

Chapter Eleven: The Development of a Gender Awareness Programme that challenge Teachers' Perceptions and Pedagogical Practices in ECE

Renisha Singh and Keshni Bipath

Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Introduction

Gender equality in early childhood education is pivotal to eliminating socio-economic challenges, including poverty, limited education and inadequate healthcare (Van der Gaag and Putcha 2015). Numerous studies emphasise the importance of promoting gender equality in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to enhance academic success, improve future employment prospects, and reduce societal inequalities (Aubrey 2017). Developing an environment that supports educational equality for both boys and girls is crucial for their growth and development (Abbott 2011). However, achieving gender equality in early childhood development (ECD) depends heavily on teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices, as these shape children's experiences and understanding of gender (Nabbuye 2018). Despite these insights, limited attention has been given to the role of teachers in either perpetuating or challenging gender stereotypes within ECD settings. Research suggests that young children are highly susceptible to internalising gendered norms and stereotypes through their interactions within educational institutions (Gansen 2017). Therefore, understanding teachers' beliefs and practices is vital to creating inclusive learning environments and ensuring a more equitable start for all children.

Literature review: Teachers' pedagogical practices and gender identity in early childhood

The literature emphasises teachers' significant role in shaping children's gender identity development in early childhood education (ECE). Since children spend a considerable amount of time in ECD centres, teachers' practices and pedagogical choices have a profound impact on gender identity formation (Aina and Cameron 2011). This literature review explores the influence of teacher interactions, classroom practices and awareness programmes on gender identity development.

Teachers' interactions and gender identity formation

Gender identity formation is a multifaceted process influenced by various social, cultural and individual factors such as race, class, language, ethnicity and religion (Baig 2015). Teachers significantly impact this process through their instructional methods and interactions with children. Research highlights that teachers' interactions and pedagogical practices reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes, consciously or unconsciously (Robinson and Jones-Diaz 2017). Baig (2015) concluded that teachers' everyday classroom interactions facilitate the construction and perpetuation of gender norms. Through these interactions, school culture and broader societal expectations regarding gender are conveyed to children (Blaise 2010).

Classroom practices and gender stereotyping

Several studies have highlighted the differential treatment of boys and girls in classroom practices. Pardhan (2011) explored how teachers' gendered interactions reflect deep-rooted patriarchal values, leading to differential engagement with boys and girls. In many cases, boys were more visible in the classroom, received more attention and were presented with higher-order questions and greater challenges, particularly in science and mathematics (Halai 2010). Conversely, girls were more often compliant, independent and received less attention. Such practices contribute to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and expectations (Pardhan 2011). Additionally,

gender differences in disciplinary practices were noted, with teachers using stricter disciplinary measures with boys while expecting girls to conform to norms of responsibility, passivity and politeness (Gansen 2021).

Classroom management and gendered practices

The literature also indicates that gender relations influence classroom management, impacting how teachers interact with boys and girls differently. Ahmed et al. (2018) observed that female teachers often focus on building relationships and fostering teamwork, while male teachers tend to adopt more authoritarian and assertive approaches. This differential treatment may reinforce gender stereotypes and unequal gender roles in young children's perceptions.

Policy and curriculum's role in gender identity construction

Policy documents and curricula are crucial in guiding teaching practices and shaping gender identities. The South African National Curriculum Framework emphasises the development of children's sense of identity and belonging, advocating for an anti-bias approach to address gender issues in early childhood (Department of Basic Education [DBE] 2015). Policies provide explicit and implicit directives for teachers to create inclusive environments that promote gender equality.

Awareness programmes to enhance gender identity

Teachers' perceptions and practices significantly shape gender development. However, there is a growing recognition of the need to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Research by Xu (2020) and Chapman (2016) suggests that gender awareness programmes can help teachers reflect on their biases and adopt gender-sensitive practices. Such programmes involve professional development workshops, encouraging gender flexibility, and developing child-centred discourses in early childhood settings (Warin and Adriany 2017). Teachers are encouraged to facilitate a range of activities that challenge traditional gender roles and promote gender equity.

