



Leonardo da Vinci project No. D/06/B/F/PP 146 569

**GENDER LOOPS: GENDER MAINSTREAMING IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES
FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE AREA OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE
WORK AND FOR DAY CARE CENTRES**

REPORT OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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PREFACE

The Leonardo da Vinci project „Gender Loops: gender mainstreaming implementation strategies for education and training in the area of early childhood care work and for day care centers“, No. D/06/B/F/PP 146 569, aims to implement Gender Mainstreaming strategies in vocational training institutions for educators (schools, colleges and universities), further qualification institutions for educators and early childhood education institutions.

„Gender Loops“ project partner in Lithuania is a non-governmental organization Social Innovation Fund. The main contractor is Catholic University for Applied Sciences (Germany), project coordinator is NGO from Berlin – DISSENS E.V. (Germany). Other partners are: Reform – resource centre for men (Norway), Oslo University College (Norway), University of Girona (Spain), and Women’s Solidarity Foundation - KADAV (Turkey). Project evaluator is Men's Counselling Centre Graz (Austria).

From the 1st of October 2006 to the 30th of September 2008 these organization work together to develop a Curriculum for the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming in vocational training institutions for educators.

Among the other things the Curriculum deals with legal and political requirements, theoretical foundations, learning targets, differences and similarities regarding the realization and the understanding of Gender Mainstreaming in the area of early childhood education. In addition, the curriculum includes recommendations, gender cooperation models between vocational training institutions for educators and early childhood education institutions and strategies to increase the proportion of men participating in the vocational training of educators. The Curriculum also presents Gender Mainstreaming Analysis Instruments and practical methods and games that reflect gender, and methodological explanations concerning their teaching.

Gender Mainstreaming, a strategy to foster equality between women and men, aims to integrate a gender perspective in all decision processes of organizations, institutions and administrations and to utilize all decision processes to foster equality between women and men.

The project, Gender Loops, describes Gender Mainstreaming in Early Childhood Education in four focus areas:

- Enlarge gender identities of children, educators, parents, students and teachers.
- Improve the equal allocation of resources (executive positions, money, time, attention) among children, educators, parents, students and teachers.
- Improve the gender competence (gender knowledge) and gender sensibility among children, educators, parents, students and teachers.

- Increase the proportion of men participating in the training for educators and as educators, respectively.

Working for a successful implementation of Gender Mainstreaming in Early Childhood Education Institutions and in the field of training and further qualification for educators implies that all participants take these focus areas into account. Relevant social, political and educational measures must be addressed.

Responsible for the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming in Early Childhood Education Institutions and in the field of training and further qualification for educators are in the first instance ministries of education, training and further qualification institutions for educators, state/public institutions of Early Childhood Education Institutions and the Early Childhood Education Institutions.

Responsible in the second instance are further/other policy makers and diverse participants and institutions of the civil society like for example NGOs in the field of education.

The main activities of the project will be carried out within **three working phases**:

In the first working phase, the foundations for the laying down of the curricula are being created. An analysis of literature, as well as quantitative and/or qualitative interviews with training and further qualification institutions for educators, will show the current state of discussions and knowledge and the needs concerning Gender Mainstreaming in training and further qualification measures for educators in the partner countries.

In the second working phase, methods, games and strategies will be developed with which educators and the early childhood education institutions can better reflect gender in their work. These methods, games and strategies will be tested in early childhood education institutions. This testing will take place partly in cooperation with universities.

In the third working phase, the project partners describe and document their methods, games and strategies for the toolbox. In addition, the project partners draw up the chapters of the curriculum. The curriculum will be evaluated, and modified if necessary, in seminars with trainers and teachers.

1. METHODOLOGY

This research was performed using qualitative research method – semi-structured interview. Interviewer was Justina Raudonytė, Master in Sociology. Interviews were performed using questionnaires, adjusted to every group on the interviewees, based on the general questionnaire framework that was created during first partnership meeting in Berlin.

Interviews with 14 respondents were performed during May 2007.

- Directors of ECEIs were chosen randomly from the list of pre-school education institutions of Kaunas city;
- High school teachers were interviewed according to requests sent to the high schools deans asking for contact persons;
- Male students were interviewed according to the contacts provided by high schools and if they agreed to talk;
- Men, who were working as teachers in pre-school education institutions, were interviewed according to contacts, received during research.
- Experts were chosen according to institutions, which are important for research topic: Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson in Vilnius, Education department of Kaunas Municipality, Kaunas Pedagogues Qualification Centre.

The interviewees were interviewed face-to-face or by phone. Every interviewee was sent the questionnaire by e-mail before the interview. All persons agreed to participate in the research, however, some refused to talk on the topic.

All the interviews were recorded, and later transcribed in detail. The report is divided according to the groups of interviewees': directors of ECEIs, high school teachers, students, Men, who work as teachers in ECEIs as well as experts of the field. The report is generalization of results of the in-depth interviews and depicts the current situation in gender mainstreaming in pre-school education as well as needs analysis in teacher training.

Table No. 1. Characteristics of the interviewees

Interviewee No.	Sex	Work field
1	female	director of ECEI
2	female	director of ECEI
3	female	director of ECEI

Interviewee No.	Sex	Work field
4	female	director of ECEI
5	female	Teacher at higher education institution
6	female	Teacher at higher education institution
7	female	Teacher at higher education institution
8	male	Student studying pre-school education
9	male	Student studying pre-school education
10	female	Specialist of education at Municipality
11	male	Legal advisor of gender equality
12	female	Methodical advisor for ECEIs
13	male	Teacher at ECEI
14	male	Teacher at ECEI

2. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS WITH DIRECTORS OF EARLY CHILDREN EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The interviews were taken in Kaunas city. By the random way, three directors of nursery-kindergartens and one director of kindergarten-school were selected. For interviews, the face-to-face method was used. All the selected directors of institutions agreed to collaborate. There are 88 pre-school children education institutions in Kaunas city. The directors of these institutions are all women. According to the opinion of the interviewed: both - inveterate stereotypes and strong Lithuanian traditions, as well as the fact that the salary for the teachers is very low (~174 Euro per month) and the fact that such profession isn't prestigious, could influence this situation.

2.1 Integration of gender equality aspect

The bigger part of the interviewed agrees that it is very important to analyze the gender aspects in pre-school education institutions. By the opinion of some interviewed people, men should be more conscious themselves, as currently they are not looking for job in such institutions.

The aspect of gender equality is not applied very widely in the pedagogues' work with children in Lithuania. There is no common methodical material about how the education should be organized. Programs prepared by each institution individually changed the earlier published public programs. In that case, they could successfully examine the problem of gender equality themselves in organizing children education. On the other hand, a question is how this should be done: *“how and what methods should be used in delivering the problems of gender equality for children? The fact is that children up to six year old think that they are equal, individual and important to themselves.”* (Interview No. 3). Child usually does not care about stereotypes because only he/she is important for him/herself. Directors of ECEIs are convinced that in general kindergartens prevent development of the stereotypes. It is more important to highlight the gender equality in families, because pre-school education institutions as well as secondary schools are just the intermediate link in the children education.

Children attend special lessons every day. The content of these lessons depends on conception of the teacher. Practical activities are not divided to girls' and boys' activities: *“during our activities children are taught that mother could command and father could wash dishes, that all works could be divided.”* (Interview No. 2). Children can choose what games they want to play; teachers are not trying to address them to “girls” and “boys” games. Directors of ECEIs highlighted

practices of difference, personality, autonomy, politeness, professional orientation, empathy in the education activities.

Directors of pre-school education institutions motivate their workers to participate in the qualification-raising seminars. According to the regulations, every pedagogue has to attend at least 5-hours-length seminars during the academic year. Every month institutions get list of seminars, offered by the Qualification Center and each teacher has chance to chose seminar according to competencies that she/he lacks. Thematic of qualifying trainings is very wide but the directors could not say, whether question of gender equality is actually integrated into these courses. This question simply has not been highlighted to the participants of the trainings. Specialized gender equality trainings are also not organized for the pre-school education institutions.

