



Brief

Early Childhood Sustainability Education in Danish Day Care Institutions – Places as Supporting Structures

Katrine Dahl Madsen*, Nanna Jordt Jørgensen & Mia Husted

University College Copenhagen, Denmark

*Contact corresponding author: Katrine Dahl Madsen, e-mail: kama@kp.dk

In Denmark, attention to early childhood sustainability education has been on the rise since the concept of sustainability was introduced in the 2018 early childhood curriculum. In the curriculum, sustainability is mentioned in relation to the curriculum theme of nature, outdoor life, and science, with an implicit focus on ecological sustainability. Working from an engaged research position with the ambition to contribute to supporting wider approaches to sustainability education in early childhood, in this article we present a discussion on the potential of considering place as supporting structure. The article presents an exploration of examples and reflections on a participatory mapping of place-based early childhood sustainability education involving social educators, educational managers, and municipal administrative staff in two municipalities in Denmark. Aiming to examine activities, approaches to, forms of participation in, collaborations about, and challenges to early childhood sustainability education, the mapping and a set of qualitative follow-up interviews identified and explored these themes in relation to specific places in local communities and day care institutions. Theoretically, the article combines inspiration from Wickenberg's concept of norm supporting structures (Wickenberg, 1999) with discussions on place-based sustainability education (Gruenewald 2003; Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017). Analyzing how places may work as supporting structures for approaches to sustainability education in day care institutions, the study suggests that early childhood education for sustainability in many cases emerges as a continuation of an existing educational concern with nature and outdoor life. However, some places invite for wider approaches to sustainability while other places contain such potentials but appear to be inaccessible for younger children. With inspiration from Mandikonza

and Lotz-Sisitka's Bhaskar-inspired use of the notion of absences, we reflect upon the ways in which the research process attempted to make absent places and discussions present, hereby enabling participants to reflect critically on sustainability and on structural barriers for processes of social and ecological change. The mapping indicates that places are important supporting structures for early childhood education for sustainability. A stronger focus on children's participation and perspectives may qualify future mappings and developments of places as supporting structures.

Keywords: *dilemmas; mapping; nature pedagogy; systemic action research*