Gender-responsive pedagogy and inclusive practices

The development of gender-responsive pedagogy is critical for promoting equitable classroom environments. Teachers must be aware of their gender biases and actively work towards providing equal opportunities for both boys and girls. This involves offering equal access to learning materials, ensuring equal participation in classroom activities, and using inclusive language during lessons (Ismail et al. 2022). Despite the challenges in implementing gender-responsive pedagogy, such as deeply ingrained gender norms, continuous gender awareness-raising activities can gradually lead to more equitable teaching practices (Ananga 2021).

Promoting gender equality through curriculum and resources

To foster an inclusive learning environment, teachers must critically assess and adapt classroom resources, such as books, toys and instructional materials, to disrupt gender stereotypes (Giraldo and Colyar 2012). Teachers should ensure that activities and themes do not favour one gender over another, allowing both boys and girls to explore various aspects of masculinity and femininity. By providing equal opportunities in all areas, such as sports, drama, and play activities, teachers can create an environment that supports gender flexibility and challenges traditional gender norms.

Addressing gender fluidity in early childhood education

Recognising children with fluid gender identities is crucial in creating inclusive learning spaces. Research by Proulx et al. (2019) indicates that schools with LGBTQ-inclusive programmes are less likely to face issues of bullying and suicidal thoughts among children. Thus, developing awareness programmes encouraging teachers to support gender fluidity can broaden children's experiences and disrupt stereotypical teaching practices (Parker 2016). Teachers' pedagogical practices significantly impact gender identity development in early childhood. The reinforcement of gender stereotypes

through teacher interactions and classroom practices perpetuates traditional gender roles, highlighting the need for awareness programmes and gender-sensitive training. Policies and curricula should guide teachers towards inclusive practices that promote gender equality. By challenging traditional norms and creating supportive environments, teachers can play a pivotal role in enhancing gender equity in early childhood education.

This literature review suggests that gender equality in ECE requires a multifaceted approach that involves challenging existing stereotypes, adapting classroom practices and raising teachers' awareness of their impact on children's gender identity development. Developing a gender awareness programme in ECE draws upon post-structural theory, focusing on critically interrogating teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. This approach recognises teachers' pivotal role in shaping gender-stereotypical development (Ball et al. 2013). The programme aims to challenge and transform these perceptions by fostering a deeper understanding of how discourses influence and regulate gendered behaviours.

Theoretical framework

Post-structural theory, which emphasises discourses, power, subjectivity and agency, is the foundation of this gender awareness programme. In this context, discourse is defined as established ways of speaking, thinking, feeling and acting that provide a framework for understanding gender norms (Blaise and Taylor 2012). These discourses regulate behaviours by establishing rules and practices that determine what is considered normal or acceptable for different genders (Foucault 1972). Through their pedagogical practices, teachers often unknowingly reinforce these traditional discourses of femininity and masculinity (Martin and Muthukrishna 2011).

For example, the discourse of femininity prescribes particular behaviours and ways of being for girls, emphasising gentleness and quietness, while the discourse of masculinity encourages dominance and loudness for boys (Blaise and Taylor 2012). Additionally, regulatory practices within these discourses label and punish deviations from established gender norms, leading to ridicule or exclusion, such as when girls play with boys or boys engage in activities associated with femininity (Bhana et al. 2011). Queer theory further complicates this

understanding by highlighting the influence of heterosexual norms on gender identity formation, and the marginalisation faced by those who deviate from these norms (Blaise and Taylor 2012).

Role of critical reflection

Central to post-structural theory is critical reflection, which enables teachers to interrogate dominant beliefs about gender embedded in the hidden curriculum of ECE (Gelot 2019). Through reflective discussions, teachers are encouraged to question why certain groups dominate others and to become aware of the power dynamics that shape their pedagogical practices. This reflection helps teachers understand how their experiences of prejudice, discrimination and homophobia influence their perceptions of gender identity (Blaise and Taylor 2012).

The gender awareness programme aims to cultivate this critical awareness by engaging teachers in discussions about gender, power, inclusion and exclusion. These discussions are designed to develop analytical thinking and encourage the adoption of anti-bias approaches in the classroom. By critically reflecting on their experiences and the discourses they perpetuate, teachers can gain insight into how their practices influence children's construction of gender identities (Blaise and Taylor 2012).

