



## **Gender in Early Childhood Education: Teacher training**

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This report presents the results of the first phase of research of the *Gender Loops* project “Methodologies, resources and strategies for working on gender issues for early childhood education teachers and teacher training centres” financed by the European Union as part of the Leonardo programme<sup>2</sup>.

The purpose of the *Gender Loops* project is to implement gender mainstreaming strategies in vocational training institutions for educators, in continuous training and in early childhood education centres. The project commenced in October 2006 and ends in October 2008. The countries taking part in the research are Germany, Lithuania, Norway, Turkey and Spain.

During the first phase, the project will study the current situation as regards the initial vocational training of early childhood education educators in gender mainstreaming and sexual diversity in each of the participant countries. The collected data will be used in later phases to develop and pilot methods, games and strategies targeted at trainers and early childhood education centres. The findings will also be used to draw up a final proposal for introducing changes to curricula.

The report is structured in three parts. The first part is theoretical and methodological in character and discusses the type of data used: documented information, quantitative data obtained from a survey of teacher vocational training centres and, finally, semi-structured interviews with the key agents. The second part analyses the obtained results and structures them into five large thematic areas: gender and professional competencies in initial training of early childhood educators; the training (university and secondary) that trainee teachers receive today; the lack of male educators in the sector; how sexual diversity is dealt with in initial training; and the obstacles we have detected to introducing gender and sexual diversity in early childhood education. Finally, we present our conclusions with a series of final recommendations for implementing gender mainstreaming during this phase of education.

### **1. Methodology and starting point of the research**

#### **1.1. The current state of affairs**

The research and literature on the role of gender in education has evolved over the last thirty years. The first studies basically involved with inequalities that exclusively affected women. They basically focussed on the late incorporation of women into education (Fernández Enguita, 1997) and later on with the persistence of gender inequalities in the manifest curriculum in mixed schools or in the hidden curriculum in co-educational schools (Subirats, 1990, 1993). The main focus therefore was on gender inequality in the education system.

In the case of the manifest curriculum, they denounced the persistence of sexist stereotypes in text books: the traditional spheres of women were hardly dealt with in the school curriculum and the curriculum transmitted an image of men divorced from the tasks of child caring and domestic chores. As a result of these studies, a considerable amount of didactic materials have been produced over the last twenty

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<sup>2</sup> For further information on the project: [www.genderloops.eu](http://www.genderloops.eu)

years aimed at correcting this bias and reviewing the entire curriculum in terms of gender (González and Lomas, 2002).

The research undertaken throughout the eighties and nineties on the hidden curriculum found that educators (irrespective of their gender) treated boys and girls differently. This differentiation took the form of greater interaction between teachers and boys than between teachers and girls (Subirats and Brullet, 1988); or the differential evaluations or expectations of educators concerning the same behaviour displayed by a boy or a girl (Morgan and Dunn, 1988; Abraham, 1995).

But, in the majority of European countries, developments have taken place in the last twenty years that have redirected the research on the issue:

- The post-compulsory stages of education have become increasingly feminised (Bonal and Calero, 1999);
- Women's academic achievement has improved in practically all subjects, and increases with age (Merino, Sala and Troyano, 2003);
- Debate recommenced about the convenience of going back to the segregated system (different classrooms or centres for boys and girls) based on the argument that it would entail advantages for both genders (Barrio Maestre, 2005).
- Heterosexism and homophobia has been denounced in the education system, in terms both of the manifest and the hidden curriculum (COGAM, 2005; Romero, 2006).
- The preoccupation for boys' and girls' identities has gained terrain over the debate on equality, which has led to a considerable body of research on the construction of masculinity in schools (Lesko, N., 2000).
- There has been criticism of the lack of sentimental education in our educational system (and its strong connection with the gender system) (Oliveira, 2000).
- Debate has been initiated around the fact that there are few male educators (Santos Guerra, 2000).

All these issues have primarily focused on the stages of primary and secondary education and paid less attention to early childhood education. In the area of early childhood education, the preoccupation with gender issues has basically been centred on the differences in the feminine and masculine socialisation of pupils (especially in the case of girls). The issues that have been dealt with the most have been sexism in children's stories and boys' and girls' games. However, we have seen the same trend here as in all other stages of education: a loss of interest in the subject during the eighties and the nineties.

As regards early childhood education, the main body of research has centred on the feminisation of the sector and on the class background of future teachers (Valera and Ortega, 1995). In recent years, the debate has focussed more on the need to incorporate new competencies demanded by the information society (a greater knowledge of English and of new technologies, resolving conflicts, immigration, etc.) (Gil Villa, 2000).

Despite all these years of research and production of didactic materials and resources on the issue, the introduction and implementation of gender mainstreaming in early childhood education centres and initial teacher training of early childhood educators today still depends too much on the individual efforts of teachers interested in the issue.

There have also been institutional initiatives to increase monitoring of compliance to the education directive that states that gender mainstreaming must be taken into account in education. However, we believe (and this is the point of departure of our research), that we also need to incorporate this mainstreaming in the initial vocational

training of educators so that future teachers can implement gender effectively and systematically in their professional practice.

## 1.2. Methodology

We have used three research techniques to gather data. We began by studying documents on the implementation of gender in the initial teacher training of early childhood educators. We then went on to review the legislation and the syllabi of vocational training centres (both university and vocational training centres). From this preliminary analysis we were able to draw up a first report on the situation and degree of implementation of gender and sexual diversity issues in initial teacher training.<sup>3</sup>

We then drew up a questionnaire which was sent out online to all the university training centres and vocational training centres which provide training to early childhood educators. We contacted 63 universities and 207 vocational training centres. The questionnaire was addressed to the management of each centre in the case of the vocational training centres and to the dean of the faculties in the case of the universities. We requested that the questionnaire be filled in by the coordinators of early childhood teacher training or by the people in charge of gender issues, if there were any. We then carried out follow-up by phone to ensure a higher response rate and check that the questionnaires had reached the right person. The final response rate was very high, 30% of the survey universe. We received 81 filled in questionnaires, 23 from universities and 58 from vocational training centres.

