

## **AWARENESS OF WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE PROFESSIONAL FIELD AROUND A PLURICULTURAL CONTEXT**

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### **Target audience**

- Pre-service teachers
  - Secondary teachers / Enseignants du secondaire
- In-service teachers
  - Secondary teachers/ Enseignants du secondaire

### **Itineraries**

- Identity exploration
- Exploring attitudes towards languages and cultures\_

### **Abstract:**

Since the inhabitants of Malta live on a very small island, they are quite traditional in their attitude towards the roles of men and women in society. This project's aim is to prove how rooted people from different countries are to sexual prejudice especially with regards to jobs. From research done for this project, it was very obvious that such discrimination is not present only in Malta just because it is a small country, but even in bigger European countries. So the activities would like us to think about what we, as educators, can do to change such an attitude in the classroom environment.

### **Rationale**

In this activity, divided in 7 worksheets which should take a minimum of 8 hours, I tried to focus my attention on women's roles in society around a pluricultural environment. My aim is to point out certain differences which might be interesting to discover when comparing countries of the Mediterranean, Europe and Northern Africa. I have chosen this particular geographical setting mainly because the island of Malta, being at the centre of the Mediterranean, is "sandwiched" between two apparently contrasting ways of thought, adopts both systems and it would be interesting to see which are the variables influencing the other countries participating in the LEA project.

Another aim is to prove that, although on paper, in the 21<sup>st</sup>. century, women ought to have reached the same status as men, in real life this is somewhat a myth. I believe that teacher training in this field is a must because teachers are the educators of tomorrow's citizens and so can be seen as a turning point that can generate change. The fact that this activity created so much interest in the participating members of LEA proved that this lack of balance between men's and women's roles is sadly still felt in ALL countries, even those that seem to be more avant-garde than others.

The activity aims for trainees to develop from an interpersonal to an intrapersonal dimension. That is why the worksheets establish a crescendo that peaks on a very global outlook. The first worksheet helps the teachers look at themselves as opposed to their family members hence serving as a generation to generation focus. As the worksheets develop, so does the trainee that starts thinking about his / her society, we embark on a trip in memory lane as we remember the teachers who have influenced our life and gradually one starts understanding better this discrimination against women and how teachers could have the potential to fight this.

Worksheet 4 helps teachers to consider the national scenario analyzing ways of thinking in each country and pondering on how to create awareness against sexual discrimination that can be

enhanced by the study of various job advertisements in different countries. That is how participants will understand their own concerns on jobs and cultures in the comparison of systems across other cultures and social contexts.

The climax is reached when reading excerpts from Council of Europe documents about the insistence on equal rights to everybody without sexual, racial, religious or social discrimination. And it is in the last worksheet, when the participants have to present their own poster with a powerful slogan that they show how much they have assimilated during this teacher training.

In this way, both pre-service and in-service participants will be able to apply themselves such an activity in their own classroom environment, both in the formation of young pupils as well as in adult education, in order to instill a better way of thinking in tomorrow's world.

### **Personal and social dimensions / dimension individuelle et sociale**

- Observing the cultural diversity of contexts and individuals;
- Observing how educators can influence the attitudes of learners towards languages, those who speak them and their culture, as well as their motivation and curiosity towards them;
- Recognizing the cultural complexity of individual and collective identities;
- Enhancing the role of languages and cultures in building societies that are fairer, more supportive and more democratic;
- Enhancing each individual's language and culture by considering language and culture as a means of human development (aimed at social inclusion and as a preparation for exercising their citizenship);
- Recognizing the political character of the measures adopted with regard to languages and cultures;
- Combating exclusion and linguistic and cultural discrimination while embracing the opportunities of a life together in society;
- Having a global vision of the exercise of one's profession (professionalism) as consisting of different dimensions

### **Professional dimensions / dimension professionnelle**

- Being aware of the need for a new linguistic and cultural education capable of promoting plurilingualism and pluriculturalism;
- Knowing and defending the reasons for an education favourable to the development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence;
- Observing, analysing and making use of – in didactic terms – the diversity that exists in one's teaching environment (individual and collective repertoires);
- Creating synergetic effects between the teaching of different languages and cultures by co-operating with the teachers of other languages and other subjects.

Grouping:

 (individual) /  (pair work) /  (group work) /  (whole class)

## Worksheet 1

**Timing: 60'**

### From a personal to a social dimension



In pairs, discuss and compare the jobs of your grandmother, your mother and your own. Do you all have the same level of education? Do you feel you made certain progress compared to them?



