



# THE NORDIC PEDAGOGICAL TRADITION – MAIN TOPICS & HALLMARKS

To establish what characterizes the Nordic Pedagogical Tradition implies looking at both the past and the present. Traditions are the result of historical developments which to a larger or lesser degree are present today. Even though each Nordic country has its own unique history, and each country's ECEC system therefor differs from the other's, there are some fundamental similarities or distinctive features that make it natural to claim there is a Nordic Pedagogical Tradition.

These features can be put into two main categories, which manifests themselves through each country's national legislation, curriculum and guidelines and their respective pedagogical practices. The first is the child-centered perspective, grounded on common ideas about children and childhood. The second is the structural organization of the ECEC sector as a universal publicly funded part of the welfare society, making ECEC available and affordable to all.

## **The intrinsic value of childhood & play**

Childhood is seen as a phase of life with intrinsic value, and the point of departure for the Nordic countries' pedagogical practices is children's everyday life. Within the curriculum frameworks children's participation is emphasized, and their perspectives, experiences and interests are used as starting points for the ECEC activities. The intrinsic value of childhood also implies freedom from expectations and responsibility to perform. Play is an important activity in its own right. It is seen as a part of children's way of life; a way of expression with intrinsic value. Play also gives the opportunity for children to explore, develop and learn. Social interaction and making friends are purposes in itself.

## **One ECEC for all**

The Nordic ECEC institutions are for all children below compulsory school age, and the children's own culture and community is highly valued. National legislation and curriculum are directed to all children, regardless of age, cultural background or need for special support. Children's right to participation is an essential guideline. Derived from fundamental values such as democracy, tolerance, equality and anti-discrimination, the aim is to include all children.

## **Broad and holistic approach to children's development**

Care, play and learning are inseparable features of the pedagogical practice, and all activities are seen as important for children's development. Everyday life in the ECEC institutions is organized, but without rigid timetables and classes. Outdoor play and exploration, being in nature and doing field trips are understood as valuable for children's well-being, development and learning. The aim is a manifold of experiences to promote children's all-round development, not specific learning goals promoting narrow skills or restricted areas of knowledge. Evaluation is directed towards the pedagogical practice, not the individual child's achievements in predetermined learning areas.

## **ECEC teachers and staff pursuing and contributing to the children's perspectives and interests**

The pedagogical work in Nordic ECEC is based on dialogue, curiosity and exploration. The ECEC teachers are trained to pursue and contribute to the children's perspectives and interests and use them in pedagogical situations in everyday life. ECEC staff works in teams to develop their practice founded on a topic-based, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary conception of knowledge with considerable room for play and spontaneous activity.

## **Family collaboration**

The pedagogical practice is developed in co-operation with the children's families and home environment. Collaboration includes listening to parent's expectations, wishes, needs and demands. Parent's and ECEC staff have a shared responsibility for the children's well-being and development.

## **The Nordic Pedagogical Tradition:**

- Childhood as a phase of life with intrinsic value
- Care and friendship as purposes in itself
- Play in its own right
- Democracy and children's right to participation
- Integrated and inclusive approach regardless of children's age, background or need of special support
- Holistic approach to children's well-being, development and learning
- Being outdoors, engaging in nature
- Evaluating the ECEC practice, not individual children's skills and knowledge
- Educated staff working in teams, pursuing and contributing to the children's perspectives and interests
- Family collaboration