Gender issues in school situations

- Gender and gender differences

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1. Abstract

This essay takes a closer look at gender in connection to school and English as a second language. Through the works of a number of authors, the subject of gender is explained and there are explanations to how everyone takes part in the process of creating gender even as children. One section of the essay is about how teachers together with their students and colleagues can work with issues related to gender to create a more equal classroom, in order for everyone to have the same opportunities for a good future.

The essay also includes a discussion of the results of a small-scale questionnaire-based research task carried out at an upper secondary school in Småland, in the south of Sweden. It investigates whether pupils at that particular school find themselves treated in different ways because of their sex. It also investigates if teachers find themselves treating their pupils differently and if so, on purpose. The reason for using a research is to connect the theory of the books to the reality in school.
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2. Introduction

As children, we learn about what boys and girls should do and should not do. In her study *Genuspedagogik* Kajsa Svaleryd states that teachers may actually treat boys and girls differently without knowing about it (Svaleryd 18-21). For example, teachers may talk in a different voice to boys compared with how they speak to girls, or they may have different expectations of boys than they have of from girls when it comes to a particular subject, for example maths or English. From our parents, we learn to categorize individuals as boys and girls from a very early age (Svaleryd 23-24). Furthermore, most of us probably Surely we have our own ideas about how a girl should act and how a boy should act and maybe that is why people treat them differently.

I became interested in gender and differences between the two sexes during the pedagogical courses in the Swedish teaching training program. I reflected on gender differences during my teacher training period in the autumn of 2006 and started to wonder if boys and girls are treated differently in the classroom. I noticed during my teacher training period that autumn that boys took up so much space that the girls became invisible. Boys shouted and screamed swearwords to each other to such an extent that the teacher had no time to help those who needed help (in this case the girls), as they were busy trying to calm the boys down.

This essay will investigate if boys and girls are treated differently in the English classroom, and, if so, provide a few suggestions as to why this is the case. It will also investigate whether teachers are aware of gender differences and if they treat boys and girls differently on purpose. It is important to have in mind that this is a very small-scale study. My own ideas of gender differences and the small- scale research that was made at an upper
secondary school in Småland as well as theory from books, articles and web pages will all be considered. The investigation is used to link theory from the books to the reality in school.

The primary aim of this essay is to try to find out if boys and girls are treated differently in the classroom. Using questionnaires I ask how and why teachers work with their pupils to create a more equal classroom because according to Swedish law everyone should have the same opportunity to take part in the learning process (Skollagen, the opening paragraph).

3. Method and material

Two questionnaires were handed out at an upper secondary school in the south of Sweden to English classes and teachers of English as a second language as well as to teachers of other subjects. I will discuss the results of the questionnaire that was handed out to a number of students, who study English as a second language at upper secondary school. The school has about one thousand pupils and it is situated in a city. I will also discuss the results of the questionnaire that was handed out to teachers both of English as a second language and of other subjects. The reason that the questionnaires were handed out to other teachers than only English teachers is because there were too few teachers of English at this specific school. Additionally, I will investigate whether or not students find themselves treated differently in some way because of their sexes and also if teachers find themselves treating boys and girls differently and, if so, why. The reason that I wanted to use questionnaires is because I wanted to reach as many as possible. The timetable for this essay did not allow me to hand out the questionnaire to more than 30 students and around 10 teachers. It is important to remember that this investigation cannot really provide any general statements about the problem but it will provide a small-scale response to it. My study is not universal but it gives an insight into of how both teachers and pupils think when it comes to gender.
The questions that are used for the questionnaire which were handed out to the pupils can be found in the Appendix on page 34-35. The reason why I chose these questions was because I wanted to find out firstly, if they do think about these kinds of questions and secondly I wanted them to develop their answers. The questions which were handed out to the teachers can also be found in the Appendix on page 36-37. With these questions I wanted to make the teachers think about gender and put it in relation to their profession as a teacher. By giving the teachers examples as part of some questions my aim was to make it easier for them to understand what that particular question was about. The questions that are used for the questionnaires are both open and closed questions. Open questions can be developed while close questions are questions that only demand a yes or a no. The reason I used both open and closed questions is because they will be analyzed in the essay together with theory and my own thoughts and also because the answers will be developed in different ways. Christer Stensmo claims in his book “Vetenskapsteori och metod för lärare” that it is harder to analyse open questions but they are essential for the study because it is those questions that explain how and why a student or a teacher thinks the way he or she does (Stensmo 24-25). I chose to write the questions in Swedish, both to reduce the risks of students misinterpreting the questions, and also because some of the teachers do not teach English.

Furthermore I realized during the process of writing this essay that I needed to complement my answers to the questionnaire that was handed out to the teachers, since I did not receive all the information I needed to be able to answer the questions that I had. Therefore I carried out a semi-structured interview at the same school where the questionnaire had been handed out but the interviewee had not answered the questionnaire though. The interviewee is an English teacher who has been working at that school for ten years and her age is 35. According to Allan Bryman’s book “Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder” a semi-structured interview means that there are a number of questions that are prepared for the
interviewee, based on the purpose of the investigation. These questions are numbered but one does not have to ask them in that particular order during the interview, it depends on how the interview develops. Bryman continues to write that by using a semi-structured interview one has the possibility to develop questions and ask attendant questions if one need to go deeper in within the answers. There is always the possibility to explain one question if the interviewee does not understand and that is an advantage you do not have when it comes to questionnaires.

