

# Improving Pedagogical Practices through Gender Inclusion: Examples from University Programmes for Teachers in Preschools and Extended Education

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**Abstract:** Working with gender equality in teacher education embraces a wide range of policies and practices. Against the backdrop of relevant research on gender in preschools, universities and teacher education, the study provides an outlook of the praxis on selected Swedish university programmes for preschool teacher education and teachers in extended education. The study is inspired by educational ethnography and applies quantitative and qualitative text analyses of programme and course documents. The article describes how gender perspectives can be systematically incorporated into university teaching through curriculum design and constructive aligned teaching. The author discusses whether the described pedagogical practices and gender inclusion in higher education have the potential to promote (preschool) teacher students' systematic acquisition of values, knowledge and skills as a precondition for improving sustainable pedagogical practices. The article also touches on the relevance of the results for the field of extended education and academic training for pedagogues and teachers who work in non-formal educational settings.

**Keywords:** gender, preschool, extra-curricular education, preschool teacher education, sustainability, intersectionality, theory and practice

## Introduction

Improving pedagogical practices in extended educational contexts and the use of research have become connected poles in discussion of out-of-school education in information and knowledge societies. Pedagogues are encouraged to develop their professional skills through life-long education (Stecher & Maschke, 2013). An increasing number of children are participating in non-formal education contexts, which are generally linked to institutions and (educational) organisations. Certification has less importance in informal than in formal education and self-directed learning is stressed. "An essential task of out-of-school educational research is therefore to answer the question of how non-formal educational contexts should be designed so that successful and optimal learning processes are being made possible"

(Stecher & Maschke, 2013, p. 19). Structures and processes as well as training for professional groups working in extended education have come to attention.

Klerfelt and Haglund (2014) describe that the training and education for pedagogues working in extended education is not to be underestimated and give examples from research on extended education in Sweden. Preschool teacher education as well as teacher education had been integrated into Swedish universities since the 1970s. There are overlapping fields for preschool teacher programmes, primary teacher programmes and secondary teacher programmes. With recent reforms in teacher education in 2011 the professional title for pedagogues working in after school institutions has changed from “leisure-time pedagogue” to “teacher working in leisure-time centres” (Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014) or – in some other places – “teachers working in extended education”.<sup>1</sup> This change in terminology indicates that both training and tasks of pedagogues working with children after school have become increasingly formalised. However, if we follow the logic in the introductory chapter to this issue, both after-school institutions and preschools can be described as extended education as they are not subject to certification, compulsory attendance and systematisation to the same extent as formal schooling (Kielblock & Monsen, 2016). In other words, these institutions leave much room for self-directed learning and we might want to consider which expectations this places on the training of teachers in preschools and extended education, also in relation to gender.

Internationally, gender equality and equity are highly relevant topics for teachers’ education. Working with gender equality in teacher education embraces a wide range of policies and practices which according to UNESCO (2015) range from formulating gender-responsive policies and plans, working with institutional culture, environments and teacher attitudes, to designing gender sensitive instructional materials and pedagogy. On a macro level, management tools and evaluation strategies have to be developed in accordance with aims of gender mainstreaming. The curriculum for teacher education institutes (TEI) has to be assessed and developed.

The curricula adopted by TEIs in preparing future teachers should be carefully revised. A quick look at the curricula set by many TEIs around the world [...] reveals a grave shortcoming regarding issues of gender equality. For example, students being prepared to become schoolteachers are given courses on education theories, the psychology of learning, teaching methodologies and class management, evaluation and assessment, and one or two practicum courses. *Nowhere can any emphasis on gender equality issues be seen.* Even courses on curriculum design do not address such issues. This problem of omission needs to be addressed by curriculum designers of TEIs. (UNESCO, 2015, p. 60, emphasis added by the author)

UNESCO strongly recommends including gender into the different courses that form the curricula. However, they also mention that there is so far a shortcoming with such initiatives.

Over the last decade, teacher educators and gender researchers in the Nordic countries have worked with gender inclusion and gender-sensitive teaching in university programmes (e.g. Erixon Arreman & Weiner, 2007, Hedlin & Åberg, 2011, Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Teacher educators in Finland have worked strategically with gender awareness in teacher education programmes (Lahelma, 2006, 2011).

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1 Primary teacher programmes include in Sweden four branches now; one for teachers from preschool-class to year 3, two for teachers from year 4-6, alternatively 7-9, and finally one for “teachers in extended education”.

In Sweden, Lenz Taguchi (2005) recommends introducing post-structural feminist thinking into preschool teachers' education and Reimers (2006) favours understanding of intersections of norms about nationality, sexuality, and ethnicity as topics for preschool teacher training (Reimers, 2006). Norm-critical positioning and intersectional gender pedagogy are seen as possibilities to change university teaching (Kalonaityte, 2014; Bromseth & Sörensdotter, 2012; Lykke, 2012).

