



Non Violent Education

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Violence Prevention in the Educational Institution "Kindergarten" – Present Approaches and Development Possibilities

Country Report on present situation in Sweden



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SWEDEN

Country level report based on literature

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I. Structure of Early Childhood Education and Care

The Swedish preschool-system developed a lot in a quite a short period of time. 1975 went about 10% of all children between 1 to 5 years to some kind of preschool. 2003 were already 83% of all children from this age-group in a preschool. This corresponds with the high employment-rate of parents – especially from women. But since 2001 resp. 2002 have also unemployed parents or parents on maternal leave the right for a place in a preschool – at least for 15 hours a week. Preschools have become an important part of the Swedish education-system.

1. Legislation in general

1.1 Law and Legislation

The Swedish welfare state unifies all tasks concerning the public school system for children, young people and adults as well as preschool activities and child-care for school children in the National Agency for Education (Skoleverket). This Ministry is the central administrative authority and is responsible for central policy, goals, guidelines and financial framework. It is responsible for the curriculum, national objectives and guidelines for the public educational system, which is laid down by the Swedish Parliament and Government. The National Agency for Education supervises, follows up and evaluates the public school system. And every three years it presents a current overview of the school system to Government and Parliament.

The actual providing of education and school services is in the responsibility of the municipalities. Within the official framework laid down by the National Agency for Education the 290 municipalities have to establish a concrete school plan, which determines on local level the organisation, development, funding and evaluation of school activities. The municipalities can decide how to provide education, care and social services to their inhabitants as long as it is in the range of the national goals and standards.

Two documents are of special importance on the legislation level concerning preschools: The Swedish Education Act and the Curriculum for the preschool.

The Swedish Education Act

The Swedish Education Act is from 1985 and was adapted last time in 2007. This law concludes all aspects concerning preschool and builds the basis for the curriculum and the whole work of preschools.

Curriculum for the preschool (Läroplan för Förskolan 1998)

1998 the National Agency for Education published a general curriculum, the “Läroplan för Förskolan” (Lpfö 98). This curriculum builds the basis for all school plans in Sweden. In a catalogue of twelve pages it defines important goals and values and specifies them in guidelines. All this goals and guidelines are at the same time broad enough that the local municipalities have a margin to evolve inside the values and goals of Lpfö 98 an own curriculum and define by which means these goals should be achieved.

Basis of the curriculum are democratic values which is also the foundation of Swedish society itself. “An important task of the preschool is to establish and help children acquire the

values on which our society is based. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school shall actively promote in its work with children.” (Curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 98, 2006 p 3)

Children are seen as competent learner, active thinker and involved doer and should have the possibility to learn and develop themselves according to their skills and experiences. In co-operation with the homes the preschool should offer a place for a harmonious development of the children.

1.2 Policy and reform-debates

Especially the Swedish preschool system had been in the focus of many considerations and changes in the last years. The Curriculum from 1998 had a deep impact on the form of the preschool and introduced a lot of changes to level out the access to preschools for all children from an early age and to provide a common catalogue of values to all preschools.

Only by comparing the two OECD-Reports (Starting Strong) from 2001 and 2006 a lot of changes in the Swedish preschool-system are evident. „The right of every child to a place „within reasonable limit“ (defined as not more than three months) is assured in almost all municipalities. A government bill to make pre-school universal and free for all 4- and 5-year olds was legislated in 2003. For children from bilingual backgrounds, a free 3-hour kindergarten programme is available every morning from the age of 3. Fee variability across municipalities, which hindered low-income parents from using services, has been countered in the legislation. In addition, the restrictions on access for children of unemployed parents, and for children of parents on paternal leave, have been completely removed; the right is now attached to the child, irrespective of the situation of parents. Further legislation introduced a low flat, parental fee for services.“ (Starting Strong II, 2006, p 413)

New regulations on parent’s involvement and influence are being prepared to intensify the role and involvement from parents in the Swedish preschool.

