



DEVELOPING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' AWARENESS AND CHANGE OF GENDER-ORIENTED PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Studies of gender still indicate lack of equal opportunities between the genders as well as gaps prevalent in the education system. Creating an equalitarian culture at school obliges teachers and certainly pre-service teachers to examine their attitudes before inculcating values of equality to their learners. This study aims to explore pre-service teachers' awareness of gender-oriented issues and find whether their gender perceptions have changed following attendance of the 'Gender and Education' annual course. The study was conducted according to a qualitative approach and the research population consisted of 18 pre-service teachers. The research tool consisted of a semi-structured in-depth interview. A qualitative content analysis was performed according to Schein's model. The findings illustrate changes in the level of pre-service teachers' knowledge and competences, self-awareness, dialogue with the environment and behaviour. Moreover, the pre-service teachers' awareness of gender issues and importance of offering equal opportunities to both genders were enhanced.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes, Gender and education, Gender-oriented perceptions, Gender in teacher education, Gender equality, Gender studies.

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Contribution/ Originality

The paper's primary contribution is finding that gender stereotypes still exist among pre-service teachers. It is therefore important to integrate gender studies into teacher education programs. Developing pre-service teachers' awareness and changing gender stereotyped thinking, will enable future teachers to educate for gender equality and social justice.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women in the world experience inequality vis-à-vis men and the way to achieving equality is still long. Even today in the 21st century one cannot speak about gender equality and there are

still considerable gaps in various areas including the education system around the globe, Israel included (Herzog, 2010; Abu-Rabia-Quidar, 2011; Connell, 2011). Indeed, movements for woman rights enhanced acknowledgment of discrimination in workplaces, the military, economy, politics and education. Violence against women, rape and sexual harassment have been on the agenda of woman organisations. These organisations indicated the harm which advertisements, work and wages as well as textbooks caused to women. Moreover, the education system promotes gender studies, programmes and workshops which empower female-students and female-teachers, encouraging them to self-actualise and acknowledge their skills and capabilities. Already several years ago the education system has comprehended the need for gender studies (Gilad, 2007; Tutri, 2011; Zameret-Kercher, 2013).

The fundamental assumption underpinning this study is that pre-service teachers [hereinafter - "students"] should acquire gender-oriented bodies of knowledge, competences and values which have most frequently been excluded from pre-service education programmes. The more they do it, the more professional teachers they become, adhering to the values of gender equality. This study explored students' awareness of gender-based issues. It also investigated whether their gender perceptions have changed following attendance of a 'Gender and Education' annual course. The rationale of the course is that it will enhance awareness of gender perceptions and develop gender-oriented thinking as well as a dialogue about gender issues which had started in the past. This rationale is becoming more intense today and will continue also in the future, being the key to the future of our children and to a sustainable equalitarian society.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Gender Stereotypes

Due to stereotypical perceptions, people tend to assign features and roles characteristic of the male's group versus those which characterise the female's group. The professional literature engages extensively in the processes which entail the formation of gender stereotypes and their impact on both genders. Most researchers concur that socialisation plays a central part in the acquisition of characteristics and behaviours suitable for the gender classification of every man and woman. Family, community, communication media and education system constitute socialisation agents that perpetuate gender-oriented stereotypes (Chodorow, 1989; Gilad, 2010).

As far as choosing a profession is concerned, various studies indicate that both women and men view themselves as engaging in occupations which reflect their personal preferences. These preferences are shaped already at a young age through the process of socialisation. In that process, certain values are attributed to gender roles characteristic of women and men, leading women and men to choose 'feminine' and 'masculine' functions accordingly. During their initial socialisation process at home and at school, women are encouraged to learn a profession which is considered 'feminine' such as teaching, education and office services (Sáinz and Eccles, 2012).

From the aspect of characteristics, studies point out features perceived as typical of men versus those which are typical of women. This distinction between 'feminine' and 'masculine' characteristics is manifested by textbooks and children's literature (Gilad, 2001). Many textbooks

and children's stories depict men as heroic, brave, wise, strong, successful, persevering and charismatic. Conversely, women are described as weak, dependent, submissive, easily sobbing, renouncing and unstable. These stereotypical descriptions evoke readers' automatic reaction to the described figure and reinforce overall stereotypical perceptions of woman and man groups (Gera Committee Report, 2002).

