Because the higher education curricula for the education of kindergarten teachers are based on the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (Heikkilä et al. 2007), we need to examine the contents of those national guidelines if we aim to criticize a lack of information about gender-sensitivity in the education of kindergarten teachers. This document states that each child should feel that it receives "equal treatment regardless of gender" and that the early childhood education and care in Finland is based on "equality between girls and boys" (Heikkilä et al. 2007: 15,33). However those statements unfortunately remain rather vague, therefore we argue that gender-sensitive education needs to be more specifically addressed in the curricula for the education of early childhood pedagogues.

2.2 Starting points of equality work in early childhood education

The first attempts in the Nordic countries to approach gender inequality from an early childhood education perspective reaches several decades back. In 1980, an Icelandic kindergarten created Hjalli-pedagogy, where they separated the children into two groups based on gender. They believed that being in mixed groups would restrict the children from trying out games and skills, which were viewed as characteristic for the opposite

gender. In their own separate groups the children got to try out the skills, that the peda-gogues felt they would have otherwise missed out on. The perspective behind this ped-agogy was though a belief of psychological differences between genders and thus the children were not viewed individually. Also the focus was more on children instead of the attitudes and approaches of adults. (Bredesen 2004: 52-57.)

Gradually the equality work was replaced by a more norm-critical perspective. This per-spective emphasizes people becoming aware of the norms in the society and how they influence one's own actions. In Bredesen's opinion Hjalli-pedagogy was based on the assumption that only two genders based on the two sexes exist. It completely ignored the idea of children being gendered actors, who would individually create their own gen-der roles. (Bredesen 2004: 56.) The norm-critical perspective questions the division into two genders and instead tries to offer multiple alternatives for individuals to be a person in the gender they live in (Tasa-arvotyötä Pohjoismaissa n.d.).

The equality work in Sweden and later also in Finland was mostly based on Hjalli-peda-gogy. Swedish materials and experiences shaped the work in Finland until the Finland-Swedish organization Folkhälsan decided to create Finnish research around the topic. With their project "An equal kindergarten" they aimed to examine how inequalities take place in early childhood education and to find tools for changing the actions, norms and routines that strengthen them. (Sundell 2012.)

In 2008 The Finnish Ministry of Education funded a three-year project called TASUKO, which was about equality and gender awareness in the teacher education. The project covered all the Education Departments in Finnish universities, including the Early Child-hood Education Departments. The goal was to commit the universities to ongoing devel-opment work concerning equality and gender awareness in teacher education. (Snell-mann 2011.)

2.3   The "Equal encounter in nursery schools" -project

After a pilot-project in 2010, The Feminist Association Union continued with a two-year project "Gender-sensitivity in early childhood education – equal encounter in nursery schools" to plan and implement training for kindergarten professionals about equality education. The goal was to promote gender-sensitivity in the pedagogical work in Finn-ish-speaking kindergartens through research, education and engagement in the debates

of educational policy. The project has since received additional funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture, and will continue until June 2015.

So far the project has cooperated with Diaconia University of Applied Sciences in the form of lectures and online courses. Other partners in the project are the organizations Folkhälsan, OAJ (Trade Union of Education in Finland), Seta ry (LGBTI Rights in Finland), Suomen Vanhempainliitto (Finnish Parents' League), Suomen Lastenhoitoalan Liitto (The Finnish Association of Childcare). (Tasa-arvoinen päiväkoti n.d.)

The information material and tools developed through the project are a very good basis for teachers to start applying a more gender equal approach to their work. However, we think that in order for the materials to be used by a larger number of professionals, we have to create awareness amongst future kindergarten teachers, so that they become motivated to inform themselves about the topic and acquire new ways of working.

2.4   Creating an access for early childhood pedagogues

As mentioned above, several agencies have already produced materials and tools to be used by interested early childhood pedagogues. However, the shortcoming is a lack of awareness for their relevance. Many students and professionals are lacking access to the subject matter. To be interested in applying gender-sensitive methods, pedagogues have to first understand the importance behind them. This desired awareness cannot be taught - it can only arise through experiential learning, meaning the critical reflection of own experiences. For this reason, our aim was to focus on developing a workshop that would support this type of learning and therefore serve as the necessary access bridge to gender-sensitive pedagogy.

We planned a workshop to be implemented with students specializing in early childhood education from several institutions. We took into consideration that it should be possible for participants to multiply our methods, meaning implement a similar workshop in various settings, either with students of early childhood education, with already working kindergarten teachers, or even with a group of parents or a mixed group.

After our workshop was successfully implemented, we began collaboration with the "Equal encounter in nursery schools" -project coordinated by The Feminist Association Unioni. We shared the understanding, that there is a need for effective ways to raise

interest amongst professionals in order for them to use the materials and methods the project has developed. While there is a large amount of theoretical information and concrete tools for gender-sensitive education, ways to actually motivate child care professionals and make the concepts accessible for them are still lacking and have to be developed further. Frontal teaching, as in presentations and lectures, is not sufficient, but instead there is a need to find ways of increasing awareness, making the target group feel involved and assisting them in finding their personal motivation to reflect their practice critically with regards to questions of gender. The workshop we have developed addresses this need. Together with our partner organization the workshop can be developed further and the guide we produced will be used by the project and made available online as a resource for educators.

2.5   What is gender-sensitive early childhood education

Gender-sensitive early childhood education aims to treat all children with the same rights, tasks and opportunities regardless of their gender. A gender-sensitive early childhood pedagogue reflects for example on speech, interactions, task-allocation, and physical learning environment with regards to how they affect gender differences. (Wahlström 2003 & Henkel 2006.)

In Wahlström's (2003) compensatory equality pedagogy the goal is to strengthen what girls and boys master already, and to also strengthen the areas that seem untypical for the respective gender. Based on Wahlström's research, untypical areas for girls means supporting them as individuals so that they can take over a higher level of independence and to express their own needs stronger. For boys the focus is on letting them find fellowship with each other, developing their skills in human relations and having them more included as individuals instead of just as a group. (Wahlström 2003: 137-140.) Henkel (2006:70) also points out that within a gender the individuals are different and therefore the individuality should be supported. Essentially it is important that each child receives a positive self-image, which is strengthened by the pedagogues, and that all children can have a connection with each other. (Henkel 2006: 69-71.)

The "Equal encounter in nursery schools"-project has defined three basic principles guiding the equality-work in the field of early childhood education. The first one addresses generalizations and presumptions about children that are made based on gender. These can limit children's self-expression. Unequal treatment of children is usually not a result

of intended action but rather happens unconsciously and indirectly. The work community needs an increased awareness and tools to uncover unconscious, unintended behavior towards children. (Tasa-arvo on perusoikeus, n.d.)

The second principle is the replacement of negative attention with positive. Children can internalize negative feedback as part of their self-image, if the same children frequently receive negative attention. For this reason, equality work tries to identify those situations where individuals receive negative communication, so that alternatives can be found. Furthermore, practices that promote equality and encourage constant positive feedback should be emphasized. (Tasa-arvo on perusoikeus, n.d.)

The idea that many small details form a large structure is the basis for the third principle of gender-sensitive early childhood education. Even small changes to everyday routines and habits can already have a great impact. The short-lived moments of everyday life, as in speaking sharply to someone or body language itself may seem insignificant to adults, however may have a greater impact from the perspective of a child. Larger inequalities in society can be supported by the thinking that small details are insignificant. Larger cultural structures however are comprised of many small details that shape those structures. It has to be seen not only as a possibility but as a responsibility to improve equality in every social interaction. (Tasa-arvo on perusoikeus n.d.)

3 Relevance

It has been argued that the construction of two opposing genders leads to a multitude of undesirable inequalities and social exclusion and is harmful to healthy human development (Harvey & Laszloffy 2006). Farell (1998: 107) finds that considering gender in our practice with small children is an issue of human rights and social justice. According to Hämäläinen (2003) social pedagogy aims to address social problems through educational practices. In this context, if we regard inequalities and exclusions, which are results of the social construction of gender, as a social problem, one essential way to address this may be found in how we teach gender to each other in our everyday lives, especially in early childhood, when many basic assumptions concerning oneself as an individual as well as cultural assumptions are formed. Therefore, we see this thesis as highly relevant to social-pedagogic work.

Early childhood professionals need to examine their interactions with children and their families. Their work is both set in an already gendered environment, and is contributing to it at the same time. They are both under the influence of gendered ecologies and participants in them. Because the main task of early childhood pedagogues is to create learning and living opportunities that will enable shared and personal learning and therefore make a contribution to the common good, they need to be aware of their professional attitudes and work practices, which need to be adjusted in the face of ever changing social circumstances and family ecologies. (Farrell 1998: 106-107.)

According to Jones (2013) in order to be critical practitioners, we have to process the discourses of what is considered private and personal, of how differences are constructed and the power structures that maintain discrimination and oppression. We have to be able to examine and comment on our personal and professional histories, our past and current practice, and how problems are socially constructed. (Jones 2013: 107.)

3.1 The role of early childhood educators

It has been acknowledged, that children are being treated differently according to their gender from the moment of birth. The accumulation of a large number of incidents of differential treatment impacts on behavior, reactions, self-identity and even brain structure. (Paechter 2007: 47.)

Gender-related practices occur at random in different situations. The production of a gender or breaking of a gender norm in early childhood education is tied into concrete incidents. (Värtö 2000:49 & Ylitapio-Mäntylä 2009:111.) When people are interacting, they are creating conditions that will either widen the perceived gender roles or maintain the existing gender norms (Odenbring 2009:19). A kindergarten teacher can suddenly be faced with a situation, where one ends up unconsciously strengthening a gender norm or forbidding the breaking of a norm. Children are usually discouraged to cross any gender borders, but instead limited to the expectations of their gender. The way adults act and speak, and their facial and body expressions tell and show children how they are supposed to act as girls and boys. Gender has societal and attitude-linked default values, as in norms, according to which pedagogues function in the early childhood education. (Ylitapio-Mäntylä 2009: 101-102.) This means that the pedagogues act based on the norms that prevail in the society and the environment they work and live in, and that there are certain norms linked to gender.

