Framing possible democratic subjects in Danish Early Childhood Education

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What are the possibilities and barriers for children’s democratic experiences in Danish early childhood institutions (ECI)?


**Childhood studies** – Cultural analysis inspired by Danish Anthropologist Cathrine Hasse. A focus on everydaylife in ECI and the cultural connections and models, that children experience through their various positions. (Hasse 2011).

**Ethnographic fieldstudy**, participatory observation/interviews/video combined with participatory workshops with staff. Two kindergartens, Copenhagen and Greater Copenhagen.

**Poststructuralist perspectives**
Potential subjects for democratic experiences?
Political framing of livable lives (Butler 2015)

Today
Democratic Experiences

• Pragmatist Deweyan concept of experience, as doings and undergoings in a cultural context through participation and communication.

• A way of life.

• Experiencing being a subject in the world, being called upon as a (unique) subject. elational, situational.

• Experiencing the middlefield between individual wants and collective desires. Experiencing being there, tackling/troubling/disturbing that middleground.

• Possibilities for action and transformation together with others, rather than limited to listening to children’s perspectives.

• Experiencing dealing with How can we live together?, rather than defining the ideal democratic society.
• **What can that possibly mean for younger children?**

• Who, can move what/how, when? What/who invites who, when?

• Possibilities for participation and learning are unequally distributed (Larsen 2010, Bundgaard & Gulløv 2005, Palludan 2003)

• Moving beyond ‘the Children’ in childhood studies.
Prologue

_Saraf from Africa_

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_Anna_: “And then there is Saraf. He was also able to speak in the nursery, but now he has been in Africa for 6 months, in Tanzanien. So he has forgotten all of it”._

_Karen_: “From where?_

_Anna_: “Yes, from Africa. Well, so he has no language, (she looks in his direction)… well no Danish language”.

Saraf is slowly moving closer to 3 bigger children playing in the sandpit.

_Anna_: ”Our children here are very considerate. They are good at including new children. Do you see how they let him stand there?”

_Karen_: “What is his mothertongue?”

_Anna_: ”African”, (she responds. Without hesitation) *(Fieldnotes 26/9-2016)*
Everydaylife

*A moveable and fluid context

*The Initiating Child
- The independent, initiating, creative, active, individual child as a strong overall ideal.

-The responsive adult
- Listening to and responding to children’s ideas, initiatives, opinions – and following their ‘tracks’ as a strong pedagogical ideal.

-Democracy is related to having a choice, and expressing voice and perspectives, and contributing to community. Embedded.

Danish verbal language skills crucial.

Pedagogical strategies:
Supporting the initiating competencies of the child, or compensating.
Invisibilities

*Some children are less likely to be found in situations where they are performing the initiating child.

*Some ‘tracks’, initiatives, expressions, contributions etc. seem to be invisible or unhearable for the professionals as such.

*Some children seem to be more or less concretely invisible for the adults as well as for the other children.

*Some children are considered as ‘not fit’ for democratic experiences. Minority children are generally considered as in need of so much, before they can participate.

*References to a larger or smaller part of children’s life experiences outside of the Institution are to a large degree invisible in materiality and interaction. E.g. minority languages

*Potentials are overlooked – the professional gaze and ambition is preoccupied elsewhere
• How is it possible to be seen as a somebody, who can possibly contribute and have something on their heart? /To be called upon as a subject?
Frames and Grievable lives

Butler invites us to think about what can become visible as potential life.

Normative, politically charged frames are differentiating between what lives we can perceive of as grievable lives or lost lives, and with that, what can we perceive of as life at all.

