



Bildung und Kultur

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Gender Loops

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The first results of the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative survey on the carrying out of gender-related courses and strategies to promote the equal rights for girls, women, boys and men in the vocational training of educators.

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Introduction

In the period from 7 December 2006 up to 28 February 2007, 294 vocational training schools for educators received a letter in which the directors of the schools were asked to take part in an online questionnaire on the subjects of “gender-reflective education”, “gender competence” and “gender mainstreaming” in the vocational training of educators” and on “Men vocational training to be educators”. The feedback quota was 29% or 85 schools which is a good average response.

During that same period, 16 guideline-supported interviews were carried out throughout Germany with teachers, professors and experts from the field of the vocational training and further vocational training of educators¹. The following were the main questions asked in the interviews:

1. To what extent do educator vocational training schools integrate gender-related subjects into their study plan?
2. What support do those questioned see as necessary in implementing and providing gender-related courses?
3. What strategies are used to put gender mainstreaming into practice in these vocational training schools?
4. What stumbling blocks do vocational training schools have to face when implementing gender-related courses and putting into practice a gender mainstreaming strategy?
5. What ideas and impulses already exist or are already being put into practice for a successful, practical and as extensive as possible integration of gender-related courses in educator vocational training schools and in the educational work of early childhood institution facilities?

1. Results

1.1 Data on the vocational training schools

Vocational training schools from 12 federal states took place in the survey. We did not receive any replies from the federal states Bremen, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia.

The questionnaire was filled out to approximately 41% by the school directors and to approximately 35% by the extended school management and to 24% by the lecturers.

The percentage of men in educator vocational training is very low. In 65% of the vocational training schools, the percentage of men in educator vocational training is lower than one third, and the percentage of male students is even lower than 10% in 65% of the vocational training schools.

¹ The experts here were lecturers from educator vocational training schools, professors from the university education sector for educators and trainers of educators, who were also in part authors who are well-known in the area of (gender-reflective) education in early childhood. The following quotes from the survey have been kept anonymous up to now. The abbreviation EA here stands for expert from the area of educator vocational training, EF stands for expert from the area of further vocational training for educators.

1.2 Vocational training schools active in gender education

The vocational training schools that took part in the survey can be described as active in gender education². With only a few exceptions, the school directors and lecturers say that, as part of a gender mainstreaming strategy, the vocational training schools should contribute towards increasing the gender reflectivity of the students and improving their gender competencies. 33 vocational training schools make statements in their school development plans, their school curricula, their overall concepts or on their websites concerning the gender equality of men and women. 10 more schools are planning to improve the way their school presents itself publicly in this sense.

73 vocational training schools stated that they have integrated gender-related lessons in their vocational training courses. More than half of the schools questioned stated that the lessons take a “gender-related view” to some extent, this applies as much to the discussion of gender theories as to the gender-reflecting offer of courses in the coeducative setting and approaches in the gender homogeneous work with girls and boys³.

1.3 Ambivalent situation at vocational training schools

The assessment of the gender-related courses and their content is ambivalent however. On the one hand, 20 vocational training schools stated that the subject of gender was regarded as important for the majority of the teaching staff. On the other hand, the quantitative and qualitative survey also shows that impulses for the integration of gender subjects tend to come from individual lecturers and a great number of the gender-related courses are so-called 'optional' subjects which can be chosen by the students of their own free will⁴. The survey also shows that, up to now, only six vocational training schools offer further qualification training courses for the teaching staff on gender-reflective teaching and/or gender mainstreaming. It therefore has to be assumed that, in many vocational training schools, a “combination” of single/individual gender-reflective lecturers and voluntary gender courses on offer mean that only a small percentage of the students have the opportunity in their educator vocational training course to gain sufficient gender competence.

1.4 Need of support in implementing gender-related courses

This ambivalent situation is also reflected in the needs for support that have been formulated, because – although gender-related courses play a certain role in the lessons in most schools, 71 vocational training schools would like more support in the implementation and provision of gender-related courses and practical work.

