



**6<sup>th</sup> SIG gender balance research conference in Budapest / Hungary**  
**Strategies and realities: approaches to a better gender balance**  
**Tuesday, 28.8.2018, 9.00-16.30**

***Notes from the conference (Tim Rohrmann)***

*My favourite quotes from this years' conference*

*"Like the fly in the milk we are." (Male ECEC student in Greece, paper of Elena Mousena).*

*"It's more than he jumps well with the kids." (Female manager, USA, paper of Jean Plaisir)*

22 researchers met for the 6<sup>th</sup> SIG gender balance to exchange experiences and to develop ideas and strategies for research in the field of gender balance in the ECEC work force. The group was even more international compared to earlier conferences, with participants from Australia, Israel, South Africa, USA and xx European countries.

***Introduction round***

We were pleased to welcome EECERA 2018 chairs Sándor Pálfi, Vice Dean, and Anikó Nagy Varga, Faculty of Child and Adult Education of the University of Debrecen, Hungary, who joined the introduction round of the conference and stayed for a debate on recent developments in ECEC.

Sándor Pálfi had been invited not only as EECERA conference chair, but as well because he had been the first male ECEC teacher with university degree in Hungary in 1980. As he told the group, it had been "hard" to be the first male teacher, and it was even difficult to issue his diploma, because the regular title in the diploma was a female expression! The traditional understanding of ECEC in Hungary is strongly connected to the mother's role, based on "unconditional love", and touch is an important part of caretaker-child-relations. Against this background, it was strange for parents to see a man taking this role. However, parents easily accepted him when doing physical and movement education, going outdoors, or making music. Until today ECEC in Hungary has a "feminine" character, even the name of the profession of workers is female ("ante" = aunt), and male teachers are still rare, with only 140 of 31.000 pedagogues, although it is reported that men are "awful popular" in the centres. – This personal introduction was followed by a general debate of the role of academic teaching vs. learning through (free) play, which is in the centre of the Hungarian approach to ECEC, presented in the Framework of Hungarian kindergartens.

In the following introduction round, participants informed about their ongoing projects, and about developments in their respective countries. This report summarizes some developments without claiming to be exhaustive.

In the United Kingdom, the issue of men in ECEC has been discussed much during the past two years. The British government has set up a working group and published a report in the issue. The British Research Council is funding a project for the diversification of the workforce. A 3<sup>rd</sup> National conference was organized by grass root activists.

In Germany, a new nationwide quantitative study on attitudes of parents and practitioners towards men in ECEC was published in November 2018 (only in German) → [https://www.chance-quereinstieg.de/fileadmin/company/pdf/Literatur/181108\\_Kitas\\_im\\_Aufbruch\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.chance-quereinstieg.de/fileadmin/company/pdf/Literatur/181108_Kitas_im_Aufbruch_WEB.pdf).

A qualitative study is still in progress and will be published 2019. The National coordination centre for men in ECEC still exists, but with only little funding and limited activities. However, a nationwide network of coordinators and leaders of working groups for men in ECEC continues to support local initiatives and projects.

Several activities were reported from the Nordic countries. Norway has nearly 10% male workers now. There has been another National conference, projects and research, and continuing public interest in the issue, especially after a study had reported better school results from children who had been in kindergartens with a higher share of male workers:

Drange, Nina & Rønning, Marte (2017). Child care center staff composition and early child development. Statistisk Sentralbyrå Discussion Papers (no. 870). Zugriff am 08.01.2017. Verfügbar unter <http://www.ssb.no/en/forskning/discussion-papers/attachment/332823?ts=1604982ebc8>

In Sweden there are a few local projects, but also skepticism and resistance although gender equality is valued so high – why? In Iceland, the teacher’s union tries to promote men in ECEC. Colleagues from Australia, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, the US and other countries informed about ongoing practice/research projects on men in ECEC, on children’s views on gender differences, and other related topics. Sometimes research can build up on existing research, in other cases it is pioneer work to set the issue on National agendas. Several participants from China, Egypt, Germany, Ireland, and the UK reported from their PhD studies. Many interesting results were later presented on the EECERA Annual conference → all presentations are available at [http://www.siggender.eu/sig\\_documentation.html](http://www.siggender.eu/sig_documentation.html).

