

Preschoolers challenge stereotypical gender roles

November 3 2009

According to research from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, a preschooler's gender determines how he or she is treated and responded to in play and learning activities, and when the children's possibilities become expanded, it is usually a result of the children's and not the teachers' initiative.

The Swedish [preschool](#) curriculum requires promotion of [gender](#) equality, but researchers at the University of Gothenburg's Department of Education, who performed gender analysis of 114 video sequences of six preschool groups (in total 45 hours of material), conclude that this may be easier said than done.

Different responses to questions

The analysis shows that girls' questions and comments are responded to differently (in a negative sense), that teachers tend to masculinise teaching tools and that masculinity is the norm in children's play and art work. These tendencies are reinforced in the interaction between teachers and children since teachers often have stereotypical ideas of what [boys](#) and [girls](#) are interested in.

Yet, the analysis also identified that boys and girls very often share play and learning with each other. Furthermore, they show great concern for each other by being helpful and taking responsibility for others' well-being regardless of gender.

Children may challenge existing structures

The analysis also shows how children manage to achieve border crossing at preschool, which causes stereotypical gender structures to change. An example of border crossing is when a LEGO figure that has been gender-defined by a teacher is redefined by a child from 'man' to 'mum'.

As Professor Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson and doctoral student Eva Ärlemalm-Hagsér write in the current issue of *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*: 'Both children and teachers contribute to the creation and expression of gender structures at preschool.'

'But the study finds that it is the children that reformulate and expand their possibilities. There is not a single example in the material where teachers consciously challenge [children](#) to engage in border crossing.'

Source: University of Gothenburg ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Preschoolers challenge stereotypical gender roles (2009, November 3) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-11-preschoolers-stereotypical-gender-roles.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--