The vocational training schools see a particular need for support in teaching the methods for a self-reflection of gender, in gender-reflected co-educational teaching as well as in teaching theories and methods in the work with boys. In addition,

² One must assume that mainly vocational training schools that are active in gender-related teaching took part in the survey, which is why the results summarised here cannot simply be extrapolated to apply to the entire landscape of vocational training schools for educators.

³ The diagram on the gender-related courses and practical work in the teaching schools can be found in the appendix

⁴ The gender-related optional subjects are often courses on working with girls and/or boys of juvenile age. In the area of elementary education, work with boys and girls plays a lesser role.

theme-based further qualification training courses by the teaching staff in the college are also often requested⁵.

The experts from the fields of vocational training and further vocational training who were interviewed considered the production or provision of easy-to-read and understandable theoretical texts, concrete ideas about what literature to read, videographies of gender-reflected films and “intelligently thought-out learning situations” on gender subjects as well as the increased exchange of contents and closer cooperation with other vocational training schools that offer gender-related courses to be of particular importance.

1.5 Men in educator vocational training

The application of strategies for increasing the percentage of men in educator vocational training is afforded a special status. After all, 18 vocational training schools pursue a strategy to increase the percentage of men and 11 schools are planning this step in the future.

The qualitative und quantitative survey shows that, for several vocational training schools, working together with the network "New ways for boys"⁶ is one strategy for increasing the number of men in educator vocational training schools. The schools systematically approach young men, invite them to Girls' Future Day⁷ in the college and give them a first impression of the vocational training as an educator.

1.6 Stumbling blocks in implementing gender mainstreaming

One central stumbling block in implementing gender mainstreaming that has been named, is the lack of a gender-political and gender-educational exchange of experiences with other vocational training schools. Other stumbling blocks are the lack of time resources, the lack of needs assessments and the lack of indications for the concrete implementation of gender mainstreaming. The qualitative survey also makes clear that students are often not very interested in gender topics because the subject of “equal opportunities based on gender” are seen as “a thing of the past”.

2. Impulses and ideas for integrating gender into educator vocational training

The integration of gender-related subjects into all learning areas and subjects in educator vocational training is one of the main aims of the project Gender Loops. Realistically, the cross-sectional establishment of gender topics in vocational training schools and universities is a process that will take a long time.

⁵ The diagram on the needs for support in the implementation of gender-related courses can be found in the appendix.

⁶ The Network of New Ways for Boys bundles, supports and inspires regional activities that are directed particularly at boys (pupils from school years 5 to 10) and takes up questions concerning career and life planning, the reflection of gender roles and the promotion of social competence in an adequate, gender-sensitive form. New Ways for Boys has a service office and a website that acts as a platform for dialogue and networking and supports dedicated people in schools, youth work and career advice in the implementation of offers for boys (see www.neue-wege-fuer-jungs.de).

⁷ Sometimes also on other “open days”.

Impulses and best practice examples are introduced in the following, which were estimated to be of particular importance for a successful implementation of gender subjects.⁸

2.1 Structural framework

- **Further qualification training courses on gender**

The integration of gender-related topics into the learning process/array of subjects requires an entire gender-reflective teaching staff. Further qualification training courses on gender offer an initial good opportunity to sensitise lecturers towards gender topics. Experience has shown, however, that it can be counterproductive to force lecturers to take part in further qualification training courses on gender against their will. It would therefore seem more opportune to combine obligatory and voluntary gender courses.

For example, the following further qualification training structure has proved its worth in the model project “Gender Mainstreaming Support Organisations of the Youth Welfare Service in Northrhine-Westphalia“ in which five different support organisations from Northrhine-Westphalia have taken part.⁹

1. Initial event

In an initial event that lasted several hours and which was directed at the management and all employees of the respective support organisation, the gender project and gender mainstreaming were presented as strategy and analysis instruments. In addition, one-and-a-half hour working groups were offered to the participants. With these, the project leaders wanted to point out the various possibilities of an advanced further qualification training course on gender and awaken the curiosity of the participants concerning the continued implementation processes.

