



Malmö Högskola

Lärarutbildningen

Kultur, Språk och Medier

Examensarbete

15 högskolepoäng

English in single-sex classrooms

English teachers' considerations when selecting texts for single-sex classes

Engelska i enkönade klassrum

Engelsklärares överväganden när de väljer ut texter för enkönade klasser

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Lärarexamen 270 hp
Engelska och lärande
2008-12-17

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to find out whether some teachers at the vocational upper secondary schools where we have had our teaching practice are aware of the gender perspective and if/how they implement it in their teaching. The focus of the investigation is to find out to what extent the teachers in question take gender into account when they select texts for their single-sex classes. The aim was to learn about the teachers' thoughts and views on gender issues as well as learning more about how to work gender consciously in the classroom. Qualitative interviews with seven upper secondary teachers were carried out. The semi-structured interviews we conducted contained guiding questions concerning gender, single-sex classes, material used for teaching. All the interviewed teachers think that gender is a very important question both in school and in society. The majority of the participating teachers do adjust their material with gender as a factor according to the sex of the majority of the class. The teachers emphasized that they also take other factors into account when selecting texts; an important one is the pupils' course of study and interests.

Key words: gender, sex, reading, single-sex classes, texts, vocational upper secondary school, gender and education, equality, boys and girls.

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1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of our choice of topic, the purpose of this dissertation and the research questions.

1.1 Background

At upper secondary school the paths for adolescents to choose between are often seen as typically female or male courses to take. It is obvious for everyone that the amount of female pupils deciding to study to become plumbers or truck drivers are in minority, whereas in programmes heading for a future profession as a child minder the majority of the pupils are female. This leads to many classes consisting if not only of one sex, at least of a majority of one sex. We ask ourselves the question why this is the case in our “century of equality” but it leaves for interesting thoughts and discussions. Whether you teach a class where one sex is in majority or you teach a mixed class, gender issues play an important role. We believe that the way you handle gender issues (even if you do not handle them) affects the pupils you teach. Moreover, research into the subject shows that there is an imbalance in the equality in Swedish schools, both in the way teachers address their pupils and in the way they treat them and expect them to behave which has been stated by Björnsson (2005) and Öhrn (2002). However they also claim that a change has taken place and female students increasingly take up more “space”.

We are really interested in learning more about whether we as teachers can make the subject of English more interesting and relevant to our pupils by sometimes introducing texts and exercises, which are adapted according to gender in classes consisting mainly of one sex. We believe that using a typical “boy” or “girl” text in a mixed class has benefits as a means to raise discussions about gender differences and to make them aware of gender issues. Above all this might also make the pupils understand and accept “the other side of the story”. Tolerance between pupils is important and is needed for change to happen.

It is important to remember that although you can divide the sexes biologically into two groups these are not homogenous in any other way. Even though we believe that gender is an important factor to take into consideration, we also believe that factors such as ethnicity, social background, religious and political views are important for the pupils' personality, interests and behaviour and they all play a role in the educational setting. It can come as no surprise that the ages when pupils attend upper secondary school are years of confusion and years when a foundation built for what they will become as grown ups. It is our responsibility as teachers to make sure that they become secure in themselves and in their surroundings, and to ensure this we need to be aware of what we can do when it comes to dealing with these issues.

It is extremely important to mention that all girls are not the same and that all boys are not the same. Of course there are huge variations within the same sex. In this dissertation we talk about girls as a group and boys as a group, but we are aware that what is written about girls and boys respectively in this dissertation does not apply to everyone.

We are aware that our topic area is of a normative nature and that this is a bit problematic for our results. The curriculum for the non-compulsory school (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 1994) clearly states that no distinction should be made between girls and boys when it comes to equal opportunities and conditions. Equality between women and men is mentioned as one of the basic values and is just as important as individual freedom and integrity. Further, school should promote equal rights and opportunities for men and women and pupils should be encouraged to develop their interests without prejudice as to gender differences. No one should be discriminated at school based on gender. These guidelines must be taken into account by all teachers, and therefore our informants would break against the national curriculum if they were not aware of these matters and did not work according to the steering documents. This of course has implications for our results, as the teachers have to take gender into account when teaching and cannot give us any other answer than that they do teach from a gender perspective. However, we focus on learning more about whether there are different ways in how to work gender consciously and what strategies our specific informants use and we are interested in getting examples of how they work in the classroom. We also focus on to find out to what extent the teachers' choices of texts has anything to do with the sex of the majority of the class they are going to teach.

1.2 Purpose

A great deal of our teaching at our partner schools has taken place in classes where one sex is in the only one or in clear majority. This fact has raised our curiosity: is teaching most advantageous when the texts and exercises are adapted to the sex of the majority of the class, and how this is accomplished. We wish to learn more about the pros and cons of gender adapted teaching and also learn more about views and attitudes of experienced teachers towards using gender as a factor when deciding what materials to use and how to use them. We want to increase our knowledge of what significance gender/sex has in English education and we want to become more aware of our own attitudes towards it. Every single pupil should get the same opportunity to develop her/his learning without being labelled and handled solely due to prejudices about their gender and the stereotypical roles of that gender. We hope that the result of our investigation will give us knowledge and inspiration how to work actively with gender issues in our everyday teaching. The purpose of our investigation is also to find out whether the teachers at our partner schools are aware of the gender perspective and how they implement it in their teaching, particularly in single-sex classes. From the experience of our teaching practice we have the experience that gender issues are very important to some teachers, whereas other teachers do not seem to focus on them very much. We have experienced that the teachers of the programme-specific subjects at the vocational programmes are the least interested in these issues.

1.3 Questions

The questions that we investigate are the following:

- What are some English teachers' perceptions of how they work gender consciously in the classroom?
- To what extent do the English teachers in question perceive that they take gender into account when they select texts for a single sex classroom?

2 Theory and terminology

Several theories explain gender development, and these theories differ in several aspects. Understanding the most common gender theories is useful when one is investigating gender issues. Within feminist theory we can find several different perspectives as well. When one talks about gender and gender issues, there are several terms that need to be clarified and distinguished.

In this chapter the theories and terms that are most important for our investigation are presented and explained.

2.1 Biological determinism

According to Measor and Sikes (1992), the theory of biological determinism claims that most differences between women and men are results of biological factors such as chromosomes and hormones. Biological determinism theorists claim that the chromosomal inheritance is responsible for the development of gender identity and sex differences in cognitive skills and personality. Measor and Sikes (1992) point out that biological determinism has no good answer to the question why there are historical and geographical variations in the position of both sexes. What it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man differ a lot across societies. If the distinction between women and men was only caused by biology, it would only be possible to find one universal cultural form for each sex.

2.2 Psychoanalytic theory

Measor and Sikes (1992) explain that the field of psychoanalytic theories is huge, but that they all have their roots in the work of Freud. These theories deal with the early years of life and with the intense feelings and conflicts that confront the growing child. The starting point is the child's very strong bond to the mother. This bond is of great importance because of the long period of time that the child is dependent upon its parents. As the child grows, it has to

break this attachment and establish itself as separate. Measor and Sikes (1992) further explain that theorists within this framework have different views of the separation process, but most agree that it is different for girls and boys. Freud argued that the process where the boy gives up his first love, his mother, is difficult and painful and as a result, boys learn to control their desires and impulses and therefore develop a social conscience. According to Freud, girls never go through this process and are seen as failing to mature fully in a psychological sense. Freud has been accused of having a deficit view of women.

2.3 Gender socialisation

According to Measor and Sikes (1992), the feminist argument emphasises early socialisation rather than biological inheritance as responsible for gender differences. Gender socialisation theory claims that the early socialisation provides role-models for sex-appropriate behaviour. Measor and Sikes claim that in almost every society there is a pattern of socialisation, which encourages boys to become masculine and girls to become feminine. Consequently, boys and girls learn to be either feminine or masculine through the different social expectations from family and other people around them.

2.4 Feminist theory

Measor and Sikes (1992) mention liberal, socialist and radical feminist theories as the three most common feminist theories. What all three theories have in common is that they think that gender has a central role in how the society works.

Bartkowski & Kolmar (2005) claim that the basic issue in feminist theory is that of women's inequality and domination by men. Feminist theory also deals with the issue of gender asymmetry, i.e. that women and things associated with women are of lesser value than men and things associated with men. Feminist theories examine and try to explain the causes and conditions where men are more powerful and men's production, ideas, and activities are regarded higher in value than women's.

As mentioned above, there are different kinds of feminist theories. According to Eisenstein (2001), this is not the same as saying that feminism has a problematic theoretical status. Instead, it means that there are many different ways in which one can theorize the key institutions and relations of patriarchy.

Eisenstein (2001) claims that feminist theory has always had to struggle with the “problem” of difference, particularly women's supposed difference from men. Feminist theory focuses on women as homogeneous, as if all women were alike, and as if they were all different from men in the same way. However, Eisenstein (2001) stresses that liberal feminism means that women are not different from men, that they are the same, or more similar than different.