2.2 Men working at ECEI

The directors of ECEIs could name only few occasions in their studies and work experience when men have chosen an educative job. There is a male pedagogue working in one institution, he provides ceramics coterie activities since the beginning of this educational year. In another case, young men substituted the teacher during the summer. The directors of institutions have not met any other practices when the teacher was a man, not a woman. The men who work in pre-school education institutions do only technical works; they work as keepers, electricians, and assistants. Therefore, the contact between children and men in the kindergarten is minimal: *“They just say hello to them [technical workers], so they just learn some politeness like neighbors. Children see them only if they come e.g. to repair a sink. Sometimes children stand around and watch them working.”* (Interview No. 1).

Almost all directors' attitude towards men working at ECEI is positive and they would hire male teachers with pleasure. The common opinion was that women, due to their delicacy, thoroughness and empathy to the child's needs are preferred for the work with small children. Perception that men are able to work with 3-7 years old children is natural. The main thing is workers' level of education, pedagogic professionalism and competence, personal characteristic and wishes to work, not their gender. One of the ECEI directors did not agree with this opinion. She thinks that a man who wants work in such position would not be self-confident. She said, *“I would think that something is wrong with such man, that he might have some complexes. I know only two men who are working as teachers for primary classes and I can clearly see the problems of their masculinity. In primary classes it might be fine, but I would say NO to male, who wants to work*

as a teacher in pre-school education institutions, i.e. to lay children down, to wash them, to organize feeding for them, take them outside, play with them and organize their activities” (Interview No.1). She offered a variant that men could provide handcraft lessons.

There are just a few practices of mixed staff in pre-school education institutions; therefore, directors of ECEIs found it hard to say, if this could improve the quality of work. This kind of staff composition seems to be natural as long as there are no cross-purposes. Some directors of ECEIs expressed the opinion that a few men in their staff could brighten and improve work climate, could bring some balance, serenity and rationality.

Directors, who welcomed men’s work with children, said that children need father and mother in their family; therefore it is also very useful to have gender balance in pre-school education institutions. It would be new and interesting experience for the children to have a man as a teacher. Besides, for those kids who have no father in their family it is essential. The main thing is to know the specifics of work with small children and to have proper methodology. Then the work would not be static but creative.

2.3 Other problems and their solution

2.3.1 Job prestige

All directors named their institutions as pre-school education institutions not as kindergartens. There is a possibility to name them as schools, because all interviewed institutions have strong educative aspect. However, such name would not change much, and it would be only first step. It’s important to concentrate to the competences of workers, the quality of work, and the image of institution. There is a dominant opinion among parents that such institutions are not as important in child’s education as schools are: *“parents think that school is in a higher level and pre-school education institution is not as important in the children’s education as school is.”* (Interview No. 3).

All the interviewed persons agreed that the prestige of this job mostly suffer because of small salary. Our society often forms and keeps the stereotypes that such job is not suitable for men. It is a good idea to start changing the formation of such attitude in early childhood. The family and mass media should contribute to this process. Usually a man is considered as breadwinner in the family. The society might judge negatively a man, who gets small salary for the job, which

requires more nervous strain, and not physical work. Concerning the opinion of the interviewed, attitude to a man as a good and professional children teacher will probably not change in Lithuania soon. One of the innovative strategies could be handcraft lessons for both: girls and boys, provided by male teachers.

2.3.2 Salary

Today the salaries in pre-school education sector are neither very high, nor very low; they depend on qualification and category. Initial salary is about 174 EURO per month; workers with better qualification could get 290-435 EURO per month. Only after 4 years of work, teacher may become a head-teacher and, later, a supervisor. During the first years of his/her work, teacher has to work for a small salary and the living standard in Lithuania is quite high already. Young worker has no experience and qualification in order to get a higher salary for the pedagogic job in pre-school education institution. Young person can get the same or double as high salary for the ordinary unqualified job, which does not require high education. We can emphasize once more, that the salary question is one of main arguments, which indicates why men in Lithuania do not work as pedagogues in pre-school education institutions. As one ECEI director said: *“there is no stereotypes only small salary. It has to be about 900-1200 EURO per month. In order to live better, State has to invest more into doctors and pedagogues. Pedagogues have to be free people; they should not live from one salary to another. They need to go to the concert, to buy a book, to visit other countries.”* (Interview No. 4). Even in the expression, that it is normal for women (but not for men) to work for small salary, there is a hidden gender stereotype, which seems to be invisible for directors of ECEIs themselves.

3. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS WITH LECTURERS

Lithuania has five higher education institutions (3 universities and 2 colleges) that prepare preschool education specialists. Three structured telephone interviews were performed 4th to 9th May 2007. The respondents were searched by sending information request form to the higher education institutions. Three of them have responded, providing contact persons. All of them are female lecturers and two of them – senior lecturers.

3.1 Gender balance in academic community

Men and women ratio is varying in the higher education institutions; still males are a minority, for e.g. they make 1/10 in one institution, while almost one fifth in the other. Often they conduct non-pedagogic subjects: “*these are subjects of several didactics, general subjects of higher education, law, IT, physical culture*”. [Interview No 5]. One of the schools has a quarter of men in its staff due to increasing number of guys, making their pedagogy-related PhD. Interviewees were not sure if having more males in their staff would be for better or worse. In their opinion, personal characteristics and competence as crucial factors, but not gender.

None of the schools has been applying special strategies to increase the number of male students studying preschool education. United efforts to attract prospective students rely only on the initiative of the institutions themselves. Universities/colleges organize such recruitment tours as open days, school-visits, issuing advertising brochures and papers. Sometimes for every speciality there is a separate brochure issued. However, there are no special gender quotas for prospective students, no encouragement either: “*There might be a word or two said to attract more males, but nothing special is actually done (...). We do not segregate, but only state that it is not only female oriented speciality, but it is for males as well.*” [Interview No 5]. The situation proves the fact that academic society still lacks understanding of the importance of balance between males and females in working and studying environment.

3.2 Refresher courses

Interviewees mentioned that the male lecturers are active: “*our colleagues often participate in various classes, are taking part in refresher courses*” [Interview No 5]. Gender equality issues seem not to be so relevant for preschool education lecturers at Lithuanian universities and colleges: “*none of our colleagues have found this problem relevant enough to create methodology or framework (...) because we did not face any high violations*” [interview 7]. Although this is an interesting topic to go deeper, often there are no possibilities to do that, i.e. no refresher course on gender equality is organized. Universities and colleges, various educational centers could organize different courses. Organization and participation in such classes would show the importance of the topic. Unfortunately, gender equality aspect is not integrated in refresher course for lecturers; furthermore, they still do not have need to study gender equality related problems.

Refresher courses for teachers in ECEI are not organized in every higher education institution. One of the interviewees expressed her opinion that it might be due to the additional time-consuming work and reluctance of additional responsibility. Still there are several universities and colleges having qualification centers for the Heads and educators of preschool education institutions. Course topics depend on the participant needs and arising questions. There are no courses on gender equality issues organized by qualification centres as there is no request from Heads/educators and no initiative from organizational side: *“we offer what we can, but they (Heads, educators) select themselves. If there are special needs, we are trying to satisfy them”* [Interview 5]. It seems that gender equality issue is not listed in those needs nowadays.

3.3 Male students studying pedagogy

The key obstacle that influences a very small number of applications from males is a stereotype: *“Men do not apply because teacher in preschool education is female and they have never ever seen it being a man”* [interview 5]. One of the interviewed lecturers noticed that girls usually have higher grades than guys do, and that limits their chances to be enrolled: *“Acceptance is made by the grades. They determine girls being accepted, not guys (...) Males fill up more applications than there are vacancies available. But selection is common for everyone without taking gender into account; otherwise it would be violation of women rights* [Interview 7]. Usually males with good grades do not choose this major. As the number of applications to this major is regulated by stereotypical attitude, applying males could have quotas and special measures. According to the CEDAW, it is not violation of human rights, but positive discrimination. Unfortunately, the society still has little knowledge about the appliance of such special measures.