Wahlström (2003:105-106) states that pedagogues feed the children with norm-driven expectations and behaviors, thus encouraging them to conform to stereotypical gender roles. Children aspire to feel belonging into a group and therefore they act according to expected roles and norms. Based on Wahlström the perceived norms in kindergartens should be widened in order for the children to be able to act in different ways while still complying with the norm accepted by the group.

Ylitapio-Mäntylä (2009:111-112) found in her thesis that many kindergarten teachers had felt puzzled when facing a situation with a child breaking a gender norm. In these cases the children easily react according to the way they have been earlier taught by their family or the environment and thus strengthen the narrow gender norms themselves. This is when the kindergarten teachers need the knowledge and competence to impose gender-sensitive ways of thinking and reacting in order to widen the current gender norms for the children.

Because children's perceptions of existing gender roles are limited to certain stereo-types, it is an important task for teachers to present children with a larger variety of available options, and to guide them to become critical agents of their own lives. Educators must take an active role in developing and expanding children's views on what is possible for their own and for the other's gender. In order for this to happen however, it is imperative that they increase their own critical consciousness as well as that of the parents. Apparently "natural" responses in the interaction with children must be deconstructed to assist them to become aware of a larger spectrum of available ways to interact and behave. For this to happen, teachers must have an awareness of their own attitudes, gender position and values, and consider these when observing their interactions with the children, as well as the interactions between the children. (Lowe 1998: 219-220.)

When describing their assumptions about acceptable gender roles, parents and caretakers tend to draw on their personal memories from childhood and the way they grew up. Own experiences and background clearly impact their ideas on gender. Also media are said to have an effect. (Bower 1998: 37.) Also for child care professionals, the assumptions about gender roles emerge from their experiences in childhood. Therefore we think that we need this workshop for students and professionals to reflect on these experiences and beliefs that have evolved from them.

Based on Kettunen (2013) the themes of gender and equality are hardly dealt with in kindergarten teacher education and this does not meet the competence needs in the work field. Also as the research found out that the themes are only covered in their education through active students, we can see that some interest is already there (Kettunen 2013: 51). According to Hynninen & Lahelma (2008:4) the students that have participated in courses about questioning the gender have felt the education should be common to all students.

According to Kettunen's research (2013:50-51) the students felt that in the kindergarten teacher education there is a gender-neutral view on equality, which makes it seem as equality is already achieved in early childhood education and thus the topic does not need to be covered. But the same research also points out that the topic of gender and equality have been brought up through active students. Therefore we need to reach the current early childhood education students and raise awareness among them in order to create the need to include gender equality in the curricula.

3.2   Examples of gender-specific upbringing of children

The expectations that parents and teachers have are different for male and female children. Already as newborns, many girls are described to have more delicate features than boys, even when no objective difference was found. One study describes how parents have been found to have very high expectations for their male babies and very low expectations for female babies. The researchers used an adjustable slope and asked the mothers whether or not they would believe their child to attempt and succeed to climb down. Boys were believed to be able to climb down much steeper slopes than girls, even when none of the babies could actually succeed on the steeper slope. On the other hand, female babies were expected to fail much more often, even though actually 100% of all babies were able to climb the less steep slopes. (Mondschein at al. 2000 cited in Paechter 2007: 49.)

Since the expectations for physical performance are higher for male children, they will be encouraged to physical activity on a larger scale than girls. This, together with more rough-and-tumble play in early childhood and more whole-body stimulation will impact on their development, and make it more likely for them to succeed in sports than girls. (Paechter 2007: 48-49.)

While the physical skills are emphasized however, emotional socialization is neglected in boys. Parents are more likely to engage in conversations about feelings with girls, and therefore, at an age of 6, girls are found to have a much larger vocabulary to describe different emotions. (Paechter 2007: 49.) There are also differences in cognitive education. When two toddlers of different gender were building block towers, Wahlström (2003:23) observed that the girl's parents were acting impressed and applauding, while trying to save the tower. When the boy was building his tower, his parents tried to break it while the construction was still in progress, which made the boy keen to build it again and again. In this context the girl was expected to fail, and parents had a tendency to help her perform the task while being impressed that she was actually able to succeed, while again the boy was encouraged to, and expected to creatively try different things on his own.

When pedagogues aspired for a kindergarten group of children to calm down, Wahlström (2003:12) says they made children sit so that every other one was a girl and a boy. A closer observation made her realize that the reason behind this was that the girls should function as "buffers" between boys. Together with girls also being the "helpers", Wahlström realized that the girls' roles enabled the workers to concentrate on the boys and to give them most of the attention. When having for example a baking session, the boys were freely learning new skills and using different machines, while girls mostly helped the pedagogue. Here, boys were encouraged to develop an exploring character and a large number of technical skills, while a caring, assisting character was encouraged in girls. Skills, that should be learned by everyone equally, are really learned according to gender.

Wahlström also says that boys are often given the freedom to move around while girls are kept closer to adults (2003:7, 15). Boys are also commonly viewed as louder and girls as more quiet. When boys and girls play together, the limits or norms of the gender become often more flexible. Mutual game of tag with running and screaming gives even the girls an opportunity to steam out and to join the boys in a fun physical activity. (Ylitapio-Mäntylä 2009: 107.) In mutual games the boys have though learned that girls should be protected as they are viewed as more fragile than boys. Värtö (2000:60) states that even adults protect girls from getting too wild by disrupting their roughest plays. The control of rough games and use of volume also applies to boys, but often in a less strict manner.

3.3 Limits to healthy development

As mentioned earlier, the current gender paradigm hinders optimal human growth and should therefore be critically challenged. Gender-sensitive early childhood education is one way of addressing this. The following examples will outline the negative impact of the western gender system on human psychological well-being.

First, the inflexible dual structure of the system excludes those who refuse to be positioned within the narrow borders of what it means to be either male or female. It does not consider or acknowledge the legitimate existence of anyone without a clear distinct biological sex, of persons not identifying as solely male or female or those whose behavior or appearance enters what is considered the behavioral space of the "other" gender, or anyone with a minority sexual orientation. This leads to stigmatization and marginalization that often has deep psychological consequences for the affected individuals including self-hatred, shame and aggression. (Hardy & Laszloffy 2006.)

Secondly, one consequence of the current gender paradigm is the devaluation of what is considered female and therefore subjugation of women, which can lead to experiencing feelings of anger, shamefulness, powerlessness and self-hatred. (Harvey & Laszloffy 2006.) Being male and displaying behavior that is considered masculine is regarded favorable in our society and men are privileged in a variety of ways. Consequently it is eight times more common for girls to display gender-atypical behavior than it is for boys (Alanko et al. 2008).

However, while attributes associated with masculinity are often valued and rewarded, the gender paradigm also sets strict limits on permitted behaviors and expressions of feelings for men. In order to comply with their role appropriately, fundamental aspects of their selves need to be suppressed, which substantially limits their capacity for growth and development as human beings (Kupers 1993 cited in Harvey & Laszloffy 2006). This is consistent with research that suggests that negative feedback about gender-atypical behavior from parents and peers contributes to psychiatric problems in adult life (Alanko et al 2008: 9).

Gender inequality has to be addressed because it has serious implications not only for the private life but as well for the public sphere. Political power, access to employment

and income, and provision of care work in the family must all be seen as gendered (Pascall: 2012). If we find the unequal allocation of the care work in a family unacceptable, we cannot continue raising children along a gender-binary that encourages caring qualities in female children, while it neglects emotional development in male children, who instead have more access to learning cognitive and leadership skills. Gender has implications for every aspect of our lives and therefore has to be examined and critically addressed on all levels. Gender inequality needs to be understood and addressed not only on the level of social policy but has to start from the way gender is learned through socialization, beginning from early childhood. Implications for individual psychological development and macro-level societal circumstances have to be seen in context.

4 Theories on Gender

4.1 Gender socialization in childhood

Sociologists define socialization as the different processes in which humans learn skills and habits necessary for participation in communities. These processes begin at birth and continue throughout the entire lifespan while people try to adapt to new groups or changes in groups they are already members of.

Even though there are numerous theories about gender socialization that differ in approach and perspective, it can be said that in general gender socialization is defined as the ways through which "individuals learn the gender norms of their society and come to develop an internal gender identity". By gender norms is meant the collections of rules and expectations for acceptable masculine or feminine behavior in any given cultural setting. The term gender identity describes the manner in which being feminine or masculine, male or female, becomes internalized as a part of the way individuals think about themselves. (Ryle 2014: 120.)

Gender socialization happens on three levels that are intertwined with each other. In order to understand the process of gender socialization we need to look at all three levels and acknowledge their significance. The three levels are individual, interactional and institutional. The individual level addresses how individuals internalize gender. This approach comes from the perspective of psychology and focuses on the analysis of the

individual, how gender becomes established in the individual. To understand how this happens however it is necessary to go beyond this perspective and see how gender becomes internalized through the interactions with others. In sociology, persons being socialized are referred to as targets of socialization, while individuals, groups and institutions undertaking the socializing are called agents of socialization. Institutions can be for example the family, school, religion but also the media. (Ryle 2014: 128.)

One important theory trying to explain gender socialization is social learning theory that has its roots in behaviorist psychological theory. According to this theory certain behaviors are gender-typed or sex-typed, therefore more expected and accepted when displayed by a member of one sex while unexpected and considered inappropriate when displayed by a member of the other sex. Gender socialization happens when people get rewarded for behavior expected of their assigned sex and punished for behavior typed for the opposite assigned sex. Crying is a gender-typed behavior seen as acceptable behavior for girls but not for boys, and therefore boys are more likely to be punished or corrected for this behavior and will be less likely to repeat it in the future. We have to keep in mind that the agents of socialization do not necessarily intend to make these decisions but are often unaware of them. (Ryle 2014: 129-130.)

While social learning theory views children as passive recipients of socialization, the cognitive developmental approach tries to explore children's active role in acquiring a gender identity. They do this by going through a series of developmental stages. Children first develop a gender identity by the age around two-and-a-half to three years, which marks the first stage. At this age children are able to identify their own assigned gender as well as the one of others. The next stage is the stage of gender stability, reached around age five. Gender stability means the awareness that gender is something that is not going to change over time. Before this stage a young boy might express his ambition to become a mother one day, while older children who already have reached gender stability would correct him that this would not be possible, as he could only become a father. (Ryle 2014: 131.)

