

*Deconstructing different discourses concerning integration/pluralism in the multicultural field - represented by a Muslim Day Care and The Framework Plan for Day Care Institutions in Norway.*

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Introduction:

Equal opportunities in education have been a national ideology in the Norwegian School system in decades. But children with another ethnic background than Norwegian often fail in the school system. Research shows (Lauglo 1996, Fyhn 2000, Engen, with others 1996) that children with minority background perform less well than ethnic Norwegian children in the Norwegian schools, but at the same time children with a Tamil and Vietnamese background achieve better (Engen, with others 1996). These contradictory results show the need to give more focus to the multicultural field. The school discourse is not focused on the kind of qualification minority children are in favour of, like speaking many languages, multiethnic experiences, and knowledge about different religions and traditions. If the discourses had been more focused on the positive aspects of cultural differences, may be not so many children with minority background had been disqualified? Seeberg says (2002, Imer program) in her project "Dangerous differences" that the Norwegian School do not prepare the students to deal with differences. The American pedagogue Elliot Eisner (1994) emphasises that the issues not taught in school are as important as issue taught.

During the last 20 years there has been ongoing debates in Norway concerning how integration can be reached for children with minority background. How children best learn the Norwegian language, how to stimulate to multicultural, hyphen identity ( Werbner & Modood 2000), and how to be qualified for the Norwegian schooling? These discourses emphasise that day care institutions and schools have a lot of challenges to fulfil the ideology of obtaining equal opportunities for all children in education. A classroom or a day care institution filled with children from other ethnical backgrounds than Norwegian will not alone

gives a multicultural profile or content. The teaching and learning take place through the Norwegian language and the major discourse is Norwegian.

### Our studies

At Oslo University College there are few minority students, about 10 % (Greek 2002; Andersen 2002). Very few such students attend Teacher Training Education, some more in Early Childhood Education. The Department for teacher training recruited this year 70 students on a new study "Flerkulturell lærerutdanning" (Multicultural Teacher Education) (FKL 2002). One of the aims of this new study is to qualify students for work in the multicultural school and Day care institution. This can be interpreted as creating an inclusive environment for students with another background than Norwegian; studies have shown that these students are having difficulties to fulfil their study at the College (Becher & Otterstad 2000 b, Greek 2002). The majority has to ask for and be interested in all the students' background and resources.

### We have done two studies.

1. In 1997 we interviewed 7 minority pre-school teachers (Becher & Otterstad 2000 b). The informants gave retrospectively their stories / assessment of their experiences concerning their education, their fellow students and the administration of the college. The students reflections are focused on how their positions were towards the 'other' students and the teachers. They experienced that few of the fellow students were interested in their background and they felt invisible in many of the educational situations. Some felt marginalized (Gullestad 2002) and some pointed out that the majority was in the position of power (Foucault 1977), and could set the premises for their behaviour.

2. In our next study in 1999/2000 we did ethnographic studies of 9 minority students (Becher & Otterstad 2000 a) within teacher education. In our material we find elements of what we then define as contents of 'multicultural competencies'. We thus deconstruct

(Rhedding-Jones 1996, 2002, Cannella 1997) the concept giving it a meaning that might be more applicable to the living lives of minority students. An important element in the 'concept' of multicultural competencies as we see it, is the 'border crossings' that these students experience all the time. A challenge for higher education and our educational practice is how we understand and take into account the 'border crossings' that the students are 'working on' or 'exposed to' constantly.

Greek and Halvorsen (2000) did another study concerning minority students in Oslo University College. Their study accomplished interviews with about 70 minority students in our institution. Some "results" from these studies we find interesting is: Minority students are often excluded from common activities were Norwegian students are in majority. Greek and Halvorsen (2000) say that minority students "*do very seldom participate in teams or groups with majority students in the ordinary studies. Minority students wish to have an active participation in the student milieu, but most of them do not get entry to educational and social contexts*". Minority students are excluded by not being talked to or looked at. In an observation we did in our study we found that a minority student who had several points to make in the group-discussion simply were not looked at and nobody considered her opinions worth mentioning. The other four students just continued the discussion as nothing was said. Some of the students with ethnic minority background felt that they were in a damn if you do and damn if you don't situation. If they tried to be active and bring in their questions, experiences and competence they become very visible and vulnerable in case they said or did something "wrong". But it is also "wrong" not to say or do and be active because then they become totally invisible. (Acc. to Kanter (1977) minorities have a 'spotlight' that makes them very visible). Kanter says minorities represent a group and therefor are not seen as individuals.

