

# Individualization as educational idea(l)s – a cross-cultural study of kindergarten teachers` educational practice

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# Background

- Contemporary discourses within kindergarten curriculum reforms in Norway as well as in China focus on individualized teaching, children`s agency, children`s rights, freedom and autonomy.
- Curriculum studies often focuses on deficits among the teachers in order to implement curriculum reforms.
- Dualistic assumptions of the education in the east and the west
- Comparative studies within early childhood education focuses much on curriculum and educational politics and are in many ways having the western discourses as a model.

# Why Norway and China?

- Personal biography
- Curriculum reforms in both countries
- Epistemological – the interplay between insiders and outsiders.
  
- Dilemmas with this choice:
  - my position as being a Norwegian researcher
  - the language
  - the role of the interpreter, «co-researcher»

# Objects of the research project

- To produce small scale empirical knowledge about cultural educational practices and what the kindergarten teachers want to obtain in the everyday life and activities in the kindergarten by doing the implicit and taken for granted assumptions less tacit. Critical questioning.
- To contribute with different intention and methodology in comparative research

# Research focus and questions

- How do kindergarten teachers understand the idea of individualization and how is this idea constituted in the practices of the kindergarten teachers?
- What do the kindergarten teachers see as their object concerning the child`s being and becoming?

# Theoretical perspectives

- Cultural perspective: Culture as practices, as something we do.
- Cultural-historical concepts and perspectives: The importance of collective history and the object of activity
- Social studies of childhood

# Methodology

- Comparative case study of one kindergarten in China and one in Norway
- Ethnographic approach - being in the field over time and at different times

# Data production

- Polyvocal photo/video-elicitation with focus group interviews of the teachers.  
Collaboration of interpretations and not the researcher as the only interpreter.
- 4 edited videos and 2 photoedits
- 12 interviews
- Being in the field for 30 days in both kindergartens



# Unit of analysis

- Presentation of artifacts on the walls in the kindergarten
- Natural science activities
- Everyday routine activities



# Cultural historical analysis

- Cultural analysis need interpretations – content analysis, self-reflexivity - critical analysis and knowledge about structural conditions and cannot be separated (Saukko, 2008).
- Using concepts from the CHT

# Some preliminary results/interpretations

- Firstly, I have found that the educational practices in the two kindergartens are much more different than what I would have expected from the curriculum guidelines. Educational practise must be seen as a negotiation between culture, history of the activity system and the new curriculum guidelines.
- Secondly, both groups of teachers point to the formation of the child as their main object. Still, the educational objectives have a Janus face when interpreted from both insiders and outsiders.
- What the Chinese teachers see as improving the human by working hard and looking for the exemplaric principle, the Norwegian teachers interpret as a form of elitism.
- What the Norwegian teachers interpret as equality and seeing the individual child, the Chinese teachers see more as being of low quality and laissez- faire.