



How to teach gender competence

The GeQuaB-Concept and its transferability to university

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1. Preliminary remarks

The further education concept „Gender qualification in educational work (GeQuaB)“ has been developed in Germany for full-time and part-time employees in the field of adult and youth education. The project for a test implementation of the concept has a running time of three years and has been funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The objective of the project was to teach gender competences in the praxis of educational work.

The training was to enable the further development of gender competences of persons with teaching or organizing functions in the field of adult and youth education. Although it has been developed for an another target group, it contains valuable information and proposals for the identification of qualification needs in the field of higher education didactics from the point of view of gender mainstreaming.

2. What do we mean with Gender Competence?

„Gender Competence“ belongs to the key-qualifications (cf. Metz-Göckel/Roloff 2003) and refers to the gender perspective as a transversal perspective. Gender competence is related to three different levels (cf. GenderKompetenzZentrum 2008):

- **The expression of will:** Gender-related self reflexivity. Sensibilization for one´s own role in the construction of gender, sensibilization for gender relation and discrimination structures and for the necessity to work in the sense of gender equality.
- **Gender knowledge:** The fundamental theoretical insights of gender research are well known as well as the specific knowledge about gender aspects in distinctive fields related to technical, natural and social sciences.
- **Gender-related skills and methods:** To act in a gender-sensitive way; to implement will and knowledge in one´s individual doing, to be able to apply the necessary strategies to implement gender mainstreaming.

The concept of competence is subject-oriented und is based on formal as well as informal processes of learning, which are of special significance when dealing with gender relations and gender structures. In the following text, when we use the term “gender competence”, we differentiate – just as we do when referring to the concept of key competences – between individual competence, cognitive and functional competence, method and social competence.

3. The didactical concept of gender qualification in educational work

The three levels of gender competence stay in inter-relation to each other and should be regarded as of equal rank and equal importance during the communication process. It means that a high level of gender knowledge is not automatically followed by a gender-related self-reflexivity or even by gender-sensitive acting. These three levels of gender competence constitute the grid, on which the structure of qualification actions should be oriented. The corresponding didactical elements are sensibilization (the expression of will), transformation (gender knowledge) and transfer (skills and methods). The mutual intertwinement of these levels should be again and again reflected during the didactical process.

Thereby the didactical element of sensibilization is oriented toward the social competence of the participants, who work as multipliers in the field of further education. This happens on one side through a critical look at their own gender role and at how they themselves contribute every day to the social construction processes. On the other side, sensibilization enables to consider the organizational context of one's own field of activities with the objective to identify it as a part of one of the „gendered institutions“ (Joan Acker 1991), which are the daily theatre of gender construction processes. In the interplay of the competence levels, sensibilization has to be given a key role. It is our opinion, that gender sensitive self-reflexivity constitutes a precondition for a comprehensive development of gender competence.

The communication of information helps to optimize the knowledge and skills competences. Most of all, it was important for us to underline the gender theoretical character of our approach, in order to avoid conveying anew essentialist precepts. This is why the training concept of GeQuaB is based on a gender theoretical frame, which considers in an equal manner social construction processes and structural relations of power. The gender theoretical knowledge should constitute the basic knowledge, which appears to be a necessary precondition in order, on one side, to realize a successful transfer of gender perspective into the own praxis, and on the other side, to enable a realistic evaluation of the gender structure of the own field of activities.

The increase of the method and social competences is primarily oriented towards transfer into the own praxis. The first objective is the evaluation and modification of the own professional activities from a gender point of view. This concerns one's own pedagogical action in teaching and learning situations as well as the own action within the organizational context of these professional activities. The decisive point for a successful transfer is that the participants consider gender-sensitive action in the practice not as a supplementary requirement but as an optimization of the own professionalism.

A central didactical element in the gender qualification training has been its process orientation. The basis of the learning process was constituted by four work sessions of four or five days each within a period of 18 months, in which the same group of 16 persons worked together along the whole period. Thus the group itself became a social place for learning, which enabled the participants to refer on common experiences, to reflect and develop the own concepts. But this process orientation expressed itself as well during the different work sessions. They alternated between sensibilization, theoretical approach and practical application. They were completed by practical exercises for the time between two sessions, which were discussed in common during the following session.

4. Contents of the GeQuaB-Modules

Sensibilization

- Sensibilization for gender aspects in the own biography and in professional praxis
- Sensibilization for gender aspects in one´s own professional work, e.g. through the introduction of concepts and methods for the self-evaluation of teachers
- Simulation of pedagogical conflict situations with a gender dimension and implementation of intervention options

Organisational level of sensibilization

- Survey about the current state of discussions on Gender Mainstreaming in the own institutions and organisations
- Elaboration of criterias for the elaboration of educational programs respectful of gender equity on the base of an analysis of all ready existing programs from the gender perspective (contents, illustrations, layout, language)

Theoretical basic knowledge

- Basic scientific knowledge in men, women and gender studies
- Concepts of gender-related policies as the promotion of women, Gender Mainstreaming and Diversity Management
- Didactical theories on adult education

Didactical-methodical basic knowledge

- Critical assessment of the own pedagogical concepts in adult education
- Acquisition of the concept for gender equity oriented didactics and methodology
- Reflection about usual methods from a gender point of view
- Introduction to new methods enabling to treat gender as a specific theme
- Further development of the method competence through the presentation of new methods and their group-based implementation in the form of a method workshop
- Elaboration of reflective and evaluative methods for educational work beyond gender attribution

