

Inclusion in Education for 0 to 8 Years Old Children in the Danish Society 2015.

Definition:

The definition of inclusion used in the review is:¹

To participate in the community of learning is being together with and participating actively in the teaching and community with classmates and there having the optimal academic output and a positive self-image.

This paper looks at how inclusion is being handled in the Danish society in Danish Schools, Kindergartens and Early Childhood Institution; in general.

A. Policy

In 2015 almost all children in Denmark should be included in mainstream institutions

and schools – ordinary children, children with special needs, children with social and emotional problems, and children with other cultural and language background than Danish and children suffering from poverty.

In the website of the Danish Ministry of Education it is pointed out that 96% of all children in the general school system, in Danish, *folkeskolen*, should be included in 2015 from 94,4% in 2014.²

Almost all political parties are supporters of the decision and it is agreed with the municipalities 2012³. It is pointed out that the wellbeing of the pupils should be kept. Various initiatives from the government have been taken to support the municipalities and schools in the transition process with knowledge about organization of the transition, access to consultants, resource centers, and research and development projects of good practice.

Under the website of the ministry a resource center, Inclusion-Knowledge and Development, has its own website to gather and provide information about the various initiatives. The ambitions are both keeping the wellbeing of the pupils and at the same time heighten the level of performance. Pupils with considerable need of support are still being offered special education or special schools.

¹ Formulated by the Danish Institute of Evaluation 2011

² 82 % of all children attend *folkeskolen* from 0-10th grade. 15 % attend the free schools also called private schools. During the last 5 years *folkeskolen* has lost 12.000 pupils to the private schools. They are financed by 71% of the state.

³ Local Governments Denmark, in Danish: KL or *Kommunernes Landsforbund*

The inclusion initiatives of the Danish government are based on the Salamanca Declaration and the UN Declaration on Disabilities.

A research report on special education made on initiative by the Ministry of Finances about the quality and costs of teaching and activities in the school system in general and with special reference to *folkeskolen* made in 2010, showed that the costs of special education was increasing over many years. In 2009 the cost of special education was 23,9% of the costs for general education in total. 80% of the costs of special education were spent on special classes and special schools. There were also some indications that the academic achievements of the children in the special classes and special schools were lower than special education connected to mainstream schools and classrooms.

In 2012 the agreement was made with the Danish municipalities about working for more inclusion and less segregation in the Danish school system.

The development of inclusion in the municipalities is followed by the University of Aarhus and SFI, The Danish National Centre for Social Research, and a report is send out each year.

Research

One of the initiatives of the government to promote inclusion was ordering a research report from Clearinghouse of Educational Research under the Faculty of Education at the University of Aarhus. The purpose of the research report is to establish an informed background of evidence based on international research contributing to the understanding of inclusion and exclusion and what research has found are valid approaches and good practices:

“Effects and Educational Actions in Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Elementary School”

The report is a systematic review of international research of inclusion, and it is stated that the report is made on commission from the Ministry of Education and send out 2013, so here is a clear connection between government and research level. The review includes 279 studies dating back from 1994 and is in the review process reduced to 43 high quality research studies. The studies investigate academic achievements and social competences/attitudes in mainstream pupils and pupils with special needs. According to the report 11% of all pupils are referred to special education. Half of them are referred to special schools or special classrooms without any connection to mainstream classrooms.

As background for the research is pointed out that the wish for inclusion is both seen from the perspective of the right of the child to be part of the community of other pupils and to learn as

much as possible(Salamanca Declaration) and on the other hand to save money, as the special schools and classrooms are expensive solutions. The school should work like a “mini society” and have the diversity you find in the “big society” and get used to it, to the benefit for all pupils.

The goal of the review is to find the international knowledge that already exists about what works in the transition and implementation of inclusive education and the evidence behind.

The effects that there are searched for are:

Cognitive effects, social effects and effects on wellbeing.

Children with special needs are:

Children with development disorder, psychiatric and psychological diseases, social and environmental difficulties.

B. Implementation of inclusion

How the efforts working with inclusion is being implemented in the day-care services is being investigated in the evaluation report for day-care: Inclusion in Day-Care from 2014 made by the Danish Institute of Evaluation based on interviews and questionnaires to a representative group of social educators in kindergartens and crèches, heads of institutions, child minders and consultants in the municipalities.

The report mention that focus on inclusion in educational networks can be seen from the fact, that 27 out of 84 Danish studies from the upper mentioned research base has a kind of focus on inclusion. These studies have a broad perspective: from studying children being a part of the community with other children or being excluded, to groups of minority children, who seem to be excluded already in the kindergarten, to focus on children with autism having difficulties having relations with the other children, to finally an overall feeling of missing tools for inclusion of children with special needs.

The agenda of the day-care area is not so tied up with the perspective of saving money on special offers for children with special needs as inside the school area as it is on the focus on children in general as being part of the community and having access to development.

Institutions that work with inclusion are characterized by:⁴

⁴ Bent Madsen

Inclusion is a common assignment for the whole institution
The educational effort is mirroring the actual group of children
The focus is on relationships between the child and the social context
The children as a group has a social responsibility
The cross professional collaboration is formalized
Special and mainstream education is integrated
Procedures for collaboration with parents is developed
There is a dialog with the local community

C. Needs and Challenges

The evaluation points out some significant connections:

Institutions that work with a systematic approach to inclusion are more likely to have had education in inclusion, have access to resource persons in the municipality, have a written background or a concept for their work and include parents more. The report shows, that the municipalities have a focus on inclusion, 98 % of the educational consultants say that it is a task for the whole day-care area, 83% say they have a strategy and 59% say they have a written platform for that work. On the other hand 50% of the social educators say that there are children that miss possibilities of education as they seldom participate in social communities with other children.

29% of the social educators have not had any educational course to improve their competences to work with inclusion within the last 10 years. And only 50 % of resource persons in the institutions have been offered further education in handling inclusion. 86% say they have had the possibility to have support from the PPR and 67% say they can draw on the educational consultant in the municipality.

All heads of institution answer that they have focus on inclusion and 52% say they have a specific way of organizing inclusion and 63% say they have a written platform. That is less than the answer of the consultants when it comes to strategy. 51 % of the social educators use some kind of tool to secure that they don't exclude children, but mostly it is informal dialogs with other staff that is the common way to estimate exclusion. When asked in the investigation most educators answer that they have a positive view on their work with inclusion although 59% experience obstacles to be able to work in an inclusive way. Problems that make inclusion difficult are physical space in the institution and rate of staff per child. More education, support from resource persons and feed- back would improve the effort. Overall they say that there is a lack of strategy and direction in the approach of the municipalities to work with inclusion. It seems as an overall picture that it is important to have a systematic approach to inclusion. There is a coincidence between the use of a systematic approach and

having access to the upgrading of competences and educational programs concerning inclusion. And there is a coincidence of having a systematic approach and the assessment of risks of exclusion and the access to special educated resource persons or experts in Denmark