

## Practicing Gender Pedagogy: The Case of Egalia

Toplumsal Cinsiyet Pedagojisine Yönelik bir Uygulama: Egalia Örneği

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### To cite this article/ Atf için:

Acar Erdol, T. (2019). Practicing gender pedagogy: The case of Egalia. *Eğitimde Nitel Araştırmalar Dergisi – Journal of Qualitative Research in Education*, 7(4), 1365-1385. doi:10.14689/issn.2148-624.1.7c.4s.3m

**Abstract.** Egalia is a state-funded pre-school that provides education to 1-6-year-old children in Sweden. What separates Egalia from other schools is the gender-neutral pedagogy practiced in the school. The aim of this study was to investigate the dimensions of the gender-neutral pedagogy practiced in the school and the principles it is based on. A document analysis approach was followed in the present investigation. A total of 16 documents have been gathered and content analysis was administered. The results have been grouped under the following themes: school's objectives; philosophy; philosophical principles; educational principles; curriculum approach; gender-neutral pedagogy and the effects of this particular pedagogy on school activities, emotions, character traits, and the language and materials used in the school; recruitment of gender pedagogues, school's recruitment policy, teachers' roles and school-parent relationship. A gender-neutral pedagogy model has been presented based on the results.

**Keywords:** Egalia, gender, pedagogical approach, early childhood, preschool.

**Öz.** Egalia bir ile altı yaş arasındaki çocuklara hizmet veren İsveç'te bir devlet anaokuludur. Egalia'yı diğer anaokullarından ayıran uyguladığı yansız toplumsal cinsiyet pedagojisidir. Bu araştırmanın amacı da Egalia Okulu'nda uygulanan yansız toplumsal cinsiyet pedagojisinin boyutlarının ve dayandığı ilkelerin incelenmesidir. Araştırma doküman incelemesi yoluyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma kapsamına on altı doküman alınmış ve dokümanların çözümlenmesi içerik analizi yoluyla yapılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları, okulun amaçları, felsefesi, felsefi ilkeleri, eğitim ilkeleri, uygulanan program yaklaşımı, toplumsal cinsiyet pedagojisi ve bu pedagojinin etkinliklere, duygulara, karakter özelliklerine, kullanılan dile, eğitim materyallerine ve kıyafetlere yansımaları, toplumsal cinsiyet pedagoğu uygulaması, okulun personel politikası, öğretmenlerin rolleri ve eğitimleri ve okul ebeveyn ilişkileri başlıklarında sunulmuştur. Araştırma sonuçlarından hareketle yansız toplumsal cinsiyet pedagojisi uygulamasına yönelik bir model önerilmiştir.

**AnahtarKelimeler:** Egalia, toplumsal cinsiyet, pedagojik yaklaşım, erken çocukluk, okul öncesi.

### Article Info

Received: 31.05.2019

Revised: 13.09.2019

Accepted: 30.09.2019

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## Introduction

The concept of gender has started to be used as a result of women's struggles to have equal rights to those of men and it, in terms of meaning, has been differentiated from sex. Gender is a concept used to explain the characteristics of being a man or woman in the process of socialization. Gender states that the roles that men and women play in social life, rather than being natural or having developed as a result of an instinctive division of labour, are designated culturally and learned, and can change over time (Çakır, 2007). Gender claims that the differences between men and women are not only biological differences, and the concept has been in use to represent both social and cultural differences that have resulted from biological differences (Marshall, 1999). Sex, on the other hand, describes men and women's genetic, biologic, and physiologic characteristics (Köşgeroğlu, 2010). While sex represents man and woman, gender represents being a man or woman (Oakley, 2016).

The differences between men and women, which result from gender, form gender inequality. According to Wharton (2005), those differences are frequently used to justify behaviours that are inequitable. Because of gender inequality, women are in unfavourable conditions when it comes to reaching resources or education, participating in work life and decision-making mechanisms, dividing household tasks, implementing human rights, and so on. Developed and developing nations adopt ensuring gender equality as part of their policies in order to reverse those unfavourable conditions for women. Gender equality means that men and women have not only equal rights guaranteed by law but also the practice of related laws ensure that men and women can equally benefit from opportunities, resources, and services in social institutions and society (Kalaycı & Hayırsever, 2014). Gender equality does not imply that men and women's roles should change or men and women should be more similar; the point that needs to be emphasized is that men and women should be equal in reaching opportunities and sharing responsibilities.

Various gender indices (i.e. Gender Inequality Index, Global Gender Gap Report, Gender Equality Index, and The Environment Gender Index) are published in order to present countries' positions and development in terms of gender equality. One of those indices is the Gender Equality Index within the European Union countries published by the European Institute for Gender Inequality (EIGE). In this index, differences between men and women and violence against women in areas of work, income, information, time, power, and health are calculated using a scale from 1 (representing complete inequality) to 100 (representing complete equality) (EIGE, 2018). The EIGE results showed that Sweden was in the first place with 82,6 points, Denmark in second with 76,8 points, and Finland in third with 73 points in terms of gender equality (EIGE, 2015). Those results suggest that gender equality has not been completely achieved even in Sweden which is the top country. Nevertheless, Sweden has a number of strategies in practice in order to achieve gender equality. Those strategies include (Egalia, 2018; EIGE, 2019; Government Offices of Sweden, 2019; Oyler, 2015; The Equality Ombudsman, 2011):

- Feminist governance which means that gender equality is one of the priorities of the government,
- An obligatory and paid 90-day paternity leave, and an up to 480 days optional paid paternity leave,

- The Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research responsible for conducting search and funded by the Swedish government,
- Male rape clinics aimed to decrease the effects of shame and labelling for male victims of rape,
- The strategy of mainstreaming gender which means that gender is recognized as one of the main policies,
- The Equality Ombudsman practice which is a government initiative responsible for monitoring the laws for discrimination against gender, transsexual identity and voice, ethnicity, religion, other beliefs, sexual orientation, or age,
- Egalia pre-school which provides education in line with gender pedagogy.