The competencies of the students are not utilised relevantly in teaching or in other forms of educational work. In our interviews and observations we became aware that the students had so many experiences and knowledge that they were not asked to show. Some of our informants had e.g. long termed professional education and practice related to early childhood education from their home country. Neither students nor teachers tried to make their background relevant. (There are of course some exceptions, but our overall impression is as such). Example from an observation of a student in practice:

*“Is it possible to sing Brother John in Urdu”?* The student was surprised and pleased to be requested (by the researcher) to contribute with something from her own “background”

### Multicultural competencies

This studies made us concerned with how to use the experiences and competencies those minority children and students have. How can their experiences and competencies be made relevant in our educational practice? But first of all: what are multicultural competencies<sup>i</sup>? Is it possible to “open up” (deconstruct) and be more specific on the concept? (In a modern research paradigm we would call this “opening up” (or deconstruction) an operationalization.

- Quickly understand the culture or context relevant).
- Activate the “right” set of manners and norms
- Choose quickly the best set of action that correspond in the context and at the same time keeping my self integrity intact / knowing who I am in this context
- Create strategies for navigating in different situations
- Adapt oneself quickly to new situation (development and improvement competence)
- Creativity in influencing change in the “sphere” the persons are participating in
- Tolerate expel and rejection without suffering too much “sustain damage”
- Be in processes where something known meets the unknown and where experience and comparison of both phenomena lead to a sort of distance in the assessment (reflection)

- Evolve ability to take into consideration the perspectives of others
- Hold and extend repertoires of norms, manners and convention, including religious norms and traditions
- Find both similarities and differences related to parallel existing discourses.

Multicultural competencies to us seemed to be a positive concept related to minorities and we wanted to contribute to make the majority discourse about minorities more reflective.

The majority discourse on multiculturalism.

What are we doing when we formulate positive competencies supposed to be potential qualities in minority children and students? We put down categories related to student's background and culture. Do we stimulate essentialism (May 1999) and stereotyped comprehensions when we create categories in this way? In questions concerning culture critical theorists (like May) and poststructuralists (like Rhedding-Jones) advocate caution in naming cultural differences. What is the difference of essentialising positive qualities when we do not want to essentialise bad qualities in minority people?

We see that encouraging positive multicultural competencies might contribute to make the majority discourse concerning minorities more favourable. Minorities in general are not influential and are not in powerful positions (Foucault 1977). The favourable potential of multicultural competencies might affect the majority to value cultural differences to a greater extent than they are doing today. E.g. in schools and day care institutions there are not much celebrity of cultural and religious differences even if aims of official documents allow and require these institutions to do so. That is: on the one side. On the other side they close and narrow the possibilities of bringing cultural and religious differences into practice (Frame Work Plan 1995, p.6).

Many minority parents do not find that their values and norms are represented in the institutions that their children attend (Sand 1997). How can it then be possible for the children

to develop a positive attitude towards their home values? How can the potential of multicultural competencies be revealed and developed? How can the aim of integration be interpreted? Both parts must contribute to be equally dignified and show respect for each other in society where everybody can aspire to the same opportunities for success and happiness.

### Deconstructing different discourses in a Muslim Nursery and the Framework Plan for Day Care Institutions concerning integration/pluralism.