Questions that were asked in the interview can be found in the Appendix on page 39. It is important to have in mind that the results and answers that will be presented in the essay later on are based on two questionnaires and that there may have been other answers if another way of investigation had been used. It is also important to remember that when questionnaires are used, it is possible that people interpret the questions in another way than the enquirer does. I have tried to keep this in mind when analysing the answers.

4. Previous Research

Since there were very few, almost no, articles and books written in English about this subject, most of my sources are in Swedish. Moreover the secondary material that will be used in this essay is about how we create our own prejudices, and how people shape their prejudices even as children, and how our thoughts about what is boyish and what is girlish are created in a social context together with older and younger people. One secondary source, Svaleryd (2006) brings up how boys and girls are supposed to act and also why. Svaleryd mentions some methods that can be used in the classroom to work with gender with the students, as this is important to make students and teachers aware of differences in treatment of the two sexes. I also want to refer to three psychology books namely “Social Psychology” by David Myers, “Psychology the science of mind and behaviours” by Michael W Passer, Ronald E Smith and
“Personality Psychology, Domains of Knowledge About Human Nature” by David M. Buss and Randy J. Larsen, that describe gender and how gender affects our minds and how we create our own prejudices together with our friends, family and also how media affects us. Finally I have used an article ”Genusskillnader i klassrummet ur elevperspektiv” by Anna – Karin Björkhed and Charlotte Löwinge that deals with gender in school with a closer look at English as a subject.

Jan Einarsson and Tor G. Hultman have investigated the gender situation in a couple of classrooms at primary and secondary schools in their study” Godmorgon pojkar och flickor”. They found that teachers are not aware of gender differences in the classroom. Einarsson and Hultman write about boys taking up too much space and girls being nice and silent. They state that in discussions in classrooms girls tend to let the boys talk first. According to Einarsson and Hultman it could be the boys´ way of talking that makes the girls silent (37).

Svaleryd writes that boys and girls are different because grown-ups want them to be different. Small children want to be as their parents want them to be. According to Svaleryd, pedagogues need to take their responsibility and start to talk about gender as early as in pre-school. Svaleryd continues to write that with knowledge about gender we can all make big differences (33). Svaleryd has done research at a pre-school about gender and she found that girls and boys are treated differently in many ways. One example is that teachers talk in different voices to boys and girls.

Another piece of research made by Annika Lindholm and Git-Marie Nilsson says something else. According to Lindholm’s and Nilsson’s study research “Godmorgon genus”, teachers at that particular pre-primary school treated children in the same way. Their aim was to find out if teachers at that particular pre-primary school treated boys and girls differently. The teachers at the pre-primary school did not know that Lindholm and Nilsson
were observing gender issues, as this could have led them to behave like they did not normally do. They found out that eachers treated small children more softly than they treated older children but they did not find many gender differences at all. Teachers at the pre-primary school were aware of and had been educated in gender issues when they studied to become teachers. As Svaleryd mentions, knowledge about gender matters when it comes to how you treat your pupils. Svaleryd also mentions that it is important to start to work with issues relating to gender when children are young, to make them understand issues related to gender and also to give them a foundation to work with gender in older ages later on.

Björkhed and Löwinge write that girls find themselves being treated different from the boys (20). Girls claimed that teachers more often shout at boys than they do at girls. Teachers also let girls answer questions more often than boys, but on the other hand, boys are more prone to yell the answer out loud than to raise their hand. This could be one of the reasons as to why girls are allowed to answer more questions, as they raise their hands more often.

Svaleryd writes that teachers tend to be angrier with girls when they are late since they rarely are late for lessons. On the other hand Björkhed and Löwinge support what the boys think. They write that teachers tend to be more soft and nice to girls (4). Moreover girls felt that boys got more help and that they got more attention from the teacher than the girls did. According to Svaleryd this is because boys tend to be louder and teachers work hard to get them silent so that the rest of the class can work in peace (14-23). Björkhed and Löwinge support this argument and write that girls often have more control and are more proper than boys are (7). Björkhed and Löwinge claim that teachers often have different expectations on boys and girls (7).

Both teachers and pupils need to learn more about gender. People, according to Berit Lundgren’s study “Skolan I livet – Livet I skolan” pupils learn best in dialogue with
others (29), and therefore it is important to let the pupils be part of the process of how teachers and pupils will work with issues about gender (35). Svaleryd writes that since teachers need to make the noisy boys silent and so on the rest of the class does not get the help they need (14-23). What she says is about people learning best in dialogue with others is interesting since according to Bengt-Erik Andersson’s book “Ungdomarna, skolan och livet” it is important to let pupils take their own initiative and come up with their own ideas on how they can work with gender. This is because people learn many things when they are allowed to use their own minds to come up with ideas. If only the teacher comes up with ideas, he or she will probably learn more, and if pupils and teachers mix their ideas they will all learn and develop more (35).

Svaleryd writes that as a pedagogue it is important to be aware of the fact that your own gender norms and values affect the teaching, your choice of containment in the teaching and also your treatment of the pupils. It is also important to study the images and ideas that teachers have about what is masculine and feminine. The ideas that we have had during our own upbringing may not always fit into the goals and guidelines that are expressed for equal opportunities in the curriculum. It is a good idea to start to talk to other people, such as colleagues, about gender and what thoughts people have about gender, boys and girls (Svaleryd 8-9). There may be teachers who do not realise that they are prejudiced and who need to listen and talk to other people to understand that they really have their thoughts about gender. Maybe they have different expectations when it comes to boys and girls.

