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Inclusive Citizenship in Pre-school Education and Immigrant Children

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Abstract

Today's societies are increasingly multicultural, and education – specifically preschool education - playing a fundamental role in the development of multicultural attitudes. Building institutional multiculturalism is an inclusive process fostering inclusive citizenship as basic to pre-school education. This paper presents a Finnish case study of how teachers understand and reflect on the immigrant child's multicultural identity and citizenship, which are described by means of a multidisciplinary theoretical analysis. The theoretical framework is constructed through the perspectives of culture, identity, citizenship and language and is based on theories from the related academic disciplines. Structured interviews address teacher observations and experiences on the child's communication, adaptation to the pre-school group's culture as well as expressions from their home culture and their social abilities in play.

Introduction

Finland has long tradition to give equal opportunities to all children at primary and secondary schools. Even college students have quite good access to colleges. It is not depending so much on the economic or social status of family. All children have subjective right to get place in early childhood education if parents want it. Our society has not been multicultural for long time if we think how many immigrants we have.

The main point of our paper is to look for challenges which different cultural backgrounds are bringing to our every day life. We can be happy that we have a Core Curriculum for Pre-school education in Finland (2000) chapters which deal with pre-school education for different language and cultural groups or based on a specific pedagogic system of principles. Sections are: Sami-speaking children, Romany-speaking children, sign language children and immigrant children. We look most in our paper pre-school education and how inclusive citizenship education is happening. Children's backgrounds shall be taken into account, although instruction shall follow the general education and learning objectives of pre-school education. In addition, there shall be specific objectives for immigrant education, which shall be pursued within the limits of local resources and different approaches. Instruction shall support the development of Finnish/Swedish language and, where possible also that of children's own native language and the opportunity to grow in two cultures. In terms of the formation of children's identities, it is significant that matters of their own culture are also appreciated and that these are visible in everyday activities in pre-school education. The objective of support for children's own culture shall be that children become aware of the cultural

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heritage of their own ethnic group and learn to appreciate it. The goal of culturally supportive pre-school education shall be self-respecting, bilingual and bicultural adults, who are proud of their culture, background and language, integrated into society and able to pass down their own cultural heritage to their children. (Core Curriculum for pre-school Education in Finland 2000. National Board of Education.2000)

The definition of inclusive citizenship education

Inclusive citizenship education means according to the basic law and The Convention of Rights of the Child that every child has rights to care, own culture and education. Global trends for civic education and democracy are civic skills, civic knowledge and civic virtues.

Citizenship education is a lifetime process and continuing learning, involving total development of the whole person, not a finished product or outcome of a curriculum for a given time or location According to Quisumbing (see Berg et al 2003, 3).

Each nation has its own culture of values, norms and habits, and these traditions influence the development of a child's identity, including behaviour, citizenship and partnership in a European or a global culture.

The environment of the child's family transfers culture to the child. Cultural behaviour, such as how to greet are learned in everyday life (Valsiner 2000, Addo 2001) Children learn the traditions and social manners through the life of their family and in other social occasions. (See Korhonen 2002; Korhonen & Helenius 2005).

Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000, 12) have emphasized, that by promoting positive self-esteem we can encourage positive interactions, encourage discussion about how they and others feel and course attention to others points of views, try to ensure that they learn constructive ways to solve conflicts and to promote co-operation, not competition.

High self-esteem is reflection of the possession of a secure sense of identity, and an ability to acknowledge and value one's own efforts and achievements. High self-esteem provides confidence, energy and optimism and is promoted by positive self-experiences.

Citizenship education in early childhood

Citizenship education for young children - is there really such a concept? What could citizenship for the young child consist of? Would it be different from citizenship for an adult? These questions are written in the CiCe professional Guidelines (see Dyrfjord, Fumat, Pergar Kuscer & Andersen 2004, p.4)

According to the former Guidelines it is said,

that the child is a citizen from birth, but also that the young child has to grow into the responsibility and rights that are part of being an active member of a democratic society. In one way, being a citizen *is* different for young children than it is for adults. The child has to develop and grow as an active citizen,

working from experience and trying out different roles, gradually taking on more and more active role.

Children learn citizenship in everyday life, in playing in groups, through fairytales, stories and TV programs, discussing with the others, in teaching process, schoolbooks etc.

There are set goals for learning and teaching in the Finnish national curriculum for pre-school education: to understand himself and others; have the power to recognise ones' own and others' feelings; have the capacity to negotiate with others and oneself; develop creativity, communicative ability and critical thinking, in order to strengthen their self-image, security and ability to resolve problems in a peaceful manner; participate in a group with peers, and to learn from the group.

Learning citizenship, culture and democracy in pre- school age

Frameworks for learning citizenship have showed following parts, which are necessary in citizenship education. (Osler & Starkey 1999).

