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BE KINDER: unravelling paths to address gender stereotypes in education and early childhood

Tatiana Moura (Coord.) + Ayça Alaylı
+ Patrícia Ferreira + Marta Mascarenhas + Maja Gergorić
+ Mihaela Ionescu + Valentina Longo

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AUTHORS

Tatiana Moura (Coord.)

Ayça Alaylı

Patrícia Ferreira

Marta Mascarenhas

Maja Gergorić

Mihaela Ionescu

Valentina Longo

REVIEW

Dave Tucker

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Daniel Sansão (contagio.ag)

EDITOR

Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra

Colégio de S. Jerónimo Apartado 3087

3000-995 Coimbra, Portugal

PARTNERS

Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra (Portugal)

CONVIVE Fundación Cepaim (Spain)

Status M (Croatia)

IN COLLABORATION WITH:

ISSA - International Step by Step Association

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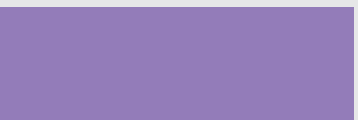
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Introduction: towards European gender-responsive and transformative education

Tatiana Moura + Patrícia Ferreira
CES/UC

Recent studies state that children have clearly defined gender stereotypes by the age of five (OECD, 2021), with gender being more of a determining factor in their future choices than socio-economic status. The International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study,¹ conducted with 4,000 children, showed that when asked what they would like to be when they grow up, boys showed more stereotyped choices, or those corresponding to traditional gender norms, than girls. Girls were more interested in functions or jobs traditionally considered masculine, such as police or firefighters, than boys were in functions or jobs considered less masculine. Overall, however, the most common career choice for girls among five-year-old girls was teacher, while boys mostly chose a career in policing. Girls tended to choose careers requiring higher academic qualifications than boys; however, girls' choices fell into roles related to care, protection and creativity (nurse or veterinarian, for example).

In short, children respond and react to the world they see, and where they live. Gender roles, norms and expectations are transmitted to and apprehended by children through interaction, language and practices that take shape in choices related with clothing, toys, stories and books, among others, creating a system of peer pressure to match gender standards, and discouraging cross-gender activities (EIGE, 2016) or those that "do not fit" into these standards.

In the face of slow change in current gender roles, we can and should ensure that children know the multiplicity and diversity of roles they can aspire to – whether

1 The International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study is an international survey that assesses children at age five across three countries, identifying key factors that drive or hinder the development of early learning. The main characteristics of the study are presented here: <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/the-international-early-learning-and-child-well-being-study-the-study.htm>

through books, films or other media, or through gender-sensitive practices implemented in their educational and family contexts that promote the deconstruction of stereotypes. Gender equality will not be easily achieved if children continue to copy the gender norms of their parents' and grandparents' generations. And this transformative role falls to parents and education professionals, who have the potential to expand their horizons from childhood, and contribute to the strengthening of their socio-emotional and cognitive skills and well-being (Wilson et al., 2022),

In education systems, the lack of reflection and, to a certain extent, the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, continue to shape, in a more or less visible way, the practices of education professionals in school settings, and the very definition of curricula. At the European level, with some exceptions, there are few gender-neutral educational approaches, as we can see with the examples from Spain. Moreover, the majority of the teaching and non-teaching staff in schools are not trained to address the issues related to the subject.

The attempt to promote this approach among education professionals is a long-standing strategy of the European Commission. In 2015, the Council of Europe recommended the inclusion of a gender perspective in all aspects of initial teacher training courses and throughout teachers' careers and promoted the development of mechanisms among country authorities to ensure gender mainstreaming in education monitoring systems. As part of this approach, the Commission has implemented a strategic framework for EU cooperation in education and training.² However, according to the Education and Training Monitoring Reports,³ the EU still shows a considerable imbalance between girls and boys concerning school leaving rates and gender gap in higher education, for example.

The KINDER project

Stereotyped ideas, attitudes and practices about gender roles and relationships are, as mentioned above, at the root of the deep inequalities widespread between men and women. Despite this fact and the individual and joint efforts of the European Union Member States to promote, adopt and enforce gender equality legislation and gender mainstreaming, gender stereotypes – particularly those related to the equal division of care responsibilities – persist in our societies, and influence the lives and

² The European Education Area strategic framework: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/about-eea/strategic-framework#:~:text=The%20European%20Education%20Area%20strategic,achievement%20of%20their%20collective%20vision>

³ Education and Training Monitor 2022 comparative report: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2022/downloads/comparative-report/Education-and-Training-Monitor-Comparative-Report.pdf>

future choices of boys and girls (following the recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on Gender Mainstreaming in Education⁴).

In this context, the proposal of the KINDER⁵ project is to challenge gender stereotypes in education during early childhood based on the assumption that transformative and synchronised approaches and curricula on stereotypes should be put into practice at an early age. It would involve children from three years old (EIGE, 2016) in order to prevent the reproduction of gender imbalances within the educational system and in family contexts, decisively impacting on the future life opportunities and choices of girls and boys (Kollmayer et al., 2018). The project took place between January 2021 and June 2023, and was implemented in three European countries – Portugal (by the Centre for Social Studies/University of Coimbra), Spain (by the Cepaim Foundation) and Croatia (by the organisation Status M), with consultancy from the International Step by Step Association (the Netherlands), and in partnership with Equipundo and the Global Boyhood Initiative. KINDER aimed to promote a transformative pedagogy of gender norms and deconstruct stereotypes by carrying out training programmes for professionals working with children of pre-school age (3–6 years old) and from the first cycles of compulsory primary education (7–12 years old). As a contribution within the European region, the KINDER programme offers transformative tools that will contribute to promoting individual changes in attitudes about gender norms and to the deconstruction of stereotypes, enabling education professionals to develop effective and innovative responses to the specific needs of girls and boys throughout the teaching and learning processes and, finally, supporting schools and the national public authorities to mainstream gender-neutral and inclusive education at national and EU levels.

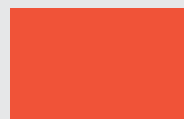
4 <https://rm.coe.int/recommendation-cm-rec-2013-1-of-the-committee-of-ministers-to-member-s/1680982c06>

5 The KINDER project was funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union (Grant Agreement: [101005800]).

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CHAPTER 1

KINDER: tackling gender stereotypes in education and early childhood

Tatiana Moura + Marta Mascarenhas + Patrícia Ferreira
CES UC / Observatory Masculinidades.pt



Introduction⁶

Tackling and challenging gender stereotypes and promoting a balanced socialisation of girls and boys has been embraced by education systems and programmes as a core strategy to achieve healthier and more balanced societies. There is, however, a gap concerning the way that kindergartens, preschools, and elementary schools approach these issues. KINDER starts from the premise that stereotypical ideas about gender roles underlie challenges related to psychosocial development and well-being, and profound social inequalities. Notwithstanding the European Union's efforts towards gender equality (GE), stereotypes persist and influence the lives, health and future choices of children and youth across Europe.

Initiatives and programmes that seek to transform unhealthy or restrictive norms and roles hold possibilities within educational spaces for widespread social change that requires engagement and commitment with children, families, schools and communities at large (Wilson et al., 2022).

The KINDER programme aims to tackle the urgency of developing an effective and innovative training programme and curricula for professionals working with children at preschool (aged three to six) and from the first cycles of basic compulsory education (seven to twelve years old). The project was implemented in three European countries: Portugal, Spain and Croatia in collaboration with the International Step by Step Association (ISSA). The main objective of the programme was to provide teachers, educators and other school staff with gender-responsive and transformative tools, allowing them to respond to the specific needs of girls and boys (particularly at these early ages) in the teaching and learning processes from a gender equality perspective. The strategy was to equip education professionals in general

with knowledge, skills, and attitudes for a gender-responsive pedagogy (while promoting behavioural change in the still prevailing transmission of gender stereotypes by these professionals) by developing research and a gender transformative training targeting them. At the same time, the teams engaged families in participatory processes to promote diversity within and outside schools. KINDER also worked to support school management and national public authorities to mainstream gender issues at an early age.

KINDER's first steps

Stereotyped ideas about gender are at the basis of the deep, pervasive inequalities between men and women. In the EU, women's presence in the labour market is still lower than that of men, and *the gender pay gap in the EU stands at 16% less per hour for women than men* (EC, 2020). Despite all individual and joint efforts from the EU Member States in the promotion, adoption and effective enforcement of gender equality legislation and gender mainstreaming, gender stereotypes – particularly those related to the division of care responsibilities – still persist and influence the lives and future choices of boys and girls (EC, 2019).

In past decades, efforts to promote behavioural changes regarding gender attitudes, norms, and differentiated expectations among boys and girls throughout their lives (e.g., careers) have brought together policymakers, academics, practitioners and corporate managers, among other stakeholders. This collective effort provided research and action-oriented recommendations to tackle the problem, targeting strategic sectors of our society. Among these sectors, some are considered crucial for the promotion of social change in attitudes regarding gender equality (e.g., workplace and work-life balance policies; public sector and public policies; justice sector, education institutions, and mainstreaming of GE programmes.)

In this sense, considering its critical role in children and young people's socialisation processes, education systems in recent years have invested in adopting new practices to promote gender equality. This is particularly true for middle and high school institutions at the European level. There is, however, a gap concerning the way kindergartens, preschools, and elementary schools approach these issues. Gender transformative approaches and curricula need to be implemented at early ages, targeting children from three years old onwards, preventing the reproduction of gender imbalances within the education system, which has a significant impact on girls' and boys' future life chances and choices (Kollmayer et al., 2018).

KINDER was designed on the premise that transmission of gender stereotypes starts at an early age and is deep-rooted in institutions like family and school systems. Gen-

der roles, norms, and expectations are passed on to children through interaction, expectations, clothes, toys, stories, books, etc. From an early age, boys and girls are placed in boxes of expected blue and pink behaviours, which critically impacts their view of the world and the way they shape their future social relationships. Young children themselves display gender stereotype attitudes from the age of three, creating a system of peer-pressure to conform to gender patterns, and discouraging cross-gender activities (EIGE, 2016; OECD, 2021).

In the education system, gender differentiation continues to shape practices and curricula (both visible and hidden), often insidiously, which makes its deconstruction particularly challenging. At the European level, with some exceptions in the Nordic countries, few gender-neutral educational approaches exist. Furthermore, most school staff are not trained to address gender-related issues and/or are not aware of their own gender bias and thus contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Interaction with children constructs gender (equal or unequal relations) and reflects the social norms of the society in which we live, impacting on the learning environment. Teachers and educators should and do play a key role in the holistic, healthy, and equitable development of children.

Promoting this approach among education professionals is a long-standing strategy of the European Commission. In 2015, the Council of Europe recommended the inclusion of a gender perspective in all aspects of pre-service and in-service teacher training courses and promoted the development of mechanisms to ensure monitoring systems for gender mainstreaming in education among country authorities. As part of this approach, the Commission has implemented a strategic framework for EU cooperation in education and training. However, according to the Education and Training Monitoring Reports, the EU still exhibits a considerable imbalance between girls and boys (e.g., early school leaving rates, gender gap in higher education, etc.).

In a similar previous call (JUST/2015/RGEN/AG/ROLE), the European Commission funded eight cross-country projects that developed and implemented various training curricula and toolkits to strengthen the capacity of teachers and educators to mainstream gender in the education system. However, the vast majority of these programmes engaged young people and targeted boys and girls starting at the age of 13. None of them involved professionals working with young children (from three to six and seven to twelve years old), with this age group being clearly disregarded as an priority for intervention in the context of the deconstruction of gender stereotypes. This reflects the low levels of awareness of the importance of earlier intervention that makes it possible to ensure effective changes in the way children are socialised in terms of gender expectations. In fact, the neuroplasticity of children at an early age, namely from three years onwards, gives a better chance of success for the interventions carried out, since at those ages children are still elaborating the way boys and girls should and do behave. At the same time, in most EU countries, ini-

tiatives engaging education professionals in promoting gender equality do not target young children's educational environments. This is a shortcoming of EU strategy, considering that the concept of gender and gender stereotypes begin to take root in children between the ages of three and seven (Ruble et al., 2007). It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to close this gap in the EU.

Although gender equality and combating gender stereotypes have attracted considerable attention at the EU level, policy and practical efforts at a national level to tackle gender inequality have failed to intervene during children's early years, when the cognitive and affective formation of gender identity and stereotypes begin to be formulated. According to the *Compilation of Good Practices to Promote an Education Free from Gender Stereotypes* (Council of Europe, 2015), only Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain have implemented initiatives targeting preschools. Yet, even in these countries, initiatives are residual. Moreover, the results of a previous REC-Action (EQUI-X -776969), conducted by the KINDER team, demonstrated the need for education and training free from gender stereotypes. In Portugal (PT), for example, the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) action "Education Guides for Gender and Citizenship – Preschool" only targeted 93 professionals out of a total of 16 079 registered professionals (0.6%). In Spain (ES), despite some progress at the national level, the backlash on gender issues is increasing in some regions, promoted mainly by conservative regional governments. The insufficient treatment of gender equality issues was accentuated by the early childhood and primary education centres in this country. Meanwhile, in Croatia (HR), national legislation on education is not fully integrated with anti-discrimination and equality strategies (see Chapter 4 of this manual for more information). This means that in this country different kindergartens and schools tackle gender equality challenges in distinctive ways, and there is no comprehensive approach to the issue. Furthermore, available research indicates that most teacher training institutions do not meet the educational needs of students with regard to gender debates.

In the midst of advances and setbacks in gender equity, the KINDER project aims to respond to the urgent need to develop an effective and innovative programme and training curricula for professionals working with children in pre-school (three to six years) and early compulsory primary education (seven to twelve). The groups of professionals were organised taking the national specificities of the education systems of each partner organisation into account. The programme is gender-sensitive (with a strong focus on masculinities) as well as age-appropriate. This means that it should be anchored in a practical approach to gender-sensitive pedagogy for children's education, considering the latest scientific evidence and global initiatives. Furthermore, KINDER acknowledges the role of families in promoting healthy gender relations. Therefore, KINDER involved families and caregivers as part of the process.

There are some global good practices outside the EU that can serve as inspiration for the development of these programmes and tools. Experiences such as GRP4ECE⁷ may provide the initial basis for the development of an EU programme targeting gender stereotypes in preschool education. GRP4ECE is a joint effort of organisations from Rwanda, Zambia, and South Africa in developing strategies to challenge stereotypes at an early age. Its toolkit enables teachers not only to become aware of their gender biases and how to overcome them, but also helps them to proactively challenge gender stereotyped ideas with their pupils. In addition, other initiatives, such as Equimundo's Global Boyhood Initiative⁸, with which the KINDER coordination (CES) has an established partnership, have informed some of the research methodologies and strategies.