Pedagogical practices

The programme emphasises the importance of shifting teachers' pedagogical practices to challenge entrenched gender norms. It aims to empower teachers to disrupt the traditional discourses that define femininity and masculinity by creating inclusive and equitable learning environments. This shift requires moving away from reinforcing stereotypes towards developing strategies that promote diversity, challenge biases and encourage all children to explore a wide range of identities and roles. By understanding and challenging the discourses that shape their perceptions, teachers can reframe their pedagogical practices to support a more inclusive approach to gender in ECE. The gender awareness programme aims to create a reflective space where teachers can critically engage with issues of gender, power and agency, thereby transforming their practices to foster a more equitable

educational experience for all children.

The development of a gender awareness programme that challenges teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices in ECE was guided by a post-structuralist theoretical approach. Post-structural theory emphasises the critical reflection necessary to understand power relationships within institutions (Foucault 1972). It challenges conventional norms and structures, allowing the uncovering of embedded inequalities. In this study, post-structuralism provided a dynamic framework for exploring and reflecting on gender and power through discourses, subjectivity, and agency (Martin and Muthukrishna 2011). The research design was centred on participatory action research (PAR) principles to create opportunities for teachers to interrogate gender biases critically, reflect on their teaching practices and collaboratively construct new knowledge (Chevalier and Buckles 2019).

Research design and approach

The current study utilised a case study approach to enable in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions and practices within the context of ECE. A case study was deemed appropriate as it allows for multiple data collection techniques and provides an informative understanding of phenomena within their natural settings (Yin 2012). For purposes of the current study, data were collected through a combination of observations, interviews and PAR workshops to gain a nuanced understanding of teachers' gender perceptions and pedagogical practices. The purpose of the PAR workshops was to provide a space for dynamic engagement and reflection among participants, while facilitating the transformation of their perceptions.

Sampling and participants

The study involved a purposive sample of twelve teachers from four registered ECD centres. The selected teachers were required to have five or more years of teaching experience with 3- or 4-year-old children and hold an ECD teaching qualification. All participants were female, as no male

teachers were employed at the selected ECD centres. The group was diverse in terms of racial composition, including Caucasian, Asian, Indian and African teachers from lower and middle socio-economic ECD centres. The sample size was small, reflecting the principles of PAR, which emphasise deep understanding and close relationships between participants and the researcher (Wood et al. 2017).

Description of research sites

The current study was conducted at four distinct ECD centres in Gauteng Province, South Africa. The research sites were selected based on their diverse socio-economic contexts and pedagogical approaches, which included Reggio Emilia, Montessori and traditional ECE methods. These centres varied in terms of physical infrastructure, resources and teaching philosophies, contributing to the richness of the study.

- **Suburban Centre A** (Midrand): A middle-class ECD centre with dedicated play and learning areas, including a library and art area.
- **Suburban Centre B** (Centurion): A Reggio Emilia-inspired ECD centre focusing on creative and observational skills, with separate play and art spaces.
- **Suburban Centre C** (Midrand): A Montessori-based ECD centre with defined learning zones, including sensory, mathematics, and practical life areas.
- **Township Centre D** (Ivory Park): An ECD centre attached to a government clinic in a densely populated informal settlement, with limited resources and classroom space.

Data collection

Data were collected in four phases using five key collection techniques: observations; interviews; PAR workshops; group discussions and reflections.

- **Phase 1: Observations:** The researcher conducted observations to examine teachers' classroom interactions and identify existing gender norms in their pedagogical practices. This phase provided a baseline understanding of how gender was constructed and reinforced within the ECD environment.
- **Phase 2: Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers to elicit their perceptions of gender and their current pedagogical practices. The interviews explored teachers' awareness of gender stereotypes and their influence on children's experiences.
- **Phase 3: PAR workshops:** In this phase, PAR) workshops were conducted to engage teachers in reflective discussions and activities. The first workshop aimed to build relationships among participants, with a focus on exploring and challenging traditional gender perceptions. The activities were designed to establish trust, encourage open feedback and facilitate collaborative learning (Wood et al. 2017). During the workshop, teachers watched a video that challenged gender stereotypes and participated in developing posters to reflect their learning. Guiding questions included:
 - How do teachers feel about challenging gender stereotypes?
 - How can teachers' gender perceptions and pedagogical practices be challenged?
 - How can teachers be made aware of gender stereotypes?
- **Phase 4: Feedback and reflection:** In the final phase, teachers provided feedback on the workshops' effects on their perceptions and pedagogical practices. This phase involved group discussions and reflections on the knowledge gained and its application in their professional contexts. Participants shared photographs and personal stories to illustrate their learning experiences. The reflective discussions aimed to support participants in developing new knowledge that would influence their professional development (Zuber-Skerritt 2018).