2.2. Processes of Shaping Gender-Oriented Perceptions

Processes of shaping perceptions of gender as well as of other issues of education, are transpiring many years before students join academic frameworks of teacher education. According to Even (1986), students, like any adult learner, come to the learning environment with their 'experience backpacks'. These 'backpacks' constitute learners' identity cards and they include: "History, culture, values, attitudes, philosophy, religion, hopes, dreams, gender, skills, competences, education, beliefs and life experience" (Even, 1986). These components are rooted in the students and affect their personal development as well as their learning and teaching processes. A study conducted by Nettle (1998), found that students' attitudes change following courses and intervention programmes. Conversely, Kagan (1992) indicates stability in students' attitudes; hence, these education programmes do not lead to any change in students' educational attitudes. Nevertheless, Kagan (1992) underscores that perceptions of adult learners can change as a result of focused learning and of training comprising experiences which undermine their beliefs.

Fullan (2012) stipulates that a change of education systems and educational processes occurs in three dimensions: change in materials and contents, change in teaching approaches and methods and change in beliefs and attitudes. The change in beliefs and attitudes is the most complex since people are required to change their fundamental assumptions and basic values. Sarason (1990) argues that the change process transpires on three strata: the cognitive stratum, the emotional stratum and the behavioural stratum. It is important to know what individuals think, feel and do regarding the change. Consequently, the change and adjustment to it differ from one person to another. Similarly, Ben-Amos and Tamir (1995) maintain that all people undergo personal and professional development stages throughout their lives. These researchers specify that among students as adult learners, awareness of these development stages is growing, accompanied by intellectual, emotional and psychological factors. Moreover, Feuerstein (1992) claims that a 'mediating' environment can change patterns of thinking at any situation and any age.

The professional literature underscores that teachers' attitudes and beliefs should be studied in order to understand teachers' conduct in the dialogue with their learners (Tatto, 1998; Wiest, 1998). Studies (Shkolnik and Keinan, 2002; Safran, 2011) illustrate that the key to good and meaningful teaching is embodied in teachers' personality rather than in their pedagogical competence which might improve with time. According to these researchers, students believe that good teachers are not necessarily teachers with a high professional level but rather people with a positive and charismatic personality who understand their students and relate to them as equal

(Wideen *et al.*, 1998; Levine *et al.*, 2013). Teaching processes which highlight gender-based issues improve behaviours, change attitudes and increase awareness of gender incidents (Gilad, 2001). When this concerns changes of personal attitudes and stereotypical perceptions, the change process is complex and slow. The difficulty in coping with equal opportunities in the education system stems first and foremost from the fact that the topic is significantly values-based and that it is perceived initially from the emotional aspect and only later from the rational aspect (Avrahami-Einat, 1989).

2.3. Gender and Education

The research literature which deals with inequality in education offers a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches to the description and analysis of inequality in education dimensions and their impact on the shaping of the education system. Nevertheless, despite the gender-oriented changes which transpire in society and in education, there is still inequality from various aspects between boys and girls. This inequality stimulates the public debate on the need for changing the existing situation (Stromquist, 2007; Zameret-Kercher, 2013). Yona and Dahan (2013) argue that social depth currents have recently become more prominent in the Israeli and other societies. These currents illustrate the importance of maintaining the centrality of the debate on educational inequality, examining the reasons for its formation and devising ways for dealing with it. Moreover, data published by UNESCO indicate that there are still gender gaps in primary and secondary education in various countries. Consequently, there is a collective commitment to achieve equality between the genders and develop the skills of each and every person without any discrimination (UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization), 2003).

Gender-oriented education is a tool of equalitarian education and it serves for coping with gender stereotypes. Gender studies develop awareness of the formation and preservation of social, cultural and educational patterns which discriminate women vis-à-vis men. Furthermore, these studies promote critical reflection from a gender perspective about everything relating to different socially-accepted values. Hence, it has become necessary to allocate more room for engaging in differentiation as part of the actualisation of a just worldview. Gender studies entail an academic and valued discourse on social topics from an important point of view which is not included today in the curricula of schools and teacher education colleges (Gilad, 2010).

