



4th SIG gender balance research conference in Dublin/Ireland

Gender Balance in ECEC: new research perspectives

Wednesday, 31.8.2016, 9.00-16.00

Notes (Tim Rohrmann)

The 4th SIG research conference invited to an open debate on gender balance issues based on reports on national and regional developments, and recent research studies. Round table talks and dialogues in small groups gave room for exchange.

26 researchers from Belgium, China, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Turkey, and the UK, took part. The conference was organized and chaired by Anna Bujnowska, Kari Emilsen and Tim Rohrmann.

Recent developments

Belgium. New research proposals regarding the situation of male assistants in ECEC are under way.

Denmark.* In the past years, a few regional projects for recruiting more men and keeping them in ECEC institutions were conducted, and results were analyzed. In late autumn 2016, the ministry for children, education and gender equality organizes five regional conferences on the issue in various parts of Denmark, in cooperation with universities which run courses in ECEC.

** information added after the SIG conference*

France. Since 2013 a small organization, Amepe Association pur la Mixité et l'Égalité dans la Petite Enfance, is working for the promotion of a gender-mixed work force in ECEC. A conference in January 2017 in Paris will be supported by governmental funding.

Germany. As a follow-up to the ESF model program More men in ECEC (2011-2013) a huge ESF model program for qualification of job shifters in ECEC was started which now has more than 50% male participants (www.chance-quereinstieg.de).

The national coordination centre for men in ECEC is planning a follow-up study to the national study on men in ECEC conducted in 2008-2009 (also published in English: Cremers, Krabel & Calmbach, 2012) for 2017, funded by the ministry of family affairs. It is intended to develop a less generalized approach, e.g. study different milieus.

Iceland. The Icelandic Government, the Icelandic teachers' union, the university of Iceland and other institutions work together on a project for getting more men into ECEC. In this context, it is also planned to conduct some research.

Norway. After many years with national action plans for gender equality which also aimed at getting more men into ECEC, there is less political interest in the issue of gender balance in ECEC.

Nevertheless, there are some ongoing and also new activities.

A project on "Young boys as play resources – an innovative recruitment initiative" was started with the aim to get boys and men interested in a professional career in ECEC. First preliminary research results from the projects were presented on this year's EECERA Annual conference (Emilsen & Ljunggren).

Poland. A research project on men/gender balance in ECEC has been started under difficult conditions, as research on gender is generally not accepted and funded by the recently installed conservative government. Nevertheless, a small group of researchers has begun some small-scale research on the situation of the (few) male workers and on attitudes of parents towards men.

Sweden. In Sweden there have been some activities on the issue of men and gender balance in ECEC in the last years, including a national survey on the issue (Heikkilä, 2015). Some research was conducted in the context of an UK-Swedish network. At the same time, fears and accusations of child sexual abuse have been a big problem for men in the field (see contribution of Eidevald on the SIG conference).

Switzerland.* Building up on a now finished research project on gender in ECEC (Tennhoff, Nentwich, Schaelin & Vogt, 2015), results are now transferred to practice with a follow-up project and website. At the same time, a national project is working on the issue of more men in ECEC. A conference will be held in Zuerich in November 2016. * information added after the SIG conference

Turkey. The proportion of men in Turkish pre-schools is higher than in most other countries, maybe due to good salaries. In the last years, several small-scale research projects were conducted on different aspects of the issue.

United Kingdom. After grass roots initiatives and a national conference on the issue of men in ECEC in Bristol in February 2016, there is new enthusiasm for the issue of men in ECEC in the UK. Regional networks and researchers at several universities promote local initiatives and small-scale research on the issue.

Cross-national collaborations

Germany and Portugal. Researchers from Lisbon and Dresden are working on a cross-country study using the method of the German Tandem study. First results were published on this year's EECERA Annual conference (Brandes & Fuertes); more research is under way.

UK/Sweden/Indonesia. A EU funded research network has worked on various aspects on the issues, resulting in two joint publications in 2015 (Brownhill, Warin & Wernersson 2015; Warin & Gannerud, 2014), and more.

Austria/Turkey/ Poland see below: round table parent's views.

Opening paper: Why more men

Jo Warin from Lancaster, UK, opened the debate with her presentation on *Why do we need more male teachers in early childhood education? International debates and perspectives on gender balance and gender transformation.* Based on gender theory, and on research from the UK, Sweden, and East Asia, Jo put into question some often-heard arguments for more men in ECEC. She argued that ECEC educators have to develop gender sensitivity, to be able to deliver a gender sensitive pedagogy and can cultivate gender flexibility.