One first piece of data that we need to take into account is that the results obtained from the questionnaire give an excessively positive picture of the implementation of gender mainstreaming in early childhood education. We came to this conclusion after in-depth interviews with members of the National Reference Group<sup>4</sup> who carry out follow-up and evaluation of the project and the results. Given our suspicion of a possible exaggeration on the part of the centres concerned about the introduction of gender mainstreaming on their syllabi, we went on to analyse all the questionnaires in more detail, including the non-valid ones, in other words questionnaires where only the first questions had been answered. Our suspicion was confirmed: the majority of abandoned questionnaires replied no to the question on whether their centre implemented a gender perspective. Hence, although we can consider the 81 received questionnaires to be representative, we need to point out that failure to reply to questions was not only due to a lack of interest on the part of the person who filled in the questionnaire but was possibly also due to the fact that the person did not have much to say on the questionnaire about actions carried out in their syllabus to cover gender issues.

Table 1 shows where the 81 valid questionnaires were received from. 67.9% of them are from public centres and 32.1% are from private centres.

As regards the type of centre, 27.2% are universities and 72.8% are vocational training centres. This distribution is similar to that of the entire survey universe.

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<sup>3</sup> You can consult this report at: [http://www.genderloops.eu/?pg=126&lang=6&menu\\_id=47](http://www.genderloops.eu/?pg=126&lang=6&menu_id=47)

<sup>4</sup> The National Reference group is made up of key social agents in early childhood education: public administrations, universities, vocational training centres, teachers, parents, early childhood education centres, early childhood sector associations, etc. For further information on the composition of the group [http://www.genderloops.eu/?pg=127&lang=6&menu\\_id=48](http://www.genderloops.eu/?pg=127&lang=6&menu_id=48)

**Table 1: Type of centre:**

	Cases	Percentage
Private Secondary Education Vocational Training Centre	19	23.5
Public Secondary Education Vocational Training Centre	39	48.1
Private University, University College	6	7.4
Public University, University College	17	21.0
Total	81	100.0

On a state level, the distribution of respondents is similar to that of the survey universe. Only the Autonomous Community of Madrid was somewhat underrepresented.

Before analysing the replies to the questionnaires concerning how gender and sexual diversity are dealt with in the centres, we would like to focus on some of the data about the people who responded to the questionnaires. 28.4% of the questionnaires were answered by men and 71.6% by women. We found no substantial differences in the replies based on gender.

With regard to the function or position held by the people who replied to the questionnaires, the majority of them, 41.8%, were coordinators or heads of studies; 13.4% were directors or deputy directors, deans or vice-deans, and 6% were teachers specialised in teacher training.

As far as the centres are concerned, we were very much surprised by their vertical segregation as regards gender. The majority of the teaching and research staff (TRS) in Table 2 were women (59.2%) whereas women were underrepresented in the management of their centres, 57.1% of which are directed by men.

**Table 2: Percentage of men and women in the centres according to their work post.**

	Managem ent	TRS	Admin. staff
Mostly women	22.1	59.2	77.0
Same proportion of Men/Women	20.8	31.0	16.2
Mostly Men	57.1	9.9	6.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

We completed our field work by carrying out 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews. These interviews enabled us to contrast the information obtained with qualitative type data and look at it in more depth. We interviewed three coordinators of teacher training from 3 universities, two public and one private; to coordinator-tutors of the specialist programme in early childhood education from two vocational training centres, one public and one private; three students, two women studying at university to become educators and a man studying at a vocational training centre to become an early childhood education specialist. Finally, we interviewed two representatives from the Administration, the Head of Co-education at an Autonomous Community level and a Coordinator of a Local Co-education Programme that involves 50 early childhood education centres.

## 2. Results

### 2.1. Gender and professional competencies in initial teacher training

The introduction of professional competencies in gender and sexual diversity is important at the present moment since universities are currently reviewing and redefining their syllabi to adapt them to the European higher education credit transfer system.

After analysing our results we found that gender competencies are not highlighted as key professional competencies that a good teacher must have. Only in the interviews, on two occasions, was any reference made to gender competencies as essential competencies. In one case, the interviewee mentioned the need to show and teach an aesthetic sensibility to both boys and girls. The other occasion was when an interviewee pointed out that early childhood education is a basic period for working on gender concerns and that a good teacher therefore needs to be trained so as not to reproduce and introduce gender stereotypes.

"Any teacher, whether a man or a woman, who is in a children's classroom, must be careful not to introduce in an implicit way, without wanting to, behaviour and reference models that can lead to stereotypes." (Head of Co-education of an Autonomous Community Administration)

Most of the interviewees do however coincide in that future teachers must have competencies for working on new realities, such as non traditional family models, especially families made up of same sex couples. They therefore must be in a position to work on any possible prejudices that may exist, both internal and external.

"I would expect [of future teachers] is empathy with the way people live their sexuality, the ability to receive any type of family and that they can see beyond each person's sexual orientation" (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

According to our data, these competencies are not generally acquired at universities and vocational training centres which train future teachers. In the case of universities for example, some interviewees pointed out that the conceptual contents on the curriculum, which are on the whole too theoretical, set the pace of the subjects and leave little room for introducing contents and practices that are more in line with the professional competencies needed during the early childhood education period.

"A great deal of emphasis is given to the conceptual contents of the subjects, which is due to the country's specific university academic training." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

In addition, this academic structure is not very conducive to reflection, especially as regards implicit models, stereotypes and the hidden curriculum.

On the other hand, and having said this, most of the online questionnaire respondents thought that their students were capable of supporting gender identities beyond predominant stereotypes and gender dualism. 67.5% pointed out that their students are very well or quite well prepared at the end of their course to support more open gender identities. They also gave their assessment on the issue of sexual diversity: 61.6% think that their students are very well or quite well prepared to deal with sexual diversity (table 3). This data contrasts with the opinions of the interviewees, with the National reference group and with the data of the survey which points to certain important educational deficiencies of students as far as both gender and sexual diversity are concerned.

**Table 3: Do you think that the students you train are in a position to:**

	Support Open Gender Identity?	Deal with Sexual Diversity?
Very capacitated	12.5	10.3
Quite capacitated	55.0	51.3
More or less capacitated	25.0	25.6
Not very capacitated	6.3	10.3
Not at all capacitated	1.3	2.6
Total	100.0	100.0

## 2.2. Gender and initial training of students in early childhood education

One of the issues that we were pleasantly surprised about was the interest that the research topic arouses among students and the people who responded to the questionnaire. In the first case, according to the interviewees, 87% of their students show an interest in gender issues.