In whole educational system there is a shortage of males studying pedagogy and in some cases they are naturally more wanted than female students: *“There have been several cases, that knowledge evaluation for males was done not as objective as for females. i.e. in favor of guys just because they are males”* [Interview 6]. The lecturer agreed that work in gender-mixed student audience is different: *“I believe work is more productive in a group, having half male and half female”* [interview 7]. Currently there is only one male student per all courses in preschool education studies at the questioned institutes. Interviewees stated that during their whole work practice they haven't faced many male students studying pedagogy. There have been cases when males were getting enrolled in these studies but later resigned. One of the reasons might be lack of avocation to pedagogy. Another more important reason is a fear to work in the female staff. On

the other hand this is the reason why it looks as a job for women: *“In September we had twelve males, while after the practice only one of them has remained. I think they were disappointed about the practice, about what they saw in reality and there was nothing to keep them, nobody to say: “Don’t worry, you will learn” etc. (...). They appeared in the environment with no man”* [interview 6].

Another interviewed lecturer underlined the importance of support for male students from the preschool education institution colleagues. Lecturer said her friends in preschool education system are very positive: *“I wish there would be men in the system and they would be willing to work. They are supported to keep studying”* [interview 7]. She told how it is done, even though she had only few cases with male students in her experience. None of the interviewed lecturers have seen male educators working within Lithuanian preschool education system. Big efforts from state and society are needed in order to change this situation.

It is important that after graduation the state resources will not be wasted and the graduates will start to work in accordance with their speciality. In this case, there are two aspects of the main importance –self-motivation of an employee and job vacancies, i.e. demand for employees. One lecturer from a smaller town college said that *“our college students are motivated and they would be willing to work if only they could find the jobs”* [interview 5]. During the last decade Lithuanian education policy has not been promoting the establishment of new ECEI and many of existing ones have been even closed. Thus, there is no shortage of employees detectable in small towns. However, the biggest cities of Lithuania, like Vilnius and Kaunas have job vacancies for teachers in ECEI, but it is virtually impossible to start living in large city with preschool educator salary: *“starting salary is about 600 LT. If the salary were higher, more people would be willing to work. There are definitely job vacancies in Vilnius, but having calculated the expenses students say job will not buy off. Not enough to live out, not talking about anything else”* [interview 5]. There are males, studying this speciality part-time, but the interviewee was not sure if students would stay working in the field after graduation. Fresh graduates are not motivated to seek positions in the field of preschool education.

3.4 Integration of gender equality aspect into the curriculum

Study programs for universities and colleges are prepared according to the national standard for preschool education. Every year there is a chance of slight changes in the program considering the current situation and expert opinion. Starting from September 2007, the study programs for

colleges will be tightened and the programs will have to be approved by Ministry of Science and Education. In spring of 2007 a special initiative group of Ministry of Science and Education renewed the training standard for teachers at ECEI, however it is not officially approved yet. Related colleges must follow this standard. Gender equality issue has been included in the renewed program as one of the most important article. This standard remains in recommendatory status and so inclusion of issue on gender equality into the program and choosing the way of its presentation depends on competences of Heads and lecturers of higher education institutions. It is desirable that study programs would be based on heterogeneous principle, i.e. “*we should see a different diversity of gender, linguistic background, talent, race, religion, nationality*” [interview 6]. Universities prepare study programs themselves, referring to the regulations in training of educators passed in 1995; these regulations are about to be reviewed. Employees at qualification center do not take part in preparation of strategic projects for national preschool education standards; they only organize refresher courses for those already employed educators.

According to interviewees it is desirable that study programs would be based on heterogeneous principle, i.e. “*we should see a different diversity of gender, linguistic background, talent, race, religion, nationality*” [Interview 6].

There should be no any distinction among boys and girls in preschool education. This includes both, education and play: “*girls can play with cars and boys can play with dolls altogether*”. [Interview 7]. Femininity/masculinity formation in child’s mind highly depends on the environment: “*issue, that girls and boys are different highly depends on child’s character and his environment, family*” [5]. One of the interviewed lecturers underlined, that family has an important input to stereotypic education context: “*Research showed that parents tend to follow the stereotypes and support them. On the contrary, pedagogues I worked with think the stereotypes should not be encouraged*” [7]

None of the schools surveyed has a separate study subject studying gender equality issues, as well as no study program has gender equality topic involved. This topic is touched in such subjects as basics of law and child evolution psychology. One of the surveyed schools includes an issue on gender equality in infancy and early childhood education, education through games, comparative preschool education, and educational anthropology. Depending on the involvement and interest of a lecturer, the topic is emphasized on a different scale. Lecturers expressed an opinion that integration of the issues on gender equality into various courses instead of conducting a full-time module would be a better way to deliver. Currently, lecturers perform this integration independently, while starting from the beginning of the school year in 2007 a regulation

indicating the includable of issues on gender equality into the study programs issued by Ministry of Science and Education will come into force. Practical matters of the way of integration will be up to institutions, however, it might be very difficult, as lecturers are not being prepared to deliver this topic on gender equality to the students. There are no any qualification courses organized for lecturers what could help them to present this topic to the students.

The interviewed colleges have exams instead of writing a final thesis. Still the students are involved in writing cases and course projects. Few years ago there has been an attempt in one college to analyze the problematic of males/females roles, however still this issue is not very popular among the students. One of the reasons for that might be a lack of theoretical material on gender equality that could be applied to the specifics of the preschool education institutions. There have been few final bachelor thesis written at one of the interviewed university with the focus on the differences between girls and boys, however there was nothing written about the gender equality.

3.5 Stereotype breaking methods

University students have noticed in their internships that Lithuania still has different education stereotype, which is excused by traditions. Nature of education strongly depends on teachers at ECEI: *“ones do encourage respect and assistance to the girl. These are traditions with different uphold”* [5]. Lecturers say the biggest input would be to avoid emphasizing differences in gender. One of the lecturers specializes in research on boys/girls differences, which reveals a decrease of traditional education in Lithuania. Research reflects differences among girls and boys in play, various activities, differences in a timescale, changing role of stereotypes. Another lecturer says the stereotypes are becoming less fixed and less expressive. However, education is still stereotypical. There are no descriptive and widespread methods to evaluate and eliminate stereotypes in education.

Interviewees couldn't mention any special methods to break stereotypes as they never had any related training. Even though lecturers use additional related readings, their methodology to conduct group works is based mainly on intuition, therefore special subject related training would be useful. Such subjects as emotional intelligence and emotional care are integrated into education of child evolution and family; however, special topics on stereotype breaking methods should be included into the psychology of evolution and education. It is not about creating a new theory or methodology, but rather about applying the existing ones. The essential subjects in this work are

educational and psychological ones; therefore the right choice of stereotype breaking methods is crucial. One of the lecturers has mentioned such methods as games, activities or drama, but in general having done the interviews it is obvious that the lecturers are not well prepared to work with stereotype formation in preschool education institutions. That makes an experience coming from abroad so important and useful, as it can be spread through various refresher courses.

3.6 Key problems and their solutions

3.6.1 Job prestige

Lecturers have mentioned a problem of educator's speciality not being prestigious. Positive image of this speciality is not being created in mass media (press, TV). Educators feel unevaluated by country and society by means of their work and salary: *"I feel the lack (of respect to the teacher, educator) starting from different attitudes – society, government, and salary, absolutely everything"*. [5].