As previously mentioned, school systems and education professionals can, and often do, reproduce and perpetuate gender stereotypes. This means that strategies targeting sexism and gender stereotypes must particularly involve institutions and professionals dealing with early childhood, while bringing families and carers into the debate. Teachers, educators, and other staff working in schools play an essential role in the holistic development of children and pupils. Therefore, they should be target groups for initiatives and activities to reflect on their own beliefs, attitudes and behaviour regarding gender stereotypes and their transmission, recognising the ways in which the school system influences the construction of identities and the emotional and social development and well-being of children (Connell, 2005) (see Chapter 2 of this manual for more information).

The KINDER approach and curricula are age-appropriate and gender-sensitive and are intended for education professionals working with children aged three to six and seven to twelve. In addition, the curricula are intersectional, focusing on gender stereotypes and diversity, as recommended by the European commission (CM/Rec(2019)1).

The use of educational materials and teaching recommendations is promoted in both public and private kindergartens and primary schools since the project's main effort is to create changes in institutions at the national level. To achieve this goal, the project has established a series of partnerships with public authorities in each of the KINDER partner countries (e.g., in Portugal with the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG), in Spain with the Delegation of the Government against Gender Violence, and with the regional authorities for education and child affairs in Aragón, Valencia and Murcia, in Croatia with the Education and Teacher Training Agency and Ombudsperson for Children and Gender Equality).

7 <https://www.vvob.org/en/downloads/grp4ece-toolkit>

8 The Global Boyhood Initiative was co-founded in 2020 by Equimundo and the Kering Foundation and aims to "support boys aged 4 to 13 and the adults in their lives with the resources they need to raise, teach, coach and set an example for boys to become men who embrace healthy masculinity and gender equality" (Equimundo, n.d.). For more information, please check <https://boyhoodinitiative.org/>

The three partners of the KINDER consortium — Centre for Social Studies, Cepaim and Status M — are based in the three EU countries (PT, ES, HR) which, to some extent, have already adopted (isolated) national strategies for the promotion of gender equality addressed to young people. However, in Croatia, these initiatives are mostly carried out by NGOs. Moreover, PT, ES, and HR share a very similar organisation of the education system in terms of preschool and basic (compulsory) education levels.

Since early childhood interventions are scarce at EU level, the project also involved the International STEP by STEP Association⁹ (ISSA). ISSA is an international learning community nurtured by leading early childhood experts from Europe and Central Asia. ISSA unites and supports professionals and partners to deliver high quality early childhood services equitably.

Where? Countries and project consortium

The KINDER partners are located in countries which, to some extent, have implemented various institutionalised/governmental initiatives for the promotion of gender equality in preschool. However, Status M (HR) is located in a country where these initiatives are mostly conducted by NGOs. Within the scope of the KINDER project, and the PT and ES experiences in promoting effective national tools and strategies for gender mainstreaming from an early age, we will also support this action in HR by approaching this issue from the point of view of science diplomacy.

The countries were also selected because their education systems have many similarities. In all three countries, compulsory schooling starts between six and seven years of age and the basic cycles of studies are similar. Furthermore, in all three countries, preschool education is optional and provided by both public and private kindergartens. In this sense, the three countries are aligned with most European countries' education systems, which makes them good case studies for the development of these specific methodologies.

In 2019, the countries reported the following figures:

Portugal – 16 065 preschool teachers for 240 231 children, 54 043 teachers in the first and second study cycles for 621 660 students. In preschools, 99% of teachers are women while in the first and second study cycle, the rate of wom-

⁹ ISSA is a public benefit organization, based on the Netherlands, aiming to “increase awareness of the importance of Early Childhood Development and of a qualified workforce. As a leading early childhood network and learning community, [they] promote quality, equitable and integrated services for children, families and practitioners.” (ISSA, n.d.). For more information, please check <https://www.issa.nl/>

en is 86.7% and 72.6% respectively. In PT, the majority of the preschool teachers are aged 50 or older (DGEEC, 2019).

Spain – Considering both public and private centres, in the school year 2019–2020, 1 265 102 children aged between three and six attended preschool establishments, and 2 900 738 students attended primary school (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2019). According to INE (National Statistics Institute, data for 2017–2018), there are 54.689 teachers in preschools, of whom 97.7% are women, and in primary schools, there are 229 799 teachers, with women constituting 81.7%.

Croatia – There are a total of 12 601 early childhood education teachers (99% female) for 139 228 children in kindergartens and preschools. In primary schools, there are 316 914 students with a total of 33 392 teachers (81% of whom are women).

The consortium is formed of one academic institution (CES) and two NGOs (Cepaim and Status M).

The KINDER partners (CES, Cepaim, Status M) are located in countries that have already implemented some kind of institutionalised/governmental initiatives to promote gender equality in preschool (Council of Europe, 2015). However, in Croatia, and some regions of Spain, gender is currently a controversial issue, as shown by demonstration and petitions for the repeal of the Istanbul Convention. In this sense, KINDER plays a vital role in the EU's efforts to promote gender equality. Within the framework of scientific diplomacy, KINDER will be an agent of the EU's values regarding gender equality and human rights. In Spain, although the situation is different, studies report that anti-equality measures are being put into force by conservative regional governments.

Moreover, the progressive standardisation of the education system among all EU countries allows KINDER to develop a strategy suitable for adoption by other Member States.

Some of the partners enrolled in KINDER were part of the very well-evaluated REC-Action "*EQUI-X: Promoting innovative strategies addressing the construction of gender identities and engaging men and boys in non-violent models of masculinity*" (01/2019-12/2019). This partnership meant that not only could various EU geopolitical contexts be considered, but it also ensured a wide range of opportunities for applicability and replication, providing a mapping of good practices and mutual learning. In addition, the coordinator (CES) is also involved in the REC-Action "*PARENT: Promotion, Awareness Raising and Engagement of Men in Nurture Transformations*" (02/2019-1/2021), a project addressing the challenges of preventing and eradicating violence against women and children by engaging men in co-responsible parenting and caregiving and promoting equal sharing of unpaid care work. This

project will add value to KINDER by providing another network of EU partners whose work has been dedicated to combating all forms of gender-based discrimination and promoting equitable relationships.

Overall, KINDER is aligned with and responds to various EU recommendations such as CM/REC(2007)/13; Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on gender equality standards and mechanisms (CM/REC(2007)17); Council of Europe Strategy for Gender Equality 2014-2017; Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on preventing and combating sexism (CM/Rec(2019)1), among others).

How was KINDER implemented?

In KINDER, knowledge production is sustained by quantitative and qualitative research engaging education professionals and parents/families in each country. This research was conducted to understand recent trends and the state of implementation of gender mainstreaming in early education, as well as the impact of the EU good practices. The main results of the research can be found in the national handbooks, as well as in the resources area of the website.¹⁰

The main objective of the data collection was to identify the main critical gaps and needs of education professionals and families and to develop gender-sensitive curricula for children aged three to six years and seven to twelve years, trying to break the transmission of gender stereotypes and meet KINDER's main objectives:

1. To raise awareness of the need for an EU approach to tackling the persistence of gender stereotypes from an early age in education systems;
2. To target the potential reproduction and transmission of gender stereotypes by professionals in kindergarten and basic schools at the national level;
3. Promote changes in attitudes towards gender stereotypes and sexism from an early age, both inside and outside schools;
4. Develop didactic material for teachers and school staff on gender-sensitive pedagogy to promote gender equality and combat gender stereotypes;
5. Encourage public authorities in mainstreaming gender-neutral and inclusive education at national and EU levels.

¹⁰ All resources produced throughout the project, as well as other recommended materials, will be made available at <https://kinder.ces.uc.pt/resources/>.

All products developed under this project are available online. The KINDER programme – including the national manuals and the pedagogical tools developed which compose the KINDER toolkit) can be freely accessed online, shared and adopted internationally. The KINDER digital hub will become a global resource and connection point for education professionals. The scientific and pedagogical research and educational materials are being adapted and translated, as the wider initiative expands into Europe and beyond. Also, the national manuals and pedagogical tools developed (the KINDER toolkit) have been transferred to the public authorities of each country, and can be used by schools at national and international levels.

Together with national authorities, KINDER implemented national awareness campaigns built upon existing European and national data and strong messages that aim to broaden public awareness and gain a better understanding of the regional landscape.

Awareness-raising campaigns were also developed during the project and shared with public authorities, fostering their capacity to mainstream gender-neutral and inclusive strategies into the education system.

KINDER Children's Day Campaign

Ne postoje ženske i muške igračke i igre



"71% ispitanih dječaka slaže se da djevojčice mogu igrati nogomet, a dječaci plesati balet"
(Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media & LEGO, 2021)

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convive Convívio de Comunidades
STATUS M 

Para las criaturas, los juguetes no tienen género.



"Las propias criaturas muestran actitudes estereotipadas según el género desde los tres años, se va así creando un sistema de presión entre iguales para ajustarse a los patrones de género, y se van desalentando las actividades mixtas entre niñas y niños"
(EIGE, 2016)

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Para as crianças, os brinquedos não têm género



"71% dos rapazes preocupam-se em ser alvo de troça por brincarem com brinquedos associados às meninas"
(Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media & LEGO, 2021)

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KINDER project (GA 101019202) was funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020)

A desconstrução de estereótipos também começa na escola

“Mais de 75% dos profissionais de educação considera que não têm formação suficiente sobre Igualdade de Género”
(KINDER, 2022)

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KINDER project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101019719

KINDER Teacher's Day Campaign

I škole su mjesta za borbu protiv rodnih stereotipa!

“Više od tri četvrtine učitelja i učiteljica nikad se nije obrazovalo na temu rodne ravnopravnosti.”
(KINDER, 2022)

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Las escuelas son también lugares para potenciar una educación libre de estereotipos de género y para atender la diversidad

“La coeducación ya es realidad en muchos colegios, pero se necesita una apuesta más contundente para que sea una perspectiva compartida entre toda la comunidad educativa.”
(KINDER, 2022)

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These products target gender stereotypes and negative gender roles such as those aimed at gender segregation in future professional and career choices, or those related to the promotion of equal sharing of care.

The training activities and pedagogical suggestions are also available in the KINDER website Playroom and Resources¹¹ areas, and they ensure the sustainability of the project in an ever-changing digitalised educational world.

The **training** methodology includes the design and planning of workshops with targeted schools to develop guidelines, response frameworks and implementation plans that address the transmission of gender stereotypes in the school context. These include training sessions with staff of educational institutions (e.g., kindergarten and elementary school teachers, assistants, administrative staff, etc.) and with

11 The KINDER website's playroom is available at <https://kinder.ces.uc.pt/playroom/> and <https://kinder.ces.uc.pt/resources/>

families. The training curriculum was designed based on the experience of KINDER partners and with the advice of ISSA. Each partner carried out face-to-face training sessions and created an online hub that will be maintained after the end of the project (Playroom, on the KINDER website). To ensure its maintenance, KINDER relied on the support of the national public authorities responsible for implementing gender equality agendas in each of the KINDER consortium countries.

KINDER also assessed the impact of the programme regarding (1) the impact of gender-transformative methodologies targeting both education professionals and families, and (2) the challenges, successes, and lessons learned from piloting for scaling it up to the European level.

These two actions built the foundation for systemic change that will impact not only on children, but also on professionals, children's families and the educational institutions that influence and shape their lives. While each country will necessarily require a different approach, our strategy is to establish relationships and collaborate with appropriate national institutions shaping education and/or youth organisations functioning at regional or national level.

Structure of the European KINDER Manual

Although it was not initially foreseen, the idea of creating a European manual resulted from the experience shared by the KINDER consortium within the implementation of a project that aims to develop transformative, gender-sensitive and gender-appropriate tools, enabling education professionals to address the specific needs of girls and boys in teaching and learning processes from a gender equality perspective.

What were the challenges common to the three countries and the national experiences moving forward for gender-sensitive education from early childhood that could sustain positive examples for the future?

In fact, by proposing to develop such methodologies to be implemented in preschool and school contexts, with children aged three to twelve, while promoting a behavioural change of the sometimes unconscious transmission of gender stereotypes by these professionals, a set of common experiences and learning has been generated among the international partners of the KINDER project, which must be shared as a starting point for policies and programmes aiming at integrating gender issues at an early age.

In this sense, this handbook will follow a tripartite structure that follows this logic:

- This first chapter, entitled "**KINDER: tackling gender stereotypes in education and early childhood**", consists of an initial framing chapter, which outlines the

theoretical contextualisation on which the KINDER project is based and which underpins its proposals for action-research in the field of educational intervention with children from three to six and seven to twelve years old.

- The second chapter, written with the support of the International Step by Step Association, specialists in early childhood development and consultants for this project, entitled "**Positive Gender Socialisation at Home and School for Transformative Change**", begins by clarifying what is meant by gender socialisation and develops the two transversal axes of the KINDER project: the role of families and schools as the main agents of gender socialisation and the way in which the education system, namely schools (kindergartens and primary schools), can support and involve parents in promoting gender positive socialisation.
- The third chapter, entitled "**Inclusive Playground. (Tiny) spatial modifications for social transformation**", brings together clues resulting from the experience of the Cepaim Foundation, in Spain, on strategies to adopt to create a supportive environment in schools (e.g., in physical spaces such as the playground). This chapter begins by exploring what happens in most school playgrounds in terms of gender representation and occupation, deconstructing these spaces and their meanings. This is followed by proposals for changes that can be made to ensure a more gender-balanced occupation of these spaces (social, physical and psychological dimensions), providing practical examples of what can be done to start such a transformation process.
- Lastly, a final chapter, entitled "**Countering Backlash: Overcoming Resistance in Challenging Contexts**", developed by Status M, will be devoted to strategies for education professionals (e.g., head teachers and school principals, teachers, assistants) to deal with potential challenges and resistance to gender-sensitive programmes from families and the wider community. Based on Status M's experience during the implementation of the KINDER project, this chapter allows them to share work being done on passive versus proactive approach to gender equality in schools, adding practical examples of this proactive approach and tips on what can be done to overcome these obstacles.

All the chapters were developed in tune with the creation of KINDER programme, i.e., taking into account the two curricula developed throughout the KINDER project, one targeting children between three and six years old, and another for children from seven to twelve years old. The KINDER programme offers transformative tools that contribute to individual changes in attitudes towards gender norms and to the deconstruction of stereotypes, enabling education professionals to respond to children's specific needs through the promotion of transformative teaching and learning processes.