According to the cognitive developmental theory the final stage of gender development is reached around age seven. At this age children reach what cognitive developmentalists call gender constancy. By this they mean the understanding that even if a person of one gender displays behavior of the other gender, such as a man wearing clothing or make-up associated with the other gender, they still are essentially male. Until children

have reached this stage, their grasp of gender is still limited to basic guidelines such as girls wear dresses, men have beards. With gender constancy children become aware that a change in bodily appearance does not change the original sex category. (Siann 1994 cited in Ryle 2014: 131.)

After children reach gender constancy, they are working actively to accomplish gender congruency, meaning to bring their behavior and thoughts in line with their perceived gender identity. This self-motivated behavior is partly encouraged by children's inner drive for cognitive consistency (Ryle 2014: 131). They will begin to actively choose practices from their surroundings that they perceive as to be consistent with their gender identity, using as role models other people they identify as belonging to the same gender, or what Paechter (2007) calls community of masculinity or femininity practice. During this process, gender socialization occurs. Also the relevance of the environment and society have to be considered here, since they contribute to and maintain the material from which children select to accomplish gender congruency (Ryle 2014: 132).

One important criticism of this theory is that it puts the emphasis of gender development very late in childhood. Empirical evidence has shown though that children begin with gender-typing their behavior already much earlier than age seven (Unger & Crawford 1992 cited in Ryle 2014: 132). It is therefore important to look at all of these established theories critically.

Furthermore the cognitive developmental approach does not explain why children choose sex as a category to socialize themselves in and not a different physiological feature, such as eye color. Gender schema theory tries to address this. (Ryle 2014: 132.)

> "Gender in particular becomes an important organizing category because it is seen by almost all cultures as functionally important to society. Gender schemas exist because cultures are structured in such a way as to convince us that society cannot function without the existence of sex and gender categories. Because of the importance placed on gender by most cultures, a very broad set of associations between the categories masculine and feminine and many other attributes, behaviors, and categories come to exist. In other words, gender pervades the way we think about the world and crosscuts many other categories." (Ryle 2014: 134.)

A schema is a cognitive system of organizing and perceiving knowledge. A network of associations and frameworks to understand certain aspects of the world can be created

through schemas. (Bem 1983 cited in Ryle 2014: 133.) According to gender schema theory, people use schemas to process incoming information and organize and sort new knowledge this information produces. Our perception of the world is shaped by these schemas and so is the way we select what information is relevant or not. Schemas are not simply folders or categories, but also the connections between these. If we think about the word mother, we automatically think about certain adjectives and attributes that we associate with it, for most people those being connected with femininity, nurturing and so on. This in return influences how we see and approach the world around us. We are more likely to notice mothers who fit the characteristics in our schema than those who do not. People learn to see their environment in gendered ways due to the gender schemas they have created. Behaviors and other qualities are sorted into categories of femininity or masculinity and further associations with these categories are created. (Ryle 2014: 133.)

Children use gender schemas as a mechanism to socialize themselves. The way we think about ourselves is called self-concept. Children begin to associate their self-concept to a gender schema after they gain the ability to identify their own sex. They know they fall into one of the two gender categories based on their own sex and they learn about their particular society's gender schema, about what is considered feminine and masculine. Therefore the associations with their assigned gender become part of their self-concept, their sense of identity. They understand that there are certain behaviors and ways of thinking that they can adapt to their sense of selves: the ones associated with their own gender category; and others which would be inappropriate to adapt. This is how gender socialization occurs according to gender schema theory. (Ryle 2014: 133.)

The process of labelling attitudes and ways of behaving as either masculine or feminine, never both, is called gender polarization. It does not only create a range of opposing associations which are mutually exclusive, it also treats people leaving their assigned category as a problem. For example, the strong connection between sex, gender and sexuality is preserved through gender polarization. If being a man means to be attracted to women, then gender polarization would consider a homosexual man to be something going against nature, as problematic and disordered. (Ryle 2014: 135.)

We have to bear in mind that all these theories merely try to explain the phenomenon of

gender socialization in general. The viewpoint of intersex children and transgender chil-
dren is not necessarily sufficiently represented, and it therefore challenges all of these
theories and forces us to rethink them.

4.2   Social construction of gender

Our viewpoint on gender comes from a social constructionist perspective, meaning that
gender is something determined through people's social and cultural experience rather
than something that is biologically given (Mikkola 2012; Mallon 2013). We are going to
argue that early childhood education is an important contributor to the construction of
gender and will show how masculinities and femininities are built up through communities
of practice outlined by Paechter (2007).

In the 1970s sociologists first adopted the term "gender" to make a distinction between
the physiological and anatomic structures and the social facets to being male or female
(Marecek, Crawford & Popp 2004: 200). It was then that sociologists started to increas-
ingly argue that assumptions about gender are more a product of social negotiation than
being biologically given. While the term sex usually refers to the biological differences,
the word gender refers to social differences, though however these influences are often
intertwined (Gove & Watt 2004: 44). Gender is also referred to as a term describing the
categorizing of specific behavior and practices, which are associated with the different
sexes in particular societies (Woodwarth 2004: 21).

Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge. Social constructionists believe that the
categories and concepts we use, such as race or gender, are not absolute, unambigu-
ous, and indisputable reflections of one objective truth or reality. What we perceive as
reality is shaped by the images, concepts and categories available to us, and therefore
can vary across cultures and history. (Marecek et al. 2004: 193-194.)

In a social constructionist perspective these concepts are collective knowledge.
Knowledge in this viewpoint is not just the result of individual cognitive thought, but the
outcome of human interaction. The meanings we attach to certain concepts are therefore
"co-constructed". They are constantly re-negotiated in our social life. Therefore people
produce meanings of gender, sex, sexualities that are circumstantial, and characteristic
to certain settings. (Marecek et al. 2004: 197.)

Individuals also construct their own identity in the same process. Therefore it can be said that the individual shapes or produces society, and the society shapes the individual in return. This entity of individual psyche and social culture can be seen as inseparable. (Marecek et al 2004: 197-198.)

4.3   Communities of practice and gender performativity

Paechter (2007: 2) identifies the central places, where children construct their views on gender, to be the family, the peer group and the educational institution. According to her, small children tend to observe very closely the behavior of adults in their immediate sur-roundings and internalize those observations as general truths about what gender appropriate behavior constitutes of.

According to Paechter (2007: 7) a community of practice is a place in and through which individual identities are developed. Children are placed in so called "communities of practice of masculinity or femininity" at the moment when a gender is assigned to them. From that moment on they will start "practicing" what it means to be male or female, taking as examples the older members of that community.

Paechter's work is based on Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity. According to Butler (1990: 114), gender can be seen as a "stylized repetition of acts", which means that gender is not something we are, but that it is much rather something we do or perform. Therefore, the ways in which people perform their masculinity and femininity can differ in different settings and across time. (Paechter 2007:14.)

Our diverse masculinities and femininities are built-up as ways of existing within different communities of masculinity and femininity practice, and are altered as we move between these communities. Thus masculinities and femininities can be perceived and acted out differently according to the social context in which individuals find themselves. (Paechter 2007:14.) Therefore Butler argues that gender is always temporary (Butler 1990: 115). However, even though the way we perform our gender is temporary, we still have to remain within the ways of performing that are accepted within that particular community of practice (Paechter 2007: 15).

Butler (1987: 27) writes that "In so far as social existence requires an unambiguous gender affinity, it is not possible to exist in a socially meaningful sense outside of established

gender norms." The social pressure to comply with the behaviors and performances associated with one's gender is so strong that most people cannot bear being criticized by their peers as not sufficiently performing their masculinity or femininity (Butler 1987: 27). It has been shown that accordingly, the majority of care-takers encourage female children to display feminine behavior, and male children to show behavior generally classified as masculine, as they see it as preferable (Palacios 1986 in Bower 1998: 37).

5   Participatory Learning

Approaches to participatory learning have a long tradition. A variety of movements focusing on this type of learning have developed different terms and concepts. In development work, the term "Participatory Learning and Action" is often used. In several European countries we can also talk about "Sociocultural-animation". What they have in common is the belief that learning happens through reflection of own experiences, and usually in groups. Often creative methods are used as a tool for expressing and processing complex topics. Usually the goal is to open up possibilities for development of communities or social change. (Smith 2009a.)

5.1   Pedagogy of the oppressed

The Brazilian educationalist Paolo Freire is often considered to have given the theoretical foundations for participatory learning. Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed is based on the idea that people in oppression are "dehumanized", and in order for them to become authentic humans, they need to become conscious of their social reality and become active in the struggle to change it. (Freire 1972.)

Most of Freire's theory is based on a dichotomy of classes: there are the oppressed on one side and oppressors on the other. When we talk about gender socialization however, we find that it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between oppressors and oppressed.

While it can be argued that the current gender norms do affect some groups more negatively than others, our approach is to focus on how gender as a social category is limiting the lives of everybody, regardless of which is the gender assigned to them or their

sexual orientation. Whether one was assigned a female or male gender at birth, the expected performances related to that gender will limit one's life in one way or another.

These gender categories however become internalized and therefore will be reproduced again. The performances, which comply with the established gender norms, are being rewarded, while those that do not, will be sanctioned. As mentioned previously, individuals are always both targets and agents of socialization. Therefore it is difficult to draw a distinction between the oppressors and the oppressed in the Freirean sense, because all of us are part of being created by and in return recreating the same problem.

Freire (1972: 15) speaks about the process of conscientization, which means "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality". With our developed workshop, we hope to achieve that many students and professionals of early childhood education will start this process: perceive how gender and gender differences are a contradiction to our freedom on an everyday basis and be therefore motivated to look for solutions and apply them.

Another central concept to Freire's theory is the fear of freedom. Freire writes that the oppressed are afraid of the punishment that they would face if they would engage in an attempt to free themselves. He continues to say, that freedom requires us to no longer blindly follow the directives and images that oppression has taught us, but to instead become autonomous and take responsibility. According to him, if we want to overcome this fear of freedom, we must analyze how it is caused, so that afterwards we can create a new situation through "transforming action". (Freire 1972: 23-24.)