Data analysis

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes across the interviews, observations and workshop discussions (Lawless and Chen 2019). The analysis focused on key themes related to teachers' perceptions of gender, dominant discourses' influence, and the impact of the reflective discussions. Emerging themes were categorised and presented to the group for verification, ensuring the findings reflected participants' collective experiences and perspectives.

Ethical considerations

The study adhered to the university's ethical guidelines and obtained informed consent from all participants. The purpose and aims of the research were explained, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity. The potential benefits of the study were also shared with the participants to ensure transparency and trustworthiness.

Findings and discussion

The data analysis in the current study focused on exploring and understanding the perceptions and pedagogical practices of ECD teachers concerning gender inequality. The thematic data analysis revealed three key themes: teacher perceptions of gender inequality; pedagogical practices and gender inequality and changes in perceptions and pedagogical practices after intervention. The study's findings are drawn from observations, interviews and collaborative discussions, which were organised into categories and connected to emerging themes.

Teacher perceptions of gender inequality

The findings revealed that teachers in ECD centres held specific gendered perceptions that influenced their interactions with children. Three sub-categories of gendered perceptions were evident:

- **Curriculum resources and hidden curriculum:** Teachers' perceptions of boys and girls were often reinforced by curriculum resources, which portrayed stereotypical gender roles. Participants noted how boys were depicted as engaging in adventurous activities and wearing shorts, while girls were shown doing passive or domestic tasks. Teachers unconsciously addressed children based on these stereotypes, referring to girls as "angels" and boys as "strong". This hidden curriculum shaped children's experiences and reinforced gender expectations.
- **Discipline strategies:** Gendered perceptions influenced how teachers disciplined children. Participants consistently noted that boys needed firmer discipline due to perceived aggressive behaviour, while girls were seen as softer and needing gentler correction. This differential treatment was a significant manifestation of gender inequality in the classroom environment, which reinforced stereotypical perceptions about boys being more disruptive and girls being more compliant.
- **Classroom management and gendered activities:** Teachers managed classroom activities in ways that reinforced gender norms. For example, boys were often given more active and structural tasks like playing with blocks, while girls were encouraged to engage in quieter activities like dressing up. The division of activities and the allocation of time for engagement indicated a gendered approach to classroom management, with teachers unconsciously reinforcing traditional gender expectations through their pedagogical practices.

Pedagogical practices and gender inequality

The findings also highlighted that teachers' pedagogical practices played a significant role in reinforcing gender stereotypes. Two sub-themes emerged:

- **Influence of hidden curriculum on boys' behaviour:** Teachers reported that boys received more attention because they were

perceived as louder, more active and less focused. This reflected teachers' perceptions and a result of the hidden curriculum embedded in classroom practices. Boys were given more attention and often portrayed as requiring greater supervision; an approach that reinforced gendered notions of boys as challenging and girls as compliant.

- **Influence of hidden curriculum on girls' behaviour:** Observations showed that girls were often praised more but received less attention from teachers. Girls were described as more emotional and compliant, needing less discipline than boys. Teachers unconsciously reinforced these perceptions, thereby perpetuating gender norms through their interactions. Classroom resources and activities, such as storybooks that depicted girls as passive characters, further entrenched these gender stereotypes.

Challenging gender stereotypes in teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices

Phase 1 of the study revealed that teachers were reluctant to challenge gender stereotypes within the classroom. They did not intervene when children played in gendered ways, such as boys constructing and girls making mud cakes. Teachers were also unaware of the subtle reinforcement of gender roles through curriculum resources that depicted boys and girls in stereotypical roles. These findings indicate a need for critical reflection on how resources and classroom activities contribute to gender bias.

However, the introduction of the gender awareness programme provided an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practices and develop greater conscientisation about gender stereotypes. Teachers became more aware of the need to critically evaluate resources and challenge traditional gender roles in the classroom. For instance, teachers began to pay more attention to selecting books portraying boys and girls in diverse roles. They encouraged all children to participate in various activities without preconceived notions of what was appropriate for each gender.