This same interest is shown by the interviewees themselves. At the end of the questionnaire 81.5% of the respondents requested to receive further information on the Gender loops project and the research results.

This question was followed by an open ended question which gave respondents the chance to add their own comments. The large majority of comments were about how interested the respondents were in the issue and they showed a special interest in didactic material and resources that could help them to present gender during the early childhood education phase.

Nevertheless, despite this interest, the data shows that gender mainstreaming strategies were not in place in the centres we studied. Some universities are beginning to draw up their own equality plans and are creating equality observatories; but this still isn't common practice. In the faculties and vocational training centres that offer courses in early childhood education, gender is not usually a priority of the academic team. When gender topics are discussed in these centres this is usually due to the individual initiative, interest or sensitivity of a particular teacher.

"There are a couple of teachers who work on gender topics. I think that, like all other universities, we don't do work around gender as a teaching team. It's one of the things, these mainstreaming issues, that we should work on at a team level, but we don't. What happens is that some teachers work on gender for subject reasons or because of their own personal sensitivity. These professors are involved in networks, in research initiatives, in work groups." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

In Table 4 we can see that the people in charge of introducing gender issues in the surveyed centres are usually (43.2% of cases) teachers on an individual level. They were followed by the more collective response ("mostly the majority of teachers"). It is surprising to see the lack of involvement of the management of these centres in these issues.

**Table 4: In charge of Promoting Gender Issues**

	Percentage
There is a Co-education group	1.2
Nobody promotes these issues	11.1
Mainly the management of the centre (management, dean, study coordinators, etc.)	11.1
Mostly the majority of teachers	33.3
Mostly teachers on an individual basis	43.2
Total	100.0

The fact that the majority of the faculty does work around the issue on an individual basis is also reflected in the documents which contain some references to gender mainstreaming in the initial teacher training centres. The subject outlines are the documents that contain the most frequent references to gender (61.7%), followed by the syllabi. The centre statutes and the centre websites are at the bottom of the list. (Table 5)

**Table 5: Documents which mention the importance of implementing gender**

	Statutes	Syllabus	Subject Outlines	Web
No	55.6	45.7	28.4	77.8
Yes, it is planned	7.4	7.4	9.9	11.1
Yes	37.0	46.9	61.7	11.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In addition, we also analysed the syllabi of early childhood education teacher training courses in Spanish universities and found that the majority did not have specific subjects on gender and co-education. Thus, in the majority of cases, when there are contents on gender in initial teacher training, they are included as part of non-specific subjects.

In the online questionnaire we asked whether on the whole, the training centre dealt with gender mainstreaming issues. 64.2% of respondents answered yes, 22.2% answered no and 13.6% didn't know / didn't answer (Table 6). This data may give an overly optimistic picture as we commented on previously in the section on methodology. But also, given that no systematic strategies are in place for implementing gender, this may be an indication of different ways of interpreting "dealing with gender mainstreaming" ranging from a one-off presentation based on a news story right up to coverage throughout the entire subject. In other words, non mainstreaming aspects of gender could have been included in this category.

In any case, the replies vary a lot depending on the type of centre with a greater proportion of vocational training centres dealing with gender mainstreaming than university centres. Twice as many vocational training centres cover gender mainstreaming in their initial training of early childhood education trainee teachers than do university centres. This data points to the need for a substantial review of university syllabi as regards gender mainstreaming. Another piece of data that we need to take into account is that more public centres responded affirmatively than their private counterparts (table 6).

**Table 6: Gender Issues are mainstreamed**

	Total	Private Vocational training Education Centre	Public Vocational training Education Centre	Private University Centre	Public University Centre
Yes	64.2	63.2	79.5	33.3	41.2
No	22.2	21.1	7.7	66.7	41.2
DK/N A	13.6	15.8	12.8	0.0	27.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

It is interesting to note that in Table 7, the percentage of centres that cover gender mainstreaming is related to the percentage of women in the management. A greater percentage of centres with women on the management team cover gender mainstreaming than do centres with mostly men in the management, 50%.

**Table 7: Gender mainstreaming is implemented according to the Percentage of Men and Women in the Centre Management**

	Overall Data	Mostly women	Same proportion of Men/Women	Mostly Men
Yes	64.9	94.1	75.0	50.0
No	11.7	0	6.3	18.2
DK/NA	23.4	5.9	18.8	31.8
Total	100	100	100	100

On the whole, at university, gender issues are usually covered or included in the following subjects: sociology of education, psycho-pedagogical fundamentals and developmental psychology. In other words in more theoretical subjects with a less didactic component, as this interviewee points out.

"The subject, Psycho-pedagogical Fundamentals, is a core subject which discusses gender issues and diversity (...). Theory and History of Educational Institutions. There is Introduction to Didactics. There's a compulsory subject on basic science topics that covers sexual differences. In Educational Intervention there is an optional subject. It is also covered in Developmental Psychology. In other words, subjects that don't have a large didactic component but cover more professional areas such as Sociology of Education" (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

Other subjects which, through the teacher's initiative, usually cover gender issues are language and children's literature. In these subjects some teachers take the opportunity to focus on gender stereotypes.

