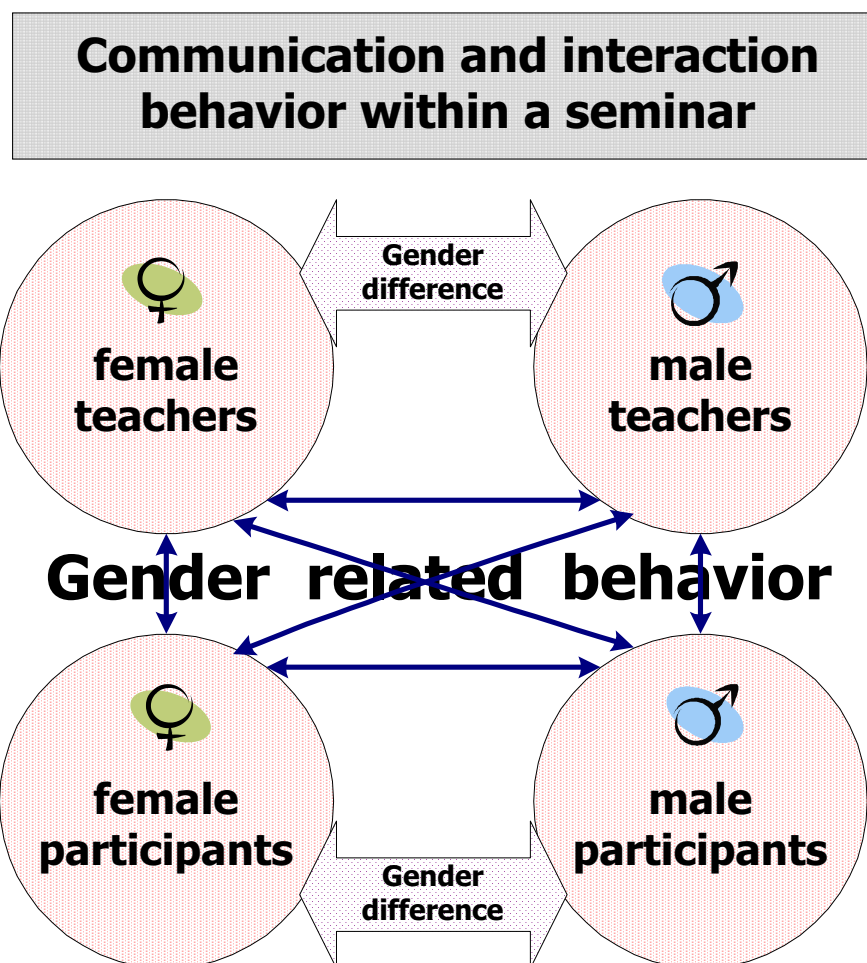


## Gender sensitive<sup>1</sup> didactics for adult education

Karin Derichs-Kunstmann

Even before implementation of the Amsterdam Treaty's Gender Mainstreaming policy began being intensively considered in Germany, those involved in adult education had been addressing the issue of what consequences should be extrapolated from the implementation of gender democracy and/or gender justice in terms of educational work. A significant impulse in this regard stemmed from the consideration of gender relationships in adult education, especially in teaching-learning processes.



**Fig. 1: Interaction**

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*This illustration shows, in a simplified manner, that women and men participating in the seminar repeatedly relate to one another in gender terms, thus manifesting gender differences and solidifying gender hierarchies.*

<sup>1</sup> In German I use the term 'geschlechtergerechte Didaktik' for the concept I want to explain. For the translation into English one can use 'gender just' or 'gender sensitive'. For this article I use mostly the term gender sensitive.



Thanks to empirical investigations, it was possible to verify that (and to verify the extent to which) "The existence of two genders is constantly redesigned in social terms" (see Hovestadt 1997, Derichs-Kunstmann and others. 1999). In addition, the authors showed that "doing gender" in seminars is associated with differing assessments of maleness and femaleness, resulting in different (gender-differentiated) participation opportunities.