Historical and cultural aspects influence traditions of education. Possible reasons of negative change of the attitude towards the educator could only be found by performing an in-depth research: *"in interwar Lithuania an educator was a highly important and respectful person. (...) Vast majority of pedagogues in 1980-1940 were men"* [7]. Interviewed lecturers do not think men can not do this job now, they rather encourage men to work in this field: *"It all merges to prestige. Nobody thinks men can not take care of children, rather the model of men behavior should be visible to small child"*. [6]. Women-only pedagogy is naturally limited by one-sided perception and delivery of the ideas. In pedagogy as well as in the family both men and women should prevail in order to achieve a harmonious education. Still, *"only women can afford themselves to do this tough and underpaid job, which is non prestigious as well. Men always want a prestige (...). In Denmark this work is considered to be a prestigious one, it is very well-paid and not easy to get for every candidate. We haven't got this prestige. How can he tell his friends he made his career and works as a teacher at ECEI? He will better seek for a loader position"*. [7]. There will be a big challenge for both - country and society in their attempt to improve the image of educator's position and to eliminate the prevailing stereotype that this position is for women-only.

3.6.2 Traditions in education

Implementation of gender equality principles is related with heterogeneous and individualistic principles, the latter one being of high importance to talk about: *“everyone must take in account various aspects of individualism, from sex to religion. One must look at the child as an individual with all his peculiarities, including sex features”* [5]. Still those are the new ideas in preschool education. An experience of 50 years of Soviet heritage still has a great influence on educator’s work performance: *“Soviet-like thinking, when everyone was educated equally without taking individual needs into account is still present in our society”*. [6] During the times of Soviet Union a school and a teacher were the tools for implementation of communism, they were restricted to choose freely the content of education and its methods. Even though the choice limits are eliminated, the tradition not to talk about gender equality coming from Soviet times is still prevailing. At that time all course books and other teaching material were containing many images of stereotyped roles. It is very important to keep on changing of existing attitudes, and to seek to diminish formation of gender equality related stereotypes within society.

3.6.3 Possible changes

Lecturers were not able to give more specific suggestions how to begin to change the stereotype regarding the position of teacher in ECEI being only feminine. However, they agreed that something must be done about it. Some ideas, such as social advertisements, social actions, and salary rise were carried out. One more solution would be to avoid homogeneous staff during the student’s practice period: *“educational practice should be held in the places having men in their staff”* [6]. Another innovative way is to involve children’s parents into the educational work: *“More attention could be paid to involve children’s parents into collaboration in favor of children, perform educational tasks, and attract more men to their own children’ needs”* [7]. Lithuania still lacks an experience about gender equality topics and especially about their integration into preschool education institutions; therefore experience coming from abroad could be a very valuable contribution to development in this field.

4. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

Lithuania has five higher education institutions (3 universities and 2 colleges) that are preparing specialists in preschool education. Two structured telephone interviews with 3rd year college and 2nd year university male students studying preschool education were performed on 3rd and 5th of May 2007. Some students' contacts received by faculty administration or lecturers from higher education institutions were no longer available. Several students rejected participation in interview giving a reason for being very busy. During the period of 2006-2007 there have been 12 male students studying preschool education at different levels within all Lithuanian higher education institutions: 1 full-time 3rd year student at Klaipėda university and 5 extramural 2nd year students (three of them were under 30 y.o., the other two more than 30 y.o.); 4 students at Šiauliai university (one in each 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th year of studies); no any male students at the time of questioning at Vilnius university of pedagogy, however there were males students already graduated from that institution; one 1st year student at Vilnius college 1 and one 3rd year male student at Marijampolė college. No male students were found at master studies in preschool education. In 10 05 2007 a written interview was conducted with 21 female students from 2nd and 3rd year studies in preschool education at Vilnius College in order to compare the experiences of male students with those of female students. The questionnaires were submitted and later collected by **Vitalija Gražienė**, docent and lecturer at Vilnius College. The questions submitted to girls were of more narrow nature, and due to the indirect interview some of the responses are not enough thorough and complete as those, of the males interviewed.

4.1 Motives for choice of studies

Both male students stated that have selected this speciality by chance. For both of them the main thing was to study at institution of higher education, however there was a difference in their study priorities: one of them was willing in speciality related with agriculture, the other one was interested in pedagogy. According to him, he enjoyed communication with little children even before the studies and he considered work with children as a real job: „I used to communicate with little children. Even then a thought that I could work and find a common language with them was coming to my mind. I simply like to talk with them; I fancy that joy of children” [Interview Nr.8]. However, the other guy was even surprised after he was accepted to study preschool education as he didn't feel to be able to do that job. The main motive of choice for him was the city, situated not far from his parents' house.

The experiences of girls are rather different. Two thirds of interviewees were feeling vocation for work as teacher in ECEI, other 8 girls have chosen this speciality by chance, and one of the girls didn't even know what the meaning of preschool education was. 8 girls from those willing to study preschool education had a feeling before choosing this speciality that they can work with children, be with them and train them, 6 students knew they wanted to study children pedagogy. One girl mentioned, she was willing to work as educator but not at school. 4 other girls before entering university already had similar experiences such as taking care of a younger relative; friends were working in this field or most of family members were educators. Meanwhile, the family members of male students interviewed were not related with education.

Male students in preschool education had to interface the attitude of society that preschool education is not a speciality for men. A male college student in preschool education perceived the reaction of people around him as a light derision, while the reactions of others were not important to the other male student of this speciality: *"Those that I know reacted with derision at the beginning. After some time by seeing me continuing the studies and calmed down"* [Interview Nr.8]. An important role to the satisfaction with studies plays the support of parents and the perspective of the future job: *"Parents are happy that I am studying. It is very important that there will be a work place after graduation, because there is a lack of male teachers working at ECEIs. Parents' support is very important to me and I don't care what others are speaking"* [Interview Nr.9].

4.2 Satisfaction with studies

Both male students stated that have selected this speciality by chance. For both of them the main thing was to study at institution of higher education, however there was a difference in their study priorities: one of them was willing in speciality related with agriculture, the other one was interested in pedagogy. According to him, he enjoyed communication with little children even before the studies and he considered work with children as a real job: *„I used to communicate with little children. Even then a thought that I could work and find a common language with them was coming to my mind. I simply like to talk with them; I fancy that joy of children"* [Interview Nr.8]. However, the other guy was even surprised after he was accepted to study preschool education, as he didn't feel to be able to do that job. The main motive of choice for him was the city, situated not far from his parents' house.

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study preschool education had a feeling before choosing this speciality that they can work with children, be with them and train them, 6 students knew they wanted to study children pedagogy. One girl mentioned, she was willing to work as educator but not at school. 4 other girls before entering university already had similar experiences such as taking care of a younger relative; friends were working in this field or most of family members were educators. Meanwhile, the family members of male students interviewed were not related with education.

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3. Satisfaction with studies

The studies themselves do not seem to be difficult for the male students. However, it is difficult for male students to change the stereotypes based on an opinion set within the society that education is a feminine speciality: *“it was strange for me that education is considered to be a speciality only for women and I wanted to deny that talk”* [Interview Nr.8]. At the beginning of the studies both guys had some doubts regarding the change of the speciality selected, however later on getting more involved into the studies they found them rather interesting and now they are satisfied with their choice.

More than a half of the girls interviewed are satisfied with their studies, some of them mentioned their satisfaction with an interesting curriculum. Five girls were glad that there is an internship included into the study program, which allows seeing the selected speciality in reality. Two girls mentioned that they have obtained enough knowledge and they are ready to work as preschool educators. Other part of girls was satisfied with studies only partially. One of the main reasons for this is the primary wish to study somewhere else. Such girls make 4 out of 21; the other two indicated their wish to study preschool education. The second reason is mainly connected with the study program itself. Several girls mentioned their satisfaction with studies, however preferred to have different kind of job in the future. For one of the female students, the selected profession

seemed to be harder than she thought at the beginning. The other girl expressed her requirement for more innovations, more modern methods of learning.

4.3 Gender equilibrium in academic community

Students did not have any training course directly related with the gender equality and mentioned that never heard about any intention to include such topic into the study program. Students are taught to view each child as an individual: *„All children have to do the same. It has been always stressed by the lecturers that there cannot be any segregation and that all children are equal and so they have to be educated independently of gender”* [Interview Nr.8].

However, this speciality, if you look at its specifics, is not oriented only to women. According to guys, most important is to be prepared properly and to know how to work with little children.