According to Freire, the Pedagogy of the Oppressed thrives to make people reflect actively on their oppression and how it is caused. Only when this happens, can they perceive the oppression not as a prison without exit, but as a situation that can be changed. Then they can become active to work for their own liberation and participate themselves to develop and multiply this pedagogy. It has to be understood that, just as our objective, social reality is not a coincidence, but something produced through human interaction - its transformation does not happen by coincidence either, but it has to be brought forward by people. (Freire 1972: 25-27.)

One of the most central ideas in Freire's work is the concept of dialogue or dialogical learning. He describes dialogue as the process of people coming together to construct

an understanding of the world. This process requires all participants to be equal in their right to self-expression. The purpose of the dialogue is a "united reflection and action" in order to bring about a desired change. This can only happen if all participants are active, and not merely consuming the exchanged ideas. There is not only one truth to be presented, but everyone's perspective has to be valued and considered equally. (Freire 1972: 61.)

According to Freire (1972: 63), people have the power to re-think and transform the world, though they are often unaware of this power. Dialogical learning requires that educators understand this challenge, but do not surrender to it. Educators must understand that there is a potential to bring about awareness for this power in people through animation and facilitation. This understanding enables an atmosphere of trust between the participants, where hierarchies between educators and other participants have been abolished and replaced by a horizontal relationship, which gives way to conversations of learning and change. (Freire 1972: 64.)

Freire's revolutionary rhetoric is often criticized to not be applicable to a western context (Piekkari 2003: 121). However the idea of creating active learning environments, where participants construct their own understanding of the topics they concern themselves with, is extremely relevant if we want to approach complex issues such as gender and culture.

5.2   Facilitating participatory learning

The workshop we developed is based on the principles of experiential and participatory learning. Facilitating creative methods aim to enhance personal reflection in groups. Our role as facilitators is not to share our own viewpoint of the situation, but to gather the knowledge from the participants and to find out how they have experienced and constructed their understanding of gender, and how this affects their work with children.

Through participatory learning, people are enabled to make their own analysis of a situation and make plans and implementations based on their own reflection. Often people engage in the creation of own visual material. (Chambers 2002: 3.) The aim of participatory learning should be a socio-cultural development of a certain community as defined

by the people in the communities themselves (Piekkari 2003: 121). Participatory methods are a democratic and critical tool for learning, where both the educators and participants can learn from each other, and more precisely, learn together (Piekkari 2005: 13).

According to Kolb & Fry (cited in Smith 2010) the first step of experiential learning happens when a certain action leads to a certain outcome. The next step would be the observation of this outcome, followed by examining the general principles by which it occurred. The learner makes connections between actions and their effects and the surrounding circumstances. Reflecting on the made observations and new connections, the learner can now implement a new action under slightly different circumstances (Smith 2010). The following image illustrates this process.
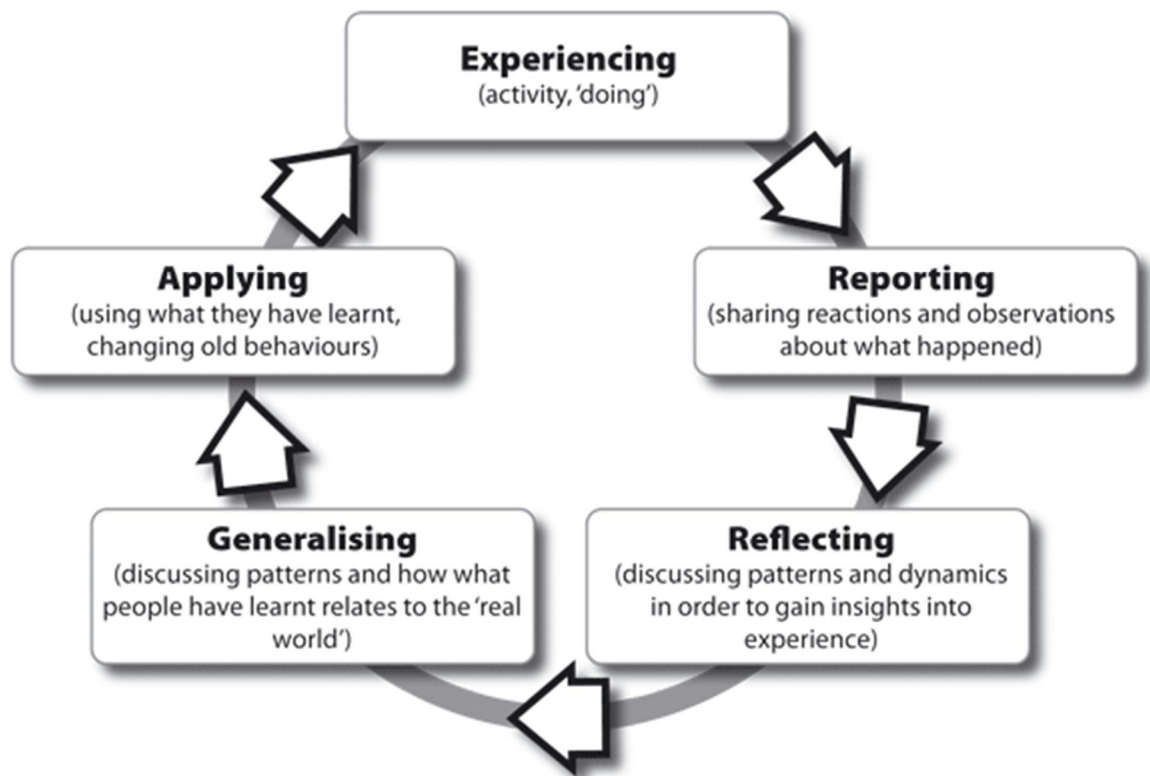

Figure 1. Experiential learning (adapted from Lewin cited in Kolb 1984: 21)

In the above figure, the learning process is illustrated by a circular shape. According to Smith (2010) however, experiential learning should rather be understood as a three-dimensional spiral. The two-dimensional circle suggests that learning happens under ever the same circumstances, however, every reflection and application process adds a new

layer of knowledge that transforms the circumstances for new actions and observations (Smith 2010).

Our overall goal of the thesis project was the promotion of critical and reflexive practice concerning gender equality and encouraging the discussion amongst professionals. Participatory learning methods have a long tradition and are considered to be effective to raise self-reflection and critical awareness of the participants. We therefore focused our thesis project on the development of a participatory workshop based on the principles of dialogical and experiential learning.

6 The Workshop

The goal of this thesis was to develop a workshop to create awareness for gender-sensitive practice in early childhood education. During our process, which began in January 2014, we planned a workshop that we implemented in the end of May 2014, after which we gathered participant feedback in order to make further improvements. The workshop was attended by four students from three different educational institutions. The workshop consisted of seven different exercises, which aim to create interest of gender-sensitive education among the participants.

6.1 Aims

Our workshop on gender aims to first of all help the group to understand more fully the dynamic nature of gender, to look both appreciatively and critically at their own gender assumptions, and to become more sensitive to the implications they may have for the everyday life. The second aim is to get the participants interested to use methods promoting gender equality in early childhood education as suggested previously by several agencies including our partner organization. The third and last aim is to get the participants interested to multiply the workshop further, for example with other students or with colleagues at the workplace.

To measure whether or not our aims were met in the workshop we organized, we provided feedback forms (Appendix 2) to all participants at the end of the workshop. The

feedback form included both closed- and open-ended questions. It also included additional space for free feedback.

6.2   Planning and advertising

We began exploring ideas for participatory exercises from literature and through discussions with experienced facilitators. The exercises we chose have been used to encourage critical thinking in other contexts, for example in multicultural work and education. Our aim using these participatory methods was to encourage reflection so that our participants would start to consider gender issues in their professional ethics. Through our participation and observation of the process we wanted to gain new insights on what is important for the participants and how to improve our methods.

We composed the workshop of seven different parts and named them: introduction and warm-up, meaning of gender, childhood games, memory lane, human statues, ideal images and closing. The content of these is explained below. We estimated that the workshop would last approximately three hours.

For facilitators of participatory workshops it is recommend not to be overly prepared. The nature of the participatory group experience makes it impossible to exactly predict content and timetables. It is important to have a flexible schedule as to allow time for discussion and adjust contents and methods according to the needs of the group. The idea of participation is to gain knowledge from the group and give the power to the group. By deciding on a strict timetable beforehand, the facilitator assumes the power and does not give space to the group process. Therefore it is important to make practical arrangements that allow flexible planning (Chambers 2002: xiv). For this reason we planned an extra 10 minutes for every exercise so the group process does not have to be rushed or interrupted.

According to Freire's (1972: 61- 64) principles, dialogical learning happens in groups and the facilitators should assist the learning process, not dominate it, and all participants should be made to feel included and safe to share. For this we concluded that a smaller group would be preferable instead of a group with a large number of participants. A smaller group also gives room for deeper discussions. We decided to plan a workshop for a number of six to eight participants.

The original idea was to create a workshop for students specializing in early childhood education and implement it with a group of students from our own educational institution, where we first identified the lack of awareness education regarding gender. Since the participation was voluntary it proved to be difficult to motivate students to join. We then extended the advertising to also students at other educational institutions.

The advertisement for the workshop took place during April 2014. We shared our advertisement among various public and closed student groups and to our contacts at Metropolia UAS, Helsinki University, Laurea UAS and Diak UAS. We created a group on a social media website in order to keep connected everyone with interest to work on this topic.

Our idea was to create such a workshop, that anyone who participated could multiply, meaning use the same methods later on with other early childhood education students or professionals in their future work environment. By addressing students from different educational institutions we were also hoping to reach a larger area of possible multiplication in both formal and non-formal education settings. The workshop can also be multiplied by the participants to be used in their future workplace with other child care professionals.

6.3   Implementation

In order to make attendance possible for the desired amount of participants we provided several optional dates for the workshop and used a poll to determine the most suitable date. The Kaivopuisto International Kindergarten supported our thesis project by providing space and art supplies for the workshop. Six participants were expected to join our workshop in the end of May 2014, out of which two remained absent. We decided that four participants was still a sufficient amount and proceeded with our exercises as planned.