Mentally, try to imagine the following persons and write a very brief description of each:

a) SECRETARY : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b) CARPENTER : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c) SOLDIER : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

d) BABY-SITTER : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

e) ENGINEER : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

f) TEACHER : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Finally, try to elaborate a table discussing in a very large group, for each of the persons listed above, how many have imagined a Male or a Female for each particular job. Two or three persons could be asked to read their very brief description.



With a partner, list the pros and cons of being a Male or a Female for each of the said jobs.

Example:

#### SECRETARY

PROS		CONS	
MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE



What did this activity help you understand about your teaching career?

Think of this quote from the *Declaration on the elimination of discrimination against women* proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 2263 (XXII) of 7 November 1967:

Discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and with the welfare of the family and of society, prevents their participation, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries and is an obstacle to the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity.

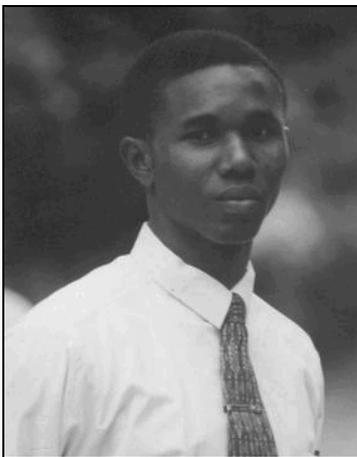
## Worksheet 2

Timing: 60'

### Social stereotypes



In pairs, discuss the photos. Who are these people? Can you write a paragraph describing their social life and the job you think they do?



Read the text

“PREJUDICED BY APPEARANCE” and check how close you were to the conclusions you had previously done. Did you guess their job? If not, did you at least come close? Why don't people believe them when they say what they do for a living???

### PREJUDICED BY APPEARANCE

*Most of the time, we judge people by their physical appearance. When we meet someone walking next to us in a street, just with one look, we calculate his age, if this person is married, notice his colouring, decide if we find him or her attractive. But why does this happen? Why are we often prejudiced by the appearance of others? Read the experiences of these three people and check if most people are prejudiced or not.*

**DAVID JONES, 27**

Most of the people I meet find it hard to believe that I work as a secretary because they say that I don't look like one! Usually they are blonde sexy young women or ladies around 50 years old with spectacles, not black young men! People expect black people to have lots of kids, to be in a gospel choir or to sing reggae. But I love my job. Actually, my boss is a woman! And all my friends have a lot to say about that ...

**CHU LING, 32**

Many are very surprised when I tell them I work as a hairdresser in a posh salon in London. Most people from Asia usually work in Chinese restaurants or as cleaners in hotels. But I have been a hairdresser for over 10 years, first in Taiwan, then in London. I work in a salon whose clients are usually pop stars and actresses and I really enjoy it.

**LARA CLARKE, 24**

Almost everyone raises his eyebrows when I say I am a vet and thinks I am incapable of doing the job properly. Usually a vet is a middle-aged man in a white coat with smart glasses. I'm female, although I know I look like a male! I have had my nose pierced and I dye my hair. I haven't got a boyfriend and work for long hours. So I don't have much time for social life and haven't been to a nightclub or a pub in ages.



In a large group, discuss what you have learnt from this activity and what relevance you think this has to your teaching profession. Do you think society is still rooted to social stereotypes? Which countries do you think are the most avant-garde in the professional field? What is your country doing to this regard?

Consider the following statement:

Discrimination against women, denying or limiting as it does their equality of rights with men, is fundamentally unjust and constitutes an offence against human dignity.

### Worksheet 3

**Timing: 60'**

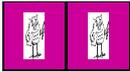
#### Gender issues in the field of education



In pairs, discuss your favourite teacher. Tell your partner why this person influenced you so much. How come you still remember this teacher after so many years? Do you appreciate this teacher especially for the teaching methods or for the personality? Do you feel this teacher had a paternal / maternal instinct towards the class?



In a large group, discuss how many have imagined a favourite teacher who was a woman. In each respective country, teachers at different levels (Pre-School, Primary, Secondary, High School, University) are usually men or women? Does it make a difference whether you are considering teachers of languages or science subjects?



With a partner, discuss the following statement:

**When learning a different language, I prefer the teacher to be a native speaker because s/he can transmit in a better way the values and culture of that particular country besides the language.**

How far do you dis/agree with this statement?



How has this activity improved your insight about your profession?

Some food for thought:

In 2001, a *Group of Specialists on promoting Gender Mainstreaming in Schools* was set up to evaluate existing policies and practices and devise new ways and means of promoting gender mainstreaming in the school system. The group prepared a report on how gender mainstreaming can be promoted in schools through, inter alia, initial and continuous teacher training, introduction of new teaching methods and learning contexts, revision of curricula and teaching materials and includes examples of good practice.

