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Ethnic Diversity – the Challenges to Child Protection and Child Care

In the globalised society of today social work with citizens of minority ethnic background has a paradigmatic importance as it tests the relationship between social work and the nation state. Do social workers focus on circumstances hindering the individual citizen of living what he or she considers a good life? Or is social work so tied up with loyalty to the nation state ideology that social workers within a specific state focus on assimilating service users to the mainstream of this nation?

Most social workers would agree that it is a democratic challenge to social pedagogy and social work to combine the ideal of equality with the ideal of respect for and recognition of diversity. Never the less Scandinavian research finds that social workers often ignore the cultural, lingual, religious and ethnic background of a child being placed out of home. Often there is no information in the social records of where the child is born, and when the child, its parents and siblings migrated to the present country of living; language spoken between parents and child, do the child and/or the parent speak the majority language of the country they live in? Are there need for / use of interpreters when majority social workers cooperate with the family, what are the arguments for matching child and the specific foster family or residential home?

Researchers have often interpreted this by what Sheldon and Sheldon has called 'The bloody fool theory of child care', i.e. social workers are either blind, lack 'life experience', are too busy doing good to use their common sense, or they are just plain stupid.

There are of course a variety of other more structural factors that can contribute to better explanations for the complex background for what is happening in child care. In my paper I want to discuss three such factors:

- Mechanisms involved in categorisation, explanations by situation / explanations by characteristic
- Perceptions of culture: Evolutionistic, relativistic and contextual
- Perceptions of citizenship: Liberal, communitarian and global citizenship

I shall focus only on the challenges of ethnic diversity to child care. But of course children and their parents do not experience othering and other forms of discrimination solely on the grounds of ethnicity, but also on the grounds of gender, age, disability, health status, race and skin colour, caste, class, descent, national origin, culture, religion, language and sexual orientation. Through

my paper I will argue for the strength of an intersectionality perspective that combines power and inequality to the possibilities persons have for acting as a subject within the frames of social structures, institutional practices and dominating ideologies – also within the frames of the perceived 'Help' of the child care professionals.