Gender inclusion is – as this article will argue – important in all pedagogical university programmes, training primary and secondary school teachers as well as preschool teachers and teachers in extended education. Gender dimensions are important in university pedagogy (Metz-Göckel, 2012). Gender inclusion integrates ideas of gender mainstreaming and gender sensitivity into university teaching (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Working with gender inclusion is meant to prepare students to develop socially sustainable pedagogical practices that build on gender equality and gender fairness in their pedagogical work with children. In higher education, gender inclusion is not an end in itself but a means to inspire students to incorporate gender discourses into their pedagogical work in practical fields. Gender inclusion is a set of working strategically for gender equality in university studies by engaging all university teachers into the work for more gender equal and gender sensitive teaching (Bramberger, 2015; Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Gender inclusion aims at the pedagogical dimensions of realising gender equality policies and can be seen as a compliment to gender mainstreaming, which is more of a political tool.

The purpose of this article is to investigate how gender inclusion as a pedagogical practice in higher education has a potential to promote (preschool) teacher students' systematic acquisition of values, knowledge and skills as a precondition to improving sustainable pedagogical practices in extended education. The basic assumption in this article is that knowledge for designing courses for higher education (e.g. Biggs, 1999; Biggs & Tang, 2011; Toohey, 2002) can also provide necessary perspectives on working with education for pedagogues and teachers in the extended education field. The article features how working with gender equality issues can systematically be included into university programmes through curriculum design and constructive aligned teaching. *Constructive aligned teaching* concentrates on the learning outcomes of different activities. It describes intended learning outcomes, creates learning activities and assesses students' performance according to standard grading criteria (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

The author exemplifies different strategies with illustrations from selected Swedish university programmes, one programme for preschool teacher education and one for teachers in extended education. The examples are chosen from an internal programme evaluation grounded in systematic quantitative and qualitative text analysis of programme and course documents. In the following article, this data will be analysed in order to gain a deeper understanding how gender inclusion in the university curriculum can play an important role for pedagogical practices in extended education. Methodological considerations and research ethical concerns are being introduced. The reader will be guided through different steps of quantitative and qualitative analysis of a preschool teacher curriculum in order to discuss possibilities of a systematic inclusion of gender perspectives into the training of pedagogues. Guiding questions are how gender, equity and related topics are being addressed in

programme and course syllabuses, and how intended learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment of related topics are organised. Pedagogical implications will be discussed for the field of extended education with a focus on weather and how such strategic work in higher education can be regarded as precondition to improving pedagogical sustainable practices in non-formal education.

## Methodology Framework

The study introduced here is in some means inspired by educational ethnography. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2003) ethnography is best understood as a reflexive process. However, the general goal of ethnography is to gain knowledge and many ethnographers would not want to apply ethnography with a goal of programme development. However, the inspiration this study received from ethnography is that more than only one source of material will contribute to a more complex picture of the educational reality described. As a case the author chose one university in Sweden that in over a decade has strategically worked with gender inclusion in all teacher education programmes. As far as the interest of this article is on extended education, two programmes were chosen, preschool teacher education and the programme for teachers in extended education. However, due to limitations only results from the preschool teacher education programme are presented.

The study builds on data from an internal program evaluation. When compared with external evaluations, an internal evaluation has the advantage that the evaluators have access to certain informal knowledge of the programme that they are already familiar with (Conley-Tyler, 2005). According to Conley-Tyler (2005) “an internal evaluator will need to rely on standards such as ‘professional competence, objectivity, and clarity of presentation’ [and to] a transparent methodology that will allow the results to speak for themselves” (Conley-Tyler, 2005, p. 8).

The study builds mainly on text analysis of programme and course documents. Analysis of student examination, informal interviews with course representatives and the director of studies, as well as some observations during programme meetings and courses are used for contextualisation of information that was gained through the below more systematically described document study.<sup>2</sup>

### *Research Ethical Concerns*

Both internal and external evaluators face a number of ethical issues. Internal evaluators are said to deal with stronger cases of divided loyalty and pressure to suppress negative results, but there is according to Conley-Tyler (2005) no compelling ethical reason to prefer external to internal evaluators. Informed consent, privacy, avoiding

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2 While programme development was an interest of the initial internal evaluation, the results presented here aim to contribute to a more complex analysis on how constructive alignment in higher education can support students' systematic acquisition of values and skills as a precondition to improving pedagogical sustainable practices in non-formal education, over the boarders of the university programmes described just here.

harm or exploitation and considering consequences for future research are relevant ethical concerns for ethnographic studies (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003).