In order to ensure gender equality, individuals should be able to develop a sexual identity that is based on equality and free from stereotypes. Since the middle of the 20th century, after the abolishment of any kind of discrimination and insulting behaviours in policies relating to pre-school education institutions, Sweden has started combatting traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes because of concerns that sexual identity starts to form as early as childhood (Sandström, Stier & Sandberg, 2013). In 1998, Sweden prepared a curriculum for pre-school education. This curriculum has accepted gender equality as one of its basic values and highlighted the similarities between boys and girls (Lind-Valdan, 2014). The Delegation for Gender Equality has published two reports in 2005 and 2006 regarding pre-school education. The first report revealed that pre-school teachers had insufficient knowledge about gender equality. Additionally, the second report stated that, for every 25 members of staff within a pre-school, there should be a pedagogue who is specialized on gender (Regeringen, 2005, 2006 as cited in Sandström et al., 2013). The curriculum prepared in 1998 has been updated with the enactment of the Education Act in 2010. In both the curriculum and the Education Act, pre-school education institutions have been introduced as places that focus on practices that aim for gender equality. The aim is to educate both boys and girls in line with their interests and skills, and combat traditional gender roles by not preventing children's exposure to the limitations of traditionally imposed gender roles (Bayne, 2009; Lind-Valdan, 2014; Sandström et al., 2013; Shutts, Kenward, Falk, Ivegran & Fawcett, 2017). Nevertheless, there was no guide book which including samples that explained how the highlighted components of the curriculum could be realized (Lynch, 2016). The audits conducted in 2011 revealed that traditional gender roles and stereotypes were reproduced in pre-schools, especially in those located in the Södermalm district of Stockholm, as a result of practices applied to combat gender inequality (Lind-Valdan, 2014).

Egalia Pre-school, which aims to contribute to solving the problems relating to gender inequality, has been established in the Södermalm district of Stockholm in 2010. Egalia is a small state-owned and funded pre-school offering education to 1-6 year old children (Lind-Valdan, 2014; Mallozzi & Galman, 2012; Tagliabue, 2012). Egalia is a Latin word and means equality (Leach, 2016). Egalia has been the first institution to declare that it would use a pedagogy that is gender-neutral (Nielsen, 2011b as cited in Sjørup, 2013). As a result of the gender-neutral pedagogy it has been implemented, Egalia has received attention from both the Swedish and international media, and the literature includes both positive and negative viewpoints about Egalia. In fact, the discussions about Egalia have drawn the author's attention and resulted in the present investigation being carried out. The present study aims to reveal the magnitude of the gender-neutral pedagogy that is implemented in Egalia and the principles that their pedagogy is based on.

The analysis of the international literature suggests that research conducted in English on Egalia and the gender-neutral pedagogy it implements is limited (Lind-Valdan, 2014; Lynch, 2016; Shutts et al., 2017; Sjørup, 2013). The present study is significant since it can both contribute to the international literature and reveal the principles of the gender-neutral pedagogy practiced in Egalia through a systematic investigation, evaluation, and examples.

### Method

Document analysis has been used in the present study. Qualitative document analysis, like other qualitative research methods, is an interpretative research method that involves investigating models and processes, exploring and defining implicit meanings (Altheide, 2000). The documents that can be used in the research to make systematic evaluation vary. Commonly used documents are official records, letters, newspapers, magazines, autobiographies, advertisements, books, articles, videos, audio recordings and so on (Bowen, 2009; Merriam, 2015). Scientific journals, newspaper articles, videos, project reports and thesis statements were used as documents in this research. The initial plan was to collect data through a research tool including open-ended questions and documents relating to Egalia. The research tool was sent to the Egalia pre-school as an email, but no response was received to the email. Therefore, the final decision was to do a document analysis on collected documents related to Egalia. The documents to be collected were determined in the following way: (1) firstly, the English documents that provided information on the school's website, (2) secondly, the English documents that the school's website suggested, (3) thirdly, the English documents that resulted from a Google Scholar search with the keywords of "Egalia Pre-school", and (4) finally, English documents that resulted from a YouTube search with the keyword of "Egalia" were included in the document analysis. The characteristics of the collected documents are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

#### *Details About the Documents*

Accessed through	In-text citation	Document type
School's website	Egalia, 2018	Information about the school
The document suggested on the school's website	Scott, 2017	Electronic news article that includes interviews
	Leach, 2016	
	Weller, 2015	
	Hebblethwaite, 2011	
Google Scholar	Tagliabue, 2012	Academic research article
	Shutts et al., 2017	TEDx speech
	Rajalin, 2016	Electronic news article
YouTube	Abend, 2013	PhD dissertation
	Lind-Valdan, 2014	Academic research article
	Mallozzi&Galman, 2012	Project report
	Lynch, 2016	Video containing information about the school and families
YouTube	Sjørup, 2013	Video containing information about the school and families
	VICE, 2017	
	Wikström, 2015	
	Euronews, 2013	

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis has been conducted to analyse the collected data. The following steps were followed in data analysis: (1) documents were skimmed and initial themes and categories were created; (2) documents were scanned in detail and initial themes were further developed by adding categories and/or sub-categories; and (3) in order to accommodate the new categories the data were recoded and a number of themes were either merged with existing ones or deleted. The resulting themes and categories are presented in Table 2 (see the Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendation section).

### **Validity and Reliability**

The originality and accuracy of the documents analysed is one of the factors that affect the reliability and validity in document analysis. In order to determine the originality of a document, the researcher should be able to answer questions relating to a document's date, source, and author (Merriam, 2015). The present study investigated and presented such details about the analysed documents in Table 1. Most of the analysed documents were accessed through Egalia's website.