Precisely in view of the findings described above, and against the background of international debates on equality policies, adult education should view itself as a forum in which a constructive confrontation can take place regarding the structure of gender relationships and the further development of a gender-just society. In terms of women's education, these issues have been addressed for almost 30 years, and have given rise to important didactic elements relating to the education of women which have flown into this approach. However, I am of the view that the time has come for men to also confront these issues. I believe that a joint confrontation a "new gender contract" is vital. This requires joint seminars involving women and men (gender dialogue).

However, the gender approach in adult education goes beyond this, and also has consequences for other work in educational establishments (see Fig. 2). With regard to the courses and/or seminars, I have differentiated between gender-related education work and other co-educative educational provision.

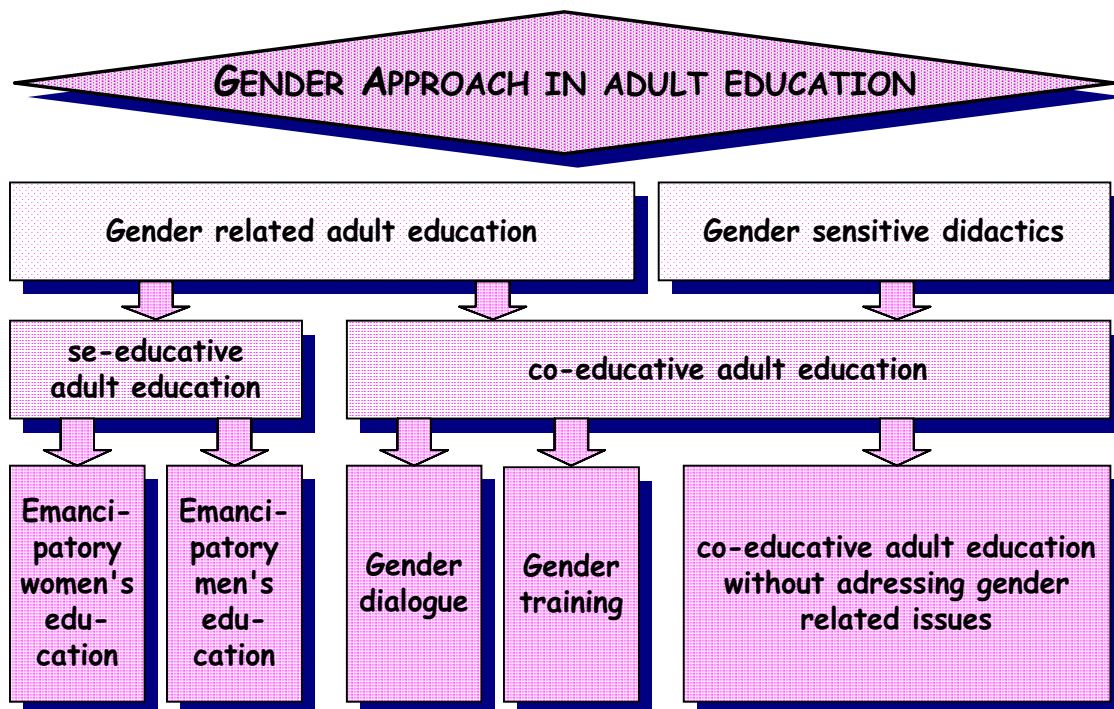
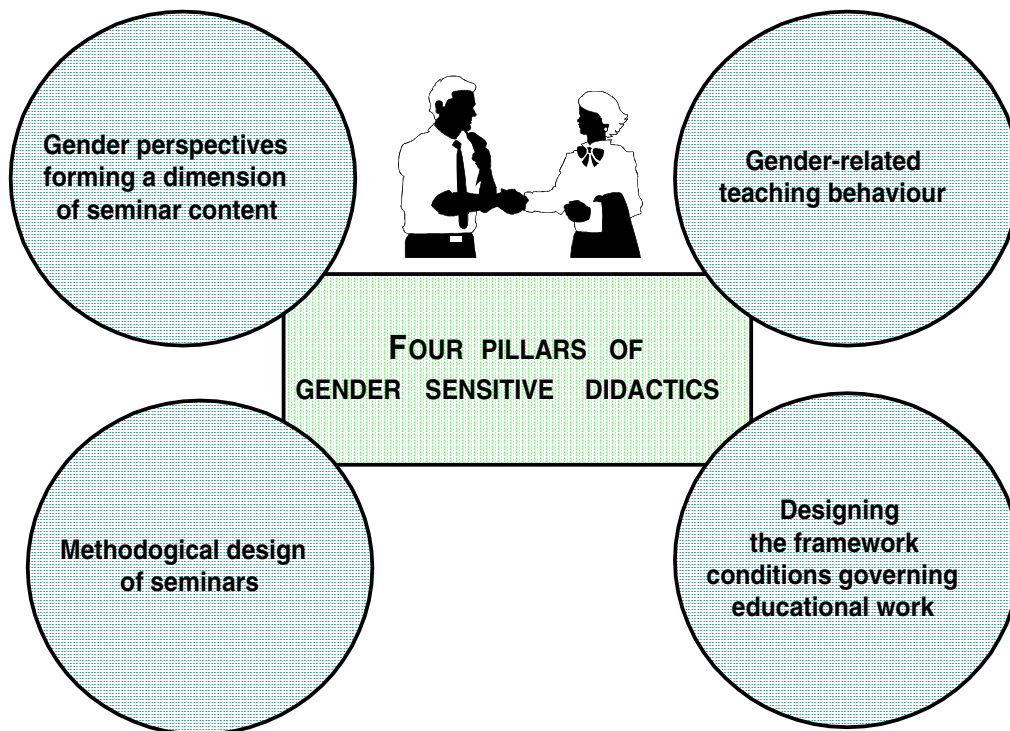