2.5 Feminist theory and education

The three most common feminist theories: liberal, socialist and radical all have ideas and aims concerning feminist theory and education. According to Sandra Acker (1987), the main aim for liberal feminists is to secure equal opportunities for the sexes. Liberal feminists in education also focus on socialisation, sex roles and sex stereotyping. “Girls (and boys) are thought to be socialized (by the family, the school, the media) into traditional attitudes and orientations which limit their futures unnecessarily to sex-stereotyped occupational and family roles. At the same time, socialization encourages patterns of interpersonal relationships between the sexes which disadvantage females” (Acker, 1987, p. 423-424).

According to Acker (1987) the key issue for socialist feminists concerned with gender is how education is related to the reproduction of gender divisions within capitalism. “Other socialist-feminist analyses have explored the links between school and motherhood ... Schools, especially in situations of declining resources and in socially advantaged areas, rely on unpaid help from mothers (some of whom are themselves are trained teachers) ranging from repairing books to assisting with classroom routines ... So schools make use of, and perpetuate, a sexual division of labour in the home” (Acker, 1987, p. 426-427).

“Radical feminists want to see a fundamental change in the social structure, one which will eliminate male dominance and patriarchal structures (Acker, 1987, p. 428). “The goal of a

feminist education is not equality in knowledge, power and wealth, but the abolition of gender as an oppressive cultural reality” (O’Brien quoted in Acker, 1987, p. 429).

2.6 Definition of sex and gender

It is very important to explain the difference between sex and gender, as these two terms are often confused and used interchangeably.

Wharton (2005) has experienced that when people talk about men and women, they often use the term ‘sex’, which implies that men and women belong to different categories. However, Wharton (2005) stresses the fact that human males and females share many characteristics, especially biological ones. For instance, both males and females have 23 pairs of chromosomes. In other respects, however, male and female bodies differ. Examples of such characteristics are for instance internal and external sexual structures, hormonal production and chromosomal differences. These characteristics signify *sex*. Consequently, the term *sex* refers to the *biological* distinction of male and female.

According to Tallberg Broman (2002) the concept of *gender* was first used within the Anglo-Saxon women’s research in the 1970s. In comparison to the term *sex*, *gender* refers to the social, and not the biological, differences between women and men, i.e. *gender* is the *social constructed* *sex*. Tallberg Broman (2002) argues that these social differences are results of upbringing, ideas and constructions. *Gender* is contextual, i.e., it varies widely among different societies and cultures and changes over time. The concept of *gender* is also a question of power structures, as patterns of dominance and subordinate are also included in this term.

2.7 Gender roles

The Encyclopedia of Social Psychology explains the term *gender roles* as the social expectations about the typical and appropriate behaviour of men and women. The female gender role normally includes the expectation that women and girls show communal traits and

behaviours like expressivity and emotional sensitivity. On the contrary, the male gender role includes the expectation that boys and men show more energetic traits and behaviours like independence and self-confidence. The term gender role also includes the expectations about things such as interests, hobbies and choice of profession. Although some variability of beliefs about what is male and what is female exists worldwide, people from different cultures more or less agree about what men and women are like. It is a general opinion that women have a tendency to be more communal than men, and that men have a tendency to be more energetic than women.

2.8 Gender equality

Nationalencyklopedin explains that *gender equality*¹ means that women and men have the same rights, duties and opportunities within all essential areas in life. Gender equality presupposes an even division of power and influence and the same opportunity for women and men to become economically independent. The term also refers to women and men having the same access to education and the same opportunity to develop personal interests and talents and that women and men should share the responsibility for home and children. There is a difference in *formal* equality and *actual* equality. In Sweden, we have formal equality, i.e. there are no laws or regulations that hinder equality. However, the work for actual equality is still going on, i.e. that women and men should have the same conditions in reality.

2.9 Gender equity

While gender equality means that women and men are treated the same, the term *gender equity* means to treat men and women fairly by considering differences. Browne (2004) emphasizes that gender is linked to all aspects of ourselves, such as ethnicity, social class and language background. Each person's life experience is unique. "Gender equity approaches, therefore, are not based on the assumption that certain groups of children can be viewed as homogenous categories (e.g. 'girls' and 'boys') but instead acknowledge and take account of

¹ "Jämställdhet" in Swedish.

the existence of these differences in order to challenge the existing inequitable status quo. Equal opportunities, however, often fail to acknowledge children's diverse life experiences, and the prejudices and discriminatory practices individuals need to negotiate on a day-to-day basis are rendered invisible. Gender equity emphasizes fairness in both process and outcome" (Browne, 2004, p. 2).

2.10 Gender stereotypes

The Encyclopedia of Organization Studies explains that masculinity and femininity are constructed as opposites. The one is what the other is not, and the resulting gender order often reinforces male superiority. A survey made in 1981 in the United States showed that what people perceive as masculine are for instance to be individualistic, dominant, aggressive, competitive, and ambitious. Femininity was explained with characteristics such as being loyal, gentle, shy, affectionate, sympathetic, understanding, compassionate, warm and tender. This is what the Encyclopedia calls examples of *gender stereotypes*. Girls and boys learn how they and the other sex are supposed to be, they try to live up to the norm in their thoughts and they expect others to do the same.

With this brief overview of gender theory, feminist theory, feminist theory and education and gender terminology we want to make our standpoint clear: we believe that there is still a lot to work on regarding men's and women's equal opportunities in society. We as teachers have a responsibility to actively work to reduce these differences and especially in school, where young people, girls and boys, from different backgrounds meet and where we as teachers can work to counteract gender stereotypes and groupings.

As a part of our study we are interested in our interviewees' personal views on and interest in gender issues and if/how their attitudes towards gender and gender equality influence them in their teaching.

3 Previous research

This section is a summary of some of the research that has already been carried out in the area of gender and education. In this chapter we will also describe what the national curriculum says about gender and education.

3.1 Gender and education

Gender and education has been a topic for debate in school as well as in the media during the last decades. According to Björnsson (2005), there are established views on gender differences in school. One of those is the view of boys dominating the classroom and the girls and the teachers letting them do so. A traditional view has been that the teacher gives boys more attention and that girls often have to act as “teacher assistants”. Both Björnsson (2005) and Öhrn (2002) claim that these traditional gender patterns have changed a lot over the past few years and that the results of research made in the 1970s and the 1980s need to be modified by newer studies. The consistently pattern in earlier research, where girls were quiet in the classroom and interacted less with the teacher than boys is not as visible in newer studies. Recent research paints a more varied and less univocal picture of how girls and boys act in the classroom. However, the quiet girls have not completely disappeared, but the more self-confident ones have become more noticeable. Öhrn (2002) also claims that there is a lot of variation among girls and one can see that the social background plays an important role for how girls and boys behave in the classroom. For instance, quiet girls often seem to have parents with a low standard of education while girls from intellectual middle-class families are often active, self-assertive and humorous.

According to Björnsson (2005), several studies show that there are a few boys that occupy a lot of space in the classroom and the teacher’s attention. It is mainly boys with learning difficulties who get a lot of attention, or those boys who do not behave in a way that is expected from them in a classroom. Thus, pupils with learning difficulties, not boys in general, get the most attention in the classroom, but the pupils with learning difficulties are

more often boys. Björnsson (2005) also points out the important fact that several researchers have found that gender differences in the extent to which girls and boys interact with the teacher during the lessons mainly seem to be about boys being more criticised and getting more reprimands from the teacher than girls. Björnsson (2005) refers to a study made by Brophy which shows that the extent to which different pupils communicate with the teacher has to do with the pupil's behaviour in the classroom more than with sex.

The changed gender patterns have been discussed in the media. Öhrn (2002) points out that there has been a visible assumption in the debate that the girls' overachievement has been at the boys' expense. Earlier, when it was discussed that the girls were under-achieving, it was not suggested that it was at the boys' expense. Rather, biology and differences between the sexes were mentioned as reasons for the difference in girls' and boys' achievement.

Even though the traditional gender patterns are changing, there are still visible gender differences in school. One such example is the pupils' choice of upper secondary programme. According to Öhrn (2002), pupils' choice of programme is much more related to gender than to level of achievement. Statistics presented at www.skolverket.se show that there are clear dividing lines between what programmes girls and boys choose to study. For instance, only 2,5 % of the pupils at the electronics-programme were girls the academic year 2007/08, and only 14 % of the pupils studying at the nursing-programme were boys.

According to Skolverket's *Engelska - samtalsguide* (2008), there are differences between girls' and boys' achievement in the subject of English in the way that girls are overachieving even more while boys are underachieving, and the gap is increasing. This is the case in the whole of western Europe, but the trend is especially noticeable in Sweden and Scandinavia. Girls are generally better than boys at reading comprehension in both Swedish and English. As reading comprehension is fundamental for learning in general, it is important to draw attention to the boys' bad conditions in this respect. Differences in girls' and boys' study progress to some extent have to do with their motivation and attitudes towards the subject. Recent international research shows that boys generally have a more negative attitude towards language studies than girls. A school which is supposed to protect equivalence and equality needs to take this problem seriously (Skolverket, 2008).