Creating an equal school or an equal classroom should be something that teachers would want to work with (Svaleryd 10). But to make this happen it is necessary to start with yourself and your ideas about gender.

4.1 What is gender and how can we connect gender to school?
In his book “Mänskliga samhällen“ Abraham de Swan writes that it is important to keep in mind that things that we consider boyish and girlish, and thoughts people have about what a typical boy or girl is like, are socially constructed by all human beings. How people expect a typical boy or girl to act will produce that behaviour in the boy or the girl (42). According to Svaleryd gender means to think in terms of socially constructed identities (Svaleryd 14). People have their own thoughts about what a stereotypical girl is and what a stereotypical boy is. People simply think differently about boys and girls.

The phrase gender stereotype is often used in discussions about gender. This can be explained as the ideas that people have about how men and women differ from each other or are supposed to differ from each other. Gender stereotypes can have important real-life consequences for men and women, consequences that can do damage to people’s health, their jobs, their odds of advancement and their social reputations (Buss & Larsen 683). Passer and Smith explain gender as the sense of “femaleness” or “maleness” that is an integral part of our identity. They continue to write about gender schemas that are organized mental structures that contain our understanding of the attributes and behaviours that are appropriate for and expected of males and females (8).

A fundamental categorisation of human beings is to divide them into the two categories men and women. The term gender furthermore implies that masculinity and femininity are sociocultural constructions. Ingela Schånberg writes in her book “Genus och utbildning” about gendered job sharing which means that men do one kind of work and women do another kind of work. Some job sharing is regarded as more suitable for men to do while other job sharing is regarded as more suitable for women to do. In other words men have more executive posts while women have jobs that are more connected to people and often have lower status. There is also a tendency that a woman’s work is less valued and that
women in comparison to men have less well-paid jobs. Women also seem to have lower positions in their jobs (20).

To discuss gender in school is meaningful, both to students and to teachers. Some teachers may have been raised to believe that boys are better at some subjects and that girls are better at other subjects. In other words, the teacher has preconceived ideas about his or her students and this could affect his or her grading of the students. Svaleryd mentions that what a pedagogue will expect a particular student to do or not matters, because as human beings we want to fit into a particular frame. For example, if a teacher expects his or her male students to be loud and troublesome, that is probably what they will turn out to be (18).

There is, of course, a biological difference between boys and girls (De Swan 42). We may have different knowledge about different things as well and we may like different things, but those differences are not necessarily based on our sexes. As said above, those differences might be based on our own prejudices.

Future teachers read and learn about gender and how it can be expressed in the classroom. Kurt Liljeqvist claims in his book “Skola och samhällsutveckling” that it is important to talk about gender with pupils, because these studies teach them about more than just gender. They will learn about ethics and morals and also about how to be a good citizen (262). Lundgren writes, that learning happens in communion with others, in discussions with friends, classmates or grown-ups. Pupils learn many things while discussing with others (29). They will learn about respect, how to be a good listener, how to express their own thoughts and they will also learn about gender.

An equal or unequal school is nothing that someone else has created or is creating. We are all participants of an everyday gender drama. To stop this gender drama we need to start with teachers’ views on their own pupils and what kind of expectations teachers may have on their pupils and also if their expectations are different on boys and girls (10).
4.2 Children and gender

Svaleryd writes that in her book about when it comes to children it really depends on the parents how the child will turn out to be in the future (33). Children are alert and eager to learn new things when they are young. When a parent treats his or her child in a certain way, that lays the foundation for how that child will act in that very same situation in the future (33, 45).

Svaleryd continues by writing that the word “boy” makes many people to think about wrestling, bruises, cars and loud voices while the word “girl” makes many people associate to the colour pink, dolls, best friends and colouring books. Even when boys and girls are small children their parents and other grown-ups have ideas about what boys and girls should be like. They have their prejudices about what is girlish and what is boyish. Girls are supposed to be cute, nice, helpful and silent, while boys are supposed to be active, dominating, loud and always demanding attention (14-15).

Childrens’ choice of a certain game is very much controlled by the social and cultural expectations that are connected to their own sex and the opposite sex. Studies show that children primarily choose to play with other children who belong to the same sex. The fact that children make choices based on social stereotypes is problematic since it leads to a limitation of boys’ and girls’ experiences and learning (Svaleryd 16). When boys play games they often tend to play far away from grown-ups. They also often tend to play games in which they compete with each other, for example who can run the fastest. Girls on the other hand tend to play games in the vicinity of grown-ups to feel safe. They often play games with close friends and girls’ games are often about feelings, for example love (Svaleryd 19).

4.3 Teaching and gender
This section is about gender in teaching with particular reference to the teaching of English. Without knowledge about gender and differences between the two sexes, a teacher could treat his or her students differently without knowing about it (Svaleryd 14). Svaleryd also mentions that boys are given the most time in the classroom since they often crave attention. They are loud and even if English as a subject is more preferred by girls (as said above), boys seem to get more time to talk and show their knowledge. Teachers tend to help boys faster than they help girls and according to Svaleryd this is because boys want immediate attention (18). Teachers simply seem to be afraid that boys are going to be troublesome and loud and disturb other pupils while they are working with their English. Therefore, teachers help them first in order to avoid possible disturbances boys (Svaleryd 18).