Changes in perceptions and pedagogical practices

After participating in the gender awareness programme, teachers showed a shift in their perceptions and practices. The change in awareness became a catalyst for transforming the early learning environment into a more gender-equitable space. Teachers reported being more mindful of their attitudes towards gender, the influence of the curriculum on gender perceptions, and the need for inclusive classroom activities. One participant noted, ‘I make sure both boys and girls do the same activities’, indicating a conscious effort to avoid reinforcing gender roles.

Teachers’ collaborative reflections and actions, guided by the principles of PAR and post-structuralist thinking, aimed to create a more inclusive space for all children. This awareness allowed teachers to critically examine and adapt their perceptions, discipline strategies and classroom management practices. The study revealed that challenging teachers’ perceptions can lead to meaningful changes in pedagogical practices, transforming the classroom environment.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study explored the development of a gender awareness programme aimed at challenging teachers’ perceptions and pedagogical practices in ECE. The findings revealed entrenched gendered perceptions among teachers, influenced by hidden curricula, classroom resources and daily practices. These perceptions shaped their discipline strategies, classroom management and interaction with children, reinforcing traditional gender norms. However, the gender awareness programme catalysed change, leading to a noticeable shift in teachers’ understanding and attitudes toward gender. Teachers became more reflective of their own biases, critically evaluated classroom materials and consciously worked towards creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

The study underscores teachers’ perceptions of their critical role in either perpetuating or challenging gender stereotypes in the classroom. It highlights that transforming ECE spaces requires a shift in teachers’ awareness of their pedagogical practices and classroom dynamics. By

challenging traditional gender norms and embracing gender inclusivity, teachers can contribute to broader social transformation, fostering a learning environment that values equality for all children through the following recommendations.

The first five years of a child’s life are crucial in shaping their identity. Therefore, the study recommends implementing the Renisha Singh Gender Awareness Pedagogy (RS-GAP) Framework within the ECD sector (See Figure 11.1). This framework aims to address and challenge gender stereotypes embedded within teaching practices, resources and social interactions. The RS-GAP framework envisions a collaborative approach involving parents, teachers, community stakeholders and ECD internal stakeholders in creating an inclusive and gender-equitable learning environment.

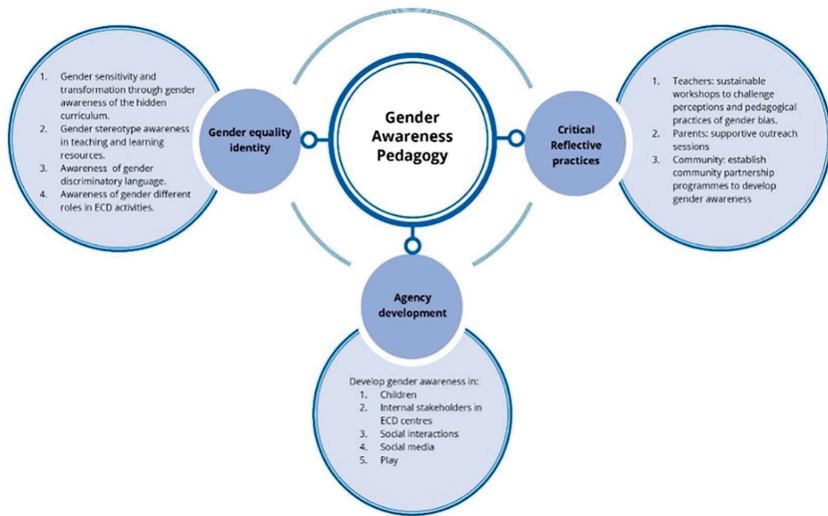


Figure 11.1: The RS-GAP
Source: Authors’ own

Key components of the RS-GAP framework are outlined below:

- **Professional development workshops:** Continuous professional development and training on gender equality

should be provided to ECE teachers. These workshops should raise awareness about hidden curricula, gender biases and their implications for classroom practices. Training sessions should also provide practical strategies to promote gender equity in teaching methods, discipline strategies and resource selection.