"In Language Didactics, they look at types of stories, text book materials. They sometimes analyse stories or find stories that take aspects of gender into account or that reflect upon stereotypes. Though I must admit, it's not easy to find material." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

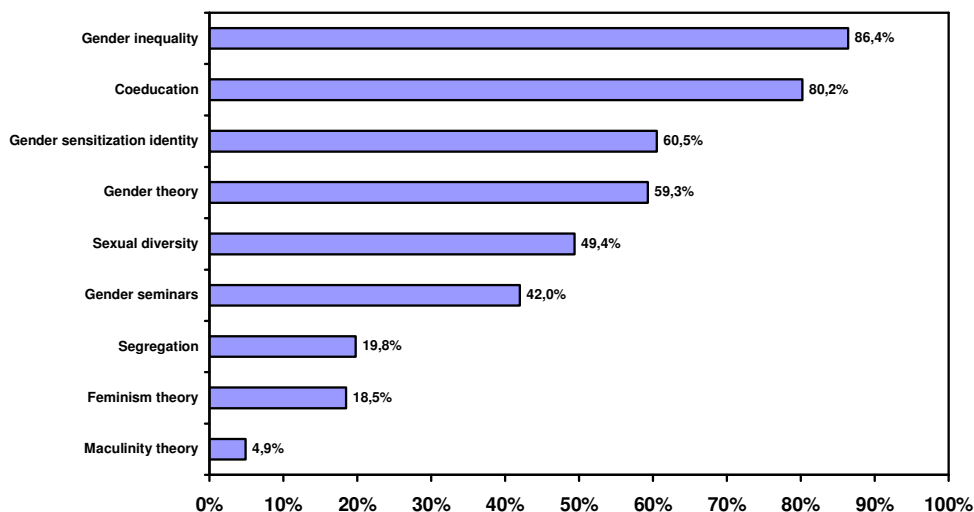
In vocational training centres that train Early childhood Education Specialists, gender issues are introduced in more practical and didactic subjects such as games methodology or social affective development.

"As far as coeducation is concerned, we put forward the idea that all the boys and girls should play at everything. That boys should stop being afraid of their body. If a boy displays more tenderness then someone could say...that's better because, in the dehumanised world, it's something that you value more. We can cover all this in the three subjects that I teach which are: Communication and Language; Social Affective development in relation to the family and Cognitive development." (Early childhood education studies vocational training coordinator)

Graph 1 gives us a more detailed outline of which topics are generally covered in the subjects of early childhood education studies. In this case we didn't ask about gender mainstreaming but about which topics are covered, discussed and analysed in class.

Gender inequality and coeducational learning are the topics that are covered the most in 80% of the centres. These are followed by theories about gender and gender identity (60%) and sexual diversity (49.4%). Although, as we have seen, gender concerns are discussed (inequality, theories, identity), there is no specific presentation of feminism and masculinity theories. No significant differences were found in this respect among the different types of centres.

**Graph 1. The centre covers....**



On the other hand, among both the questionnaire respondents and the interviewees, theories about masculinity are not covered very much in the subjects. Hence, gender is almost always discussed from the point of view of inequality and the imbalance between women and men. There are however some exceptions, as this woman interviewee points out:

"We have worked on this with seminars and exchanges. We discuss new masculinities and affective education for children. I am more familiar with 'nursery' [0-3 year] than with kindergarten [3-6 years], and babies are more tender. We do massage activities, we teach them how to be more tender and let the children express their feelings. We do not treat boys and girls differently. Some schools provide neutral toys but obviously many children come to us with behaviours learnt in the family. " (Head of Coeducation of a Local Administration)

Most of the questions on the questionnaire were about objective aspects (what is being done in the centre) deliberately avoiding opinion questions. Having said this, we thought it a good idea to ask one single question about to what extent the respondent thought it appropriate to cover gender and sexual diversity issues during the stage of early childhood education. Although the question is a personal question targeted at the particular person who is answering the questionnaire, it is nevertheless of interest in that these people hold management posts in their centres and their answers can help us to compare which topics are considered more suitable for early childhood education and which are considered as more suitable for later stages of education. (Table 8)

**Table 8: Do you think it is appropriate to cover the following topics during early childhood education?**

	Yes, very appropriate	Better during later stages of education	These are not topics that should be covered in education	Total
Gender inequalities	74.1	23.5	2.5	100
Non stereotyped identities	79.0	19.8	1.2	100

New Masculinities	65.1	32.9	2.0	100
New Femininities	67.1	30.0	2.9	100
Homosexuality and Sexual diversity	46.9	48.1	4.9	100

In this respect, it is worth pointing out that the respondents differentiated between topics related to gender in the general sense (inequalities and identity) and those related to sexual diversity, as regards their appropriateness for the early childhood education period. The former were widely accepted by the questionnaire respondents, over two thirds of whom responded affirmatively, whereas in the case of the latter, homosexuality and sexual diversity, almost half of the respondents regarded them as appropriate topics for later stages of education.

In addition, we asked whether the centre carried out initiatives (apart from their academic activities) in relation to gender (Table 9). It was surprising to see that the majority of the centres do not carry out any specific initiatives to increase the presence of male students in courses where there is such a high presence of women, or that only 35.8% of the centres carry out or have carried out continuous training on gender and education.

**Table 9: The centre carries out...**

	Yes	It is planning to do so	No	Total
Continuous training in gender and education	35.8	9.9	54.3	100
Continuous training in Gender mainstreaming	6.2	8.6	85.2	100
Gender audits inside the organisation	7.4	9.9	82.7	100
Initiatives to increase the presence of men	13.6	14.8	71.6	100

As regards the way they usually present gender topics, respondents generally pointed out that they usually use news stories to do work around these topics. In other words, rather than being a planned part of the syllabus or on the course outline, gender tends to come up when it is mentioned in the press or the media. These news stories are therefore used to cover gender topics on a one-off basis in the classrooms.

"Knowledge of gender, above all from sociology, is transmitted to students via information that appears in the press. News stories, such as the feminisation of the school teaching profession and similar topics." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

Furthermore, the centres that have a system based more on seminars with small groups of students rather than lectures, are more likely to introduce topics related to gender. They are generally more flexible and allow more room for introducing these and other issues.

"The system we have of working in seminars...these issues come up. For example, a student or someone else who in their practical training wants to observe how stereotypes work or someone who explains that there is a girl in their group with two fathers or two mothers, or a boy who wants to be a girl and wears skirts. These issues come up in the seminars we do here" (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

As regards the resources and materials that the centre provides for covering gender issues we found that the centres have more materials on gender than on sexual diversity. Even though 61.5% of the centres do have didactic materials on gender, we

were surprised that, with the amount of material currently available, 38.5% of centres said they didn't have any materials. Less surprising was the fact that 64.7% of the centres did not have didactic resources on sexual diversity, given that there are fewer materials available on this topic. (Table 10)

**Table 10: The Centre Has Didactic Resources on:**

	Yes	No
Gender	61.5	38.5
Sexual diversity	35.3	64.7

This question was followed by two open ended questions on the type of teaching materials or resources used. The replies, as with all open ended questions, were very diverse: in some cases they mentioned specific titles of books and in other cases they gave a more general description.