3.2 Girls' and boys' reading

The teachers that we have chosen to interview all have experience of teaching single-sex classes. One of our research questions for this dissertation is about to what extent some English teachers perceive that they take gender into account when they select texts for a single sex classroom. With regard to this research question, we find it relevant to know something about what research has found out about girls' and boys' reading preferences. This research area is also important to our study as our informants are asked to give examples of books that boys and girls like to read respectively.

Many teachers would agree with the statement "boys do not read fiction", but that is not really true. However, Molloy (2007) found in her study that there is a traditional view among many boys to believe that it is not masculine to read fiction. This opinion is often supported by their social surroundings, as few boys see their fathers reading fiction in their spare time. On the contrary, many boys see their mothers doing just that. In the construction of masculinity it is not at all surprising that many boys distance themselves from activities that their dads are not participating in (ibid.).

Helen Schmidl has written a dissertation (2008) about literature education and she found that every pupil in her study, regardless of sex and preference of genre, thought that an exciting book is a book well worth reading. However, Schmidl (2008) found a clear dividing line between girls' and boys' reading. The girls had a considerably greater need of some kind of identification with the characters in the book or at least they wanted to be emotionally touched. By gaining insight in other people's lives, the girls felt that they learned more about relationships and about themselves. Boys, more often than girls, preferred action and were by no means as interested in relationships and detailed descriptions of people's lives as the girls. In other words, a thrilling plot is more important and interesting for boys than the descriptions of the characters in the book. Molloy (2007) suggests that the reason for why boys dislike the fiction they have to read in school is because of the plot; it often deals with topics like love and relationships, and many boys at a certain age strongly dislike precisely these topics.

Of course, there are books that both girls and boys like to read. A good example is J.K. Rowling's books about Harry Potter. Molloy (2007) believes that the reason why these books

have become so successful among both girls and boys is because they are really thrilling, but the readers also get to meet a hero who they can identify themselves with. Harry Potter fights for the good against the evil, just like classical heroes, but he also shows feelings like insecurity and weakness (Molloy, 2007).

The question is: what should be read in school? Well, if the boys in Schmidl's study were to choose, fantasy literature, adventure stories and thrillers would dominate the literature education. If the girls were to decide, the texts would be realistic and be about existential problems (Schmidl, 2008).

Schmidl (2008) suggests that the school management as well as the teachers should get further training about gender issues, so that they all get the opportunity to gain more knowledge in this area.

3.3 Single-sex or mixed groups?

Even though our partner schools have not made an active decision in pursuing segregated teaching and even though the pupils have not chosen to go in a segregated class, we still find it interesting to learn more about our informants' attitudes towards segregated teaching. All our informants have the experience of teaching single-sex classes and as a part of the answer to our research question: how do some English teachers perceive that they work gender consciously in the classroom? we want to include the teachers' strategies of working gender consciously in single-sex classes in comparison to working gender consciously in a mixed class.

The question whether girls and boys should be taught together or separate has re-emerged in both debate and research. There has been a discussion about whether teaching should be integrated or segregated. Both ways of thinking have used arguments like: it promotes learning, it creates equality and it is practical. The empirical science does not give any univocal answers to the question about what is gained by the one or the other arrangement. It seems as if the context is crucial to be able to evaluate the significance and consequences of integrated and segregated teaching (Wernersson, 2006).

The schools where we have had our teaching practice are both vocational schools where the pupils have chosen a specific programme to study. At upper secondary level, school is no longer sex integrated. The vocational oriented programmes are the most segregated and reflect the industrial society, with female and male professions. The theoretical programmes are more integrated (Tallberg Broman, 2002).

The integrated school form only takes up a very short period of our school history. The segregated education did not disappear until the 1960s, when the so called “girl schools” were discontinued. In 1962, the school forms were put together and resulted in a nine year compulsory school where boys and girls have access to the same education system (ibid.).

In today’s school system segregated groupings are sometimes used in specific subjects or activities. The thought is that sex segregated groups can offer better teaching possibilities and a content that is more suitable for the pupils. An evaluation made by the National Swedish Agency for Education showed that 25 % of the teachers in year five and year nine sometimes use segregated groups in their teaching. The most common argument is: for the girls’ sake (Tallberg Broman, 2002). Some claim that segregated teaching offers better conditions for the students to develop their knowledge, foremost the girls as they get the opportunity to work calmly, without running the risk of being disturbed by noisy boys. Others suggest that segregated teaching gives the girls the opportunity to try different social positions, which are usually taken by the boys in the mixed classroom, for instance being the leader or the class clown (Wernersson, 2006). When it comes to benefits for boys, the advocates of segregated teaching say that it could strengthen boys’ social and empathic experiences. Some also claim that by having boy groups with male teachers as role-models a positive male identity can be strengthened (ibid.).

According to a British study carried out by Mike Younger and Molly Warrington (2007) boys and girls sometimes, under certain circumstances, feel more comfortable when they are taught in girls-only and boys-only classes. The pupils mentioned several advantages of such classes, for instance that they have fewer distractions in the classroom when the other sex is not present, that they were more willing and confident to answer questions and that the classroom atmosphere contributed more to their learning. The students were also more willing to work harder and to participate in discussions in the single-sex classrooms, as they did not have to

worry about stereotypical expectations. The girls felt they learned better because the teacher did not have to continually discipline boys and the boys felt that they got more attention and help with their learning as there were no girls present who could dominate the questioning. More girls than boys thought it is advantageous to have single-sex classes but in most schools a majority of both boys and girls perceive single-sex classes, under certain circumstances, as a way for them to learn more effectively and to get more motivated. At the same time, it is important to mention that this study also showed that single-sex classes are not automatically a good solution. In some schools, girls were worried about the effects of single-sex classes, for instance some girls thought that male teachers were bonding more with the boys and some boys said that in the single-sex classroom they missed the help and support they normally got from the girls.

3.4 Teaching from a gender perspective

In our study, we want to learn more about some teachers' considerations when they select texts for single-sex classes. As a part of the study, it is also relevant for us to learn more about how these teachers work gender consciously in their classrooms.

With knowledge about gender issues, teachers are able to make conscious pedagogical choices which can benefit gender equality. For instance, the teacher can ask her-/himself: Is this method gender-neutral or does it perhaps contain a hidden gender pattern (Berg, 2006)?

With a gender perspective within the didactic area, teachers can avoid discriminating and using prejudiced teaching materials. Teaching materials that promote gender equality should contain both female and male perspectives. In both texts and pictures in modern teaching materials, there are many examples of traditional gender stereotypes. Texts that promote gender equality are open and questioning and address every conceivable reader (Berg, 2006).

According to Bengtsson and Nilsson (2007), research is ambiguous when it comes to girls' and boys' learning styles, and therefore a general suggestion for teachers who want to teach gender consciously is to vary their teaching methods as much as possible. It is also a good idea for teachers to use examples that both girls and boys can relate to. That makes it easier

for all pupils to get the point and to store the new information. Teachers can also rework examples so that they become non-stereotypical and norm-breaking.

4 Method

Methods are used to structure the research and the analysis. This part of the dissertation includes methods used in the investigation, why they were used/not used, selection, implementation as well as a section on ethics.

4.1 Interviews

Interviews are used by qualitative researchers as a tool to “uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds. These meaning structures are often hidden from direct observation and taken for granted by participants, and qualitative interview techniques offer tools for bringing these meanings to the surface” (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). The key point in using interviews is that they allow researchers to find out “what is in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton quoted in Hatch, 2002, p. 92). The limitation of interviews as a method is that it is very hard to find out what is on someone’s mind, either as they may be reluctant to share their thoughts or as the researcher is lacking the skills to guide the participants to uncover them.

As a researcher it is important to remember that the questions need to allow the participants to explain and explore their thoughts and feelings, leaving a result that is in fact qualitative. Furthermore, there is also “a danger in using qualitative interviews with only a few informants representing only one group. For example interviews with secondary school teachers on their views on teacher free lessons ... the data is often too thin for any general conclusions to be drawn” (Johansson & Svedner, 2006, p. 25). With this in mind, we wish to make clear that we are not researching this subject using interviews in order to draw any conclusions other than how some teachers working with single sex groups reason when choosing texts for their classes. This will hopefully make us more qualified to deal with single-sex classes as our understanding of the dynamics in such classes will increase as well as opinions on how to deal with texts in such classes will be discussed. We are using interviews in the anticipation that we will gain greater understanding of gender and its impact leading us to be better teachers.

“A sensitively conducted interview that keeps close to the interviewee’s reality can give knowledge that can be used to improve people’s situation” (Kvale, 1997, p. 18).

