

<b>Institution:</b> Middlesex University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> Education		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Tackling Gender Stereotyping in Childhood: research to support gender neutral schooling		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2007-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Dr Jayne Osgood	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor of Childhood Studies	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> June 2015 - date
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2017-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N</b>		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Middlesex University has undertaken research to support interventions that directly challenge gender stereotyping in schools. Gender stereotyping in schools is a longstanding problem which has serious implications for pupil confidence, academic attainment, emotional intelligence, behaviour and later life outcomes. Impacts from this research have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• directly informed public debate - through the direction of a 2-part BAFTA-winning BBC Documentary Series, which raised awareness in the UK and internationally</li> <li>• changed educational practice - there has been demonstrable research-informed impact to teaching practice through whole school interventions and individual teacher approaches</li> <li>• benefitted children and parents through increased awareness and debate.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Professor Osgood was expert consultant (to Outline Productions, a TV production company commissioned by the BBC) for the development a 2-part Documentary Series concerning gender stereotyping in primary schools: <i>No More Boys &amp; Girls: Can Our Kids Go Gender-Free?</i> Based upon research outputs on gender and childhood published over the past 13 years, expert direction was provided to the production team on the development and execution of specific interventions and experiments to tackle gender stereotyping.</p> <p>Osgood's work has consistently informed teachers and school leaders who are keen to address discriminatory practices in school. For example, to coincide with the Gender Equality Duty legislation (2007), Osgood published in "<i>Genderwatch: Still Watching...</i>", a research-based handbook with schedules designed to help schools address gender equality issues through reviewing practice, tackling inequalities and monitoring outcomes to meet statutory obligations. She has continued to undertake research on gender for bodies such as the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (Francis, Osgood, Archer &amp; Dalgety, 2005), International Anti-Bias Movement (Osgood et al., 2015) and the British Educational Research Association (Osgood &amp; Maxwell, 2015). Most recently, as the Reform of the Gender Recognition Act (2020) was in preparation, key research publications from Middlesex University (Osgood &amp; Robinson, 2019; Osgood, 2019; Osgood &amp; Robinson, 2017; Osgood, 2015, 2014; Osgood &amp; Giugni, 2015) aimed at teachers and early years educators, were written to provide practical guidance on how to address gender issues in the classroom and work towards greater equity.</p> <p>This programme of research identified key factors that teachers must address to best tackle gender stereotyping, which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising awareness of gender stereotyping as an ongoing issue requiring a whole-school approach;</li> <li>• Creating opportunities for open and on-going conversations about gender;</li> </ul>		

- Implementing specific classroom interventions e.g. auditing learning resources and their impact on gender stereotyping.
- Paying attention to gendered dress codes and attitudes towards clothing;
- Challenging gendered role models;
- Identifying unwitting sexist/gendered language in the classroom/school environment;
- Assessing how/whether school spaces are regulated according to gender;
- Ensuring greater choice and availability of children's literature and learning resources; and finally
- Working in partnership with families to ensure that home and extended family environments are also sensitive to gender stereotyping.

These research findings about how to tackle gender stereotyping in childhood directly underpinned the development of the TV documentary. Expertise and insights from this research were shared with the production team from the original design of the programme through to final airing. This involved detailed advice and guidance on the most appropriate interventions/experiments, and direction towards essential resources such as a range of gender neutral and inclusive learning materials, toys and books. Professor Osgood was in situ at the primary school featured in the programme to offer critical insights as the programme and analysis was developed. The 2-part documentary was aired on BBC2 in Autumn 2017 following a year of consultation as the programme was produced, recorded and edited. The BBC recognised the need for a documentary that could take messages from research to directly inform debate about gender in childhood, how it limits the life chances of both boys and girls, and the practical interventions that can be done at school and home to address it.

### 3. References to the research

Publications\* that coincide with Professor Osgood's appointment at Middlesex University include:

- (1) OSGOOD, J. & Robinson, K. H. (2019). *Feminists Researching Gendered Childhoods*, Feminist Thought in Childhood Research Series: Bloomsbury: London.
- (2) OSGOOD, J. (2019). Gender in the Nursery (and at home): Learning Lessons from an Early Age in L. Rycroft-Smith & G. Andre (Eds). *The Equal Classroom: Life Changing Thinking About Gender*. London: Routledge.
- (3) OSGOOD, J. & Robinson, K. H. (2017). 'Celebrating Pioneering and Contemporary Feminist Approaches to the Study of Gender in Early Childhood' in K. Smith & S. Campbell (Eds) *Feminism in early childhood: Using feminist theories in research and practice*. Springer.
- (4) OSGOOD, J. (2015). 'Reimagining gender and play' in J. Moyles (Ed). *The Excellence of Play (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. pp.49-60. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- (5) OSGOOD, J. (2014) 'Playing with Gender: making space for post-human childhood(s)' in J. Moyles., J. Payler & J. Georgeson (Eds) *Early Years Foundations: An Invitation to Critical Reflection*. pp.191-202. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- (6) OSGOOD, J. & Giugni, M. (2015). Putting post humanist theory to work to reconfigure gender in early childhood: when theory becomes art becomes method, *Global Studies of Childhood*. 5 (3) 346-60.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### a) Reframing Public Debate