2.4. Gender and Education in Israel

The Israeli education system was initially established as an equalitarian education system whereby the principle of uniform education and equal opportunities underpins the democratic concept. From a formal point of view there are apparently no differences between what boys and girls acquire within the framework of their studies at school. However in fact there are gaps of equality between the genders (Gilad, 2010). Over the years, adopting the value of equality and granting equal opportunity were attributed interpretations and meanings which have not necessarily narrowed the gaps; rather they have even 'eternalised' them (Gilad, 2010). Teachers

display a differentiated attitude towards girls and boys at school (Schwartz, 1996); textbooks include overt and covert stereotypes (Gera Committee Report, 2002); the communication media transmit stereotypes (Lemish, 2007); and parents have different expectations of boys and girls (Horgan, 1995; Shachar, 1996).

In recent years, the education system has been considering gender studies as a highly valuable issue. It enables learning of topics associated with the building of a personal, professional and social identity in a democratic society which views equality a key value. Moreover, examining the way by which pre-service female teachers perceive the woman's figure in general and the female-leader image in particular leads to an academic and valued discourse about social and educational subjects. This discourse is not included today in the curricula of schools and of teacher education colleges (Ben-Amos and Tamir, 1995; Gilad, 2007).

This non-equalitarian situation is increasingly changing following diverse activities which promote equal education for both genders. The Ministry of Education policy and different intervention programmes implemented on its behalf as well as activities of various bodies and organisations in the Israeli and global society, emphasise the importance of increasing awareness of and granting both genders an equal opportunity to believe in themselves and actualise their dreams (Gilad, 2010).

2.5. Gender in Teacher Education Colleges

The comprehension that gender studies are associated with all areas of life enhances the need for gender studies in general and teacher education in particular. These studies facilitate learning of subjects that shape a personal, professional and civil identity in a democratic society whereby equality is considered a key value. Moreover, students should acquire wide and thorough knowledge of society and culture studies from an innovative angle. This fact necessitates learning of the gender component as a crucial factor affecting the social-educational construct of structures, institutions as well as social and educational mechanisms. Furthermore, pedagogy and didactics curricula which comprise the gender component are relevant to the college and to teacher education since students are exposed in their daily life to significant manifestations of social inequality. The most significant expression of this inequality is the status of women who are perceived to be the weakest link in the social texture of the Israeli and global public arena. A curriculum including gender aspects, demanding examination of power relations consolidated by historical and cultural contexts, determines that the existing order is not essential and is seeking the way for changing it. In addition to these elements, one cannot ignore the existence of academic frameworks which conduct gender and women studies towards an academic degree. In recent years the Academic College of Education at the south of Israel where the study was conducted, has been promoting gender studies in teacher education programmes and teacher in-service training courses. In their assessment feedback forms, those attending the gender courses indicated that the courses allowed self-observation into their world as well as comprehension of gender attitudes and perceptions (Gilad, 2007).

This study aims to explore the attitudes of students towards gender-oriented issues. This is grounded in the assumption that students attending the 'Gender and Education' course and being exposed to topics from a gender aspect might be more aware of gender and education issues in their teaching process and impact the learners' perception of gender equality.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is pre-service teachers' awareness of gender issues?
2. Have the pre-service teachers' gender perceptions changed following attendance of the 'Gender and Education' annual course?

4. MATERIALS AND METHOD

4.1. Study Design

This study was conducted by means of the qualitative approach entitled 'case study'. Using this approach allows understanding, description and interpretation of what is going on in the field and includes also the covert aspects from the participants' own viewpoint. The fundamental assumption is that cultural and social incidents can be fully comprehended if they are examined from the point of view of both the researchers and the participants, those actively involved in these occurrences. The data collected from the participants can seem insufficient but they definitely enable understanding of and delving into questions such as: what does a small group think and feel? What are the group members' attitudes and approaches? (Smolicz and Secombe, 1990; Shkedi, 2005).

A case study is used for studies of teaching and learning (Donmoyer, 1997). One of the important advantages of a case study is its ability to attain insights about events in the actual contexts and sites where they occur (Miles, 1987). The case study is inductive because it presents the data out of the situation independently of assumptions. It allows researchers to demonstrate great sensitivity, diagnose and express situations from different points of view (Stenhouse, 1985). Its content is mainly descriptive and concrete, tending to develop through the reader's interpretations. The case study is unique, cannot be repeated and is not representative. Consequently, it does not enable generalisation in the usual sense. It enables readers to get an impression, although they have not been present in the investigated site and to achieve new insights about unknown relations and variables in the investigated event (Strauss, 1987).