The consistency of the study was entailed by providing a "thick description" in relation to the themes found (i.e. themes were explained in detail and supported with direct quotations). Each theme and category was based on multiple documents. Attention was paid to ensure that information provided in a document was consistent with other documents in order to establish confirmability.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

Unlike quantitative research, the researcher is the person who uses their experience in data collection and analysis in qualitative research. In the analysis of documents that are the subject of the research, it is important that the researcher knows and understands the relevant subject area closely (Yıldırım, 1999). This research was carried out by a researcher with theoretical and practical experience in the field of gender education.

## **Results**

This section presents results about Egalia's objectives and philosophy, the philosophical and educational principle it adopts, the curriculum approach practiced in the school, the gender-neutral pedagogy practices, teachers' roles and training, and the relationship between the school and parents.

### **Egalia's Objectives**

Although gender equality is one of its priorities, Egalia is also functioning in harmony with the policies, rules, and regulations just like any other pre-school in Sweden and has a strong commitment to the goals specified for pre-schools (Lind-Valdan, 2014). On the other hand, the objectives peculiar to Egalia are (Hebblethwaite, 2011; Lind-Valdan, 2014; Sjørup, 2013; Weller, 2015):

- Teaching and showing children that everybody regardless of their sex, age, physical and intellectual skills, or ethnical roots has the same rights, opportunities, and responsibilities,
- Raising children free from gender-based expectations,
- Forming and practicing a pedagogy which focuses on a child's personal identity rather than sex and which is based on complete equality,
- Ensuring that children learn the principles of democracy in both theory and practice to become good world citizens who do not discriminate others,
- Showing that sex is not a reliable category for evaluating and judging others, and
- Preparing children for a changing world.

### Egalia's Philosophy and the Philosophical Principles it Adopts

Equalitarian values that have been adopted in Egalia and the gender-neutral pedagogy are based on the philosophy of the "whole life spectra" presented in Figure 1. According to this philosophy, everybody should have the right to access the opportunities that life offers (Rajalin, 2016; Scott, 2017).

Red, purple, pink, yellow	Blue, black, brown, grey
Tiny, narrow, tight, additional accessories (ribbon, butterfly, heart)	Comfortable, wide, flexible
Shy, emotional, sensitive, calm, timid, sad	Furious, aggressive, angry
Nice, cure, lovely, good, weak, helpful, tidy, tender, careful, compassionate	Strong, coldblooded, brave, harsh, impolite, messy, naughty, dowdy, fast, firm
House play, babies, handicraft, singing, ballet, gymnastic, stitching	Football, running, jumping, technology, construction, car games, climbing, mechanical toys, dinosaur
Passive	Active

**Figure 1.** Whole life spectra

Source: Rajalin, 2016, 17:51-17:57

According to Rajalin, the school director (2016), in most societies, the life spectrum is divided into two. The characteristics on the left are generally attributed to girls and those on the right to boys (see Figure 1). The categorizations of the characteristics within the life spectrum are not based on biology but rather on culture and gender. While the colours on the left side of the



spectrum are lighter and smoother, those on the right are darker and rougher. The analysis of clothes category in the spectrum shows that clothes on the left are smaller, shorter, narrower, tighter, and include more number of elements than those on the right. It is more difficult to move, run, or climb in such clothes (those on the left) and children wearing those clothes need to be more careful. On the other hand, clothes on the right hand are wider and more comfortable. Children wearing such clothes can complete activities such as running or climbing easier. Such differences limit the possibilities for children and cause children to access half of the opportunities in life, not all (Hebblethwaite, 2011).

Thanks to the gender-neutral pedagogy practiced in the school, Egalia aims to allow children to reach all of the opportunities in the life spectrum without the limitations. Rajalin explained her views on this matter as following (VICE, 2017, 9:44-11:00):

- *“We are trying to eliminate obstacles that or event both boys and girls from doing what they want to do. We want children to have equal opportunities in experiencing their emotions, explaining themselves, loving the colours they want, and playing the games they want to play. We are not changing children whilst practicing this philosophy. We are changing our own thoughts.”*

The life spectrum is frequently mentioned in the activities and conversations within Egalia (Rajalin, 2016). The philosophical principles adopted in Egalia are as following (Rajalin, 2016; Wikström, 2015):

- Boys and girls can be different. However, skills cannot be differentiated based on sex.
- Children’s or adults’ orientations do not change based on sex, age, ethnicity, or cloth preferences.
- Everybody has the right to fully experience and express their emotions.
- Each child may have different interests or needs and each child is unique.
- Sex does not essentially reflect who the individual is.
- Differences are power.

### **The Educational Principles that Egalia Adopts**

The results of the content analysis suggested that Egalia adopts the following educational principles:

*Being Integrated into Life:* It means that everything that relates to life is presented to children at different times through games, activities, and expression of emotions. All of the pictures shown, books read, and drama activities conducted within Egalia include examples from real life (Rajalin, 2016). For example, the school provides children with the opportunity to grow and nurture plants (Wikström, 2015). This way, children participate in natural life activities in addition to social ones.

*Accepting Differences:* Attention is paid to accept and live with differences through selection of books and pictures which include different examples and cases (Rajalin, 2016). The books, toys, and educational materials used in the school are selected in a way that will allow various roles, dreams/fiction, and activities. Different family types are rendered visible and acceptable through role playing activities, conversations, and books (Egalia, 2018). For example, in addition to classic stories such as “Sleeping Beauty” and “Cinderella”, the school also allows for the story

of a baby crocodile that was abandoned by its family and the two giraffes who adopted that baby crocodile (Hebblethwaite, 2011).

*Providing Choices:* Egalia provides children with a choice. Different activities are carried out concurrently in different corners of the class and children can participate in the activities that they prefer (Rajalin, 2016). The school also includes variety in the educational materials it uses. This way, children can make choices and play with the materials that they choose (Tagliabue, 2012).