In the following debate it was pointed out that it can be difficult for men if they *as men* are made responsible for reflecting and transforming gender, regarding that there are many female students and workers who haven't reflected gender issues much. Moreover, challenging gender stereotypes can sometimes be difficult for men as they feel a need for presenting themselves as "real men" although they work in ECEC. Although many participants agreed in the aim of gender flexibility, the idea of gender als a "free-floating artifice", and the split between gender (as a social construction) and sex/body (as a biological phenomenon), was put into question: *How do we deal with (different) bodies in ECEC – in theory and in practice?*

Round table: parents' views on male ECEC workers

Meni Tsigra opened the round table with an analysis of interviews with parents about the male and female preschool m of their children (see paper Tsigra pdf).

Her presentation was followed by short summaries and statements from research on parents' views in Austria, Turkey, Poland, and Germany (see papers Rohrmann, Sak & Sak, and Cremers & Höyng). It can be summarized that parents in all countries support gender balance and more male workers in ECEC. From several countries it was reported that "real-life experiences" with male workers led to a more positive view on male ECEC workers in general.

Nevertheless, reasons for positive attitudes about men in ECEC might differ. In several cases, the support for more men was based on stereotypical attitudes on differences between men and women, e.g. men are better in disciplining boys. Moreover, even if the majority of parents are in favor of male workers, there can be a very negative minority which can strongly influence the discourse among parents and with ECEC workers. Moreover, even if the majority of parents is in favor of male workers, there can be a very negative minority which can strongly influence the discourse among parents and with and among ECEC workers.

Finally, although in general parents may accept male ECEC workers, there might be differences regarding e.g. the age of the children. In Austria (2008), only 30% of the sample agreed that children under three should be cared for by women, while 70% accepted men also as carers for infants. In Poland, only 20% supported male workers in this field, whereas the vast majority agreed that women should be responsible for infants.

It was concluded that small samples, different milieus and different educational settings might lead to different results. It is necessary to have (1) bigger samples, to use (2) more differentiated methods, and to develop (3) similar methods (e.g. questionnaires) for cross-country comparisons. Maybe parts of international questionnaires developed in other fields of gender m can be adapted to the field of ECEC.

There were controversial views about the importance of research on parents' views on men in ECEC in general. It was said that research has shown for 18 years now that a majority of parents is positive towards more men in ECEC. Parents are not the major barrier against more men, so it is not necessary to to focus on this subject. This was countered by the fact that there *are* different results in cross-country research, e.g. a majority of parents in Austria, but only a minority of parents in Poland wants men to work with under-threes. Moreover, it was pointed out that a few number of parents who are against men can cause a lot of trouble for male workers, especially young men entering the field, so these parents can indeed be a problem for men interested in the profession. Nevertheless, reasons of *individual* parents who are strongly opposing men are quite individual and difficult to research. Instead, it might be helpful to analyze *discourses among parents*, as two or three parents who are against men in the center can lead to a difficult situation for the men even if the majority is positive. Clearly, it is difficult to research discourses among parents by questionnaires; so it might be necessary to develop methods for group discussion analysis which give insights into dynamics of parents' *groups*. Another new approach could focus on participation of parents.

It was also pointed out that even if parents are in favor of male workers, this might be connected with stereotypical attitudes which do not fit to the professional self-image of workers. E.g., Swedish pre-school teachers show a high level of reflection of gendered practices, and get distracted when they meet stereotype expectations from co-workers and parents. Finally, as *Meni Tsigra* pointed out,

it is necessary to compare what is *real* (happening in the classroom), and what is *in the mind* of parents (e.g. stereotype images and beliefs).

At the end, the debate opened up to general issues. It was argued that it has to be differentiated between research and policy. And it is necessary to discuss our role as researchers *and* as citizens engaged in public discourses. What is our role as researchers?

Round table: Male drop-outs

The round table on the issue of male drop-outs had been planned in detail by *Simon Brownhill*, UK, and *David Brody*, Israel, and was conducted although both colleagues couldn't take part in the conference. The good preparation allowed an interesting debate. Results serve as a starting point for a joint research which might result in a cross-country research and publication.

As a starting point for the debate *Christian Eidevald* from Stockholm gave an overview on recent developments in Sweden. In contrary to developments in Norway, gender equality policy in Sweden did *not* support strategies for getting more men into the field in the last decade. Instead, the focus was laid on the development of gender reflexivity regardless of worker's sex. At the same time, fears of being accused of sexual child abuse (CSA) are an obstacle for men in ECEC. After pedophile scandals in the nineties of last century, and again in 2014, men's presence in pre-schools was publicly questioned (see paper Eidevald...pdf).