4.2. Research Population

The research population consisted of 18 pre-service teachers [hereinafter – students] in their 1st-4th year of studies towards a B.Ed. degree in different pathways and specialisations. All the research participants were the same students who attended the 'Gender and Education' annual course. The participants study at an Israeli academic college of education. They come from the Jewish and Arab sectors, are religious and secular, both women and men.

4.3. Research Tool

The research tool included semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted at two points of time with all 18 students: at the beginning of the academic year and at its end. The interview questions focused on gender perceptions, professions and roles of women and men, features of women and men as well as gender-oriented stories they shared or heard. The interview questions were based on a study conducted by Millet and Gilad (2014).

4.4. Data Processing

A qualitative content analysis was performed in accordance with the theory grounded in findings (Shkedi, 2005) and based on the model conceived by Schein (1985). According to the theory grounded in findings, the data were content analysed in three stages. First, the research texts were divided into assertions in which a topic started and ended and these assertions were grouped into categories. Then the connections between the categories were examined. Thereafter, the findings analysis was performed by means of Schein's model at three levels: fundamental assumptions level, values level and behaviour level.

4.5. Statement of Ethics

The researcher followed the rules of ethics prevalent in Israel and protected the participants' rights. The participants were students learning in the college where this study was conducted and they had given their consent to participate in this study. The participants were told that the information collected through the interview was for the purpose of this study only. It is anonymous, confidential and no other use will be made of it.

5. RESULTS

The most prominent finding is the change in the students' gender perceptions throughout the academic year. At the beginning of the year, the students demonstrated attitudes and beliefs which illustrated lack of awareness, knowledge and understanding of gender issues. During the course the students were exposed to theories and studies and were actively involved in workshop activities. Compared to the situation at the beginning of the academic year, towards its end the students' awareness of gender issues was enhanced and it became apparent that the way they coped with gender issues had changed.

5.1. The Students' Perceptions of Feminine/Masculine Features

The findings clearly indicate that the students make a clear distinction between feminine and masculine characteristics. Most of the students maintain that the five features: jealousy, aesthetics, indulgence, gossip and over-sensitivity are mainly typical of women. They perceive women as highly jealous for their children, husbands and different relationships; gossip a lot and are interested in stories and experiences which are not directly connected to them. They are highly sensitive and take to heart everything and every story; cry easily and 'make a mountain out of a molehill'. In most cases they dedicate a long time to nurturing their body and attribute great

importance to the way they look. Unlike these feminine characteristics, the students perceive men as initiating and self-confident, ambitious and adventurous. The entire research population perceived men as initiators who usually have high self-confidence, are willing to experience innovative matters, are very ambitious and high-achievers.

5.2. The Students' Perceptions of Masculine and Feminine Roles

The findings highlight the differences in professions and roles significantly attributed to men or women. The students maintain that there are two prominent profession groups. One group comprises the 'masculine' professions: security and safety, company management, soldiers in combatant units, drivers and prime ministers. Another salient group includes the 'feminine' professions: secretarial work, fashion modeling, being a housewife, sewing and flower arrangement. The other professions, e.g. doctor, computer programmer, chef, police officer and so on, are assigned by the students to women as well as to men.

5.3. Changes in the Students' Perceptions from a Gender Aspect

Table-1. Changes which students underwent following the course

Level	Description of change
Knowledge and competences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acquiring knowledge about valued topics and issues ▪ Professional exposure to a topic unknown to them ▪ Learning about women's status in various cultures ▪ Experiencing with tools for coping with the topic
Self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An opportunity for self-observation and in-depth individual learning ▪ Awareness of discrimination and inequality at school and in society ▪ A different way of looking and sensitive attention to one's course peers and to the teaching staff at the college ▪ Another way of looking at pupils and the environment
Dialogue with the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Differentiation between attitudes of one's course peers ▪ Considerable and meaningful gaps in the immediate society ▪ Stereotypes in families with a very large differentiation ▪ Prejudices in work environments
Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talking more about inequality and trying to generate a change ▪ Educating differently one's own children and pupils for offering equal opportunity to both genders ▪ Paying more attention to small details in daily life (books, talks, advertisements) ▪ Expressing opinions openly and without fear

Table 1 illustrates the changes which students underwent following the course. The obtained findings were grouped and classified into four main levels of change: knowledge and competences level, self-awareness level, dialogue with the environment level and behaviour level.