4.2 Our choice of investigation method

The qualitative interview is a natural choice when it comes to understanding what and why teachers do as they do when choosing texts. It gives us as researchers an opportunity to trigger participants to disclose information and at the same time reflect, whereas a questionnaire would not allow for more in-depth details. The choice of method is naturally also based on the time at hand. Observing teachers and their way of adjusting/not adjusting their teaching materials to single-sex classes would be interesting but time consuming as it would take at least a terms observations in order to say anything about the way teachers do or do not adjust according to gender. Nor would it be entirely in line with our purpose, which is to find out more about the teachers’ thoughts and opinions on their own attitudes towards the gender perspective and to what extent they perceive that they implicate it in their teaching. The pupils’ point of view would also lead to greater understanding, but to make our dissertation to the point we decided to focus on the teachers’ perspective.

The interview technique that we used was the semi-structured interview, where we as researchers led the interviews, using guiding questions that allowed for open endings as for the participants to develop their thoughts and views (Hatch, 2002). The interviews took place in a separate room in order to not get disturbed during the interviews. The time frame was loosely set from half an hour to an hour to ensure that we would not run out of time. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed where information relevant for our research was expressed by the participants.

We decided to conduct the interviews in Swedish and then translate the results into English. This is due to the fact that we feel that the teachers although great at English, would feel more comfortable speaking Swedish and we also wanted the interviews to feel as natural as any conversation we have with them in the teachers’ lounge. Since they probably seldom have advanced discussions about gender in English, there is also the risk of them having a problem expressing their exact personal views and opinions.

4.3 Selection

When we chose who to interview for our dissertation, factors such as age, sex and experience in teaching single-sex classes affected our choice, as we wished to collect thoughts and ideas from multiple perspectives and avoid the problem of getting too limited data. The sex of the participants could possibly be of interest as we thought that the female teachers' views on gender and gender theory might differ from the male teachers' views. However, we will not be able to draw any general conclusions since there are too few participants.

Our opinion, based on experience from our partner schools, tells us that there are more female than male English teachers and our investigation reflects the "real" world in the sense that we have fewer male interviewees. Regarding the age of the participating teachers, we wish to reflect on whether the different age groups have any specific thoughts about gender in common. This is interesting due to the cultural changes regarding gender roles over the last half century, but we are aware of that it is impossible to generalize because of the limited amount of participants in our study. All of the participating teachers are working at our partner schools where we have had our teacher training.

We chose to interview teachers who we, from the impression we got at our teaching practice, thought and hoped would have something to say about gender and education. That is the reason why several of the interviewees have an ardent interest in equality and gender issues. However, in one of the schools, three out of five English teachers took part in the investigation and they were chosen for practical reasons, namely that they were the closest available teachers at the time when planning the interviews, as well as being willing to take part in the investigation.

4.4 Implementation

The interviews were conducted and recorded by one of us and one participant at the time. The time frame was up to an hour planned interviewing time. The participants were prepared that the subject would be gender. The guiding questions however were not handed out in advance as we wanted the participating teachers to come prepared only with their experiences and not

with any “correct answers”. Although the content area of gender is highly normative we are avoiding the problem of “correct answers” as we are looking into in what the teachers’ thoughts and perceptions are of gender and of how they work with it, which is something that can be done in many ways. The guiding questions belong to five different categories; the interviewee’s experience of teaching single sex classes, the interviewee’s attitude towards gender and equality overall, the interviewee’s strategies when selecting texts for his/her single-sex classes, advantages and disadvantages with teaching single-sex classes and reflections on how the interviewee’s gender adapted teaching has worked. These categories are connected to our research questions in the following way; the interviewee’s experience of teaching single sex classes and the interviewee’s attitude towards gender and equality overall are both categories providing the most fundamental information in order to answer the research questions, although these two categories respond to both research questions, the second category is most vital for the first question. Further on, the interviewee’s strategies when selecting texts for his/her single-sex classes is directly connected to the second research question and so is the category advantages and disadvantages with teaching single-sex classes as they both focus on single-sex classes as well as texts to be used in single-sex classes. Reflections on how the interviewee’s gender adjusted teaching has worked is connected to the first research question and functions as a help for the interviewee to reflect on what outcome there has been on working gender consciously.

4.5 Ethics

When dealing with data regarding sensitive subjects, such as work, private life, individual views and standpoints it is important that participants feel secure in their anonymity as well as secure in that the investigation deals with what it was set out to do. All participants were given a paper before the interview, where they got more information about our study and our purpose as well as our contact information so they could contact us if they had any questions. The participants were at any time free to ask questions about the investigation and or the interviews. The paper also informed the participants that the interviews were going to be recorded and that notes were possibly going to be taken during the interviews, but that the recordings were only going to be listened to by us as writers of the dissertation to secure the anonymity of the participants. Apart from what the participants said in the interviews, they

were also asked to fill in a very short questionnaire about basic information such as their sex, age, education and the amount of years they have been working within the educational field. The basic information does not give away the identity of the participants since the names of the schools where they work/used to work are not mentioned in this dissertation. All the participants were given the opportunity to study the dissertation and its result.

5 Interview results

In this chapter the results of our data collection from the seven interviews we conducted are presented. Each teacher's thoughts and views are presented in separate sections of the chapter, i.e. the results are presented teacher by teacher and not in different typologies. This is due to the fact that this is a qualitative study where we want to give each participant the opportunity to really express what they think and feel. We believe that if we would show the results in different typologies, it would be harder for the participants to really come forward and harder for us to show each individual's personal thoughts and opinions.

Connection to previous research is included in the sections respectively. The different sections contain a summary of each teacher's answers to our guiding questions. The guiding questions relate to our research questions, which are the following: What are some English teachers' perceptions of how they work gender consciously in the classroom? To what extent do the English teachers in question perceive that they take gender into account when they select texts for a single sex classroom?

As mentioned above, we aim to secure the anonymity of the participants in our dissertation and therefore we will use assumed names. However, we will give some background information that could be of relevance to our results and analysis. Quotes have been translated into English by us and because of that they might not literally reflect the true nature of the teachers' way of expressing themselves.

5.1 Teacher interview 1

Karin is an English and Swedish teacher between 45 and 55 years old. She has a lot of experience in teaching girls-only as well as boys-only classes. She has been working in school for fifteen years and at this particular school for ten years.

Karin is very interested in gender issues and is a part of the group for equality at the school. She thinks inequality is really problematic in the society in general and also in school. In her opinion, boys get more attention in school, and therefore she consciously tries to give girls as much or as little time and attention as the boys. Karin's interest and commitment in gender issues also influences her teaching. For instance, she often uses texts which deal with gender and inequality issues, such as articles, films and books. Even though Karin has a lot of knowledge about gender issues, she thinks that teachers should get further training in this area, in order to learn more about the latest research and to learn more about how to work more gender consciously. That is in line with what also Schmidl (2008) suggests.

When Karin is about to select a new text that she will use in a single-sex class, she takes several different considerations into account. To some extent, she asks the pupils what they would prefer to work with, but she also uses the text book as a starting-point and then collects related information and literature from other sources. Which programme her students have chosen to study is not crucial for her selection of texts, even though she includes terminology etc. that is of relevance for their course of study.

Karin says that that she can see differences in teaching girls-only classes and boys-only classes.

You could say that when I enter the boys-only classroom, we more or less follow *my* lesson plan, which I have decided beforehand, but when I work with the girls there can be more of a discussion and they question my plans much more than the boys do, and sometimes it happens that I change my plan according to the girls' wishes.

Karin stresses the importance of the students' own interests when she selects which texts to work with in class.

It must be a text that is of interest to the pupils and I pick texts that I think will interest the pupils and as a consequence, I do not always use the same text with the girls as I do with the boys. Sometimes I use the same text in both groups, but not always. A couple of years ago I used an article where the rap artist "Petter" was interviewed. In the interview Petter explained that he thinks it is so much fun to read and that fiction is important. That article I used in my boys-only classes but not in my girls-only classes, so that text was especially aimed for the boys. Choices like that I make quite often. The reason for why I used that article in my boys-only classes is that Petter is a character with whom the boys can identify themselves, which I think the girls would not have done to the same extent. Another reason for using this particular article in the boy-classes is because it provides a possible model for the boys to copy, as boys are generally not as interested as girls in reading fiction.

Thus, Karin sometimes adjusts her teaching materials according to the sex of the majority of the class. She also has an example of what she did in a girls-only class which she thinks would never work in a boys-only class.

We actually had a big project work about equality where we used several different articles and we also watched a TV-programme, and the girls were really, really interested in this topic. I doubt that I would let the boys read the same articles. I just do not think that the boys would be interested enough in that specific topic. Of course you can work with equality with boys as well, but I believe that they require another type of text.

Karin is absolutely convinced that views and values about equality and gender issues start at home and that the home environment and the views and values of the parents play a major role. However, she believes that school plays a role in trying to make our society more equal. In Karin's opinion, school is important because it can offer another way of thinking than what many pupils are used to from home. As a consequence, the pupils get to see that there are several different ways to look at these issues, they get an option and they can choose how they want to live their lives.

Karin strives towards the goal of treating boys and girls equally in the classroom. However, she recalls when she taught mixed classes, that she unfortunately gave the boys more attention than the girls.