Participation in the study was voluntary. The director of studies and all course representatives were informed about the study. The programme documents, which were analysed are public and were downloaded from the university server. So these are not confidential. Students' examinations were anonymised before analysis. The project is not about evaluating certain actors' engagement and no names will be given in the text. However, as the university is widely recognised, there is a risk that information about certain participants may be revealed. Participants were invited to discuss the early results before publication. The study does not risk harming individual participants or invade their privacy and results are only published in the context of research and with the intention of programme development. The study follows research ethical concerns (Bryman, 2016; CODEX, 2010).

### *Material and Analysis*

The quantitative and qualitative document analysis for the preschool teacher programme builds on the following documents:

- Programme syllabus
- Course syllabus for all courses (28 courses)
- 17 study guidelines<sup>3</sup>
- Written examination from a selected course
- Other programme documents, e.g. related to teaching practice
- Conversation and E-mail communication with teachers in the programmes and head of programme (after consent)
- Participation in courses and programme meetings

Different steps of analysis are described in connection to the presentation of the results.

### *Local Background*

The curriculum for Swedish preschools (Lpfö 98, rev. 2010) states:

The preschool should counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles. Girls and boys in the preschool should have the same opportunities to develop and explore their abilities and interests without having limitations imposed by stereotyped gender roles. (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010, p. 4)

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<sup>3</sup> Each teaching practice is considered being an own course and has an own syllabus but study guidelines include information both on the course and associated teaching practice. This results in fewer study guidelines. Three guidelines were not available because they were under revision before an upcoming course.

If preschools shall live up to this central aim in the preschool curriculum preschool teachers need to be trained for this task. Gender equality has been given a lot of attention in Swedish preschool research during the last decades (Dolk, 2009, 2013; Eidevald, 2009; Karlson & Simonsson, 2008, 2011; Heikkilä, 2015; Hellman, 2010, 2013; Lenz Taguchi, 2005). In Swedish preschool policy and practice, gender equality has since the 1960s focused on treating girls and boys equally, based on assumptions that this is desirable. According to Edström (2005, 2010), this is still the approach. Working critically with gender in preschool education can be perceived as a self-evident content. Including feminist theory and introducing norm-critical perspectives is therefore no new recommendation in Swedish preschool teacher education (Lenz Taguchi, 2005; Reimers, 2006). What is new for this study is that it systematically follows up how related topics can be incorporated into specific programmes and that it starts of in an evaluation of how gender equality and equity matters are being touched on in specific (preschool) teachers' programmes.

In Sweden preschool teacher education is studied at university. National aims for all preschool teacher education programmes are stated in the National directions for higher education and are regulated in the Swedish Higher Education Act<sup>4</sup> and according to further regulations (e.g. Ordinance 2009:1037, Ordinance 2006:173). New teacher education programmes were introduced throughout Sweden in 2011.

The students study 60 credits educational science (ESc), 120 credits preschool education (PrE) supplemented with 30 credits teaching practice (TP). ESc courses are on topics such as the Preschool's role in society, Development and learning, Documentation, Social relations, Special needs education, Preschool evaluation and Research methods. PrE courses cover topics like "Preschools' educational content and objectives in relation to children, parts 1 and 2", Play, Aesthetic learning as well as Preschool mathematics, Language and Natural sciences. Many of the courses are combined with TP. The final four-week TP and the Degree project are in the field of preschool education.

Local universities are governed by the National Ordinance, but define their own policy documents like the syllabus for the programme and the courses, so there is some flexibility in the aims and goals a university or faculty defines for its programmes. Similar to preschool teacher education, the programme for teachers in extended education is studied in close collaboration with other teacher education programmes. The programme for teachers in extended education comprises 180 ECTS; 60 ECTS in educational sciences (ESc), 30 ECTS in practical and aesthetic subjects (PAeS), 60 ECTS in extended education (EE). The final thesis and 30 ECTS in teaching practice (TP) are conducted in relevant fields for extended education. So, although these are programmes training staff for extended education the structure of the programmes is very similar to other teacher education programmes.

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4 Higher Education Act, Chapter 1, Sections 8-9; translation available through The Swedish Council for Higher Education 2013.

## Results

The programme syllabus for the preschool teacher programme contains 22 targets that describe values, knowledge and skills to be mastered by the students. Three of these goals address values and skills concerning gender and equity:

- Communicate preschool values, including human rights and democratic values
- Prevent discrimination and degrading treatment of children
- Consider, communicate and establish an equality and equity perspective in educational activities (Ref: LiU-2016-00393, revised 2016-02-16, author's translation).

The term equality (Swedish: *jämställdhet*) focuses on gender-equal relation and the term equity (Swedish: *jämlikhet*) addresses the acquisition of similar rights and positions for people from different social backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> These goals are directly taken from the national ordinance for preschool teacher education. Each university decides how the national goals are to be realized. The local preschool teacher education programme syllabus states: "The programme acknowledges and supports critical reflection about gender, class and ethnicity dimensions in learning and teaching." (Ref: LiU-2016-00393, revised 2016-02-16, author's translation) This sentence is quite relevant, as we will see that similar formulations are used in many of the course syllabus in the university's (preschool) teacher education programmes.