Björkhed and Löwinger write in their essay that English as a subject is more suitable for girls. This is because girls seem to be more eager to learn English, because they can make a connection to the subject of English and to the society in general and understand why they will need knowledge in English now and in the future (5). One problem though seems to be that girls are too shy and too silent. Another problem could be that teachers pay more attention to girls because of the theory that English, as a second language, is more suitable for girls. On the other hand, the teacher could pay more attention to boys because they want to help them and make them more interested in the subject of English. According to Björkhed and Löwinger both girls and boys like the idea of having classes that are organized after gender, so that boys and girls do not work together but rather that boys are on their own and girls are on their own. Because of their low self-esteem, girls wish to be separated from boys in the classroom, as they have the courage to talk more and do more when boys are not around (5–6). Furthermore Björkhed and Löwinger write that it is a good way for both pupils and teachers to have separate English classes with one group of boys and one group of girls. This is because teachers could pay all attention to the girls one day and all attention to the
boys the other day. To pay all attention to the girls would be very good for them according to Björkhed and Löwinger (7), since girls could practise to talk more and to show that they can and are willing to show the teacher that they know things. It is also good for the boys, since they get all the attention from the teacher and the teacher could put energy only on the boys, without having to feel that the girls are forgotten (Björkhed and Löwinger 7).

Björkhed and Löwinger mention that it is important to girls what kind of teacher a subject has. Girls seem to like a subject very much if the teacher makes the pupils feel safe and good. So if a teacher in English treat boys and girls differently the pupils will probably take notice of that. A teacher who is aware of gender issues and has knowledge about how girls and boys differ from each other, would be a very good teacher in many ways (7).

Björkhed and Löwinger continue to emphasize that teachers need to sit down and talk about gender together with their colleagues, and connect it to the material and the methods that are used in the classroom. Are there materials and methods that are good and equal for both girls and boys? For example, the method that is described above, about teachers who are more willing to help boys first because they are afraid that they will disrupt the silence in the classroom if they do not get help in time, may not be the most equal method.

The result of Björkhed’s and Löwinger’s investigation also shows that boys and girls are different in the way they handle criticism. Girls tend to take criticism more personally than boys do. Girls can be very hurt and be angry with the teacher for a long time. According to Björkhed and Löwinger, teachers are often aware of those differences, because they seem to give criticism to girls in a more soft voice while they actually seem to shout to their male students to be quiet(10). In this way both girls and boys get the wrong picture. Why are teachers talking with a softer voice to girls than they tend to do to boys? Björkhed and Löwinger write that to create an equal (English) classroom it does not necessarily mean treating boys as bad persons, but rather that boys and girls should be treated in the same way.
4.4 Choice of material

I begin by discussing gender in more general terms and how the gender situation has developed throughout time. Then I focus on gender issues in the school environment and the concept of gender is connected to children and to English as a subject. Suggestions are made with regards to how teachers can work both with their students and with their colleagues to create a more equal classroom. I conclude with a discussion and an analysis of my investigation in connection to theory written on the subject of gender.

Material in the form of books, texts and articles often deals with gender in one way or the other. When a teacher is supposed to choose for example a text that his or her pupils are supposed to read and work with, gender issues must be considered. Examples of how English as a subject can be connected to gender could be that the teacher uses materials, as textbooks, movies or literature that only one of the sexes is interested in. Teachers may use books that only girls like or teaching methods that are more suitable for boys and maybe teachers may spend more time with one of the sexes and so on.

Small children are often interested in books and want grown-ups to read for them. Grow-ups, in this context, are teachers. When teachers at pre-school read books for children and show pictures that belong to the texts, children learn many things. Ann-Kristin Munkhammar and Maria Sundvall write in their essay “Gymnasieelevers syn på könsroller i skolan” that nowadays, books often contain contexts that represent boys as the protagonists in books (6). Furthermore, they write that boys (both in movies and in books) are strong and self-confident while girls are emotional and weak and often need boys to be strong (6-7). If this is what children in young ages see and hear, this is probably what they will learn. When
those pupils grow up and start upper-secondary school and teachers show movies or let the pupils read books (that are similar to those they read at pre-school, but with another context, because of their age) that are not considered in terms of gender, pupils will increase their thoughts about what a man is like and what a woman is like. According to Munkhammar and Sundvall, teachers need to take their responsibility and read through texts and look at pictures and relate it to gender issues. They can ask themselves questions such as: What is the text really about? What is the sex of the main character, is it a boy or a girl? How are girls described and how are boys described? Who has the power in the book or in the movie? Who has written the book or the text? Do I always choose books written by male authors and what signals do this send to the pupils (are women not good enough to be authors)?

Later on at upper secondary school, pupils are often supposed to read books, articles or newspapers. When pupils are at this age it could be a good idea to both read books and also to analyze them from a gender point of view. Maybe they have noticed or seen things that the teacher did not have in mind at all? The questions above could be ways of working together with pupils to discuss gender issues and make them realise that gender issues could mean choosing certain books or movies written by only male or female authors. This is a good way to open both teachers’ eyes but also pupils’ eyes for gender issues. Bo Lundahl writes in his book “Läsa på främmande språk” about motivation in the classroom. A good way to motivate pupils is to take their interests in consideration and make something fun out of them. Teachers could pay regard to the different interests of boys and girls and use them as a foundation for finding good materials (78).

5. Result and analysis

There were two questionnaires handed out to an upper secondary school, in the south of Sweden. As written above, one questionnaire was handed out to 30 pupils who study English
as a second language and the other questionnaire was handed out to 10 teachers both of English and of other subjects.