6.3.1   Introduction and warm-up

According to Smith (2009b) the first quarter of any group session should evolve around three central tasks. The first one is to introduce the group to the topic and put the themes to be discussed clearly at the center of attention. Another equally important task is to

establish an environment of trust, where all participants feel comfortable to engage with each other. The third task is then to encourage the initial conversation between partici-pants. (Smith 2009b.)

We started the workshop by sitting down in a circle on the carpet. We introduced our-selves shortly and then asked everyone to tell something about themselves - their names, place of study, work experience, motivation and interest to join the workshop, and expectations. This way the participants got a first introduction to each other and we were able to get an idea of the participants' expectations and wishes for the workshop. The goal was to create a relaxed atmosphere where everyone would feel comfortable to share their views. We tried to introduce the workshop without giving too much input on the topic of gender yet as we wanted the ideas and views of our participants to be the starting point for the workshop. We tried to emphasize that this was not a lecture about gender or a seminar to learn concrete methods for use in the early childhood classroom, like some participants might have expected, but that we wanted to work together to re-flect and discuss how we have learnt our own assumptions about gender and how they affect our practice.

In order for the participants to get to know each other further and to create an informal atmosphere we made another round, where participants were asked to name their fa-vorite toy from their own childhood. This also helped the participants to enter the mood of childhood that we intended for the following exercises and reflections.

6.3.2 Meaning of gender

After the first introduction we planned two exercises to address the previously mentioned three tasks suggested by Smith (2009b). The aim of the first exercise was to enable participants to focus on the meaning of the word gender and to begin exploring what gender meant for them. We asked the participants to discuss in pairs which thoughts come to their mind when thinking about the word gender and what the word implies from their own perspective.

After around five minutes we asked the participants to share their ideas and insights they had during the conversation with their pair. We wrote the word "gender" in big letters on a small whiteboard, and then all the words suggested by the participants at different

angles all around it. We gave space to briefly discuss all the suggested concepts to allow all participants to reach an equal level of understanding. After this, we explained that the participants were going to use their own experiences to reflect the meaning of gender and its impacts upon our lives more deeply.
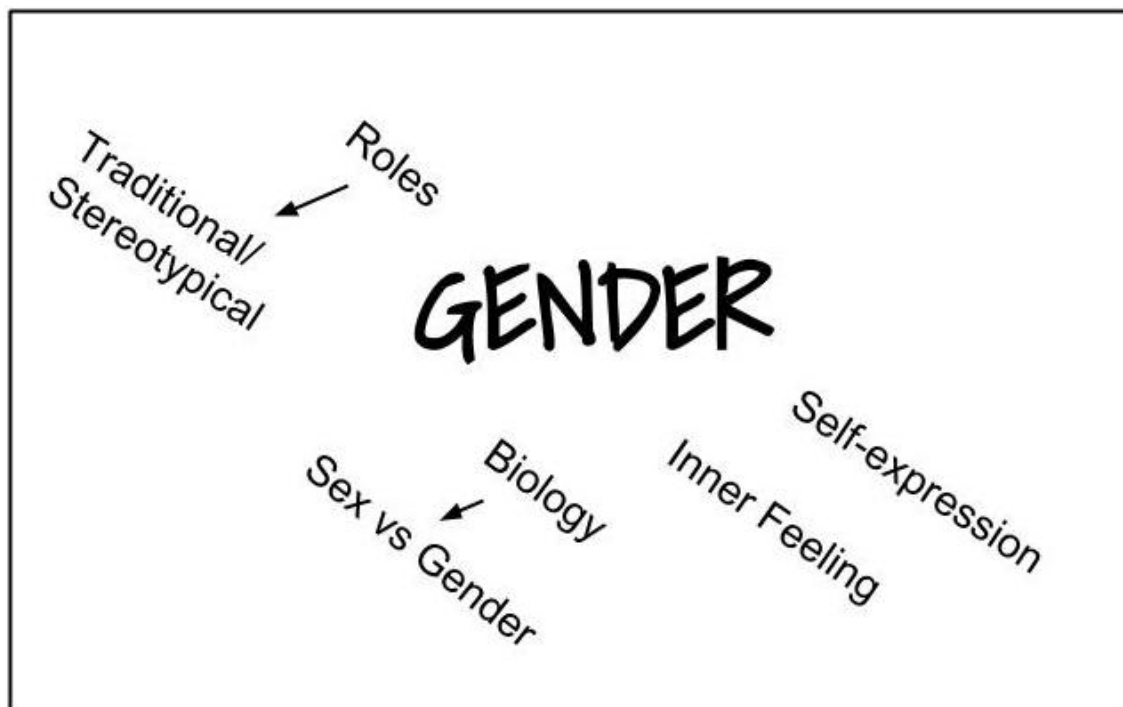
Figure 2. Collection of topics discussed in small groups during the workshop

The visual outcome of this exercise is illustrated above. Visualizing the different associations with the word gender encouraged the group to further reflect on the topics they had suggested. In this initial discussion the group began thinking and sharing viewpoints about issues surrounding gender, questions about stereotypes and roles, inner feelings and self-expression, biological and social dimensions and the interconnections of all of these concepts.

6.3.3 Childhood games

Next we asked the participants to discuss in the group about their favorite games from their childhood. After they had discussed this for a moment, we asked them to choose one of them that we could all play right then. This part of the exercise was good for everyone to further enter the mood of childhood. After having acted out the game we

asked participants to discuss how they thought gender was visible in the childhood games and if they thought girls and boys had different roles in them.

In this exercise we had engaged in a form of drama. We had imagined a scene from our childhood, or a possible version of it and acted out this scene. The idea behind participatory methods is to use own life experiences as a starting point for learning. In accordance with Freire's dialogical principle the content of the learning is decided from the participants' own perspective, not by the educators.

Drama is a form of art combining different disciplines that can support individual learning holistically by processing life experiences through the use of the body and the mind and artistic self-expression that requires the use of all our senses. Furthermore drama helps a group to process ethical questions, develop emotional intelligence and social interaction skills. (Piekkari 2005: 13.)

6.3.4   Memory lane

After the introductory part of the workshop, which includes a warm-up and establishing the session's focus, facilitators should begin to encourage the exploration further so that participants can deepen their understanding of the topic and identify points of connection to their own life (Smith 2009b). The following two exercises were chosen to follow this purpose.

In the fourth exercise we asked everyone to close their eyes and to try remembering themselves at a certain age, asking them separately for ages 3, 6 and 9. We asked them to think about what they were wearing, where they were, who was with them and what everyone was doing. According to gender schema theory, objects, feelings, and descriptions can all be seen as gendered (Ryle 2014: 163). With this experiment we wanted to identify if some of the aspects of the memories would fit into a gender schema and if the participants were aware of those schemas or whether they could uncover new ones.

During this exercise we encountered a challenge we were not prepared for. When we included the exercise into our plan, we did not consider the possibility that for some participants very difficult memories might come up. This came as a surprise for us and forced us to make quick changes to the program. Because this was not the purpose of the

exercise, we immediately tried to steer the focus towards positive experiences. The following exercise, drawing of maps, was originally meant as a separate entity and we were going to ask participants to think of any childhood summer day. Now instead we asked participants to think about a happy day and moved over to this part of the program more quickly than originally planned. The developmental changes we made as a consequence will be explained in Evaluation of the workshop (6.4) and ethical consideration will be discussed in section 7.2.

As already mentioned, in the next part all participants were asked to think of a happy memory of their childhood, such as a day during a summer holiday. In order to make the memory visible to others, we instructed them to draw maps of the environment. We suggested maps, because they are more concrete and technical than ordinary drawings, and many adults who are not used to creating visual art, and maybe are even embarrassed to show a drawing to a group, find it more comfortable to make such a technical drawing. However we gave the freedom to choose the form of drawing so if somebody felt more comfortable to draw something else than a map, we made it clear that it was allowed as well.

The aim of these two exercises was to identify and make visible typical behaviors, clothing, hobbies or relationships between family members that were specific to gender. The participants were asked to hang their drawings on the wall where everyone could see them in the same way one could observe paintings in an art exhibition. The participants were first asked to "interpret" each other's drawings before the artist, the participant who made the drawing, got her turn to explain what was happening in the map or picture. Through facilitative questions we encouraged the group to reflect on the situations, how gender is visible in them, how they felt then and how they feel about the situation now, or if they think it would have been the same if the genders were reversed.

6.3.5   Human statues

This exercise is based on Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the oppressed" and is an adaptation of what he calls Image theatre (Boal 1979: 112). The participants were asked to split into pairs and share with each other some situations where they have actively imposed gender stereotypes on a child in their work practice or with their family. In case they could not think of such situations we asked them to think of a situation they witnessed with someone else having done so.

The idea of the human statues is to act out and examine the actual image, the ideal image and discuss the transitional image, meaning, how we can move from where we are now to where we want to be. Presented with statues that the participants create as representatives of the current situation, everyone is asked to suggest ways of changing it (Boal 1979: 112-113).

We asked the participants to show the situation in a human sculpture. In this exercise the participants used each other as clay to express something that happened. The participants were not allowed to talk while they molded their clay but they had to give instructions with non-verbal communication. This exercise required participants to touch each other, so it was important for everyone to feel comfortable with each other. Because we had so few participants we, the facilitators, offered our own bodies as clay as well, as the sculptor should not be part of the statue.

When the statues were ready we first asked the participants of the other pair to describe what they thought the statue expresses and what they thought happens in the scene. Afterwards the sculptor herself was asked to tell about the situation, what happened, how she felt, how the child might have felt, and if she thought the situation could have been handled in a different way.

One example of a situation this exercise brought up was that of a boy, who had fallen from a bicycle and cried. The participant reported she had discouraged the child from expressing his pain and disappointment about his failure through crying. This brought up several questions to discuss in the group about how girls and boys receive different care and treatment by adults in face of hurt, and also about how difficult it is to stay aware of these actions when days are hectic and there are already "so many other things" to consider when working with children.