At the knowledge and competence acquisition level, the students told they had enriched their knowledge and education in a variety of gender issues. These encompass theories, valued issues, differences between various cultures, examples of programmes for bridging gaps and inculcation of equalitarian gender culture at school. The following assertions written by the students demonstrate this finding: *"The course helped me to learn things about women's status which I*

ignored before... I saw the cruelty of men towards women... in most societies women are in a state of oppression, devoid of rights in comparison with men", or: "During the course I acquired vast knowledge, how to behave, what does it mean being a woman in society, which difficulties we encounter and how to solve them". Furthermore, the students acquired tools and competences for coping with the issue of gender in class and at school and developed teaching units at different age levels.

At the self-awareness level, the students pointed out that due to the change in their way of relating to the issue, they were given a professional opportunity for observing themselves and the environment in a different way. Moreover, awareness of the gender issue was enhanced, as reported by one of the female-students: "Today I am more attentive to the issue of gender, I am careful and listen when I am in the company of children and learners...". Learning in the course helped the students to view the issue in a new light and relate to it with responsibility and sensitivity, in an attempt to change the existing situation. One of the female-students summed up: "Following the course I underwent changes in my personal perception and my behaviour which are manifested in different areas. I am more aware of the differences and reference of myself and of others".

At the dialogue with the environment level, it became clear that the students adhered to different opinions which they expressed in the course debates. As mentioned, the group that attended the course was heterogeneous and therefore the students had a heterogeneous perception of their course and co-students and as well as of other general matters. The students were exposed to the opinions and worldview of their course peers. Many students were amazed to find out attitudes and beliefs of their co-students and were mainly astonished to realise there was a non-equalitarian situation in education and in society. One of the female-students described her feeling in the following way: "After everything I have heard and assimilated in the course, I am astonished to understand that there are still meaningful gaps in society... I must have lived in a bubble, refusing to believe that it still exists and so intensely also in the college".

At the behaviour level, most of the students have undergone change processes. One of the female-students described the change she had experienced: "There are things to which I have not related in the past. For example, inequality in children's books, novels, television programmes and activities in class... now that I am more aware I'm trying to change it and make other people also aware of it...". A mother-student described it in her words: "Today I make more efforts to educate my children according to different gender aspects in which we engaged during the course". In fact, most of the students were certain they would assume responsibility, assist pupils (several female-students emphasised they would be more helpful to girls) and promote their development according to the personality and needs of each and every individual.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Data analysis was performed according to the model designed by Schein (1985), which facilitated explanation of the students' attitudes and examination of the changes they underwent following the course. According to this model, the organisational culture as a hierarchical structure is characterised by three levels of analysis: the fundamental assumptions level, the values level and the behaviour level. The students' fundamental assumptions regarding gender

issues dictate the values and ideology in which students believe and which dictate their behaviour in everyday life. The changes experienced by the students who attended the course were characterised by three prominent points of time. At the beginning of course, with the exposure of situations and data which attest to discrimination between the genders, reactions of astonishment, surprise and lack of knowledge were salient. Later, reactions of anger and frustration were prominent, *"it's really not just"*, *"we must change the situation"*. Towards the end of the course reactions of determination and wish to invest energy became prominent: *"we are changing the situation"*, or *"we promise to change"*.

