

**Rosa Diketmueller**

*University of Vienna, Centre of Sports Sciences, Austria*

**Abstract**

## **NEGOTIATING GENDER ISSUES AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN SCHOOL YARDS**

Schoolyards and outdoor areas become increasingly important for the social and the physical development of pupils. The results of a recent study (Diketmueller & Studer, 2007) show that girls and boys behave very gender stereotypically and different groups - especially girls - reduce their level of physical activity in schoolyards to a minimum. To promote encouraging environments for both genders and different age-groups, schools have to offer varied open spaces, as well as innovative pedagogical approaches to empower teachers and pupils to negotiate the issue on a daily basis.

Within the project 'School yards, physical activity and gender relations' teachers and pupils of 20 schools were sensitized to this issue. Based on the assumption that gender is socially constructed and embedded in daily routines and organizations (Lorber 1994), in a first step it was important to analyze the situation and to identify moments of construction and perpetuation. Pupils together with teachers observed systematically who uses the outdoor areas in which way, they discussed their experiences and results in focus groups, they developed strategies and stipulated use zoning plans to offer more pupils a broader access to physical activity. This requires, of course, a minimum of gender awareness of pupils, too.

Teachers as facilitators empower the pupils to participate in the process of planning, implementation and managing, considering the needs and interests of different groups and individuals. Raising gender and diversity awareness of pupils contributes to a broader sense of sustainable education.

The results lead us to the conclusion that gender awareness is not only important for teachers, but is an important competence for pupils to identify unbalanced situations and to have skills for dealing with situations and negotiating solutions.

1. Diketmueller, R., Studer, H. (2007). *Schulfreiräume und Geschlechterverhältnisse*. [www.univie.ac.at/schulfreiraum](http://www.univie.ac.at/schulfreiraum)
2. Lorber, J. (1994). *Paradoxes of Gender*. Yale Univ. Press.