In the debate different developments in various countries were debated. Regarding the Norwegian example, getting more men into the field doesn't guarantee more gender equality, but can be seen as one step into this direction. On the other hand, the promotion of gender equality without a focus on men and women, as in Sweden, doesn't lead to more male participation in ECEC.

Regarding fears of CSA, institutions in some countries – e.g. the UK – have developed rules against close physical contact between workers and children. But safeguarding strategies can be part of the problem instead a solution: "The more safeguarding, the more fear". In Germany and Norway, different strategies were developed to deal with the problem. In projects and policy development, it is agreed that it is necessary to thematize sexuality, CSA and child protection, and gender issues connected.

After this, participants formed small groups to discuss a wide range of issues on the issue of male drop-outs from the field of ECEC (regarding men in vocational training/study courses as well as workers in ECEC centers). The debate included the following issues and argumen:

- *Salaries* show relevant differences between countries, and moreover the *relevance* of salaries seems to be different between countries. E.g., good salaries seem to be important for the decision of Turkish men to become pre-school teachers, whereas this doesn't seem to be so important for Icelandic men (at least this was the impression of the group).
- *Fear of accusation*. To research this is not so easy: how can you research people's *fears*? It is necessary to develop support groups to deal with the problem – single-sex as well as mixed-sex groups.
- *Feeling 'out of place' and 'on their own', and gender territories*. Indeed men can feel isolated, and "male" and "female" cultures of language, communication, and conflict exist. This is connected to different understandings of professionalization.

- *The 'glass escalator'*. Career perspectives are important for both men and women, although for many men this might be more relevant. Institutional situations differs between countries because of different ECEC systems.
- *'Role model' pressure* could be a relevant factor, but has to be seen in the wider context of gender stereotypes and discourses in society. Moreover, there are different understandings of what the concept of "role model" means.
- *Burnout – "It's hard work!"*. Burnout is an issue regardless of sex. Nevertheless, for men it might be ambivalent that the stereotype notion is that working in an ECEC center is "not ambitious", while at the same time experience that it is indeed "hard work".

Final round

In the final round, participants gave a positive feedback. The contributions and debates on the conference were called "inspiring" and "refreshing". The majority of participants agreed with the concept of a full-day conference, and also to the mix of round table talks and small groups, which enabled deeper debates in the group (although there were still very many issues and time was n too short).

Moreover, participants showed interest in further research collaboration. At the moment, there is mostly small-scale and deep follow-up research under way. A possibility for cross-country research would be systematically linked case studies, focusing on tthe he questions "what's common, what's different?".

Regarding the future development of the SIG group, the connection between research and practice was discussed. It was agreed that the SIG group at first is a research group: "research is the frame", last not least because this allows funding from participants' institutions. Nevertheless it benefits from being a mixed group and making connections to practitioners and practice projects, so it will continue to be open for all people interested in the issue.

Future organization of the SIG within EECERA

The future organization of the SIG group and its connection to EECERA was discussed in a later meeting during the EECERA conference, see "SIG organization team notes 2016".

Communication within the SIG: mailing list, website, dropbox and country contact persons
see next page.

Publications

As in the past years, publications of SIG members and other contributors on the issue of gender balance/men in ECEC are listed in pdf documents for the past years which are available on www.siggender.eu → publications.

Presentations on gender issues on the 26th EECERA Annual conference

see next page and www.siggender.eu → documentation.



SIG communication

The SIG has developed the following means of communication:

- A mailing list with now more than 100 interested colleagues.
- The website www.siggender.eu with basic informations about the SIG, lists of publications, conference documentations for download. The website is hosted by the University of Applied Sciences Dresden, Germany (because of this, the frame is in German).
- A joint dropbox with a lot of files, e.g. publications, statistical data, SIG reports... send a mail to Tim → rohrmann@wechselspiel-online.de if you want to get access.

Morover, a list of “country contact persons” is available on the website. The contact persons promote networking in their country and can answer or forward requests for information about recent developments, and research contacts, in their respective countries. They are not elected representatives. If you want to serve as contact person for a country not already on the list, or have requests about the list, please contact the SIG convenors.

Presentations on gender issues on the 26th EECERA Annual conference

Gender issues were again featured prominent on the 26th Annual EECERA conference. Several symposia dealt with issues of gender in childhood and/or gender balance in the ECEC work force, two of them organized by the SIG Gender Balance. The broad range of contributions demonstrated the complex interplay between cultured gender differences and individual development of children, women and men. Several cross-national studies revealed similarities and differences between gender discourses in countries, e.g. Germany and Portugal, Germany and Sweden, and even more distinct between Western and Eastern countries as China and Indonesia. The presented papers will be soon available on www.siggender.eu (go to “documentations”).