## Worksheet 4

**Timing: 120'**

### **Gender discrimination in a pluricultural environment**



Ask the participants to bring employment ads for any type of job (these can be taken from newspaper clippings or ads from the internet) where gender discrimination is obvious and also where they feel that gender discrimination has not been done.



In groups of four, study the newspaper ads. Do you feel some are being sexist? Which elements indicate gender discrimination? Identify those ads that do not make any difference between men and women and that give equal opportunities to all. What type of language do these use?



Each group has to choose one particular ad where they feel gender discrimination has been the case and imagine what questions could have been asked during the interview of that particular job. Include a set of personal questions as well as those questions about professional preparation and experience. Which type of questions do you feel show gender discrimination? If you were to imagine this interview in different countries, could you find any differences / similarities when carrying out an interview? Do you think certain personal questions are asked everywhere or not?



In the same group, prepare an ad for a similar post to that presented in the previous activity but being careful not to enhance gender discrimination.



Write your own personal views on gender discrimination. According to you, which are the main causes of this? Do you think it happens everywhere? To what extent? How does this make you feel personally? What relevance do you think this has with regards to teaching?

Target thought:

Gender mainstreaming cannot replace specific policies which aim to redress situations resulting from gender inequality. Specific gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming are dual and complementary strategies and must go hand in hand to reach the goal of gender equality.

## Worksheet 5

Timing: 120'

### Gender equality at home



In a group, discuss the following:

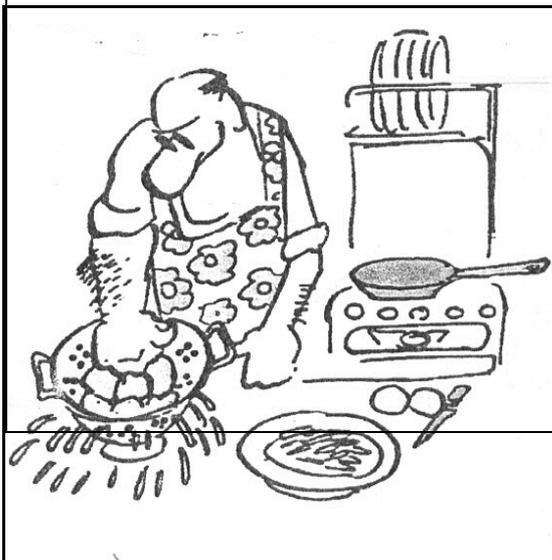
- a) Do you think men and women in your country have very defined roles? For example, do the men provide for the women, while the women look after the children and the house?
- a) How do you think roles have evolved, how are they changing today?



Read the following extract on a popular tradition in Greece:

### HUSBANDS PLAY THE ROLE OF WIVES

In a small village in northern Greece, husbands and wives swap their roles for a day. So the husbands wear their wives' apron and headscarf, they clean, polish and scrub while their women drink the coffee prepared by the men and read the newspapers.



The festival is held every 8<sup>th</sup>. January and it is called *Gynaikratia* (women in charge). During this day, men should not leave the house; but most of them sulk about this and complain: "Women should not have rights for a day, not even for an hour".

The young generation might find nothing wrong with husbands helping with the household chores. The girls expect their male partners to help at home because they go out to work. However some think that a woman is free only if she does not get married.

**Key words:**

**male chauvinism** – prejudiced attitude of certain men who believe they are superior to women

**feminism** – belief in the principle that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men

**stereotype** – an image, idea or character that has become fixed or standardised in a conventional form without individuality



In groups, try to answer the following questions:

- a) How would your society react to the idea of forcing husbands to be housewives for one day each year?
- b) Do you think that some women would prefer to stay at home and look after their children while their partners supported them. Give your reasons.
- c) Do you think women should receive some kind of payment for looking after the home?
- d) In your country, are there some men who stay at home while the women go out to work? How are these men viewed? Do you think it is a good idea?



Working in the same group, imagine you have been commissioned by your local government to come up with ideas for organising a festival in your town similar to the one in Greece. However,

- Some men have complained about the festival, saying it shouldn't go ahead. They believe the festival is an insult to them, disrupts their lives, and that what happens in the home is private.
- The women are strongly in favour of the festival, saying it's only a bit of fun, it's their one day off, and it helps their men realise what life is like for them. The women even say that something should be done either to make men help at home, or to pay women for their work.

Make your recommendations and be prepared to justify them! You will have to try and please both the men and the women!



Do you think teachers can help in decreasing sex discrimination in society? How could they do this? What is exactly the role of an educator? Discuss in groups.

Consider this hint:

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is the expert body on equality between men and women in the UK. It was created by Parliament in 1976 to try to end sex discrimination and promote equal opportunities between men and women.