Boys took more and I gave them more attention than the girls. Even though I am aware of the fact that boys often get more attention, I did it anyway. But I think it is important to be aware about this, in order to consciously try to counteract the pattern. It is hard to evaluate yourself, because I probably do many things unconsciously, without even noticing.

5.2 Teacher interview 2

Josefine is an English and Civics teacher, 30 to 35 years old, and she has taught male and female, single-sex classes as well as classes with both sexes. She has worked in school for six years and at her current position for three years.

As an example of what kind of texts Josefine could use in her female single-sex classes she says: "When I was a fully trained teacher I quite early had a class of forthcoming hairdressers. They had some texts in English and they were about typically girlish subjects, like breast

enhancements and plastic surgery. There were mostly girls in that group, one student, however, was male”.

Although Josefine sees breast enhancement and plastic surgery as typically female subjects, she would consider using the same text in a class of boys since she expects that the response to the text would differ and since the topic always is interesting. Berg (2006) says that there should be both female and male perspectives in the teaching material to promote gender equality. Josefine takes a text with an interesting topic and then uses it in a way to create discussion, by using different perspectives the pupils come out with different responses to the text. You could say that Josefine, as Berg suggests, involves both perspectives not only by the written material but also in the way she handles, presents and discusses the material with her pupils.

As an example of texts she has used in a class where the majority were male, she mentions *Bosse Bildoktorn*. These are texts that are directly connected or intended for the vehicle mechanic program. The reason for using that kind of text is obvious since they are so tightly connected to their future profession. Josefine would use this text in a girl group, if they were studying to become mechanics as well, but mentions that girls seldom go in those classes. Josefine states that she used the text “not because they were boys but because they were studying that programme.” It should be mentioned that Josefine has had more male students than female lately, since the school she is currently at has had programmes more aimed at male students. However, now the school has expanded and at the moment more of a 50/50 situation predominates.

The difference in female and male pupils’ preferences when it comes to what types of texts they like to read Josefine claims to be a result of “interests, habits and what they are brought up with. What they have been exposed to as well as what the group around them reads and likes.” Mostly there has been a pattern of male students preferring science fiction and with girls she has read typically female literature, for example *Dear Nobody* which is a book about a teenage girl who becomes pregnant. The divide Josefine describes between what boys read and what girls read comes as no surprise and both Molloy (2007) and Schmidl (2008) have come to the same conclusion.

Josefine has strong feelings about gender issues and states that she “is something of an advocate at her school when it comes to gender and equality issues.” And she has been working actively both with the students as well as raising the issue among colleagues. She sees gender issues as important in the world of school since the school “is like a miniature society in its format and this is where they spend big parts of their lives. This is their world, where they get influenced, where they are to learn and school passes on what is important so of course it is important with gender here.”

That Josefine gives gender a place in school is clear and she states that she has it in the back of her mind at all times. When choosing texts, their course of study and interests comes first even if she expresses dissatisfaction with textbooks with texts that are so clearly linked to being “boy texts or girl texts”.

Although Josefine aims to meet all students as individuals, and meet and treat them in the same way, yet with the necessary modifications, she has observed how the single-sex classes she has taught “show the typical gender-roles quite clearly. The girls are well-educated, grown up and are expected to be more hard-working than boys. Not all girls of course, but if you are to look at it generally, there are more hard-working girls than there are hard-working boys. Naturally there are exceptions in the male classes; there are some who are very hard-working. However, boys generally take up more space than girls and are perhaps more spontaneous, more forward.”

Josefine has as a step towards problematizing gender brought two single-sex classes together, one pure male class and one pure female class to discuss gender issues and have both sides of the story and they get the opportunity to express themselves.

The funny thing is that when they were brought together they agreed on most things, although in other situations their opinions were not the same. It probably has to do with the interaction, as when you get together and do not know each other, you might not really want to say what is on your mind and how you feel. But it is exciting, yes it was a bit fun and I felt as if it was necessary for a few of them.

Josefine is of the opinion that when it comes to gender issues, there is no larger difference in the opinions of her female and male colleagues. Neither does she see a difference when it comes to their age. There are both women and men in the front of the gender train as well as male and female colleagues who do not share her interest in it. As neither age nor sex seems

to be a factor she credits (or blames) the social background. “I believe that if you are conservative in other questions, then you are in these questions as well. If you are a reactionary in any possible context then you are in this too.”

5.3 Teacher interview 3

Lotta is a Swedish and religion teacher between 35 and 45 years old. She has a lot of experience in teaching girls-only as well as boys-only classes. She has been working in school for eight years and at this particular school for six years.

Lotta is extremely interested in equality and gender issues. She is a member of the group working for equality at the school and also the representative of pedagogues in the pupils’ working group for equality. “I think it is extremely important to problematize gender. As I teach single-sex groups it is no wonder that we discuss this topic a lot. You can never work too much with these issues.”

Lotta is very aware about gender roles, stereotypes and patterns and has a lot of knowledge about research done in this area, but her way of working consciously with gender issues is not to adjust her material or ways of working according to the sex of the majority of the class she is going to teach. She uses other strategies to work gender consciously. For instance, when she makes literature lists and presents a number of books from which the pupils are free to choose which one they would like to read, her goal is that fifty percent of the titles should be written by women and fifty percent by men. However, when Lotta selects a book which all the pupils in a class are to read, she chooses a book which she believes could be read by anyone and has a plot about human problems that are relevant to discuss. Thus, she does not select specific titles for boys and specific titles for girls. “Which texts I select totally depends upon what is going on around us and also upon what I myself have read recently and to be frank, I choose literature that I personally like to read.”

Another example of Lotta’s gender conscious teaching is a project she has been working with during the autumn term, in collaboration with another teacher, at another school.

This other teacher had a boys-only class in the Swedish B course on Monday mornings, and that was exactly when I had a girls-only class in the same course, so we decided to work together. The

pupils have been very positive towards this project work and would actually like to continue the collaboration. I believe that both the girls-only class and the boys-only class *want* the other perspective, especially in discussions.

Even though Lotta has a feeling that pupils in single-sex classes sometimes miss the other sex in discussions, she has also heard many girls saying that it is such a relief to go to school without having noisy boys around all the time, so pupils partly perceive the single-sex situation as something good. This is in line with what some advocates of segregated teaching claim, namely that segregated teaching is especially beneficial for girls, as they get the opportunity to develop their knowledge without being disturbed by noisy boys (Wernersson, 2006). However, Lotta points out: “I personally think that we need each other. The boys need the girls and the girls need the boys, I do *not* believe in schools with only one sex.” However, Lotta is not completely unfamiliar with the thought of sometimes separating girls and boys when teaching a mixed class.

That depends upon how that specific group works together. If I have a class where traditional gender patterns are prevalent, where the boys are really noisy and take most of the teacher’s attention and the girls are really quiet and reluctant to speak, separating them might be a way to let the girls’ voices be heard as well. I find it really interesting when some of the girls in girls-only groups adopt the traditional “boy roles”, where they get really active and speak a lot during class.

This argument is also something that the advocates of segregated teaching point out. They claim that segregated teaching gives girls the opportunity to try different social positions, which are usually taken by the boys in the mixed classroom (Wernersson, 2006).

Even though Lotta does not like the idea of using a particular type of texts with girls just because they are girls and another type of texts with boys just because they are boys, she admits that there are quite clear differences in what girls and boys like to read when they can choose themselves.

I hate to say this, but girls’ and boys’ choices are *very* sex-linked. Girls really want to read books where they can identify themselves and they want to read books which have realistic plots and they want the books to be about relationships. The boys want to read action and want a lot of things to happen fast, otherwise they get bored.

What Lotta says here about girls’ and boys’ reading is exactly what Schmidl (2008) also found in her study: that girls need identification and like to read about relationships while boys prefer to read action books.

Lotta finds it really hard to give a good answer to whether she treats girls and boys in the same way in the classroom. “I would really like to think that I treat the pupils as individuals, but of course I am different when standing in front of a girls-only class in comparison to a boys-only class, but I can not really point out exactly what that would be ...”

5.4 Teacher interview 4

Elin is a Swedish and English teacher between 25 and 30 years old. She has taught male and female single-sex classes as well as mixed classes. She has been working as a teacher for a year and a half and she has been at her current position for four months.

Elin has used texts about love, life and relationships in her female single-sex classes but the texts about love she has also used in the male single-sex classes. Her experience in using them in the male single-sex classes is that “It takes a lot more preparation to use a text like that in a male group, it takes more to get them started and more explanations on what they are supposed to write and what I mean and I have to say: write now or you will not get a pass”. Elin has experienced that boys prefer closed questions and that they like exercises such as “fill in the gap” which is an exercise with only one right answer. Meanwhile the girls like discussions and do take an active part in voicing their rights and take a more active part in influencing their education.

Her examples of texts she has used in a male group are texts with action, news and history, preferably a bit of violence as well. Other than that she has used texts that are specifically directed to their chosen course of study, i.e. mechanics, electricians or construction.

