European Early Childhood Education Research Journal

ISSN: 1350-293X (Print) 1752-1807 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/recr20

Early childhood teacher education in the Nordic countries

Johanna Einarsdottir

To cite this article: Johanna Einarsdottir (2013) Early childhood teacher education in the Nordic countries, European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 21:3, 307-310, DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2013.814321

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2013.814321

European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 2013
Vol. 21, No. 3, 307–310, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2013.814321

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

EDITORIAL

Early childhood teacher education in the Nordic countries

Full-day integrated preschool is universal in the Nordic countries. In the past, preschools were part of the social sector but have been moving gradually under the Ministries of Education. Today, all five Nordic countries have national curriculum guidelines that preschools have to follow. The 'social pedagogy approach' to early childhood education and care (OECD 2001, 2006) has been associated with the Nordic countries, although there are indicators that this might be changing (Andresen 2013; Haug 2013). Traditionally, the aim of early childhood education in Nordic countries has been the integration of care and learning and supporting children in their current developmental tasks and interests. Introducing children to society and fostering social dispositions has been emphasized. Play and a holistic approach to learning have been in the forefront as well as dispositions to learn (Johansson 2006; Moss 2013). Early childhood teacher preparation in the Nordic countries has been in concordance with and built on this tradition. During the last decade, preschool teacher education in the Nordic countries has been reformed. Although there are variations among the countries, all have placed an emphasis on strengthening the education and moving it to a higher educational level.

In Finland, today's professional preschool-teacher education is a bachelor degree programme at universities (early childhood education) or at the universities of applied sciences (social sciences). An increasing number of early-education students complete a master degree, although it is not required, and many preschool directors have a master degree. Finish preschool teachers typically work in preschool classes (for six-year-olds) or day-care centres (for one- to five-year-olds) (Onnismaa and Kalliala 2010). At the national level, the administration of preschool education and after-school programmes in Finland have belonged to the Ministry of Education and Culture, whereas the day-care centres have been in the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. There has been a long debate as to whether or not the whole early-education system should be under the Ministry of Education and Culture and in June 2013 the administration and steering of the whole system was transferred to the Ministry of Education and Culture.

In the last two decades, the education of preschool teachers in Iceland has undergone tremendous transformation, moving from a three-year course of study at a college for preschool teachers, to a bachelor's degree programme at a university of education, where it was connected to the education of other teachers. Finally, it developed to a five-year master's degree programme at a research university. Hence, today, only those who have a master's degree from an accredited university and have been granted a license by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture can use the occupation title 'preschool teacher'. A regulation connected to the laws gives guidelines for universities to follow regarding all teacher education programmes. Preschool teachers are qualified to work in preschools (1–6). Preschools in Iceland have been under the Ministry of Education since 1973. In 1994, preschool education became, by law, the first level

of schooling in Iceland, although it was neither compulsory nor free of charge (Einarsdottir 2006, 2011; Guttormsson 2008).

Reforms in Danish teacher education initiated in 1992 created a unified three-and-a-half-year long preparation programme for 'social educators' across settings and age groups. The training of staff for preschools and after-school programmes was included in this new programme at the colleges for social educators. Thus, a new unified profession was formed with strong borders delimiting them from elementary school teachers. This new, combined profession was quite general in nature and emphasized the development of general educational competence in working with children, youth, and adults. It also aimed at work with people with social and psychological problems and special needs. In 2006, a mild specialization was implemented, so now, students can choose to specialize in children and youth and take courses on the pedagogy of preschools. Since 2011, the preschool sector has been organized together with the school sector by the Ministry of Children and Education (Jensen, Broström, and Hansen 2010; Johansson 2006).

Preschool-teacher education in Norway requires a three-year bachelor education in universities and university colleges (n. høgskole). The preschool teacher education is now under reconstruction. A new national curriculum plan for preschool-teacher education has been developed and will be put into practice in 2013 in which the education of specific subject areas is required. Since 2005, responsibility of preschools has been transferred from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs to the Ministry of Education in order to ensure continuity in the education of children and young people. Preschool teachers who have added an extra year to their studies are also qualified to work in elementary school (grades 1–4) (NOKUT 2010; Rammeplan for førskolelærerutdanning 2011).

Preschool teachers in Sweden today have three and a half years (210 ECT) of university education. Pre-school teacher students are awarded a degree that allows them to work in pre-schools (1–5) and in pre-school classes for six-year-olds. Universities are given guidelines for their preschool-teacher education programmes. However, individual universities can, to a certain extent, shape the programme as long as they abide by the overarching principles (Johansson 2006; Karlsson Lohmander 2004). In 1996, the responsibility of preschools was transferred from the Ministry of Social Health and Welfare to the Ministry of Education. In 2011, Swedish preschools became an integral part of the Swedish public-education system and thus a distinct form of school (Karlsson Lohmander 2011; Ministry of Education and Research 2011).

The contributions

The articles in this issue cover matters of importance for early childhood education and care. Various research methods are employed in order to shed light on the topic at hand with the overarching aim of informing and influencing policy and practice. All the authors come from Northern or Central Europe with one exception. The articles report on studies conducted in the Nordic countries, England, Ireland, Germany, Belgium and Australia. Two of the articles focus on leadership in early-childhood settings. Louis Hard and Arna H. Jónsdóttir explore two studies of leadership in early-childhood education and care, one in Iceland and another in Australia. The article presents evidence that micro-politics and horizontal violence have a powerful influence on leadership aspirations and enactment. Diane Preston reports on a study conducted with managers in early-childhood settings in England. Interestingly, the findings indicate that the participants end up in a role in which they have not been trained

and are actually moving away from what they like best – that is, working with the children.