The results from the pupils were almost all the same. Boys felt that girls were treated more nicely and that teachers did not yell at girls if they were late for lessons. My interpretation is that boys feel that it is unfair that girls are not yelled at for being late, while boys are yelled at. Of course this could give some kind of picture that shows that it is okay for girls to be late for lessons, but boys should not be late. This is not a fair way to handle rules about not being late for lessons. Moreover girls felt that boys got more help and that they got more attention from the teacher than the girls did. One girl has her own theory of why teachers put more energy on boys. She thinks that boys seem to think that they know more things. Therefore they feel the need to shout it out loud in the classroom, to make everyone notice that they knew the answer for a particular question. One can ask oneself if the teacher allows his or her male pupils to shout out loud or if they have rules which imply raising one’s hand if someone wants to speak. In that case it is not okay to let the boys speak out loud. If they do not have rules like that, the girls maybe need to take more space, but by reading the answers above it is clear that the teachers at this particular school treat boys and girls differently.

Another boy writes something interesting, namely that he thinks that teachers treat boys as men and girls as sensitive dolls. According to Björkhed and Löwinge teachers may actually treat boys as grown-ups even if they are more immature than girls (4). Maybe that is a strategy to make boys get more attention and feel mature. This boy’s answer is also a proof of that teachers treat boys and girls differently, what I do not understand by reading his answer, is if he thinks that it is a benefit for the boys or for the girls. It may be a benefit for the boys, since they get the possibility to feel mature and they might be given more responsibility because of this. Or it may be a benefit for the girls, since they are treated like
dolls they might get more help and more attention. However, the pupils at this upper secondary school seem to agree on the fact that their teachers treat boys and girls differently sometimes, but they do not have the understanding or knowledge about gender to explain why they thought the way they did.

The other questionnaire was handed out to 10 teachers and half of the teachers thought that they treated their pupils as one united group, while the other half of the teachers thought that they treated their pupils as boys and girls but not on purpose. As De Swaan writes, people often treat boys and girls differently without knowing about it (42). Often people do not have enough knowledge about gender to know why they act in a certain way. Eight teachers wrote that they do not have different expectations from boys and girls. This could be the case but it could also mean that they hope they not have different expectations on boys and girls. One teacher wrote a simple yes at that question, without giving an explanation. Another teacher wrote that she expects girls to have more control and she also expects that her female pupils study more than her male pupils do. She added though, that she knows that it is not necessarily true. By thinking like this she has already placed her pupils in different categories. My interpretation of her answer is that she expects more from girls than she does from boys, and that is not in any way a fair way of teaching, in my opinion. Björkhed and Löwinge support the argument as the female teacher expresses, and write that girls often have more control and are more proper than boys are (7). They also mean that teachers often have different expectations on boys and girls (7).

One question was about how teachers would like to work with gender and all ten of the teachers liked the idea of working together with their colleagues and with their pupils. They seemed interested in working with gender issues and that is a good start. Teachers may not consider gender as an important thing before they have worked with gender and therefore they do not know much about gender in connection to education. That could be why the
answers were short, they simply did not have the knowledge about gender to develop their questions more.

The last question was if teachers treated boys and girls differently on purpose. One of the teachers thought that she treated boys and girls differently on purpose. She wrote that she thinks that boys are treated differently on purpose, because they are annoying and destroy the silent atmosphere in the classroom. Another teacher wrote that she thought that it is our own prejudices that unconsciously control our actions, those prejudices that we learn when we are young. She seems to be aware of the fact that gender is about thoughts that are shaped from birth. If teachers spend some time to think about gender more specifically I think that they would all find examples of how gender could be expressed in the classroom. Often teachers do not have the time enough to sit down and reflect on things, there are always other things to do. Time need to be reserved by the principal so that all teachers can spend time on discussing gender.

Some teachers at this upper secondary school seem to be aware of gender. They seem to know that some teachers treat boys and girls differently and some teachers even have different expectation from boys and girls. All ten teachers were willing to work with gender and issues that are related to gender though.

Furthermore I interviewed an English teacher as a complement to my questionnaires. The interview questions can be found in the Appendix on page 38. According to the teacher she does not reflect on gender everyday at every lesson but she tells that she has been reflecting in terms of gender more since they have changed materials at the school. She says that:

It is very obvious who the materials, in forms of texts- and workbooks, are aiming at. For example when we read about health in the last chapter the pictures in the textbooks were only pictures
of skinny girls and the text which were supposed to be about food, really was about how to lose weight and by reading the texts one could understand that they were aimed for girls.

She continues to say that:

Many of the girls noticed that and before they said that I had not thought about it in that way, but the pupils did so we took it up for a discussion in the hole class and it was obvious that the boys had been thinking of it too.

Ever since that lesson she told me that she always tries to think about gender and to whom different kinds of texts or movies that she shows are aimed for. She adds that: “I feel embarrassed to admit that I never thought about gender before this happened though, and I do not think that there are many teachers who reflect on gender”. She says that since her pupils notice gender issues in their textbooks she often discuss gender in relation to movies they look at or books which they read. She says that:

Pupils in this age and in this time are aware of gender issues and they are interested in talking about gender and this goes for both the girls and the boys, so I have learned to always look for gender issues in the material that I use in my tutoring, but as said before it is very new for me but I wish that all my colleagues could reflect on it as well.