One girl remembered that at the beginning of the first year of studies there was one guy in the course, however he left promptly. Majority of girls pointed out the lack of male students studying preschool education and therefore, it was hard for them to talk about the gender equality. 5 girls emphasized that due to the little number of male students in studies of education, they are more respected, valued and preserved by the lecturers.

The program of preschool education is based on various subjects in pedagogy and psychology, there are also general academic subjects included. Most of the lecturers are women: *“Men are teaching philosophy, physical training, politics, and mathematics. They teach mainly general training subjects. Just women prevail in educational and psychological field”* [Interview Nr.8]. It is obvious that at institutions of higher education students in preschool education are communicating mostly with female lecturers, and this fact may play a role in formation of stereotype that education is a field for women only.

4.4 Integration of gender equality aspect into the curriculum

Students did not have any training course directly related with the gender equality and mentioned that never heard about any intention to include such topic into the study program. Students are taught to view each child as an individual: *„All children have to do the same. It has been always stressed by the lecturers that there cannot be any segregation and that all children are equal and so they have to be educated independently of gender”* [Interview Nr.8].

12 female students didn't feel any integration of gender equality into the curriculum, one girl noticed that there haven't been any projects or cases written on this subject, meanwhile other 7 girls stated the opposite. One of them wrote: *“There was talking about the gender of children,*

explanation what boy like the most, what are their needs, how is their individualism, what are needs of girls and how is their mentality made up". One can notice from this statement that the needs of children are explained in accordance with their gender. The major part of girls emphasized that training program does not distinguish any of gender. One girl mentioned the opinion expressed by lecturers telling that the situation when males do not want to study pedagogy is not a positive thing. Other female student stressed the gender equality: *"It is important collaboration between both genders as it gives great results. Opinion expressed by both of genders is of the same importance"*.

Institutions of higher education that are preparing the specialists in preschool education record only few conferences or trainings related with gender equality in their practice. However, such trainings are important as they helps to understand that: *"neither woman nor a man can be discriminated at workplace on the basis of gender identity"* [Interview Nr.8]. Therefore, it is very important that students in preschool education feel motivation for further training in the field including also participation at the conferences. We could conclude from the responses of the female interviewees that they haven't participated in any additional trainings or conferences as not enough attention is being paid to this. One girl has expressed her interest in taking part in trainings on gender equality.

4.5 Internship

Work experience becomes very important when a student wishes to evaluate his or her suitability for this kind of job and to get rid of any doubts if any: *"I was thinking that later will change the field of studies, but later started the practice and I liked the work with children, therefore I stayed"* [Interview Nr.8]. Work practice during the studies raises also some fears, as it is necessary to adapt to the colleagues, to know the specifics of work with children and be able to apply some methods of behavior with them. Most of the times, the staff that male students join during the practice is made of women only and the future male educator surprises them. However, the guys said they haven't felt any negative attitude towards them; on the contrary, they received a support.

Another important issue is how children perceive men working with them. Both male students interviewed noticed that for children it is a bit strange phenomenon, however it does not create any problems at work, most of the times children are encouraged more to keep discipline. Warm relationship is felt as well: *„At home mothers take care of children, at ECEIs – female teachers, maybe this is a reason why children get bored with a woman and her way of*

supervision. I think for me is easier than for my female study mates, because kids were obeying me more than them” [Interview Nr.8].

Male students emphasized the fact that children lack masculine attention and example. There are more males studying primary education and working in this field. It would be great to have more males working in preschool education institutions as well. One of the interviewed male students mentioned that he enjoyed mostly working with children of younger age: *„I used to work with children between 3-4 and 6-7 years of age. It is more joyful to work with the younger ones, as you show them or tell them something and it is interesting for them. Those in primary education know more and it is more difficult to make them interested in something” [Interview Nr.8].*

Both male students agree that preschool education is not predetermined by gender and it is not insuperable for men. This positive attitude is influenced also by the experience of other countries: *„Men can do this work. I know that men are working at ECEIs in Sweden and Denmark. In Lithuania maybe you can find some, if there are at all” [Interview Nr.8].* Both males and girls emphasized the salary of this kind of specialists being very low. There is always a temptation for the young person willing to earn more to find a job according different than acquired speciality: *„After internship the Head of the ECEI suggested me to come and stay. The starting salary offered – 600 Lt. If I find a better paid job, I would keep the position of teacher at ECEI as an additional after-lunch job” [Interview Nr.8].*

Another challenge is the attitude of the society, which divides specialities into feminine and masculine ones. Therefore, here a key role plays a vocation for education. One male student preferred the future work in position of a Head of the ECEI or as a special teacher instead of working as a teacher at ECEI. Both male students emphasized that teacher needs a lot of patience and responsibility for his work: *“A lot of patience is needed for work with kids. It is not a hard job, but I would not like to do it. It scares me when it comes to be responsible for the children” [Interview Nr.9].*

4.6 Possible changes

It was difficult for interviewed male students to answer the question how to their opinion the current situation with preschool education in Lithuania could be changed so that preschool education institutions would have more males working there. One of their proposals was implementation of educative activities and information of society. At the same time, as one guy expressed his opinion – it is very important to motivate and support male students who are already studying this speciality: *„it is necessary to search for males studying this speciality and organize*

conferences and workshops for them. To tell them how warmly children welcome male teachers”
[Interview Nr.8].

Female students confirmed that preschool education is considered by society to be a speciality for women and emphasized the importance of changing such an attitude. At the same time it is necessary to change an image of women as the only who can be responsible for children that is prevailing in the society. Almost half of all interviewed girls indicated that there is an opinion formed within the society which specialities for studies and work are designed for men and which ones are just for women. All this influences the position of the society that men cannot work as teachers or educators.

5. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS WITH MALE EDUCATORS AT ECEI

It was rather difficult to find men working or having worked within institution of preschool education. No men working as teachers at ECEIs were found in Kaunas. During the time of research we found 2 men working at ECEIs as teachers for facultative activities such as ceramics and music. They had no degree in education sphere; however, both of them were higher school graduates.

The teacher in ceramics works at one ECEI in Kaunas for more than 10 years. He is an elder man, graduated from Vilnius Academy of Arts. Once a week he conducts two-hour duration classes for children. Parents of children pay a symbolic fee for the services of this teacher. According to the director of this ECEI both parents and children are very satisfied with these activities. Currently the teacher has 2 groups of children with 15 children in each of them (in total there are 50 children in this ECEI). Mostly, these are older children from 4 up to 6 years old. Director's opinion about this teacher was very good and she was very satisfied with their mutual collaboration. Ceramics classes are very useful for children as they help to strengthen muscles of hands and palms and develop creative thinking.

The other teacher also interviewed during the research works as music teacher at ECEI. At the moment of interview he has been working at ECEI for 2 months only what is too short time in his opinion to evaluate this kind of job. He is having music classes for children at preschool age every day till midday.

During the research a contact was established with Algis, a man from Kaunas, who has been working as a teacher at a private Montessori preschool 9 years ago. He worked at that ECEI for 2 years and had to quit job due to the bankrupt of the institution. This man was hasn't got a diploma in education and has completed vocational studies as a painter.

We also managed to find out that 2 guys have been working at Vilnius ECEIs after graduation from Vilnius Pedagogical University with specialization in preschool education. We haven't succeeded to interview the one of them who has been working at ECEI for one year in 2005. The other man, his name is Tomas (the name changed – remark by author) has worked in a private ECEI for 4 years starting from 2001 and later has changed his job taking a position of a director at one primary school in town. He is 30 years old, married, and has kids. In May 30 2007 a structured interviews have been done with both of these men who have worked as teachers at ECEIs. The one living in Kaunas has been interviewed directly, while the telephone interview has been conducted with the one, who has been working in Vilnius. We

think that it is very beneficial to reveal and illustrate the work experience of these men in order to show to our society that it is a normal phenomenon to have men working at ECEIs.

