

FOCUS



Gender Equality and Education

Gender Sensitive – *Why Important?*



"As a trainer I have the opportunity to make male dominance visible and to change the situation." Taking up findings from feminist research, Ulrika explains why it is important to be sensitive to gender issues in training situations and puts forward some ideas about how trainers can work towards gender equality.

by Ulrika Eklund

Women and men, boys and girls are all individuals. Does it matter how I act as a trainer? Can I and should I be gender neutral?

As a trainer looking at life, training and gender-equality, I can adopt one of the following attitudes:

- There is no male dominance. Society gives women the same rights and possibilities as men so there is no problem and, as a trainer, I need take no action.
- Male dominance exists but it is because women generally are not as capable as men. As a trainer I am simply dealing with individuals. If one of the sexes takes up more attention and space it is because they deserve it and it is up to the other to show its competence.
- Male dominance is part of society but in reality women are just as capable. As a trainer I have the opportunity to make male dominance visible and to change the situation.

In society there is a male norm and men as a group are in power. But does this affect you as a trainer? My answer is; yes, it does. If you as a trainer do not work gender-sensitively, which sex gets the attention, the space and the time? Which sex is encouraged to continue with new and harder tasks, and which is merely encouraged to confine itself to familiar things? Which sex is remembered as individuals and which is remembered as a group? Which sex is

encouraged to continue putting across its point for the longest time in any discussion? What methods are being used? What subjects and themes are being discussed? Who is the role model?

One third - not more

Many pieces of research have drawn attention to the common perception that women are dominating a situation if they take up more than 30 percent of time or space. This may be in the classroom or at a meeting or in the media. Classroom studies have shown that teachers tend to speak two-thirds of the time, boys tend to speak two-thirds of the remaining time so that only one-ninth of the total classroom time is left for the girls.

Other research has shown that the same text tends to be viewed differently depending on whether the writer is thought to be a woman or a man. When people think that the writer is a man, they judge it more positively than when they are told that it was written by a woman.

Berit Ås, Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Oslo has found that the general reaction to a woman who has spoken more than 33% of the time is that she has dominated the conversation. Even people who are very aware of this react in the same way.

In the 1970s Professor Ås drew attention to five very common 'suppression techniques' in the language of power which men use to assert their dominance



in conversation, often at the expense of women. These are:

- ▷ Making someone invisible
- ▷ Making someone look ridiculous
- ▷ Withholding information
- ▷ Damned if you do and damned if you do not
- ▷ Burdening someone with guilt and shame.

We should learn to recognise and resist these very common techniques in men's language of power.

The winner takes all....

So maybe the winner will be the male participant on training courses, if we do not pay attention to the gender aspect. Perhaps the male participants get more attention and more space. In which case, you have to be aware as a trainer and use methods that are gender sensitive, even though if we look at the numbers of young people participating in projects supported by the European Youth Foundation and in the activities of the European Youth Centre, we can see that the participation is equally divided between the sexes. The activities receiving grants from the European Youth Foundation in 1998 had 46.8 % male participants and 53.2 % female participants; in 1999 47.2 % male participants and 52.8 % female participants. And at the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and in Budapest in 1998 there were 46.9 % male participants and 53.1 % female participants, and in 1999 45.8 % male participants and 54.2 % female participants.

Making the situation visible

It is also important to make this situation visible in education. One way to do this is by using statistics. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities had a mainstreaming project to find a tool with which to make an equality analysis of municipal activities. Gertrud Åström was the project leader and presented the 3R-method. The first R stands for Representation, the second R for Resources and the third R for Realia. Representation answers the question, "How many women and how many men?" A count was made in the different bodies and activities. Resources answers the question, "How are

our common resources such as money, space and time distributed between women and men?" Realia answers the question, "Why is it that the representation and resources divided between the sexes are as they are?" It is more about norms and values, and recognising the situation for what it is; about whose interests are being looked after and whose needs are being catered for. It is the quantity aspect which answers the first two questions about Representation and Resources and the qualitative aspect is answered in the third question regarding Realia. You cannot measure the Realia, it is the analysis of the situation of the two first Rs.

These questions above are the ones that are needed to mainstream an activity. You have the statistics and also the possibility to discuss which norms control the activities. To mainstream means to permeate the whole situation with gender equality thinking, from the analysis and the report to implementation and evaluation.

The European Union and Council of Europe have decided to work with gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming as a concept appeared for the first time in international texts after the United Nations Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi, 1985). If you want to work with gender mainstreaming here are five points worth thinking about.

- Make the situation visible with statistics by using the 3R model for example.
- It is important that the leaders and decision-makers firmly establish the legitimacy of gender mainstreaming. On training courses this means that both the trainers and the organisation are involved.
- Knowledge - you can never have too much. Show the facts.
- The mainstreaming should permeate the whole activity, from planning to evaluation, so that it presents a comprehensive picture.

... you have to be aware as a trainer and use methods that are gender sensitive ...



... if you do not talk about it male dominance will continue ...

- Distribute/redistribute resources equally between women and men. For example, financial resources or the amount of time spent with the trainers.

Social or biological?

There might well be a discussion about whether gender is socially or biologically constructed, but instead of remaining confined to this discussion, try to take it further. The important thing is to change the situation and the answer is never black or white. There are social and cultural influences however, and for me they are easier to change than the biological ones.

Fifty - fifty

When is it equal? Should it always be the case, that women and men be exactly fifty - fifty in everything? The important thing is not always the fifty-fifty situation, but that you are aware that one sex is losing out on something where the other sex benefits, the choice is deliberate. Use this only when you want to gain something else, otherwise a good rule could be to keep it fifty-fifty.

Strategies for gender education methods - small things you can do as a trainer

Here are some examples of methods that you can use to work with the question of equal time-sharing. Some of them are used in feminist pedagogy.

- ... Be aware!
- ... Divide the time and the floor - give alternate questions to women and men or give men and women the same amount of time.
- ... Use speaking rounds as a method. Sit in a circle; let people speak one at a time, use the circle. Do not let people interrupt the speaker.
- ... Work with unisex groups. Maybe the answer will be the same in both women's and men's groups but the way of working could be different.
- ... Work in small groups, 6-8 persons.
- ... Use both male and female trainers and speakers.
- ... Use examples from both the male and female "world".
- ... Be aware of the suppression techniques and be conscious of them.
- ... When preparing the invitation - whom does it address?

... Decide on a strategy with the team leader, how you are going to work with this question.

... Presentation is important - make people feel confident and give them the opportunity to speak. Think how you are going to furnish the room. Have time for "coffee talk".

... Use games and discuss things like the role of gender, use games like Abigale, Albatross and value exercises like Where do you stand ? or Theatre of the Oppressed.

I am not saying - force "silent people" to talk. But just to be aware that they have to sit and listen to the "talkers".

I am not saying - quotas are a goal in themselves. But only that it is a method, so long as women and men are not on an equal footing.

I am not saying - that women and men are exactly the same or that all women are the same or that all men are the same. But simply that women and men should have the same opportunities in today's society where male dominance prevails.

I am not saying - that all men are oppressors or that all women are oppressed. But let it be known that men as a group have more power today and woman as a group have less power.

Dilemma

The dilemma about talking about gender difference is that you might end up widening the gap instead of decreasing it. But if you do not talk about it male dominance will continue. This is the dilemma for a feminist concerned with the issues of gender and education.

Contact address: Ulrika Eklund, Bergsgatan 7B,
S-112 23 Stockholm, Sweden
tel.: + 46-(0)8-650 63 38
e-mail: ulrika.eklund@telia.com