The BBC documentary has been hugely popular, nationally and internationally, and the rigour of the programme was recognised with a BAFTA nomination. Over 1.5 million ratings per episode was achieved, and the series drew one of the BBC's biggest youth audiences for a factual series in 2017. Ensuing debates on social media reignited the importance of gender in childhood. It was shared via BBC Digital Stories platform 5 million times within 24 hours of transmission; one month later rising to 26 million. The series has been broadcast

internationally, from New Zealand, Israel, Spain, Belgium, Holland, Hong Kong to Australia. It featured on *Gogglebox Australia*, where the cast initially disregarded the show as 'pc madness' but ultimately praised it. It is being remade in Germany, Spain, Japan and USA.

By drawing upon rigorous research, the documentary effectively captured public attention and raised awareness that gender remains a pressing issue and demands the active participation of teachers, childcarers and (grand)parents. The specific interventions featured in the documentary that generated widespread debate concerning girls' confidence and boys' lack of emotional intelligence was noted by MP Jo Swinson: "*a fascinating television programme on the BBC that some hon. members might have seen...explored gender issues and how, even at an early age, they were already being embedded*". She went on to praise the documentary for raising this as an issue for debate.

The documentary also informed on-going debates about the importance of clothing and stereotyping deeply entrenched within society. Based upon research into the importance of clothes and dressing up in childhood (Osgood, 2014; Osgood & Robinson, 2019), the most controversial experiment dressed babies in clothes of the opposite sex. The problematics surrounding clothing, as rehearsed in research and presented within the documentary, fuelled public debate underlining that gender stereotyping is routinely reinforced through slogans, colour and cloth design. The small but significant research-informed interventions that featured in the documentary made a tangible impact upon the public debate that circulated across various media sources (from BBC4 Women's Hour, BBC Breakfast, ITV Good Morning Britain, to Mumsnet) where reference to the documentary and its interventions are frequently cited.

*b) Changing Educational Practice: the participating school*

The impact of the six-week TV experiment at the primary school on the participating children was powerful:

- Girls' test scores for self-esteem, intellectual self-confidence and problem-solving ability exceeded boys scores by the end
- Boys made significant gains in terms of empathy, emotional vocabulary, and behaviour in the classroom.

The teacher featured radically altered all aspects of his approach to gender in the classroom as a result of the interventions and experiments. As he stated: "*Before I was part of this documentary, I was not aware of it at all. Now I see it everywhere...the main change has to be my own expectations and language... I now also plan to look at gender within curriculum topics.*" He went on to stress that: *it's really about sustaining that impact though. It has totally changed my teaching and I am so passionate about helping to create a gender equal world for our children to grow up in*'. The interventions had such a profound impact on his attitudes and behaviour that he now speaks at numerous teaching conferences, is active on social media (with 21.5 thousand followers on Twitter and an active member of the #Global Equality Collective). As a result of the documentary, he co-authored an edited book (Rycroft-Jones & Andre, 2019 which included a chapter from Osgood) aimed at teachers and parents on the topic.

The impact within family homes was also tangible, with many parents visibly shocked at how gender stereotypes were unwittingly reinforced on a daily basis through consumer choices and narrow gendered expectations; participation in the experiment directly resulted in changes to parental behaviour in respect of consumer choices, and language use at home. The teacher said of the parents: *'The parents enjoyed the experience; they saw it as a very positive thing. Most of them continue to think about things differently, their use of language, the way they treat siblings etc. It has definitely had an impact.'*

As a consequence of being involved in the documentary and engaged in the research-informed interventions, the primary school has implemented curriculum and whole-school policy changes designed to ensure sustained impact: The KS2 Leader stated: *'we kept all*

*the ideas, the positive signs are now up in all classrooms, gender neutral books are in each class, gender equality and talking about gender is now part of our curriculum, the language we use with our children etc. The girls have really benefited from this, they have grown in confidence and feel they can achieve anything, and this is mirrored in their academic achievement. The boys as a whole are more empathetic and don't tend to overestimate themselves and underestimate the girls.'*

*c) Changing Educational Practice: Lifting Limits Pilot Programme*

The research that underpinned the documentary, alongside the evidence of impact at school level, inspired a series of programmes and interventions across the country. For example, *Lifting Limits* has used the documentary during INSET sessions with 270 teachers at five primary schools in the London Borough of Camden between September 2018 – July 2019. Interventions and experiments featured in the documentary were introduced in a pilot programme. Data collected pre- and post-pilot demonstrated:

- Increased reflection by staff on their own unconscious bias, the messages they give children about what boys and girls can do, language use and the impact of their practices on children. For example, half of the respondents in the post-pilot survey (50%) said they reflect a lot on the messages they give boys and girls about what they can do, up from one third of respondents (29%) in the baseline survey.
- Greatly-increased staff confidence to address gender stereotyping and inequality with pupils, colleagues and parents. For example, there was a 60% increase in staff confidence to explain the impacts of gender stereotyping to colleagues (48% in the baseline survey compared with 77% in the post-pilot survey).
- A 22% increase in staff perceiving that they have the tools, resources and support they need to be able to address any sexism among pupils (with 74% agreeing with this statement in the baseline compared with 90% in the post-pilot survey).
- Changes in attitudes, with staff holding less stereotypical views about gender at the end of the pilot. For example, 78% of staff disagreed with the statement 'boys and girls are naturally better at different things' in the post-pilot survey, up from 66% in the baseline, an increase of 18%.
- Staff perceive the research-informed INSET presentation and the whole school approach to have been the key aspects which have supported changes in awareness, confidence, reflection and practice.