### *Quantitative Analysis of the Curriculum (Course Content and Goals)*

All documents, programme syllabus, course syllabus and most study guidelines were available from the university website. Through a systematic quantitative analysis of course documents it will be illustrated which courses address gender and related topics and whether the terms are explicitly mentioned in the description of the content and the goals (X) or somewhere else in the course documents (O).

Relevant terms were chosen after an in depth study of course documents for the first year of study. See table 1 for the distribution of terms such as gender, class, ethnicity, norm-critical, intersectional, women, men, and children's rights. The search was extended to closely related terms, like sex, social background, diversity, norm, normalization, and democracy or democratic (x, o). In the search process truncation was applied. I double-checked the context where the terms appeared, e.g. that class was really aiming at social class and not at school class.

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<sup>5</sup> This aim is represented both in the syllabus for teachers in extended education and for preschool teachers.



Table 1. Gender content in the courses.

	Classification TP included	Gender (sex)	Class (social background)	Ethnicity (diversity)	Normcritical norm,normaliz.	Intersection	Equality (equity)	Man/men Woman/women	Children's rights democra-).
<b>Year 1</b>									
Preschool & society	ESc TP	X	X	X	O		O	O	X
Development & learning	ESc	X	x	X	o			O	o
Documentation	ESc				o			O	O
Preschool & Children, 1	PrE	X	x	o	X	O		O	
Play	PrE TP	X	X	o				O	
Aesthetic learning, 1	PrE TP	X	X	X	O	O		O	
<b>Year 2</b>									
Language, 1	PrE TP	X	X	X		X		O	
Mathematics	PrE TP	X	X	X				O	
Science and technology	PrE TP	O						O	
Language, 2	PrE							O	
<b>Year 3</b>									
Aesthetic Learning, 2	PrE	X	X	X				O	
Preschool & Children, 2	PrE TP	X	X	X	X			O	
Collaboration	PrE TP	O						O	O
Pedagogical leadership	PrE	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	
Social relation	ESc	X						O	
Special education	ESc	x	X	X				O	
Preschool evaluation	ESc							O	
<b>Year 4</b>									
Research method	ESc							O	
Teaching Practice	TP (PrE)						O	O	
Thesis	PrE	O		O				O	

Note: Educational science=ESc, preschool education=PrE, teaching practice=TP; X (capital letter in bold style) indicates that the term is explicitly mentioned in the course content or goals; O indicates that the term is mentioned somewhere else in the syllabus, in the list of references or in the study guideline. x and o indicates use of related terms which are in (brackets) in the syllabus or guidelines.



Table 1 shows that gender perspectives are mentioned in the syllabus and study guidelines of courses with quite diverse content, both in the field of ESc and PrE. Most of the syllabuses relate to the topics gender, class and ethnicity. This is not only related to courses on values, democracy and children's rights, where one could expect social categories as a self-evident content. Also in other courses that are not explicitly related to questions of value education or democracy, perspectives on gender, class and ethnicity are according to the quantitative analysis integrated into the course content. The students encounter norm-critical perspectives in quite a few courses and the term intersectionality is used on some occasions. Gender is slightly more frequently mentioned in the syllabus than social background or ethnicity. The concepts of equality or equity are mentioned three times, but only once in the syllabus and twice in study guidelines or teaching practice documents.

However, there was also a number of topics or terms that were missing in the documents. These are for example masculinity, queer or transsexual, violence in the family or violence against women. Norm-critical and norm-creative studies that pay attention to questioning norms and heteronormativity, are definitely included into the course literature and teaching (e.g. Martinsson & Reimers, 2014). However, the topics mentioned above are not explicitly visible in the course documents and from a university pedagogy perspective we could say that alignment is missing (Biggs & Tang, 2011). It is worth mentioning that the term violence was missing in course documents, as the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) is encouraging all university programmes training professionals such as doctors, nurses, social workers or teachers and preschool teachers to include teaching on violence in the family in their teaching (UKÄ, 2015).

Masculinity studies would be another important field, however, it seems to be overlooked. The programme seems to miss out highlighting in their course documents that a gender focus is not, as sometimes wrongly expected, only important from a woman's perspective. Lykke and Pernrud (2013) showed at the same university that many men engaging in preschool teacher education had interest for gender studies and were looking for alternative role models. However, the number of men being trained for and working with education for younger children is still small.<sup>6</sup> Men's role in preschool has been discussed extensively both in Sweden and internationally (e.g. Heikkilä & Hellman, 2016), and this is definitely a field worth addressing more explicitly with students in preschool teacher education programmes.

