

Parents' views on male educators in the Greek preschool

Meni Tsigra

The research: The research about parents' views on male educators is a part of a wider project which focuses on the interpretation of the daily reality/(life in) of the kindergarten, where male educators work, analyzing educators' (male and female) discourses, and also children's and parents' views on their male and female educators (Tsigra 2014).

The research-project has been carried out in three **full-day** classes and in a **classic** one in four public kindergartens (**P.K.**) (P.K. is attended by children of 4-6 years old and administered by the Ministry of Education) (Tsigra, 2010). **Full-day** classes operate from 8:00 to 16:00, having only kindergarten educators as staff (excluding support staff). In the P.K. chosen, a male and a female educator share the teaching hours during the full-day class. The **classic** class operates from 8:00 to 12:30 and in the P.K. chosen a male educator was responsible for the teaching hours.

This presentation focuses on the parents' views on male (and female) educators working in the three full-day classes: In the 1th case study, 18 children, 4-6 years old, attended the class (7 girls and 11 boys), in a city of 100.000. In the 2th case study, 17 children attended (8 girls and 9 boys), in a village and in the 3th case study, 19 children attended (9 girls and 10 boys), in a village very close to a city. In all cases female educators have worked more years than their male colleagues - the male educators have worked in kindergarten for about 10 years.

Theoretical tools: Given that male educators have challenged a strong social stereotype, practising a profession which is considered 'feminine', how the parents of the kindergarten children represent male educators? I use the terms **position/positioning**, from the poststructuralist theory, to analyze the parents' views. According to the poststructuralist theory, the agents' positions are not given: they are produced and reproduced in the context of social practices and discourses. Positions are connected to the power and therefore to the **gender** (Davies, 1994).

Methodology: I used a **focus group** approach in each of the three case studies, where 10, 8 and 8 parents participated – 25 parents (22 mothers, 3 fathers and 1 grandmother) – about half of the number of the children's parents. Focus group approach allows the parents to classify the topics they like for discussion or to point out new topics. Besides, the interrelations between the participants are a basic factor for reflectivity in the discussion (Morgan, 1996).

Research questions: I organized the interviews setting five topics for discussion:

- Their first impressions when they realized that one of their child's educators was a man/male (one), their fears or anxieties.
- Their expectations of both educators, especially from the male one.
- Their children's experiences from the male and female educators.
- Their opinion about the entrance of male educators in preschool education.
- Their personal choice for their child's educator (male or female, and why?)

The **first findings** suggest that parents are in favour of having male educators and have positive views on men's entrance in kindergartens. Also, as we'll see in this presentation, parents support the gender balance in the preschool education.

Further questions for discussion are: How stereotypical are parents' views? What aspects of masculinities are presented in the parents' discourses?

References

Davies, B. (1994). *Poststructuralist Theory and Classroom Practice*. Victoria: Deakin University

Morgan, D.A. (1996). Focus Groups. *Annual Review Sociology*, 22:129-152

Tsigra, M. (2010). «Male teacher's and children's gender construction in Preschool Education». In 26. OMEP World Congress, "Children citizens in a challenged world", August 11-13, 2010, Goteborg, Sweden. http://www.ehs-dresden.de/fileadmin/forschung/SIG_GB/OMEP_2010_Tsigra.pdf (more info about preschool education in Greece)

Tsigra, M. (2014). "Children's views on male and female kindergarten teachers". In International Research Conference SIG Gender Balance, EECERA Special Interest Group, 7 September, Crete, Greece. http://www.ehs-dresden.de/fileadmin/forschung/SIG_GB/Tsigra_EECERA_SIG_gender_2014.pdf

Tsigra, Meni (2016). Parents' views on male EC educators in Greek pre-schools.
Paper presented on the 4th SIG Gender Balance Research Conference,
31.8.2016, Dublin, Ireland.

“Parents' views on male EC educators in Greek pre-schools ”

Meni Tsigra

4th SIG gender balance research conference
Dublin/Ireland

Gender Balance in ECEC: new research perspectives

EECERA

Wednesday, 31 August 2016

A wider project

- **The research:** The research about parents' views on male educators is a part of a wider project which focuses on the interpretation of the daily life in the kindergarten, where male educators work; it aims at analyzing educators' (male and female) discourses, and also children's and parents' views on their male and female educators.
- Also, this research examines the different aspects of “masculinities” of the male educators in the Greek pre-schools.