Unfortunately Simon Brownhill couldn’t come to Budapest, so the opening contribution on “Strategies and Realities: A critical reflection of ways to attract, recruit, retain and develop men in the Early Years sector” had to be cancelled. However, a summary of the paper is available on the SIG docu webpage → Brownhill 2018 strategies.pdf. [http://www.siggender.eu/forschung/SIG\\_GB/2018\\_SIG/Brownhill%202018%20Strategies.pdf](http://www.siggender.eu/forschung/SIG_GB/2018_SIG/Brownhill%202018%20Strategies.pdf)

### ***Gender dynamics of mentoring***

*Moderation: Jo Warin, Lancaster/United Kingdom*

Jo Warin introduced the issue of peer support and the role of mentor's gender for mentoring processes for men in ECEC and men and women in gender-mixed teams. Small group work focused on four significant time points in vocational careers:

- Vocational aspirations for ECEC work
- Support during professional training
- Mentoring and support during first job
- Mentoring for leadership roles

In the small groups sessions, participants shared stories, questions, and research experiences.

Regarding the first stage of stepping into ECEC, participants shared many examples of cultural differences relevant for men's experiences. These include biographical issues, societal norms and expectations, but also economic factors. Sometimes these factors are contradicting, for example governmental funded pay incentives and good training possibilities for men, while at the same time cultures norms are not supporting men in caring roles.

There are huge differences in the organization of mentoring in practice institutions in different countries. Moreover, expectations and assignments towards male workers beginning in a job are quite different. For example, in China, new beginners are usually assigned mostly caring tasks, what is a problem for several men as these are perceived as "female". The group then discussed the relevance of a same-sex mentor especially for newcomers.

Another option for the support of male students and workers are male-only working groups. Such groups can create a safe space for men for mutual learning and debates on relevant issues and can serve as viable options for professional development. Men's working groups can fill a gap when there is a lack of mentoring at the workplace. Such groups can work on a huge variety of topics, including the use of the body in interactions with children, or the relevance of male workers as role models for young fathers. – However, it should be noticed that some male workers are not interested or even criticize men-only groups. See also:

[Dayan, Yael; Perez, Yair & Brody, David \(2013\). A Grassroots Support Group for Male Early Childhood Educators: Implications for Practice.](#)

[Rohrmann, Tim & Emilsen, Kari \(2013\). How do working groups of male educators contribute to professionalism and quality in ECE?](#)

The session closed with a general conversation on leadership styles and gendered expectations regarding leadership. Mentoring for leadership roles is not very common in the field of ECEC. Men are sometimes expected and expecting to take over leadership roles, but there are relevant differences regarding this tendency between countries, and the so-called "glass escalator" theory can't be confirmed in general.

It was concluded that more reflexivity on gender and diversity is relevant for support and mentoring of male workers in ECEC on all levels, from training to leadership.

### ***Career Trajectories of Men in – and out of – ECEC***

*Input: David Brody, Jerusalem/Israel*

David Brody presented some information on the ongoing international research project *Men's Career Trajectories*, which had developed from the collaboration in the SIG since 2017. In this project, 16 researchers from 13 countries worldwide work together with no or very little funding. This is a fascinating and challenging experience where people are enjoying exchange and are deeply interested in the other's perspectives. First results of the project will be presented on the next EECERA conference in Thessaloniki in 2019.

For more information, see [mct\\_project\\_update\\_2018.pdf](http://www.siggender.eu/forschung/SIG_GB/2018_SIG/Brody%20MCT%20project%20update%202018.pdf) on the SIG docu website  
[http://www.siggender.eu/forschung/SIG\\_GB/2018\\_SIG/Brody%20MCT%20project%20update%202018.pdf](http://www.siggender.eu/forschung/SIG_GB/2018_SIG/Brody%20MCT%20project%20update%202018.pdf)  
or contact David Brody → [davidb55@gmail.com](mailto:davidb55@gmail.com).