- 1) *Information and rights.* It is important that the child learn that she/he has rights. She does, not for example, have to accept that another child takes her toy. But she has to understand that other children also have rights: she cannot have the ball all the time in the kindergarten.
- 2) *Identities and feelings.* The child can learn to reflect on her own identity through contact with others. She can be guided to develop empathy to other children, to accept their needs and to play together with them.
- 3) *Inclusion.* Children can do things together as a group and learn to help each other, despite differences in age, cultural backgrounds, etc. It is important that the pre-school teacher notice and include all children in the group.
- 4) *Skills.* Children should learn how to solve conflicts, how to argue and how to use their knowledge about their rights.

(see more Dyrfjord, Fumat, Pergar Kuscer & Andersen 2004, p. 14).

The Convention of Right of the Child

According the Article 22 is the following:

A refugee child is entitled to special care needed by him or her

The content of this article is important in the practical level in pre-school education and kindergartens. How does it work? According to many research has been found, that it is sometimes almost impossible to know and understand children's situations. All educators know that language teaching and communication are important and gives a child possibilities to learn culture and express his or her own thoughts. Empowerment is also an essential goal. Teacher students need deeper understanding and knowledge during their study time. Teachers are important persons in society, they can support and help children.

Research

There are two different parts in this research and they form the wholeness. The other part is for pre-school teachers and the other for the kindergarten teacher students.

Both parts are a qualitative case studies. The used method is individual interview and teachers' and students' writings.

The questions for the pre-school teachers are these:

1. What do you think, what is immigrant child's situation in the children's group?
2. What kinds of experiences have you about this ?
3. How have you taught immigrant children in your group? What have you done? How have you started with these children?
4. What kind of methods have you used?
5. What kind of materials have you used in teaching?
6. How have you worked with the immigrant child's family?
7. What is the attitude of the whole staff of the pre-school?

Research for students was second years students in pre-school teacher education in Helsinki (N=40) were asked to write about the article 22 (The Convention of Right of the Child):

Results

Pre-school teachers

Teachers mentioned strongly that citizenship, culture and language is a part of value and ethics, too. They told much about this. Teachers' views were very realistic and they answered honestly. All teachers understood their responsibility

"I think that most important is that I can get children understand and respect themselves and the others. These are values, I think. We have talked about these much in our staff meetings."

"I wish that children can trust on the others and they have good self confidence. And they can feel to be in safety"

The problem is too large groups of children and a shortage of educated staff and possibilities to get real support. Teachers have experiences and they wanted to be very positive and they saw that children have problems in language and to orientating for the Finnish culture. They used the same methods than usually with children, but the reading and story telling they use more than usually. All teachers mentioned, that play together is the best.

"It is good that we talk much also, which is "right or wrong", so they learn moral things. This is difficult, because the child's family is behind. The child has difficulties to understand language. The ways of thinking are different in different cultures. All ought to be very concrete"

"I think that in fact many subjects and activities consist culture education. It depends on the group and the teacher how they take it."

"I like to read children books, where are this kind of topics."

"For children have to be in their group possibilities to play and be together."

"Children's homes and pre-school together create skills of citizenship for children"

Students

"A refugee child is entitled to special care needed by him or her". Multiculturalism is in Helsinki more daily life than exception. All pre-school teacher education has been developing curricular issues. Our students think that they have to know more and more to understand better children's life and thoughts. "Children have seen/experienced much more than we if we measure issues e.g. with the survived life of refugee children". "To know much about the importance of languages is not enough". Student's attitudes to give their best and be part of inclusion is very strong. We teacher educators have very big challenges to work with. Students see very important to encourage a sense of worth. self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence are ones of most important resources also for immigrant/refugee children. Children need a sense of belonging and inclusion. Integration is not always enough. Integration means :the child fits to pre-school; inclusion: pre-school fits to the child. Students were looking after their own adult attitudes/behaviour and telling how important it would be to find the "childish", natural way to talk about things. "Who is more dark - you or I" were children talking together. "Do I have to say interrupt" was the "adult" question - "you are", so easy can things be. Inclusion does not leave people out, it stresses a sense of belonging. Play is one of the best ways to be involved. Piaget's theory of self-regulation (his equilibration process) has two aspects. The first involves being in situations, events, experiences, which fit with what is already known , which do not require the person to modify the structures within them (assimilation). The other involves meeting a situation, experience, event which does not fit what is already known, and which requires a change in the structures within the person, and modification in his/her behaviour (accommodation). Assimilation , to be "like others" is out of question. If the best interest of child is to get education and care in segregation she/he has to get this. (Bruce 1997.) All these words have very important to think about. The main goal in this part of the research is to develop teaching. This topic has been useful with talking about writings with students.

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