

A Nordic approach to ECE system and Social Differences

– A Danish trial. Challenges for Professional Knowing and Learning

*Reconsidering the basics in Early Childhood Education
18th EECERA Annual Conference, Stavanger, September 2008, 4.-6.th*

*Bente Jensen, Associate professor, Ph.D.
School of Education, University of Aarhus, Copenhagen*

Overview

A political and societal context

International and nordic research

A Nordic approach to national curriculum

Research-questions, methods and analyses are challenged

Here the ASP-project, "Action-competences i social-pedagogical work with socially endangered children" (HPA-projektet) takes departure

- some aspects and preliminary findings are discussed

A political and societal context

General economic prosperity, altered social conditions

Increased social efforts towards welfare for everyone/education

It has not been possible to stop the 'negative social heritage'

Growing up under socially endangered conditions have still
consequences relates to poorer life-chances

Political awareness, quality-reforms, and the Danish National
Curriculum of ECE (2004), revised in 2007



Theoretical approach – away from individualizing societal problems

Bourdieu's theory of social inequality as a question of power –
one explanation of the issue of reproduction of inequalities
generation after generation

Berstein-based theory of institutional learning processes
building on the codes of middle-class, another

Theories of new possibilities in a post-modern society
(Giddens)? - or new risks (Beck)?

The individualizing paradigm, children 'shape' their own
identities, socially endangered children 'lack something'

Social differences, ECE- intervention in research

First. Positive effects of ECE programmes starting in early childhood (Esbing Andersen, 2005, Heckmann, 2008, Schweinhart, 2007) an economic perspective

Second. We still don't know which methods and what types of interventions that works – or under which conditions.

Third: There is a lack of evidence of longterm –effects and of explanations of effect controlled for individual and social variables (age, gender, ethnicity, social capital etc).

Fourth. We know too little about the problems of taking an 'individualizing approach' to the ECE-intervention – and its exclusion-risks (Jensen, 2007, Palludan, 2005)

Lastly. Nordic research point out a number of problems related to the day-care centers implicit processes of reproduction of socio-cultural differences (se also the presentation on Symposium V/6, Moser et al.)

Differences between the Nordic and the Anglo-Saxon models for ECE

The Nordic model

Child-oriented, holistic learning perspective

No learning standards, assessments

Development in a broad sense

Democracy in practice

Social pedagogical tradition (holistic)

The Anglo-saxon model

Academic skills and knowledge

Learning standards, assessments

School related achievement

Learning of democracy

Early Education tradition (academic)

ECE approaches

Both approaches assume that a society can contribute to reducing social inequality by education children

- By supporting children's development in a broad sense (Nordic model)
- By strengthening school-related achievements in a more narrow sense (Anglo-Saxon model)

“Successful programmes do not categorise young children as having developmental or language needs, but believe that young children will learn and develop quickly if given a supportive pedagogical environment” (Bennett, 2006, p. 150)



The paradoxes of the Nordic model

one the hand the Nordic model of ECE –curriculum provides unique opportunities for supporting all children through learning activities from a socio-pedagogical approach building on inclusion AND learning

og the other hand, the Nordic model may produce, as shown in nordic research, risks of maintaining or even strengthening the reproduction of socio-cultural differences

Research-questions, methodology and analyses are challenged



A Danish Trial

Action Competencies in Social Pedagogical Work with Socially Endangered Children (The ASP-project)

Value basis is the Nordic model

The explicit focus of the ASP-intervention is to work with exclusion/inclusion as **part** of the learning processes

The professional ASP-development take departure of research-based educational processes *in practice* and *out of practice*

Jensen et al. (2006-2009) – se also www.dpu.dk/hpa

The ASP-project - an overview of design

The ASP-intervention programme (HPA-mappen)

A qualification 'package':

- qualification folder, material build on research-based knowledge of policy, practice, research
- actioncompetence development process, professionals development through self-and comm
- implementation strategies based on an organizational learning perspective

