

Changing the concept of gender in Norwegian ECEC's ... or not?

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The significance of gender perspectives

My agenda

- How do we understand gender?
- The ECEC as gendered arenas
- Providing room for diversity – how?



ECECs responsibility

Engages in purposeful work and deliberate practice so that ***all*** children and ***all*** employees are given room for a diversity of gender expression.

Provide opportunity for children and adults to develop **in accordance to abilities and interests** and **preventing gender stereotyping**.



ECECs responsibility

Knowledge and awareness – competence

ECEC employees need scientific foundations - concepts and understandings (Bø 2014:14)

We must also draw attention to what it means if we are **NOT** conscious of our own practices and consequences of our actions and choices from a gender perspective.

- Concerning the children
- Concerning the staff



How do we understand gender?

- Let us establish that sex and gender matters, both biologically and socially.
- Biological **sex** is linked to the body and its *functions*, **gender** attributed to the biological sex and is a *social construction* (Emilsen 2015, Stordal 2015).



How do we understand gender?

- The importance of gender and how gender is expressed depends on the society and the culture we live in (Emilsen 2015).
- The way we understand gender changes over time in different cultures and societies (Butler 1990, Conell 1996).
- There are also differences within gender categorie's (Aasebø and Melhuus 2005).



Sex and gender can be understood as:

1) Something **given**

Nature-given/biological, with social consequences.

2) Something **constructed**

Something we make and renew and shape the meaning/significance of.



Gender can be understood as:

3) Something we **do** (practise), the way we perform or 'do' gender often depends on the setting and context (Bratterud, Emilsen and Lillemyr 2006)

Gender is *not* something we passively inherit - but something we actively create (Aasebø and Melhuus 2005).



Born this way or become like this?

Biological sex is important, but the genes only determine us to a certain extent.

Cultural "gender differences" matters:

There are biological differences, but the context, environment and society these biological differences are expressed in, have great significance (Emilsen 2015).



The «third gender»

A certain percentage of people are born with indeterminate sex, hermaphrodites, or they have orientation as transgendered.

Those who for various reasons cannot or can define themselves as either/or, socially and biologically, experience challenges and difficulties (Renolen 2015).



Challenges or opportunities?

Norwegian law explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.



Photo:Nils Pickert in Emilsen 2015



The ECEC as gendered arenas

Focus on gender and equality concerns:
knowledge and awareness of attitudes,
behaviors, activities and ECECs design.

The gendered educator

The gendered ECEC arena



The gendered educator

The significance of the staff concerning:

- How children's gender identity is developed/shaped

Employees relation to gender issues affect children's development of gender identity and understanding of self as a boys or girls (Stordal 2015, Renolen 2015).



The gendered educator

The significance of the staff concerning:

- Attitudes, experiences and beliefs regarding gender

Children relate to expectations, the framework and the guidelines given for boys and girls (Emilsen 2015).



Gender and values

Which values are the basis for our actions and decisions?

Are they conscious or unconscious?



**Caring and nursing women?
Men as explorers and adventurers?**



The gendered educator

The significance of the staff concerning:

- How is gender diversity expressed in everyday life?

What the staff say and do ...



The gendered educator

Communication

- Body language
- The choice of words - Intonation

In what way is this gendered?

Why does it matter?



The gendered educator

Gender differences in risk taking and excitement seeking (ES): *“Research in several different cultures and countries has documented that men score higher on ES scales than women* (Sandseter (2014:437)

Men have more liberal attitudes towards children’s risky play than the female ECEC practitioners (Sandseter (2014:437)



The gendered educator

Boys engage much more in rough and tumble play and it is considered important for the development of children (Storli and Sandseter 2015).

Male workers recognise this activity more than female workers.



The gendered educator

- How do we value games and activities?
- Which activities does the staff take initiative to?
- In which activities do the male and female staff participate, respectively?
- How do males and females position themselves in the room – indoor and outdoor?

Is this gendered?



The gendered educator

Are there differences in how women and men interact with children in ECECs?

Three important differences are expressed:

- Men are more 'physical' with children than women
- Men are more playful with children than women
- Men are less focused on safety and security than women

Men often play more roughly with children and have different tolerance levels in working with children. This is seen positively by both women and men (Lysklett and Emilsen 2007)).



The gendered ECEC institutions

- The design of the ECEC buildings and outdoor area – important for boys and girls, men and women
- Spaces that give room for variation in play and learning.



The gendered ECEC institutions

The physical room “speaks”

Whose room is it?

The women's room?

The children's room?

Girls' or boys' room? (Askland 2015)



The gendered ECEC institutions

- A pedagogical institution or a "cosy nest"?
- If the childcare institution is seen as a substitute for home, it can contribute to the production of a gendered workforce (Cameron et al. 1999).



Providing room for diversity

Superior ethical principle for ECEC's:

Surroundings should not define sexual orientation and gender identity.