• Framing of the visual experience but also the specific ontology of the subject.
• Circulation. Disruptive normative structures.
• Normative frames rooted in larger frameworks, that are seldom questioned

(Butler 2015/2009; Frames of war - when is Life Grievable)
Pedagogical Orientations

*Having Roots and being ‘educated’(dannet) is connected to time and place.*

*Inadequate and socially deprived - In need of so much*

Deprived in experience and language

THEA“Many years ago I worked in a place where it was mainly immigrant children, and it was really interesting to see this difference in children coming from homes, deprived in experience, and I think about these girls who had this roleplay going on, they were crazy about playing role games, driving the buggy around, and into the kitchen and cook etc., but their roleplay was very stereotypical ... They couldn’t develop it at all, they could play the same game for three years, but nothing new happend at all. And then when I look at the good ones of our children, they play in ways that take off in all kinds of directions, and I think this is maybe the difference between children that are rich in experiences and rich in language and are fed with words all the time”
Invitations, obligations, possibilities

The Government: Strong Daycare Institutions – Everybody must be in the community, April 2017)


Socialdemokratiet: Justified and realistic – A foreigner policy, that Unites Denmark. (Marts 2018).
Early childhood Institutions as magical places (invitations)

Heckman High Quality Word-counts arg, Language(sprog) *Exception; English, French and german

Circulation of certain kinds of knowledge

Early Intervention/ School Readiness

Anti-exclusion

Playing Children’s Perspectives Moveable and fluid learning environment

Democracy, community

Initiating child

Children in precarious positions

Bilingual children

Educating the Whole child
The initiating Child

Bildung, equality and democracy must be reflected in the day-to-day pedagogical practice in order for the children to experience participation in, as well as having influence on the shaping of the everyday life and the activities, regardless of their background, gender, age and culture” (Ministry of Children & Social Affairs 2018: 8)

”UN focus on the child’s right to play and participation is key to Danish ECI. This means that the ECI are obligated to secure children’s participation and create learning environments with a starting point in the children’s perspectives, and where the child-initiated play is promoted by the staff, who also cherish the children’s initiative, imagination and enthusiasm (virkelyst)” (Ibid p.16)
• “All ECI must build on the democratic values, that is characteristic of the Danish society and contribute to integration into the Danish society, so children can begå sig in the danish society. This means that Danish is the main language in alle ECI, that the children are to be introduced to Danish traditions, that they are involved etc.”

• (Ministry of children and Social Affairs 2017:8)
One Denmark – Our society

"Most citizens from Non-Western backgrounds are coming from societies, that build on a markedly different valuefoundation than the Danish. Many descendants incorporate Danish values and norms in their way of life. But there is also a large group, who doesn’t.

Citizen Survey; almost 40% of persons with non-western background find, that the man is a natural head of the family” (Government 2018:7)

Problems:
* Economically and culturally a Burden
* Lack of responsibility

Solutions:
* Limitation of them
* Distribution of them
* Demands towards them

"We need to talk about things as they are. Honest and without being squeamish". (Socialdemokratiet 2018:42)
Early childhood as sites for anti radicalization interventions

- Max 30% non-western immigrants in the same ECI
- Compulsory learning programme— 25 hrs pr. week from year 1.
- Language testing as indicators for promotion from grade 0-1.
  (tillæg til aftalen om parallelsamfund – aftaletekst obligatorisk læringstilbud 2018)

- Strengthening Danish language, Bildung, development and readyness for learning
- Introduction to Danish traditions and celebrations (højtider),
- Knowledge of Danish values as equality, participation and co-responsibility (medansvar)

*Early childhood Institutions as sites for Democracy, Equality, community, Danish society.

A radicalized Integrationist framework? – Magic Place 2
(Øland og Larsen 2011)
Circulating frames

How could it be possible for professionals to view minority children, esp of non-western descendence as anything else than problematic?

Progressive pedagogy doesn’t seem helpful;

THEA ”Well, I think that they fail completely exactly when they have a free choice, when they have to stage themselves, and have to do something themselves, participate in playing – then they actually can’t. Then we can all single out those children who can’t participate, because they don’t understand enough to join in”.
Learner identity is enhanced when children’s home languages and cultures are valued in educational settings and when kaiko are responsive to their cultural ways of knowing and being”.

(Te Whariki 2017:p17)
References

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