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CHAPTER 2

**Positive gender
socialisation at
home and school for
transformative change**

Ayça Alaylı + Mihaela Ionescu
International Step by Step Association – ISSA

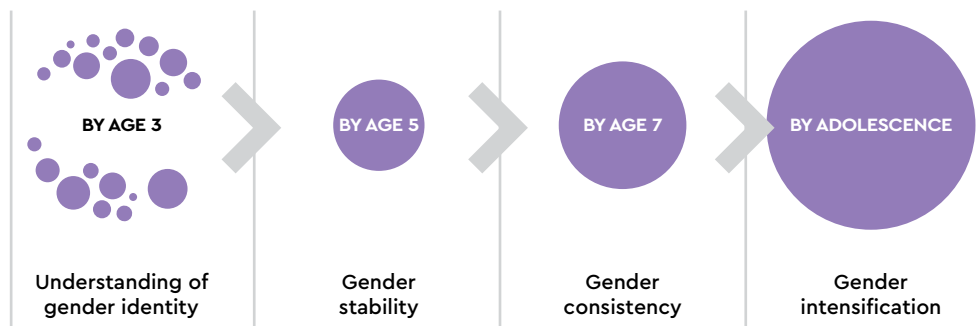


Introduction

What is gender socialisation?

Societal norms surround us from birth, and throughout life we learn and understand their value and relevance to society and gradually accept them as of our own. In other words, when children learn and internalise the gendered norms, beliefs, rules, and values about what members of a society should or should not do or feel, this process is defined as gender socialisation (Nandyose et al., 2018; Stockard, 2006). Gender socialisation can occur throughout childhood as well as across generations through internalised traditional gender identities. It is a multi-dimensional and complex process that begins at birth, continues through childhood, and intensifies during adolescence (see Figure 1). For example, preferences for a boy or girl child can affect the parental/caregiver's interactions with babies right from birth (UNICEF, 2011).

Figure 1. Gender Socialisation from early years towards adolescence



Children also learn and understand the consequences of conforming to gender norms and the result of breaking them and choosing different ways of being, and they might also internalise unequal norms and beliefs (Blakemore 2003). Gender norms do not have to be harmful in nature; however, how they are communicated and transmitted across generations has an impact on children's development and may limit them in reaching their full potential. Gender norms function as self-fulfilling prophecies. Once girls "learn" that science is not for them, their academic achievements in related topics might be lower. When boys "learn" to solve frustrations through aggression, they will become more aggressive. In the worst cases, they may endanger girls and women's lives and their physical and psychological integrity and deny all their rights.

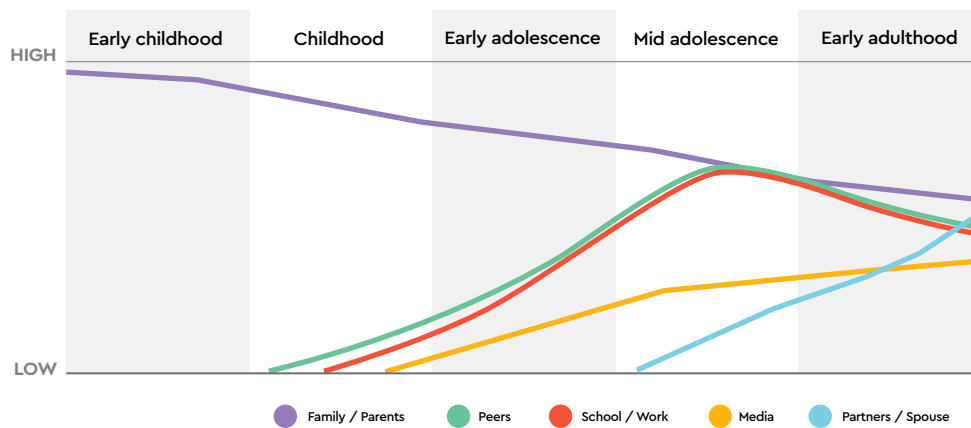
Modelling different roles based on sexes and setting different norms and expectations perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of harmful gendered norms and roles (Nandyose et al., 2018). What is supportive and responsive to children's development is to provide them opportunities to explore multiple identities (e.g., for girls being more than a woman or a mother, or beautiful; and for boys being at the same time strong and sensitive) and become unique individuals (Jha, Sheeba, Shelly & Muna, 2021). Parents are the primary agents of socialisation, and they play an essential role in promoting positive gender socialisation (Bussey and Bandura, 1999). However, gender socialisation does not only occur in the immediate family environment. As children grow older, the influence of others such as peers, teachers, other adults, and the influence of systems and structures such as education and media increases (Perales, Hoffmann, King, Vidal & Baxter, 2020). Therefore, not only parents but also teachers and schools play a crucial role in promoting positive gender socialisation.

Parents as the main agents of gender socialisation

Gender socialisation can occur in a child's life through multiple agents of socialisation. However, the most influential agents of gender socialisation are parents or primary caregivers (Neetu et al., 2017).

Agents of gender socialization

Beginning from early years, children are influenced by multiple agents of gender socialization. These agents include caregivers – parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, or nonrelated caregivers – peers, teachers, religious leaders, celebrities, and institutions such as schools, places of worship, and media. Parents, being the main agents of socialization, are followed by peers and school environments.*

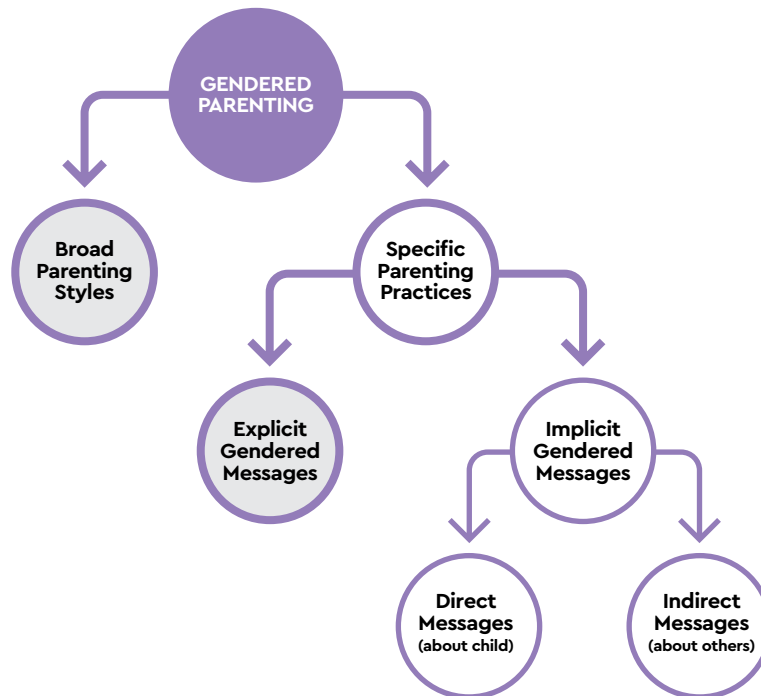


*UNICEF and ICRW, 2017. Gender socialisation during adolescence in low- and middle-income countries: conceptualization, influences and outcomes, Innocenti Discussion Paper.

Gender socialisation begins even before birth. Children's sex, from the moment that parents and caregivers learn about it, has power in shaping parental behaviour. Many parents take decisions about their children's immediate environment and interactions based on the sex of the child. These decisions might include deciding on the colour of the baby's room or clothes, choosing toys for their child and, most importantly, the messages that they instil in children in terms of what girls and boys are expected or not to do. Although when asked directly, many parents and caregivers would say they behave similarly to their children regardless of their sex, still there are implicit messages that children receive from their parents based on their sex. Earlier cumulative research has shown that there are no significant differences between daughters and sons in their parenting styles; however, parents might be inclined towards specific gendered practices. Parents might say that they do not mind their children engaging in activities they like, but at the same time they might implicitly send different messages to their daughters and to their sons. For example, girls might receive more praise for art, but boys might receive praise for physical activities such as climbing trees. It often happens that parents are not always aware

that they are engaging in gender-oriented behaviours and messages. Such parenting practices can be expressed explicitly as well as implicitly and may convey direct and indirect messages (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018) (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Overview of gendered parenting practices



Parents might consciously or unconsciously transfer discriminatory gender norms to the next generation through the following pathways:

- Active teaching, e.g., telling boys that they cannot cry.
- Making girls (but not boys) take on caregiving and domestic tasks at home.
- Speech, actions, behaviours and practices (whether deliberate or otherwise), e.g., giving girls dolls and boys guns to play with; praising girls for their looks and praising boys for their physical strength.
- Modelling gendered behaviours, e.g., only female caregivers are engaged in unpaid care work, while male caregivers are engaged in paid employment.
- Harmful gender-based practices at home e.g., gender-based violence; restrictions on female mobility; stigmatizing of menstruation as impure or taboo.

Adapted from Neetu et al., 2017.

Role of schools in gender socialisation

Gender socialisation does not take place solely in the home environment. Education systems and institutions have the potential to influence gender socialisation and gender equity in society and for future generations. Teachers and peers are two important agents of socialisation in school environments. Teaching and learning practices, school and classroom environments can be organised in ways that perpetuate gender stereotypes. Teachers might consciously or unconsciously apply methodologies that do not create equal opportunities for boy and girls. Materials used under these methodologies can be also gender biased (Mlama et al., 2005). Similarly, peers can have an impact on gender socialisation in preschool and school years. Children might perpetuate stereotypes such as "short hair only for boys" (Bigler, Hayes & Hamilton, 2013).

The early childhood period is an important period where early gender socialisation begins. From an early age, children begin to form stereotypes about the world around them. During their early years, the meaning of being a boy or a girl, a man or a woman is being shaped. Teachers and classrooms play a significant role in responding to children's needs. A high-quality preschool education recognises not only the quality of learning and teaching but particularly the quality of interactions with the children (Halim & Ruble, 2010). Research has shown that educators might interact differently with children based on their gender (Leah & Bazeley, 2019). They might unknowingly engage in activities that separate girls and boys in the classroom. Gendered teaching behaviour can be deeply rooted. Although teachers report they would like to challenge harmful gender norms, it is not always reflected in their daily practice and interactions with children. The educators' implicit beliefs and subconscious understandings of gender play an important role in reproducing gendered stereotypes in child's early years and beyond.

The table below summarises the main mechanisms that influence gender socialisation, starting from child's early years.

Table 1. Mechanisms influencing gender socialisation

Mechanism	How it works	Example of findings
Attention	Educators might have implicit biases that might manifest in their behaviour. This might lead to reproducing harmful stereotypes and result in discriminatory practices.	Boys receive more attention from their educators both during early years in preschool settings and school years (Chick et al., 2002).
Rewarding 'appropriate' behaviour	Gender stereotypes also contribute to the encouragement of "gender-appropriate" behaviour in infants and children. Educators might have expectations for children to behave in a certain way based on their gender and reinforce their behaviour within certain roles. They can also have an effect on children's play preferences, which is central to development and learning.	Reinforcement for girls for their clothes, hairstyles or helping behaviours while commenting more on boys' physical skills. Having toys that are gender stereotyped in the learning environment, praising boys for building blocks and criticising them for playing dress-up (Chick et al., 2002; Ewing & Taylor, 2009).
Separating boys and girls	Educators unconsciously might treat children differently, which might reproduce gender stereotypes.	Asking boys to move furniture and girls to clean up, giving pink materials to girls and blue materials to boys or grouping children based on their gender (National Union of Teachers, UK, 2013).
Gendered language	Language is a fundamental aspect of gender socialisation. Caregivers and teachers might communicate with children in a biased way in terms of the words they choose while referring to children of different genders.	Educators tends to use terms of endearment such as 'sweetie' when referring to female students while they tend to refer to male students with more traditional masculine terms such as 'buddy' (Fagot, 1977).

Gender transformative approaches for positive gender socialisation

It is crucial to promote equal, positive, and inclusive norms, values, attitudes, and behaviours to reduce gender inequalities and remove limits on children's

potential. 'Positive gender socialisation' seeks to change discriminatory gender norms to achieve equitable outcomes for children (Neetu et al., 2017).

Given that parents are the main agents of socialisation, supporting parents in engaging in positive gender socialisation is important to challenge and transform harmful norms and practices. For example, parenting programmes with a gender transformative approach are effective in combating gender-based family violence (Stern, Alemann, Delgado & Vásquez, 2023). Transformation of other circles that affect individuals' lives such as schools and institutions is also necessary to ensure positive gender socialisation (Marcus, Samuels, Jalal & Belachew, 2021). Teachers, schools, and the education system also play an important role in the promotion of positive gender socialisation (Perales et al., 2020). Supporting gender-transformative pedagogies and practices in schools can help prevent negative outcomes of harmful norms and practices. For example, gender transformative practices in middle schools can help reduce violent behaviours among middle school boys (Banyard et al., 2019).

A gender transformative approach critically examines inequalities and challenges gender roles, dynamics and social norms that perpetuate and legitimise gender inequalities. It seeks to transform underlying harmful social norms at different levels in societies (policies, systems, etc.) and promote positive gender socialisation in future generations. A gender transformative approach not only strives to transform harmful norms and practices, but also promotes equality by strengthening positive norms and promoting the position of women and girls (Marcus, Samuels, Jalal & Belachew, 2021). Ultimately, the aim of a gender transformative approach is to achieve structural and social change by detecting root causes of gender inequality and ensuring gender equality and protection of rights in this manner (WHO, 2011). '

How does a gender transformative approach promote gender equality?

- Encourages critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms, and dynamics
- Recognises and reinforces positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment
- Promotes the relative position of women, girls, and marginalised groups.
- Transforms the underlying social structures, policies, systems, and broadly held social norms that perpetuate and legitimise gender inequalities.

Interagency Gender Working Group. 2017. The Gender Integration Continuum. Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau - https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00X1WH.pdf

Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are defined as overgeneralized and oversimplified beliefs about individuals, leading to expectations that they will act or behave in a certain way based on gender. They might define what is acceptable and appropriate behaviour; they assume every member of a group is the same. These create limitations for children, while they are developing and going through gender socialization.

Why do we need to challenge gender stereotypes?

- They limit children's holistic development. Having only a certain type of toys (e.g., only Barbies for girls) would restrict different areas of development.
- They are linked to gender-based violence and harassment. Research findings suggest that young men and boys are more likely to perpetuate violence towards their partners when they hold rigid beliefs on gender norms, roles, and stereotypes (Reyes et al., 2016).
- They limit educational and career opportunities. Although there have been successful efforts to empower girls and women in STEM careers, it is equally important to empower boys and men towards professions that are seen as 'feminine' by society, such as teaching. Studies show that boys aspire to become engineers significantly more than girls (Chambers et al., 2018).
- They create gaps in school achievement. Recent school achievement reports show that boys are falling behind girls in school achievement in subjects such as literature and reading (OECD, 2019).
- They have a harmful impact on happiness, mental health and well-being. Holding rigid gender stereotypes in school years (e.g., girls have good clothes, boys are tough) has a negative impact on levels of happiness among children (Ochman, 1996).

Gender transformative approaches in parenting

Given that parents are the main agents of socialisation, parenting approaches have significant potential for promoting positive gender socialisation and, in turn, gender equality in society.

