ABSTRACT

GENDER AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ICELAND

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The goal of this presentation is to discuss the views of women primary school teachers in Iceland about gender. It is based on an interview study with 14 experienced teachers focusing on teaching boys and girls in relation to gender issues. The study is based on poststructural feminist and profeminist views, and it aims at unveiling and combating some of the persistent myths about the differences between boys and girls and men and women teachers.

One of the most surprising findings of the study was that in spite of the researcher continuously asking about gender differences—and receiving many answers about them—the interviewees contended that often times the differences between the individual children are greater than the gender differences. There is a balance in teachers’ story as it relates to the children: neither gender or individual differences come out as more important. When asked about teaching styles, the interviewees maintain that teaching styles are mostly individual rather than gendered styles. Further, the interviewees believe that most children do not mind if a man or a woman is their teacher.

The implications of these findings will be discussed. The teachers’ belief in "the individual" can be utilized to increase plurality in teaching methods, useful for boys and girls and for children with different cultural backgrounds and different abilities. But we must also emphasize gender studies in Icelandic teacher education. This is not to replace the discursive and legal individualism but to add gender analysis as one of teachers’ methods to analyze the needs of children. Furthermore, the paper argues that it is important for ALL teachers to be able to teach ALL children, and we (at least in Iceland) need not only men teachers but also more women teachers into our primary schools.