*Including Affective Education:* Egalia provides an education that allows children to become aware of and regulate their emotions. Life skills meetings- in which children are informed about respect, feelings, ethics, and manners- take place weekly. In those meetings, teachers aim to allow students to express their concerns, feelings, and ideas about a predetermined topic through, for example, questions such as “What is/are necessary to be a good friend?”. Books are read, games are played, or role-play activities are carried out those topics based on children’s age and maturity levels. Alternatively, children are provided with EQ dolls (An EQ doll set consists of six dolls and each doll represents a different feeling.) in order to allow them to recognize, express, and deal with those emotions (Lind-Valdan, 2014).

*Creating A Rich Learning Environment:* It is considered that presenting children with all of the components within the life spectrum will enrich children’s lives. Therefore, Egalia provides various activities ranging from playing football to playing with dolls, various forms of dancing, singing, reading books, shooting films, observing the nature, painting, drawing, and drama. Additionally, Egalia pays attention to conduct those activities in an enjoyable, reliable, and educational way in order to maximize children’s participation (Egalia, 2018; Lind-Valdan, 2014; Rajalin, 2016).

*Ensuring Trust:* Each child is paid attention to and valued in Egalia. Attention is paid to create a school environment that is based on trust and this, to an extent, is achieved by looking in children’s eyes and establishing rapport with them (Egalia, 2018). It is also important that children view each other as friends and trust one another (Wikström, 2015). Therefore, collaborative learning is used as a strategy and students are provided with an opportunity to evaluate issues from multiple perspectives. Children are encouraged to share their opinions, develop solutions together, and help each other (Egalia, 2018).

*Providing Freedom:* There are no limitations in Egalia. Children are emancipated to challenge and overcome limitations regarding sex. Each child is supported to freely express their views and be listened to by others (Rajalin, 2016; Scott, 2017).

*Providing Encouragement:* Children are encouraged to participate in different activities and develop an attitude to try everything since the school’s aim is to allow children to touch on different areas of life. Children are encouraged to be versatile in game, activity, friend, place, or material selections (Egalia, 2018; Rajalin, 2016).

*Ensuring That Children Are Active:* Attention is paid to allow children to become active and take responsibility in maintenance work, activities, games, and decision-making in the school. The school strives to render each child as a visible individual (Egalia, 2018).

## **The Curriculum Approach Practiced in Egalia**



The educational principles adopted in Egalia (see above) are parallel to the principles of the learner-centered curriculum approach (LCCA). The principles of the LCCA are as follows: Focusing on the individual, importance on feelings, optional education, developing creativity, encouragement, an enjoyable learning environment, freedom of moving around, and an environment of trust. “Freedom” and “opportunity” are the key concepts of the LCCA (Ellis, 2013) and the pedagogy practiced within Egalia frequently mentions those concepts. The use of those concepts allows learners to address their needs and interests by providing opportunities to pursue and explore what they wonder, make a choice, and take responsibility (Ellis, 2013). The documents analysed in the present study showed that “Frobel” education model is influential in Egalia (Lind-Valdan, 2014) and methods relating to the “social constructivist approach” are practiced in Egalia (Sjørup, 2013). Frobel has established an educational institution where children can grow naturally and which is based on trust, games, physical activity, and creativity. Frobel’s childhood experiences and views regarding games are included in the developmental education philosophy (Ellis, 2013; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2016) and the LCCA is based on the developmental education philosophy. Constructivism- evaluated under the categories of cognitive, radical, and social constructivism- is a LCCA which claims that learners should construct their own understanding by relating new knowledge with their previous experiences (Henson, 2003). In the light of this information, it is concluded that the school practices a LCCA.

### **Gender-neutral Pedagogy Practices**

At first glance, there does not seem to be any practices in Egalia that is different from practices of other schools in Sweden which provide LCCA (Scott, 2017). Nevertheless, the most significant difference that distinguishes Egalia from other schools is the gender-neutral pedagogy (GNP) that it adopts. GNP posits that the society will become more equal by treating everybody in the same way regardless of their sex. This pedagogical approach opposes the idea that character traits, emotions, interests, and wishes change based on sex. GNP requires a democratic education environment that focuses on accommodating all individuals’ feelings (Leach, 2016; Lind-Valdan, 2014). Rajalin’s statement with regards to GNP is as following (Lind-Valdan, 2014, p. 227):

- *“We don’t want to deny the biological sex. It is the gender we are working with. And the most important part is how adults relate to the children. Research shows that gender determines how children are approached - already as a crying baby. – We think we are free, but whenever we make suggestions it is almost always something within the gender category. And most people abide by the gender roles they have been assigned [...] We believe that everyone should grow up to be as they want.”*

There is a relationship between gender and physical environment. Norms, stereotypes, and expectations regarding gender are reflected through objects in a place in addition to the layout and design of the place. The language used in order to talk about the physical world affects how an individual within a certain environment views that particular environment and whether they feel that they belong to that particular environment. This language, in addition to the language conveyed through the environment itself, has the potential to emphasize or nullify gender discrimination and hierarchy (Lynch, 2016). Therefore, by dismantling normative sex categories, GNP aims to combat gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles (Lind-Valdan, 2014). The GNP practiced in Egalia has a number of effects in activities, emotions, character traits, language, educational materials, clothes, the attitudes and behaviours of the staff in the school, and school-parent relationships. GNP’s effects in these areas are further explained in the sub-categories below.