### ***Mixed and multiple methodologies in gender balance research***

*moderated by Yuwei Xu, Portsmouth, UK/China*

During the last decade, there has been a rise of research interest in the field of gender balance in ECEC in various countries. Many early studies were interview studies with male and, less often, female practitioners. Recent research shows more diversity regarding methods and methodologies. Different methods can provide both complement and contradict findings. How can this be used to gain comprehensive insights into gender balance issues?

Building up on information and papers provided by participants before the conference, Yuwei Xu presented a short overview on methodologies used in existing research, see pdf on SIG docu website:  
[http://www.siggender.eu/forschung/SIG\\_GB/2018\\_SIG/Xu%20SIG%20conference%20methodologies%202018.pdf](http://www.siggender.eu/forschung/SIG_GB/2018_SIG/Xu%20SIG%20conference%20methodologies%202018.pdf)

The presentation was followed by lively discussion, including the following issues:

- Objectivity vs. subjectivity. The relevance of quantitative studies with big samples vs. in-depth qualitative studies with small samples was discussed.
- The relation between interview and interviewee is relevant, regarding aspects like equality, familiarity, trust, and power.
- The gap between 'what people say and what people do' can be analyzed by the combination of questionnaires or interviews with video observations.
- It plays an important role if there is only one man in the team or two or more → no generalization of findings from teams with one male colleague to all men in teams.
- Group discussions can be a good method for the analysis of "shared orientations"; this makes sense as ECEC workers teams *are* groups constructing their understanding of gender (balance) together.
- Regarding parents, the interrelation of parents' attitudes and the gender of their child/children could be important.

Two different levels of methodology were discussed: (1) a micro-sociological level, focusing on interactions, the construction of power relations, etc., and (2) a macro level, focusing on policies and strategies. While in (1) gender is constructed in interactions, in (2) definitions of gender are fixed in discourses and documents. – It was suggested that members of our research network could compare existing material from different countries, possibly including re-analysis of existing data.

### ***Male ECEC workers in children's picture books***

*Moderation: Tim Rohrmann, Hildesheim/Germany*

Inspired by a research on children's picture books on issues of inclusion, Tim Rohrmann had asked all participants to bring examples of children's picture books which display men working with children in kindergarten. It came out that there were several books and even series of books displaying men working in kindergarten from the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark), a few such books from Germany, but not from other countries. Participants looked at the books in small groups and exchanged their impressions. Questions for reflection were

- How are practitioners/preschool teachers presented as men and women? Which colors, patterns, attributes are displayed?
- What are the men doing, what are the women doing? What are their roles in the context of kindergarten, and in the context of the story?
- How are relations between children and men constructed?

The presented books showed a variety of men, including some men depicted counter-stereotypical. In one case gender of teacher was not evident. Some of the books showed very positive examples of men working with children, and also men and women working together. On the other hand, many books still displayed stereotypical elements. For example, in a Swedish book, male and female preschool teachers were both addressed as "Fröken" ("Miss"), the traditional female term used for kindergarten teachers. Sometimes it was important to look at details. A German book showed a man doing the same work as his female colleague. However, the female colleague had long hair and a ponytail, and in all appearances in the book at least a little part of her clothing was pink.

In summary, this was an interesting overview, but at the same time it came clear that in many countries, the character of a male kindergarten teacher hasn't emerged yet in children's literature. Some colleagues were encouraged to have a look for such books in their countries, and we would enjoy to see some more interesting books on next year's conference!

### ***Final round***

In the final round, participants agreed that this had been a wonderful and inspiring meeting with a rich and varied program. Some participants felt inspired to get their students to work on the issues discussed on the conference, others expressed their interest in more comparative research. The small group work was appreciated, as were the tea and coffee breaks. Finally, it was "nice to see people from all over the world who share the passion for this issue", as one participant stated.

Regarding topics for next year's SIG conference, the following ideas came up:

- Cross-country cooperation: explore possibilities for merging findings from several countries, including re-analyzing existing data.
- From research to teaching and practice: how can scientific knowledge be transferred to our teaching at university, and to our work with practitioners?
- Methodologies: the debate on this issue was a start and should be continued.
- Joint analysis: work together on examples of data, e.g. interview excerpts, in small groups.
- Subjectivity and self-reflexivity: How do we deal with our own subjectivity in research processes?