2. Gender qualification training courses

The gender vocational training courses are aimed at management staff and interested employees. It was the goal of the qualification training courses to take stock of gender aspects in the different areas of the support organisations' work and to make them aware of the complexity of the category gender as well as the effect it has on the living conditions of men and women. Three days of qualification training were split up into a two-day event and, some months later, a one-day follow-up event.

At the end of the two-day qualification training course, projects for putting gender mainstreaming into practice were developed and the realisation of these was then examined and discussed on the third day of qualification training.

3. Review event

This event was aimed at all employees and served to review the realisation of gender mainstreaming in the support organisations and in the carrying out and development of the model project. What was discussed in particular, was how the projects planned in the gender qualification training were put into practice.

⁸ At this point, once again many thanks to our interviewees who shared their stories and ideas with us.

⁹ Referred to in the practical work report and in the evaluation report of the Special Office for Gender NRW on the project “Gender Mainstreaming Support Organisations of the Youth Welfare Service in NRW“: Debbing, Cäcilia/Ingenfeld, Marita/Cremers, Michael/Drogand-Strud, Michael (2005; Ed.): Gender Mainstreaming. Mädchen und Jungen in der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Expertise zum 8. Kinder- und Jugendbericht der Landesregierung NRW

- **Obligatory gender seminars**

The establishment of obligatory gender seminars guarantees that the students are forced to deal with gender subjects in the course of their vocational training. The usual practice in vocational training schools, only offering gender seminars as optional courses, means, on the one hand, that many students can go through their entire vocational training without learning any gender competencies or without learning anything about gender at all. Obligatory gender seminars also signalise unmistakably to the outside world, that vocational training schools take the subject of gender seriously.

- **Gender teams**

The setting up of gender teams¹⁰ makes possible an advanced gender-political and gender-educational intervention in vocational training schools. The analyses showed that a gender team can achieve gender-political and gender-educational goals to a certain extent, if the teaching staff is generally open-minded towards gender subjects.

- **Interaction of teaching and practice**

The (institutionalised) exchange of gender-educational knowledge and experience between teaching and practice makes possible learning experiences and “synergy effects“ in the (further) development of gender-reflective teaching and education. A transfer of knowledge and experience between teaching and practice or between practice and teaching is of particular importance, because altogether only very little knowledge has been gathered from practical experiences in the area of gender-reflective elementary education. Teachers, lecturers and educators therefore have to “rely“ on the few good (and bad) gender-educational experiences.

Visits by students to facilities that work in a gender-reflective way or to special days focussing on early childhood institutions that are regularly organised by universities are good examples of interaction projects.

- **Supervision for those who teach**

Supervision that goes hand in hand with teaching activities offers a good opportunity for making self-reflection processes possible for those who teach with regard to their own gender biography. (Because) biographical work that takes a look at one's own process of becoming a man or a woman is an important prerequisite so that lecturers can “feel at home in the subject area of gender and be competent in conveying this to others“ (EA1), as one of our interviewees commented.

2.2 Methodical-didactic procedure

- **Gaining gender competencies**

Learning gender competencies requires “learning space“ in which the educators-to-be can exchange their experiences and knowledge, gain experience and learn off their own backs, independently, without fear, openly, (self) critically and in a motivated manner.

¹⁰ A gender team consists of two or more lecturers who are particularly interested in the implementation of gender-political and gender-educational objectives in the vocational training school. The gender team develops and initiates gender and gender mainstreaming strategies and checks how they are implemented in the vocational training school.

When it comes to dealing with the topic of gender, whether in discussions on gender mainstreaming or equality of the sexes, this requires “space for action and for dealing with the topic” in which the students can exchange their – as a rule very different popular theories – and popular ideas about men and women as well as their personal gender biographies. Working in small groups offers good opportunities for this. A lesson model that is strongly oriented towards the model of the receptive teaching of knowledge by those teaching can be counter-productive by comparison.

- **Research-based study**

The method of research-based study has proved its worth in experience. The students see themselves here as researchers who develop their own gender research questions and try to answer these.