### Activities

Whilst carrying out activities that are compatible with the national education strategy, Egalia pays special attention to gender equality. Students in the school are encouraged to try out activities that do not suit traditional gender roles. For example, whilst not all girls are expected to enjoy playing football, necessary conditions are arranged to allow girls to try football (Rajalin, 2016). Rajalin explains (Nielsen, 2011b as cited in Sjørup, 2013, p. 35):

- *“It is difficult for a boy to have ballet as his main interest. It is difficult for a girl to choose a sport where your muscles grow extensively. We limit the lives of people by saying things are girlish or boyish. We enhance the children's feeling of ‘me’ or ‘I’ by working with genuspedagogy. I am me, and I am alright as I am.... It is okay that we are different... We are also a part of the breaking down of fixed roles of gender when it comes to choosing an education, which will bring dynamics to the different professions.”*

Teachers do not try to categorise children based on their sex or they do not deter children from doing certain activities. Girls who want to play house or boys who want to play with blocks are not deterred from completing those activities. Their weekly schedule includes activities ranging from dance and movement to drama, creativity, language, and mathematics. Stories, songs, and dramas in such activities include examples from different family types and their life styles (Scott, 2017; Tagliabue, 2012). Abend's observation of a girl playing in the sandbox is as following:

- *“[A] 5-year-old girl played in a sandbox. The box contained more mud than sand, and as she whacked at it with a plastic shovel, globs of dirt stained her pink dress [...] No teacher chastised her, and certainly, no one told her that girls aren't supposed to play like that.”*

### Emotions

What makes Egalia unique is that it does not only treat children equally in terms of teaching/learning opportunities, access to physical spaces and teachers, but it also ensures that students experience their emotions equally. Egalia abstains from limiting children not only from gender stereotypes but from all kinds of stereotypes (race, religion, physical appearance, and so on). Experiencing emotions such as happiness, curiosity, anger, disappointment, despair, and sadness is not restricted to a certain sex (Lind-Valdan, 2014). Rajalin's (2016, 10.05- 12.31) views on categorising emotions are as following:

- *“We know that people all over the world got the same emotion system. We need emotions to handle life and relations. But even emotions we divide into groups. We more often say about baby girls if they just are two, three weeks old and scream.... they want to eat then we more often use words like right nerd shy and emotional and for boys we are more often saying oh he's so angry, frustrated and what can this lead to in life? We think that boys learn to be called frustrated and they get to know about anger and girls train to be more emotional to do.*

In Egalia, it is believed that emotions do not have sex and all children have the right to freely experience their feelings and Egalia strives to provide equal opportunities to children to live all kinds of feelings. For example, a crying boy does not hear statements such as “You should be strong, enough, stop crying!”. Regardless of their sex, students are counselled to allow them to recognize, express, and regulate their emotions. Just like girls, boys are also provided with the same opportunities to express their feelings when they get hurt, for example, whilst playing and teachers try to comfort boys and girls in the same manner (Tagliabue, 2012). The school has a number of dolls (EQ dolls) designed to teach feelings. Each doll reflects a different emotion. For example, one of them smiles and another frowns. With the exception of their Scandinavian hats,

all the dolls are completely naked. The aim of this is to show that genders do not have a particular sex (Abend, 2013).

### *Character Traits*

Different standards are used to interpret boys' and girls' character traits. Those standards can cause the same behaviour to be interpreted differently based on whether it is a man or a woman who displays the behaviour. Moreover, this situation is rarely realized by adults (Nielsen, 2003 as cited in Sjørup, 2013). For example, when a girl is observed to be shy, this situation is attributed to sex and it does not raise any concerns. However, when a boy is observed to be shy, it is considered that something is wrong. Nielsen defines this double standard as "gender attribute". In gender attribute, the two sexes are considered as the opposite of each other. It is considered that a quality attributed to one of the sexes is the opposite of the other sex. A hierarchy is built as a result of this differentiation and while the qualities attributed to males are considered as the norm, the qualities attributed to females are considered as the "other" (Sjørup, 2013). Because of the effects of the gender attribute, GNP considers that the qualities used to describe individuals also reflect the expectations from them. In order not to reflect society's expectations, Egalia abstains from categorising and/or labelling children through such standards. Rajalin's (2016, 13:29-14:36) explanations with regards to this are as following:

- *"We give expectations on what we want from them, what we think about them, what we believe in them. we mean that all human beings have to train all these positions to have in different situations in life to end to be able to and feel free to be in different situation. So what we do in our school is to not put labels on the shield Rabia we don't say we avoid to say for example three - she's so beautiful or cute or helpful or Mohammed he's so wild and tough."*

Egalia abstains from stereotyping children or adults according to their sex, age, ethnicity, or cloth preferences. For example, it is not assumed that girls are calm, cute, and affectionate; or boys are wild, naughty, and furious. It is believed that each individual is unique in terms of their emotions and expressions (Egalia, 2018).

### *Language*

GNP has a gender-neutral language extension. In their study investigating the relationship between objects and grammatical gender, Philips and Boroditsky (2003) have found that the grammatical gender attributed to an object can affect individuals' perceptions with regards to the similarities between human beings and objects. The way an individual perceives an object is affected by the pronoun it is linked to. As such, Egalia also considers that grammatical gender affects the way children think. The school tries to abolish gender roles by ignoring grammatical gender in language. The school does not use terms such as "boys", "girls", "women", or "men". Members of staff use terms such as "friends", "children", the name of the group students are part of, or students' names in order to address them. The reason for this is to create an inclusive affective connection for children (Egalia, 2018; Lind-Valdan, 2014; Sjørup, 2013). In relation to this, Rajalin highlights (Nielsen, 2011b as cited in Sjørup, 2013, p.4):

- *"It is not because they are wrong or dirty words. But we as adults are full of facts, experiences and information that is adherent. In order to break this and think freely, we change the words. If we need a group designation we say 'friends' and 'children'. Are there any savvy girls, who want to help in the kitchen? It is a way to exclude."*

Statements such as “Girls, sit down!”, “Jack, help the boys!”, “Come on boys, let’s go and play football” are not used in Egalia. The reason for this is not to cause children from the opposite gender to feel excluded. The word “friend” is frequently used within the school in order to allow children to feel equal to their counterparts and since it is more inclusive. Another reason why that word is used is that the school wants children to see each other as friends (Hebblethwaite, 2011; Leach, 2016; Shutts et al., 2017). Students’ statements are corrected in cases where their speech includes stereotypes or traditional gender roles. In addition to this, if a child makes a statement such as “Girls cannot play football, football is a game played by boys.” then the teacher asks a number of open-ended questions to the child in order to understand why the child thinks in that particular way (Leach, 2016).