When asked what the pupils read when they get to choose for themselves, she says that most students like to read true stories but

I have to say that I have not read as much with the guys as I have with the girls. The boys think it is rather boring to read. I have only worked on practical schools. They have not liked to read and they choose the shortest text or something that has to do with a special interest. So if I have a book about Zlatan for example, then they read that but they might not read all of it. I do not know, I also have novels, horror novels, that they have read, meanwhile the girls prefer true stories, real misery.

Elin believes that the difference between boys’ and girls’ reading preferences has to do with their reading habits. That the boys do not have the same reading tradition, and that they think

it is boring. She expresses that there can be a negative vibe in the male classes, that no one likes to study or read and that reading is seen as female sometimes because “It is something that girls do, boys do not sit with a book and drink tea, they have a hammer in their hand. When I have a mixed class the girls can lure the boys on to read. It is sad but I think it is easier for girls since they are better at expressing themselves for some reason.”

That boys do not have the same reading habits as girls is connected to Molloy (2007) who found that few boys see their fathers read and reading fiction is therefore perceived as feminine.

Gender is a factor when Elin chooses what texts to use in her single-sex classes, although she does not want the divide between boys and girls to exist. She has the understanding that when going in to a single-sex classroom it is really difficult to throw out a text that is not typical for their gender-role, and unfortunate as it is, often practical reasons must come before the matter of heart.

I have a prejudice about boys and girls and their understanding, and I have also gotten proof of this which has resulted in that I try to do more practical things with the boys, have them answer more practically on things. The girls can philosophize slightly more when they answer while the boys need more leading questions, more questions they have to answer. With the girls I can ask – what is love? With the boys for example I might have to ask – what is love? Are there different kinds of love? Is it the same love to a dog as it is to your mother? I.e. I have to be clearer towards the boys and have them answer more concrete and practical. The girls can think and write slightly more. The matter of fact could be that I am creating different types of classes by working in a specific way with boys and in another way with girls, which is a shame. I might be creating a slow male single-sex class by helping or guiding them too much but at the same time, they are struggling with a question like – what is love? And then I get a thousand questions – What do you mean?

Elin thinks that gender is an important issue that needs to be discussed in school and she tries to focus on it, but as time goes by she finds it hard since it is hard to convince pupils to break their gender-patterns and the reality is that there is a lack of time and the effort must be put on having things flowing on. Elin wishes she had the time to work with this though “it is very sad because if we do not work with this issue in school, then how are we supposed to be able to change? How are we going to make it more equal if we do not try? But I try, I do try, yet I do adjust of course.” When she has tried to think outside of the box the pupils have not done the work they were supposed to and that makes it easy to fall back on handing out texts that you know will “work” to get a result that can be processed and graded.

5.5 Teacher interview 5

Lennart is an English and Swedish teacher between 45 and 55 years old. He has experience in teaching girls-only as well as boys-only classes. However, he has almost exclusively taught girls-only classes the last couple of years. He has been working within the educational field for twenty-one years and at this particular school for six years. Lennart is a teacher of English and Swedish.

According to Lennart, our society is not entirely equal. He points out that men still earn higher salaries than women and men and women do not always have the same conditions.

I definitely think that equality is the goal to strive for. I think it is really important to work with gender issues in school, but also with values in general. There should be no doubt that school takes a stand in this issue and should work consciously to promote equality, as it is a part of our mission.

The gender perspective is something that Lennart thinks about and tries to apply in his teaching every day and it is very natural to him to regularly discuss basic values with his pupils. However, he is not sure that the work in school always manages to actually influence the pupils' attitudes.

I think that their home environment plays a more important role. Most pupils' values are probably conveyed by their parents and those are really hard to change. I do not think that you should exaggerate the role of the school in the promotion of equal opportunities. I think that for instance templates from Hollywood influence the kids more than school does ...

A text that Lennart uses in his English A-course to raise discussions about gender issues is The good wife's guide which he has taken from *The Housekeeping Monthly 1955*. This text offers a number of suggestions for how to be a good wife, such as always having dinner ready when the husband comes home, to remember that his topics of conversations are always more important than yours, that a wife has no right to question her husband and that a good wife always knows her place.

This text usually causes a discussion. The Swedish girls usually get upset about how things were in the 50s and they can almost not believe that this is actually true, while the immigrant girls from the Middle East see this as something perfectly normal. This text opens up their eyes for inequality between the sexes.

When Lennart is going to select a new text for a class, he takes several different considerations into account.

One factor is of course the pupils' ambitions and their level of knowledge. But I also have the goals of the specific programme that the pupils are studying when I choose texts, because they think that is the most meaningful to do. Pupils at the OP-programme for instance think it is most meaningful to read texts which have to do with nursing and medicine.

Gender is an important factor for what text Lennart selects. "I think about that a lot and that is simply because I know what interests a group of girls and what interests a group of boys and I am aware of what works in different groups." Lennart uses films as an example. When he lets his girls-only classes watch a film, which he does a couple of times a year, he chooses a film that has a main character that the girls can identify with. This is also what Schmidl (2008) points out; that girls often have a need of some kind of identification with the characters in the text.

I usually do not pick films where the central character is some wimpish bimbo, but rather strong heroines who take their fates into their own hands. *Thelma & Louise* I usually show every year and also *North Country*. I choose these films because they convey the image of strong and independent women. I work a lot with trying to strengthen the girls and teach them how to claim their rights, and then these films are good starting-points for discussion. Working on strengthening the girls is especially important at OP and BF, because quite a lot of power of initiative is demanded from them when they are out on their internships and they can actually fail if they are too passive and do not take initiatives.

As a principle, Lennart thinks that girls and boys should be treated equally in the classroom. He points out that for him personally, personality is more decisive than sex for how he treats a pupil. "If there is a boy in a class who is really shy, I might try to treat him in a way that will strengthen him". However, after some thinking, he admits that he sometimes treats girls and boys differently.

For instance if the pupils have overstepped the limits I can not be as harsh towards the girls as towards the boys. I think that boys can handle a reprimand better than the girls. The girls are more sensitive. When I think about it I realize that I sometimes actually treat girls and boys differently ...

5.6 Teacher interview 6

Anki is a teacher of English and physical education between 45 and 55 years old. She has experience in teaching boys-only classes and mixed classes, but not girls-only classes. She has been working within the educational field for twenty-five years and at this particular school for twenty years.

For Anki, equality and gender thinking is a given part of her life and mind. She explains that she lives in a very equal relationship.

I cannot say that I think about equality that much, I am surrounded by it in a very natural way. But of course I get upset when I hear about inequalities and realize that girls are not always given the same opportunities as boys. I am not so stupid that I am not aware of that inequality exists in our society. I think that the most equal is to say that I *value* everyone equally. For me, everyone is worth equally much. I do not think that “boy qualities” are better than “girl qualities” and the important thing in my teaching is that all the different qualities are given space in my classroom.

When Anki is going to present a new text to a class, she often uses the text book as a starting-point and takes a look at the next chapter in the book to see if she gets any inspiration. “For weaker pupils it is a security that they can find some of the material we are working with in the book”. Another factor that could play a role in Anki’s choice of text is if something specific has happened in the class. “If there is a situation that needs to be dealt with, like adolescent problems, I might take the opportunity to work with that.”

The programme which Anki’s pupils have chosen to study does not influence her selection of texts very much. “The programme they are attending is not crucial for my choice, but to some extent I take that into account. At some programmes it is easier than at others. For instance, media is much easier to get into the education of English than electronics.”

Sometimes, Anki uses gender as a factor when she is about to select a new text.

When I teach boys-only classes I try to find texts that attract the boys. Generally, it is easier to get girls to read, and they more or less read everything, so when I teach girls it is easier to select books. It is so much harder to get boys to read fiction, so when I choose a book for the boys to read I really try to find something that I think they will like.

The observation Anki makes about boys being reluctant to reading fiction relates to Molloy’s findings (2007), which also shows this phenomenon. Anki’s perception of boys’ reading perhaps also has to do with the fact that the types of texts presented in school are often not what boys usually read or what they like to read (Molloy, 2007).

Anki has several examples of gender-adjusted material that she successfully has used in her boys-only classes.

We read *Kensuke's Kingdom*, which is about a boy who is out sailing and falls off the boat and gets stranded and lives on an island. It is a quite "boyish" book, where you manage to take care of yourself and make tools etc, but the book is also about family and values in life.

Another example of a text which Anki has used in a boys-only class is the film *Tigerland*.

A couple of years ago I showed this film to a boys-only class. It is about a group of American boys who attend a boot camp, where they are trained to become tough, right before they are about to leave for the Vietnam war. The film is really good in many ways and fits the boys-only class really well, because the environment is really boyish. I am not sure I would have shown this film in a girls-only class. I do not think that very many girls would rent this film in a video store.

As an example of a book which both girls and boys in her classes have liked to read, Anki mentions Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. "It is written in a boyish way with short sentences and the central character is a boy, but at the same time it is a drama about relationships." This observation could be compared to what Molloy (2007) found out about the Harry Potter-books, namely that a book with different components which attract girls and boys respectively, such as relationships for girls and a thrilling plot for boys, are books that both boys and girls appreciate to read.