- **Critical review of curriculum resources:** Teachers and school administrators should critically evaluate and select classroom resources, such as books, learning materials and activities, to ensure they represent diverse and non-stereotypical gender roles. Guidelines and checklists can be developed to help teachers assess resources and eliminate gender-biased materials.
- **Reflective practice and collaboration:** Encourage teachers to engage in reflective practice and peer collaboration to examine their perceptions and classroom practices continuously. Establishing communities of practice or regular discussion forums where teachers can share experiences and insights can help maintain the momentum of change initiated by the awareness programme.
- **Gender-inclusive classroom management:** Teachers should implement gender-inclusive strategies in classroom management and interactions with children. This involves consciously balancing attention between boys and girls, offering all children equal opportunities to participate in activities and addressing children by name rather than reinforcing gender stereotypes through language.
- **Longitudinal monitoring and evaluation:** Schools and educational institutions should establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of gender awareness programmes. This will help track changes in teachers' practices and perceptions over time, identify areas for further improvement and sustain gender equity initiatives in the long term.
- **Policy advocacy and curriculum reform:** This study's findings highlight the need for broader advocacy at the policy level to include gender sensitivity training in teacher education programmes. Curriculum reforms should integrate gender

equality as a core component of early childhood education to create systemic and lasting change in ECD centres.

- **Teacher training workshops:** Conduct targeted professional development workshops to raise teachers' awareness of gender bias and its impact on their pedagogical practices. These workshops should include practical strategies to challenge stereotypes in classroom activities, interactions and resource selection. Teachers should be equipped with skills to promote gender equity in everyday ECE practices.
- **Parental guidance sessions:** Host outreach sessions that guide parents on cultivating gender awareness at home. These sessions should emphasise the importance of balanced language use, equitable activities and critical media consumption. Parents should be encouraged to reflect on and challenge gender stereotypes that may unconsciously shape their interactions with their children.
- **Community and partnership programmes:** Establish community-based partnership programmes to raise awareness about gender stereotypes and their effects. Collaborate with community organisations, local government and stakeholders to promote inclusive gender norms beyond the classroom. By integrating community efforts, the framework can create a more holistic and sustainable approach to gender awareness.
- **Curriculum and resource evaluation:** Advocate for the critical review and revision of ECD curricula and teaching materials to eliminate gender bias. Schools and educational policymakers should use the RS-GAP framework as a guideline to ensure that all learning materials and activities promote gender equality and reflect diverse gender roles.
- **Monitoring and support systems:** Implement systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the RS-GAP framework. Schools should evaluate teachers' practices and children's responses regularly to ensure ongoing progress toward gender inclusivity. Additionally, provide continuous support and mentorship to teachers and staff to reinforce gender-equitable

pedagogical practices.

- **Collaborative dialogue and reflection:** Encourage open dialogue and reflection sessions among teachers, parents and community members. These sessions can provide opportunities to share experiences, address challenges and foster mutual learning on gender awareness. A culture of collaboration will support ongoing conscientisation and commitment to gender equity.
- The RS-GAP framework promotes a sustainable and comprehensive approach to gender equality by fostering gender awareness among all stakeholders. Implementing this framework in ECE will lay a strong foundation for children to develop gender-equitable identities, positively impacting their academic, career and socio-economic outcomes.

By implementing these recommendations, ECE teachers can continue to challenge gender stereotypes, creating a foundation for more inclusive and equitable early learning environments that positively impact the development of all children.

References

- Abbott, D. A. 2011. Is there an optimal environment for child development? *Ave Maria L. Rev.*, 10: 121.
- Ahmed, M., Ambreen, M. and Hussain, I. 2018. Gender differentials among teachers' classroom management strategies in the Pakistani context. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 5(2): 178–193.
- Aina, O. E. and Cameron, P. 2011. Why does gender matter? Counteracting stereotypes with young children. *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, 39(3): 11–20.
- Ananga, E. D. 2021. Gender-responsive pedagogy for teaching and learning: The practice in Ghana's initial teacher education programme. *Creative Education*, 12(4): 848–864.
- Aubrey, C. 2017. Sources of inequality in South African early child development services. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 7(1):