5.1 Beginning of studies and work

Algis' speciality is a painter and the proposal to work at ECEI came to him by chance: „*My cousin owned an ECEI and I came to visit her one day for some reason. One child was crying and I made him quiet. Later my cousin asked me if I wish to work with children. At that time I didn't have any job, so I agreed. It was hard at the beginning as I am specialized in different field, but later I got used to it. I liked the Montessori methods a lot*“ [Interview No.13]. According to this man, the agreement for taking this job came spontaneously. He was willing to try it even though he didn't have any work or life experience dealing with children. He was satisfied with the salary as it was stable and at that time higher than country's average, with work conditions and with work itself after he has tried it.

Tomas (name changed – remark of author) has graduated from Vilnius Pedagogic University with Bachelor diploma in preschool education. He told us that he it was his wish to work with children as a teacher. His priority however was the primary education, where he was not accepted: „*I didn't pass according to the conditions of the competition to this speciality as my admission score was too low. So I have chosen the speciality of preschool education hoping that maybe somewhere in the future I will move to the preschool education. My choice was random, but I started the studies, liked them and so I didn't make any changes*” [Interview No.14]. Up to his graduation, this guy didn't imagine himself as a teacher at ECEI. Once he has been informed by the Head of the Department about the job proposal at one of the private ECEIs in Vilnius. Conditions proposed by director of that ECEI were acceptable for him as salary was higher in comparison with other ECEIs, flexible schedule, institution itself was not far from his living place and it was one of the prestigious ECEI in Vilnius where wealthy people were bringing their children.

According to Algis the reaction of people around him to his job at ECEI was normal. The staff itself was not big – two teachers, director, a cleaning lady and a cook. Director invited her relative herself to come to work at her ECEI. Algis felt positive attitude towards him while communicating with teachers from other Montessori ECEIs even though there were no other men working there. Different reaction to the selected studies was at Tomas family. His mother was glad that her son will have a job, however his father was not satisfied with his son choice. Later on when his son started to work according to his speciality and to live independently he stopped reproaching him.

Tomas has been the only male student in preschool education during the whole period of studies. There were guys at university studying the primary education, music, psychology, and ethics and the interviewed guy recalled meeting them during the general lectures at university. During their work as teachers both men confirmed that they haven't met any man that would work as a teacher at ECEI and remarked the lack of male teachers also at the secondary schools where they make up to 10% or 20 % of the total number of teachers and usually teach subjects related with exact sciences. Such situation according to the interviewees is predetermined by the prevailing stereotype telling what the proper job is for a man. However the change in stereotype attitudes of the society is retarded by the inner fear related with self-inappreciation, doubts in man's ability to take a proper care of a child. Both men with experience in preschool education think that the work of the teacher should not be related with a gender. More important for this job is devotion for education: *„most important is to have a certain warm feeling for children and a wish to work with them“* [Interview No.13].

Favorable circumstances influenced the change of stereotypes in the mind of the interviewed men. If no personal invitation to work at ECEI were made, they wouldn't look themselves for this kind of job: *„Work of a teacher is suitable for both – men and women. I do not have such a stereotype because I have done this job myself. If I wouldn't receive a real proposal and encouragement that I can work with children, I would never try this job myself“* [Interview No.13]. Both men had friendly relations with their female colleagues and they never felt any negative attitude towards themselves. The most important thing according to them is to do well your job and have the same goals in education of children.

5.2 Relationship with children' parents

Normally parents were bringing their kids to Montessori ECEI after being recommended by friends. There was only one group of 30 children in this ECEI due to the deficiency of rooms and lack of teachers. Both ECEIs where the interviewed men were working were the private ones and the fee for ECEI services was higher than in other public ECEIs. At Montessori ECEI parents have been encouraged to take an active part in education of children, i.e. meetings were taking place at ECEI where parents were being informed about the specifics of Montessori way of education so that they could continue this way of education of their kids at home. Parents have been invited to participate and also to watch how their children are spending time at ECEI: *„we were asking parents to sacrifice half day of their free time and to come once per year or 6 months to see how their children are spending their time at ECEI“* [Interview No.13].

Algis recalled the first reaction of parents to the male teacher as a trustless. However, after being satisfied with the teaching results parents accepted positively the fact that teachers of both genders are working with children, and thus male teachers started to feel their support: *„At the beginning parents were reacting strangely, as sometimes children were afraid of me. In such a case, as we were only two teachers – one female and me the female teacher was working with children. After some time I started to feel a big support from parents’ side and there was no any sense of hostility in the air anymore”* [Interview No.13].

5.3 Relationship with children

Algis was really fond of the Montessori system: *„I like everything that is has to do with handwork, as it stimulates the brain activity”* [Interview No.13]. This man started the job of a teacher without any special training and was learning while working. Algis believes that such job is not for everyone and it is not an easy one: *„I initiated from zero and had to learn everything: first of all how to control children, second – how to make them interested and third – to reach some results. It is a good idea to start from the position of an assistant to the teacher and not straight from the teacher’s position”* [Interview No.13].

The main idea of Montessori educational system is teaching children to be independent, trying to make them do everything themselves, for example to dress up, to make up their beds. The teacher interferes only when it is really necessary. A very important issue in the process of children education is to consider individuality of each child. Here the admission age limit for children is 2,5 – 4 years as for older children it is already difficult to adapt to the special system of education that Montessori ECEI is known for. Algis preferred to work with children of 3 years old as for him was easier to deal with them. In his opinion children, younger than 3 need more care and attention as *“2,5 years old children are still very fragile and they still need their parents”* [Interview No.13].

Algis thinks that attendance of ECEI for each child is a stress as there is a change of environment; there appear new children and adults. Both Algis and Tomas noticed that children are used to be under supervision of women and for some of them a certain time period was needed for adaptation to the male teacher. Both teachers agree that the ideal combination for ECEI would be to have teachers of both genders and their mutual contribution to education of children. Such model would be close to the image of family. Tomas suggestion is to have more men working at ECEIs as growing children, especially boys, need example of proper masculine behavior.

At ordinary ECEIs there is one teacher working with children and mostly that teacher is a woman. As the interviewees said the fact that the teacher is a woman may influence education,

which is based on games. As a fact men and women may look differently at the same things: *„The man’s way in teaching children must be slightly different from the woman’s way. Men are more strict and have less patience”* [Interview No.13].

5.4 Changes in work and carrier

Algis’ experience in teaching at ECEI is 2 years. He had to quit his job due to the bankruptcy of ECEI, which was not able to survive from the childcare fees any longer. Later he received proposals to work at other ECEIs, however in the first case he was scared by the requirements to obtain the right qualification, in the second case the salary offered was not satisfactory: *„After the ECEI where I used to work went bankrupt the other ECEI in better financial situation suggested me to pay me an internship in Denmark. I would be able to get an international certificate, but I got scared as my knowledge of English language is not very good”* [Interview No.13]. The former teacher believed that they were interested in him mainly because he was a man. He regretted that was not working at ECEI any longer. After having changed 3 working places he says that the work at ECEI was giving him the biggest satisfaction.

Director of ECEI where Tomas was working and his colleagues has positive opinion about his work performance and told us that they would welcome male teachers again. The decision to change job for this young man was related to his wish to try himself in another field of work: *“I have an opinion that a man cannot work for a long time at one workplace and do the same job all the time”* [Interview No.14]. Currently this young man works as a director at one primary school. He didn’t feel any discomfort while working with small children as he was getting along with them very well.

5.5 Gender equality in the process of education

As to opinion of interviewed men, preschool children do not understand yet the meaning of gender equality, but it is already important to speak with them about this subject. Algis, who worked at ECEI 9 years ago, mentioned that there were no any discussions in Lithuanian society about gender equality at that time. To his opinion the fact that this subject is becoming more relevant with each year leads to the necessity to teach children about the equality in opportunities of both men and women and that an individual has a right to choose any speciality she or he wishes. Tomas recalled that during his teaching at ECEI he never distinguished any speciality for being masculine or feminine. On the other hand he never spoke with children directly about the gender equality, gender stereotypes and similar related issues. Family also plays a big role in education of children because: *”each child comes to ECEI already having a perception formed by*

his/her family about which games he/she can play and which ones would not be appropriate” [Interview No.14]. According to the interviewees, the fact that a male teacher has been working at ECEI has also influenced the families of children by developing understanding about the equal opportunities inside the families, forming an opinion that a man can take a good care of a child as well.