Anki believes that school plays a major role in the promotion of equal opportunities in the society and that school definitely can make a difference, as the school staff often spend more time with the pupils than the parents do. "Of course the views and values that the kids bring from home also play a major role, but I am convinced that we mean a lot and that we play an important role, but it is not easy ..."

5.7 Teacher interview 7

Erik is an English and Physical education teacher. He is 25 to 30 years old and has worked with both male and female single-sex classes. He has also worked with mixed classes. Erik has been working in the school world for roughly a year and in his current position for four months.

Erik is conscious of always trying to colour the texts that are read to the pupils' chosen course of study, i.e. in the car mechanic classes he has used texts by Bosse Bildoktorn who writes

about tools and such. Those texts happened to be a little too advanced for his students although they are directed to their level but the concept of using texts that are meaningful to the students is what Erik uses as a mean of scaffolding. He would not have used those texts in a girls-only group, but this is due to the limited amount of girls studying at that programme. He has used equivalent texts directed to the course of study, at other programmes, for example with the florist class where all but one student is female.

When Erik has a class consisting of two different upper secondary programmes, since the classes are quite small this happens for example with the florist and nursing programmes, he has handed out different texts to the groups respectively and then had them explain or present the texts to each other so they can share their interests. It is clear that Erik mainly focuses on his pupils' course of study when choosing texts for them.

Without ever having let the students choose their own texts/books Erik states that the boys prefer to read texts with slightly more action and speed and that there is a difference between boys' and girls' reading preferences. Other than choosing the texts that correspond to the pupils' course of study Erik has worked with texts about famous people, something that he has found both male and female pupils enjoy.

When discussing gender, Erik thinks it is important that pupils should never be favoured because of their gender, their religious beliefs or their political ideas and so on, and they all go hand in hand.

I do not treat pupils differently because of their sex, it rather has to do with the knowledge I have about the student. If I know that someone might be a little more sensitive or so I might treat that person a bit differently, but that has nothing to do with their sex. I only treat pupils slightly different according to her/his specific needs. It does not have to do with gender. It is not that I behave in one specific way towards all female students. That is not the case.

The benefits of having single-sex classes are according to Erik that

If you have a group with only female pupils, they might find it easier to get their opinions across, or when there are issues around women as a group, any topic they need to discuss, that would have been more sensitive if there would have been boys in the group as well. That might still be the case though, since I am a man and those issues would perhaps be easier to discuss with a female teacher. Naturally that applies for a male single-sex group as well. The problem in a female class is sometimes that they get slightly too sensitive ... and I believe that if there were more boys in the class that would even out the sensitive parts better. That might sound very man chauvinistic.

Erik's thoughts about the benefits of having single-sex classes is in accordance with Younger's and Warrington's (2007) study where they came to the conclusion that students sometimes feel more comfortable with single-sex classes.

Erik has a clear focus on the pupils as individuals and has their course of study at the centre of attention when choosing what is to be read and worked with. Gender comes in as a part but merely when it comes to handling and teaching all students in the same way, supposing that there are no special circumstances that demand extra care. There is a tight connection between Erik and the plan for equal treatment that The Swedish National Agency for Education has published, which Erik decidedly aims to follow. Erik is also aware and works according to the curriculum for the non-compulsory school system (Lpf 94) as he specifically points out that no one should be discriminated because of their gender and that no distinction should be made between girls and boys when it comes to equal opportunities and conditions.

6 Analysis and discussion

In this section, we will analyze our data collected from the interviews and discuss our findings.

The purpose of this study was to find out whether some of the English teachers at our partner schools are aware of the gender perspective and if/how they implicate it in their teaching. We specifically focused on learning more about what considerations the teachers in question take into account when they select texts for single-sex classes. We also wanted to increase our own knowledge about what significance gender/sex has in English education and we hoped to learn more about how to actively work with gender issues in our everyday teaching.

6.1 The extent to which gender affects the teachers' selection of texts

The findings of our research show that all of the participating teachers are well aware of gender and think that it is important to raise gender issues in school and to work towards equality between the sexes, which is also emphasised in the curriculum. However, we have seen that the teachers have different ways of working consciously with gender in the classroom. What all teachers have in common is that they think that our society is not completely equal. Examples such as men earning higher salaries than women and the fact that women more often than men stay at home with the children as well as they are less likely than men to get into high positions at work places were mentioned by the teachers as visible signs of inequality in our society.

Several of the teachers in question do sometimes select different texts for their girls-only and their boys-only classrooms respectively, which could probably be a good idea, as Schmidl (2008) found in her study that girls and boys like to read different types of texts. Elin and Lennart both feel that they know what works in different groups and often select texts according to what they think will interest the sex of the majority of the class. Essentially they do so because in their experience, the result often turns out to be better when they work with

texts that deal with topics which the pupils are interested in. They can see a clear dividing line between girls' and boys' interests.

Anki, Josefine and Karin sometimes choose specific texts for their single-sex classes. They especially point out that it is hard to get boys to read and a good way of getting them to read fiction or appreciate a film is to select texts from a specific genre, such as action or fantasy, as the teachers in question have experienced that boys prefer precisely those genres. That experience closely relates to Schmidl's findings, i.e. that boys like to read fantasy literature and thrillers rather than realistic novels. Anki, Josefine and Karin also think that a good idea when choosing a text is to make sure that there is a character in the text who the pupils can identify themselves with, for instance Karin mentions the rap artist "Petter", which she used in her boys-only classes. Lennart mentioned the strong, independent women as main characters in the films *North Country* and *Thelma & Louise* as especially suitable for girls-only classes. This is something that Schmidl (2008) also claims; that especially girls want to be able to identify themselves with the characters in the text.

Erik and Lotta have other strategies for gender conscious teaching. They both perceive gender as something really important but they do not feel that it is necessary to work with different texts with girls and boys. They rather think that what promotes equality the most is to let everyone read the same texts and then let the pupils problematize gender. To them, it is important to choose texts which can be appreciated by anyone and to deal with human problems that can form the starting-point for discussions. The fact that there are books that both boys and girls like is something that Molloy (2007) also points out and gives the books about Harry Potter as an example. Even though Erik and Lotta do not select specific texts for girls and specific texts for boys, they are very aware of gender issues and work consciously with them, for instance by bringing the topic up for discussion in their classrooms.

We have received different answers to our question: To what extent do teachers take gender into account when they select texts for a single-sex classroom? Some of the teachers who participated in our study use gender as a factor when they are to select texts for single-sex classes to a great extent, while others do it to some extent, whereas a few of the teachers in question have as a principle to use the same texts in girls-only classes and boys-only classes. As this is a qualitative study, we cannot draw any general conclusions from our results. However, we believe that the extent to which gender affects the teachers' selection of text

might have to do with their personal views and attitudes towards gender and equality. The two teachers who claimed that they never use gender as a factor when they select texts for a single-sex class believe that everyone should be treated equally and they do not want to make any distinction between what girls and boys should read. The other teachers, who use gender as a factor sometimes or often, seem to be of the opinion that the most beneficial for girls' and boys' learning respectively is to sometimes use different texts in different groups. Of course these teachers think that there is also a lot of material which works well with both girls-only classes and boys-only classes. Bengtsson and Nilsson (2007), have a general suggestion for teachers who want to teach gender consciously – to vary their teaching methods as much as possible. This is due to their research being ambiguous when it comes to girls' and boys' learning styles. It may seem logical that varied teaching will lead to the best outcome and varied texts may have the same outcome.

6.2 Other considerations the teachers take into account when selecting texts

It is important to mention that all of the teachers take several different considerations into account when they select texts for single-sex classes. Among those who took gender into account, other factors also played important roles. For many of the teachers in question the students' course of study was really important for the choice of texts. For example, Josefine and Erik have used texts by Bosse Bildoktorn in their vehicle mechanics-classes, as this is closely linked to their interests and the programme they have chosen to study. Lennart mentions that he uses texts about medicine and nursing in his nursing-classes, as the pupils in those classes find it most meaningful to read texts which relate to their course of study. The fact is that each programme at the upper secondary level has specific programme goals and it is in the responsibility of school that these goals are reached. In the goals for the florist programme as well as the nursing programme and car mechanics programme it is included that the pupils should be able to communicate in English with the sight on the need in the forthcoming profession (www.skolverket.se). Thus, Erik, Josefine, Lennart and all other teachers at the upper secondary level are supposed to focus on the pupils' course of study in their teaching. This fact makes it clear that there are many different areas which teachers must take into account when teaching, and gender is only one such area.

Other factors, such as previous knowledge, the level of ambition among the pupils, the goals of the syllabus, the pupils' interests, the teachers' own reading preferences as well as the next chapter in the text book are also important when these teachers select which texts to present.