- 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v7i1.450>
- Baig, A. B. 2015. Exploring the contribution of teaching and learning processes: constructing students' gender identity in an early years classroom of a government girls primary school in Pakistan. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(3): 1.
- Ball, L. C., Cribbie, R. A. and Steele, J. R. 2013. Beyond gender differences: Using tests of equivalence to evaluate gender similarities. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 37(2): 147–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684313480483>
- Bhana, D., Nzimakwe, T. and Nzimakwe, P. 2011. Gender in the early years: Boys and girls in an African working-class primary school. *International Journal of Educational Development* 31(5): 443–448. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2010.09.001>
- Blaise, M. 2010. Kiss and tell: Gendered narratives and childhood sexuality. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 35(1): 1–9.
- Blaise, M. and Taylor, A. 2012. Using queer theory to rethink gender equity. *Young Children*, 67(1): 88–97.
- Chapman, R. 2016. A case study of gendered play in pre-schools: how childhood educators' perceptions of gender influence children's play. *Early Child Development and Care*, 186(8): 1271–1284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2015.1089435>
- Chevalier, J. M. and Buckles, D. J. 2019. Ins and outs of participatory action research. In: *Participatory Action Research*, edited by J. M Chevalier AND D. J. Buckles. London and New York: Routledge.
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2015. *The South African National Curriculum Framework for children from Birth to Four*. [Online]. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/media/911/file/SAF-national-curriculum-framework-0-4-En.pdf> [Accessed on 28 April 2025].
- Foucault, M. 1972. *The archaeology of knowledge*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Gansen, H. M. 2017. Reproducing (and disrupting) heteronormativity: Gendered sexual socialisation in preschool classrooms. *Sociology of Education*, 90(3): 255–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040717720981>
- — —. 2021. Disciplining difference(s): Reproducing inequalities through disciplinary interactions in pre-school. *Social Problems*, 68(3):

- 740–760. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spaa011>
- Gelot, L. 2019. Training for peace, conscientisation through university simulation. *Journal of Peace Education* 16(2): 195–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2019.1576514>
- Giraldo, E. and Colyar, J. 2012. Dealing with gender in the classroom: a portrayed case study of four teachers. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(1): 25–38.
- Halai, A. 2010. Gender and mathematics education in Pakistan: A situation analysis. *The Mathematics Enthusiast*, 7(1): 47–62. <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/tme/>
- Ismail, I., Cabus, S. and Pieck, L. 2022. *Effectiveness of a gender-responsive pedagogy model in early childhood education in South Africa*. Brussels, Belgium: VVOB – education for development.
- Lawless, B. and Chen, Y. W. 2019. Developing a method of critical thematic analysis for qualitative communication inquiry. *Howard Journal of Communications* 30(1): 92–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2018.1439423>
- Martin, M. and Muthukrishna, N. 2011. Deconstructing discourses of gender equality in cross-gender friendships: Grade seven boys and girls in an inner-city school. *Gender and Behaviour*, 9(1): 3798–3816. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC34660>
- Nabbuye, H. 2018. *Gender-sensitive pedagogy: The bridge to girls' quality education in Uganda*. ECHIDNA global scholars program, policy brief. Washington: Center for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution.
- Pardhan, A. 2011. Influence of teacher-student interactions on kindergarten children's developing gender identity within the Pakistani urban classroom culture. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(7): 929–948. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2010.504371>
- Parker, S. 2016. Gender fluidity. In: *Ethical ripples of creativity and innovation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. pp. 165–173.
- Proulx, C. N., Coulter, R. W., Egan, J. E., Matthews, D. D. and Mair, C. 2019. Associations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning–inclusive sex education with mental health outcomes and school-based victimization in US high school students. *Journal of Adolescent Health*,

64(5): 608–614.

- Robinson, K. H. and Jones-Diaz, C. J. 2017. *Diversity and difference in childhood: Issues for theory and practice*, 2nd ed. McGraw-Hill Education, UK.
- Van der Gaag, J. and Putcha, V. 2015. *Investigating in early childhood development: What is being spent, and what does it cost?* Washington: Brookings Global.
- Warin, J. and Adriany, V. 2017. Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26 (4): 375–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2015.1105738>
- Wood, L, Louw, I. and Zuber-Skerritt, O. 2017. Enhancing postgraduate learning and development: a participatory action learning and action research approach through conferences. *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 14(2): 120–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767333.2017.1295361>
- Xu, Y. 2020. Does the gender of a practitioner matter in early childhood education and care? Perspectives from Scottish and Chinese young children. *Children and Society*, 34(5): 354–370. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12371>
- Yin, R. K. 2012. Case study methods. In *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological*, edited by H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, and K. J. Sher. Washington, American Psychological Association. Pp. 141–155.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. 2018. An educational framework for participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). *Educational Action Research*, 26(4): 513–532. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2018.1464939>