We are seeking alternative practice in Day Care Centres to find discourses that represent something else than the Norwegian Day Care discourse represent. The evaluation report from a project “Free payment for all 5-year old children in the inner city of Oslo” (Sand & Skoug 2002), have included a Muslim Day Care institution, in their study and we find it interesting to try to deconstruct this aspect. We have done some field notes from a visit to this Muslim Day Care Centre where our focus has been: if, or how, the multicultural utterances/practice can contribute in the debate of multiculturalism and boarder crossing? We also want to point out some aspects from the text in Framework Plan to underlie what we interpret as limits/reductions to obtain multicultural practice in Day care institutions.

#### The Muslim Day Care Centre

Notes from the Muslim ‘barnehage’ late September 2002. The Muslim nursery is situated in a Muslim area in Oslo. 80 children attend in four different departments (groups). The children are between 3- 6 year old. They represent different areas/district in Oslo, and also suburbs around the town. The families have different background and mother tongue. The common experiences are the Muslim background in the Norwegian society imprinting of Christianity. There are few ethnical Norwegian children in the Muslim nursery. There is also few ethnic Norwegian staff.

It is just this private foundation that runs this type of nursery in Norway. In the general law for the Day Care centres in Norway there is a paragraph that emphasise that institutions shall be run in conformity with Christian values. The institutions are “*also expected to mediate central Christian traditions as expressed in for example the major Christian festivals*” (p. 12 – Q- 0917 E). It is possible to apply dispensation from this paragraph and replace (compensate) with another outlook on life than the Christian belief. This foundation also runs a school in the area.

The Minister of the Department for schools has to approve all private schools. Many have politically been sceptical to give approval to a Muslim school and nursery because of the possibilities of segregation and not integration of children with another culture and language than Norwegian. The Muslim school/nursery discourse can be understood that this type of school/nursery will give the Muslim children better opportunity to succeed in the school system than an ordinary “Norwegian” school. The children will have more opportunities to recognise and feel comfortable with the ideology their family represents in a broader sense than the Norwegian school does. As mentioned earlier many children with parents from not ethnic Norwegian background have problems to succeed in the Norwegian school system. If we consider the perspective of integration, the possibilities of social integration with ethnic Norwegian children are limited.

#### Examples of the content in the Muslim Day Care Centre:

Islamic values and traditions. The content in the Muslim nursery is built on Islamic values and traditions, and the staffs have to be committed to the Islamic object clause. The Norwegian Frame Plan is actively used in the Muslim Nursery including the typical discourse most Day care institutions in Norway are building on (celebration of the Nation Day, Christmas, talk about the autumn, winter....). At the same time much of the content is represented and based on Islam.

Islamic values, and working with developing knowledge of the Norwegian language, are the most important objectives in this Day Care. Their Framework plan also gives ideas of how to work with different elements within the Koran. This nursery can be characterised as a Muslim – Norwegian day care institution. The Islamic values/tradition are often compared with the Norwegian traditions and these comparatives gave possibilities of creating reflection towards different traditions. Christmas and Easter celebration were discussed and explained as “why we Muslim” celebrate differently. When we read the annual plan we can read the importance given to the Muslim prayers. A photo with a poster with Allah’s 99 Prayer is hanging on the wall. This picture represents Allah’s 99 qualities, like gracious, one that gives a lot, knowledge... The pre – schoolteacher says that this is an important subject for discussion and reflection in the circle time.

*A mother is together with her son trying to accustom him to the nursery. He is apprehensive, and he doesn’t like to be left alone. He speaks another language than the other children, so he doesn’t understand anything what is being said. But when the circle time starts with a prayer, the pre – schoolteacher read a Dwai together with the children. Everybody sits with their hands open on their knees and says the prayer in a choir. The “new” boy seems relaxed and comfortable. He smiles and reads the text after the teacher. She asks his mother if he knows this prayer. He doesn’t. As observers we find this interesting, the Muslim discourse is known for the new comer who indirectly recognises this and can relax. The children have common experiences with the Muslim belief and he feels qualified and competent.*

We also find a Ramadan calendar on the wall. In the period (waiting time) before Id, the staffs hang verses every day on the calendar in expectations of Id. We find this practice interesting to compare with the Norwegian Advent ritual and see this ritual as possible influence in the Id rituals?