What she says is interesting since according to Andersson it is important to understand that pupils develop their minds while coming up with own ideas and therefore it is important to let them find their own ways of working with gender issues. If only the teacher comes up with ideas, he or she will probably learn more, and if pupils and teachers mix their ideas they will all learn and develop more (35).
I asked her if she thinks that she is treating boys and girls differently and she says that she used to treat girls more nicely because they are often more silent and she also says that she tended to let the girls talk more during the lessons but she also adds that:

This is of course something that I did not know that I did until I started to reflect on gender. Now that you ask me I know that I still sometimes yell more at the boys and tend to be softer against the girls, but now I am at least aware of the fact that I sometimes treat them differently and I can start to change my behaviour. I also know that I used to think that girls were better at studying so I think that I might have had higher expectations on girls than I had on boys and how fair is that?! I continue to ask her if there are occasions where she needs to treat girls and boys differently and her answer is short and distinct: “No I do not believe there are occasions where people should be treated as boys or girls, it is better to treat all humans as humans”. She remembers a movie which she saw together with one of her classes which was about a girl who wanted to become a professional football player and she remembers that there were many bad words about women who cannot play football and so on, she says that:

I really want to go back in time and change the aim for that lesson, since many of the pupils said bad things about girls playing football and so on I would like to have brought up gender issues regarding to that situation but I did not know how to do it. But today I know how I would have wanted to work with it. This is what I mean because I think some teachers need to analyze their
materials more often regarding to gender but I also think that many teachers are afraid because they do not know how to work with it. It seems as if teachers, even though they have knowledge about gender, do not know how to use that knowledge and how to be able to prepare lessons that deal with gender issues.

We continue to talk and she tells me that they do not work with questions regarding gender at her school, she wishes that they could have discussions about gender to make everyone more observed on how they reflect and think about gender or if they do not. She would like to make them realize that things as we do or books that we read often have a message and could often be discussed in terms of gender. Lundgren writes, that learning happens in communion with others, in discussions with friends, classmates or grown-ups. Pupils learn many things while discussing with others (29). They will learn about respect, how to be a good listener, how to express their own thoughts and they will also learn about gender.

6. Discussion

According to the curriculum, pupils should be taught about equal rights between men and women and that all human beings have the same worth (Lpo 94, Lpf 94). This is, in other words, something that teachers should integrate in their tutoring and teach their pupils, as well as English is something that should be taught.

The answers to the questionnaire which were handed out to the pupils showed that boys tended to think that girls are being treated more nicely if they are late for lessons. This is something that does not match what Svaleryd claims (103). She writes that teachers tend to be angrier with girls when they are late since they rarely are late for lessons. On the
other hand Björkhed and Löwinge support what the boys think. They write that teachers tend to be more soft and nice to girls (4). This probably differs from school to school and from teacher to teacher but it is important that one is aware of gender issues in school and one’s own actions regarding to gender and teaching.

Furthermore Svaleryd writes that teachers tend to spend more time on boys because they need to calm them down. This means that the rest of the class can not possibly get the help they need (14-23). Some of the girls wrote that teachers spend more time to help boys and the boys were given more attention from the teacher. Einarsson and Hultman seem to agree and write that teachers are not aware of gender differences in the classroom. They write about boys taking up too much space and girls being nice and silent. They continue to write that in discussions in classrooms girls tend to let the boys talk first. My own experience tells me that boys more often than girls shout out answers loud in the classroom. I think that self-confidence and no respect for rules are two factors that matters in this case. Girls seem to be more shy and have more respect for rules.

At the school, where the investigation was made, all the teachers were willing to work with gender issues, both with colleagues and with their pupils. And as said before that is a good start because you need to have an interest for the issue to be able to understand and reflect on your own thoughts about gender. By reading one of the answers to the questionnaires I found out that one teacher simply answered that she had different expectations on boys and girls. But she did not give an explanation and maybe her knowledge about gender was not enough to give us an answer on why she did treat her or his pupils differently. Moreover, pupils at this upper secondary school seem to notice some differences in their teachers’ behaviour toward boys and girls. Maybe they need to discuss their thoughts and try to analyze them together to make them realize how their way of treating their pupils can affect them in the future by putting them into two different categories: boys and girls.
Furthermore the interviewee told her story about when she saw a movie together with her pupils that was about a girl who wanted to become a professional football player. Many of her pupils reacted badly with comments like girls cannot play football or be a professional football player. This is something that is important to think about when it comes to their future as individuals in a society that strives for the equal treatment of men and women. If you do not talk about comments like that, which signals do we send to them? Svaleryd claims that we are born into a society which has already placed us in different categories. Another example of how to use materials in a gender point of view is how you can use books to discuss gender with pupils. Munkhammar and Sundvall write that nowadays, books often contain contexts that represent boys as the protagonists in books (6). This is something that can be discussed with pupils and colleagues as well. I think that by working with gender in this way, it will open pupils’ eyes and make them understand how gender could be connected to material such as books and also to the society in general. By asking one’s pupils about their interests one can hopefully also find books and other materials that they like and are interested in. By doing this it could make it easier for them to understand gender and the importance of discussing it. Lundahl writes about motivation in the classroom. According to him a good way to motivate pupils is to take their interests in consideration and make something fun out of them. Teachers could pay regard to the different interests of boys and girls and use them as a foundation for finding good material (78).

But as both the interviewee and the teachers who answered the questionnaire mentioned they are all interested in working with gender issues. It is a good start to want to work with gender issues, since the first thing in this process is to realize that both pupils and teachers might have prejudices or hidden thoughts that control their actions. Since many pupils wrote that they feel that teachers treat boys and girl differently it seems that teachers
need to learn more about gender issues and how their own thoughts about gender affects both their actions and their way of treating pupils.