This exercise aims to assist participants to re-examine experiences from the new perspectives they have gained through the previous discussions in the group and integrate new knowledge into their thinking. This can be a difficult process and discussions might heat up: it is important that facilitators make sure to keep the space safe for dialogue and exploration. (Smith 2009b.)

6.3.6 Ideal images

According to Smith (2009b) the last part of a group session should be concerned with assisting participants to assess their comprehension of the workshop's key questions and committing to actions resulting from new realizations. One essential task is to facilitate the process of identifying goals for the future and to think about possible ways to reach them.

For this reason, the last exercise was about reflecting what Boal (1979: 112-113) calls the ideal image. Participants were encouraged to think about what kind of practitioners they want to be and how they want to work with children. Participants were asked to individually think and then write down short value statements of what an ideal childhood and early childhood education should be like. We gathered them all together on a wall and asked the participants to try to find one umbrella statement that would connect all the other ones that have been written down.

The participants made 11 notes altogether. Some of them were very broad, they made suggestions such as "having an open mind" or "treat every child as an individual", but others were more concrete, for example "help children develop a self-concept" or "provide a safe environment where children can freely express their feelings without judgments". Statements of the first category gave us the opportunity to ask the group what exactly it means for them to "have an open mind" or treat "all children as individuals", which were good starting points for discussion and reflection of own professional attitudes.

Statements of the last category gave concrete suggestions for practice. Participants had the opportunity to discuss how kindergarten teachers can provide the safe environment they identify as important to a good early childhood education, where feelings can be expressed freely. They also shared viewpoints of what they think is essential to children's self-concept and how teachers can strengthen it.

6.3.7 Closing

We ended the workshop with a moment of evaluation. We asked the participants what they thought was their favorite part of the workshop and gave space to share impressions

and questions, in order to gather verbal feedback and make sure no major questions or concerns were left unanswered.

As already mentioned, the ending phase of a workshop should create a sense of commitment to actions that result from the reflections of the previous phases. However, participants should not feel as if they are being pressured into making promises they do not feel comfortable with. Sometimes the aim of a workshop can just be to engage people in new critical thoughts about their own practice in general. Nevertheless, if the objectives go beyond this, it is important that participants receive the opportunity for further networking. (Smith 2009b.)

According to these principles we asked the participants in the final circle if they are interested to keep working on this topic, and also how they feel about multiplying the workshop by themselves. There was a clear interest and also the wish to receive a printed guide about the exercises. The option for further workshops and possibilities to stay connected through the already existing social media group were discussed. We also handed out a reading package including different materials and suggestions for further reading from our partner organization and previous projects. We thanked everyone for their participation and handed out the feedback forms which enabled the participants to give anonymous feedback individually.

6.4   Evaluation of the workshop

According to Vilkka & Airaksinen (2003:157-158) the target for evaluating the implementation of a practical work includes the ways of achieving the goals and how the material was collected. In the case of our workshop this means evaluating how the workshop succeeded and how useful the used materials were.

To measure whether or not our aims were met in the workshop we organized, we provided feedback forms (appendix 2) to all participants at the end of the workshop.
The feedback form included both closed- and open-ended questions. There was also extra space for participants' own comments. The questions were designed according to our aims and were addressing participants' perceived awareness of the subject, their motivation to use methods of gender-sensitivity in their work with children, and interest to multiply our workshop in the future. We numbered all feedback forms and questions.

The first number refers to the feedback sheet, the second to the question (example: F2.4 means response from sheet 2, question number 4).

From our viewpoint, the overall execution of the exercises was implemented successfully. The participants were easily engaged in the activities. The small size of the group was beneficial to go deeper into the discussion, but for some of the exercises a larger group could have functioned even better. Also the participant feedback, verbal and written, confirmed that a larger group was felt to have enhanced the learning experience and that there was a wish to share and discuss with more people from different backgrounds.

We had reserved three hours for the workshop and expected the exercises to take around two hours. This way it was possible to allow at least 10 extra minutes for every exercise in case the group process would take longer. We kept well to our plan and had no risk of running late, even if we at times let the discussion continue freely. Also our space was free to be used by us for as long as necessary, since it was not reserved for any other group on the same day. We also had provided coffee and vegan sandwiches to prevent a decrease of active participation for reasons of hunger or fatigue.

From our perspective most of our exercises fulfilled their purpose as we expected or even better than we thought. We had a very active and communicative group so we did not have to rely on a large number of facilitative questions to keep the discussion alive. Written participant feedback confirms that the exercises were experienced as useful and that the learning environment was pleasant.

> F2.7: "[The best part about the workshop was the] free & open conversation [...]. The activities were fun."
> F1.2: "Useful, things we did today are easy to take forward and introduce to people. Enjoyable, to get to share experiments, and talk in a safe environment without judgments."

In the feedback form we asked participants whether or not they had thought about gender equality in general before the workshop, to which 3 out of 4 answered that they had. After the workshop we asked if the participants had gotten any new thoughts about the meaning of gender for early childhood education. Three out of four participants stated that the workshop raised new thoughts for them. The responses indicated that the participants had become more critical to gender equality and started viewing it from a new perspective, and that they had motivation to apply their new thoughts and reflections towards developing their practice.

F1.3: "I've tried to be aware about genders, now I also realize people can push traditional gender roles even though they actively try to avoid it."

F3.2: "[...] it was useful to build my own awareness regarding my own actions (intentional and non). Activities were enjoyable and not 'too much' "

Especially the answers above given by participant 1 and 3 indicate critical thought processes. The participants realize that actions can be both intentional and nonintentional, and awareness of both is one of the key concepts related to gender-sensitivity.

When asking about the participants' interest to use methods of gender equality in their work with children, they all stated they will support gender equality in their work. Participants viewed gender equality as being an important part to be considered with regards to children's development and felt that it is linked to the well-being of children.

F1.4: "Definitely will use [methods of gender-equality in my own work in the future] I find it very harmful to force gender roles to children."

F2.4: "Yes, of course depending on the age & level of the children I'm working with. Also I think that gender-equal methods are a part of a bigger concept of overall equality & wellbeing of children."

F3.4: "Absolutely, acceptance and freedom of expression are integral to healthy development of 'self'."

The answer of respondent 2 indicates that the subject matter is being critically digested and that other factors and perspectives can be taken into account when drawing conclusions for one's own early childhood education practice.

Also when asking about their interest to multiply the workshop, three out of four participants stated that they can imagine themselves implementing a similar workshop in the future. One participant stated that she does not feel yet to have enough knowledge and experience at this point, but would consider it after studying the topic more.

Q5: Could you imagine yourself to facilitate a similar workshop with fellow students/professionals or parents in the future? Why / why not?

F1.5: "Yes! It is important to raise awareness and these methods are very easy to approach."

F2.5: "Maybe not, because I don't see that I have the knowledge & experience to do it. But after I have studied gender more and got more information then maybe yes."

F3.5: "Yes, [with] co-workers to build awareness."

The answer of respondent 2 clearly indicates the need for more information and training on the topic. Other participants felt that awareness is important and that the methods used were easy enough to be multiplied in the future. We aimed to get the participants

interested in the methods of the workshop and to feel empowered to use the methods themselves. From the answers we received we can conclude that this aim was reached.

When asked what could be done to improve the workshop, two respondents answered that a bigger group to reflect with from different perspectives would be beneficial. One respondent also wished for a series of workshops that could deepen the reflection in more concretely themed sessions.

From the responses we received, it can be suggested that: the participants were thinking more critically about the personal and cultural meaning of gender, they became more aware of considering gender equality in their work and interested to use the available methods when working with children. They also stated that they were interested to implement a similar workshop in the future. Based on this participant feedback we can conclude that all our objectives for the workshop were achieved.

After the workshop we stayed connected with the participants and sent them the already mentioned handout of our exercises (Appendix 3) for them to use if they are interested to implement a similar workshop. This was an explicit wish from one of the participants that arose during the evaluation. This is another indicator that shows us that the workshop met the aim to raise interest for the participants to become active and possibly organize their own workshop.

6.5   Developmental changes to the material

As already mentioned, one challenge that we encountered was the emerging of difficult personal memories during the third activity. This was a learning experience for us and we addressed the issue by adjusting the program during the workshop.

In the future, should we hold this workshop again and decide to include the same exercise, we would be more prepared in our facilitation. We could explain the purpose of the exercise beforehand and leave it up to the individual participants if they want to join this exercise or not and we could also instruct participants to think specifically about a happy moment right from the start, instead of just any moment from that particular age. We also considered this in our list of exercises that we provided subsequently to the workshop and that will be used further on by our partner organization (Appendix 3). We modified the instructions for the exercise so that a similar situation could be avoided in the future.

The guide that the participants received several weeks after the workshop already included some advice to explain the exercise well before beginning it and to give all participants the option to stay out of the circle if they feel uncomfortable about partaking. It also gives the specific instruction to focus on positive moments. After further reflection we thought that maybe this exercise is not suitable for inexperienced facilitators and that it could possibly be left out or replaced by a different one. From verbal participant feedback however we know that some participants thought this was a very interesting exercise for them that gave them new realizations that they otherwise would have missed.

We decided that before we finalize the workshop guide for our partner organization, we still added a comment that this exercise should only be used by facilitators who feel that they are competent enough to estimate and handle the risks involved, and otherwise it should be left out or replaced. All those suggestions however can merely reduce the risk, but are no guarantee for a similar situation not occurring again. We therefore concluded that, in this case facilitators should provide an option for after-care, meaning to offer their time after the workshop to talk about difficult emotions and ensure their participants emotional well-being. For this it can also be useful for facilitators to have knowledge about the available mental health support services in case the affected participants feel that they need more extensive help, for example with unprocessed traumatic memories.

7   Discussion

The search for our thesis focus began in January 2014. With a general interest towards gender-sensitive early childhood education in mind, we began to involve ourselves more deeply with the already existing projects and produced materials around this topic. At this time we also made our first contact with our partner organization The Feminist Association Unioni and the coordinator of their "Equal encounter in nursery schools"-project. However, since the project was supposed to end, collaboration did not begin at this point. We decided to begin planning for our project independently without an official partner organization.