Both interviewed men agree that teachers at ECEI may have a big influence on formation or support of stereotypes set within the society. However, there is a prevailing opinion in the society that school has an educative function for a child, while at ECEI children are just playing. According to the interviewees such attitude is wrong as the character of a child is developing at the preschool age. Tomas, who worked at ECEI few years ago said that the main reason why parents bring their kids to ECEI is not that it allows them to work during the day, but because they realize the importance of ECEI in life of a child. Thus parents start to value more such institutions: *“ECEI assists children in learning how to communicate, speak and play, there they acquire all other skills that would be necessary for their future lives.* Parents already realize that ECEI gives their children a base for school” [Interview No.14]. How important is the preschool education shows also the fact that parents take their kids to the private ECEI where they have to pay around 500 Lt per month, while in Lithuania the minimal monthly salary is 600 Lt. On the basis of the results received from the interviews we can conclude that the more male teachers there will be employed to work with children even on preschool level the better it will be for children as it would give them an example of the right male behavior.

5.6 Possible changes

It was difficult for interviewed male students to answer the question how to their opinion the current situation with preschool education in Lithuania could be changed so that preschool education institutions would have more males working there. To their opinion the main problem of such situation is the stereotype lying deep in the society that work at ECEI is a feminine profession. According to Tomas even though the government in Lithuania declares education to be a state’s priority area however, in reality it is different. Low salary is the main reason why there are few men working in education sphere. Higher salaries paid to those working at ECEIs would also influence the society attitude towards the work at ECEI itself.

6. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS OF SPECIALISTS IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY

The interviews were carried out with adviser on legal issues from the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (thereinafter – OEEO), specialists in preschool education from Education department at Kaunas Municipality (thereinafter – specialist) and Kaunas Pedagogical Qualification Center (thereinafter KPQC) methodologist for preschool education institutions (thereinafter – methodologist). After having summarized the interviews performed, we can give an insight about the situations related with gender equality in the early childhood education institutions.

6.1. Integration of gender aspect

In 1999 the law on equal opportunities between women and men and in 2005 – the law on equal opportunities came into force. The monitoring of both laws enforcement lies under responsibility of OEEO. According to the office advisor on legal matters, these are two special anti-discriminatory legislations, provisions of which prohibits any discrimination regarding age, sexual orientation, disability, race and ethnic origin, religion or beliefs. These legislations haven't eliminated manifestation of diverse discrimination forms in the state; however it had influenced appearance of some positive changes. The fact that anti-discriminatory legislation is in effect clearly expresses the attitude of the state against discrimination, considering the discriminatory actions as illegal, not to be tolerated, violating the human rights. It disciplines the potential violators of legislation and makes them to give a thought about the outcomes of the illegal actions, however very often they are not tolerant in their attitudes and thinking.

Legislation consolidates the real opportunity not to reconcile with the violators of law and to defend the own rights. It creates favorable conditions to refer to OEEO for more and more people who faced an inadequate attitude towards them. The educative articles presented by mass media impels people to give a thought whether opportunities of people with different characterization are equal in real life, and whether the work quality at the work place is being evaluated from the side of equal opportunities. 24% of all complaints received are related with gender issues, submitted to OEEO by women and men. Most of the complaints are received from the biggest Lithuanian cities. According to the ombudsman, 10% of all complaints are related with the education institutions. The examples presented by the advisor were related more with higher education rather than with early childhood education. Most of the problems that occur at secondary schools are related with stereotyped attitudes: *“In one case, the textbook for the 7th*

grade contained the text, where a woman was scorned and equated to zero till she got married. There have been cases with complaints for not setting equal opportunities to enter gymnasium, also for having different handcraft lessons for girls and boys” (Interview 11).

Breaking stereotypes is rather problematic, especially if taking into account that the process of conception development within the society is a long-term one that lasts many years. Publicizing the activities of OEEO in the mass media, thus encouraging people not to reconcile with discrimination and to be able to evaluate cases related with themselves, their friends, relatives, is doing a preventive work in this field. It is important to avoid the construction of stereotypes in the education system, first at ECEI and afterwards their transmission to the later stages of education. OEEO has organized a special studies cycle for ECEIs educators. Trainings took place at 10 ECEIs. During those trainings OEEO was trying to draw attention to the stereotypes breaking at ECEIs: *“There are mainly female educators working at ECEIs, male educators are very few. Breaking stereotypes in such institutions is very important, especially due to the fact that female educators take care of children and educate them by female example only” (Interview 11).*

6.2. State’s policy and male educators at ECEIs

Currently there are no any male educators at ECEIs that belong to Kaunas City Municipality. The specialist from Kaunas Municipality department of education assumes that the number of male students studying preschool pedagogy doesn’t really mean that the number of male educators is increasing. Most of times after graduation they decide to choose another job, not related to their specialty. There are no any special strategies that could motivate men to work in this field created in our country. During the meetings between Ministry of education and science and representatives of Kaunas municipality the discussions included presentation of strategies implemented by other countries and oriented towards the increase of number of men at ECEIs. However, there was no any decision taken regarding the application of any special means in solving this problem in Lithuania.

According to the specialist, ECEIs in France and Sweden have implemented the programs on *gender neutrality*. In EFA Global Monitoring Report prepared by UNESCO it is mentioned that there are about 20% of men working at ECEIs in Denmark. Such results could be influenced by a positive attitude already formed within the society and the sponsorship by the State. In order to break the stereotypes in Lithuania it is necessary to implement the active social advertising actions that would educate the society and would assist in changing the attitude. Wages are being paid from the municipality budget, however the amount of finance is being estimated on the national level what would assure that the salary of educators in the whole country, be it a city or

the rural area is the same. Therefore, the increase of wages for the employees of this sector can be done only to the state extent.

It is officially considered that the position of educator at ECEI can be held by both man and woman: “There are responsibilities, training requirements declared by the ministry of education, laws of education, words given by the minister that explains who can be an educator in a certain field and of a certain subject” (Interview 10).

One can feel the stereotype that women are better teachers at ECEI in Lithuania, however this is the tendency in the whole world as well. Interviewed methodologist could hardly imagine a man being in position of teacher at ECEI, mainly because she has never come across such situation before: *„I don't think that a man could have enough patience that is needed at his kind of job. If it would be just some additional hours and such activities as choreography, music or crafts would be great”* (Interview 12). Currently it is most important to fill up the work places, as it is felt a big lack of teachers at ECEIs. Such situation opens a favorable environment for integration of men without any artificial displacement of women from this sector. Due to an increased need for more places at the ECEIs, a project focusing on development of services in early childhood and preschool education till 2012 is in the process of preparation. It foresees the funds intended for raising the status of the educators, representatives of especially important and responsible profession.

6.3. Gender equality aspects at ECEIs

As stated by Kaunas County Municipality Education department specialist in ECEIs women dominate the education sector. The number of men educators is increasing very slightly within the system of education therefore they are almost absent in the preschool education. Seeing the example of masculine behavior is very important for boys and they cannot get it from the female teachers. This problem is especially relevant taking into account that the number of single mothers in Lithuania is constantly increasing. Both interviewees employed in education sector stated the fact that still ECEIs themselves do not feel any necessity to concentrate on gender issues. The main attention is drawn to the care of a child independent of his/hers gender, as according to the state provisions, ECEI has to meet child's natural, cultural, ethnical and social needs: *“It is more important to secure the safety of a child, his/hers adaptation so that he or she will get used to live in the social environment, to develop child's creativity, stimulate his/hers ways of self-expression such as verbal, artistic, motion”* (Interview 10).

