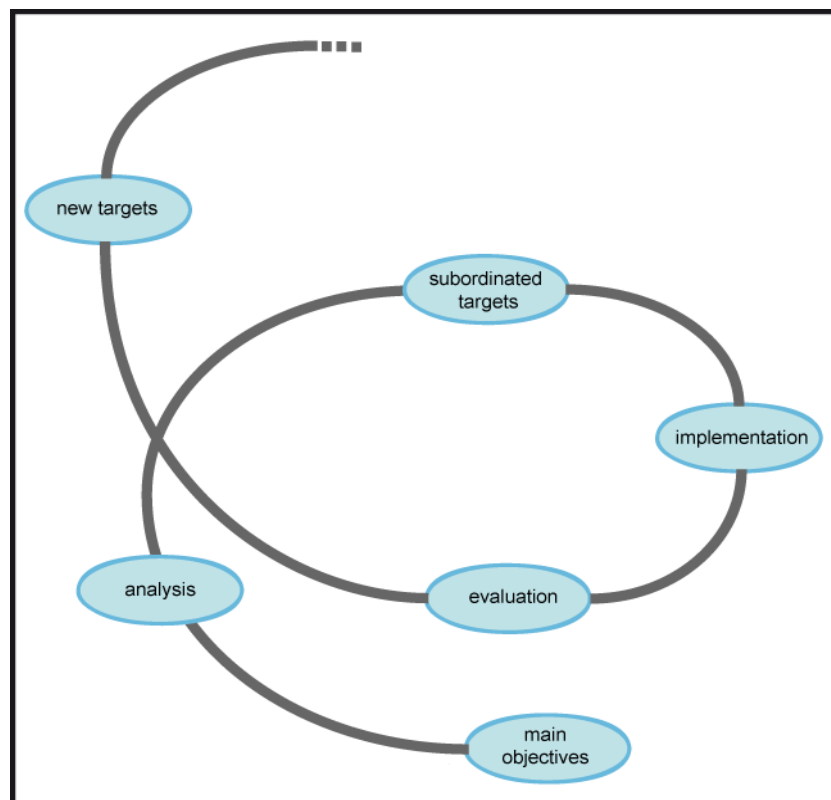




Gender Mainstreaming in Early Childhood Education

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The following paper is a proposal for how a process of change towards gender equality in early childhood education can be implemented in five steps: Formulation of main objectives/ Gender Analysis /Formulation of subordinated targets /Implementation of measures / Evaluation. These Steps should not be perceived as completed process, rather as an open spiral, where evaluation is followed by analysis and the development of new objectives and/or subordinated targets.



I. Main Objectives

The strategy Gender Mainstreaming implies a clear gender equality main objective, but it has to be concretised for a certain field of interest. The project partners of Gender Loops have developed the following main objectives for gender equality in early childhood education:

- Enlarge gender identities of children, educators, parents, students and teachers.
- Improve the equal allocation of resources (executive positions, money, time, attention) among children, educators, parents, students and teachers
- Improve the gender competence (gender knowledge) and gender sensibility among children, educators, parents, students and teachers
- Increase the proportion of men participating in the training for educators and as educators, respectively.¹

II. Analysis

In a second step, the structure of institutionalised early childhood education should be analysed. Therefore the 3-R Method of gender analysis, developed by the Swedish scientist Gertrud Aström, will give evidence to gender specific disparities.

¹ <http://www.genderloops.eu/files/6d2e36d7d5b5a6b7783e2ba7aa66aabc.pdf>. (03.09.2008)

We want to explain the process of analysis by giving a specific example: the use of space by boys and girls, analysed along the 3 R-method. On the level of “representation” the gender composition of girls and boys in different children’s play areas can be analysed. Gender disparities may occur regarding the distribution of “resources” such as time, space or attention. We may concentrate on the amount of time that boys and girls are spending in different areas, in gym and garden, and we may also concentrate on the size of space that girls and boys use for playing: one square meter for painting a picture, or hundreds of square meters for playing soccer. “Realia” refers to norms and values which influence gender roles and the attitudes and behaviour of girls and boys: Are the play areas divided into gender stereotypical games and activities? Does the name imply gender stereotypes ?

III. Subordinated Targets

Based on the gender analysis results with reference to representation, resources, norms and values, specific gender equality targets will be defined in a third step.

We stay with our example “use of space by boys and girls”. A range of studies refers to gender stereotypical use of space: While girls prefer playing in small groups, sitting at the table, painting pictures and staying with the institutionalised rules, boys tend to play in big groups, action oriented and in need of big space. More often than girls, boys tend to exceed the limits.² Based on such results, equality targets may aim for the development of new practices for children, such as encouraging physical activities for girls and active participation within daily duties (cleaning dishes, moving chairs and tables) for boys and girls. Boys and girls may be encouraged to participate in “atypical” games.

Assessment criteria have to be defined at this stage of the process.

IV. Implementation

Where negative impact on gender equality is assessed, it is essential to identify ways and measures to redesign daily practice and to promote gender equality.

In our example: “Free play areas” (no assignation) or mobile toys (container with fixed wheels) could help to avoid gender stereotypical play areas. “Boys’ days” or “girls’ days” give children the possibility for experimentation with “atypical” games in safe and gender homogeneous rooms.³ E.g. the *Hjalli-Education-Approach* in Iceland avoids gender stereotypical games and replaces toys with other materials.⁴

V. Evaluation

The evaluation focuses on the achievement of expected equality targets. Different methods can be used, e.g. daily observations of gender compositions in different play areas. Video recorded guided observations of certain game sequences allow distanced analysis and reflection by observers who are not interfering. Ideas, reflections, experiences and changes can be collected in a research diary in a continuous way. Action research offers the possibility to analyse everyday work systematically.⁵ The connection of action and reflection enables educators to go for new educational activities.⁶

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³ Schneider, Claudia (2005). *Qualitätsstandards für geschlechtsspezifische Pädagogik für Betreuungs- und Bildungseinrichtungen für Kinder im Alter von 0 bis 10 Jahren* [Broschüre der MA57]. Wien.

⁴ Ólafsdóttir, Margrét Pála (1996). Kids are both girls and boys in Iceland. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 19 (4), 357–369.

⁵ Altrichter, Herbert & Posch, Peter (2007). *Lehrerinnen und Lehrer erforschen ihren Unterricht* (4. Aufl.). Bad Heilbrunn.

⁶ Mühlegger, Gerda (1999). *Aktionsforschung im Rahmen von Fortbildungen zum Thema „Geschlechtssensible Pädagogik“*. Wien.