When parents engage in gender transformative parenting, they intentionally apply gender equity and fairness, equality, and inclusion in a responsive way. Gender trans-

formative parenting seeks to transform unequal and imbalanced power structures in families and future generations. Therefore, it promotes positive gender socialisation and supports holistic child development through parenting interactions, behaviours, emotions, knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes (UNICEF, 2023).

From their early years, children begin to develop a sense of gender identity that becomes more consistent and expressive towards the middle childhood period. Gender socialisation during these periods and beyond shapes gender identity, stereotypes and norms that are internalised by children. Gender transformative parenting applies a life cycle approach that recognises the needs of holistic child development that are constantly in a state of change (UNICEF, 2021). Parents should start promoting positive gender norms and socialisation from birth by encouraging and modelling gender-equitable treatment of children and behaviour among the family members in the household. Parents can promote positive gender socialisation through various pathways. Table 2 provides examples of gender transformative parenting practices for these pathways.

Table 2. Pathways of socialisation and transformative parenting practices

Pathway of gender socialisation	Gender transformative parenting
Active teaching	<p>The parent/caregiver listens with empathy and attends to the child's needs with sensitivity.</p> <p>The parent/caregiver praises children in a gender-neutral manner, not only for gender-typical behaviours.</p>
Modelling	The parents/caregivers share domestic responsibilities of caregiving in a democratic and equal manner.
Speech, actions, behaviours, practices	The parent/caregivers respect the child in selecting toys or type of play regardless of whether they fit into gender stereotypes.
Gender based practices	<p>The parents/caregivers establish mutual respect in the family.</p> <p>The family can talk about any important issue; no topic is seen as 'taboo'.</p>

Building parenting alliances and engaging men in caregiving are two critical elements of gender transformative parenting. Building parenting alliances at home between parents/caregivers by agreeing on aspects of raising a child, parenting styles and values, division of tasks and roles as parents, supporting each other, etc. brings gender-equal and gender-balanced togetherness in the home environment of young children. Men and fathers' engagement in caregiving and child-rearing has many benefits for positive gender socialisation and gender equality. Boys who have fathers who show positive and caring attitudes and behaviours at home are less likely to use violence to a female partner later in life and more likely to have positive attitudes towards gender equality (Barker et al., 2011).

Promoting gender transformative approaches is important to prevent socialisation of harmful gender roles, beliefs and norms that have negative impact on individuals and discriminatory outcomes (Jha, et al., 2021). Having an involved father has a positive effect on challenging gendered behaviour, roles and attitudes in future generations (Perales, 2020). Especially boys who grow up in households where parenting alliances are built, equal relations are modelled, equal participation in decision-making is accepted and fathers are involved in caregiving have more egalitarian values, and show no tolerance for violence (Jankauskaite, 2022).

Gender transformative approaches in education

As children grow older and enter the school system, the impact of other agents of socialisation such as peers, teachers, other adults, and schools grows larger. Education has great power to transform harmful gender norms and discriminatory practices to achieve gender equality and equity. It is important to keep in mind that it is not solely the task of teachers, but of the whole system (See Figure 3.)

Gender transformative approaches in education do not only acknowledge different between genders and explore ways to address inequalities and reduce harmful gender norms and practices, but they also detect root causes of inequalities and dismantle gender norms and power relations. Gender transformative education challenges power relations and rethinks gender norms by utilising all parts of an education system from policies to pedagogies. This would remove barriers to education and boost progress towards important social shifts, such as the reduction of gender-based violence and early marriage, increased participation of women in the labour market, the promotion of gender equality, and women's and girls' leadership in decision-making roles (PLAN International, 2021).

Figure 3. Five main components towards a gender transformative education system



A variety of gender-focused strategies can be implemented across the five core components of pre-primary education systems.

Adapted from Nugroho, Anindita, Delgado, M., Baghdasaryan, B., Vindrola, S., Lata, D. and Mehmood Syed, G., (2022) Tackling Gender Inequality from the Early Years: Strategies for building a gender-transformative pre-primary education system. UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, 2022.

Role of schools

Schools have a great potential for fostering gender transformative approaches by recognising and addressing the needs of children regardless of their gender through their management, policies and practices (Heikkilä, 2020). A gender transformative school:

- Reviews the curriculum, textbooks, other learning materials and teachers' guides to ensure that issues related to gender, equality and inclusion are appropriately addressed;
- Recognises and addresses gender-based needs of both boys and girls through its management system, policies, and practices;
- Ensures adequate infrastructure based on needs (e.g., students with disabilities, separate toilets etc.);
- Develops and enforces teacher codes of conduct;
- Establishes student safety and protection measures in a gender-sensitive way;
- Ensures equality between male and female teachers by:
 - Transparent recruitment and selection of teachers and staff;
 - Equal teaching conditions and equal representation in management positions;
- Provides teachers, principals and staff gender-responsive teaching training including topics such as equity issues and learner-centred education; gender-responsive teaching approaches and tools; conflict resolution; trauma-informed practices; addressing and preventing sexual harassment and physical and sexual abuse; and school management and leadership;
- Generates and looks for funding to provide scholarships to poor girls or at-risk students, abolishing school fees and reducing hidden costs, providing incentives for teachers, ensuring an adequate supply of materials and upgrading the school infrastructure;
- Connects with the community, shares information, engages in collaborative projects with other local schools and education institutions and involves community members in school committees and parent-teacher associations (FAWE, 2018).

Role of teachers

As mentioned earlier, teachers play a significant role in challenging the reproduction of gender stereotypes by engaging in gender transformative pedagogies in their practice. They can use different strategies to promote positive gender socialisation and to create gender transformative and enabling environments for children's development. Table 3 summarises key practices that teachers can use to promote positive gender socialisation and gender equality (Mlama et al., 2005; O'Sullivan, 2013; UNESCO, 2009).

Table 3. Key teaching practices and interactions for positive gender socialisation

Key teaching practices and interactions for positive gender socialisation
Providing children with alternative examples of activities, such as sewing, woodwork, etc. in a gender-neutral way
Valuing the learning ability of both female and male students equally and giving them equal chances (e.g., while answering questions, leading discussions).
Facilitating all children's abilities to learn, progress equally, and develop their potential to the fullest.
Reacting cautiously to unfriendly and potentially gender-biased attitudes that students may demonstrate toward their female and male peers.
Phrasing questions to reflect equal gender representation – using female and male names and characters when providing examples/illustrations.
Introducing gender-non-conforming professions such as examples of male nurses, female firefighters.
Helping students question gender-biased attitudes to prevent them from happening in the future.
Looking for characteristics/behaviours resulting from social norms that may hinder academic learning and performance (e.g., shyness, arrogance, dominance, bullying, lack of confidence, and fear of speaking out in class).
Ensuring each student has equal opportunities to practise on the demonstration models without being made to feel uncomfortable and without being belittled by others.
Assigning similar duties to both female and male students (for example, tidying, moving furniture).
Discouraging and punishing gender-discriminatory and sexist behaviours.

Gender transformative curriculum, learning environment and materials

For the education sector, to promote gender equality and positive gender socialisation, it is important for practitioners' work to be aligned with a gender transformative curriculum and accompanying learning resources. Most often, the curriculum is pre-defined and teaching and learning materials are already provided. However, schools and teachers have the potential to revise and enrich their existing curriculum and materials gradually (FAWE, 2018; Nugroho et al., 2002). Regularly collecting information on the effectiveness and ongoing relevance of the curriculum to children's needs and skills to suggest future revisions and improvements is essential, even if revising the curriculum does not take place immediately or often (UNICEF, 2020a). For example, even though the early childhood curricula in the 1990s were developed from a gender equality perspective in Sweden, the curriculum was revised and enriched from a gender transformative perspective (Skolverket, 2019). Most importantly, revision and enrichment of the curriculum should parallel capacity building for practitioners and teachers, to ensure teachers are competent in implementing the new curricula.

Steps towards a gender transformative curriculum (FAWE, 2018):

- Establish a task force in your school mandated to screen all teaching and learning materials for their gender responsiveness and motivate teachers to challenge the gender stereotypes encountered in the materials. The task force can check story and picture books, posters and other visuals for stereotypes and urge the staff to write questions that challenge any stereotypes in the margins of these books. In addition, these books could be supplemented with more gender-sensitive materials.
- Stimulate and support teachers to develop and use gender-neutral play materials and other learning materials.
- Look out for gender-responsive teaching and learning materials to supplement the existing curriculum and distribute them free or at a low cost. Praise your team for creating their own gender-sensitive materials with locally available resources and stimulate them to be resourceful in creating such materials.
- Bring gender stereotypes in existing learning materials to the attention of publishers and education officials when given the opportunity to provide feedback. Stimulate and support teachers to develop and use gender-neutral play materials and other learning materials.

A gender transformative curriculum cannot be complete without teaching and learning materials that are developed and designed from a gender transformative perspective. Studies have shown that learning materials, textbooks and the learning environment in schools might have gender bias and might reproduce gender stereotypes (Blumberg, 2008; Page & Jha 2009). This might manifest under the 'hidden curriculum', which refers to schools transmitting norms, values and beliefs to students in the classroom and school environment beyond the formal curriculum (Blumberg, 2008; UNICEF, 2014). Therefore, revision and adaptation of teaching and learning materials and the learning environment is essential to ensure they are free from gender bias and promote gender quality.

How can education system and schools support and engage parents to promote positive gender socialisation?

Through pre- and in-service training

Teaching practices and interactions can help challenge harmful gender norms and challenge stereotypes and teachers are vital in doing so. Teachers need to develop competence and shared understanding to be able to effectively promote positive gender socialisation in educational institutions. Pre-service training and continuous professional development (CPD) are two main pillars in supporting teachers by equipping them with necessary competences in supporting parents in promoting positive gender socialisations. Pre-service training and CPD should reflect a gender-transformative curriculum (Nugroho et al., 2022).

Reflecting on one's own beliefs and biases is crucial to be able to examine their own gender biases and identify and challenge inequalities in the classroom (O'Sullivan, 2013). Teacher training on how to actively promote gender equality in practices helps teachers to foster positive gender socialisation and gender equality. Teachers should be able to model positive behaviours and interactions for children and parents through the way they are organising the learning environment, choosing and engaging with gender-inclusive materials and curricula and creating environments that are safe for challenging traditional gender norms (PLAN, 2021; UNICEF, 2023).

Engaging parents and building family-school partnerships

Socialisation processes are complex and involve multiple agents of socialisation. Children's family environment and interactions with primary caregivers are crucial for children's learning and development, but the community surrounding the child, such as the school environment, plays an important role as well (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Educators and schools have the potential to support parents in engaging in gender transformative parenting practices to foster their children's holistic development.

Both parents and schools are responsible for creating an optimal environment for the child's learning and development. Building educational partnerships between families and schools is necessary to ensure continuity positive gender socialisation between home and school environments and to promote gender equality in the wider society (Nugroho et al., 2002). Parental involvement, especially that of the father, is positively linked to a child's learning outcomes (Bago et al., 2020). Schools and educators can apply strategies to enable fathers' and mothers' equal involvement in education to build strong and gender-responsive family-preschool relationships (Nugroho et al., 2022). For example, teachers can engage both mothers and fathers equally instead of just referring to the mother in cases where the child is sick or when talking about child-raising issues (PLAN, 2021).

Designing education programmes that support gender equality

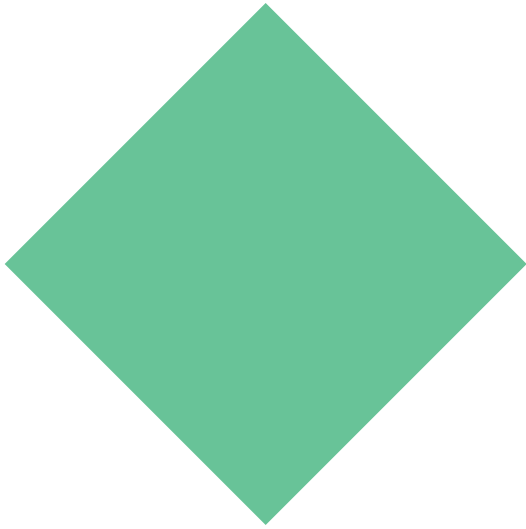
Education provision should take the gender equality perspective into account. The way in which the provision of early childhood education and services are organised can especially make a difference in contributing to gender equality. For example, the accessibility and timing of programmes should not restrict primary caregivers' (often mothers) employment chances (Karlson & Simonsson, 2008). Moreover, programming should respond to the needs of fathers. Strategies should be implemented such as organising separate sessions for fathers and mothers, providing incentives to parents who attend the activities and incorporating discussions about household decision-making processes around childcare in the sessions to facilitate behavioural changes (Bonilla et al., 2019).

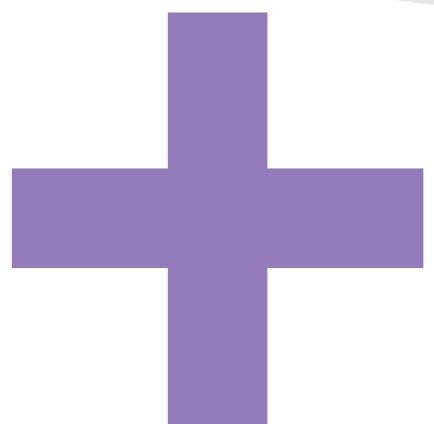
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CHAPTER 3

Inclusive playground. (Tiny) spatial modifications for social transformation

Valentina Longo
Cepaim Foundation



Intervening in the playground for a more equal and inclusive use of space

Recess is one of those moments of school life that allows observation of pupils in a less formalised environment: it is a space to play, to rest, to eat and to spend time in a less directed way than in the classroom. It is a very important space for socialisation within the school day, as it is the place where pupils socialise and interact, learn to negotiate, to play in a cooperative way or alone, and to win and lose freely. In short, they explore and practise different skills, like the cognitive, the social, the affective and the behavioural ones. Nevertheless, this does not mean that recess time is automatically a free and neutral space from a gender and inclusive perspective, since the use of space is strongly gendered; i.e. it is produced by and produces gender norms and relations. In this article we present some experiences and proposals to transform school playgrounds into inclusive and co-educational¹² spaces. We use the terms recess and playground as synonymous, even if the first refers to the dimension of time (when) and the second to the spatial dimension (where).

Playgrounds and classrooms are separate environments with partially different social norms and rules. Nevertheless, they belong to the same ecosystem and what happens in the playground does have repercussions in the classroom. Recess time can be a moment of exclusion for some pupils, or of tension for others. The playground can be experienced as a space of solitude or violent practices that do not happen in the classroom or remain unnoticed. As a school space where free play takes place, an aspect that must be preserved, playground and recess are both a privileged opportunity for observation for adults and a very important event for pupils.

¹² Co-education is one the most used concepts in Spain when considering education with a gender and diversity perspective. The concept of co-education has been changing and broadening its meaning during recent decades, in the same way as the concept of gender equality. Even if it is a disputed concept, the perspective we embrace on co-education means taking both sexual orientation and gender diversity into account, as well as other intersectional fronts that can reproduce inequality, such as racialization and class.