Activity groups organized by the teachers at ECEIs are formed in accordance with the needs or problems of the children and not according to their gender. During the free time children choose

themselves with whom to play and which toys to take. There are cases when in some ECEIs the boys are taught to show bigger respect for girls. Still family plays a big role to the world outlook of a child. The behavior itself as well as the stereotype attitude usually is formed till the age of 4. Therefore the way children play between themselves shows the behavior of their parents in the family.

As the state programs have been eliminated currently each ECEI is preparing their own annual programs individually with regard to the habitable region and the needs of children attending the ECEI. By knowing the possible ways of implementing the gender equality in the daily activities, teachers at ECEI could include the gender equality issues into the content of education.

In Lithuania there exist such education methods as traditional, Waldorf, Montessori, Good start, the Egmont project and none of them pays more attention to the gender issues between the children. The main function of the ECEI is considered to be the unification of possibilities of each child (which can differ depending on the environment where the child lives and his family) to start the school. As stated by the interviewees the courses on integration of gender equality issues at ECEIs would interest the teachers at these institutions.

6.4. Collaboration of ECEIs with other institutions

Education department by Kaunas County Municipality is collaborating with Kaunas Pedagogical Qualification Center, which organizes refresher courses for educators, however gender equality issues haven't been integrated into these courses nor this institution has investigated the possible need for such specific trainings. The interviewed methodologist remembered few cases when problematic situations occurred due to the gender of the students. KPQC trainings are focused on issues related with methodology, planning and organizing of work.

Usually a topic is chosen according to the requests expressed by the teachers participating in the trainings, most of the times these are the problems related with children communication and their behavior. Issues on gender equality still don't get enough attention; the State should start to initiate special strategic programs related with gender mainstreaming. The overall situation in Lithuania has to be analyzed in order to design special means for implementation of gender equality at ECEI and stipulate the breakage of stereotypes related with these institutions.

Education department by Kaunas County Municipality supervises the ECEIs' methodical group, which takes care of methodical activities at ECEIs in Kaunas city: *„This is a deliberative body, which analyses the ways of work improvement, what innovations should be introduced, what means should be foreseen and implemented for solving the problems”* (Interview 10). This group consists of ECEIs' directors and their deputies. Group organizes meetings once per month in

accordance with the specific work plan projected for one year. Methodical groups organizes seminars, exhibitions, conferences, debating clubs, prepares different publications and recommendations. By this methodical group there exist twelve separate specific small methodical groups consisting of teachers that teach different subjects: „*Such groups have been initiated only in Kaunas and they are successful, i.e. ECEIs themselves often take initiative to solve certain problems or analyze specific topics. We have groups dealing with moral education, safety of child, child's evolution, children having social problems, art, music, physical culture and motion*” (Interview 10). Such methodical groups are a good example how to disseminate effectively information about the means and methods used for successful implementation of gender equality at ECEIs.

CONCLUSIONS

A qualitative research carried out during the project “Gender Loops” covered different issues related with integration of gender equality into the system of preschool education. Having performed an analysis of the results received from the 5 groups of informants interviewed during the research, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- 1) All groups of interviewees agreed that preschool education, as speciality is not prestigious and not popular among men. Such situation has been influenced by the prevailing gender stereotypes (pedagogy is considered to be a female speciality) and by very low initial salaries.
- 2) All groups noted that currently mainly women are working at preschool institutions and pedagogy itself is becoming feminine, therefore it would be very useful to encourage more men to enter the education sector. A child has to see examples of behavior characteristic for both – woman and man; however female teachers cannot give a child an example of man’s behavior.
- 3) Gender equality aspect is still not being integrated widely into the system of preschool education. This is mainly due to the fact that there is a lack of proper training for educators and teachers, lack of experts in this field who could organize qualifying training, seminars.
- 4) Head of ECEIs agreed that it is important to analyze gender aspects at ECEIs. However integration of gender equality aspect has not been applied yet as there is a lack of methodical resources and qualifying courses on this subject. Teachers at ECEI do not have a big interest themselves to go deeper in the topic of gender equality.
- 5) Directors of ECEIs explained that at ECEI all children are educated equally independently from their gender. Men at ECEIs usually have a role of helpers in household tasks; however it is very rare to find a man educator working with preschool age children. According to directors, men can take full care of children aged 3 to 7, if they got proper training and qualifications for this kind of work. Such situation would be a good experience for children, especially those that lacks father in their families. As stated by informants ECEI plays a very important role in the life of a child, however within the society it is still popular belief that secondary school is much more important.
- 6) At Lithuanian institutions of higher education that specialize in training educators of preschool education men constitute a minority. Usually male educators are teaching

general subjects, while educational and psychological subjects are mainly under responsibility of female educators. Among interviewed institutional lecturers there were only few interested in gender equality. Such indifference might be an outcome of the fact that there are no any refresher courses with focus on integration of gender equality organized. There are very few male students in preschool education. However, universities still take no actions to increase the number of male students choosing this speciality.

- 7) According to opinion of the interviewees the main aspect that young men take into consideration while choosing the speciality is the existing stereotype that preschool education is not for men. Those, who have chosen this speciality anyway, at the beginning they sometimes get scared of being surrounded only by female students. After graduation a lack of motivation to work in this field exists mainly due to the low salary. At the time when interviews were performed the interviewed institutions still didn't have any special course on gender equality, however the aspects of this issue were already integrated in different subjects. A standard of training an educator in preschool education has been renewed, but still not officially confirmed. According to this renewed standard it will be required to talk about gender equality. It will request to talk about the gender equality. Students in preschool education are taught to educate each child independently from his/her gender. However, as it appears in practice sometimes female educators keep the stereotypes about the roles based on gender in preschool education.
- 8) Lecturers agreed that applying the special methods, adapted to the issues on gender equality, could break such stereotypes. Lithuania still doesn't possess experience about the issues on gender equality and especially about its integration at the ECEIs. Therefore, it is important to exchange experiences with other countries.
- 9) The interviewed males studying preschool education or working at ECEI have chosen this speciality by accident. They remained satisfied also after having started the studies. According to males related with preschool education, this kind of work is not intended only for women; man can perfectly perform their job if they know how to do it. Interviewed male educators in preschool education confirmed such affirmation as well. They used to work at private ECEIs and were satisfied with their work with children. Their choice to work at ECEIs was influenced by favorable circumstances, such as personal invitation, good working conditions, higher salary comparing to the salary at public ECEIs.

- 10) Informants confirmed that children welcome males working at ECEIs very friendly.
- 11) Interviewees agreed that teachers at ECEIs have big influence in formation of stereotypes or maintaining those already existing within the society. Therefore, training of teachers in gender equality issues is very important. Teachers themselves still don't feel a need for such trainings, however it is important to realize that a child starts to form his world-view already at the preschool age and the future choices in his life will be influenced by the way she/he was educated since his early years.
- 12) It is necessary to eliminate existing attitudes towards gender inequality and to seek the reduction of stereotypes' creation within the society. It will be a big challenge for the state and the society to raise the prestige of educator profession and to eliminate the stereotype saying that preschool education is a work only for women.

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APPENDIXES**List of Interviews:**

- Interview Nr.1, 2007 05 02, Kaunas;
- Interview Nr.2, 2007 05 03, Kaunas.
- Interview Nr.3, 2007 05 04, Kaunas.
- Interview Nr.4, 2007 05 02, Kaunas.
- Interview Nr.5, 2007 05 04, Kaunas;
- Interview Nr.6, 2007 05 08 Kaunas;
- Interview Nr.7, 2007 05 09, Kaunas;
- Interview Nr.8, 2007 05 03, Kaunas;
- Interview Nr.9, 2007 05 05, Kaunas;
- Interview Nr.10, 2007 05 04, Kaunas;
- Interview Nr.11, 2007 05 14, Kaunas;
- Interview Nr.12, 2007 05 27, Kaunas;
- Interview Nr.13, 2007 05 30, Kaunas;
- Interview Nr.14, 2007 05 30, Kaunas.