1.3 Structure

The responsibility for providing sufficient preschool centres and places with a good quality lay within the municipalities. According to the Homepage of the National Agency of Education the municipalities should “be staffed by persons with the proper training or experience to meet the children's needs for care and found educational programs.” The concrete school

plan, which determines the actual preschool-form and -organisation has to be based on the national goals and standards from the Lpfö 98.

Beside the municipally run preschools there are also private preschools. These get permissions from the municipalities if the program they offer meet the safety and quality standards the municipally has laid down. The Municipalities are responsible for the supervision of such activities as well as for programme implementation and evaluation of their own preschools. For a general reassurance, supervision and evaluation from keeping to the values and standards according the Lpfö 98 and the Swedish Education Act is the National Agency for Education responsible.

The concentration of all the different school issues on national level in one Ministry - the National Agency for Education - makes the Swedish system quite easy to overview and understand.

For parents and children there are beside some more institutions important to help them and reassure their rights.

Children's Ombudsman (Barnombudsman)

In Sweden as well as in most of the other Nordic Countries (Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland) has the government installed a children's ombudsman. In Sweden is the children's ombudsman selected by the government each time for six years. She/he is at disposal for all children till the age of 18. Basis for the work are the UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child. The tasks are:

- Represent the interests and requests from children and youth
- Reinforce the carrying out of the UN-Convention of the Rights of the Child
- Overview the keeping of the UN-Convention of the Rights of the Child
- Information and formation of opinion
- Research and Statistics
- International knowledge transfer about the UN-Convention of the Rights of the Child

Child Health Centres (Barnvårdscentralen)

Child Health Centres offers information and advice about children's development and how to cope with the role as parents in everyday life. Already in 1938 started Sweden to build up such Child Health Centres and they have become an important help for parents to provide children a good environment to grow up. During the first years parents usually visit Child Health Centres more then ten times depending on the situation. The Child Health Centres

make also all the standard controls and the vaccinations. Important to mention is the official check up on children on the age of 4 years which focuses on the child's personal development and should help to see in an early stage if a child needs special support.

1.4 Financing

In the average the total costs for one place for one child in the Swedish preschool system are 105'000 SEK. The biggest part of the costs are covered by the municipality. The parental fee covers about 8% from the total costs. (Kostnader Riksnivå, Rapport 301, Del 3, 2007, p 21)

“ Municipalities are permitted to charge a reasonable fee for a place in a preschool or family day-care. Fees may, however, not exceed the municipality's actual costs, nor be so high that parents decline activities that would have been of value for the child. From 2002, municipalities may apply a maximum fee for preschool activities and childcare for schoolchildren. Those municipalities that use maximum fees receive a government grant. For preschools, the system means that families are charged a maximum of 3, 2 or 1 percent of the combined household income for the household's first, second and third child, respectively. The monthly fee must, however, not exceed 1260 SEK (app. 137.- Euro) for the first child, 840 SEK (app. 91.- Euro) for the second, and 420 SEK (app. 46.- Euro) for the third child in preschool activities. Virtually all of the country's municipalities applied the maximum fee system in 2003.“ (Homepage Skolverket)

From the age of 4 years children have the right for a free access for 15 hours/week. Children with a bilingual background have this right already at the age of 3 years to promote the integration in the Swedish Education system. The fee's are only calculated for all hours above this 15 hours / week.

1.5 Age of children visiting the preschool

The Swedish public school system consists of compulsory and non-compulsory schools. Compulsory schooling begins at 7 years, so that preschool is part of the non-compulsory school. In 1998 the distinction between day-care and kindergarden were removed by the School Act and nowadays all services for young children from 1-6 are defined as “preschool” and services for children from 5/6-7 years are defined as “preschool class”. The service of the preschool is aimed at children from 1 year till they start with the “preschool class”.