The materials can be grouped into the following categories: Audiovisual material, children's books and stories, journals (for example the journal *Infancia*) and material prepared at the centres. Some respondents mentioned where these materials came from (the Women's Institute of their Autonomous Community, associations such as ADAVAS, *Entiendes*, *Coordinadora Gay y Lesbiana*, etc.) or specific projects such as Project *Harimaguada* or the materials of *Urtxintxa Hezitzaile Eskola* in the Basque Country. It is worth mentioning that most centres also commented that, in addition to all this information, they also use their own materials.

Another way in which the centres introduce gender concerns is by organising talks and conferences on these topics or in optional subjects which last 4 or 5 sessions.

"Sometimes we invite people to come to a training session or to talk about their experience" (Head of Coeducation in an Autonomous Community Administration)

"We do one-off sessions (a workshop or seminar on gender) because it's good to do so every now and again." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

Research findings on gender do not reach these centres systematically. The little research that there is on gender once again reaches the centres because a teacher is interested in or is more sensitive to the subject. It is these teachers who take on the responsibility of making it reach the students.

"No [the person is referring to the fact that they do not receive information concerning research on gender issues], but I brought in stories about two women who adopted." (Early childhood education studies vocational training coordinator)

"We also discuss studies, for example one that was carried out by our dean on playground games. For example, the study found that when a boy gets hurt playing football, he is left aside and the game goes on. But when a girl gets hurt everybody stops the game to watch and help her. It is important to be aware of all this." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

In the practicum, gender topics are usually limited to student observations of the boys' and girls' play and work routines. They don't usually gather data systematically on the educational centre and its gender structure, the introduction of gender mainstreaming, the gender roles of families, the stereotypes that the boys and girls reproduce, etc.

"This doesn't happen on a formal level. What we do do is that some teachers when they are asked to analyse their practical training, above all in the 0-3

years bracket, they are asked to take into account difference, equality, etc. But the issue is not included in our documents (on a formal level) " (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

In the questionnaire that was sent out to the centres we asked what they needed in order to further implement gender concerns on their course of studies. 49.4% of respondents thought that the centre required support in implementing gender in early childhood education studies. It should be pointed out that the area where most support is needed is in increasing the proportion of men in Early childhood Education Studies, because up to now, in the case of Spain, unlike other countries which have introduced specific policies to address the issue (Norway for example), this is an issue that doesn't seem to worry political decision makers in charge of the educational administration, nor is it the subject of debate in education science forums.

The other large area in which the respondents thought that their centre would need support is in continuous training on gender and education issues.

We also asked whether there was a person or committee specifically in charge of gender concerns. In 72.8% of the centres there is nobody specifically in charge of this area. 6.2% of centres are in the process of introducing this position and in 21% of centres there is someone or a committee. We then went on to ask what tasks this person or committee performed or was expected to perform, basically focussing on the tasks of drawing up the centre curriculum, implementing gender mainstreaming and tasks related to continuous training.

### **2.3. Sexual diversity in Early Childhood Education**

The new legislation on same sex couples in Spain (the marriage and adoption law) has turned the issue of non traditional family models and sexual diversity into an issue that needs to be dealt with in early childhood education. Many of the interviewees coincided in that they thought that future early childhood educators needed to receive training in these new realities. On the other hand, although the centres have not developed and worked on this matter very much, today, early childhood education needs to be able to manage the sexual diversity that may be present in an early childhood classroom. In an open and plural society these matters need to be dealt with in natural way and educators need training in competencies that will enable them to work on diversity in the classroom.

With regard to sexual diversity, the first thing that draws our attention is that, in the majority of universities and centres where we carried out the interviews, sexual diversity is not a visible issue.

In the online questionnaire sent out to the initial training centres, we expressly added questions concerning training in sexual diversity issues for future early childhood education professionals. On the whole, the centres acknowledge the relevance of the issue, although they also point to a lack of specific didactic resources on the subject. When asked about its relevance, the majority of centres in the survey (62.9%) replied that they thought it was important to cover this subject in early childhood education. However, in the opinion question most people answered "best in other stages of education" when they were asked about the appropriateness of dealing with various issues in early childhood education (48.1% compared to 46.9%, who responded affirmatively). The lack of initial training on sexual diversity became more patent when the centres were asked whether they had didactic resources on the subject. Only 38.5% of the centres responded yes to this question. This piece of data contrasts with the fact that 49.4% of the centres state that they cover sexual diversity in some of the subjects as well as with the optimism they show concerning their students' abilities to cover these questions professionally in the future (only 12.9% of the centres acknowledge that their students will not be in a position to cover sexual diversity).

What's more, the students we interviewed had not received much information or training on sexual diversity issues. For example, the following comment by a female student reveals a certain amount of confusion and wrong ideas about the roles of same sex couples.

"We are working on this in psychology [the subject of homosexual couples]. If there is someone who acts as a mother and another person who acts as a father, it's alright for the child." (Student 1, University)"

This unfamiliarity or lack of training also exists around how to deal with the sexual orientation and transexuality of boys and girls in early childhood education.

"Q: Imagine that there are boys who want to kiss each other or a boy who wears a dress because he feels he's a girl. Have you worked around that?"

Students 1 and 2: No

Q: If you found yourself in that situation what would you do?

Students 1 and 2: We haven't come across that.

Student 2: Well, during Carnival many boys had a great time dressing up as girls." (Students 1 and 2, University)

In the analysis we carried out of the early childhood education syllabi of Spanish universities and the interviews we carried out, we didn't find subjects that deal specifically with the issue of orientation and sexual diversity. If it is covered, it is mentioned along with gender. This is through the initiative of teachers interested in the subject or because it's in the news.

"No, not as a subject. The subject on different types of families [Welfare and Health] mentions family diversity and also talks about boys' and girls' sexuality (...) It is not on the syllabus, but it is on the subject programme [Welfare and Health]." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

In the majority of cases, the issue of sexual orientation and diversity has been discussed as a result of the case of same sex couples who, since the year 2006, can get married and adopt children in Spain:

"It is mentioned in relation to this topic [the family]. This topic was one that came up a lot last year because that was when the homosexual marriage law was passed, so we did a lot of work on it." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

Apart from the issue of new family models, we didn't find any other indications, except when it is focused on from the point of view of the problems it poses for the child and the families.