The Chief Executive Officer of Lifting Limits recounted the importance of the evidence-base underpinning the documentary that informed the approach taken to developing INSET: *"Professor Jayne Osgood's body of research into gender and childhood has been hugely influential, not just in the academic field, but also in informing practice for educators striving to address gendered inequalities and stereotyping through their practice. In particular, through the BBC documentary No More Boys and Girls, Professor Osgood's research reaches school practitioners in a relatable and practical way. At Lifting Limits, we work with primary schools to challenge gender stereotyping and promote gender equality through a whole school approach and the first step for schools joining our programme is staff Inset training. We include several video clips from No More Boys and Girls in our training because they illustrate so clearly and accessibly many of the issues we are looking to address in schools and we find that these clips are incredibly impactful for school staff. Professor Osgood's writing for educators also identifies a range of practical steps school staff can take to challenge gender stereotyping in the school environment, prompting reflection for example on language used, classroom organisation and resources made available to children in book corners and dressing up racks."*

*d) Changing Educational Practice: teacher training and continuing professional development*

A range of schools, including single-sex comprehensives in large metropolitan cities to smaller rural schools in Scotland, have also made use of the BBC documentary and its specific interventions in INSET sessions - to increase staff confidence, bring about changes in attitudes and behaviour, and revise school policy to tackle gender stereotyping. The research and documentary are now widely embedded in a range of teacher training and continuing professional development programmes in various institutional contexts. For



example, Equaliteach engaged over 11 thousand children and young people and 3.5 thousand teachers in nationwide programmes during 2019-20; National Improvement Hub in Scotland has a resource: *'Improving Gender Balance & Equalities'* available to all 5,000 schools across Scotland, and the Men in Early Years Network (with networks in London, Bristol, Southampton, York, Northumberland and Scotland) reaches over 13 thousand male practitioners. Other specific examples include the Foundation Degree taught at the Montessori Centre International (MCI) which now includes the documentary, and research upon which it was based, as part of a *'Supporting Gender Diversity'* module. One student reflected on the difference encountering the documentary and research made to her practice: *'It highlighted that even in this day and age, the subconscious still plays a big role in our stereotyping even if it is actually against our core beliefs. In my setting I have always tried to stamp out gender stereotyping amongst the teachers, but it was more so on an obvious level e.g. pink is for girls and blue is for boys, or rough and tumble play being more accepted amongst boys, and for the most part is thankfully successful. The documentary however, led me to question if I was doing enough to actually change the subconscious attitudes, which then led to some role play and group activities amongst the team that allowed us to question our own attitudes towards this topic.'*

A range of programmes at Middlesex University now include the documentary as a teaching resource and introduce students at BA, ITE and MA level to the research-evidence that informs it. As a consequence, over 4000 trainee and in-service teachers engage with the debates presented in the documentary, and through their own research actively engage in ways to implement strategies to tackle gender stereotyping in their own practice. As this MA student recounted: *'Professor Osgood's research highlighted how we are all so embedded in a culture that is gendered that we don't even see how it affects us...as a result of her research and the MA course, several changes were made to policy and practice at my school'*.

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- a) Lifting Limits (2019) Lifting Limits Pilot Impact Evaluation Report. Available at: <https://www.liftinglimits.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Impact-Evaluation-Report-final-for-website.pdf> (accessed 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2020)
- b) Testimonial from Caren Gestetner (CEO of Lifting Limits).
- c) Testimonial from Graham Andre, teacher featured in the documentary.
- d) <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2017/aug/17/no-more-boys-and-girls-can-kids-go-gender-free-review-reasons-to-start-treating-children-equally>

This corroborates the claim made that the documentary, and underpinning research generated renewed public debate about the importance of tackling gender stereotyping in schools.

- e) <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/primary-rocks-live-5-lessons-we-learned>

Corroborates claim that the attitudes and behaviour of the teacher featured in the documentary have altered. This impact has been translated across national teaching networks through training and professional development.

- f) <https://twitter.com/hashtag/nomoreboysandgirls?lang=en>

This twitter hashtag demonstrates the furore and debate that ensued on social media and the lasting impact it has had to public debate and its connection to newer initiatives and projects designed to tackle gender stereotyping in schools.

- g) [https://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/womens\\_rights/3008058-no-more-girls-and-boys-can-our-children-go-gender-free-bbc-2-tonight](https://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/womens_rights/3008058-no-more-girls-and-boys-can-our-children-go-gender-free-bbc-2-tonight)