Sand and Skoug (2002) in their evaluation report point out that children in role-play are practicing praying 'when they are visiting the Mosque'. Some of the children want Shalwar Camisees for their outfits and dolls clothes. Through the strong emphasise on the Muslim traditions and values the children in this nursery have 'good opportunities' in strengthening their Muslim identity on behalf of the differences in culture and language.

#### The staff's role.

We registered two ethnic Norwegian staff in the Muslim day care, while others represent Pakistan, Somalia and Albany /Macedonian. The children represented countries like Somalia, Pakistan, Albany/Macedonian, Norway and Morocco. Many of the children know each other or have family relation towards each other. At our visit we registered the use of the utterance "Tante" ("Aunt"). In " the Norwegian nursery discourse this word is "banned", the professional staff don't want to be identified with an "aunt" and encourage the children and parents to call them by their first name. The pre-school teacher in the Muslim nursery emphasised the importance of using the concept "Aunt". The staff had deliberately chosen "aunt" because it can be juxtaposed as a relation represented within a family context. The concept "aunt" is more common to use, and we assume this word gives more recognition from the "homeland" discourse. The pre – schoolteacher says everybody uses different "private" utterances like sister, daughter, son, ...

We also find this in Bhatti's (1998) report when she does her fieldwork in England with 50 first generation children and their families from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Many of the fathers called the researcher Baji (sister), the mothers used Behen (sister) and the grandparents Beti (daughter).

*A "new father and his son" enter the room. The father is invited to sit around the table while his son plays with the other children. He is second generation Pakistani – born and brought up in Norway. He talks freely and openly with us (visitors) about his*

*background and different subjects of social and cultural character. He also has a “private conversation” with the pre – schoolteacher where they extend information on which of his brothers who have been attending the same school as the pre – schoolteacher. They know about each other’s families and when we ask them, they say this is usual in their context.*

This communication can be interpreted as a private or family sphere form of interaction between the professionals and the parents. We think this give the children in the nursery good feeling of recognition towards their social family experiences. The connection between the nursery and the family sphere is tied together. The discourse can be said to be known and the children have the chance to feel qualified.

#### Rituals.

Islamic rituals are familiar to the children and followed every day in the nursery.

Religious values are integrated in rituals and practice. E.g.

- Before and after meals: washing hands, saying a prayer
- In connection with visits to the toilet: small cans to wash abdominal was placed on the toilet
- In the staff toilet there was a big note on the door telling us not to put the feet into the little servant because it could fall down

These regular rituals convey safety and recognition to the children. They are important in the homes of the children as part of a religious practice. Our meeting with these standard Muslim conducts make us aware of how strange it must be for Muslim children not to experience these regular rituals.

#### Co –operation with parents.

We also read from the evaluation report (Sand & Skoug 2002) that co-operation with the parents is important work, which also was emphasised of the leader of the nursery. But we

can't find anything mention in the annual plan for the nursery. The report continue to point out that in every day life the staff encourage the children to learn to respect and behave in a manner as a "good" Muslim. The children should be polite toward each other and learn different greeting rituals. These again were connected to the children's rituals at home. In this respect the staff functioned as guidance in co-operation with the parents. What did they point out as "good Muslim behaviour" in the Norwegian context? Sometimes it was challenging to find a "middle path" to satisfy the parents wishes. Compromises had to be taken – like boys sitting besides girls, girls wearing Hitchab - or what was considered as "legal dances".

#### Language.

The children are organised in groups with children with the same mother tongue every week, with a responsible leader related with the children's background, the emphasise is on bilingualism. The pre – schoolteacher read Little Redhead in Norwegian and Urdu. Some children don't have this offer as no staffs represent their mother – tongue. But for the children representing the "main language groups" the stay in the day care functioned as "maintain the mother tongue and expand the competence in Norwegian".