The terms "women" and "men" appear in all syllabuses as far as there is a standard sentence included in every syllabus at the education (and most of the other) departments stating that "The course is carried out in such a way that both men's and women's experience and knowledge is made visible and developed". This sentence can be understood to aim at gender sensitive teaching but also encourages for norm critical perspectives in courses. As one course representative in a teacher education programme states, this sentence means "that both men and women participate actively in the course, that male and female students' voices are being heard equally, that as course representative, I have a norm critical approach and am observant on how we talk and write about men/women in the course. It also means that we use a

<sup>6</sup> Locally only 14 of 210 new admitted students in preschool teacher education were men (6,66%).

variety of different examination forms in order not to disfavour a certain category of students. And finally, that we, if possible, adapt the content of our course (literature and research) to recognize the importance of gender in relation to the courses content” (quote from an internal evaluation, translation by the author). This description interprets the central university policy and illustrates approaches to include a gender perspective throughout courses. The qualitative analysis will provide further examples of this.

### *Qualitative Analysis: Teaching Strategies and Learning Opportunities*

Obviously, there is no easy way to understand what students actually learn in a course and it will be even more difficult to evaluate which practical skills they attain for their future work. “A quality curriculum must necessarily include gender equality as an outcome of teaching and learning, and the school’s socialization process” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 58). The curriculum analysis presented here focuses on intended learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). The inclusion of gender perspectives into the courses will be further investigated in order to understand *how* gender, equity and related topics are being addressed in documents and courses; guiding questions are how intended learning outcomes are formulated and which learning activities are being planned in order to provide learning opportunities for students. Courses with relevant gender content according to the quantitative results were analysed more in detail. The main source for this analysis was study guidelines. On top of that some written examinations are being analysed.

#### Introduction of Concepts

The first course in the programme “Preschools role in society, pedagogy and democracy” provides a foundation on normative and critical perspectives on pedagogical work in the preschool. Normality and deviation are central topics, and age, gender, ethnicity and class are introduced. UN children’s convention, and children as democratic actors are in the centre when the preschools’ education mission and value educational are being discussed. Two lectures touch on gender, norm-critical pedagogy and social categorisation in preschools. The lectures are followed up in seminar groups of about 30 students. The topic for the seminar is class, sex, age and ethnicity in preschool and course literature is being discussed (Björk-Willén, Gruber, & Puskás, 2013; Lenz Taguchi, Bodén, & Ohrlander, 2011). Note that the term used in the study guideline in this first course is “sex” and not “gender”, the term to be introduced for social sex.

In the following educational science course on development and learning, gender and diversity dimensions are also evident. There is a goal in the course that students shall be able to describe significance of diversity in preschool. The course treats among others how differences between children regarding social background, gender and ethnicity are linked to development and learning. Also here the pattern is lecture, course literature (Martinsson & Reimers, 2014) and follow-up in seminar groups.

When being introduced to the field of preschool education in the second term, students start with a course on *Preschool educational content and objectives in relation to children*. Students shall demonstrate their understanding of consequences of different approaches and perspectives for understanding children's daily lives. A variety of goals are taken into account, such as "explain how the child's living conditions and perception of children varies over time and context", "describe the consequences of different approaches to children on everyday life in preschool or day-care" and "describe how different social categories affects children's cognitive and socio-emotional development". Students are theoretically introduced to the concept of intersectionality, in order to get some tool to understand that different social conditions interact in the children's life. In a lecture and a following seminar, students are introduced to understandings of gender as a construction and to the importance of gender awareness in preschools. Students meet in workgroups, where together they discuss course literature. They also have to find by themselves a journal article touching on gender and diversity in preschool contexts. The different groups shall introduce the content of their chosen articles to students in the other working groups and engage into a discussion on implications of *doing gender* in preschool.

The introduction of gender and related topics is, as recommended in guidelines on working with gender in university, early in the programme (Fogelberg Eriksson & Karlson, 2006). Step-by-step, students are introduced to different terms and are encouraged to understand gender concepts in relation to children's backgrounds and life and pedagogy in the preschools. Students have to engage in exercises for reading, discussing and introducing others to their knowledge. By finding articles by themselves in the library's database they attain what has been described as "generic competence" for their professional life. That hopefully can build a foundation for life-long learning, relevant for well-prepared pedagogue who can interact with research in order to base their pedagogical actions on scientific evidence.

### Application of Concepts

Towards the end of the first year of studies and during the second year, a gender perspective is applied to different contents of study. Gender perspectives can be applied in all subjects (Kampshoff & Wiepcke, 2012). I will refer to three courses, one on aesthetic learning, one on language acquisition and one on mathematics in preschool.

