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The double profit of an ethnic meeting between Danish and foreign cultures in an extraordinary Danish kindergarten

Kirsten Scheel Nielsen and Jesper Froda

Slagelse Institute offers a Bachelors Professional degree in which a great part of the education is based on learning in praxis. One of the institutions connected to our Institute is rather unusual in that some 75% of its children have a non-Danish ethnic background. Such a high percentage is quite rare in Denmark. The area where the institution is located is characterised by many social problems, among the Danish as well as the 'minority' ethnic groups: despite these problems the institution has developed clear attitudes and very satisfied children and parents. We examine some of the elements of this satisfaction.

The kindergarten is an 'ordinary' Danish institution, based on Danish values. The 'foreign' children are received exactly as if they were Danish children, and a massive language training programme is offered to the Danish children as well to the 'foreign' children. Social education is highly valued: only tolerant and open-minded staff members and students are welcomed and employed in the institution, which has no religious affiliations.

Some of the Danish values mentioned above are:

- the children are outdoors every day, whether the weather is good or not, or if the children are dressed for the purpose!
- December is a month filled with joy and making presents - Christmas carols are sung, but not psalms
- the pedagogy is not an authority, but a cooperative partner.

The 'foreign' children do not receive any special attention other than the help of an interpreter, but they do not receive any less attention than the native Danish children. All activities are undertaken with small groups of children, and the intense language training takes place in a concrete, but also a playful, way, so that a strong social education finds its way into the language-training programme.

The 'double profit' is extra to that of the language and social development of both the Danish and 'ethnic' children. Many Danish children have very few resources of emotions or mental cognition. Although the Danish children speak their mother tongue, they are able to participate in the daily language training with the ethnic children and the ethnic children make advances in learning and development, and gain higher status. The result is that the ethnic children are strengthened, and parents see that their children make friends very quickly with the Danish children.

References

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