In a first phase, the students have the possibility to express themselves on certain gender topics, to present their popular theories and to develop research questions.

In the second phase, the students have the opportunity to test their popular theories, for example, through observation or interviews and to find answers to their research questions. In the third phase, the students are given scientific texts that open up theoretical and empirical paths to the topics and questions the students have. The research process of the students is supported by critical and reflective group processes.

Examples from the survey:

1. Students could pursue the question, for example, of what effect the presence of male educators has with respect to the educational work in early childhood institutions, by developing a standard questionnaire for educators and sending these to early childhood institutions that also employ male educators.
2. Dealing with theoretical phase models and the question as to what awareness children have at the ages of 2 to 6 about gender role stereotypes and sexuality provides another promising option.
3. Other students videotaped children looking at picture books. They dealt with the following question: How children deal with picture books with untypical gender images; what social awareness do children have of gender and how do children construe gender. These students noticed during their project, for example, that they were able to find a great number of picture books in which strong, emancipated girls can be found but no picture books in which "untypical" boys play the main role.
4. The principle of research-based study can also be applied to the subjects of work with girls and work with boys. In this way, for example, students can research what facilities in the local area offer girls' work and boys' work and how they justify this work in what they do. The students then visit these facilities and question the educators on their gender-reflective approaches and experiences.

- **Gender-related learning experiences**

Simplified, gender-stereotypical popular theories and experiences often affect the awareness and the professional self-conception of the students. The students will not “give up” these popular theories without having problems. Often, gender-related learning experiences peter out within one to two years in these popular stereotypical ideas concerning gender. Gender topics should therefore be dealt with on several occasions during vocational training and made real for the students.

- **Access through a definition of education**

One way to provide the students with access to gender topics is a definition of education that focuses on the self-education of children. (Gender) education then refers to the process in which girls and boys create images of girls and boys, develop theories about the definition of gender-based identity constructions and orient their activities towards these. If children do not have the opportunity to make for themselves diverse and differentiated gender images, they tend to develop simplified stereotype gender-based self-images that influence their future actions, interests and choices. One of our interviewees also speaks about the educational project “gender” that the children have to learn to deal with and the educators have to understand. Gender-reflective education therefore must not necessarily be justified by the normative reference to a gender-equitable society (see further below), but by the fact that educators have the professional task of supporting children in the unhindered development of their personalities¹¹.

- **Increasing “biologisation”**

The questionnaire shows that lecturers are increasingly confronted with the fact that students refer to popular texts or scientific surveys that mainly justify gender differences in the different biological predispositions of men and women. Students then use biological justifications to speak out against gender-reflective educational work, with the argument “you shouldn’t try to bend the children”.

This biologist justification needs arguments and information that “promote” gender-reflective education and which are able to represent the “social construction of the culture of two genders”¹² as convincingly as possible. The reference to the term self-education (see above), biographical work and the introduction of texts that argue with the biologist justifications¹³ are good opportunities to “react” to the biologist arguments of students.

- **Access to gender topics**

Experience has shown that the students are not necessarily hungry (for knowledge) when it comes to gender topics. A lack of interest in and resistance to gender topics are based, among other things, on the already described popular stereotypes, in own traditional ideas of gender identity and in the low instance of the establishment of gender topics in the area of elementary education. It does not make sense to normatively justify (to the students) the teaching of gender knowledge. Students don't

¹¹ You can find a more exact description of the connections between education and gender in the following, among others:

Krabel, Jens (2007): Mädchen werden – Junge werden. Wie geht das eigentlich? Ein Plädoyer für das Recht auf Geschlechterbildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen, in: Prengel, A./Overwien, B. (2007, Ed.) Recht auf Bildung. Zum Besuch des Sonderberichterstatters der Vereinten Nationen in Deutschland

Rabe-Kleberg, Ursula (2006): Gender als Bildungsprojekt. Wie Mädchen und Jungen sich die zweigeschlechtliche Welt aneignen, in: Betrifft Mädchen, 19. Jahrgang 2006, Heft 3, 100-104

Rohrmann, Tim (2006): Lernen Jungen ander(e)s als Mädchen? In: early childhood institution heute, Heft 1, 2006, 6-14

¹² See Hagemann-White 1984.