The course *Aesthetic learning processes, creation and learning* builds on theoretical and practical moments with focus on aesthetic learning processes and children's active creativity. Students are enrolled in art, drama, music or PE. The course touches on how children learn and communicate through aesthetic processes, which are to be discussed "as a tool for learning and development, taking into account various factors such as ethnicity, gender and class". Students are offered a lecture on how esthetical learning processes and gender are related to each other. The lecture gives examples on how gendering in the preschool becomes evident in material, rooms and encounters and how alternative strategies can be build. This can be seen as preparation for the two-week teaching placement included in the course. One task in the course is a role-play or performance, which aims to take children's social conditions with regard to ethnicity, gender and class into account. Another task is to assess a mobile application for children from a gender perspective, for example, with regards

to colours, form, sound, characters and so on. In this course, the topic is aesthetic learning but during the tasks students get a chance to apply concepts on gender and diversity in creative learning exercises. The focus is on gender but other social categories like ethnicity and class can alternatively be chosen. The variety of compulsory exercises answers to claims that different examinations fit different student groups.

In the course *Children's language development and communication* children's linguistic development is discussed and problematized from an intersectional approach taking gender, class, ethnicity and age into account. Multilingualism, as a central topic in the course, sets also an agenda on central perspectives. The course literature takes up both a gender and diversity perspective (Björk-Willén, Gruber, & Puskás, 2013; Eidevald, 2009; Eilard, 2004). The course literature covers both a number of chapters in a student literature anthology and a dissertation thesis, so the students meet both popular science and research perspectives.

In the course on preschool mathematics the students pay attention to how different conditions such as, for example, gender, class and ethnicity affect children's learning in mathematics. The students read *How to become mathematical: Building new relations to mathematics and gender in the work with young children* (Palmer, 2011). Obviously the availability of research on gender in applied fields is an important precondition for university teaching in that field. Previously there might have been an interest in problematizing the learning pattern of girls and boys but without available literature there was also a risk for stereotype description, which can counterwork the teachers' intentions (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013).

These examples illustrate different ways and possibilities to connect mainstream topics in (preschool) teacher education with a gender perspective. Students experience varied possibilities to apply theoretical gender concepts in a praxis-oriented context during their studies. High quality course literature with a gender perspective is an important precondition. Gender is one of the perspectives course representatives have to take into account, just as they used to do with other fields of research related to the subject of their course. The examples above also show that creativity in relation to working forms and examination tasks can be an advantage in order to apply a gender perspective in a way that is attractive for students and relevant in connection to the core content of the programme.

## Synthesis

In the third year there is one course that sticks out in the quantitative analysis as far as almost all relevant terms are being used. The course is on *Pedagogical leadership in preschools*. The course touches upon "how social categories as age, gender, ethnicity and class can be approached from intersectional and norm critical perspectives in order to contribute to equality and equity perspectives in the preschool field" (author's translation). One goal is to "be able to explain and analyse the importance of pedagogical leadership for equality and equity in the pedagogical field". Here, the students have to show their knowledge in a short report of 4–6 pages. The purpose of this exercise is to describe how preschool teachers, with a starting point in the preschool curriculum, can lead pedagogic activities so that children have the opportunity for participation, equality, equity and equal opportunities, and at the same time learn about various topics. The preschool teacher students shall work with the inte-

gration of different topics from fields like for example language or mathematics with equity learning. Students have to synthesise their knowledge from different fields.

During the most recent course 112 students took this examination, 37 received the grade pass with distinction, 60 passed and 15 failed. This is a good result compared with other earlier courses where more students failed. This might indicate that students have a good basis to solve the problem including searching for and using own articles as required by the task. Although it is difficult to judge whether such a written examination can show students' practical learning, we can see that they at least show a theoretical understanding about how gender and other topics can be practically integrated. The course representative describes this as a precondition for a readiness to act, which students would not have otherwise. "The didactical input is to connect [preschool] didactic knowledge with child participation and gender, which also can contribute to practical expertise". (E-mail communication)

13 student papers (4 pass with distinction, 7 pass and 2 fail) were anonymised and further analysed. Papers with high grades (pass with distinction) showed a high competence in applying gender perspectives. The ability to integrate didactic thinking and equity policy contributed to passing and the students who failed did not show the basic skills for writing such a reflective academic paper. "I think it is important that the whole team tries to lead continuous discussions on how one should meet the children in different situations. [...] It's about the need for staff to constantly question, thematise and problematize their ideas on how they view children in relation to gender norms but also in relation to the attitudes they have on children's initiative and activities" (quote from student paper with grade pass, 2016, author's translation). This quote shows how a student with reference to Arnér's (2009) book on children's agency in preschool describes how ideas on gender and democracy can be treated in preschool practice. Although university studies cannot directly guarantee students' pedagogical actions, it can very well prepare the students to reflect on their future profession and their own role in pedagogical practice.