At the level of fundamental assumptions – the encounters throughout the year encouraged the students to undertake a journey designed for getting acquainted with themselves. The talks and debates allowed them to be partners to processes of reflection and self-estimation of fundamental assumptions, values and stereotypical thinking. Every student comes to the learning environment with a 'basket' of beliefs and opinions in many and diverse areas and topics, including the issue of gender. Even (1986) presents learning as a continuous process to which adult learners come with an entirety of values, attitudes, beliefs and life experience. Hence, these components which differ from one person to another have a meaningful impact on the personal development of each and every learner, both male and female. The students also join the college and the course with a 'backpack' filled with beliefs, opinions and perceptions of their own. With the content of this 'backpack' they enter a learning circle in the course. The students come from a different background of beliefs and opinions that are the consequence of the cultural world in which they have lived and which they experienced on a daily basis (Ben-Peretz, 2002; Levine *et al.*, 2013). For example: how do students perceive the professions and roles of both genders? There is a consensus about certain professions which are considered 'masculine' versus 'feminine' occupations. The approach linking social roles and gender stereotypes argues that these stereotypes are derived from the different social roles as opposed to those fulfilled by women. Society expects men to be able to replace a wheel in a car, unplug the kitchen sink and so on, whereas women are expected to know how to cook, change diapers and take care of children. The students are part of society and they too have similar expectations, namely that men are meant to engage in certain professions and women in other, 'softer' occupations. Classifying the professions into 'feminine' and 'masculine' categories reflects the students' personal preferences which are consolidated already at young age, leading them to choose professions according to this gender distinction. These findings are in line with other studies which show that principles and values inculcated in both genders during the socialisation process encourage them to choose professions considered 'feminine' or 'masculine' (Reskin, 1993; Sáinz and Eccles, 2012). Another example deals with categorisation of women's characteristics versus those of men. The students' perception of the characteristics complies with findings of studies which investigated this issue. Like other people, students live in an assessing and judging environment which affects the impressions they shape and the attitude they consolidate. Everything they do is not disconnected from the environment. All students absorb, store, remember and process social information which is

classified into social and gender-oriented schemes, reflecting the social beliefs on the topic of women and men (Gilad, 2007).

At the level of values – the value of equality was acknowledged by the students as essential and obvious. They believe that equality is crucial in the teaching/learning processes and it should be a 'guiding light' for teachers and educators in their work with pupils at school in particular and in society in general. Many students maintain there is some progress towards equality at the statement level; yet, in practice, equality is not yet comprehensive. There are hurdles on the way to change attitudes and beliefs of students in teacher education courses. However, in spite of the difficulty and complexity of this process, one can indicate changes which have transpired following intervention programmes and different gender-oriented courses. These findings support previous studies, illustrating changes in students' attitudes and beliefs following varied intervention programmes and mainly prolonged and focused programmes (Nettle, 1998).

At the level of behaviour – The students underwent a process of change in their behaviour as a result of changing their beliefs and values. The fact that the students attended an annual course impacted them not only on the awareness level but also on the behavioural one. This finding is in line with the findings of Nettle (1998) and Fullan (2012). Similarly, Schwartz (1996) showed a relation between one's values and behavioural patterns. He argues that behaviours are associated with values and even if values are not the exclusive factor which affects people's behaviour, they have a meaningful impact on behavioural patterns. Throughout the year, the students' personal development made them assume personal responsibility and deal with states of inequality in a more professional and confident manner. Students implement the value of equality and equal opportunity in their practical work at school and they relate to pupils in an equal way. Other students realised that in the course of their college studies they could at least affect their immediate environment.

Nevertheless, we cannot remain complacent and think that one single course of teacher education will indeed change the students' perception and their way of conduct in inculcating equalitarian gender culture at school. Sometimes the gaps between the students' level of beliefs and awareness and their level of behaviour indicate lack of assimilation and change of the second degree and mostly at the level of fundamental assumptions and values.

According to the model of Schein (1985), the main hurdle is a change at the level of fundamental assumptions. As long as the fundamental assumptions are not changed or assimilated, it will be difficult to pass on to the second level, which is the level of values in which people believe and most certainly it will be difficult to change at the behavioural level. The change in perceptions and gender-oriented attitudes is difficult and complex. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that the varied activities the students experienced during the course provided them with tools and competences for enhancing their awareness, developing sensitivity and devising ways for coping with gender-oriented stereotypical messages introduced into the education system by various socialisation agents. The most meaningful change which the students underwent was starting a cognitive and psychological process of re-examining their

personal 'credo'. Moreover, the course enabled them to know their co-students better, acting out of respect, tolerance, empathy, openness and containment.

Teacher education programmes should offer courses and seminar classes of gender and education, both compulsory and elective. In order to successfully inculcate and assimilate equalitarian education for all pupils, pre- and in-service teachers should attend various training courses in and out of school. During those courses they will undergo change processes in their self-perception and gender perception. The equalitarian approach in which teachers' belief is grounded will orient them in creating an equalitarian education culture at school and in shaping the educational and pedagogical practice. Courses which try to generate a change in students' perceptions from a gender viewpoint are complex and should be taught with sensitivity and by conducting a discourse that respects all the participants.

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