

The importance of: Gender Equality education

Gender Equality Commission of the
Council of Europe
9 October 2014
Helsinki



Today I will talk about...

- A few words about the situation.
- How I started - barriers
- What conditions are needed to teach gender studies/equality education?
- How is it taught?
- What is taught?
- Why is it necessary?
- How gender inequality appears in schools?



Hanna Björg Vilhjálmssdóttir

How do we know that we need gender education?

- Wage gap
- Fewer number of women everywhere there is power – in spite of women's better education
- Media – stereotypes
- Gender based violence
- Domestic work
- Prostitution and human trafficking

**Men
Of
The
Year
2012**



Hanna Björg Vilhjálmsson



Inequality

- Women and men – boys and girls are taught that power is masculine – and that masculinity is power
- How are we taught that? Yes – by the values, with the role models, with the stereotypes – everywhere in the culture we are taught that men are superior and women are inferior.

The media

- is the single worst enemy – there the stereotypes are foremost withheld.
- Women are silenced – by being first and foremost sexy and all about youth and beauty – and by not being there. Not visible – not having a voice – not having an opinion – but being an object.

Situation in Iceland

- Quite good! – Compared to the rest of the world. But Icelandic women are angry
- Gender equality law since 1975 (gender education at every school level)
- Gender equality office
- Gender studies faculty in the university
- Gender education in the curriculum (2011) – both direct education and indirect – through all other subjects

How it started

- Yours sincerely is a feminist who knew the law on gender education in Iceland
- Started working as a teacher in 2006
- 2007 started offering KYN 103 as a non obligatory course
- Grassroot work
- No teaching material – but still – it is everywhere



He Can Do It!



©Kioncube humron

Hanna Björg Vilhjálmsdóttir

Barriers

- Gender equality faces resistance in general
- A matter of choice to attend the course
- Some fellow teachers are a little sexist – some a lot
- Some students look at feminists as terrorists
- Lack of teaching materials – but still...
- All teachers must be gender educated – all are not

Barriers

- All around negative discussion about feminists in the community among the general public
- The inequality is moulded into the culture – we need to respond
- Everybody has an opinion on the matter – few have knowledge



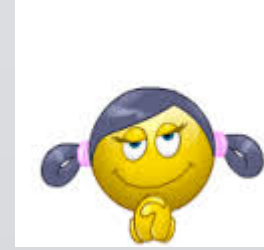
What needs to be done

- Gender equality in the curriculum
- Teachers training – different pedagogy
- All school levels
- Textbooks – teaching material?
- Gender mainstreaming in schools – students social life

Challenges in the classroom

- Students prejudice towards feminism and think they want a woman privilege more than equal rights
- Students think that equality is already here
- Students completely accustomed to the pornification - normalised
- Girls are sexist too– are co-dependent to the masculinity “we want this to be like that”

Challenges in the classroom



- The students don't realize the connection between cause and consequence, e.g. the pornification in pop culture and increase in cosmetic surgery
- Students look at gender issues as an individual thing - "many women are violent" or "some women are in charge in the home"
- Misconception – "women just don't apply"

Important background in teaching equality

- Awakening
- Limited knowledge goals
- Address the students through their feelings, experience and attitude
- Participation and activity
- Democratic framing – the students take part in organising
- Students feel that they “own” a part of the course

Important background in teaching equality

- The term „Power is a key issue - and put it in perspective
- Discuss other minority groups
- Being able to be vulnerable and honest
- Be bold – talk about challenging and intense issues

Gender equality education is also about

- Empowerment
- Communication
- Expression
- Arguing
- Empathy
- Civil consciousness
- Activism
- Solidarity
- Broadmindness
- Toleration
- Self-understanding
- Lifeskill education

Why...?

- Personal happiness: both girls and boys are suffering
- Society's healthiness: We are not using every individual's possibilities
- An Icelandic study shows that students are more negative towards gender equality in 2006 than in 1992 – backlash? Is the pornification to blame?
- Student thirst for this kind of education

Gender inequality in schools

- Girls are objectified in the school
- Boys take more part in the social life
- Girls have more anxiety
- Boys are far more likely to be in a position on a student council
- Boys are more likely to dominate in the classroom
- Boys get more time and attention from teachers
- Girls tend to be anonymous, quiet and forgotten

My guiding lights in the classroom

- Diversity and fun
- Closeness with the reality of the students
- All the issues of inequality are discussed
- Training in criticism and “reading” the society
- The boys do not feel themselves as the criminal or the bad guy - and the girls do not consider themselves as the victim
- The culture is to blame
- Empowerment and responsibility

What and how do I do it?

- Essentialism v. social construction (born or not born with gender role)
- Start with the closest surroundings of the student and carry on to the international community
- School and the social life
- The home
- The workplace
- The media
- Politics
- World issues



What and how do I do it?

- Manifestation of the inequality viewed:
- Headcounting (democratic demand), prostitution, domestic violence, rape, misogyny, fashion, tv shows, wage gap, trafficking, appearance, cosmetic surgeries, pornification, porn, socialisation, the price of masculinity – and so on
- My students “infect” other students of the wisdom (smile)

What and how do I do it?

- The Culture plays a key role – is all around, moulding us – without criticism
- Cause and effect connected
- Flow of discussion and thoughts – concepts defined and put in contest



What do students do?

- Do team building exercises
- Write a diary – reflect on their opinions and others
- Share stuff in the classroom like articles, ads, books, movies, music videos, stories about themselves and others - raise questions
- Open up and discuss issues
- Dispute
- Take a concept test

What do students do?

- Show up like a clock
 - Participation
 - Give a presentation about gender issues of choice
 - Make posters
 - Plan a gender equality day in school
 - Write a newspaper article
 - Write an essay
-
- And they thirst for this kind of education and pedagogy

What has been succeeded

- Taught in 17 upper secondary schools in Iceland (of 33)
- 11 feminist clubs in upper secondary schools
- - their manifesto is that gender studies will be obligatory
- So the course has coloured the school culture
- Also taught in some elementary schools – not obligatory
- Many defined actions have been taken – Facebook/ social media activism
- General discussion in the community

Next steps

- Educate and coach teachers and everybody who works with children
- Direct and indirect (the hidden curriculum) equality education
- All school levels
- Educate parents
- Make it unnecessary

What is all this about?

- Not just about feminism
- Not just about being a teacher
- But about the role of the educational system
- About democracy
- About justice – for all

Bad things happen
when good people
do nothing

- Edmund Burke



Hanna Björg Vilhjálmisdóttir