“He” and “she” which include grammatical gender are replaced by “hen” which is used to represent the third-person pronoun (Weller, 2015). After the latest revisions to the Discrimination Act, “opposite- gender identity and expression” has been introduced and accepted as the foundation of discrimination. Therefore, the use of “hen” has been legalised (Lind-Valdan, 2014). In relation to the use of the “hen” pronoun, Wikström, the school coordinator, explains (Leach, 2016):

- *“For example, if a firefighter is coming in and we don’t know if they are a man or woman we would call them ‘hen’,” says Wikström. “We assume it’s a ‘he’ because we get that image in our head.” They also use “hen” in songs where they’ve noticed that more assertive or aggressive animals tend to be called “he” and sweeter ones “she”. Why is that? In Egalia, “hen” is used for such instances.”*

### *Educational Materials*

The educational materials used in Egalia are organized in a way that reflects gender equality (Lind-Valdan, 2014). Just like any other pre-school, it is possible to see toys such as dolls, tractor, and sandbox in Egalia. However, in Egalia, there is not any corner labelled as “block corner” that includes building blocks, “play house corner” that includes dolls, or “car corner” that includes cars. As part of the GNP, all toys and materials are mixed. The reason for that is to allow boys and girls to play together (Hebblethwaite, 2011; Leach, 2016; Scott, 2017).

The school strives to create as much variety and diversity as possible in the materials used. There are both black and white, both male and female dolls in the school. In addition to books that include gender stereotypes such as “Cinderella” and “Snow White”, the school includes books that are about single-parent or homosexual families as well as adopted children in its library. The inclusion of different family models in the books is significant. This practice is considered as an important standard to explain the structure of today’s society. The purpose of this practice is to abolish traditions and taboos and allow children to realize different sexual identities. The school mostly prefers materials that include roles, plays, or characters that challenge stereotypes. For example, one of those materials is “Pippi Longstocking”. Pippi Longstocking is a series of books about an adventurous girl who is curious to learn and try new things (Rajalin, 2016; Tagliabue, 2012; Wikström, 2015). It is important to have a gender balance in educational materials. Therefore, for example, if leadership is to be discussed then examples which include both boys and girls as leaders should be presented.

In cases where the educational materials used in the school include gender stereotypes, the related part of the material is either changed or skipped. For example, whilst reading a fairy tale, the teacher can either change the part where the prince saves the princess into princess saves the prince or the teacher skips that part (Egalia, 2018; Scott, 2017; Shutts et al., 2017).

In Egalia, children can play with whichever toy they want to play with. If they prefer, boys can play with cars and girls with dolls. Under no circumstance, the materials are taken out of the teaching environment but rather new ones are added on a regular basis (Wikström, 2015). Rather than removing the traditional toys, the GNP embraces the idea of adding new toys next to the traditional ones.

### *Clothes*

In general, the school does not allow commenting on clothes that are associated with certain sex. For example, girls do not receive comments such as “What a beautiful dress you have!” or boys do not receive comments such as “You look sturdy in your new t-shirt.”. Instead, questions such as “Do you like your t-shirt?”, “Do you feel happy in your clothes?” are directed to the children. The aim of this is to prevent reinforcement of stereotypes (Rajalin, 2016; Shutts et al., 2017). The school does not interfere with the way families dress their children. Children can wear the clothes they like whenever they want. Gender pedagogues and teachers try to be role models with their cloth preferences and body language. Boys in Egalia, if they want, are free to wear a dress (Hebblethwaite, 2011). Rajalin, explains (Hebblethwaite, 2011):

- *“It is all about giving children a wider choice, and not limiting them to social expectations based on gender.”*

### **Gender Pedagogues**

Sweden has trained gender pedagogues in order to combat gender discrimination (Sandström et al., 2013). One of the main duties of gender pedagogues is to identify staff’s perceptions of gender and observe their behaviour. In order to do this, the gender pedagogues in Egalia have recorded members of staff for a day and then watched the recordings with them. The most significant discrimination has been observed in teachers’ behaviours. It has been observed that teachers used different tones of voice while talking to boys and girls. In addition, teachers scolded girls who displayed rude behaviours; however, when it was boys who repeated a similar action, teachers were more tolerant. Similarly, it has been observed that while teachers tried to comfort a crying girl, they tried to avoid a crying boy. Rajalin stated that “[a]fter we had been filming and observing each other, we understood that it's not the children we have to change, it's ourselves” (Scott, 2017). After watching the recording, gender pedagogues interviewed teachers and directed questions such as “Why do we treat children differently?”, “What can we change?”, “Why is it important that we change this?” (Lind-Valdan, 2014, p. 226). Other duties of gender pedagogues include ensuring that teachers use a language that is sensitive to gender equality and supporting children’s development of behaviours, discourse, and attitudes that are sensitive to gender equality.



## Teachers' Roles

Egalia has the principle of recruiting individuals with different backgrounds (i.e. a Swedish female teacher who is in her 20s and has recently graduated, and a 50-year old male who has Iranian roots). 40 % of the staff are male (Leach, 2016) and the staff have devoted themselves to ensure gender equality. Emelie, who is 27 years old and has recently completed her teacher training, explains (Hebblethwaite, 2011):

- *"I want to change things in society. When we are born in this society, people have different expectations on us depending if we are a boy or a girl. It limits children."*

Teachers' roles in order to provide gender equality are as following (Egalia, 2018; Shutts et al., 2017; Tagliabau, 2012; Wikström, 2015): (i) Purifying the language they use from sexism and grammatical gender, (ii) encouraging children to play and work together, (iii) selecting songs or stories which challenge or do not include gender stereotypes or roles, (iv) being a role model who is sensitive to gender equality through their attitudes, discourse, and behaviours, (v) talking to children about gender issues and asking them questions that prompt them to think about those issues.