A wider project

- The research-project has been carried out in three **full-day** classes and in one "**classic**"/"**morning class**", in four public kindergartens (**P.K.**) (P.K. attended by children of 4-6 years old and administered by the Ministry of Education).
- **Full-day** classes operate from 8:00 to 16:00. In the P.K. chosen, a male and a female educator share the teaching hours during the full-day class (The first educator teaches from 8:00 to 12:00 and the second one from 12:00 to 16:00).
- The "**morning class**" class operates from 8:00 to 12:30 and in the P.K. chosen a male educator was responsible for the teaching hours.

The research

- This presentation focuses on parents' views on male and female educators working in the **three full-day classes**:
- In the 1th case-study, 18 children, 4-6 years old, attended the class (7 girls and 11 boys) - (a P.K. in a city of 100.000 people).
- In the 2th case-study, 17 children attended (8 girls and 9 boys) - (a P.K. in a village) and
- in the 3th case-study, 19 children attended (9 girls and 10 boys) - (a P.K. in a village very close to a city of 80.000).
- In all case-studies female educators have worked more years than their male colleagues - the male educators have worked in kindergartens from 7 to 10 years.

Theoretical tools

- Given that male educators have challenged a strong social stereotype, practising a profession which is considered 'feminine', the question is: How the parents of the kindergarten children perceive and represent the male educator of their children?
- I use the term **position** from the poststructuralist theory, to analyze the parents' views. According to the poststructuralist theory, the agents' positions are not given: they are produced and reproduced in the context of social practices and discourses. Positions are connected to **power** and therefore to **gender**.

Davies, B. (1994). *Poststructuralist Theory and Classroom Practice*, Victoria: Deakin University

The target group - Methodology

- I used a **focus group** approach in each of the three case studies, where 10, 8 and 8 parents participated – 26 parents in total (22 mothers, 3 fathers and 1 grandmother) – about half of the number of the children's parents.
- The parents' employment status varied:
 - 11 of the mothers were unemployed housewives (especially in the P.K. in the villages),
 - 4 parents were educators (3 mothers and one father),
 - 4 were owners of small shops
 - 7 parents were private and public employees.The social-economical background was low and lower-middle class

Methodology

- **A focus group** approach must be organized very well by the researcher.
- The discussion topics must be clear for the participants.
- However, a focus group approach allows the participants to classify the topics they like for discussion or to propose new topics.
- The interrelations **between the participants are a basic factor for reflectivity in the discussion.**

Morgan, D.A. (1996). Focus Groups. *Annual Review Sociology*, 22:129-152

Research questions

I organized the sessions, setting five topics for discussion:

- What were their first impressions when they realized that one of their child's educators was male?
- What do parents expect the male and the female educators to do in kindergarten?
- What are children's experiences from the male and female educators ("what do children bring home")?
- What is their opinion about the entry of male educators in preschool education?
- What is their personal choice for their child's educator?

Parents' first impressions

1. A positive response (15 out of 26)

- "A very positive impression. I have to say the best. I believe that whoever wants to become a kindergarten educator must really like it..." (Int. 1/ father of a girl).
- "The first time that I met Mr. B. I was surprised positively. I think that a male educator is more patient and sensitive than a woman" (Int.1/boy's mother). (A lot of parents agree with this...)
- "I was surprised positively. I had a male educator as colleague... Children loved him" (Int.2/boy's mother and kindergarten educator)
- "I liked it! I thought of it very positively! I think that kids must take stimuli from both sexes." (Int.3/boy's father)
- "I was very happy... My daughter wanted to attend Mr. B. class. I feel more secure with Mr. B. I believed that he could manage the class much more effectively." (Int.1/ girl's mother)

Parents' first impressions

2. Anxiety about the male educator's skills to take care of the children, which very soon was overcome (11 out of 26)

- "At the beginning it was strange. I compared him to myself. I have no patience. I believe that someone must have the charisma to deal with such a large number of kids... It is a natural characteristic... I would not think of all these thoughts if it were for a female educator..." (Int. 2/girl's father)
- "My fear was about my daughter's behavior. The first days she preferred Mrs. K., but now she has a very good relationship with Mr. B." (Int. 1/mother's girl)
- "At the beginning I was surprised. I was not sure if he could manage the class. I thought that he would be more strict and he would have less patience than a woman..." (Int. 3/girl's mother)

Parents' expectations

More than half of the parents have different expectations

1. Different expectations (according to gender)

- "I expect different things. I would like Mrs. K. to be more emotional with my daughter while Mr. B. to cope with the difficult circumstances. The differences between them because of the different gender are very exciting. I am very happy about this ...and the children like it also."
(Int.1/girl' mother)
- "Just because there are man and woman, children will take different things. The most important is the cooperation between them and the common job... One complements the other. For example, Mr. K., as a man, could face something with humor when Mrs. M. will discuss it more."
(Int.2./boy's mother)
- "I think that a man is a positive pattern for the children. At the beginning, I didn't value it. I am divorced, and I think that Mr. B. covers the father's absence. One day my daughter told me "Mammy, I love Mr. B.""
(Int.1/girl's mother)

Parents' expectations

"I expect different things. The male educator teaches and gives advice to kids more efficiently... Especially to the boys who don't see enough of their fathers..." (Int.3/girl's mother - more parents agree with this...)