"There is a topic that talks about sexual identification to find out whether it is a problem or not. We discuss it and try to find patterns for identifying whether it is a problem or it is having a negative effect on the child's life. We try to treat it as something natural and in a natural way. We don't try to indoctrinate." (Early childhood education studies vocational training coordinator)

As regards materials and methodologies for working on sexual diversity, we already saw from the questionnaire we sent out that the majority of centres did not have these types of materials. In recent years, thanks to GLBT associations, materials have been created and distributed for working on sexual diversity and orientation in the classroom. However, the majority of materials are targeted at primary (6-12 years) and secondary education (12-16 years).

There are some stories for small children but more didactic, audiovisual materials and methods are needed to work with the teachers and the children during the early childhood period.

Consequently, today, not enough is being done to introduce sexual diversity in early childhood education. In the first place because educators are generally not trained to introduce these issues and secondly, because there are no suitable materials available, as this interviewee pointed out:

"It is not being covered; it's something we should do. We have a lot of work. I want to be optimistic. I believe that it is not that teachers do not want to do it; it's because they don't know how to do it. We have a story for working on sexual diversity but it's only used in the centres where they have coeducation programmes (...) It is something that should be introduced gradually. " (Head of Coeducation of an Autonomous Community Administration)

#### 2.4. The shortage of men in early childhood education

The questionnaire we sent out to the centres showed that there were very few or no men studying to become early childhood educators. As we can see from Table 11, if we add the first two rows, 84.4% of the centres have less than 10% male students.

**Table 11: % Male Students**

	Percentage
None	16.9
1-10	67.5
More than 10	15.6
Total	100.0

These figures are higher than those given to us by the experts we interviewed. The majority of experts point out that in the universities only around 2.5% of the students on these training programmes are men. This percentage is even lower in the vocational training centres which train specialists who work mainly with boys and girls aged 0 to 3 years old. This discrepancy between the survey figures and those provided by the experts is due to the fact that in some cases the questionnaire respondents gave figures of all the students studying at the centre or faculty rather than those who were specifically taking the early childhood education course.

The interviewees pointed to two factors to account for the shortage of men in early childhood education. On the one hand, cultural questions or stereotypes and secondly the lack of social prestige and low salaries of the early childhood educator profession.

In relation to social prestige and salary, it should be pointed out that early childhood educators are among the worst paid in the education system. The salaries are even lower, around 700 euros and the number of hours are longer in the case of specialists in early childhood education, who basically work with children aged 0 to 3.

"People earn very little in early childhood education, especially in the 0-3 year old bracket, they work a lot and earn very little. So, for men, it's not very attractive socially. It is not recognised or valued (...) If the early childhood teacher profession enjoyed the same social status as for example, port or road engineers there would be more male teachers." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

Although this holds true for the teaching staff in private companies and for early childhood education specialists, it is not the case with teachers who are public servants. There is no economic explanation for why there are more male students in Primary Education (6-12 years) training courses than in Early Childhood Education (0-6 years) training courses.

Furthermore, the way men and women have traditionally been socialised, the former focussing on productive work and the latter on reproduction and caring, has meant that the early childhood education profession, which is very close to maternity and caring, is highly feminised.

"It is feminised for a number of reasons. The profession enjoys little social prestige and that in some ways confirms the fact that women are considered second rate citizens. And there are also certain maternal components in education which women identify more with than men." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

And on top of this, we have the social difficulties and barriers that men who want to take up this profession come across, as these two examples show.

"An anecdote of a woman teacher whose son wanted to study early childhood education. The father recommended that he study physical education because the son liked sports and the mother did everything she could to dissuade him from studying either early childhood education or physical education and tried to persuade him to study primary education. The son loved 0-6 year old children but he didn't take the course because his social environment pressured him not to do it. In the end he studied to become a primary school teacher, 'they sold him the motorbike'. He's happy but..."(University early childhood education coordinator)

However, early childhood education companies and centres don't have any problems when it comes to hiring men. On the contrary, men usually find work easily because the centres are aware of the need for a masculine role in their organisations.

"No. Normally it's the other way round. The companies want to hire men because of the role they have in front of the children. Because the profession is very feminine and that's a problem in inverted comas." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

"No. on the contrary. They very much like to have a male figure with the children" (Early childhood education studies vocational training coordinator)

On an institutional level, we have no indication that the education administration is doing anything to incorporate men as teachers in this stage of education.

"[She lowers her voice] I think that it [the Administration] hasn't even considered this as being a problem. [She raises her voice]. You and I see it that way because we have thought about it, but the department hasn't considered it. They don't regard it as a problem. They view it as something normal, natural; I don't think they consider it to be a problem." (Head of Coeducation of an Autonomous Community Administration)

On the other hand, some interviewees suggested certain things that could be done to encourage more men to enter the early childhood educator profession. For example, they pointed out that it would be a good idea to create materials showing men working in early childhood education centres.

"The demand [men who enrol on early childhood education courses] is what it is. I think it would help if we filmed materials showing men in these roles" (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

For example, a work was done by Mirta Lojo who interviewed and recorded men and women in jobs that are traditionally done by the other gender. The DVD, which is available to secondary education centres in Catalonia, includes an interview with a man who works in an early childhood education centre. This material could help to show other roles and encourage young men to choose early childhood education studies (Lojo, 2005).