¹³ See Bredow, von Rafaela (2007): Das gleiche Geschlecht. Neuroforscher suchen nach dem großen Unterschied - und können ihn nicht finden. In: Der Spiegel, 6/2007

Frey Regina (2002): Ganz natürlich? In: taz Magazin vom 30.11.2002, S. VII, 351 Z. (TAZ-Bericht),: www.taz.de/dx/2002/11/30/a0247.1/text , (23.04.2007)

Rohrmann, Tim (2006): Die Henne und das Ei oder: Löst das Hormon das Verhalten aus oder umgekehrt? In: TPS, Theorie und Praxis der Sozialpädagogik, Heft 8, Oktober 2006, 6-11

necessarily become more open to gender topics, because lecturers draw their attention to a society that is unjust in terms of gender. Equal opportunities are “a thing of the past“ for many students.

- **The term “gender”**

The questionnaire made clear that seminars or courses on gender topics that are titled with terms such as "gender" or "gender mainstreaming" are less popular among students. Lecturers and teachers in vocational training have noticed that “gender” or “gender mainstreaming” seminars are not chosen by students, while seminars on subjects like working with girls or working with boys incite a great deal of interest.¹⁴

2.3 Gender-related lesson contents

- **Self-reflection/working with memories**

The survey made clear how important a self-reflection of one's gender and working with memories are for the later gender-reflective work.

The view into one's own past, reflecting on an own gender construction process and the linking of gender requirements and attributions with one's own earlier wishes, rebuffs, what was forbidden, slights, affection and hurts make students open for gender topics that have to do with their very own personal experiences.

One example from the survey:

Male students require special preparation before working in early childhood institutions, in order to learn to deal with the various gender-related attributions and requirements on a personal and professional level.

Experience in teaching and in practice has shown, for example, that people often think that men are incapable of working with small children and men are often confronted with the latent accusation that they want to abuse children. One of our interviewees describes the gender-related attribution that men are often subject to as follows:

“The men must be given support. It is simply ridiculous when individual men enter this women's domain. It is so ingrained with traditional femininity, that the men either have to take on the role of the 'cockerel among the chickens', they have to play football or they have to work with the boys who nobody else wants to work with (...). A 25-year old male educator doesn't have a chance. He slips into the role of the son, the prince. I know many men who have fled from this profession.“ (EF1)

The biographical work in homogeneous gender seminars or small groups¹⁵ is one possibility for men to prepare themselves for these gender-related requirements and “to steel themselves“ for working in early childhood institutions.

- **Gaining gender observation competencies**

In the questionnaire, it became clear that reflective “gender observations” in early childhood institutions are the basic prerequisite for gender-reflective practice.

¹⁴ See Debbing, Cäcilia/Ingenfeld, Marita/Cremers, Michael/Drogand-Strud, Michael (2005; Ed.): Gender Mainstreaming. Mädchen und Jungen in der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Expertise zum 8. Kinder- und Jugendbericht der Landesregierung NRW

¹⁵ The following article offers a good insight into the special situation of men in early childhood institutions: Engelhardt, Walter Josef (2006): „Onkel Tante Helmut“ oder Welche Erzieher brauchen Kinder? In: TPS, Theorie und Praxis der Sozialpädagogik, Heft 8, Oktober 2006, 38-42

Gender observation tasks can be integrated without much ado into the learning area “observation”. The observation of the way boys and girls act in their surroundings and how they play can demonstrate educational room for action and sensitise people towards the necessity for gender-reflected education.

- **Concrete gender-reflective examples in practice**

The still relatively “inexperienced” field of gender-reflective education in early childhood institutions still needs, for many students and teachers, concrete examples of gender-reflective practice, so that they can get an idea of what areas of action and references to practice look like. Examples from practice help the students to gain a less abstract view of gender topics and makes it possible for them to even see themselves as people who act in a gender-reflective way¹⁶.