The perspective adopted by the KINDER project¹³ aims to develop gender transformative curricula for professionals working with children. Nevertheless, it is not only professionals who are responsible for teaching under an inclusive focus and gender+ perspective. Inequalities are also perpetuated through the use of space since it can be seen as a generator of normative social relations. The gender+ transformative approach means also considering the use of space as a factor that encourages or diminishes an inclusive experience at school: it is the responsibility of the educational community to promote a safe space in schools, where children spend so much time. The use of space gives a lot of information of the process of socialisation of girls and boys, including the dynamics of exclusion and power relations. Playgrounds are privileged sites to watch and they can constitute an opportunity to work on in order to transform social relations inclusively and equally. Although we are aware that not all the work on equality and social transformation can be undertaken in the playground, we believe that it can be one of the starting – or ongoing – points to acquire awareness and modify stereotypes and practices both for children and the professionals working with them.

The inclusive and gender+ perspective requires the implementations of initiatives that address different aspects – among others, the space and its use – and involve a variety of actors that belong to the educational community. The interest in the dynamics established in the physical-temporal space of the playground is not new, but recently in Spain much attention has been paid to the transformation of playgrounds. Many projects have been implemented to foster inclusive practices in them, including promoting physical activity other than football, favouring socialisation through play – especially cooperative games – and diversifying the use of space.

The playground is one of the spaces where girls and boys develop many of their abilities, but also where they learn to relate to others, to get to know other experiences, to live together, to understand, and to share a common space with different people. Therefore, from a co-educational perspective, it is essential to pay attention to their configuration, to the values that these spaces transmit to girls and boys, as well as to observe how the use of this space generates different appropriations and discriminations, following gender norms. These norms will be later reproduced at home and in the street, hence the importance of working on access to the different spaces as a right from childhood onwards. Baylina, Ortiz and Prats (2008), citing the work of other feminist theorists, list how gender influences the use of space in childhood. These authors high-

13 Our perspective aims at proposing a transformative educational methodology that allows inequalities to be tackled through an intersectional lens since the gender dimension is intertwined with other structural elements, such as class, sexual orientation or place of origin, among others.

light women's lack of security in relation to their bodies, which already appears in childhood and causes girls to hold back when "occupying" space, inhibiting the movement of their own bodies. (Col·lectiu Punt 6 y Coeducació 2020, page 22)

Other studies underline how conventional playground spaces promote segregated games for boys and girls where a precise boy-girl hierarchy is constructed and reproduced (Tomé and Subirats, 2007). Given the reproduction and perpetuation of these well-known dynamics, inclusive or co-educational playgrounds are built as participatory processes with the aim of generating spaces which can create other activities and social relations within them, including gender relations, but not only: they should become spaces which can promote and welcome diversity, overcoming binarism, racism, ableism, etc.

The objectives of the co-educational/inclusive playgrounds are to:

- Balance inequalities in the use of space between genders, ages, origins and disability;
- Promote the shared use of spaces, resources and activities across genders, ages, backgrounds and functional diversities;
- Decrease gender differentiation of activities, which tends to respond to stereotypes and reinforce gender role models.

(Col·lectiu Punt 6 y Coeducació 2020, page 29).

There are three main dimensions to be taken into consideration when designing and implementing an inclusive transformation of a playground: the physical, the functional and the social, as pointed out by Col·lectiu Punt 6 y Coeducació (2020, pages 29-32). Despite three dimensions being closely intertwined, we keep them separate at this point for the purpose of explanation. Below, Col·lectiu Punt 6 and Coeducació's (ibid.) vision of the three dimensions is summarised, with practical examples in each case.

The **physical dimension** is the most visible and responds to the questions on what the physical space is like, its characteristics and the disposition of the elements within and in relation to the other parts of the school. The disposition of the space and its elements is connected directly to the level of definition of the activities that can be carried out in it: is the space devoted to a specific activity, like a certain game, or is it multifunctional and can be used in different ways? This dimension also includes other physical elements such as the light, the temperature and the natural elements. In recent years more and more interest, both from parents' associations and experts, has

arisen around the lack of natural elements, like trees, in playgrounds, which leads to very high temperatures in summer both outside and inside schools. This means that, in such cases, outdoor spaces are not usable from May onwards. The physical dimension leads directly to the functional and the social, as this member of the Cooperative Pandora Mirabilia states, talking about her experience in schools in the Madrid region:

Most playgrounds share the same configuration of a large court dominated by the star activity of the recess: football. The game is played mostly by boys and almost always the older ones. Girls and those who don't like it or who don't match up in the eyes of the rest, tend to end up on the periphery, where there is not much furniture or resources. (Member of Pandora Mirabilia Cooperative, interview 2022)

Possible changes in the physical dimension

- Natural elements that help to separate the quieter spaces from the busier ones.
- Generating intimate/quiet corners in relation to the buildings with furniture for symbolic games such as genderless experimentation tables (kitchen-workshop-laboratory).
- Benches for relaxing and reading.
- Calming or pacifying the court with the introduction of natural elements such as greenery or sitting areas around it.
- Sand areas with elements for experimentation and limits with elements such as logs that can also be used for sitting, gathering and a quiet area, or with wood elements for balancing.
- Trolley or fixed library space (biblioyard).
- Small houses, tents and other hiding places that can also help to organise the space.
- Domes or natural tunnels (cane or wicker)
- Horizontal climbing walls that have no other uses (bouldering).
- Tightrope and hammocks between trees.
- Games painted on the ground and also on the track.

(Collectiu point 6 patios y Coeducació, 2020, page 86)

The functional dimension consists of the different activities that can be carried out in a specific space, including lazing around and relaxing. According to urban experts, the five primary needs that people seek to satisfy in public space (Carr et al. 1992) are:

1. Comfort,
2. Relaxation,
3. Passive engagement,
4. Active engagement,
5. Discovery.

In the case of playgrounds, the starting point is observation and then finding out the activities that different groups of pupils miss and would like to carry out, as well as activities that are sought to be promoted according to specific objectives, like facilitating children's learning processes or diversifying relational practices.

Possible changes in the functional dimension

- Defining what is considered a balanced, diverse and non-hierarchical use of spaces, for both children and adults, in order to work on it. Naming what is perceived as unjust and unbalanced is a first step for the transformation.
- The use of the playground as (another) outdoor classroom, to break with the established uses of the playground at break time. This can help girls and boys to take ownership of the space in a different way and to break down stereotypes and hierarchies.
- Organising a system for the use of materials that involves girls and boys in their management, to play quieter or symbolic games (with boxes, boots...) so that everyone can choose what they want.
- To use the courtyard dynamically by establishing rotating schedules for different sports other than the conventional ones (football and basketball), such as handball or volleyball, or incorporating new sports such as korfbal (mixed team sport) with mixed groups of girls and boys of different ages and abilities.
- To set days without a ball so that the courtyard can be occupied with other activities and games and to encourage those who always play with a ball to try other activities.
- To make children co-responsible for taking care of the equipment, spaces and other people.

The social dimension refers to the social content of space: the relationships and the bonds that occur during the recess, including both children's reciprocal interactions, those among children and adults and those among adults. Within such interactions, we can observe when there are conflicts, both visible and invisible: what kind of conflicts take place? Among whom? Does someone intervene? Who? What kind of intervention? Moreover, other aspects can be investigated like the repercussions of conflicts in the classroom and outside the school environment. The social dimension is particularly interesting since it can be related to the adult gaze and perception.

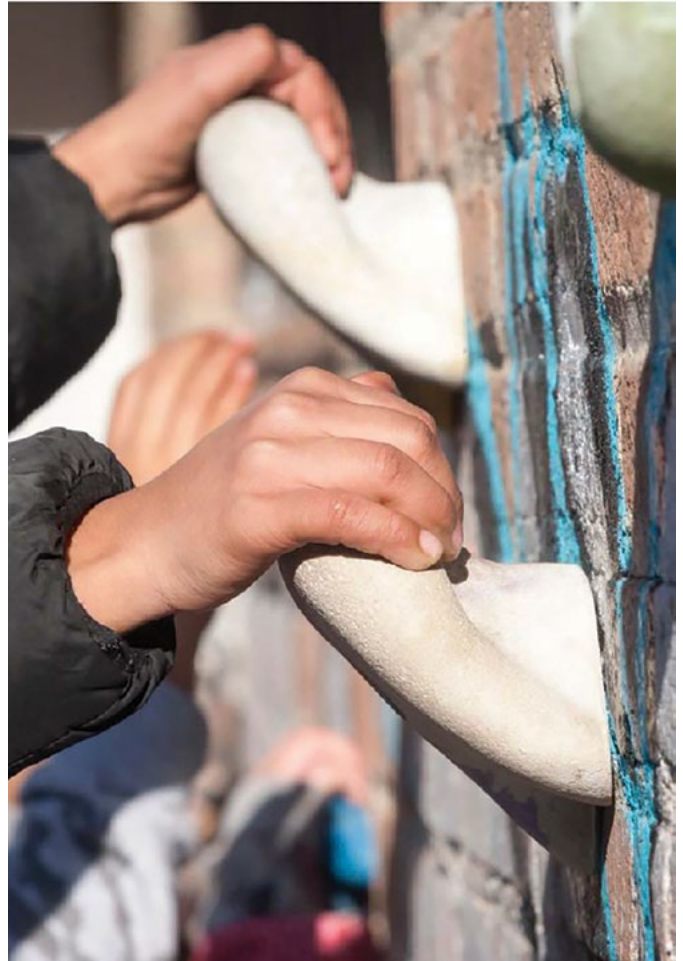


Image by Diego Yriarte. Retrieved from: *Collectiu Punt 6 y Coeducació*, 2020, page 33.

Possible changes in the social dimension

- Adopting a proactive attitude from adults towards girls and boys to stimulate other games and ways of relating to each other that break gender stereotypes.
- Talking in the classroom about the conflictive issues that happen in the playground related to inequalities, stereotypes and diversity of sex, gender, age, abilities, etc.
- Involved adults can play an important role by stimulating games other than football and ways of relating to each other that break gender stereotypes.
- Encouraging cooperation between girls and boys, e.g. having them learn different skills from each other.
- Working on accompaniment, mutual help and care for others during recess.
- Defining the pedagogical lines linked to playground time and doing so jointly or shared with the teaching staff and the canteen personnel.

(Collectiu point 6 patios y Coeducació, 2020, page 89)

A good practice by Pandora Mirabilia

Pandora Mirabilia¹⁴ is a feminist cooperative based in Madrid and specialised in research, training and awareness raising, communication, cultural production and management, and participation and intervention processes. They have been working for some years in the Madrid region in collaboration with schools in order to transform playgrounds with participative methodologies. They started in 2016 with a project for the creation of the "Network of inclusive and sustainable playgrounds"¹⁵ in two schools in the city: Nuestra Señora de la Paloma and Santa María and worked in collaboration with the architects of PezArquitectos¹⁶ and the urbanists of Punt Sis.¹⁷

Transformed playground in the school Nuestra Señora de la Paloma, which was the object of an intervention. Source: Blog of the project "Network of inclusive and sustainable playgrounds"

<https://redpatios.wordpress.com/2018/12/07/cronicas-en-video-del-proyecto-re-d-de-patios/>



We had the chance to interview a member of Pandora Mirabilia in 2022 in the frame of the research activities of the KINDER project. According to her own words:

These projects seek to promote accessibility, environmental sustainability and the participation of the entire educational community in the con-

¹⁴ <https://www.pandoramirabilia.net/>

¹⁵ If you want to know more about these projects, please visit the blog: <https://redpatios.wordpress.com/>

¹⁶ <https://pezarquitectos.com/>

¹⁷ <https://www.punt6.org/es/es-col-lectiu-punt-6/>

figuration of the playgrounds. First, a steering group is created, then a participatory diagnosis is drawn up on the uses of the playground, followed by a series of workshops to draw up proposals for improvement. Finally, the playground is transformed in collaboration with the educational community, prioritising the use of recycled materials and self-construction. (Pandora Mirabilia, interview 2022)

Two years later, the school Nuestra Señora de la Paloma has a vegetable garden, huts, blackboards, snack areas, planters, a kitchen module, a climbing wall and vines for children to hang from.

After some years of activities in the transformation of playgrounds and despite the standstill due to the COVID pandemic, the cooperative Pandora Mirabilia is receiving a lot of demand for support to start a process of change. The initiative can come from different actors of the educational community who are aware of the expertise of the Pandora Mirabilia cooperative and of the visibility of even small transformations.

We are receiving a lot of demand/many requests from parents' associations, from interested teachers, from equality agents in some municipalities... they are calling us to give training sessions, to ask us for advice, to ask us how to finance it, the first steps. Then the process of approval and development is slow and there are several obstacles. It is something that arouses interest, also at the political level because it is something visible. Although I want to underline/highlight that the physical transformation is only a part of it. (Member of Pandora Mirabilia)

Given the innovative methodology, the transformative objectives and the number of different subjects involved, the members of Pandora have identified some necessary keys for the transformation of the playground and its sustainability that we list here and specify below:

- Participatory process: the whole educational community is involved;
- Transparency and communication;
- Small changes sustained over time;
- Directive group support;
- Enlarging the concept of the transformation

Participatory process: the whole educational community is involved

The process of transformation usually starts when any educational agent realises that there are conflicts, discomfort, strong hierarchies and/or segregation in the use of space during recess and decides that is important to intervene. At that point, experts with co-educational and participatory perspective are called. In the case of Pandora Mirabilia, they usually start with the implication of different actors that can include the teachers, the management staff of the school, the pupils, the families, some technical staff and public administration actors. All actors, with different roles and expertise, become part of the process and are considered experts in their own territory. In the case of the school "Nuestra Señora de la Paloma", they acknowledge that:

It was a good idea to start from the beginning by involving the whole community. It has been a participatory process, quite a long one, throughout the whole school year. The children have worked about what they would like their playground to be like. The teachers have worked, we have held meetings and then parents have been organising themselves. It is important to say that the people who live in a territory are the experts on that territory, because they are the ones who have the daily experience. (Pandora Mirabilia, interview 2022)

Transparency and communication

In order to guarantee the most extensive participation, transparency and open communication are core aspects to sustain the process. Information needs to be widespread and to reach the entire educational community, especially those families that are not used to keeping very constant communication with the school. We refer especially to those families that are not involved in parents' associations and are less present in school life. They are used to having a direct channel with the school management, and it is often the only channel they use. Another important aspect of the communication with families concerns the precise narration of the types of change in order to confront possible fears from parents.