6.3 The teachers' views on the school's responsibility in working for equality

Everyone of the teachers in our study believe that it is really important to be conscious about gender and actively work for equality and try to counteract traditional gender-roles and patterns, not least because it is included in the duty of school as an organisation and a part of the curriculum. The teachers are all aware of the traditional gender roles as well as gender stereotypes but when teaching they try to avoid dealing with pupils according to these and instead see their students as individuals. However, as mentioned before it is sometimes hard to control your actions and unconsciously there may be times when pupils are treated according to gender roles and stereotypes. Most of the interviewed teachers definitely thought that the work in school can change pupils' attitudes. School is the arena where they spend big parts of their days and most of the teachers believe that school is a place where you can make the pupils become more aware about inequality in our society. In school, it is possible to reach the pupils and hopefully give some of them another perspective than the one they have got from home, as that perspective is sometimes rather conservative. However, many of the teachers also believe that the home environment and the values conveyed by the parents also play a major role in the development of pupils' views and attitudes towards gender issues and equality, perhaps an even more important role than school. Lennart is unsure if school actually contributes to changing pupils' attitudes, but he still thinks that it is important that school takes a stand on this issue and brings it up for discussion.

6.4 The teachers' perceptions on how they treat girls and boys respectively

The participants in our study all believe that boys and girls *should not* be treated differently due to their gender and that both girls and boys should be given the same opportunities and conditions in school. As described in section 2.8 the term gender equality is what the teachers interviewed work in accordance with. None of the teachers claim to work for gender equity, a

term described in 2.9. However, some of them show signs of adjusting accordingly. All of the teachers suggest that they might make an unconscious distinction in their treatment of girls and boys in the classroom. In fact, many of the interviewed teachers are quite sure that they sometimes do treat the girls differently from the boys, but only one teacher, Lennart, is able to give a concrete example. Could the teachers' feelings about sometimes unconsciously treating girls and boys in different ways perhaps be linked to the discussion about gender issues in schools in recent years, where it has been stressed that boys both take and are given more space than the girls? About that we can only speculate, but we find this observation very interesting, especially as all of the teachers mentioned this but only one teacher could give an actual example.

Important to mention is that most of the interviewed teachers point out that to them, the individual and her/his personality is more important than gender when it comes to how they treat their pupils. For instance, Lennart says that if he has a really shy boy in a class, he might treat him in a way that can strengthen this shy boy, and that has to do with personality rather than gender. Erik also strongly stresses that it is the pupil's individuality that decides how he meets and interacts with the pupil and not whether it is a girl or a boy. This is connected to what Browne (2004) emphasizes, which is also stated in section 2.9, that gender is linked to all aspects of ourselves, such as ethnicity, social class and language background. Each person's life experience is unique. "Gender equity approaches, therefore, are not based on the assumption that certain groups of children can be viewed as homogenous categories (e.g. 'girls' and 'boys') but instead acknowledge and take account of the existence of these differences in order to challenge the existing inequitable status quo" (Browne, 2004, p. 2).

6.5 Final remarks

By conducting this investigation, we have learnt that the teachers of single-sex classes we have interviewed are aware of gender and think about it in relation to their teaching. There is not one clear-cut way of dealing with this issue, but by being aware of it you have a great advantage as well as possibility to see and react in an appropriate manner. All the teachers were in some kind of agreement and that is a promising sign, since we find the work for equal rights and opportunities very important as well as a part of the national curriculum. Some

teachers mentioned that the views and attitudes of the teachers of the programme-specific subjects in the courses of study may differ. We can only speculate about the reasons for the differing views and opinions of how important gender issues are, but it is a good sign that all English teachers who took part in our investigation work consciously with gender issues although they may do it in different ways. All the teachers who took part in the investigation seem to be of the same opinion as Schmidl (2008) who in her qualitative study suggests that all school managers as well as teachers should receive education on gender issues in order to work gender consciously.

We were aware from the start that there would not be any general answers for us. We can still draw inspiration from the fact that teachers do focus on their pupils when selecting texts, because of their gender, their interests or their course of study. When we think about how the teachers choose what text to use, it makes us think that teachers' work depends on the school where you work, how many pupils there are, and what kinds of classes you teach - class dynamics, gender of the class, study programme.

English is the type of subject where you really have every kind of possibility. Apart from the foundation or aims of the syllabus and curriculum you have an opportunity to decide what to do and how you are to achieve the goals. Working with gender in one way or another is possible and somewhat obligatory since it is one of the school missions: to give all pupils the same opportunities and conditions for learning and help them prepare to be fully equipped to handle life as adults. That Skolverket's *Engelska - samtalsguide* (2008) claim that boys are underachieving in the subject of English only makes working with gender even more important. Gender differences are often looked upon with regard to how girls and women are disadvantaged, but it is important to remember that inequality also concerns boys' rights and obligations as well as their achievements.

Gender is an important factor and we as future teachers do have to give it some thought and always carry it with us in the back of our minds since our attitude towards it shows through. Pupils are affected by everything we do in school and we need to set the examples for the sake of our society. Equality is a foundation for a democratic society.

We have had the chance to hear experienced teachers discuss gender adapted material and single-sex classes. The previous research that was looked into as a part of our project has also

broadened our minds. Our opinion after having worked with this topic and learned about the pros and cons is that gender adapted material is right in some situations. However, we will stress again that not all girls are the same, nor are all boys the same. Therefore do we believe that it is important to vary the materials and be careful not to ascribe different values to pupils because of their sex/gender. We also would like to acknowledge that single-sex classes have both positive and negative sides. An important advantage for the pupils is that a single-sex class sometimes might feel more comfortable. The teachers interviewed stated this, which is in accordance with the study carried out by Mike Younger and Molly Warrington (2007) who concluded that boys and girls sometimes, under certain circumstances, feel more comfortable when they are taught in girls-only and boys-only classes. The pupils mentioned several advantages of such classes, for instance that they have fewer distractions in the classroom when the other sex is not present, that they are more willing and confident to answer questions and that the classroom atmosphere contributes more to their learning. A disadvantage may be that they do not get experience in existing and working together with the opposite sex.

A part of the purpose with this dissertation was to learn more about pros and cons concerning gender adapted teaching and also to learn more about views and attitudes of experienced teachers towards using gender as a factor when deciding what materials to use and how to use them. We also wanted to increase our knowledge of what significance gender/sex has in English education. We feel that we have gained a lot of inspiration in how to work gender consciously in the classroom, and we also feel that this study has given us different perspectives on the matter. Through this dissertation we have learned more about gender issues in school and we hope that this knowledge will help us to take an active part in the work for equality in our society, as a part of our future profession as teachers.

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Interview with "Erik" 2008-11-25

Appendix – Interview questions

Om den intervjuades erfarenheter av att undervisa i enkönade klasser

- Berätta om dina erfarenheter av att undervisa klasser bestående av enbart ett kön eller av klasser där ett kön är i klar majoritet.
- Ge ett exempel på någon text som du har använt i en flickgrupp. Skulle du kunna använda samma text i en pojkgrupp? Varför/varför inte?
- Ge ett exempel på någon text som du har använt i en pojkgrupp. Skulle du kunna använda samma text i en flickgrupp? Varför/varför inte?
- När eleverna själva får lov att välja texter, t.ex. skönlitteratur, har du kunnat se några tydliga skillnader mellan vad tjejer väljer att läsa och vad killar väljer att läsa?
- Kan du ge något exempel?
- Vad tror du att dessa skillnader beror på?

Om den intervjuades attityd gentemot genus och jämställdhet i allmänhet

- Hur skulle du beskriva din syn och inställning till jämställdhet och genus?
- Varför/varför inte är genus och jämställdhetsfrågor viktigt att synliggöra i skolans värld?
- Hur påverkar genusfrågorna ditt dagliga arbete i klassrummet?
- Vilka skillnader upplever du i ditt sätt att agera som lärare/i ditt bemötande i en pojkklass jämfört med en flickklass jämfört med en blandad klass?
- *Bör* ditt sätt att vara och arbeta vara detsamma i en pojkklass/flickklass/blandad klass? Motivera ditt svar. (Är det mest jämställt att behandla pojkar och flickor exakt lika eller är det mer jämställt att behandla dem olika?)

Om den intervjuades strategier när hon/han ska välja ut texter till engelskundervisningen

- Beskriv hur du generellt går tillväga när du skall välja ut en ny text som din klass ska jobba med.
- Vilka faktorer påverkar ditt val?
- Vilken/vilka faktorer är viktigast? (programtillhörighet, kursplan, kunskapsnivå, elevernas intressen etc.)

(Om läraren inte själv tar upp det: led in på eventuella skillnader i val av texter till pojkgrupper/flickgrupper och varför dessa val görs. Vart på listan hamnar genusfaktorn när texter väljs ut?)

Fördelar och nackdelar med att undervisa i enkönade grupper

- Upplever du att det finns några fördelar med att undervisa i enkönade klasser? Vilka?
- Upplever du att det finns några nackdelar? Vilka?

Reflektioner kring hur den intervjuades genusanpassade undervisning har fungerat i praktiken

- Hur upplever du att din genusanpassade undervisning har fungerat i praktiken?
- Hur blev resultatet?