- **Examples from practice in experience-based education and manual work**

Teaching experience-based learning and manual work in educator vocational training schools enables many female (and male) students to gain competencies, which they often do not bring with them into their vocational training because of certain gender-related socialisation experiences.

Positive experiences were made in the teaching modules, in which the often still very young female students learn to fell trees using a power saw, to build igloos in the woods and then spend the night in them or to use drills to build chairs and tables.

These experience-based educational and manual work lesson modules often mean that, after their vocational training, the educators pass on certain manual and experience-based skills to the children in their practical work in early childhood institutions. As the example in an early childhood institution in New Zealand shows, manual work projects in early childhood institutions can also expand the gender ideas of the parents. In a film that shows early childhood institutions in New Zealand, one mother explains that she didn’t recognise her “princess” after her daughter built her own chair in her early childhood institution using a drill.¹⁷

The questionnaires also make clear that young women, in particular, experience an increase in their self-confidence due to experience-based and manual lesson modules. One of our interviewees expressed this situation as follows: “Some young women have the confidence (to work with the power saw J.K.) and you notice how they grow 5 centimetres.” (EA2)

¹⁶ You can also find clear examples of gender-reflective pedagogy in the following, among other:
 Frauenbüro Stadt Wien (2003; Ed.)/Orner, D. et al.: Geschlechtssensible Pädagogik im Kindergarten. Projektbericht aus dem Kindertagesheim fun&care Brunhildengasse. Wien: Eigendruck
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 Rohrman, Tim (2003): Gender Mainstreaming in Kindertageseinrichtungen. In: Kindertageseinrichtungen aktuell, Ausgabe ND, 3003, Jg. 11, Teil 1: Heft 11, 224-227; Teil 2: Heft 12, 248-252: www.earlychildhoodinstitutionpädagogik.de/1318.html (2.11.2006)
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¹⁷ See Carr, Margaret: Assessing children’s learning in early childhood settings. A professional development programme for discussion and reflection support booklet and videos: What to assess? - Why assess? - How to assess. New Zealand council for educational research (NZCER) / The University of Waikato. Wellington 1998

3. Gender as a cross-sectional topic

The first analysis of the qualitative and quantitative survey has brought forth several strategic steps for action to promote the better integration of gender subjects as well as political and educational measures for equality in vocational training schools for educators:

Vocational training schools that already integrate gender topics comprehensively in their courses should assume the function of "beacons" and be presented noticeably in the (professional) public. A differentiated description and emphasis of the gender-political and gender-educational efforts made by these beacon vocational training schools with their various best practice examples could first of all make the (professional) public more aware of the gender-related lessons and subjects which to a large extent still remain invisible and, secondly, the "beacons" could make a contribution towards gender-competencies being regarded as important educational qualifications for students and being taken seriously and, thirdly, this could mean that a positive competition concerning the best and most innovative gender policies and gender education could come into being among the vocational training schools. Making the best practice vocational training schools visible could also, fourthly, provide support to individual lecturers and gender teams who work hard to integrate gender topics in the vocational training schools and make their work more appreciated.

The in many ways insufficient integration of gender topics and the desire that vocational training schools have often expressed for an exchange of contents make clear the necessity for a **networking** of vocational training schools or lecturers who are working towards integrating gender topics. For this purpose, professional conferences, discussion forums and study groups should be organised in which lecturers exchange information about their experiences and where the teaching of gender topics can be made more professional within educator vocational training.

The aim of a seriously intentioned gender mainstreaming strategy, however, must be that the gender perspective flows into all learning courses and subject areas as a cross-sectional topic. The experts interviewed insist that "gender" must run as a central theme through all learning areas and subjects so that the category 'gender' can be integrated into educator vocational training as a cross-sectional topic.