Svaleryd writes about different methods that can be used in the classroom when working with gender. She starts out by writing that she does not give any final solutions when it comes to working with gender together with your pupils. Because of experience she knows that when working with gender it is important to start with the teacher and his or her thoughts about gender. Therefore Svaleryd gives examples of methods that are suitable both for teachers who work together with students and for teachers who work together with other teachers. Furthermore, Svaleryd writes that a teacher who does not care about gender and differences between the two sexes will probably not care to work with gender together with his or her students. This way, those pupils will not learn much about gender and how gender affects society (78). However, when it comes to working with gender together with pupils Svaleryd thinks that it is a good idea to start out with thoughts about values (80). The exercises that will be presented in this essay are exercises that any class or any teacher can practise. In this essay these exercises will be connected to English as a second language at upper secondary school.

The first exercise that Svaleryd presents is called “Pass forward”. It is an exercise that does not take much time to do. All pupils are supposed to sit at chairs in a circle. One pupil starts out by saying something positive about the pupil next to him or her. It continues this way until everyone has said and heard something positive. This exercise is much about values and how to make people feel good about themselves. The exercise can stop here and the pupils can be happy and feel positive about themselves for the rest of the day. If they want to work more specifically with gender issues, they can write down words that boys and girls have said to each other and heard from each other on the blackboard. Later on they can discuss what kind of positive words boys said and what kind of positive words
girls said. This kind of exercise could be a good start since it deals with both values and gender (82 – 83). This exercise is spoken and heard in English and is a good exercise because pupils practise how to talk in front of a group, they learn words and they learn how to be good listeners. Svaleryd mentions that to make these exercises to work, is it important that no one is interrupted when talking. Pupils also learn to have respect for each other when different values and opinions are expressed.

The second exercise that Svaleryd mentions is called “Friendship”. It is about how boys and girls think of friendship. What is important when it comes to being a good friend and why those particular things are important, are examples of questions that can be used. The teacher divides the class into groups of boys and girls. It could be two groups with all girls in one and all boys in the other or it could be smaller groups. The important thing about the groups is that girls and boys are not supposed to be mixed. Let the groups discuss questions about how a good friend is supposed to be. Let one of the boys and one of the girls write down how they explain a good friend and compare the results. Are there differences between how boys want their best friend to be and how girls want their best friend to be? Discuss how boys and girls differ in their view of friendship and also why (Svaleryd 90). In this exercise they practise their spoken oral English and they also practise writing and listening as well.

The third example of exercise is called “Associate to words”. Pupils can either work in groups of boys and girls or they can work individually. The teacher hands out slips of paper with the words: boy, girl, man and woman. Under every word pupils are supposed to write all the words they come up with. Write boy, girl, man and woman as different headlines on the blackboard. Write the things that boys and girls wrote under each headline. Discuss if boys and girls associated the same things to the different headlines, or if boys and girls wrote different things under the headlines. Also discuss why certain things are connected to boys,
girls, men and women (Svaleryd 99). In this exercise, many things are practised in English as a second language. Oral skills are practised when they discuss, listening skills are practised when other pupils are talking, reading skills are practised when pupils read what it is said on the blackboard, and writing skills are practised when they write down examples on their piece of papers.

Finally Svaleryd gives the fourth example of how to work with gender in the English speaking classroom. The pupils could bring an outfit magazine each and look through it and see on how many pages girls’ clothes are presented and on how many pages boys’ clothes are represented. Pupils can discuss in small mixed groups if and why a certain sex is represented more. This is a good exercise when English is practised both in terms of orally and listening skills (130). Another way of working with gender may be to read a book, for example “The Rice Mother” by Rani Manicka (at English C-level) and try to analyze the gender differences in that book. Yet another way of working with gender is to use a theme and to cooperate together with (for example) social science. Gender and equal rights could be a theme and in that way they learn both English and social science at the same time. Some people may argue that these examples above of exercises of working with gender take too much time from their usual teaching. These exercises do not necessarily have to take much time.

However, Svaleryd also writes about how teachers can work together with his or her colleagues with gender. A good start is to ask yourself or a colleague how he or she treats a boy respectively a girl arriving to the classroom a couple of minutes too late. This is a common problem according to Svaleryd. Many teachers tend to ignore boys when they are late for a lesson, while teachers want an explanation from girls who are being late (103). Another example of how teachers can make themselves aware of the fact that they may treat his or her pupils differently, could be to ask a colleague to be present at a lesson and observe
if the teacher talks more to girls than they do to boys. Maybe the teacher talks in different voices to boys and girls. Or teachers could film themselves with a camera when he or she is teaching and according to Svaleryd a few teachers have done that and they noticed that they were treating boys and girls differently (89).

To work with gender differences and equal rights has to be a part of the daily work and gender needs to be integrated in the teaching (Svaleryd 78). These exercises that are described above are only a few examples but it is a good start. It is not the exercises themselves that make the pupils and colleagues more equal. The exercises give the group of pupils or teachers a foundation and material to a collective work of reflection. It is the collective process of reflection that can challenge the single person’s thoughts and later on maybe also his or her actions (Svaleryd 78-80).

7. Conclusion

I chose to write about gender since it is an important term in connection to school and to subjects, in this case English. I wanted to investigate if boys and girls are treated differently in the English classroom, and, if so, provide a few suggestions as to why this is the case. This essay also investigated whether teachers are aware of gender differences and if they treat boys and girls differently on purpose. Gender and English can be connected in many ways. Some examples could be that the teachers of English choose material (books, texts among other things) that is more suitable for only boys or girls. The teacher could also speak or listen to one sex more than the other.