## School-Parent Relationship

Each term teachers meet parents individually to talk about their children's development. Teachers and parents exchange information with regards to how the child's development and learning continue in and out of the school. Egalia also has a parents' council in which all parents can participate. The council meets at least once every term and allows parents the opportunity to discuss the activities carried out in the school. Additionally, every spring, Stockholm City Council administers a questionnaire to all parents whose children are registered to pre-school. The results of that questionnaire are effective in shaping the school's strategy (Egalia, 2018).

The reason for why families prefer Egalia is the GNP it adopts and its libertarian nature (Hebblethwaite, 2011; Leach, 2016; Lind-Valdan, 2014; Tagliabue, 2012). For example, a metal designer mother and a dancer father decided to send their children to Egalia. The mother explained that they had to continuously tackle stereotypes because of the jobs she and, especially, her husband had chosen. The parents stated that they wanted to send their children to Egalia in order to allow them to grow up free from limitations and social expectations (Hebblethwaite, 2011).

## Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendations

When the research results are examined that the educational objectives in Egalia are raising children free from gender expectations, creating and practicing a pedagogy that focuses on the personal identity of children and that is completely based on equality, and teaching the principles of democracy. The school's philosophical principles include the following: skills do not change based on sex; differences are power; tendencies do not change based on sex, age, or ethnicity; and sex does not reflect who the individual is. Similarly, the educational principles adopted by the school include: being integrated into life, accepting differences, providing a choice, including affective education, creating a rich learning environment, ensuring trust, ensuring freedom, providing encouragement, and ensuring that children are active. The school adopts a



learner-centred teaching approach. Egalia practices a gender-neutral pedagogy and this pedagogy has effects on activities, emotions, character traits, language, educational materials, clothes, staff's attitudes and behaviours, and the relationship between the school and parents. Educational activities provide children with an opportunity to try new things and allow children to experience their feelings freely. It is believed that each individual is special and unique and the language used in the school does not include sexist language or grammatical gender. In the interview by Leach (2016), according to neuroscientist Daniel Glaser, language plays a significant role in developing behaviour. Even the slightest detail in the language can have a distinct effect. Therefore, language has the potential to influence children's perceptions (Leach, 2016). There is not a placing order for the educational materials used in Egalia, those materials include variety and diversity, and the school allows presentations of different family models in their materials. Moreover, children's wishes are taken into consideration in the selection of those materials. The school does not interfere with families and children's choice of clothing and children are free to wear the clothes they want to wear. Gender pedagogues, who aim to combat gender discrimination, are recruited in Egalia. The primary duty of those pedagogues is to support teachers' and students' discourse, behaviours, and attitudes that are sensitive to gender equality. In terms of recruitment policies, the school endeavours to recruit members of staff with different backgrounds and prioritises recruitment of male staff. It is believed that recruiting more numbers of male staff will increase the level of gender equality. It is argued that children need male role models as much as female ones (Bayne, 2009). Teachers' roles in Egalia include: Using a language sensitive to gender; encouraging students to play together; challenging gender roles and stereotypes; and talking to children about gender issues. The analysis of the relationship between the school and parents showed that the school held development evaluation meetings for parents to discuss their children's development and there was a parent council that aimed to negotiate the nature of activities held within the school. The reasons why parents prefer Egalia include the GNP practiced in the school and the democratic nature of the school.

The results of the present investigation bring up the questions of what the effects of the education based on the gender-neutral pedagogy practiced in Egalia would be in the short and long term. Although there is still a need for more time to find out the long term effects of it, the study conducted by Shutts et al. (2017) presents the short term effects of the GNP practiced in Egalia. Shutts et al.'s (2017) findings revealed that children in Egalia can better communicate with the opposite sex and are less likely to adopt stereotypes when compared to their counterparts in other schools. GNP decreases children's gender considerations.

Experts have different views on the pedagogy practiced in Egalia. While there are researchers who support the idea that GNP has a substantial effect on combatting gender roles and stereotypes, there are also researchers who claim that the efforts to abolish gender differences are aimed to brainwash children; boys are limited and prevented from doing activities peculiar to their sex; boys are raised like girls and girls are raised like boys; children are encouraged to become homosexual; the aim of this pedagogy is to reverse the gender hierarchy; biological differences are ignored; gender equality has become an obsession; abolishment of gender roles prevents children from preparing for real life; and children are isolated from the real world (Euronews, 2013; Hebblethwaite, 2011; Lind-Valdan, 2014; Mallozzi & Galman, 2012; VICE, 2017). Rajalin, nevertheless, asserts that those critiques have been misguided and those who make the critiques do not really understand what is aimed to be achieved in the school (Scott, 2017). In spite of all the negative critiques, there is a long waiting list of parents who want to register their children to Egalia (Hebblethwaite, 2011). The Södermalm district considers and

supports Egalia as a role model for realizing the judicial objectives aimed to combat gender roles and stereotypes and as a source for informing and training those working in pre-schools in the district about GNP (Lind-Valdan, 2014). Furthermore, Egalia has become a source of inspiration for other schools (ibid.).

Evaluating the question of whether the pedagogy practiced in Egalia can be implemented in another country, it can be said that Sweden is in the leading position in policies and practices regarding gender equality. Therefore, Swedish society's readiness to adopt this pedagogy can be considered to be higher in comparison to other countries. Nevertheless, societies who are relatively in a lower place compared to Sweden can still be advised to adapt the GNP practiced in Egalia.