Professional development through knowing and learning

Out of practice: Through dialogue between all agents: Professionals, managers, consultants and consultant from University Colleges and Researchers

In practice: Through dialogue in institutional processes, reflections in communities of practice

Methods and data

The study of 2700 3-6 year-old children in 60 day care centres is based on an RCT-design
Institutional learning evaluated by interviews with managers (before – after)

Outcomes

Children's learning and competence development (individual level) (indicators of effects)

An innovative learning organisational development (institutional level) (factors assumed influencing effects, and effects in itselfes)



The ASP explore five questions

Do the the ASP interventionprogram impact children's social development and learning competences, does the 'gab' narrow? (differences between intervention/referenceinstitutions)

Which factors are significant in terms of effect/the absence of effects? (individual, social, institutional)

Are some institutions more effective than others ("Best practice")? And why? What characterises "Best practice"?

How does the professionals commit to the ASP-concept of knowing and learning and how does this impact the succes of intervention?

- and which further questions and challenges arise?

Some preliminary findings with focus on challenges for professional knowing and learning

Huge differences in terms of the pedagogical work and basis for developing 'best practice'

Teachers' professional skills and qualifications concerning new challenges.

It's demanding for teacher working with the entire ECE/ASP-implementation process by having to reflect upon one's own practice and role in relation to new knowledge of socially endangered children - and a demanding implementation strategy

Three typologies are preliminary identified

The super-motivated institution

The manager motivated from the beginning, and managed her staff, the ASP-programme made sense to the staff, they took ownership and falls in line with already formulated need for knowledge and learning. An open learning culture in the institution promote the experience of community of practice.

The sceptic/changing institution

The manager acknowledges that their motivation was low and they worked slowly in the beginning. She saw how her job as a rolemodel was crucial. The manager changed her attitude consequently, succeeded in making the staff commit themselves to the project. The three components: Ownership, common reflection and time became central pivotal points in the changing process.

The non-motivated institution

The resistance persists throughout the project. Typically the institutions as a whole (manager and her staff) have not been able to gather the necessary energy needed to participate in the demanding project. Differences in these institutions will be further explored

Summary of institutional differences

In general

The intervention-institutions can be said to be under the same pressure in order to implement the Nordic approach to the ECE-system and integrate it in working systematic with the ASP-programme – they are all affected by the external and internal pressure

However some

of the institutions have embraced the idea of ASP-intervention programme and they work enthusiastically with the project and the huge challenges it offers. They see actually ASP-programme as 'a gift' that enables an improvement of the national demand in relation to the national curricula (ECE). Others – as we identified- are overwhelmed by the demands and huge challenges

Discussion

Children seen as agents in their own learning processes, and 'children at risk' need to be involved, included on equal terms

The professionals teachers are met with demanding requirements seen in the perspective of the nordic approach and The ASP- intervention

Huge differences between the quality and the implementation in the various institutions

Planned structured programmes and learning - its up to the professionals to create their own standards, and that challenges professionals learning and knowing in different ways

Pedagogical theory and practice behind the concrete local intervention

Conclusion: ECE systems – new challenges and perspectives in a time of globalisation

The Nordic model different from the structured programmes identified in international ECE programmes. No study provides sufficient evidence that the Nordic model is more (or less) efficient than the international efficient model programmes

The sociological perspective, which together with a learning perspective constitute an alternative setting for working with ECE may offer new reflection and action possibilities in the pedagogical practice (ASP-programme)

Further research interests

Research in organizational learning and innovation in workplaces in other fields (Elkjaer, 2006; Høyrup, 2006; Siggaard Jensen, 2007) have documented that circumstances related to the processes of learning and knowing in work organisations can either restrict or promote a social innovation (Denvall, 2006) - and thereby effects?

It would be of interest to go further collecting new data and analyzing data in this respect.

Bente Jensen, Associate professor, Projectmanager, Ph.D.
University of Aarhus, Copenhagen, School of Education,
Department of Learning

Email: bj@dpu.dk

For more information se www.dpu.dk/hpa and www.dpu.dk/om/bj