We noticed quite quickly that there was a lot of materials available for professionals to be used in kindergartens to support gender equality among the children. But these materials are mostly found by professionals who are themselves already engaged in the

topic. In order for gender-sensitivity to become more effective, all professionals of early childhood education should be engaged with it. Therefore we realized that there is a need for raising awareness amongst students and professionals, who have not yet included the concept of gender-sensitivity into their critical reflection of practice. Here is where the idea for an awareness raising workshop about gender-sensitivity came up.
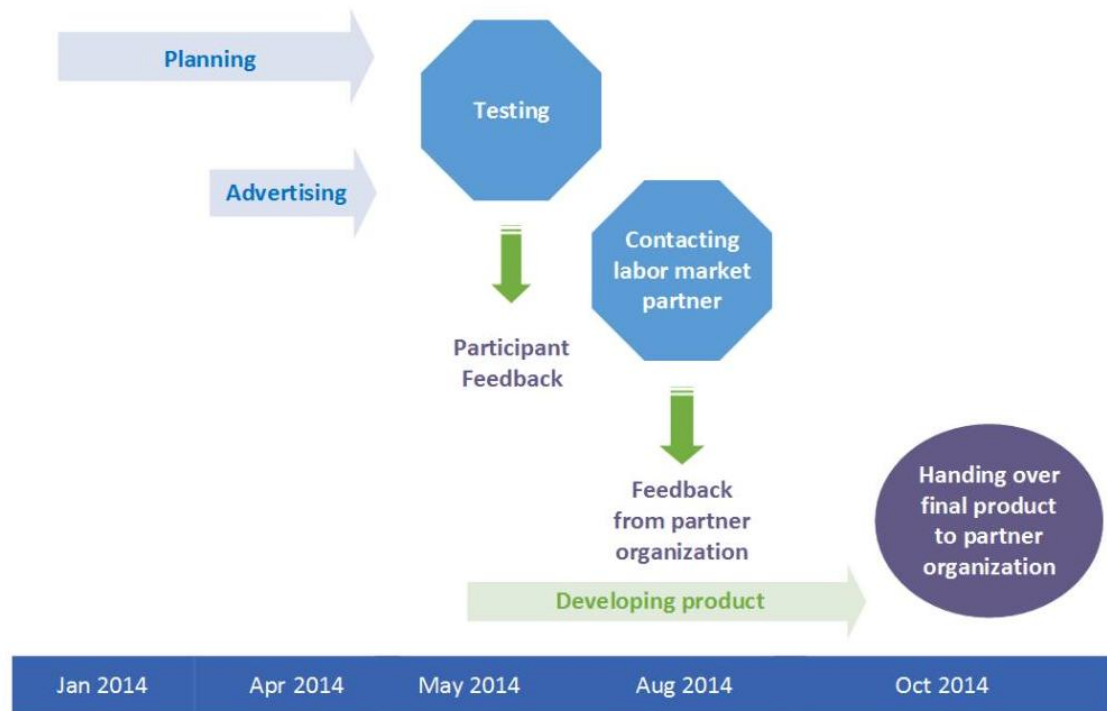
Figure 3. Timeline and overview of entire thesis process

Advertisement of the workshop through social media raised interest and we were able to gather nearly 30 students, kindergarten teachers and parents of small children in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, who were interested to work on this subject. Due to the timing of the workshop, with the summer holidays approaching, and its voluntary nature we were able to gather only a small group of four to come on the specific day. However there has been a broad general interest to continue working on this topic and organize further events. Since this workshop has to be seen as one part of a larger social change, it is important to network and plan continuous projects in the future. The now existing virtual networks is therefore beneficial.

We were fortunate to use our existing contacts with the Kaivopuisto International Kindergarten. We received practical support from their parent association in implementing our

workshop on their premises and using existing art supplies. Initially some parents were also interested to join the workshop, but unfortunately they were unable to attend. The perspective of parents would have been very interesting and enriching for the learning in the group.

Later on, the "Equal encounter in nursery schools"-project received continued funding and was prolonged until June 2015. Therefore our collaboration with Unioni began only after the summer break and after the initial implementation of the workshop. In retrospect it could have been beneficial to have a more intensive contact and collaboration already in the planning and advertising phase. However, we received helpful feedback in order to develop and finalize our workshop guide. Suggestions included an introductory text that puts our exercises on gender into a larger cultural context, and more detailed explanations about the purpose of each exercise.

As a final result of our thesis, the produced material will be made available to educators on the web pages of the "Equal encounter in nursery schools"-project. So far, a launch event open to the general public is scheduled, during which further use of the workshop can be discussed. Furthermore, a practical workshop open to the general public is planned and advertised in co-operation with the Feminist Forum (FemF). For this purpose, methods and exercises have to be modified to fit a tighter time frame and an unpredictable group size with varying levels of previous knowledge and experience.

Based on the interest for our workshop by Unioni, organizers of FemF and professionals in the field, we can conclude that the idea of our thesis was well chosen and that it is linked to the current discussion in the society. According to the feedback we have received from the participants and partner organization, our thesis also addresses the need to create awareness in the field.

Our theoretical framework for our project was appropriately chosen. Theories of gender socialization are of significant importance in order to understand how assumptions about gender are learnt and how they affect our interactions with each other including our work with children. Theories of participatory learning are vitally important to consider when planning educational exercises that aim to encourage reflection of own experiences and practice.

The process of planning and implementation of this final thesis was significant in terms of our professional growth. The exploring of available theories and researches, and their combination with the practical implementation strengthened our understanding of the connection between theory and practice. While developing the workshop and materials, we have gained valuable experiences, new skills and professional networks.

7.1   Limitations

While reporting our implementation and making conclusions, we realized that it would have been useful to have an additional question in the feedback form that specifically asks participating students if they had felt that in their study program, the question of gender-sensitivity is considered sufficiently or if this is a topic they have discussed with their classmates prior to the workshop. This issue came up during the discussions while the workshop took place, however, the information would be more reliable and rich if we had gathered it through written feedback. We would have then had more reliable information considering the impact and individually perceived necessity of our workshop.

What further limits the reliability of our results is that the participants we reached are likely to all have previous motivation to participate and work on the topic of our workshop, because they attended voluntarily. If we had had a group of students or professionals that were sent by their teacher or superior to participate in a similar workshop, the outcomes would have likely been different. It is also possible that the entire workshop process was creating a bias amongst the participants, so that by the time they were filling out the feedback forms, they gave responses according to what they believed was expected of them to answer.

The participants we reached in our workshop were diverse in cultural background and came from different educational institutions and study programs. However, one limitation to our results is the fact that all participants were female students in their twenties (authors' estimation, no data about age was recorded). It is likely that we would have received different results with a group more diverse in gender, age and professional background.

Our recommendation is to always consider the background and circumstances of a group before planning a workshop. Methods may have to be adapted according to size of a

group, cultural background, professional experience, previous knowledge, age or ability of the participants.

So far, we have no knowledge of this workshop having been multiplied with the help of our guide. Even though we received feedback that the instructions are understandable and easy to follow, we do not actually have reliable information whether or not someone was able to implement a workshop based on our written instructions. Hence, we have only hypothetical knowledge of how functional our workshop guide would be in practice.

7.2   Ethical considerations

Carrying out a thesis project ethically aims to serve the interests and safety of individuals, communities and environments and attempts to create positive outcomes in a holistic way, taking into account all of these (Israel & Hay 2006: 2). As already mentioned previously a practice-based thesis needs to be reported with the means of research communication (Vilkka & Airaksinen 2003:9). Therefore the same ethical considerations have to be taken into account as for any research in the field of social sciences. Ethical conduct in this context revolve around the concepts of informed consent, confidentiality, beneficence and non-maleficence (Israel & Hay 2006: 10).

All participants signed a consent form (Appendix 1), where they permitted us to document their participation in the workshop. We gave the participants the time to read through the form by themselves before signing it. The consent form promised to keep all participants identity confidential but allowed to use and publish disguised quotations. All information given in the feedback forms was transcribed to digital documents without any personal data attached to the answers. Handwritten feedback and signed consent forms will be destroyed after completion of this thesis.

The principle of nonmaleficence refers to minimizing the risks of harm or discomfort to participants (Israel & Hay 2006: 95). When working with a sensitive topic like childhood memories, one risk for participants that has to be taken into account is the re-experience or re-living of stressful or traumatic life situations or events. The facilitators were not fully aware of this risk before the implementation of the workshop which caused unnecessary harm to at least one participant. As a consequence, alterations to the workshop model have been made in order to reduce this risk in the future. Facilitators interested in using

our workshop guide are made aware of this risk and are presented with a variety of options to avoid similar harm occurring in the future.

The principle of beneficence refers to the expectation for researchers or professionals to advance the well-being of participants and in some cases to increase the sum of good for society as a whole (Israel & Hay 2006: 95). Benefits for the participants of this workshop include a chance to broaden their perspective and add to their professional growth through self-reflection, group-discussions and networking with other students. As we found from the feedback we received, this type of learning is also an enjoyable social experience.

Also the Talentia ethical guidelines for social welfare professionals refer to the principle of beneficence. They state, that professionals in the social field should promote social justice in not just their clients' lives, but in the whole society. Promotion of social justice can be for example preventing negative discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation, recognizing diversity, or opposing to unjust approaches and practices that are "oppressive, unfair or harmful". (The Committee on Professional Ethics of the Union of Social workers 2007:9.)

As already pointed out earlier, the workshop we developed is directly addressing a social responsibility to challenge a current gender paradigm that openly encourages and justifies discriminatory practices and therefore limits healthy human growth and creates a multitude of inequalities.

8   Conclusions

Early childhood pedagogues have an important role in children's education and development. Widespread current practices have found to be contributing to gender inequality by discriminating children based on gender. Through gender-sensitive pedagogy professionals are enabled to create learning environments that better promote children's equality. It is thus vital that gender-sensitive approaches become more widely known and used amongst students and teachers in the field.

The aim of this thesis was to develop a workshop to make the concept of gender-sensitive practice more widely known and to encourage critical reflection from this perspective.

