

English summaries

Eva Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson, 2009 – In preschool many gender patterns exist simultaneously/ Många olika genusmönster existerar samtidigt i förskolan/. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, Vol 14, No 2, pp 89–109. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788

The aim of this article is to illustrate how different gender patterns are manifested in everyday life in preschool. The theoretical and analytical framework of the study is based on (i) Rogoff's sociocultural perspective on development and learning, and (ii) a gender theoretical perspective. Central aspects to consider when trying to understand gender structures in social practice in preschool are children's and teacher's creation of meaning through acts and language – interpretations that influence the historical, societal, and cultural context in which the preschool practice exists.

By demonstrating how these structures, here named *gender patterns*, are expressed in everyday play and learning, it is possible to develop a deeper knowledge of preschool as an socialising actor within the field of pedagogical research. The empirical foundation of the study is based on 114 video sequences from six different preschool groups.

The research material was collected in the project »Can play and learning be integrated in a goal-oriented practice?» (which was carried out in the years 2003–2004). The aim of the article was to find patterns of interplay as they appear and are expressed in children's and adults' actions. The video sequences, which have been transcribed, have been analyzed both as a whole and also with regard to the specific details from each sequence.

The most important results of the study are that gender is constructed by children as well as teachers in preschool, and that it is primarily the children themselves who are innovative and challenging. Different gender patterns, existing in preschool simultaneously, are demonstrated in four themes. These themes are described as *making distinctions*, *stability*, *fellowship* and *crossing of boundaries*.

In the theme *distinction*, we reveal that masculinity is positioned as the norm in preschool and how this is shown in everyday practice. Subgroups in this theme are *boys in focus*, *girls are made invisible*, and *masculinity as a tool and norm*. The theme *stability* shows that the interaction between the teacher and the children may contain stereotypical conceptions of boys' and girls' different

interests. This theme also shows that girls actively act as rule-keepers in order to maintain the rules they perceive as to be prevailing.

In the theme *fellowship*, it is evident that girls and boys are valued equally and are given equal conditions when it comes to teachers' attention and participation. It also becomes clear that children are helpful to, as well as considerate of, each other. In the last theme, *crossing of boundaries*, the constant acts of innovation and creation are made visible. Here we can see opportunities for change of positions, re-interpretations and crossing of boundaries in the everyday practice.

The four themes presented above: *making distinctions*, *stability*, *fellowship* and *crossing of boundaries* throw light on the children's multifaceted everyday life. In this everyday life, gender is constantly constructed in children's play and learning in a complex pedagogical practice, and different gender patterns take effect simultaneously in the social practice. Children as well as teachers are actors who influence how these gender structures are formed, expressed and created during preschool activities. The practice is formed through dialogues and actions, and from cultural conceptions and frames, interpersonal actions, and the individuals' own interpretations and actions.

To sum up the result, preschool children of today live with parallel gender patterns in their preschool everyday life. While stereotypical structures are being maintained, boundaries are also being transgressed and verbal and physical expressions are being reinterpreted. One of the most important results of the study is the finding that it is the children who reframe and expand their possibilities.

At the same time, we found no examples of teachers who deliberately challenged the children to transgress boundaries. This is in itself an interesting result, as Swedish preschools are committed to equality in their national curriculum. According to the curriculum, the teachers should make sure that children's play and learning are not directed by stereotypical gender patterns or gender roles.

By combining socio-cultural theory with gender theory in this study, we have tried to embrace the whole in which structural patterns are brought to life in preschool. In future research, the children's own understanding and perspectives could be valuable contributions to a deeper development of knowledge on this theme, a very welcome perspective. Finally, we would like to point out that studies portraying children's play and learning in preschool from a gender perspective are much needed, something which is important to consider in future knowledge development concerning preschool children's everyday life.

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This study draws on data from a project in a nurse education programme in Sweden. The goal of the project was to improve a nursing programme so as the students would be better prepared for the demands of working life. The idea was to situate the whole education at the workplace, not only clinical studies but also theoretical ones. This programme can thus be seen as an instance of a very far-reaching attempt to create learning environment in which the movement towards *authenticity* and building a curriculum that is based on *real-life problems* are central.

During the 20th century there has been a growing interest for authenticity in education and for designing learning environments that resemble features of real life. It is claimed that knowledge is a part of real-life and could only be learned as such. As a consequence, formal education does not adequately prepare students for the demands of the new working life and the new economy. In response to this request, educational programmes like Workplace Based Learning (WBL) and Work Integrated Learning (WIL) have emerged, aiming at developing workplaces as arenas for learning. Secondly, much academic education has been reorganised in line with principles of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in which curriculum and instruction takes its starting point in problems intended to be authentic. The programme developed in the current project was based both on basic principles of workplace and problem-based learning.

The aim of this study was to scrutinize how teachers and students themselves construed and managed their programme in the intersection between the ambitions of the project; the conditions of the clinical practices they were involved in; and the theoretical parts of their programme. An ethnographic approach was adopted to answer these questions. The data collection included interviews with groups of students and teachers, participant observations and video documentation of group work.

The results showed that the teachers' knowledge of the topics and disciplines dealt with were often described as less important by the teachers themselves, whilst the students found the teachers' lack of familiarity with the subject matter highly problematic. Firstly, the students said that it was hard to find out on their own what knowledge was important to master. Secondly, they thought that learning processes were far from cumulative since important conclusions were quite often found to be wrong later on.

The blending of a problem-based and a disciplinary organisation of instruction invited new tensions to emerge. A focus on clinical problems implied that explanations from different parts of curricula and textbooks were demanded. This logic interfered with the regular organisation of theoretical content in the education. Consequently, each problem had to be covered by a set of complex theoretical explanations. Such explanations were experienced

as fragmentary and hard to grasp or grapple with by the students. For this reason, ordinary lectures on separate disciplines were introduced later on.

Another major finding was that the workplace to a large extent structured what was possible for students to learn. Some students claimed that the knowledge they acquired depended more on what tasks happened to be focus than on their learning needs. In this sense, the curriculum realised was mainly governed by the needs of the work place.

In conclusion, the programme had a problem-based design, something that functioned as an important means for structuring the instructional activities. Still, it is apparent how the design of the programme was rather open-ended, and how especially the students initially searched for an implicit order. Since the students were relying on established institutional structures of education and work, in shaping their everyday studies, the same structures were also re-constituted as two parallel threads in the programme. The programme was not established as an integrated one. Instead it is better described as a mix of different orders, each one driven by its own rationality. It is concluded that the movement towards authenticity should further take in consideration how students actually construe and understand relations between content knowledge and real life problems in work based and problem-based learning environments.