### A Gender Perspective in the Teaching Practice, Possibilities of Choice and Advancement

During the studies, students are prepared for and learn through teaching practice (TP). 20 weeks of TP is divided into blocks of one to four-weeks in combination with different courses; there is a TP in almost each term. The final TP is four weeks long and is to provide "practical application of various teaching abilities in preschool" (author's translation). There is a learning aim related to gender; claiming that the students shall "demonstrate an ability to prevent and counteract discrimination and degrading treatment of children and showing an active and conscious approach to gender equality and equity in educational activities" (author's translation). The preschool teacher who supervises the student during the TP has to attest that the student meets a number of didactical and social competences. Two criteria touch solely on these matters, to prevent degrading treatment and to demonstrate a conscious approach to gender equality and equity in educational activities. Theory and practice are being combined when students participate in TP and university based studies with related study goals (Schanz Lundgren & Lundgren, 2012, Hultman, Schulz, & Stolpe, 2011). So students, teacher educators, teacher trainers in the TP and acting

preschool teachers have to communicate and position themselves in relation to pedagogical leadership and gender.

Finally, after the programme has prepared all students for a gender aware practice, students can individually specialise on gender topics related to preschool education. In the degree project (15 ECTS), students have relative freedom to choose their field of study. This provides a possibility that if they are interested in gender perspectives and want to advance further, they can choose a topic with scientific and pedagogical relevance in relation to gender and preschool education and develop their competence to synthesise gender with various aspects of learning.

Preschool teacher students at this level will soon work in preschools, after-schools and other pedagogical work places where they will meet and teach highly diverse groups of children. Also students have a right to be treated with equal opportunities during their studies. As Kalonaityte (2014) states, the university needs to interact with the students in such a way that everyone understands that they are welcome. This – combined with the well-planned curriculum – hopefully provides conditions where the highly diverse group of preschool teacher students will be prepared to apply academic knowledge, develop professional identities and become reflective and gender aware practitioners, able to plan and act on the basis of well integrated gender knowledge and competence.

## Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to describe how gender inclusion as a pedagogical practice in higher education has a potential to promote (preschool) teacher students' systematic acquisition of values, knowledge and skills as a precondition to improving sustainable pedagogical practices in extended education. In this context, extended education is viewed as a pedagogical field, which leaves much room for self-directed learning and is not subject to certification, attendance obligation and systematisation to the same extent as formal schooling (Kielblock & Monsen, 2016). Academic training for pedagogues in non-formal education institutions is regarded as important (Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014) and this article describes major traits to be taken into account, not only when working with gender inclusion. The fields to be discussed here are how a progression within the programme can be built and how programme planning can also contribute to bridging the tension between theory and practice often described (e.g. Lane & Corrie, 2006). Finally, pedagogical implications for the wider field of extended education will be discussed.

### *Gender Inclusion, Academic Progression and Evaluation*

Gender inclusion is, as earlier described, a pedagogical tool that can be combined with gender mainstreaming at universities (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013, Bramberger, 2015). Understanding basic features of gender inclusion can contribute to the broad discussion of working with gender in higher education and is seen as an important



compliment to gender sensitive teaching in higher education (Bondestam, 2004), gender awareness in teacher education (Lahelma, 2011) and intersectional and norm-critical teaching at universities (Bromseth & Sörensdotter, 2012, Kalonaityte, 2014, Lykke, 2012). Gender inclusion focuses on pedagogical questions when curriculum planning and university didactics are central.

Pedagogical and scientific progression is regarded as relevant in university education programmes. The point of departure of different taxonomies and models is that students develop from easier to more complex activities, and that the teaching activities can be described with respective verbs (Biggs & Tang, 2011). These ideas are very influential in university teaching. A classic model for progression is Bloom's revised taxonomy (Bloom, 1956). Key-concepts for university teaching are to *remember*, with students showing that they are able to recognize and recall facts, to *understand*, with focus on understanding what facts mean, to *apply* the facts and rules, concepts and ideas. The next step, *analyse*, asks for an ability to break down information into component parts; *evaluate* demands an ability for judging the value of information or ideas and finally students should reach the goal to *create* by combining parts to make a new whole (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Ideas of such a progression are reflected in university programmes, at least after the Bologna process, where study programmes build on basic level, continuation level, intermediate and advanced level within the first and second-cycle of higher education.

For the analysis of gender inclusion in the preschool teacher programme such a progression became evident. Students were introduced to terms and basic concepts related to gender and education early in the programme. Students got a variety of possibilities to apply concepts on gender and diversity e.g. to fields like aesthetic learning, preschool mathematics and language acquisition in the end of the first year of studies and during the second year. This was embedded in a variety of learning exercises and examinations. Students had to synthesise and argue for the relevance of gender and diversity perspectives for practice in the preschool during the final year. Both theoretical reasoning and practical engagement were part of the students' performed capacities' examination. Finally, students with a specific interest in gender could develop their competence in the field in the degree project. This provides a deep approach to learning, as "students who make their own choices of units are more likely to take a deep approach to learning because they are choosing to pursue an area in which they already have some interest" (Toohey, 2002, p. 15). The combination of providing all students with necessary knowledge and understanding and also leaving room for individual choice (Fogelberg Eriksson & Karlson, 2006) strengthen the gender approach in this curriculum design.