"It is very nice ...My son will play football with a male educator... Just because there is the image of a man in the kindergarten, it's enough... He doesn't need to do anything important..." (Int.3/ boy's father)

2. Same or different expectations? ("secret" different expectations according to gender)

- "I expect the same things ... I think that their attitudes depend on both, gender and character. For example, a man may not value something as important whereas a woman will scream about it. ...A man is more cool..."
(Int. 2/girl's mother – 2 more parents agree with this...)
- "I don't expect different things. Maybe discipline. But, I think that although Mrs. K. is more strict, Mr. B. "sets the children in order"."
(Int.1/girl' mother – more parents agree with this...)

Parents' expectations

3. According to the character [The (implicit) gender]

- "I don't expect different things. But I see Mr. B. as a Primary school educator/"daskalos". He teaches like a Primary school educator. And the children obey him, not because he is a strict educator, not because he is a man, but because he is Mr. B." (Int. 1/girl's father - 3 more parents agreed with this...)
- "I believe that the different behavior depends on the different characters" (Int.2/girl's mother)
- The kindergarten educator is called "**nipiagogos**" (**cares about children**) while the Primary school educator is called "**daskalos**" (**teacher of children**) ... Although the two educators have studied in Universities for 4 years and they are paid the same salary, parents consider that there is a hierarchy between them: The Primary school educator ("daskalos"), traditionally, is related to children's education while the kindergarten educator ("nipiagogos") is related to children's care. Formally (e.g. in Curriculums) both of them are called educators.

Children's experiences from the male and the female educators

What does a child bring home?

1. The male educator as the *significant other*

15 out of 26 parents report that their children talk more about their male educators...

- «... Everything he knows Mr. A. taught him. My son is fond of him. I think that Mr. A. affects the kids more ...! A male educator transfers things to children easier... and the children pay more attention to him than to their female educator! » (Int.3/boy's mother)
- "She talks more about Mr. B. at home . When she learns something new, she says that Mr. B. said it... My daughter isn't afraid of him...But anything Mr. B. says sets a pattern. She always talks about Mr. B. as if Mrs. K. didn't exist." (Int. 1/girl's father)
- "He talks about Mr. B. all the time. Mr. B. says this, Mr. B. says that...For two years, I thought that, in the circle time/ "pareoula", there was just one educator" (Int.1/boy's mother)
- "Cristiano is fond of Mr. K. All day he talks about him..." (Boy's mother from Albania)

Children's experiences from the male and the female educators

2. A balance

8 out of 26 reported that there is a balance in children's experiences

- «My son doesn't bring home different experiences from his two educators. No, there is a balance... He talks about Mrs. L. and Mr. A. in the same way ...» (Int.3/boys father)
- "I think that she is happy in the school. She learns a lot of things from both educators. She doesn't say anything particular about any one of them ..." (Int. 1/girl's mother)
- She doesn't tell me anything particular... She likes both of them... (Int.2/girl's mother)

A balance in accordance with the school schedule

- "She doesn't differentiate her two educators. She talks about both of them... She says that they paint and read fairy tales with Mrs. K, while they play and write with Mr. B." (Int.1/girl's mother)
3. One mother reported that her daughter talks more about her female educator and two mothers said that kids talk more about their peers ...

Parents' opinion about the entry of male educators in preschool education.

All parents agree to the entry of male educators in preschool education

- "I wish there were more men in kindergartens... We must break away from these stereotypes ... from viewing the kindergarten as a woman's job." (Int.2/boy's father)
- "I believe that children "earn" from both of them...We must stop being biased ... As parents, we are responsible for it... We never suggest to a boy to become a kindergarten educator/"nipiagogos" ..." (Int.2/boy's mother)
- "It would be very nice for the kids I agree with the entry of men in kindergarten... Kids don't see enough of their fathers ... The male educators would be a pattern for the kids, especially for the boys." (Int.3/boy's mother)

Their personal choice for their child's educator (male or female and why?)