It is important to have clear and transparent communication and to have a good relationship with the management, because beyond the parents' association, the management team reaches out those families who are not in the school. There are many families who are not in the association, whose members have a very specific profile. All the families were communicated with through the management and it was the way

to disseminate activities, such as open days or sessions with the families. As far as communication is concerned, it is very important to give clear information as there are often fears: "What is to be done? Will it be dangerous?" (Pandora Mirabilia, interview 2022)

Small changes sustained over time

When we talk about "transformation", we think of big changes that require a lot of specialised work and money; Pandora Mirabilia focuses on small transformations that do not require a lot of specialised personnel and materials. In this way, participation is also ensured in the actual moment of transformation and the educational community's role is highlighted.

One of the keys of the project to transform the playground is the establishment of maintenance routines on the one hand, and the determination of a group of people responsible for it on the other. It is necessary to continue taking care of the space and managing it once the transformation process is finished. In other words, physical transformation must be combined with the continuous management of the space. This ensures the preservation of the infrastructure, equipment and facilities, and also the constant participation of families in school life. In short, we could define the whole process as a *do-it-yourself* practice based on accompanied self-organisation and mutual learning.

The transformation of a playground has a physical part. We focus a lot on micro-transformations, but it is true that in some cases there is funding from the city council for some larger works where we, together with the educational community, do not get involved. We usually carry out micro-transformations with the educational community in alliance with architects. The issue is that you have to maintain things, if you don't take care of them... we are at the beginning and we try to generate structures that are then sustained over time. We set up playground committees, where there are interested teachers and families, where there is a protocol for care and monitoring. (Pandora Mirabilia, interview 2022)

Directive group support

The attitude and implication of school's directors is an important aspect at the base of a successful project. If there is a lot of participation by parents' associations and motivation to carry out the transformation, but the management is not involved, only a few phases

of the project might function properly. For example, in-depth diagnoses with viable transformation proposals can be defined, but if there is no validation by the management, such proposals will be never implemented. Obviously, it is also important that the entire school is involved and that everyone feels as if the project is their own.

One of the projects in which we were involved was very complicated because of the size of the school and because the parents' association was not very active. It was a project promoted by a very motivated member of the school association. There was little trust within the school; we were seen as strangers who went to their playground. The management supported the whole process of diagnosis and workshops in the classrooms, but with many difficulties when it came to facilitating the opening of the school in the afternoon in order to be able to carry out the transformation, for example. There were things that were very big and depended on the city council, and they didn't end up being done well. It was very complicated logistically. (Pandora Mirabilia, interview 2022)

Enlarging the concept of transformation

Beyond large-scale works, there are other mechanisms for transformation, for example, organising a bike day: on that day, everyone does not play ball, but comes to the playground with their mechanical means of transport (bike, scooter, skateboard) and in this way they are already changing the use of the space and generating other relationships without the need to change it physically. However, playgrounds need to be conceived as free play areas that needs to be regulated as little as possible, while at the same time encouraging inclusion and equality.

The aim of transforming the playground is to respond to various needs according to the results of the participatory diagnosis: it is a process in which the meaning of the word "transformation" is constructed considering all pupils' needs. For example, if a proposal for a zip line comes up, it has to be assessed who would use it, considering other furniture that is more accessible, like a swing, so that children with vertigo or other mobility constraints can play on it.

Participatory co-educational playground processes – a general model by Pandora Mirabilia

The process of transformation has several phases and culminates in the construction of alternatives, including meeting spaces, nature or those aimed at enhancing different physical skills such as jumping, climbing, balancing or dancing. Below, we present the different steps to take, as experienced by Pandora Mirabilia.

1. A member of the educational community **requests** the accompaniment of Pandora Mirabilia (teachers, families, families' associations). In some cases, there was someone from Pandora who was part of the parents' association: this connection generated trust relationships that are very important.
2. A process of **information and awareness** raising about the project is developed with teachers, families and sometimes with the city council, social agents in the district/neighbourhood/municipality where the playground is located: details are given of what the project consists of and its phases. The aim is to get all these agents to endorse the project.
3. A **steering group** is created, composed of adults (parents and board of directors) and, in some cases, pupils. The steering group validates the implementation and Pandora Mirabilia designs the strategy with them.
4. The **diagnostic phase**, often carried out in parallel with the information and awareness raising phase, consists mainly of sessions with teachers, families and pupils conducted by Pandora Mirabilia. With **teachers**, the main method consists of showing a big map of the school and, while visualising it, they are asked to respond to questions such as: what spaces there are, how they are used, the layout of the playground, which games are more important and which are less important, what happens in the corners, where the girls and boys are, etc. The physical environment is analysed as well as the practices that happen within the space. According to Pandora Mirabilia, some teachers know what happens in the corners very well while others have no idea. The cooperative also organises sessions with **families** and **families' associations**, inviting the whole educational community. Finally, Pandora arranges sessions with the pupils in both the classrooms and the playground. They use different methodologies so that the youngest children can also participate. Even if this should be just the diagnostic phase, many proposals of transformation already emerge at this point.
5. **Proposal design:** Pandora defines a proposal based on the diagnosis derived from the participatory process. The process of definition is adapted to the specific characteristics of each school. In the case of a school with a high number



Image by Diego Yriarte. Retrieved from: Col·lectiu Punt 6 y Coeducació, 2020, page 43.

of pupils, they have been modifying this step by including the creation of a **playground committee**. As the proposals are often repeated and there are many classes, the playground committee allows them to bring together one girl and one boy representative per class, teachers, the board of directors and people from the city council. In the playground committee, the proposals are agreed upon using the previous diagnosis and the demands arising from it.

6. Transformation process: it consists of the **work itself** and the **physical transformation** of the playgrounds through

intensive collective workdays with the educational community, prioritising the use of recycled materials and self-building.

7. **Celebration** of the renewed playground in open days with the participation of the whole educational community and the neighbourhood/town. It is a festive day that will also serve to strengthen relations between schools and the people and projects being part of the Inclusive and Sustainable Playgrounds Network.¹⁸
8. **Continuity** and **sustainability** are guaranteed through the playground committee. The group meets periodically to ensure the project continues to be active: it collects any incidents that arise and makes a diagnosis of the transformations that have been made, proposes the necessary adjustments and also develops a *care and maintenance protocol*. Pandora Mirabilia recommends at least one meeting a year for tidying up as a way of maintaining the playground and also for creating community with all the actors involved. Another tip concerns the preparation of chronicles and video reports with keys and indicators of the process, which serve as tools for replicating the project in other school centres.

An example of a successful project according to Pandora Mirabilia

A project for a school in which powerful synergies converged, since the centre is located in the neighbourhood in which we spend a great part of our lives. This makes things easier in many ways: one of the architects was a mother at the school and one of the Pandoras was also a member of the Parents' Association. It was a very close school for different reasons: there was a shared political vision and diagnosis of the problems. Moreover, the participation in the educational community of members of Pandora facilitated a certain knowledge of the space and its dynamics. Trust was something that did exist already, so we didn't have to build it. It is one of those projects where, today, you ask a former student who is now in high school and she tells you that she misses the playground. When I go to pick up a friend's daughter who studies there, I see the playground and I can see that it is different from the average playground.

An example of a difficult project according to Pandora Mirabilia

In one specific case, the school had 700 pupils and a weak Parents' Association. In this case, there was money, but it was a one-year project that overwhelmed us a bit. The participative process was very complex... a project like that generates a lot of resentment in the educational community since trust is very difficult to build. Also, the management feared that the pupils could hurt themselves, for example, with the jumping games... This means that the planning has to be very well done. We did a lot of things there, a bigger sandpit, an underground irrigation channel... It was a difficult but interesting project because we had to develop a specific methodology: the playground committees were born there and the participation process was incredible. The lesson learned is to start with small changes, with corners that can then be looked at after. It was a full-scale project and it wasn't completely finished; I don't think the great expectations of the educational community were met.

Conflict on the use of space: the case of football as a space-consuming and highly hierarchising practice

The use of space often causes conflicts when different and incompatible practices take place at the same time. Such conflicts are usually regulated when it is the case of public space: when there is an open-air market on a public street, vehicles are not allowed to circulate. Regulations can be in terms of sanction – as in the case of the market – or in terms of building alternatives and differentiation of use of the space itself.

In the case of Spanish playgrounds, where the main conflict is around the occupation of the recess with football, as pupils advance through the grades, playground activities become increasingly segregated by gender and older male children tend to dominate the space with the ball game. Finger Chouhy (2020) found out that the football field and the other parts of the playground are considered two separate and distinct areas by both teachers, and girls and boys. The first spatial consideration of the playground divided into two – the space of the field and the space of the non-field – tells us about a physical and symbolic separation. In contrast to the variety of names and practices in the rest of the playground, the football field maintains its name, unalterable to any kind of creative ups and downs. It does not admit combinations in its naming and also in its practices (Finger Chouhy 2020).

As Pandora Mirabilia states, even if the diagnosis demonstrates that football needs to be displaced...

...there are myths and stereotypes about equality interventions that need to be confronted. We have come across a school director for whom the football field was fundamental, and they used a ball that was very hard and children, both boys and girls, complained to him because they were getting hurt. (Member of the Cooperative Pandora Mirabilia)

Even if the case just described is not so common and the majority of professionals, especially the female ones, acknowledge the need to rebalance the use of the playground, the strategies to decrease the prominence of football are not always shared within the educational community. In general, the aim of a playground transformation process is not to stop ball games, but to diversify the use of playgrounds to make them more inclusive – not only considering gender, but also age and other diversities – and to encourage other types of activities. In this sense, one initiative can be organising a "day without football" and another one can be the destination of the field for female football players for one day in the week. This second initiative was promoted in the school "Villa de Guadarrama", in which Cepaim organised a part of the fieldwork for the KINDER project and it was a source of conflict among teachers. They were divided between those who believed that it was a good measure to diminish the male prominence and those who thought that it was not only useless, but also detrimental in terms of how the prohibition is perceived by male children.

The process and its phases: how to organise it

In this section, we propose a schematisation of the participative process as conceived by Equal Saree as systematised in the guide "Inclusive school playgrounds A guide to diagnosis and intervention with a gender perspective".¹⁹ The publication was created based on the pilot project at the Joan Solans Centre for Early Childhood and Primary Education (Centro de Educación Infantil y Primaria, CEIP) in Granollers, Barcelona, during the academic year 2014-2015. This project was part of an action research coordinated by Dafne Saldaña within the framework of her master's thesis with the participation of the teaching staff of the school and the third-grade class of the primary school, and with the support of the Granollers City Council.

What we present below is one possible means of organisation, but other inputs are needed, other guidelines can be found in the section *Resources to transform the playground*.

The table below summarises the entire process of a courtyard transformation and includes its different phases, the activities that structure the project, the objective of each activity, the group responsible for carrying out the task, the number of sessions and the time necessary for each activity. It also proposes mechanisms to consolidate and extend the successes achieved by the project beyond the school.

A very important step prior to the actual beginning of the transformation process is to create a follow-up commission, which can be defined as a steering group, that drafts a timetable of the project and coordinates the involvement of the whole educational community. At the beginning of the process, it is important to define the roles of the people who will participate in the project and to organise the schedule of activities. Sharing the expectations of all people involved, defining the objectives to be achieved and preparing the material that will be needed to undertake the project is also a basic step in order to create a satisfactory process.

Participants

The first step is to create and coordinate the working team. When the collective process is about to begin, it is important that all the participants feel comfortable with their assigned roles. The different roles can be described as follows:

Follow-up commission – This coordinates the entire process and programmes the different activities. It is in contact with the technical team that accompanies

¹⁹ https://ia802803.us.archive.org/29/items/inclusiveschoolplaygroundsequalsaree2020/Inclusive%20school%20playgrounds_%20Equal%20Saree%202020.pdf

the process, the pupils, the rest of the teaching staff and the families, and it facilitates communication between the different groups part of the process. It is recommended that different people from the entire educational community (teaching staff, pupils, parents' associations, monitors, others) are included in it.

Teachers – They participate in the analysis and proposal of activities and are part of the collective process of raising awareness about the prevention of gender inequalities.

Pupils – The entire process is about learning about children's experiences and desires in relation to gender inequalities and hierarchies in the use of space and acting accordingly; as such, pupils are the protagonists of the project of transformation. Depending on the size of the school, the total number of pupils and the time available to carry out the process, the whole school, a cycle, a year or a class or some representatives, can participate.

Families – As part of the educational community, both as part of the parents' association and as non-organised families, they can be an important part of the collective process of transforming the playground and raising awareness for the prevention of gender inequalities.

Technical team – This is the person or team in charge of accompanying the collective process and ensuring that the established objectives are met, taking into account gender+ criteria and providing technical tools for spatial design. These people should have training related to gender studies and technical knowledge to intervene in the space.

Public Administration – If the methodology is applied in a public school, the administration has different roles: it can follow and participate in the process by being part of the follow-up meetings or it can invest money in the physical transformation of the space.

Objectives

The different activities of the methodology have been classified according to the objectives they make it possible to achieve. They can be identified as follows:

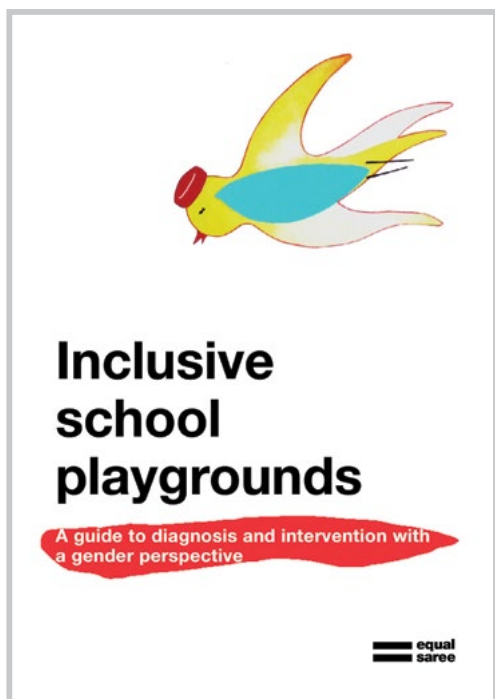
Data collection – The aim of these activities is to collect information in order to be able to carry out the gender+ equality diagnosis.

Awareness raising – These activities aim at promoting individual and collective reflection on gender+ inequalities and providing tools to identify and prevent them.

Actions for change – These are activities that make gender inequalities in the use of space visible and help to move towards their eradication.