In other words, curriculum design is an obvious path for working with the systematic inclusion of gender equality issues in (preschool) teacher education and this can also serve as a model for other programmes in the field of educational sciences. It has been argued recently that gender equality issues are being neglected in most teacher education curriculums internationally (UNESCO, 2015). However, university pedagogy provides tools for working systematically with gender inclusion. The examples presented in this study can inspire the design of this work. The first step is to ground relevant goals connected to gender equality in the programme syllabus and encourage course representatives to include relevant learning goals related to gender



in all course syllabuses. It is important not just to expect that some relevant content will be touched upon in the course but to describe explicit goals where gender and the respective course content meet. Goals are relevant for students' examination, and in effective course planning intended learning outcomes and examination criteria are to be connected (Biggs & Tang, 2011). This, what is called constructive alignment in the context of university pedagogy, can be applied in order to ensure the systematic inclusion of gender and equity work in professional university programmes.

Is this something that all universities could do? Obviously, there are a few features that have supported the process in the university exemplified here. A gender focus was already apparent in the teacher education programmes before their reform in 2011. Fogelberg Eriksson and Karlson (2006) warned that times of reforms also are full of risks insofar as change involves a risk that e.g. progressive gender strategies could be lost. However, in this case, the commitment of many actors contributed to maintaining the gender focus. Practically, intersectional thoughts have been present in teacher education programmes at this university insofar as gender, class and ethnicity (and age) have been discussed in education science courses as important pre-conditions for learning and teaching at least since the mid-90s. Ideas about a need to build a progression into the programme beyond courses (Lindgren & Klinth, 2008) have been included in all teacher education programmes. And this may also have had a positive effect in relation to gender inclusion. However, that does not mean that curriculum design with a gender inclusive focus is confined to certain universities.

Obviously, working with gender inclusion is a process that has to be driven and continuously evaluated. It is not something that happens once but something that needs to be an integrative part of programme evaluation and development. And this can be achieved at any university.

### *Pedagogical Implications*

The article also aims – as mentioned in the introduction – to discuss the potential of gender inclusion to promote the systematic acquisition of values and competences as a precondition for improving pedagogical sustainable practices in preschools. Here, this was illustrated for the preschool teacher education programme, but the implications of the study can also be applied to university programmes in other pedagogical fields, specifically in extended education. The general climate in Sweden, where social construction had been the dominant discourse over decades in public debates and steering documents (Edström, 2010), obviously also plays a role for a generally positive approach towards gender inclusion. Citing Karlson and Simonsson (2011) and their analysis of gender sensitive policies in Swedish preschools: “Opportunities for teachers to strengthen their professional positions by gender- and equality-related competences are evident.” (p. 281) There is a wealth of documentation on how gender sensitive work can be conducted in preschools. Connecting these discourses on gender in the pedagogical field and gender in (preschool) teacher education is a fruitful approach for developing sustainable practices in the broad field of non-formal education.

There is, as described, a wide range of theoretical orientations within the gender discourse. Different discourses and central terms are being introduced to students in the programme, with a certain focus on norm-critical and intersectional perspectives. Introducing a diverse – rather than dominant – theoretical perspective, considered to be the “right” perspective, provides room for critical thinking. Students had to search independently for articles and this might be seen as a generic competence, which they can take with them into their working life. If pedagogues are, as Stecher and Maschke (2013) call for, to be encouraged to develop their professional competence through life-long learning, they must receive competences during their professional training to continue reading and evaluating research-based literature and thereby be prepared for an evidence-based pedagogical practice when working in the profession. They also need to systematically build up a value system that is based on evidence and reflected on critically. I hope that the study presented here could illustrate how such training can be designed.

Needless to say, this study is part of an ongoing process of programme development. In connection with this study the author has already met some of the course representatives to discuss the results. When I presented the results to teachers on the programmes they responded directly e.g. in relation to “missing subjects”. The author works with and studies possibilities of gender inclusion in all teacher education programmes from preschool education to secondary school education. Some of the results of the work with gender inclusion have been published earlier (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Each programme faces different challenges in combination with the content taught and the student and teacher population. A brief analysis of the programme for teachers in extended education showed that the gender focus was not as clearly rooted in that programme as in the courses in the preschool teacher education programme. However, a strong focus on democracy, children’s rights and participation is evident, which is another topic argued for as being important in extended education (Elvstrand & Närvänen, 2015, 2016). Further studies have to show how democracy-oriented content and gender inclusion can be developed further in higher education programmes with a goal of sustainable pedagogical practices for pedagogues and (preschool) teachers in extended education.

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