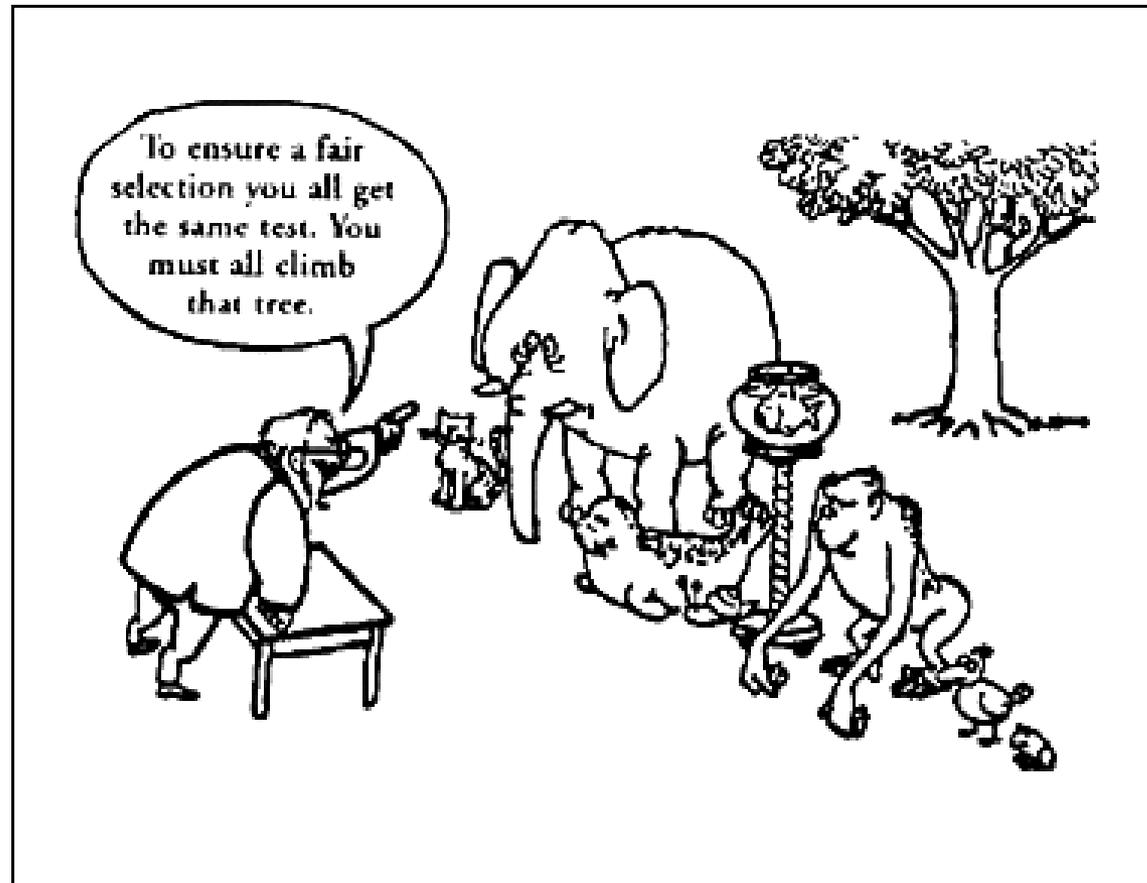
Create space for openness and diversity.

Create better opportunities for maneuvering both within and across the established gender categories

(Renolen 2015)



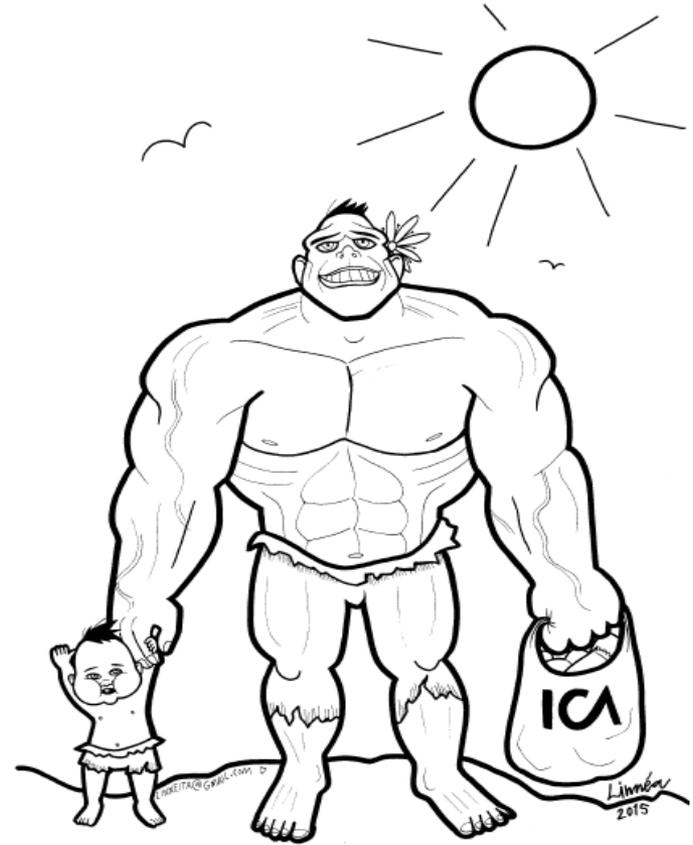
Equality - not to treat everyone alike



<http://limpan.org/>



<http://limpan.org/>



Changing the concept of gender in Norwegian ECEC's? ... or not

YES - more awareness of gender issues. Gender, diversity and equality are parts of the ECEC discourse.

NO – same old story.

«We see individuals, not gender».

«Men and women are different, so let it be».





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Balance

