

HOW CAN WE ADDRESS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC) MORE EFFECTIVELY - IN A PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

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Abstract

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) can enhance the life chances of all children, and especially socially disadvantaged children as shown in e.g. early intervention programs in the US. In the Nordic daycare systems, where >90 % of all children attend daycare, however, it is not clear whether ECEC provides equal social and intellectual opportunities for socially disadvantaged children.

The VIDA intervention program, *Knowledge-based efforts for socially disadvantaged children in daycare – a model program*, aims at improving the well-being and cognitive functioning of all children, and specifically at improving the situation for socially disadvantaged children. The main difficulty being tackled is that children whose parents are poor, unemployed, have no education or are on welfare are at a greater risk of having developmental and wellbeing problems and of being excluded from society in later life.

The project covers 120 day care centers with 7,000 children in four Danish municipalities. The objective of the VIDA program is to improve our knowledge about what means and methods are effective when implementing a new innovative type of early childhood educational efforts in daycare institutions that are aimed at socially disadvantaged children. Several methods of social innovation are developed in the VIDA program, and these are used systematically by the daycare centers involved in the study. We define social innovation as the sustainable renewal of ECEC interventions that target a child's social difficulties and that lead to improvements in the child's wellbeing, in both the short term and long term. Long term improvements are what we call the child's well becoming.

In this presentation, the findings from international research on the long-term effects of Early Childhood Educational and Care (ECEC) Intervention on children who are experiencing social difficulties are outlined. Then the design, methods and selected findings from the VIDA program are presented. And finally, the VIDA program is compared to several other international studies and some perspectives on ECEC in an EU context will be added.

Conclusion

We have seen in the international research, especially in the RCT studies in the US, that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) can enhance the life chances of all children, and especially socially disadvantaged children in the US. We have also shown both in the UK case, with the EPPE study and in the Nordic daycare systems, where >90 % of all children attend daycare, it is not clear whether ECEC provides equal social and intellectual opportunities for socially disadvantaged children. We have seen that quality matters.

This is why we need to develop a new innovative approach to ECEC that can be implemented in a context where almost all children attend daycare and in EU contexts. The VIDA intervention program, *Knowledge-based efforts for socially disadvantaged children in daycare – a model program* is such a program that takes account of the Danish context and aims at improving the well-being and cognitive functioning of all children, and specifically at improving the situation for socially disadvantaged children.

International research has found that systematic efforts in early childhood can generate positive effects for socially disadvantaged children, both short-term and long-term effects. It takes more to ensure positive effects, and inspired by international research, among others Pianta et al. (2009), we believe the key to effective interventions implemented in a large-scale context as seen in VIDA is education and training of daycare teachers and allowing staff to develop high quality ECEC interventions through changing their own teaching practices in order to find new innovative methods to improve children's wellbeing and learning through social inclusion.

Thoughts for the future

The design of the VIDA project, i.e. an RTC design by including a representative sample of daycare centers and teachers is promising for implementation in a large-scale context in Danish daycare, and presumably also in daycare in other European countries.

The materials, tools and educational models developed in VIDA can be used in other contexts if the preconditions are comparable. This means the VIDA ECEC program should be implemented by well-trained staff, in a universal daycare system, and the quality of the program is based on clear theoretical and evidence based methods, systematic and well-organized efforts and managers who are educated to implement the innovative perspectives of ECEC in the entire daycare center by training staff.

The aim of future ECEC interventions in the EU is thus to improve children's well-being in general, but also to place special emphasis on the issue of socially disadvantaged children and the risk of social exclusion. These issues are complex and challenge public policy and practice as shown in several studies. Future interventions in EU countries should therefore collaborate and together identify, develop and adapt ECEC interventions, like VIDA, and pinpoint process quality parameters in the different contexts as well as explore indicators of outcomes that measure children's well-being (short term) and later performance (well-becoming) (long term) in school, education and society.

Publications and further information

http://edu.au.dk/fileadmin/www.dpu.dk/e-boeger/VIDA_rapporter/Status_Report_1_GB.pdf

<http://edu.au.dk/en/research/research-projects/vida/>

<http://edu.au.dk/en/currently/event/artikel/enrichment-of-daycares-in-a-perspective-of-social-innovation/>

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