Because of the maternal-leave from 480 days most children stay the first year at home. At about 15-18 months children begin to spend time in day-care. Already a big percentage of

86% of the children at the age of 1-2 years are joining a preschool. 3-4 year old children are to 91% in a preschool and in the age of 5-6 years already 96% of the children are going to a preschool. (see: Starting Strong II. Early Childhood Education and Care. OECD 2006, p 410)

2. Forms of preschools

Beside the municipally run preschools there are also different kinds of private preschools like Waldorf, Montessori, „Forrest-Kindergarten“ and so on. Some times do the municipally run preschools also have some kind of special orientation like supporting special skills or to provide a special environment for allergic children. For to run a private preschool and get financial support from the state, a permission from the municipalities is necessary. This permission will only be signed if the program of the preschool meets the quality and safety standards the municipally has laid down.

The Swedish preschool system tries to integrate all children and support them, if they have special needs. For children with disabilities like deafness or dumbness do special preschool exist.

3. Information on preschool teachers

Mainly two kinds of professions are to find in Swedish preschools: preschool educators (förskollärare) and childminder (barnskötare). Preschool educators pass through a 3.5-year university study. Childminder have a 3-year upper secondary training certificate. The educational level of the preschool staff is therefore quite high in Sweden. The education for preschool educators has been changed five years ago.

„In 2002, a new teacher education programme for pre-school teachers, school teachers and leisure time workers was introduced. The development allows a common psycho-pedagogical training for teachers and leisure time pedagogues. A common core of training in general education is provided for the three categories followed then by optional „fields of study“ and „specialisations“ suited to the type of work – early childhood, compulsory school and leisure-time work – to be chosen. This new training entitles the three groups to work together in teams with children 1-10 years in pre-school, school and after-school centres. No evaluation of the reform has been undertaken to date, but evidence from the ground suggests that fewer candidates are selecting the pre-school option, possibly because of the

longer working hours and slightly lower pay. A possible resolution of the issue may be one equalising the working conditions (salaries, weekly and annual hours, etc.) of all teachers.” (Starting Strong II, 2006 p 413)

In most of the preschools are nowadays about 50% preschool educators and 50% childminders. Sometimes there is also staff employed who has no pedagogical education at all. But this is quite rarely and often in times of lack of educated people. Most of the staff in preschools are women, only about 2-3% of the personnel are men.

4. Organisation

The average adult-child ratio in Sweden is about 5 to 6 children per adult. Group size and adult-child ratios vary between the municipalities according to their own standards and requirements. On the average are about 17 children in one group. A national standard regarding group size and adult-child ratios does not exist in Sweden.

Additional to the educators have a lot of preschools special staff in the kitchen and for the cleaning. If needed preschools can get support from other specialists. It's up the preschool to organize external help.

Opening times differ also according the needs of the parents in the municipalities. If there is a need, can preschools be open between 6.30 and 18.30 from Monday to Friday. The school year normally begins at the end of August and runs to the beginning of June the following year, comprising a total of about 40 weeks. A longer holiday of just over two weeks is taken from around the 20th December to the beginning of January.

5. Diversity

Diversity and integration is of high relevance in the Swedish school system. In the Curriculum (Lpfö 98) are several points concerning this issues listed up as specially important values:

- Understanding for the own and for other cultures
- Language as an important means for the development of identity
- Integration: support of all kind of needs
- Equal treatment of girls and boys to counter traditional gender- and roll models

Sweden has a very integrative school system and has no categorisation of children. All children with special needs are integrated and have a priority right to special support and services, such as a free 3-hour session of day care already from the age of 3 years, which is one year before the officially free access to preschool. The same right goes also for children with a bilingual background.

Children with disabilities are therefore well represented in the Swedish preschool.

