

Childrens's culture, democracy and participation

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Speaking from a Danish perspective - with parallels to the other Nordic countries

- ▶ 50 years of experience with ECEC as an offer for "all children"
- ▶ Number of children attending ECEC continuously increased
- ▶ At present:
 - 95.0 % of all children between 1-5 are enrolled in public kindergartens/ECEC
 - Public funding covers app. 70 %, - parental fees cover the rest (exception for low-income groups)
 - Compulsory school from 6 years of age
 - Day-care centers are non-obligatory, but public authorities are obliged to offer access from the age of 12 months.
 - Almost all children are enrolled full-time. Attendance varies between 5 and 11 hours a day.
 - ECEC are a fundamental part of the lives of almost all preschoolers in Denmark today.

The Danish Tradition

- ▶ Pedagogical practice based on professional judgement
- ▶ Individually and collectively among the group of staff-members
- ▶ With different types of involvement of parents
- ▶ The ECEC as an democratic institution
- ▶ Inspired by theory, research and ongoing conceptualizations
- ▶ Continuous discussion about basic values, the societal 'mandate' of the ECEC
- ▶ With a general focus on children's play, children's self-regulation, children's culture
- ▶ In Biesta's terms with a priority of Socialization (Democracy as a way of life) and Subjectification (Being and becoming a person) - may be at cost of a focus on qualification (preparation for school)

Children's play and culture

- ▶ Children play for a lot of reasons - among them to be part of and belonging to the group of children as a social landscape
 - ▶ Acquire a sense of the landscape - 'reading the social world'
 - ▶ Acquire the codes of conduct - 'decoding the culture'
 - ▶ Develop ability to act properly in the context - 'legitimate participant'
 - ▶ Children's play-culture handed over/reproduced from 'generation to generation'
- ▶ → Struggling with what it is to be me, to be a kindergarten-child - knowing who I am, what am I able to do, what is my body able to do, what are my interests and curiosities, who are my friends, etc?
- ▶ Based on experiments, experiences, negotiations, successes and failures
- ▶ Points to the need for professionals who can read and act in accordance with the myriad of processes about the 'not yet' among the children

Recent (15-20 years) changes in ECEC-policies

- ▶ Denmark, as well as the other Nordic countries, has experienced ECEC-policies quite similar to what is happening in the international context:
- ▶ Children's learning has been addressed as a core concept - lifelong learning, which has been on the agenda especially in EU and the western world, with more emphasis and focus on children's learning. Reports from OECD, i.e. PISA and the Starting Strong reports, are on an international level stressing the importance of children's early learning
- ▶ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been crucial in promoting a focus on children as citizens, also including a focus on children's learning by stating the right of the child to have access to knowledge, etc.
- ▶ World wide we see increased promotions of national curricula and other similar initiatives even for early childhood education and pre-school services
- ▶ Finally, it seems that the tradition of early childhood education itself also has an increased central focus on children's learning - as part of strengthening the profession's reputation and status
- ▶ An ideological, discursive, but also policy implementing regime of **learning** as the self-evident key activity in ECEC
- ▶ → Moving the focus to a narrow prioritizing of qualification - at the expense of democratic socialization and subjectification? (Biesta)

Final considerations and questions to policies and practices

- ▶ What about children's space for making decisions about their own everyday life actions?
- ▶ What about children's rights to be a (non-responsible, in-mature, ir-rational, in-sensible, etc.) child?
- ▶ What is the place and understanding of a child perspective?
- ▶ What about children's own immediate interests and curiosities, their ways of acting and interacting, their ways of using their bodies, voices, senses - often without any specific purpose - at least seen from the adults perspective
- ▶ What is democracy seen from the child's/childrens perspective?