

Project “Qualified for the future” in Lørenskog municipality

The project started with a basic course

The basic course in DB-System® is a scientifically documented course that runs over two days. The course consists of lectures about correlations between emotions, thoughts and actions. In addition, the participants are guided through mental exercises.

The researchers call this kind of training of the brain self-guided imagery training. That means that after the course, participants can make use of a deep relaxed state – an inner room free from thought chaos. Many people think that sounds like mindfulness. But with this brain training, one does not use this relaxed state of consciousness to empty the mind of thoughts, but rather use it purposefully to work towards goals, or to change previously learned thought patterns. This is done by using cognitive techniques in "our inner room". That the training is said to be self-guided means that a person can use the techniques at home in their own living room, on a plane, or for example at the office at work - without a need for guidance.

Several research projects have been carried out on ConsciousnessTraining™. Briefly summarized, the research shows that the training provides increased ability for self-regulation - an ability that is important for managing life in a lifelong perspective. The training also strengthens our cognitive functions, which, among other things, displays as an increased ability to use logic to solve problems.

Qualified for the future

In addition to courses, the kindergarten has used the program Qualified for the future that is described in the book with the same name. (Qualified for the future, the book is in the progress of being translated to English) The program consists of a step-by-step guide about how to work with adult interaction skills and childrens' and teens' life mastering skills.

All staff has received a copy of the book. Following the course, the staff has received guidance from Deborah Borgen and Cecilie Stenhaug. Focus has been on integrating good routines for goal-oriented reflection practices in the staff team, as well as how to use the plan in group sessions with the children.

Warm hearts – magical moments

Løken kindergarten's vision is: "warm hearts - magical moments". We used this vision as a starting point for our work there, by asking questions like; "What does this vision mean?" "What do we want to achieve with it?" And "What must we do to realize it?"

One conclusion the kindergarten staff arrived at, is that presence-of-mind in the adults is important. When we are present with inner peace, we are in a better position to give the child an experience of being seen, heard and understood. Then we can facilitate "magical moments". However, if we for example have had a quarrel with our spouse before work, or if we're annoyed with a colleague, this could affect our presence-of-mind and calmness in

our interaction with the children. The techniques learned at the course can be used to process and cope with such everyday challenges.

Anbjørg Helleland, who is the head teacher - manager of the kindergarten, gives an example of how she has used the techniques. She says: "One day when I was particularly stressed when I got to work, I received a tip from a colleague about using "my inner room". I closed the door to the office and spent ten minutes in "my room" to sort out what had happened earlier in the day, and after that everything turned around. From being a day with a rough start at home, sick leaves at work, etc., I managed to turn my thoughts around, so I found good solutions".

In addition to using the technique to handle everyday events like this, the staff has worked a great deal to reflect about learned thought patterns. It is often the case that, although we have a lot of knowledge about what is good for children, we all have past experiences that result in automatic responses. Sometimes automatic responses are a good thing, but sometimes the automatic responses lead to "un-reflected practices".

An example of this, often found in kindergarten and schools, is the idea that we must make children finish their meal. The more food we get the children to eat, the better! But this "truth" is not based on knowledge of what is good for children. Knowledge about what is good for children tells us that it is not good to make children finish eating all their food. In fact, such practices can cause children to lose their ability to recognize feelings like hunger, thirst, fullness etc.

In the staff team, we therefore talked a lot about the difference between knowledge-based and un-reflected practice. And that it may be wise to choose a theme for each department to be extra aware of for a while. A kind of "awareness-raising process". Several departments selected the above example: the mealtime situation. One department chose to focus on play situations and the behaviour and presence of the adults when the children are playing. Another department wanted to focus on how adults handled situations in the wardrobe. The purpose of working with such an awareness-raising process is to develop unified practices based on knowledge of what is good for children. For example, it's easier to help children to express their feelings like thirst, hunger and fullness, if everyone in the department has familiarized themselves with the knowledge and become coordinated about what characterizes a good mealtime situation.

The inner room and lasting changes

The awareness-raising process went very well. Many who work with children are used to reflecting about their own practices in this way. But it is not always that such reflection practices lead to change. This is because our behaviour when interacting with other people has become "physical". Experiences and our interpretations of these have become neural pathways in the brain, and the neural pathways eventually follow their own logic. Although we have theoretical knowledge about what is good for children, we slide back into these established neural pathways. This is when it's important to use the technique in "the inner room" to reflect about what we have become aware of, in order to create lasting changes.

For example, if we were forced to finish our meal as a child, this could still be there as important and correct learning. In our “inner room” we can have a dialogue with ourselves about what we learned as a child and give ourselves a new understanding of what is educationally correct. When we consider the relevant event while in a deeply relaxed state, and while using internal cognitive techniques, we are able to create new neural pathways in the brain in relation to that situation. With new neural pathways in the brain, it will be easier to take new actions, because there is no longer an old neural pathway to slip back into - we have created new ones.

Tutu and the Magical Room

Clearing out the pasts of the staff past and handling the present wasn't the only work done. The last months were used to teach children about life's tasks, challenges and mysteries.

Qualified for the future consists of a plan for group sessions with children in which the techniques in DB-System® and important topics we can encounter in life are presented. Some topics that are focused upon are: play and imagination, ghosts under the bed, friendship, arguing, sorrow and painful secrets. These themes are presented through stories about a car named Tutu. He is a Mini Morris from England who one day decides to travel the world to help children cope with life.

Through the Tutu stories, the children learn to use the Magical Room. This "room" is the same relaxed state that the adults learn at the course. The children learn to use the "room" to find peace of mind, or to have an inner dialogue to find solutions for tasks and challenges. Each program for a group session consists of a Tutu story and suggestions for dialogue and practical exercises with the children following the storytelling. An example of a practical exercise may be that the children have an opportunity to close their eyes and have an inner dialogue in their magical room.

Deputy head teacher at Løken Kindergarten, Tone Løkstad, tells that all departments have had group sessions about Tutu. They did this for four to five weeks with several group sessions each week. The children were very fascinated by him and they thought it was exciting that he was helping children. They talked about The Magical Room and how we can use it to have an inner dialogue. The text was a bit too detailed for the youngest children, so the adults used keywords and told the story using their own words while looking at the pictures. In the groups of the youngest children they created their own Tutu song they have been singing, and each department has used concrete things such as a car and illustrations of Tutu and the children. In one department each group session ended with the children entering their Magical Room for relaxation. Tone also says that they feel it is a very good group session program that they look forward to repeating for the children in the autumn.

Focus on mastering life and public health in kindergartens

The framework plan for kindergartens states that the mental and physical health of children must be promoted in kindergarten. Furthermore, the kindergarten is to help promote well-being, happiness, mastering, friendship and fellowship. At the same time,

employees must prevent offensiveness and bullying. This means that the staff must be consciously aware of their own interaction skills, as well as be consciously aware of the causes for bullying, offensiveness and that children may be exposed to neglect, violence and sexual abuse.

It has been important for us to create a program to work with adult interaction skills, while the adults also have a tool for talking with children about friendship, mastering and fellowship, as well as neglect, violence and sexual abuse. This is important as part of our goal to promote good mental health and life mastering in society. Especially kindergartens are in a unique position to do just that.