Even as small children we learn from our parents, siblings, friends and the media how boys and girls are supposed to act or be. Children are alert and eager to learn as much as possible when they are young, they are also very good at reflecting on new things
and taking in new impressions (Svaleryd 33,45). It is important to consider gender and how good children are at learning how they should be to fit into the frame that is called a boy or a girl as early as in pre-school. Svaleryd mentions that what a pedagogue will expect a particular pupil to do or not do matters, because as human beings we want to fit into a particular frame. For example, if a teacher expects his or her male pupils to be loud and troublesome, that is probably what they will turn out to be (18).

Gender and school can be connected in many different ways. One way is that teachers could treat their pupils differently; Svaleryd writes that teachers tend to talk in a softer voice to girls than they do to boys (21). Björkhed and Löwinge write that many teachers often have different expectations on boys and girls (7). To be honest, that is of course not an equal teacher or an equal school. As a foundation to start working with gender issues, Svaleryd gives a number of good exercises that teachers can work with both with pupils and colleagues. Number one when working with gender issues is to start out with yourself and your colleagues, to make everyone aware of the fact that there might be hidden thoughts within teachers that make them treat boys and girls differently. Number two is that teachers and pupils work together. It is important to let the pupils be a part of the learning process, let them discuss and come up with own ideas of gender (Svaleryd 8-9). People learn best in communion with others (Lundgren 29).

My own thoughts about how to work with gender are the same as Svaleryd’s. I personally think that it is important to start out with your own thoughts about gender and to develop them with your colleagues’ thoughts. I also agree on what Björkhed and Löwinge write about, namely that some teachers have different expectations on boys and girls. I think though, that those thoughts and actions are unconsciously and that they depend on lack of knowledge. I believe that if people have the will to change things they will succeed.
My study was made at an upper secondary school in Småland, in the south of Sweden. According to the pupils at that school, their teachers treated boys and girls differently. The pupils (both boys and girls) seemed to agree on the fact that their teachers treated girls more nicely and softer while teachers were harsh to boys. According to the teachers themselves some said that they probably treat boys and girls differently, without thinking about it. They do not do that with a purpose they agreed on. One teacher wrote though, that she may treat boys differently since they tend to be troublesome and loud and she needs to be harsh to them to make them calm so the rest of the class could work in peace.

In conclusion both pupils and teachers at this upper secondary school seem to agree on the fact that boys and girls are treated differently. In my view, that could be a result of a lack of knowledge about gender and how we ourselves create gender. Both teachers and pupils at this school need to work with issues related to gender to create a more equal classroom. The teachers at this upper secondary school were willing to work with the issue of gender and thought that it was a good idea to start by discussing gender issues with colleagues. This research is not universal but it gives us an idea of how boys and girls are treated. This particular school and these particular teachers were treating boys and girls differently, sometimes even on purpose. This does not say that every school in Sweden or in the world treats boys and girls differently; some schools have worked with gender for many years. Even though we do not want to have different expectations on boys or girls and even though we do not want to be part of creating gender differences, we may actually be right in the middle of it. As said in the beginning of the essay, boys and girls are all human beings and have the same rights to be treated in the same way.
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9. Appendix

Questionnaire 1 (to pupils)

Hej, jag heter Emelie och går andra året på lärarutbildningen i Växjö. Vi skriver nu vår C-uppsats i engelska och jag tänkte ta lite hjälp ifrån er. Den ska handla om genus och hur lärare behandlar killar och tjejer i klassrummet.

Tack för hjälpen!

Ringa in om du är Man eller Kvinna

Känner du dig särbehandlad på ett eller annat vis på grund av att du är kille/tjej? I så fall på vilket sätt?

Tycker du att dina/din lärare behandlar killar och tjejer annorlunda? Hur behandlas killar och hur behandlas tjejer?
Tror du att lärare behandlar killar och tjejer olika med mening? Varför i så fall?

Tror du att det finns ett visst mönster som tjejer respektive killar ska följa? Till exempel att killar ska vara bättre på matte och därför får dom alltid svara på frågor? (även om det finns tjejer som ständigt räcker upp handen och kan svara på frågan?)
**Questionnarie 2 (to teachers)**

Hej, jag heter Emelie och går andra året på lärarutbildningen i Växjö. Just nu skriver vi vår C-upopsats i engelska och jag ska skriva om genus, hur lärare behandlar killar och tjejer i klasrummet. Det skulle vara snällt om ni ville svar på följande frågor.

Tack för hjälpen!

Ringa in om du är: MAN KVINNA

Tycker du att du själv behandlar dina elever som tjejer och killar eller som en enad grupp av elever?

Om du tänker efter, tror du att du har behandlat killar och tjejer olika på grund av deras kön?
Har du olika förväntningar på dina elever för att dom är killar eller tjejer, till exempel: förväntar en mattelärare sig att hans/hennes manliga elever ska vara bättre än dom kvinnliga?

Vad kan man göra för att arbeta emot ett sådan beteende? Ska man jobba tillsammans med sina kollegor och elever och göra dom uppmärksamma på genusskillnader och beskriva för dom att dom förtjäna att behandlas på samma sätt?

Tror du att lärare (du själv eller någon annan) behandlar killar och tjejer olika med mening?
Interview:

1, Do you ever think about gender in relation to your tutoring?

2, How do you think about gender in your tutoring?

3, Do you reflect on your material in your tutoring in relation to gender?

4, Are there occasions when you treat girls and boys differently?

5, Are there occasions where you think that it is necessary to treat girls and boys differently?

6, Do you work with gender in a specific purpose? What is your aim with working with gender issues?