## 2.5. Obstacles to introducing gender and sexual diversity in Early Childhood Education

Another area where there was a discrepancy between the data from the survey and that of the interviews is concerning the difficulties or obstacles to introducing gender and sexual diversity in initial vocational training. The main obstacle mentioned by the experts we interviewed was the fact that these concerns are not considered a priority, whereas the heads of the training centres who answered the survey basically pointed to the question of time and resources, the lack of a needs analysis and financial support as the main obstacles. These factors were followed by the lack of political support, qualified teaching staff and the lack of sensitivity on the part of both the pedagogical team and their own organisation. (Table 12)

**Table 12: Difficulties in implementing the gender perspective and mainstreaming in your centre**

	Totally	Mainly	Partially	No	Total
Financial support	14.3	33.9	21.4	30.4	100.0
Time and resources	10.0	40.0	31.7	18.3	100.0
Qualified personnel	9.1	21.8	45.5	23.6	100.0
Political support	11.3	11.3	28.3	49.1	100.0
Needs analysis	18.3	33.3	30.0	18.3	100.0
Lack of sensitivity on the part of the pedagogical team	5.0	21.7	26.7	46.7	100.0
Lack of sensitivity in the organisation	8.8	15.8	29.8	45.6	100.0
Interchanges experiences with other centres	25.9	27.6	34.5	12.1	100.0

For the experts we interviewed, the main obstacle to introducing gender and sexual diversity issues is that they are not a priority at the moment. With the exception of sensitive teaching staff who introduce these issues in their subjects, the majority are more concerned about other issues or think that they are more important, issues such as immigration, new technologies and cultural diversity.

"I think that most people see that they are important elements to work on but, on the other hand, there is a cultural tendency to say that they are "nonsense" (laughter). A lot of people think that the studies that are being carried out aren't very important. We already know what this is (gender), it's always been the same...with all respects, but that's what they think. (...) Then there's always someone who thinks, well, let's see what I can get out of this. Let's see, how could I work on gender in my subject on the Social Medium? I had in mind a particular teacher who doesn't know much about the subject but shows a lot of interest." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

Since they are not a priority they don't know what materials are currently available (in many cases the materials were created during the nineties and specially designed for primary education):

"Materials are hard to come by. It's a subject that isn't generalised in society and it's therefore difficult to find materials that introduce these issues. For example, on the issue of immigration, five years ago it was difficult to find drawings or texts that dealt with this new reality. With the issue of gender and sexual diversity it's even more difficult. It's difficult to find materials, for example, two boys playing alone and embracing each other. It's easier to draw a boy and a girl. Whereas you more easily come by two girls together. These are cultural questions that are deeply rooted. These types of matters are very difficult unless there is someone with very clear intentions" (University early childhood education coordinator)

Apart from the lack of materials and strategies for introducing gender and sexual diversity issues during the early childhood education phase, the interviews made it clear that there is no social need or demand to cover these subjects, not even from future teachers and specialists.

"I think that the students don't ask for it. I don't think it's a need for the (female) students. I think they are OK about it. They handle it in a natural way. They go to do their practical training and see that there is a male director and 13 women teachers and it's something they have accepted." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

Apart from the lack of demand, teachers are somewhat reluctant when it comes to introducing these issues. Either because they feel their teaching practices are being questioned or because they think they are egalitarian and already apply coeducation in their classrooms.

"People don't like it when they ask for coeducation [as a programme in education centres] and what's more, teachers feel they themselves are being put in question. Others don't understand why people ask for coeducation programmes because they think that they are already promoting coeducation, whereas in actual fact they aren't." (Head of Coeducation of an Autonomous Community Administration)

"Many people find it difficult to accept that it's still important to work on these issues. It's like saying, Not these issues again, how boring! Many professionals know that there isn't equal treatment but they have to deal with it." (Head of Coeducation of an Autonomous Community Administration)

### **3. Recommendations and conclusions**

#### **3.1. Recommendations**

This section reviews the main recommendations put forward in the questionnaires and interviews for improving the implementation of gender perspectives and sexual diversity issues in early childhood education studies and centres. As we can see from the data, changes are needed in the way training in early childhood studies is conceived in order to improve on the acquisition of professional competencies. Currently, there are still centres that associate early childhood education, especially from 0-3 years, more with day care than with education. It is important to change this notion and above all to understand that early childhood education is different from other stages

As far as gender competencies are concerned, both university and vocational training education centres need to carry out reflection workshops with their students.

Students must question their own identity, discover the aspects of the hidden curriculum and work on the stereotypes that are assigned to each gender.

"If there isn't reflection on gender, the models and stereotypes perpetuate themselves. There needs to be reflection about how important the gender

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concept in education is for the child. If this reflection takes place, professionals will take it upon themselves to find and use suitable materials to work on aspects of gender in the classroom (...) (University early childhood education coordinator)

This (self) reflection could be achieved via group dynamics, social-affective methods, role playing, criticism and debate. They can also use news stories or audiovisual material such as films and documentaries.

(Self) reflection on gender should not only be carried out during initial training with trainee teachers, but should also be extended to continuous training, to university and vocational training professors who train early childhood educators and to current early childhood educators. What's more, in the case of early childhood educators, this individual self-reflection should be complemented with a reflection session with the entire teaching team in the education centre. In this respect, we have examples of centres that weren't successful in implementing an intervention programme on gender in an early childhood education centre because only a few teachers at the centre supported the initiative.

"There is the case of a pre-school centre in a gypsy community which decided to work on gender because stereotypes are very accentuated in this community. What started off as a centre initiative ended up being an initiative of one or two teachers. The new teachers didn't take up the guidelines either. So the experience finally failed. Therefore, I think the reflection must be personal but it also has to involve the entire education centre team." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

With the university and vocational training centre students, the gender perspective needs to be introduced systematically in their practical training (practicum), both in daily practice and in their analysis of the centre.

Furthermore, the interviewees also outlined some techniques and methods which can improve the gender competencies of early childhood education centre teachers. For example, they can programme activities that work on aspects of gender by talking with the children about their daily routines and experiences. They can also use games, stories and songs to work on gender stereotypes. In this respect, the interviewees pointed out that early childhood educators should be on guard and careful not to transmit implicit messages in traditional stories and songs which at times extol women's passivity or violence against women.

"There are even songs for boys and girls that extol violence, like the case of a girl who is disobedient to her father and is punished by being hit on the head with a walking stick and is then buried under an olive tree. We find apologetics for violence against women in stories and songs. If you get exposed to this from an early age as something normal then it is not easy to get rid of or change it." (Head of Coeducation of an Autonomous Community Administration)

Work can also be done on stereotypes using images such as for example, men looking after babies or women in typically masculine occupations.

"Visual things which we sometimes hang up on the walls in the school. For example, a woman washing the dishes and you try to replace the woman with a man... These are things that the children see over and over again. More priority should be given to images. But, obviously, the kids continue to see their mother washing the dishes..." (Early childhood education studies vocational training coordinator)

Finally, the interviewees coincided in pointing out that, rather than work on gender with the children in specific one-off activities, gender concerns should be introduced in daily practice, in all the activities that they do.