Summary of the process with its phases

Phase	Activity	Objectives	Participants	No. Of sessions	Time of session
1. Sharing the project	1.1 Publicity of the project	Actions for change	Follow-up commission		According to the school's criteria
	1.2 Follow-up meetings	Awareness raising – Actions for change	Follow-up commission – Technical team – (public administration)	3	1 h
	1.3 Activities with families	Awareness raising – Actions for change	Follow-up commission – Technical team – Families	1	1 h 30 m
2. Preparing the gaze	2.1 Self-reflexive questions	Awareness raising	Pupils	1	30 m
	2.2 Discussion with the teaching staff	Awareness raising	Follow-up commission – Pupils – Technical team	1	1 h
3. Observing the playground	3.1 Playground characteristics	Data collection	Follow-up commission / Pupils	1 / 1	1 h
	3.2 Sectorisation and segregation	Data collection	Follow-up commission	5	Recess time
		Data collection	Follow-up commission	1	1 h
	3.3 Route map	Data collection	Follow-up commission	10	Recess time
		Data collection	Follow-up commission	1	1 h
3.4 Exploration of the surroundings	Awareness raising	Follow-up commission – Teachers – Pupils – Families – Technical team	1	2 h	
4. Listening to the pupils	4.1 Questionnaire	Data collection	Pupils	1	1 h
		Data collection	Follow-up commission – Teachers	1	3 h
	4.2 Experiential map	Data collection	Pupils	3	1 h 30 m
		Data collection	Follow-up commission – Teachers	1	2 h
	4.3 Debate with pupils	Awareness raising	Pupils	1	1 h 30 m
5. Summarising the results	5.1 Table of results	Awareness raising	Follow-up commission – Technical team	1	1 h
	5.2 Collective map	Awareness raising	Follow-up commission – Pupils – Teachers – Technical team	1	2 h
6. Defining the strategies	6.1 Drafting the strategies	Actions for change	Follow-up commission – Technical team	1	2 h
	7.1 Collaborative design	Actions for change	Pupils	4	1 h 30 m



We briefly report the content of each activity in the table as reflected in the above-mentioned manual, but if you need more specific information, please have a look at the English version of the manual:

1. Sharing the project

Divulging and promoting the project is fundamental for the involvement of the whole educational community by proposing awareness-raising and dissemination activities.

1.1 Publicity of the project – The activity is aimed at informing all the people linked to the school (families, teachers, students, etc.) about the project so that they can follow the process and find out about the calls for participation in the different activities.

1.2 Follow-up meetings – This involves coordinating the participatory diagnosis and collaborative design process, monitoring the development of the activities, presenting and discussing the results obtained and comparing the degree of satisfaction of the different agents involved with their initial expectations.

1.3 Activities with families – These are essential for the success of the process. Their involvement is encouraged and they are provided with tools to detect sexism in everyday relationships with their children. A work session is proposed at the beginning of the process where the continuous participation of families is promoted and organised.

The following three phases (2, 3 and 4) are devoted to diagnosis of the participatory playground. The activities are aimed at collecting data collection and raising awareness and have been designed considering the different types of participants in the project and generating pleasant environments that encourage equal participation.

2. Preparing the gaze

These activities are aimed at teachers and are useful to identify the different problems that occur in the playground. To do this, the participants need to exercise their gaze and prepare it for the transformation process. Teachers' perceptions of gender inequalities in the playground are analysed according to teachers' perception; moreover instruments are developed to detect situations of hierarchy and/or gender violence as well as sharing strategies to prevent them.

2.1 Self-reflexive questions – Thanks to self-reflexive questions, teachers learn to reflect on their perceptions of conflict and gender+ inequalities and to identify strategies to solve and prevent them.

2.2 Discussion with the teaching staff – The aim of the debate is to raise awareness among teachers about gender+ inequalities and their manifestations in the school playground, while sharing the perceptions and prevention strategies of educators.

3. Observing the playground

This phase is devoted to the observation of the physical characteristics of the playground in order to reflect on its layout, its uses and the different elements that form part of it. We need to collect information on the use of the space and the activities carried out there, the behaviour patterns according to gender, their relationship with the different elements and their characteristics. Each type of observation needs to be repeated several times in order to obtain relevant results.

3.1 Playground characteristics – Reflection on the physical characteristics of the playground allows us to know the configuration of the space and realise what the distribution is and the use that different groups make of it.

3.2 Sectorisation and segregation – This observation is aimed at gathering information on the gendered dynamics (masculinisation or feminisation) of the different sectors of the playground, distinguishing among the different activities that take place in each of them. This observation will allow observers to see whether there are spaces of male or female domination and whether this is related to the type of activities carried out and the position of these spaces in relation to the overall playground.

3.3 Route map – These observations are aimed at drawing the routes taken by girls and boys during recess in order to analyse them in relation to gender and spatial characteristics. The final objective is to obtain a document with the superposition of all the routes, in order to identify the areas of occupation of the pupils according to gender and other inequalities and to recognise the impact of the different elements on the delimitation of these areas.

3.4 Exploration of the surroundings – This exploration is aimed at knowing and recognising the school's immediate surroundings. Through a tour, the relationship between the school and the public space and how this influences access to the school and the social interaction of the educational community will be analysed.

4. Listening to the pupils

This phase is aimed at knowing the pupils' perceptions of the playground, their daily experiences and the conflicts that arise there; at the same time, the phase is also devoted at promoting awareness of gender inequalities in the school playground.

4.1 Questionnaire – The aim here is to know pupils' experiences in the school playground, especially on the uses and activities they carry out. The written technique of

the questionnaire facilitates the participation of a greater number of people.

4.2 Experiential map – In this activity, pupils represent what their playground is like spatially and what activities take place in it. The technique will be chosen according to the age and abilities of the pupils. It also allows us to find out what children emphasise when it comes to explaining graphically what their playground is like.

4.3 Debate with pupils – This activity aims to open debate on the conflicts in the playgrounds and collectively find solutions or prevent them.

5. Summarising the results

The results obtained through the activities of data collection and those gathered through the more experiential aspects of the pupils are compared. The results will be summarised by drawing up a large map of the playground.

5.1 Table of results – This activity aims to recognise the aspects of the playground that need to be reinforced and also those aspects that have to be worked on as a priority.

5.2 Collective map – The aim of this activity is to collect the experiences of all the pupils in the school on a large map of the playground and to locate the different experiences and possible conflicts and inequalities in the space.

6. Defining the strategies

Once the participatory diagnosis has been carried out, the intervention criteria can be generated.

6.1 Drafting the strategies – This activity is aimed at the definition of general strategies that allow the objectives established to be achieved on the basis of the activities of the previous phase (5)1 and the inequalities and hierarchies that occur in school playgrounds to be reduced.

7. Elaborating the proposals

Specific proposals for improvements are designed with the consensus of the whole educational community.

7.1 Collaborative design – By means of this activity, specific proposals are designed that will enable the objectives for improvement to be achieved.

7.2 Collaborative consensus – The aim is to reach a consensus on the proposals for improvement drawn up by each group and to schedule the interventions.

8. Transmitting the proposal

This involves definition of a technical document that incorporates the graphic documentation and technical descriptions essential to transform the playground.

8.1 Technical document – The objective of this activity is to document the process and make a technical proposal for the implementation of the improvements.

Above are presented the first steps in order to start a transformative process to change the playground and the use children make of it. After this preparation phase, the transformation itself phase takes place, accompanied by the mechanisms for sustainability that have to be organised.

Manual to transform the playground

In this section we present other resources, two in English and one in Spanish, with the aim of sharing information on how to start a process of transformation of a playground.

Moreover, we would like to highlight that the manual "Patios Coeducativos" (pages 94-114, in Spanish) contains a part focused on evaluating both the procedure and the results.

Final remarks

Transforming playground means not only physically transforming the space, but changing its dynamics, intervening in the practices that produce and reproduce hierarchisation in terms of gender, age, capacities, and skin colour. Transforming the playground means developing an educational model that tries to diversify free-time activities, offering answers to children and adults' demands, including diverse needs and also expanding the possibilities in order to deconstruct stereotypes and allow a freer personal and collective development.

The effects of the transformation are not only related to the games and the use of space in an inclusive way; the processes behind it are able to strengthen the bonds between members of the educational community, as they are carried out in collaboration with its entirety. Such processes foster relationships between all parties/stakeholders and are also a way of integrating teamwork and collective decision-making. Moreover, they contribute to building a common education project within the community, allowing a more coherent approach among all members.



Patios Coeducativos

Manual in Spanish published in by Col·lectiu Punt 6 SCCL and written by Col·lectiu Punt 6 (Adriana Cio-coletto, Blanca Valdivia Gutiérrez, Roser Casanovas, Marta Fonseca Salinas and Sara Ortiz Escalante) and Coeducació (Alba González Castellví, Aida Rivas Moreno and Anna Carreras Port).

Available at: https://www.punt6.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/libro_Patios-coeducativos_ES.pdf

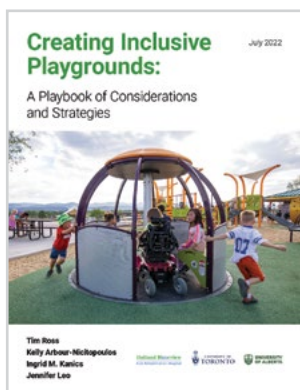


Guide on Building an Inclusive Playground

Manual in English published in 2012 By UNICEF Belgrade and focused on playgrounds for children with disability.

Focus on intersectional approach

Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/18911/file/Guide%20for%20the%20Construction%20of%20Inclusive%20Children's%20Playgrounds.pdf>



Creating Inclusive Playgrounds: A Playbook of Considerations and Strategies.

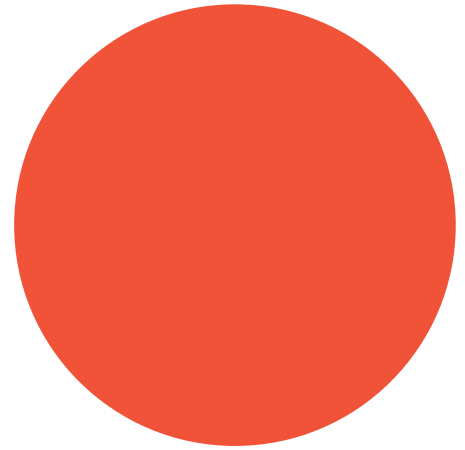
Manual in English published in 2022, written by Tim Ross, Kelly Arbour-Nicitopoulos, Ingrid M. Kanics and Jennifer Leo and published by Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital. Is it especially focused on the inclusion of children with disability, but includes other sources of inequalities.

Available at: <https://hollandbloorview.ca/sites/default/files/2022-07/Creating%20Inclusive%20Playgrounds%20Playbook%20%28July%202022%29.pdf>

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CHAPTER 4

**Countering backlash:
overcoming
resistance in
challenging contexts**

Maja Gergorić
Status M



Feminist activists who bravely challenge gender inequality often find themselves confronted with a distressing phenomenon known as backlash. This hostile response, characterised by harassment and aggression, poses significant threats to the mental and physical well-being of individuals involved, including employees, collaborators, and supporters. The following paragraphs aim to shed light on the mechanisms underlying backlash, drawing insights from the experiences of Status M as an illustrative case study. Specifically designed to cater to the needs of individuals, organisations, networks, and public bodies seeking to develop and implement comprehensive gender equality programmes in kindergartens and schools, particularly within challenging environments, this chapter also offers valuable guidance and recommendations.

The chapter starts by providing an introductory overview of opposition and backlash within the context of feminist activism. With the objective of facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the complexities associated with promoting gender-transformative education in kindergartens and schools, the subsequent section presents additional examples of challenges encountered across diverse contextual settings. Moreover, the chapter investigates the example of Croatia as a particularly challenging environment. Drawing from these insights, the chapter culminates in a set of recommendations tailored to individuals and organisations keen on instigating gender-equality initiatives in kindergartens and schools, as well as those advocating for broader gender equality in education.

1. On backlash

Backlash refers to the resistance, hostility, or aggression that arises as a targeted response to reform or progressive change, or to those advocating for change (Our Watch, 2017). It is an inevitable reaction to social change, challenging established

power structures and processes. This reaction is always influenced by the unique character and dynamics of gender within each country's context (Flood et al., 2020). Backlash can encompass both subtle forms of coercive power, such as ridicule, condemnation, ostracism, and censure, as well as more overt and severe manifestations, such as assassination, rape, beatings, lynching, or other violent acts. These aggressive actions are directed towards agents of change or leaders advocating for change (Mansbridge and Shames, 2008).

Not every type of resistance can be universally classified as backlash. There are approximately eight different forms of resistance, ranging from the least assertive form, denial, to the most active form, which is backlash (VicHealth, 2018).

<p>Denial</p> <p>Denial is the first form of resistance where the problem at hand is denied.</p>	<p><i>"There is no gender inequality in this school."</i></p>
<p>Disavowal</p> <p>Although the problem is evident, the person in charge refuses to take responsibility for the problem. They might be unwilling to engage in any type of activity that is not mandatory or prescribed by law.</p>	<p><i>"It is not within my competence to address gender inequality in our kindergarten."</i></p>
<p>Inaction</p> <p>There might be resistance to adopting a change initiative, which can be demonstrated by prioritising other issues as more pressing.</p>	<p><i>"At the moment, it is not our top concern. Our school currently has other pressing issues."</i></p>
<p>Appeasement</p> <p>Sometimes, attempts are made to appease or pacify those advocating for change with the goal of minimising the impact.</p>	<p><i>"You can hold an internal meeting regarding the issue, and we can discuss further steps in the next school year."</i></p>

<p>Appropriation</p> <p>At times, an illusion of change can be created while secretly sabotaging its progress.</p>	<p><i>"I agree this is an important issue, but it is too sensitive for pupils of that age. If this were a high school, we could have more open discussions with the students."</i></p>
<p>Co-option</p> <p>Progressive framework rhetoric and goals are often used for reactionary purposes.</p>	<p><i>"We should focus on the needs of boys in education. They are falling behind and require more attention and resources."</i></p>
<p>Repression</p> <p>In certain cases, resistance can take the form of directly undoing or dismantling a change initiative.</p>	<p><i>"We are focusing on an abstinence-based programme in our sex education class."</i></p>
<p>Backlash</p> <p>In the most extreme cases, there will be a hostile and combative reaction.</p>	<p><i>"This gender-transformative pedagogy in schools is an assault on traditional values. They are trying to erase our cultural norms and impose an agenda on our children."</i></p>

2. Challenging context

To classify a context as challenging, two requirements must be met. Firstly, there should be an absence of (top-down) institutionalised gender equality programmes in educational institutions, including kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, or universities. Secondly, attempts to introduce gender equality in education are likely to face backlash from various actors (bottom-up).

3. Backlash in the broader context of anti-gender mobilisation in Europe

Opposition and backlash against the implementation of gender-transformative and sex education in schools is not a recent phenomenon. On the contrary, it has been a primary focus of the anti-gender movement, a radical right social movement that has been gaining strength and expanding its influence across Europe since the early 1990s. This movement is largely driven by the discourse of 'gender ideology', which challenges the concept of gender as a social construct. It consists of various actors, including family associations, anti-abortion groups, religious conservatives, high-ranking officials of the Catholic Church, nationalists, populists, and radical right-wing groups (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017).