Appendix

Literature

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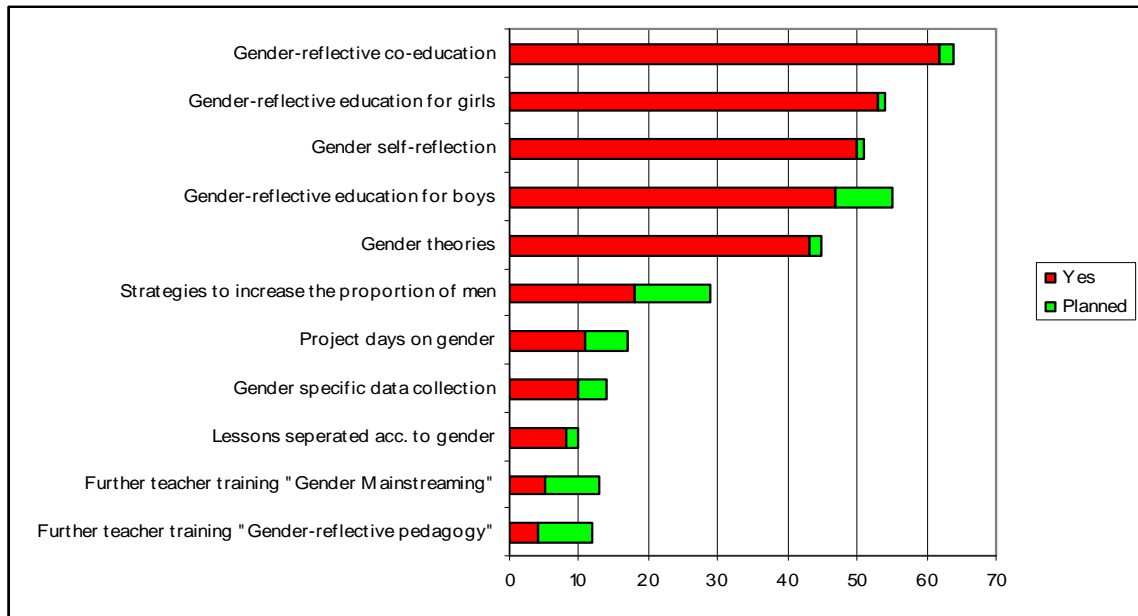
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Walter, Melitta (2005): Jungen sind anders, Mädchen auch. Den Blick schärfen für eine geschlechtergerechte Erziehung, München: Kösel Verlag

Diagram 1

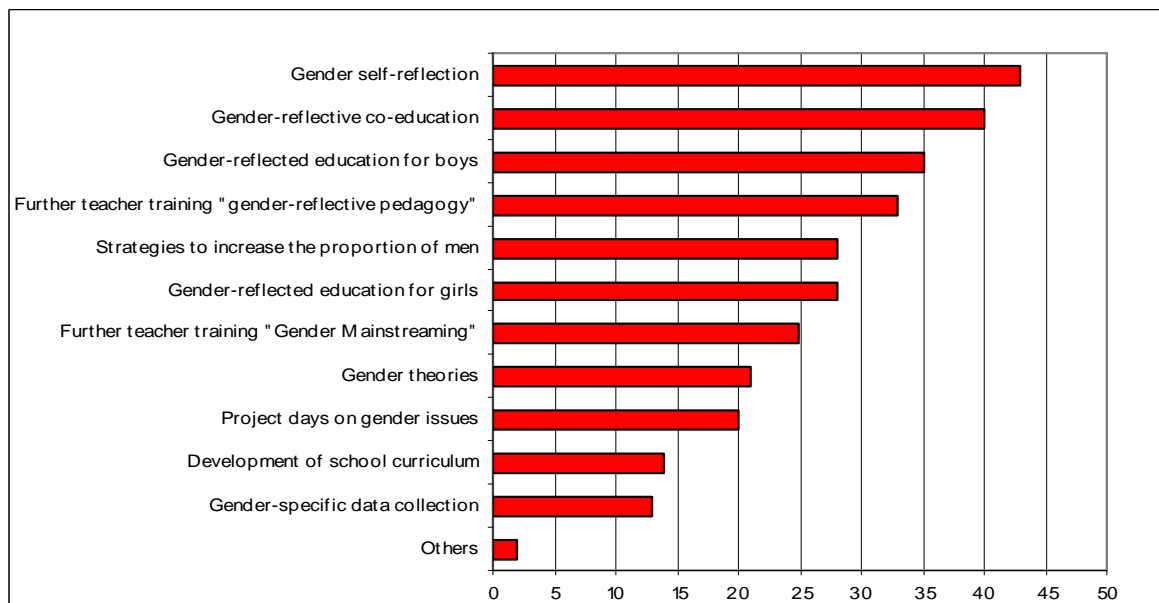
Gender-related lessons and/or practical training in vocational training schools