Fig. 2: Gender approach



I have included those educational options within which gender roles and gender relationships are addressed under the umbrella heading of "gender-related adult education". The concept of "gender sensitive didactics" has been developed to include all other co-educative education options. The aim of gender sensitive didactics is to create a learning climate which enables all participants - both women and men - to involve themselves in educational work in accordance with their learning requirements, and to achieve personal development in that forum.

The concept of gender sensitive didactics implies a comprehensive consideration of gender difference and gender justice when planning and designing education events, and thus also includes (in terms of macro-didactics) the framework conditions within educational establishments. The four pillars of gender sensitive didactics stem from this.



**Fig. 3: Gender sensitive didactics**

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### **Gender perspectives forming a dimension of seminar content**

To enable gender perspectives to be integrated into teaching content, a two-step approach is required. The first step consists of analysing existing adult education curricula and teaching concepts, while the second step consists of integrating gender perspectives. During the first step, the curricula must be examined in light of their implications and explications regarding the relationship between the genders (see Hovestadt 1997, S. 129ff.). In this regard, the following analysis levels must be considered:



- The manner and method of addressing gender relationships;
- perspectives relating to the presentation of facts;
- exclusion of significant gender aspects in respect of the seminar subject;
- presentation or non-presentation of the realities of women's' lives;
- andro-centric vs. gender sensitive language; and
- the use of gender role stereotypes.

During the second step, it is necessary to work out approaches for integrating gender perspectives into seminar content. The relationship between the genders must be addressed: i.e., those aspects of the relationship which relate to the seminar content must be made clear. The perspectives of each gender should be explicitly presented. This means that the differing social realities of men and women should be addressed in the seminars and, using concrete examples, their differing interests and viewpoints should be shown. Since social reality differs greatly, it is also necessary to address the life realities, interests and viewpoints of different social groups (not just women and men) in relation to the seminar topic, in the context of a diversity approach.