The nurseries in the project also emphasised work with social competence as an important factor in the understanding of the Norwegian language. The nurseries pointed out the need for support in the children socialisation processes, because few of the children had had experiences with other children before attending the nursery. We read this as: the children are not qualified enough in their socialisation process because they "only" have stayed at home with their mothers. In what way will the day care build on "all the other qualifications" the children have gained before attending the nursery?

#### Similarity and differences.

The nursery also had school preparing activities for the 5 – year old children. They work systematically with numbers/maths and letters. Language practices where both the

Norwegian alphabet and mother tongue language, played a central role. The children are also trained to sit quiet, raise their hands, use pencils, write properly ... This can be interpreted as a school discourse, more representing a formal school situation which is a totally different discourse than what the Norwegian Day Care Institution represent. The nursery also represented the Norwegian discourse connected to the aims in the Frame Plan (curriculum). Visits to the fire station, walking in the woods, singing Norwegian songs... But they also visited the Mosque to celebrate Muslim festivals.

The Norwegian multicultural discourse in the day care institutions can be seen as working with two/multicultural identity is of importance. But Sand and Skoug (2002) conclude in their report that the staff shows positive attitude towards working with multicultural identities, but at the same time this is more on the level of attitudes than shown in practise. The staffs in the day care centres has positive attitudes towards the realisation of integration, but the different minorities have to be represented in the daily life in every day care institution. Practice shows that the focus is on celebrations where the Islamic tradition and values gets so visible.

#### The Muslim discourse?

Will the focus on the Islamic belief and tradition contribute to acknowledge for the Muslim child's background so the integration process into the Norwegian context (nursery/school) can support their multiethnic identity? Will this nursery give the children opportunities to act as border crossers - or will the result be even more segregation than today? Can we assume that the strong focus on Islamic believes can promote children's multicultural identity as Norwegian Muslims? Is it necessary for the children to have this Muslim "support" to cope as "border crossers" in the Norwegian context? Or will the strong focus on Islamic believe function as a cultural preservation of the home culture in such a way that multicultural competencies will not be supported?

## The Framework Plan for the Day Care Institutions.

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs is responsible for establishing the framework plan, which provides a basis for all day-care centre activities. The framework plan ( Q- 0903 B) defines the day-care centre's functions within the society, its goals, and guidelines for key areas of day- care centre's responsibility, e.g. care, play and development of social skills. The plan also focuses on the role of day-care centres disseminating culture and knowledge, and provides guidelines for five areas:

- Society, religion and ethics
- Aesthetics
- Language and communication
- Nature, technology and environment
- Physical activity and health

1. *“The framework plan places day-care centres within a broad social context and reflects the common values and attitudes which the Norwegian community wishes to transmit to its children”* (p.6 Q-0877 Norwegian Day – care Centres 1995). The plan emphasises that the day- care centre should represent a milieu where respect and solidarity and the right to be different are important. *“Increase understanding for other cultures and traditions* (p. 58 in Framework plan).

Whose religion and ethics are in favour in this plan? The Day Care Institution Act says that:” *Day care institutions shall assist in giving children an upbringing that accords with Christian values.* (Q-0917 E p.4) In what way is other religion invited to take part and influence the plan with their values? How is the Christian values represented contra the Muslim values, and in what way is it possible to practice different values. In Oslo today about 30% of children in school age represent another background than the ethnical Norwegian?

How are the possibilities in a day care centre to practice prayers for example during Ramadan?

2. *“Measures directed towards specific groups of children”* (p. 8). Here is the disabled, the Sami as indigenous people, *“living mainly in the far north, with nomadic traditions”* (p.8) and children from other cultural and language minorities in focus. It is interesting to consider all these three groups presented in the Framework Plan as children demanding special needs.