n = 85

Diagram 2

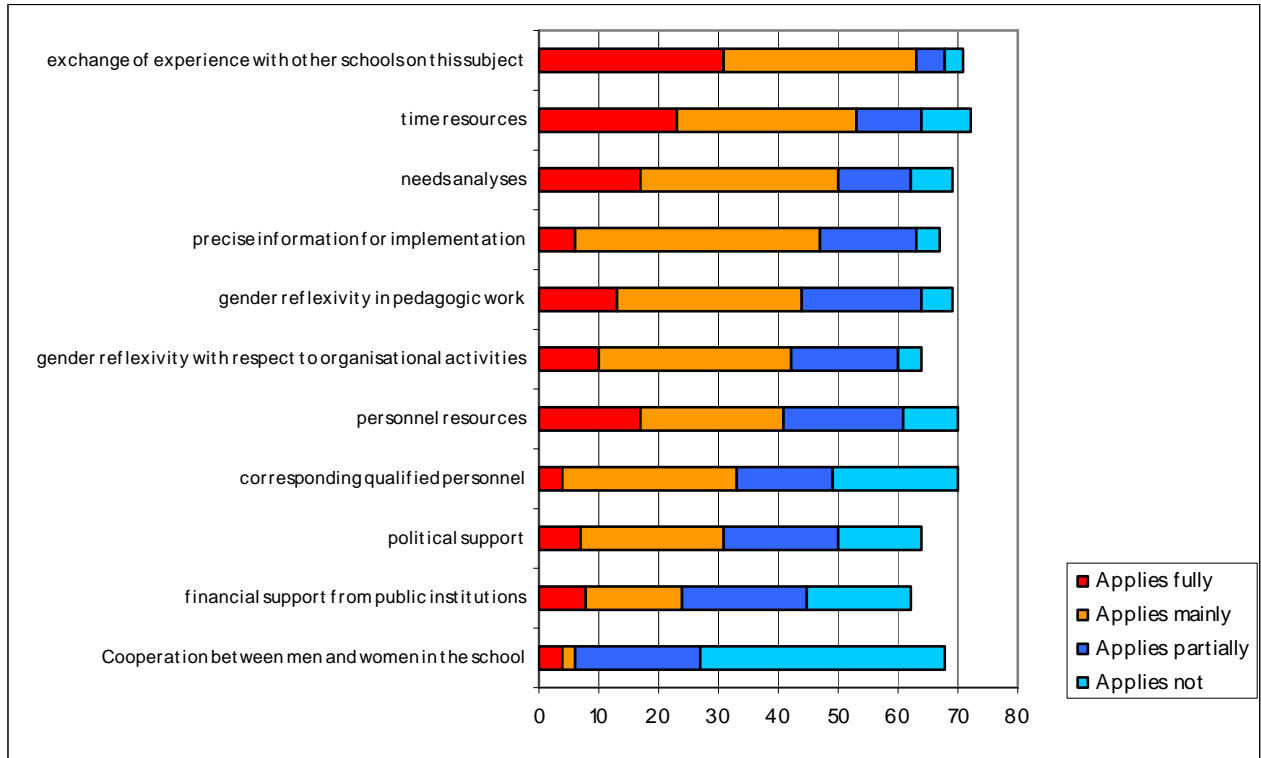
The needs of support in the implementation and provision of gender-related lessons and practical offers



n = 85

Diagram 3

Obstacles and shortages with respect to the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming
There is a lack of ...



n = 85