TEACHER INVOLVEMENT AND CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Kick-off workshop
AU Network of Public Mental Health

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Outline

- Brief introduction: research questions
- Three empirical examples:
  A. School-welfare/well-being and teacher-student relations in HBSC Greenland 2014
  B. Teachers passion in outdoor education: “Gardens for Bellies”
  C. New well-being research in TasteForLife
Research questions

I. How do students learn social awareness - to care for others - show empathy, appreciate diversity - at school and in society?

II. How do they learn about well-being and welfare at school?

III. Do the teachers organize lessons that take into account the type of learning processes that develop the students’ well-being in their actions, knowledge and experiences?

IV. How can they use outdoor learning or taste learning - skills, knowledge, social and emotional learning - in different subjects at school?
Central themes

A. Positive mental health education
B. Well-being
C. Learning
D. Taste literacy
A. School-welfare (HSBC Greenland 2014)

- Interest in the teacher-student relation’s significance for the well-being and mental health of students
- Questions are asked about:
  a. Students’ satisfaction with the school
  b. Pressure from the schoolwork
  c. Perception of their own performance
  d. Truancy

- Hereafter, the students’ perception of support from their classmates and teachers is examined and combined with the above issues.
Preliminary results (Niclassen et al, 2014)

- A statistically high correlation between the support that the students experience from their classmates and teachers and their school satisfaction
Students’ perception of support

- The perception of pressure from their schoolwork has, as school satisfaction, a clearly positive correlation with the students’ perception of support. This is the case for both the support from fellow classmates, but even more so for the perceived support from the teachers.
- The experience of being under pressure from schoolwork is thus 2-3 times higher among students, who do not feel supported by their classmates and teachers.
Primary teacher’s evaluation

• The students’ perception of their primary teacher’s evaluation of their school performance is also of great significance to whether or not they experience support from the other students, and even more so from their other teachers.
B. ”Gardens for Bellies”

- Culinary organic garden learning program
- Public school students 0-6th grade
- Running since 2006 → 13,000 students
- Each class is given their own plot of land
Three learning components

- Gardening
- Cooking
- Nature exploring
Gardening

- A gardener teaches the students how to grow organic vegetables
Cooking

• They cook with a chef in outdoor kitchens
Organic agriculture

- A farmer takes the students into the fields and explains organic farming: food production and agriculture
Nature exploring and adventure

- A nature guide organizes adventure activities in the forest to explore the local nature.
Well-being: no bullying - loose up (Wistoft & Dyg, 2014)

• A 13 year old boy says:

*In the classroom I'm bullied all day every day, but no one bullies me in the garden. It's like one long recess without bullying!*

• A girl follows up with:

*It just kind of loosens everything up when we're in the garden.*

• The boy answers:

*Yeah and you just want to learn about the vegetables that you don't know - it's the most interesting part, and also cooking together and tasting each other's dishes!*
Well-being promotes a desire to learn

- Well-being cannot be staged or organised, but it can be reflected in practises by the teacher
- Well-being among students is promoted by dedicated teachers and conscious dissemination
- Students’ motivation and desire to learn highly depends on didactic reflected well-being from teachers
- These reflections among teachers can not always be manufactured - they also depend on the teacher’s own mental health and well-being

(Wistoft et al., 2011; Wistoft 2012, 2013)
The teacher’s involvement

- The teachers’ passion is doubled by the passion to communicate their passion, as one teacher says: 
  
  *I have a passion for showing the pupils my passion*

- Way of life and passion are brought together, which is the most important elements in the educator's identity

- They create meaningful partnerships with the students

- They are not only authentic, they are passionate!

(Wistoft et al., 2011; Wistoft 2012, 2013)
TASTE for LIFE
C. Taste for Life

- New Danish Center with cross disciplinary activities
- Researchers from three Universities and teachers from two university colleges
- Focusing on taste as a driving force for learning, education, taste literacy and good food practices
- The overall goal: Children and young people learn to take mental ownership on their own taste!
- To create a basis for a better, richer and more tasteful life
Research on taste and learning

- Taste as a **driving force**
- Taste experiences, knowledge and skills
- Cooking and culinary experiences
  → taste in food knowledge
  [Madkundskab] in the Danish Public School