



# Gender equality education: The Importancs, results and barriers

- The Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre

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# How it all started

- 2006 – I start teaching in upper secondary school ([www.bhs.is](http://www.bhs.is))
- Newly graduated as a teacher
- Active feminist
- Knew the national equality law – states that all school levels shall teach equality – none did systematically
- First an optional course
- Now compulsory
- In national curriculum for all school levels equality is a basic element



- Students working on the nobel prize winner (1955) Laxness



Morgunblaðið

## Endur gæða glæsibifreið Nóbelskáldsins nýju lí

misseri hafa nemendur Borgar-  
unnioð hörðum höndum að því að  
dagúar-bifreið Halldórs Laxness

eftir að bifreiðin kunna, sem lengi heilsaði  
glæsibifreiðin, var flutt til skólans  
til viðgerðar. Á myndinni sjást Elma Björns-

dóttir, Sýlvía Karen Ragnarsdóttir  
Eva Hilmarsdóttir og Stefán Á.  
nemendur í bilamálun, stands





# Barriers

- Gender equality faces resistance in general
- Some fellow teachers are a little sexist – some a lot
- All teachers must be gender educated – are not
- Backlash: The trans- and sexeducation



# Barriers

- The inequality is moulded into the culture – we need to respond and deconstruct
- Everybody has an opinion on the matter – few have knowledge

# What needs to be done



- Gender equality and inclusion in the curriculum
- Teachers training – different pedagogy
- All school levels
- Textbooks – teaching material
- Gender mainstreaming in school's – students social life



# Challenges in the classroom

- Students prejudice towards feminism and think they want a woman privilege more than equal rights
- Students think that equality is already here
- Students completely accustomed to the pornification and traditional stereotypes – normalized
- Girls are sexist too– are codependent to the masculinity “we want this to be like that”



# Challenges in the classroom

- The students don't realize the connection on cause and consequence, e.g. the pornification in popculture and increase in beauty surgery
- Students look at gender issues as an individual thing - "many women are violent" or "some women are in charge in the home"
- Misconception - „women just don't apply“
- Privilege blindness

# Important background in teaching equality

- Awakening
- Address the students through their feelings, experience and attitude
- Participation and activity
- Democratic framing – the students take part in organizing
- Students feel that they “own” a part of the course



# Important background in teaching equality

- The term Power is a key issue - and put it in perspective
- Discuss other marginalized groups
- Being able to be vulnerable and honest
- Be bold – talk about challenging and intense issues

Gender equality  
education is also  
about

- Empowerment
- Communication
- Expression
- Arguing
- Empathy
- civil consciousness
- Activism
- Solidarity
- Broadmindness
- Toleration
- Self-understanding
- Lifeskill education

# Why...?

- Personal happiness: All genders are suffering
- Society's healthiness: We are not using every individual's possibilities
- An Icelandic study shows that students are more negative towards gender equality now than 20 years ago.
- Student (most of them) thirst for this kind of education



# My guiding lights in the classroom



- Diversity and fun
- Closeness with the reality of the students
- All the issues of inequality are discussed
- Training in criticism and “reading” the society
- The boys do not feel themselves as the criminal or the bad guy - and the girls do not consider themselves as the victim.
- The culture is to blame
- Empowerment and responsibility

# What and how do I do it?

- Essentialism vs social construction (born or not born with gender role)
- Start with the closest surroundings of the student and carry on to the international community
- School and the social life
- The home
- The workplace
- The media
- Politics
- World issues



# What and how do I do it?

- Manifestation of the inequality viewed:
- Headcounting (democratic demand), prostitution, domestic violence, rapes, misogyny, fashion, tv shows, wage-gap, trafficking, apperance, beauty-surgeries, pornification, porn, socialisation, the price of masculinity – and so on
- My students “infect” other students of the wisdom 😊



# What and how do I do it?

- The Culture plays a key role – is all around, moulding us – without criticism
- Cause and effect connected
- Flow of discussion and thoughts – concepts defined and put in contest

# What do students do?



- - Do team building exercises
- - Do different projects
- - Share stuff in the classroom like articles, ads, books, movies, music videos, stories about themselves and others
- - raise questions
- - Open up and discuss issues
- - Disput
- - Take a concept test and an oral one too

# What has been succeeded

- Taught in almost every upper secondary school in Iceland
- Feminist clubs in upper secondary school's
  - - their manifesto is that gender studies will be obligatory
- The course has colored the school culture
- Also taught in some elementary school's – mandatory and not
- Many defined actions have been taken – Facebook/social media activism
- General discussun in the community





## Impact

- Vocational teachers say that the culture in the workshop has changed – not sure why...
- Vice principal: The course has had tremendous effect on the school – decisions, processes, prevention work,
- Borgarholtsskóli is a role model according to the school's principal



## Next steps

- Educate and coach teachers and everybody who work with children and youth
- Direct and indirect (the hidden curriculum) equality education
- All school levels
- Educate parents
  
- Make it unnecessary

# What is all this about?

- Not just about feminism
- Not just about being a teacher
- But about the role of the educational system
- About democracy
- About justice – for all





Hanna Björg Vilhjálmisdóttir



# Biggest victory

- Gender studies is mandatory in all departments in Borgarholtsskóli!
- It did not occur to itself 😊

Hanna Björg Vilhjálmisdóttir





Bad things happen when good  
people do nothing

- Edmund Burke