The initial mobilisation of the anti-gender movement can be traced back to France, where it emerged as a reaction to the Ministry of Education's announcement regarding the inclusion of a new subject addressing biological sex, sexual identity, and gender roles in high school biology classes. In the spring of 2011, several lay Catholics condemned this initiative and called for the removal of the new textbooks. Although their efforts were unsuccessful, the campaign against the textbooks brought the issue to the attention of French Catholics (Carnac, 2020).

A few years later, the anti-gender movement mobilised against a law proposed by Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, the minister for Women's Rights and a socialist, which aimed to re-establish republican schools. The law included an amendment on gender issues known as the 'Alphabet of Equality.' This experimental programme sought to address gender-based stereotypes, violence, and inequality among students. Although the law was passed by the parliament, the programme itself was ultimately abandoned in June 2015 (Carnac, 2020). Additionally, in 2014, the French anti-gender movement organised a protest action called the 'Withdrawal Day from School' (French: Journée de Retrait de l'École) to oppose the Ministry of Education's intention to introduce a curriculum on gender equality in schools (Kuhar and Zobec, 2017).

Mobilisation of the anti-gender movement against educational system reforms has also occurred in Italy. The Italian anti-gender movement was mobilised to obstruct the implementation of the 2015 educational system reform, known as 'The Good School' (Italian: La Buona Scuola), which aimed to incorporate gender-inclusive education following the guidelines of the Istanbul Convention in order to prevent gender-based violence (Spallaccia, 2020). In Croatia, the anti-gender movement emerged as a response to the introduction of sexual education in 2006, particularly in relation to one of the proposed modules on sex education (Kuhar and Zobec, 2017). In Austria, an anti-gender petition was organised in 2015 against sex education and the use of gender-sensitive language in Austrian schools, while anti-gender protests against sex education in

schools took place in Germany (Kuhar and Zobec, 2017). The anti-gender movement was also mobilised against specific textbooks, such as the Hungarian history textbook that presented history from a gender perspective. In Slovenia, the anti-gender movement opposed the publication titled 'Love is Love', which Amnesty International used in extracurricular human rights workshops in schools (Kuhar and Zobec, 2017).

The mobilisation of the anti-gender movement regarding the introduction or modification of sex and gender-transformative education in schools often takes the form of petitions, letters, protests, or boycotts. It has been particularly active in Poland, France, Italy, Croatia, Austria, and Germany, and to a lesser extent in Slovenia and Hungary (Kuhar and Zobec, 2017). The reasons for mobilisation vary, ranging from reacting to educational system reforms (Italy), the enactment of new laws (France), the introduction of new subjects or programmes (Croatia and France), and recommendations from international organisations (Poland), to the publication of informal educational materials (Poland and Slovenia).

4. The Croatian context

Status M began implementing the KINDER programme²⁰ with teachers in primary schools and kindergartens. After conducting a seminar with kindergarten teachers in a Zagreb kindergarten, a brief update on the project's progress was posted on the organisation's social media, which mentioned the seminar held at the kindergarten. Shortly after, a significant backlash occurred, targeting both the organisation and the kindergarten.

The organisation received hateful comments, threatening emails, and intimidating phone calls. The backlash was directed at the implementation of gender equality programmes in schools and kindergartens, disguised as "concerned parents" expressing worries about their children's well-being. The opposition also targeted the kindergarten itself, inundating the principal with aggressive emails. These emails accused the principal of indoctrinating children with 'gender ideology', questioned the legitimacy of the project, and challenged the principal's autonomy in decision-making and the functioning of the kindergarten. The kindergarten faced threats of inspections and, along with the organisation, was reported to the city of Zagreb's Education Department, the Ministry of Science and Education, and the Ombudsperson for Children. The opposition received support from fringe radical right media outlets, which sought further information about the project from Status M and the kindergar-

ten. Numerous articles were published accusing the organisation of imposing 'LGBT and gender ideology' on children and even insinuating links to the legalisation of paedophilia. Personal information about Status M employees was exposed with the aim of discrediting them professionally, while also falsely claiming strong ties between the organisation and the green-left political party currently in office in Zagreb.

The organised backlash created a climate of fear within the organisation and among its project collaborators, including kindergartens and schools. The organisation reported the threats to the physical safety of its employees to the police and, for a time, they worked from home for fear of being attacked at the office. Status M also made the decision to cease posting project updates on social media, compromising visibility and dissemination activities due to concerns for personal safety. The kindergarten principal quickly realised that the voices of the so-called 'concerned parents' did not come from individuals with children enrolled in that particular kindergarten, if they had children at all. The principal dismissed their emails as well as the media's requests for further information.

The consequences of this organised attack have resulted in a deliberate reduction in the visibility of the project and other related activities. On the side of kindergartens and primary schools, there is now a diminished willingness to address the topic of gender equality in education. If the implementation was already challenging prior to the backlash, there is now an additional daunting element of constant worry about potential backlash and its severe consequences for the well-being of employees, job security, donor relations, and support or disapproval from the city administration, relevant ministries, or other public institutions.

5. Steps to manage backlash before it occurs

This section aims to equip educators, teachers and education authorities with essential tips and strategies to proactively prepare for and navigate potential backlash before it occurs. By adopting a proactive approach, it is possible to build resilience, engage allies, and effectively address concerns, ultimately ensuring a more successful and sustainable implementation of gender-transformative programmes in education.

Identify your allies and supporters

Take the initiative to identify and engage with allies and supporters within kindergartens and schools before implementing the programme. Initiate conversations and meetings to build relationships and gain their support. It is important to prepare in advance for potential setbacks during implementation and develop a risk mitigation plan.

In general, there are four main types of actors who can either act as allies or opponents when implementing gender equality initiatives in kindergartens and schools.

ACTORS	ALLIES	OPPONENTS
Parents		
Teachers and principals		
Non-governmental organisations		
Public institutions		

Compile a list of all possible channels to reach out to allies and seek their support. This may include contacting teachers' associations, parent organisations, educational NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders. Be proactive in initiating conversations and asking for their support. Simultaneously, identify potential opponents and devise strategies to mitigate their impact.

Develop a comprehensive gender education programme

Create a well-rounded programme on gender education specifically designed for kindergartens and schools, catering to different stakeholders such as principals, teachers, teacher-training students, parents, and kindergarten and school governing bodies (e.g., administrative or parent councils). Ensure the programme addresses the specific needs and challenges of each group.

Foster adaptability in the programme

Design a flexible programme that can be tailored to different contexts and levels of resistance. If direct engagement with students faces opposition, consider focusing on working with parents and involving them in the process. Adaptability will enable you to navigate resistance and find alternative pathways for implementation.

Start with achievable goals

Begin the implementation process with small-scale initiatives in kindergartens and schools that have previously demonstrated success in similar programmes. By showcasing positive outcomes and experiences, you can build momentum and gather support for broader implementation.

Collaborate and learn from others

Seek support and guidance from non-governmental organisations and educational institutions that have effectively implemented gender-transformative programmes. Learn from their best practices, insights, and experiences to enhance the effectiveness of your own programme.

Engage leaders and public officials

Establish alliances and partnerships with influential public institutions such as ministries, national agencies, city governments, and city administrations. Their support and collaboration can help legitimise your programme and protect it from undue opposition.

Prepare for potential backlash

Develop a comprehensive plan to address and manage backlash that may arise during the implementation process. This plan should include strategies for effectively responding to criticism, handling negative publicity, and ensuring the well-being and security of programme stakeholders

6. Steps to manage backlash when it occurs

Implementing gender-transformative education in kindergarten and schools is a crucial step towards creating inclusive and equitable learning environments. However, as we have seen, it is not uncommon to encounter resistance and backlash from various individuals and groups who oppose such initiatives. Therefore, it is essential to be prepared and equipped with effective strategies to address and manage backlash when it arises. This section provides steps to take when facing backlash, empowering actors to navigate these challenges with confidence and resilience. By understanding the types of resistance, engaging in constructive dialogue, and leveraging best practices, educators, teachers, principals and education authorities can effectively manage and respond to backlash, ensuring continued progress towards a more inclusive educational landscape.

Recognise the type of backlash

Understand that resistance can take various forms. To respond effectively, identify the specific type of backlash based on the eight possible forms previously mentioned.

Identify the actors behind the backlash

Determine the individuals or groups involved in the backlash and discern whether it originates from within the educational institution or external parties. This understanding will help tailor the response strategy accordingly.

Engage in conversations with other parties facing similar backlash

Participate in meetings or forums with other entities experiencing similar forms of targeting. When addressing kindergartens and schools, reinforce the authority of the principal in making decisions regarding the professional development of their staff. Emphasise the existence of binding documents, such as educational policies, and human rights and anti-discrimination legislation and strategies, to support the implementation of national objectives.

Maintain open communication while setting boundaries

Be open to hearing opposing views and engaging in constructive dialogue, but come prepared with well-researched arguments and boundaries in place. During workshops or discussions with teachers or parents, some individuals may attempt to derail the learning process by denying scientific data, making inappropriate jokes, expressing sexist, homophobic, or transphobic comments, or spreading unfounded statements based on biological determinism, fake news, or conspiracy theories. Respond firmly by presenting evidence-based information, promoting respectful discourse, and reinforcing the importance of creating an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students.

Presented below are examples of potential scenarios along with corresponding guidelines on how to effectively manage them:

SITUATION 1

Parent: *"I don't care about your data. It's all a conspiracy! Men are naturally superior to women."*

Guidelines for educators:

- Remain composed and maintain a respectful tone.
- Emphasise the importance of evidence-based discussions and the workshop's focus on promoting inclusivity and equality.
- Reframe the conversation by redirecting attention to factual information and research that supports gender equality and debunks stereotypes.
- Encourage open dialogue while setting clear boundaries for respectful and constructive discussion.
- Address any concerns or misconceptions raised by the teacher/parent by providing reliable resources or expert perspectives on gender equality.

SITUATION 2

Teacher: *"Why should we cater to these LGBTIQ+ pupils? It's against my beliefs and goes against the natural order of things."*

Guidelines for educators:

- Remain calm and empathetic, focusing on creating a safe and inclusive learning environment.
- Reinforce the importance of respecting the rights and well-being of all students, including LGBTIQ+ pupils, as per school policies and guidelines.
- Share personal stories or testimonials that highlight the positive impact of inclusivity on pupils' mental health and academic performance.
- Offer educational resources and materials that provide accurate information about sexual orientation, gender identity, and the importance of creating an inclusive classroom.
- Encourage ongoing professional development and training opportunities for teachers to enhance their understanding of LGBTIQ+ issues and foster inclusivity in the classroom

SITUATION 3

Teacher: "I don't want to hear about 'gender ideology'. It's all a threat to traditional values and families."

Guidelines for educators:

- Approach the conversation with empathy and respect for diverse perspectives.
- Clarify the workshop's purpose of promoting understanding and inclusivity, regardless of traditional or conservative values.
- Provide clear definitions of gender equality, explain the difference between sex and gender, and debunk the notion of 'gender ideology' as a religious and far-right attempt to frame gender equality as a threat to society.
- Share examples and success stories of schools that have implemented inclusive practices without compromising traditional values.
- Encourage the teacher/parent to engage in open-minded discussions with colleagues, administrators, or experts to gain a broader understanding of gender diversity and its positive impact on pupils.

Develop a public response and framing strategy

Respond assertively to the backlash, providing key points that explain the importance of gender equality in education. Strategically communicate the issue and emphasise its significance. Use the democracy frame, referring to binding documents that underscore the importance of gender equality in schools and kindergartens, emphasising the need for open discussions on diverse topics.

Develop an organisational strategy

Develop a comprehensive strategy within the organisation to mitigate the effects of the backlash. Distribute responsibilities among team members to moderate online comments, file police reports against harassers, and maintain communication with public institutions. Establish connections with other organisations sharing similar values to coordinate strategies and proactively plan for expected backlash.

Develop a personal strategy

Prioritise self-care to prevent burnout.

Find strength among your peers

Foster strong relationships within the organisation and connect with supportive individuals who can provide encouragement and care.

Recommendations for policymakers

Initiate proactive measures

Take proactive measures to promote the integration of gender equality in education at all levels. This can include the development of policies, guidelines, and curriculum frameworks that explicitly address gender equality and inclusivity.

Employ scientific frameworks

Utilise scientific frameworks and evidence-based arguments to counter the anti-gender narrative surrounding 'gender ideology'. Support the use of research findings and expert opinions to inform policymaking and communicate the importance of gender equality in education.

Address instances of harassment and backlash

Address instances of harassment and backlash promptly and decisively. Establish clear protocols and mechanisms for reporting and addressing harassment, including online harassment, targeting individuals or organisations advocating for gender equality. Collaborate with relevant authorities, such as law enforcement agencies, to ensure appropriate action is taken when necessary. Give public support to educational institutions and organisations which face backlash by condemning harassment and attacks and by standing in solidarity with targeted teachers and educators.

In conclusion, feminist activists who challenge gender inequality often encounter backlash, a distressing phenomenon characterised by harassment and aggression. This chapter explains eight types of resistance, ranging from the least assertive form, denial, to the most active form, which is backlash.

The nature of backlash is explored through the experiences of Status M, an organisation that faced extensive backlash following the implementation of a gender equality programme in primary schools and kindergartens. The organisation and its associated kindergarten received hateful comments, threatening emails, intimidating phone calls, and were reported to the city of Zagreb's Education Department, the Ministry of Science and Education, and the Ombudsperson for Children. The backlash created a climate of fear, resulting in reduced visibility and dissemination activities, as well as diminished willingness among kindergartens and schools to address gender equality.

The harassment and backlash faced by the organisation are part of a larger strategy employed by far-right actors organised under the umbrella of anti-gender movements. Since the early 2000s, the movement has been targeting numerous gender equality programmes in schools throughout Europe, using a range of strategies such as petitions, protests, and boycotts.

The chapter concludes by presenting a set of recommended measures to proactively manage backlash and address it when it occurs. These measures are aimed at individuals, organisations, networks, and public bodies involved in the development and implementation of comprehensive gender equality programmes in kindergartens and schools. Particularly relevant in challenging environments where resistance emerges from top-down and bottom-up sources, these recommendations include identifying allies and supporters, designing comprehensive and adaptable education programmes with realistic objectives, collaborating with experienced organisations, engaging leaders and public officials, and preparing for potential backlash.

When already facing backlash, the chapter emphasises the importance of recognising the type of resistance and identifying the actors involved. It encourages developing a public response and framing, organisational and personal strategy. By utilising these strategies and best practices, educators, teachers, principals, and education authorities can effectively navigate backlash and continue advocating for gender equality in education.

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The logo for KINDER, featuring the word "kinder" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. Each letter is a different color: 'k' is purple, 'i' is blue, 'n' is yellow, 'd' is green, 'e' is red, and 'r' is orange. The logo is centered within a white semi-circular shape.

Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



STATUS



The content of this book represents the views of the KINDER team and is their sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for the use that may be made of the information it contains.

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