According to the results of 'The Global Gender Gap Report 2018' conducted by the World Economic Forum, Turkey ranked as 130th in 149 countries while Sweden is in the 3rd place. (World Economic Forum, 2018). This situation shows that Turkey is located in a more negative position with respect to Sweden in terms of gender equality. Turkey needs the policies and practices to ensure gender equality. However, even practices regarding gender equality that existed in the past are terminated. The project 'Promotion of Gender Equality in Education' was conducted and completed in the years 2014-2016 by Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education (MoNE). Projects aimed at achieving gender equality in schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education has been suspended (MoNE, 2019). A similar situation is observed in the decision of Council of Higher Education (CHE). In 2016, CHE published 'Attitude Note on Gender Equality' and it stated that lectures, activities and projects on gender issues should be carried out in universities (CHE, 2016). However, CHE abolished the attitude note on the grounds that the concept of gender equality leads to "different perceptions and is not compatible with our social values and assumptions and is not accepted in society in 2019 (Turkish Medical Association, 2019). Although the implementation of the 'gender-neutral pedagogy' model in public schools does not seem possible in the current education policies due to the lack of ongoing projects aimed at achieving gender equality, it may be suggested to integrate the various dimensions of the model into the existing education processes.

There is need for gender equality in institutions at all levels of education in Turkey (Acar-Erdol, 2018; Acar-Erdol & Gözütok, 2017; Alptekin, 2014; Engin-Demir, Kılıç, Çalışkan, Hanbay-Çakır, Güney-Karaman & Özbek, 2016; Esen, 2013; Sayılan & Özkazanç, 2002). In the research studies conducted in the field of preschool education, it was observed that children in this period make their play, toys, clothes and color choices according to gender preferences, that they have gender stereotypes, and that women expressed their characteristics more negatively and generally tended to play with their fellow (Aydilek-Çiftçi, 2011; Şıvgın, 2015; Yağan-Güder, 2014; Yağan-Güder & Alabay, 2016). It was found out that gender stereotypes exist in the stories, fables and story books prepared for the preschool period, that women and men are presented in accordance with gender roles and that sexist language is used in the books (Çatalcalı-Soyer, 2009; Gündüz-Şentürk, 2015; Gürşimsek & Günay, 2005; Kaynak & Aktaş, 2017; Kösel, 2009). It has been determined that the preference of the play centers in the school and the time spent in these centers vary according to the gender of the child (Ramazan, Arslan-Çiftçi & Tezel, 2018). The gender-neutral pedagogy model, which aims to ensure gender equality in the areas of need, can be applied to the roles and training of teachers, personnel policy, reflection of the pedagogy on activities, emotions, character traits, language, educational materials and clothes.

Gender pedagogue works at the Egalia school where gender-neutral pedagogy is applied. After giving the necessary training (gender education; education on different family types and structures such as rainbow family; training on rights and education of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender individuals) to the psychological counselors of the kindergartens in Turkey, it may be suggested that they take on the roles and responsibilities of the gender pedagogue.

The results of the present investigation can be used to create a GNP model whose principles are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

*Gender-Neutral Pedagogy Model*

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Effects of the pedagogy on activities</b>
Teaching that everyone has the same rights	Trying out new things
Raising children free of expectations based on their sex	Prioritising children's preferences
Raising children as world citizens	<b>Effects of the pedagogy on emotions</b>
Practicing a pedagogy that is focused on personal identity	Experiencing emotions freely thanks to equal opportunities
Teaching the principles of democracy	Talking about feelings
Preparing the children for a changing world	Regulating emotions
<b>Philosophy</b>	<b>Effects of the pedagogy on character traits</b>
Equalitarian values	Each child is special and unique
Access opportunity for everything in life	Children cannot be restricted to certain traits
<b>Philosophical principles</b>	<b>Effects of the pedagogy on language</b>
Skills do not change based on sex	Not allowing sexism
Sex does not reflect who the individual is	Not using grammatical gender
Emotions do not have sex	Not using terms such as women, men, girls, or boys
Differences are power	Creating an inclusive connection
Tendencies do not change based on sex, age, or ethnicity	<b>Effects of the pedagogy on educational materials</b>
<b>Educational Principles</b>	Not categorizing the materials
Being integrated into life	Including variety and diversity
Accepting differences	Embracing different family models
Providing a choice	Achieving a gender balance
Including affective education	Being used in line with children's requests
Creating a rich learning environment	Changing or taking out the sexist language in the materials
Ensuring trust	Changing or taking out traditional gender roles from the materials
Providing freedom	Not removing the materials from the teaching environment and adding new ones
Providing encouragement	
Ensuring that the children are active	
<b>The practiced teaching approach</b>	<b>Effects of the pedagogy on clothes</b>
Learner-centred	Not commenting on appearances
<b>Characteristics of the teaching approach</b>	Not interfering with cloth choices of families
Focus on personal identity	Not interfering with cloth choices of families
Based on equality	Allowing children freedom in selecting clothes to wear
Requiring a democratic learning environment	
<b>Staff policy</b>	Staff becoming a role model with their cloth preferences
Hire members of staff who have different backgrounds	
Prioritise hiring male members of staff	<b>Gender pedagogue</b>
<b>Teachers' roles</b>	Combatting gender discrimination
Using a language sensitive to gender	Supporting attitudes, discourse, and behaviours that are sensitive to gender equality
Encouraging students to play together	
Being a role model	
Challenging gender roles and stereotypes	<b>School-parent relationship</b>
Talking to children about gender issues	Development evaluation meetings
	Parent council: negotiation of school activities
	Listening to parents' voice in creating the school's strategy

Research studies can be conducted on the application of the gender-neutral pedagogy in different schools and the effects of this pedagogy can be investigated.

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