In my view, the greatest challenge confronting didactic fantasy is not simply to 'add up' gender perspectives, but to achieve an actual integration of the gender dimension. This also entails using gender sensitive language in all cases, since this is an important precondition for perceiving the differing realities of men and women, and thus raising awareness of them.

### **Gender-related aspects of teaching behaviour**

With regard to the behaviour of those leading seminars, the task is to draw conclusions for the structure of educational work from insights relating to the gender-differentiated and gender-related behaviour of women and men in learning situations. Among other things, this requires that teachers develop sensitivity to their own gender-related behaviour modes. Based on a perception of one's own behaviour, this must result in testing and practising a changed gender sensitive mode of teaching behaviour. Necessary teaching behaviour modes include:

- Prior role elucidation within the team;
- unambiguous self-presentation,
- women teachers to deal confidently with their status as experts;
- the cessation of sexist behaviour;
- the use of gender sensitive language; and
- the aware handling of gender-related allocation process in respect of all participants (learners and teachers).

Taken in all, the aim must be to ensure that teachers' behaviour, their pedagogical interventions and their method selections prevent the solidification of gender-differentiated learning cultures.

### **Pedagogical action options available to teachers**

The sensitiveness to gender-differentiated and gender-related behaviour of participants and teachers should also result in a methodological seminar design which, within the teaching process,



reacts in a differentiated manner to the differing communication and interaction methods of the participating women and men, enabling all participants to involve themselves in the seminar in accordance with their learning requirements. Such concepts would best be served by holistic approaches which address all the senses, as well as by a subject-centred didactic approach.

With regard to the interaction behaviour of those teaching female and male participants, a conscious and differentiated approach to gender-differentiated communication and interaction behaviour is expressed, inter alia, by consciously withdrawing attention from individuals who disturb or monopolize proceedings, while consciously including quiet participants - both women and men. Such behavioural approaches would help prevent exclusive dialogues arising, while also helping to reduce the influence of dominant participants.

An additional option for increasing transparency in seminars is the joint preparation of seminar rules governing, for example, talking time, allowing participants to have their say, expressing criticism, dealing with interruptions and much more. Such rules relieve teachers, include participants in responsibility, and contribute to the democratisation of the teaching programme.

In addition, by structuring the methodological arrangements, the necessary space can be afforded to the learning requirements of all participants (see also Krug and others, 2000). Dispensing with podium-based instruction, switching methods and settings, working in small groups and using creative methods: all these approaches increase the participation opportunities for everyone involved, facilitating the involvement of participants with differing learning behaviours and speeds. The formation of gender-homogenous groups, as well as the conscious practice and reflection of unaccustomed functions in the context of role-play, enables participants to break through traditional role patterns. The targeted use of seminar criticism serves as a means to increase transparency.

The further development of gender sensitive methodological approaches is one of the tasks facing (among others) advanced training events, with the aim of testing the micro-didactic implementation together with the teachers. In addition to these proposals, teams should jointly consider how they intend approaching the gender-differentiated behaviour of both participants and teachers. They must also react sensitively to any discriminatory behaviour within the seminar, and - where appropriate - confront such behaviour in a critical and constructive manner.

### **Designing the framework conditions governing educational work**

When designing educational provision, the living conditions of the participating women and men must be considered. This has consequences for the following:

- The timing of educational options, e.g. the start, end and duration of events;
- the event location, e.g. accessibility by public transport, parking space visibility; and
- the spatial design of the event building and the event rooms, e.g. avoiding spaces which may generate fear, use of attractive colours etc.



- the issue of childcare during events is also relevant - and not simply for women's education.

In addition, care must be taken to ensure that gender-sensitive language is used in the even programmes and seminar publicity.

### Summary

In my view, gender sensitive didactics contribute to implementation of the demand for "A participatory pedagogical approach sensitive to gender roles" made in the "Hamburg declaration on Learning for Adults", adopted in 1997 at the UNESCO Conference on Adult Education in Hamburg (UNESCO 1997, p. 23). Adult education establishments, and those working in them, are challenged to make a contribution to this approach.

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