Statistic shows that the “biggest Sami group” is represented in Oslo, the capital. Can this presentation underlie a myth that the Sami people are a group moving around like a nomadic group from Sahara in Africa? To be a Norwegian in this context the Sami, disabled and children with another background than Norwegian is put in the same position to obtain equal opportunities. The presentation positions the Sami as “an exotic group” which should be provided with focus on the Sami language and culture. The “immigrant child” is reduced to the governmental founding for bilingual assistants. *“These assistants play a vital role in adapting the minority children to a Norwegian environment and in promoting cultural understanding between children and adults in day-care centres”*. (p.8)

3. *“Day care institutions shall provide children under school age with sound opportunities for development and activity in close understanding and collaboration with the children’s homes“*. *“The child Care Act is based upon parental rights and states that day-care centre activities shall be organised in co-operation with the parents”* (p.6) Every centre shall have a council and a board, initiate discussions on the function of the centres.

The goal for the day-care institutions shall be organised in co-operation with the parents. How is it possible to create equal interaction with all the children’s parents, when the values are defined before the co-operation has started? We think this point in the Frameplan can be interpreted as a lack of multi religion or intercultural perspective. There are few ethnic

minority parents representing the different councils and boards in the nurseries. If we take this from the position of power - how it is possible for minority parents to influence or inflict to another discourse than the “Norwegian/the majority discourse”?

4. *“Day-care centres and the community. .. help children to become familiar with life in the rest of the community”*(p. 7). The plan can be read as the discourse about “Growing into the Norwegian culture”. Ethnic minority culture is not a part of the Norwegian culture; it is “other cultures”. We find here a marginalisation of “the other”. The concept “we” and “others” (Gullestad 2002) are not defined in the Framework plan and the concept ‘multicultural barnehage’ (nursery) is not given any attention. Jacobsen (2000) says that ethnic minorities’ culture doesn’t fit into “our” culture.

We also read from the Framework plan different concepts within the multi ethnic field. In many ways we find it difficult to know how to use concepts because of the risk of being discriminating toward individuals or groups of people. The Framework plan uses different terminology on children with another background than Norwegian. We mean that the plan is entirely without foundation towards the use of these concepts. ‘Tospråklige’ or ‘flerspråklige’ (bi/multilingual) children, here the focus is on language. ‘Innvandrerbarn’(immigrant) or minority children, the perspective is on integration. ‘Flerkulturelle’ multicultural children where the focus is on the cultural perspective. The utterances in use will reflect the focus chosen. The challenge for the multicultural field is to connect all the perspective to wholeness where the child’s is seen in interaction, and create an awareness of the concepts in use.

#### Summarising.

We start this writing by a deconstruction of the concept multicultural competencies based on earlier studies we have accomplished. We ask questions about essentialism in our work with categories of competence as a potential for minority children. Then we put forward an example from a Muslim Day Care Centre and try to deconstruct the prevailing discourse of

this centre, which represent a minority discourse in the Norwegian early childhood discourse. We ask whether this minority discourse can encourage multicultural competencies for the children or preserve a monocultural competence based on their home values. We ask whether the minority discourse will encourage pluralism and integration for minority children in the Norwegian society or whether segregation will be the more probable result. The outlines and the pedagogical practice based in The Framework Plan for the Day Care Institutions are no guarantee for minority values being respected or promoted. In the perspective of the powerful majority discourse one “good” solution for the survival of minority values might be to establish institutions that preserves their religion and home values. In our very “small-scale” ethnography, in the Muslim Day Care Centre we saw that most of the daily activities and content are the same as in day care centres in general (not Muslim). The Christian rituals (if there are any) are replaced by Islamic rituals and practices.

The challenge for multiculturalism in early childhood education will be to bring different perspectives and practices together in ways that children feel capable of mastering different aspects of their lives. By this we believe their potential for developing multicultural competencies will be stimulated.

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Q – 0903 B Rammepan for barnehagen. [Frame Work Plan] – BFD

Werber & Modood (2000). *Debating Cultural Hybridity*. Zed books. London New Jersey

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1. We find some of these aspects of competencies mentioned in different scientific literature (Ballard 1994, Jackson & Nesbitt 1993, King (ed) 1997, May 1999)

2. In a modern research paradigm we would call this “opening up” (or deconstruction) an operationalisation.