One aspect herein was that the workshop is easily multiplied in order to spread the idea more efficiently. The final result is a workshop guide (appendix 3) that can be used by formal and nonformal educators in various settings. The workshop was tested successfully with a small group of participants with varying degrees of previous knowledge and work experience.

In order to further develop the awareness of gender-sensitivity in early childhood education, we suggest multiplying our workshop in different contexts and including similar methods into the curricula for the students of early childhood education. Interest for further workshops has been expressed by our partner project "Equal encounter in nursery schools" and follow-up events are already scheduled.

Furthermore, our partner project has expressed a need for English language materials. Most of the gender-sensitive education materials available in Finland are either in Finnish or Swedish, and can therefore be used exclusively by teachers and parents with good command in either one of those languages. A large number of English language kindergartens however exists in Finland. Furthermore, Helsinki is a very international city, and many parents have an immigrant or expat background. Thus our suggestion for further development is the production of additional materials in English.

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Consent Form

Consent Form

I, ……………………………………, agree to participate in the workshop held today by Linnea Pohjolainen and Aurelia Westendorff, which is part of their Bacherlor's Thesis data collection.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my participation to be documented.

I understand that <u>anonymity will be ensured </u>in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my verbal and written statements during the participation may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications.

I understand that no personal data of the participants will be collected or used in any way.

Signature …………………………………….

Place and Date …………….…………….…………….

Feedback Form

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions.

1) Have you thought about gender-equality before participating in the workshop?

2) In your opinion, was the workshop
- useful?
- enjoyable?

Please elaborate why / why not.

3) Did the workshop raise new thoughts about the meaning of gender for early childhood education. If so, what are they?

4) After participating in the workshop do you think you would use gender-equal methods in your work with children? Why / why not?

5) Could you imagine yourself to facilitate a similar workshop with fellow students/professionals or parents in the future? Why / why not?

6) What would you change in order to improve the workshop?

7) What was the best thing about the workshop?

8) Anything else you wish to say:

Additional information (optional):

I am … (check when applicable)

• a student Field of studies: ……. Educational institution: …….	• already working as an early childhood pedagogue in • the private sector • the public sector Years of work experience …….
• something else:	

Thank you for your participation and feedback! :-)

Early childhood and gender - Ideas for a workshop for students and professionals of early childhood education

Often generalizations and presumptions about children are made based on gender. These can limit children's self-expression. It is sometimes argued that inequalities between the genders are biologically given. However we should understand that a clear distinction has to be made between sex and gender, meaning the biological processes and the social aspects to being male, female, both or maybe neither of the two. It is a common belief that one can either be exclusively male or female and that a person's outward appearance and behavior should match their assigned sex. However it has to be understood that everyone is an individual and limiting their self-expression can be harmful for their psychological well-being and personal growth.

Unequal treatment of children is usually not a result of intended action but rather happens unconsciously and indirectly. The work community needs an increased awareness to uncover unconscious, unintended behavior towards children. This workshop is aiming to give starting points to think about the meaning of gender for the everyday life. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and their work with children. Reflection in groups also enables the search for alternatives from the participants' own viewpoints.

Objectives of the workshop:

- To explore own assumptions about gender

- To explore how gender is visible and perceived in childhood

- To share different points of view

- To raise awareness amongst students and professionals

Target groups:

Also combined groups (teachers/parents, students/professionals)

Time needed:

approximately 3 hours

Tasa-arvoinen kohtaaminen
päiväkodissa

Facilities and equipment:

This workshop can be realized by one facilitator, or a pair of facilitators and a group of ideally 6-8 participants.

- flap board or white board and markers
- 30-40 post-it notes or small pieces of paper and blue tag
- 6-8 pieces of large white paper (A3 or A2) depending on number of participants
- pens, colors
- a room large enough for the group to move freely

The first parts of the session (exercises 1 and 2) should be targeted at firstly introducing the topic and helping the group to focus on the themes the workshop will be dealing with. Secondly, it is also important to create an area of trust amongst the participants, so they feel safe to share. The third aim is to initiate the conversation between participants.

1. Introduction (Plan approx. 20 min for this)

Instruct the group to sit down in a circle. It can be a circle of chairs or on the floor, depending on the room and the group. Make sure to include those who may have difficulties sitting down.

Introduce yourself and get to know the group. Ask each participant to introduce themselves shortly, give space to talk about hopes and fears for the workshop. Ask each participant to say which was their favorite toy as a child. The purpose of this is for the participants to warm up to each other and to enter the mood of childhood.

Instruct the participants to split into pairs, preferably with another participant they have not met before or do not know well. Give the pairs five minutes to discuss, what gender means to them and thoughts the word brings up.

After five minutes or so, ask participants to share their ideas and insights. Write the word in big letters on a piece of paper, and then write all the words suggested at different angles all around it. Explain that we are going to use our own experience to understand more deeply the meaning of gender and its effects upon our lives.

This exercise gives the opportunity to discuss gender in a larger context. Questions that usually come up are around the difference between sex and gender and how they are intertwined. Is our behavior shaped by biological disposition, societal factors, or both? How do participants view gender-inequality and its implications on interpersonal, institutional or socio-political level?

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2. Childhood games (approx. 20-30 min)

Ask participants to discuss in small groups (2-3 persons), what were their favorite games in childhood. After a few minutes let the entire group decide together on one or two games that we can play now in the group. Act out those games. The purpose is for everyone to enter deeper into that mood of childhood and warm-up to each other.

Afterwards discuss how gender is visible in those games from your viewpoint.

- Did you play them mostly with boys/ girls/ or both and did they have different roles and behaviors? What might have been the reasons for the different behaviours?

After the introductory part of the workshop, that includes a warm-up and establishing the session's focus, facilitators should begin to encourage the exploration further so that participants can deepen their understanding of the topic and identify connection points to their own life. The following two exercises are chosen to follow this purpose.

3. Memory lane (20 - 30 min.)

This exercise can occasionally bring up difficult memories for some people, so it is important that you give participants the option not to participate if they feel uncomfortable. If you are a facilitator with little experience and you do not feel entirely comfortable to use this method, you can choose to leave out this exercise.

Explain that in the next exercise we will use our own childhood memories to identify how gender was visible in our childhood. Explain that this exercise is optional and if somebody prefers not to join they can stay out of the circle. Also inform that if difficult feelings arise and someone wishes to talk about them more privately after the session, that this is possible.

Instruct participants to sit in a circle, and close their eyes. Ask them to picture themselves at a certain age, start with age 3. Instruct them to focus on a happy moment at that age. Ask one or two participants what they see, which clothes they are wearing, where they are, who else is there and what everyone is doing.

Repeat the same with ages 6 and 9.

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Then ask the group to remember a childhood summer-holiday (this can as well be a celebration, for example christmas. Bear in mind that this might not be a good example in a multicultural group). Instruct the group to focus on a happy moment. Ask: What did you do? What did everyone else do? (e.g. tasks at the summer cottage/ at christmas, presents that were given)

Here we can use a creative method to describe our memories to others, e.g. drawing maps of the home environment. Instruct participants to do this individually. Allow 10-20 minutes of time for this task, then ask the participants to hang up their artworks on a wall as in an art gallery for all the others to see. The group will now look at every picture separately. First, ask the others what they see in the picture. Only after that ask the artist him/herself to explain what they drew.

Afterwards discuss with the group if there were similarities between the memories and what they observed in regards to gender, could they identify different gender-specific behaviors or roles in the family? How have they thought about those back then? How do they think about them now?

> *Intermission: at this point ask people if they need a break, have any comments or wishes, how is the general mood?*

4. Human sculptures (20- 30 min)

Ask the participants to split into groups of three and share with each other some situations where they have actively imposed gender stereotypes on a child in their work practice or with their family. In case they can not think of such situations ask them to think of a situation they witnessed someone else having done so.

Ask the participants to choose one situation to show in a human sculpture. The one who experienced the situation is the sculptor and should use the other people in their group as clay. No talking is allowed, participants have to communicate with non-verbal language to form the sculpture. This exercise requires participants to touch each other so it is important for everyone to feel comfortable with each other.

When the statues are ready first ask the participants of the other group to describe what they think the statue expresses and what they think happens in the scene. Afterwards the sculptor him/herself is asked to tell about the situation, what happened, how s/he felt, how the child might have felt, and if s/he thought the situation could have been handled in a different way. Ask him/her to change the sculpture to show the alternative scene that she suggests.

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The Human Sculpture exercise aims to assist participants to re-examine experiences from the new perspectives they have gained through the previous discussions in the group and integrate new knowledge into their thinking. This can be a difficult process and discussions might heat up: it is important that facilitators make sure to keep the space safe for dialogue and exploration.

5. Ideal image (20min):

In the next stage, after reflecting on our past and our current practice, we shall move on to think, what kind of practitioners we want to be. How do we want to work with children? Participants can individually draw up short value statements of what an ideal childhood should be like or early childhood education should be like and collect all those statements in one place where we can look at them together. Now they will gather in small groups (of 3-4 persons) to try to find one umbrella statement that would connect all the other ones that have been written down.

This exercise gives the opportunity to think about and discuss alternatives for early childhood education. Is there a mismatch between current practice and ideal practice? Are all children treated equally and are they able to express themselves freely? How does that impact on psychological development? What can we do as practitioners to live up to the ideals we have set for ourselves?

6. Evaluation + Networking

Sit again down in a circle. Give each participant space to answer how they feel after this workshop and what they liked or disliked. Ask if participants are interested to further work on this topic and give the option to stay connected through for example an email-list. If you have prepared material for further reading that the participants can take home, hand them out. If you have prepared your own feedback forms ask participants to fill them out before they leave. Or use any other feedback method of your own choice.

The idea of this guide is that the workshop can be multiplied, so feel free to copy this list of ideas for a workshop or make your own, and hand it out to your participants.

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References and recommendations for further reading on workshop facilitation:

Chambers, R. (2002) *Participatory Workshops. A Sourcebook of 21 Sets of Ideas and Activities*. London: Earthscan.

Smith, Mark K. (2009) *'Facilitating learning and change in groups'*, the encyclopaedia of informal education. [www.infed.org/mobi/facilitating-learning-and-change-in-groups-and-group-sessions/]

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