"I remember that we once asked the children to represent the story of little red riding hood in English. I proposed that they form two groups so that everyone has a role and they could distribute it as they liked. They split themselves up into boys on one side and girls on the other. They were used to working mixed up together and I wasn't worried about them dividing themselves up like this for one day. What did worry me was when I asked about the roles, the girls did it right but the boys were all either wolves or hunters and there were no little red riding hoods or grandmothers. That occasion was an opportunity for working on gender and then you begin to systematise and talk about it and see what happens." (University early childhood education studies coordinator)

In general, they coincided in pointing out that the best strategy is to introduce gender mainstreaming in all the subjects. In other words, train the teaching staff so that they are able to introduce the gender perspective in all their subjects.

"Everything that goes on in the classroom should have a coeducational component. It doesn't make sense to study psychology without taking into account the difference between boys and girls, it doesn't make sense to study psychomotor skills, working on children's games without considering the differences between boys and girls, without looking at what's inside the games, etc. (...) I think that for the time being these issues are not considered. Perhaps there's a brushstroke, in certain subjects, but that's all." (Head of Coeducation of an Autonomous Community Administration)

One of the most effective ways of introducing gender mainstreaming in all the subjects is through continuous training of teachers, with courses and seminars.

However, given that some teachers might be reluctant to introduce gender mainstreaming, the majority of the interviewees believe that on a practical level, it would be very effective to include a specific subject on gender or coeducation in early childhood education studies.

On an institutional level, the Education administration should promote the idea of having a head of coeducation in each centre, someone in charge of furthering the introduction of gender and diversity aspects at the centre.

"To begin with, what we need is a person in each centre who is responsible for coeducation...in the same way as there is someone for labour hazard prevention." (Head of Coeducation of an Autonomous Community Administration)

Finally, laws or regulations could reinforce and help to include gender and sexual diversity on the curriculum, as this interviewee pointed out.

"I think it's both these things. On the one hand people are personally interested in introducing these issues but on the other hand, guidelines in this respect would make educators more aware of the need. It's not that people are not willing to do it. Quite often people don't think about it. A law or a directive, above all as regards materials (books, language) would make people realise" (University early childhood studies coordinator)

### **3.2. Conclusions**

The current situation regarding the implementation of gender and sexual diversity issues during the Early Childhood education phase is heterogeneous throughout Spain. Certain Autonomous Communities have given a boost to gender issues in recent years. In Andalusia, for example, it is compulsory to have a head of coeducation in each centre and to include the gender perspective on the centre's development plan. However, other Autonomous Communities are not doing anything in this respect or

they have voluntary coeducation programmes for the centres with a very limited budget.

On a legislative level, it is worth mentioning that the Spanish state has strongly promoted gender equality issues. More specifically, Article 23 of the Equality Law, passed in March 2007, sets down various education initiatives to promote gender equality and the introduction of gender mainstreaming in education. One section of this article refers to the incorporation of the study and application of the principle of equality in initial and continuous teacher training courses and programmes. It is still to be seen how the aspects of this law will be put into practice in the teacher training centres.

Meanwhile, our research data (survey and interviews) shows that in Spain there aren't strategies for implementing gender mainstreaming in initial training centres. Some universities are beginning to draw up their own equality plans and are setting up equality observatories but this still isn't common practice. In the faculties and vocational training centres that offer courses in early childhood education, gender is not usually a priority for the academic team. Hence, when gender topics are discussed at these centres this is usually as a result of the individual initiative, interest or sensitivity of a particular teacher.

Despite this, the majority of centres point out that they introduce gender topics in one form or other in their studies. However, there are hardly any specific subjects on gender or coeducation, either in early childhood educator studies or in early childhood education specialist studies. At university, these issues are usually incorporated into subjects such as: sociology of education, psycho-pedagogical fundamentals and developmental psychology; in other words, subjects that are theoretical rather than practical. On the other hand, in the vocational training centres that offer courses for early childhood education specialists, although we found fewer initiatives for covering gender issues, when these are covered it is in more practical and didactic subjects such as games methodology or social-affective development.

When it comes to sexual diversity the panorama is even more disappointing. They don't have a defined strategy for introducing this issue in their studies either. They are covered in very few subjects and by very few teachers and there are hardly any materials and work methodologies. In spite of this, the centres are aware that trainee teachers in early childhood education need to have the competencies to work on these issues. Non traditional families such as those made up of same sex couples are introducing new realities that are present today in early childhood education centres and which teachers need to know how to manage. There is still a long way to go before minority sexual identities such as homosexuality and transsexuality are discussed in initial training in a context other than that of the problems that they create for the families and the children. Despite the fact that the survey findings show that the majority of teachers who come out of the universities and vocational teacher training centres are in a position to cover sexual diversity, other data tells us that this is not so. A large percentage of the centres today still think that sexual diversity is not a subject that should be covered during the early childhood education phase. It should be noted that there are hardly any materials and methodologies and that these issues are covered very briefly in the subjects and the study programmes. With this panorama it is difficult to see how students are in a position to cover sexual diversity once they finish their studies.

The shortage of men teachers in early childhood education is not an issue that worries the education administrations and as a consequence there aren't strategies for increasing their presence.

Cultural reasons, the fact that the early childhood phase is very close to maternity, and the lack of prestige and the salary of early childhood educators or specialists are among the main reasons that account for this shortage of men teachers. In the

education system this phase is the least prestigious and in the private sector it is also one of the worst paid.

Finally, it is worth pointing out the fact that they are not viewed as a priority issue today, is one of the main obstacles to implementing gender and sexual diversity issues in initial training. One gets the impression that it is an issue that has been solved whereas this is not so in reality. University and vocational training centre educators may also be reluctant to cover gender issues, not only because they consider them to be matters that have been overcome but also because their teaching practices are being put in question or because they believe that they are already egalitarian.

In this respect, (self) reflection is a basic methodology for exploring identities and practices that is very much needed in initial training.

Another obstacle to implementing these issues is the lack of materials and methods. Despite the appearance in recent years of stories, didactic and audiovisual materials, our survey data shows that it is still not enough.

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