## Worksheet 6

Timing: 60'

### Gender mainstreaming in different cultures



Read the following quotations from the concept of Gender Mainstreaming by the Council of Europe in

[http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human\\_Rights/Equality/02\\_Gender\\_mainstreaming/001\\_Factsheet.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/02_Gender_mainstreaming/001_Factsheet.asp)

Even if women have obtained *de jure* equal rights and equal status with men in the majority of European countries, they are still discriminated against in many areas. Legislation to combat discrimination and promote equal treatment has been adopted and equality mechanisms to monitor implementation has been set up. However imbalances between women and men continue to exist and to influence all walks of life and it is increasingly clear that new approaches, new strategies and new methods are needed to reach the goal of gender equality. Efforts have been made by countries at local, regional and nation level to introduce gender mainstreaming. International and European organisations (notably the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union) have played an active role by diffusing information, organising conferences and introducing the strategy in their own structures.



Discuss with a partner your feelings when reading these statements. Can you sum up the key ideas?



In groups of 4, discuss what is being done in your country to promote gender mainstreaming. Can you find differences and/or similarities that stand out?



At school, how do you promote gender mainstreaming? Invent an activity that could be passed on to other teachers that enhances gender mainstreaming in the classroom.

Consider this statement:

The concept of gender mainstreaming appeared for the first time in international texts after the United Nations Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi, 1985), in the debate on the role of women in development. The Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) calls for the promotion of gender mainstreaming, stating that “governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes, so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively.

## Worksheet 7

Timing: 60'

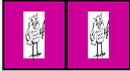
### Equality among the sexes



In a group, prepare a poster with a slogan with the aim of promoting equality among the sexes, bearing in mind the document on Human Rights against discrimination of the Council of Europe. The poster should include a slogan, a message and a diagram to represent the ideas of the group.



How could this activity help you in your teaching profession? What does it make you aware of?



With a partner, discuss whether the slogan prepared in your group would be feasible in all countries in the same way? Which elements could hinder achieving this human right?

As a conclusion, read this statement:

Gender mainstreaming can only be developed when some prerequisites are fulfilled. The most important prerequisite, but often one of the hardest to attain, is the political will to implement this strategy. Furthermore, a gender equality policy must already be in place and gender-sensitive data and statistics must be available. Tools and instruments to put the strategy into practice have to be developed and the people involved have to be trained.

### Assessment

**The** aim is to create awareness about the fact that sexual discrimination is still present in our society even though on paper this should not be so. Through these activities trainees should get better insight about the negative aspects of this discrimination and hence be better prepared to introduce such topics for discussion in their classrooms. If teachers started discussing this from their pupils' early age, I believe they could do a difference in tomorrow's society.

### Bibliography

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## LEA participants views related to gender discrimination

Christine Farrugia  
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These are some of the comments of the participants in my workshop with regards to gender discrimination:

- I think the main causes of gender discrimination lie in the upbringing of a country's children when they learn values that encourage such discrimination. However I do not think that there is anything wrong in this as long as it is not extreme. I think everyone must be allowed the same opportunities but if there seems to be a natural disposition or trend for women or men to take certain jobs and not others, this should not be stopped or discouraged. With regards to teaching I think I will seek to encourage both boys and girls alike to reach their aspirations but without trying to change their inclinations simply for the sake of having gender equality.
- The role played by society in disseminating certain stereotypes has been mentioned a number of times in this seminar, but I believe that, since it is one of the central causes, we must mention it again. It is not only seen in the media but also in life around us (quite a number of jobs are still the domain of one sex and not the other). Another reason for this is that even in cases where there is freedom of choice, men and women still choose jobs traditionally related to their gender. At High School or Technical School there are probably very few (if any) girls that choose metal-working as their course even though they are free to do so.
- I think gender discrimination is created by society. Family also exerts a strong influence on this type of discrimination. One classic example is the type of toys we give to children: dolls for girls and cars for boys. I think in this way we are conditioning and forcing the children to behave and think in a certain manner and thus they do not develop in a free manner. This can be seen in students in the way they speak and behave.
- Our society is one of the main causes of sexual discrimination, also the media. I think this happens in all countries. Even in schools, teachers assign particular roles to boys and others to girls; for example, girls are sent to wash the teacher's mug while boys are sent to bring something from the headmaster's office; so the boys' role becomes more important.
- I think that in Malta gender discrimination still exists and the worst thing is that people not only accept it but consider it to be just a natural thing. The causes are linked with culture and values which are very deep rooted. This has a lot of relevance for teaching because in our hands we have the necessary tools to change at least some ideas about the situation and with the co-operation of parents/heads of schools/other institutions we should be in a position to create a society that does not discriminate against anyone.