Transfer/Action orientation

- Elaboration of an educational work respectful of gender equity, e.g. through the development of practice-oriented projects in one´s own field of work
- Presentation of the projects during a seminar
- Colleague counselling about the experiences during and with the practice-oriented projects

The gender qualification course runs over 220 hours. It consists of four modules of four of five-days each within 18 months (= 144 hours in seminar form), plus individual work of the participants, implementation of the different elaborated concepts including documentation and reporting (50 hours) and colleague counselling as well as regional networking (26 hours)

5. About the acquisition of gender competences in gender qualification courses

The learning processes of the participants to the GeQuaB-Courses have been evaluated with different instruments. The synthesis of the results has pointed out a series of elements of the concepts, which can be considered as very successful and as transferable.

Individual Gender Competence: The participants have clearly perceived the effects of the sensibilization on the gender theme, which in some cases led to modifications of their personal attitudes. This was strongly linked to the strengthening of the perseverance in the engagement for gender issues. Claims about the necessity of taking gender issues into account have been expressed with more implicitness. Especially men realised, that this gender theme had directly something to do with them.

Skills and subject competence: The participants have constated a more professional handling of the gender theme. The implementation of gender perspective within their own work and the increase of subject-competence have been experienced as professionalization – allowing them e.g. to integrate more consciously gender-oriented elements on their own courses.

Method competence: The method competence could be increased through the specific focus on the gender perspective. This has made clear, that the general consideration of the gender perspective allowed a more differentiated application of basic principles of adult education.

Social competence: The first learning benefit has been that mutual exchanges about gender related constructs have been possible during the course. In the same way, the fact that methods of conflict solution could be experienced collectively within the group was considered as well a substantial benefit. Another gender political dimension of social competence appeared to be of importance here: the social policy dimension of the acquisition of gender competence. This dimension has frequently be experienced by the participants as a „secondary benefit“, because they could introduce the gender question in the most different contexts of their own life and were not limited to their professional activities.

6. About the transfer of the GeQuaB-Concept in the context of university

Considering the three levels of gender competence, it appears of importance for the communication of gender competence in university, that this communication should not be limited to classical structures, didactical instruments and methods of academic teaching. It is not sufficient to treat the questions of gender in lectures and courses und to teach and learn about the theoretical bases of gender.

In the following a few possibilities of transfer of the GeQuaB-concept into the context of academic teaching will be discussed. A central issue will be how to integrate gender aspects into the teaching independently of the discipline taught. It is fundamental to understand the acquisition of gender competence as an active process. Therefore the activation of learn and development processes appears indispensable beside the transmission of knowledge itself.

We refer here exclusively to the didactics of lectures and courses. The following aspects should specially considered:

The expression of will

- Gender-related self reflexivity. Recognizing one's role as a model.

The communication of knowledge

- Knowledge about the experience realms and biographies of women/girls and men/boys of different ethnical, social and regional origins, of different generations, etc.
- Specific thematic knowledge about men, women and gender studies and gender equality policies like Gender Mainstreaming.
- Consideration of the category gender in relation to one's own discipline or from an interdisciplinary point of view
- Knowledge and skills about gender-related interaction and communication processes

Skills and methods

- Point out then construction of gender roles in the process of teaching and learning
- Knowledge and skills in the field of gender-oriented didactics and methods.
- Point out the relation between gender and the other categories of society.
- Give up frontal transmission of knowledge for the benefit of participative and transparent arrangements of teaching and learning.
- Think about performance records in the form of written reflections about gender relations in academic teaching.
- Encourage students to become researchers by participant observation in courses.

Referring to the experience gathered in gender qualification in the context of educational work, two important and challenging aspects should be specially considered while transferring the concept to university and implementing it in university: the sensibilization of the participants for gender-oriented self-reflexivity and for process orientation in the elaboration of the training course.

As we have noticed, the simple transmission of gender knowledge is not sufficient for the implementation of a gender-sensible practice with one's own context of work. A sensibility for one's own role in social construction processes is an important pre-condition for it.

The readiness to reflect on these issues makes the existence of a protected (learning)space necessary - something which is very difficult to obtain in the case of in-house courses. Beside of that, the specific situation of concurrence within the universities brings some complications into this part of the training course.

The process orientation is strongly linked to this. It implies the possibility of continuity. This continuity is needed to transform a learning group working together over a longer period of time into the (learning)space for the collective elaboration of a gender-sensible academic praxis. Beside the problem of confidentiality within the protected (learning)space and the problem of continuity of work within the group, there is the problem of time. In order to guarantee the success of the implementation of a gender-sensitive teaching, it seems to us indispensable, that the experiences made in the practice could be reflected in common over a longer period of time in the form of a colleague counselling, so that this practice could be continuously modified. Beside that it should be considered, if it would be possible to develop overall offers in the context of university or to establish some links with already existing offers.

But the main question, which is to know how these ideas about a gender competent academic teaching can be put into practice on the background of an increasing standardisation of academic teaching, remains still unsolved. The Bologna process seems to promote a concentration of the academic system on the transmission of primary professional qualifications to the students. The question is how to bring this process into line with the required openness and transparency of academic teaching and the required self-reflexivity of teachers and students.

7. Literature

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