Compared to many other countries has Sweden a very modern understanding of gender equality. It is not only one of the themes that is actively brought in the education plans. Already the fact of the well developed day care system and the high labour participation of women shows that most of the children see modern roll models in their daily live. According to the OECD-report has Sweden with 35% the highest proportion of fathers, which are taking their 60 days of parental leave within the OECD countries (see Starting Strong II, 2006 p 408). Unfortunately are still only a few men working in preschools.

II. Violent behaviour, violence prevention (VP) and peace education (PE)

1. VP/PE relevant legislation

Since the 1st of April 2006 has Sweden a law against discrimination in schools. This law is intended to protect children and students from any kind of discrimination and insulting treatment in preschools and schools. It builds the legislative basis for a secure and supportive learning environment.

This legislative prevention from any kind of feelings of insult builds also the basis for all aims concerning violent prevention. Looking especially for violence prevention on documents from the National Agency for Education, the anti-discrimination law is seen as basis to prevent violent acting in preschools and schools. The protection from insulting treatment of children and students is enforced by the fact that this law has an active oblige for all teachers and educators to counter all kind of discrimination. The law “demands action” as soon as a child or a student feels himself in some kind discriminated.

Based on this law should all schools develop a strategy of “equal treatment”. At the moment not all preschools and school have already developed such an “equal treatment plan”. Part of the National Agency for Education is the “children and students ombudsman” (barn och elev ombudet) which – as part of his work – tries to enforce the development of “equal treatment plans” in all preschools and schools.

“Peace education” itself is not mentioned in the documents from the National Agency for Education. But the Curriculum (Lpfö 98) mentions a lot of important values, which should be promoted and imparted in preschools and schools and which could be seen as part of peace education. Just to mention some of the most important:

- Solidarity and tolerance (understanding)
- Sympathy
- Empathy, respect and consideration
- No discrimination

Even if violence prevention and peace education itself are not mentioned specially in official documents, they are an important part of the Swedish education system and show themselves through the Curriculum and the antidiscrimination law.

2. Relevancy of VP/PE in recruitment, education & in service training of teachers

The teacher training in Sweden doesn't look the same all over the country. But there are no general regulations that violence prevention and peace education has to be part of the education. Some University's have classes in the subject conflict handling but it's the students own choice to take the course. The curriculum and the government are concerned that educators work with these values. These themes are high on the government's agenda because of the hard and violent climate in today's society.

There are no guidelines or laws concerning special knowledge about violence prevention and peace education for getting an employment in a kindergarten or a school or while apply for a university-place in educational studies. It is up to the institutions to decide and they may have another focus on competences.

3. Organisation

In the curriculum for the preschool are the words "violence prevention" and "peace education" specially mentioned. Corresponding to the UN Children's rights the curriculum talks instead about "values" (see above chapter 1.) The methods and areas that the kindergarten work with are except the curriculum and local regulations, entirely what the kindergarten wants to work with.

4. Diversity

The values preschools in Sweden work with, include and emphasise much on cultural elements and gender. This due to the society we are living in today with many different nationalities. The educators try to talk about differences and diversity as a good and positive aspect of.

In general educators don't make any differences depending on target groups. Everybody should be handled with the same attention. But as Sweden has a policy of biggest possible integration of all children in the same kind of preschool, children with special needs get

analogical special help and attention. Boys tend to be more in focus than girls because they often have more “aggressive and loud” games than girls.

5. Violent behaviour / violence prevention / “life skills” in preschools

Most of the research concerning violent behaviour or violence prevention is focusing on children in school. For this age-group exist many different programs for example concerning bullying.

Nationally spread or evaluated programs for preschools are therefore not usual. Working on how to handle conflicts is a natural part of the preschool work – based on the values from the curriculum for the preschool. The actual forms are very different and can vary from massage, resting and just to be there as an active adult to help the children to solve there conflicts. Or, as seen in the observed preschool, by working with methods which focus on non-violent action. The range of methods is wide, but there are no well evaluated programs or long-term studies about violence behaviour, violence prevention or peace work in preschools.

LITERATURE:

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