Guy Roberts-Holmes critically examines dilemmas and tensions arising from a recent policy move of the English government that has attempted to raise the qualifications of early-childhood education practitioners. A poorly qualified early-years workforce is a concern not only in England but in many other countries. The findings suggest that although the effort has had a substantive impact on practitioners' ability to effect change, their status remains ambiguous and problematic. Reasons include poor pay, a misunderstood and ambiguous professional role and status, and increased managerial responsibilities. Practitioner research and professional development are the focus of two of the articles. Cath Arnold and Carmel Brennan examine pedagogical perspectives and practices in England and Ireland using polyvocal ethnography. They raise critical questions about values, goals and agendas and challenge dominant discourses and taken-for-granted truths. Action research used to support quality, early-years practice in Ireland is described in Josephine Bleach's article. The findings indicate that action research supported the implementation of change through reflective practice, learning communities, and professional dialogue.

Multiculturalism and diversity is a reality that contemporary early childhood practitioners content with every day. Rose Drury reports on an ethnographic study of a young bilingual child as she enters an early-childhood setting in England. The article addresses the complexities of the process of learning an additional language in the early years and argues for a socio-cultural perspective on young children's learning. The article by Ragnhild Andresen focuses on the inclusion of children with special needs in two early-childhood education settings in Norway, where concentration on listening and relating to the children was in focus. The practice is seen as a resistance against the growth of an instrumental and technical approach to preschool education that has been emerging lately.

Naomi Geens and Michel Vandenbrooeck focus on the social function of early childhood education and care in their article. They report on a study conducted in Belgium, where parental support and social cohesion were emphasised. They illustrate an example of a meeting place, or social sphere, where norms and values are negotiated in daily interactions among parents, children and professionals. The article by Katharina Kluczniok et al. presents a framework of the home-learning environment in early childhood in Germany that includes three domains of stimulation (i.e. family support, stimulation in literacy and stimulation in numeracy) and their contextual condition. The study examines the extent to which the structural characteristics and educational beliefs of the family are connected to educational processes taking place in the home during the preschool age. Arttu Mykkänen et al.'s article from Finland focuses on children's learning and reports on a study that, through video observations, aimed to understand the phenomenon of resilience during a geometrical-task assignment. The results show various actions children used to overcome difficult tasks, for instance, concentrating and actively seeking help when confronting setbacks. The findings indicate that resilience in learning situations and peer interaction is based on supportive relationships with adults and peers.

Johanna Einarsdottir
Professor of Early Childhood Education, School of Education, University of Iceland
Email: joein@hi.is

References

Andresen, R. 2013. "Vision of What Inclusive Education can be – With Emphais on Kindergarten." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 21 (3): 392–406.

Einarsdottir, J. 2006. "Between Two Continents, between Two Traditions: Education and Care in Icelandic Preschools." In *Nordic Childhoods and Early Education: Philosophy, Research, Policy, and Practice in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden*, edited by J. Einarsdottir and J. T. Wagner, 159–183. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Einarsdottir, J. 2011. *Training of Preschool Teachers in Iceland*. Reykjavík: School of Education. University of Iceland.

Guttormsson, L., ed. 2008. *Almenningsfræðsla á Íslandi 1880–2007* [*Public Schooling in Iceland 1880–2007*]. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Haug, P. 2013. "From Indifference to Invasion: The Relationship from a Norweian Perspective." In *Early Childhood and Compulsory Education: Reconceptualising the Relationship*, edited by P. Moss, 112–130. New York: Routledge.

Jensen, A. S., S. Broström, and O. H. Hansen. 2010. "Critical Perspectives on Danish early Childhood Education and Care: Between the Technical and the Political." *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development* 30 (3): 243–254.

Johansson, J.-E. 2006. "Will there be Any Preschool Teachers in the Future?." In *Nordic Childhoods and Early Education: Philosophy, Research, Policy and Practice in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden*, edited by J. Einarsdottir and J. T. Wagner, 43–69. Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.

Karlsson Lohmander, M. 2004. "The Fading of a Teaching Profession? Reforms of Early Childhood Teacher Education in Sweden." *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development* 24 (1): 23–34.

Karlsson Lohmander, M. 2011. *Continuing Professional Development of Early Childhood Staff in Sweden. Report Commissioned by the Deutsches Jugendinstitut (DJI)/ Weiterbildungsinitiative frühpädagogische Fachkräfte (WIFF)*. München: Unpublished Manuscript.

Ministry of Education and Research. 2011. Status and Pedagogical Task of Preschool to be Strengthened. http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/17/21/24/dd5b1a52.pdf

Moss, P., ed. 2013. *Early Childhood and Compulsory Education: Reconceptualising the Relationship*. New York: Routledge.

NOKUT. 2010. *Evaluering av førskolelærerutdanning i Norge 2010: Del 1- Hovedrapport*. Oslo: NOKUT.

OECD. 2001. *Starting Strong: Early Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.

OECD. 2006. *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.

Onnismaa, E.-L., and M Kalliala. 2010. "Finnish ECEC Policy: Interpretations, Implementations and Implications." *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development* 30 (3): 267–277.

Rammeplan for førskolelærerutdanning. 2011. http://www.hihm.no/Prosjektsider/Rammeflu