1. Most of the parents prefer both of them *thus supporting the balance* in the kindergarten

- "I can't choose... I believe that both of them contribute differently to kids....The kids must take stimuli from both of them" (Int. 3/boy's father)
- "I would choose both of them... Because of the different gender there is a balance in the teaching, in the kids' behavior, in the kids' emotional attitude... " (Int.1/girl's mother)
- "I would prefer both of them... Like in the Primary School.... It is good for the kids, for the parents...Each of them contributes in a different way..." (Int.2/girl's father)

Their personal choice for their child's educator (male or female and why?)

2. Some parents prefer both of them, giving to them different roles/positions...

- "It is difficult to choose....I prefer both of them ... Maybe, I would prefer a male educator for my son and a female educator for my daughter" (Int.3/boy's mother)
- "I would prefer a female educator for "pronipia" and a male educator for "nipia" (Int. 3/girl's father)
- "nipia": The kids from 5 to 6 years old
- "pronipia": The kids from 4 to 5 years old

Comment: It is a common view that "nipia" are to be prepared for education while "pronipia" just need care... Here, a stereotypical view is implicit which relates male educators to education and female educators to care...

Their personal choice for their child's educator (male or female and why?)

3. Two (2) mothers prefer a female educator...

"I would prefer a female educator... Women are more close to kids... they care about them better than men..." (Int.3 /boy's mother)

"As a woman, I feel better to communicate with a female educator... Just for this reason, I would prefer a woman... For the kids, I think that it is better to coexist both of the sexes..." (Int.2/girl's mother)

4. Three (3) parents prefer a male educator...

"As I am divorced, I would prefer a male educator for my daughter... I believe that he covers the father's absence..." (Int. 1/girl's mother)

"In our home the environment is very feminine ... The father works all day... I would prefer a male educator for my son... He knows the boys' culture better than a female..." (Int.1/boy's mother)

"As a man, I would like to see in the kindergarten a male educator ... It could be a good reason for the fathers to participate more in the kindergarten activities..." (Int.1/boy's father)

Results

- The small number of fathers in the focus groups shows that ECE is a woman's affair, or in other words, it is not a man's affair
- At the beginning of the school year, 60% of parents were very positive
- 40% of them were suspicious about the male educator's skills to care about children but these fears were very soon overcome.
- More than half of the parents expect different things from the male and female educators. The gender (explicit or implicit) is the main factor that determines these differences.
- All parents are in favour of having male educators and express positive views on men's entry in kindergartens.

Results

- All parents support the gender balance in the preschool education [a "gender-fair learning environment" (Cooney & Bittner, 2001)]
- 21 out of 26 would like their children to have both of them.
- Although children don't seem to differentiate their male and female educators (Tsigra, 2014), most of the parents report that children bring home different experiences from them: male compared to female educators seem to be **more significant** for children.
- Parents are much more in favour of the male educator in the 1th and in the 3th case study than in the 2th study (the P.K. in the village, where the female educator is also from the village – one more factor that affects parents' views).

Cooney, M. & Bittner, M. (2001), Men in Early Childhood Education: Their Emergent Issues. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 29 (2), pp. 77-83.

Tsigra, M. (2014). "Children's views on male and female kindergarten teachers". In International Research Conference SIG Gender Balance, EECERA Special Interest Group, 7 September, Crete, Greece.

<http://www.ehs-dresden.de/fileadmin/forschung/SIG>

Results

Male educator's positions according to parents (aspects of masculinities or/and "a male role model")

- "Patient", "sensitive" and "cool": "Feminine" positions or "non-conventional" male positions according to stereotypical aspects in Greece
- "having a good sense of humor": a "classical masculine" position
- "daskalos" / Primary school educator: a "masculine" position - a stereotypical hierarchy of the male educator
- "Good Regulator" of children's behavior/no strict : a "masculine" position
- "The significant "other"" for the children: a stereotypical hierarchy of the male educator also
- "a good father"

Brownhill S. (2014) "Build me a male role model"! A critical exploration of the perceived qualities/characteristics of men in the early years (0-8) in England. *Gender and Education*, 26:3, 246-261.

Results - Further questions

- Parents, in their discourses, describe the “good” male educator in preschool education – giving to him the “best of both worlds”/ “feminine” and “masculine” qualities
- At the same time, parents describe a “male role model”
- In their discourses a conventional and a non-conventional masculine ideology about the male educators coexist
- Although it is difficult to generalize the results, because of the small –scale case studies, we can claim that parents reinforce a stereotypical hierarchy of male (educators)

These results bring forth further questions in the theoretical discussion and in the research of men's entry in kindergarten...

We must:

- Recognize the different aspects of masculinities and the cultural determination of them...
- Refine the argument of the “positive male role model”

Thank you for your patience

Thank you for your patience