Early years in Denmark

Early Childhood Education and Care generally comprises facilities for children below compulsory school age, i.e., children aged 0-5/6 years.

Day care provision types are:
- 6 month to 3 years "Cradle houses"
- 3-6 years "Childrens gardens"
- 0-6 years "Childrens houses"
- 0-3 years: Daycare in private home, typically 3-6 children "day care home"

1/3 of all nurseries are private (non-profit) under supervision of the local authority.

School starts at age 5. First year of school is called 0. grade or kindergarten grade. A good mix of playing, cooperating and learning, preparing children for the life of a pupil as well as supporting the development of a socially well-functioning and competent group of children.

Schools offer afternoon clubs from around 12-17 every day. They are called SFOs. We will be visiting a school to meet with a kindergarten grade teacher and the head teacher of the school.

Purpose
The general purpose of the early childhood provision in Denmark is to further the development, wellbeing and independence of children in consultation with their parents. In addition the day-care facilities (dagtilbud) have three purposes of equal importance: educational, social and care purposes.

In 2004 the first national curriculum for early years was launched. This is very far from a national curriculum in schools. We do not teach children in early years, we support their allround development (socially, personally, physically) – and emphasis in on play.

The curriculum is basically 8 headlines that every early years provision needs to adress and develop their specific approach on how to offer this for their children:

The 6 themes of the national curriculum

The multifarious development of the child
All the potentials of the child are cherished and self esteem is regarded the main goal of the curriculum

Social competence
The ability of forming of friendship is emphasised

Linguistic competence
Not foreign languages ;-) but communication on all channels

Body and physicality
The younger a child is, the more ‘learning’ is a physically phenomena

Nature and science
As the staff is not trained for teaching science, this theme is commonly interpreted as ‘Nature and gardening’

Cultural expressions and values
Very uncontroversial interpreted. The directive is dry cleaned from gender, ethnicity and religion
Numbers
86% of all 1-3 years old children attend day care home or nursery of some kind.
97% of all 3-5 years old attend kindergarten. 8% in 'outdoor' provisions like forest nurseries.

Price of daycare
Local authorities are obliged to offer sufficient daycare capacity for all children from age 1.
Parents pay a maximum of 30% of the costs, typically around 300€ for full time day care, often including lunch. The rest is covered by the local authority through taxes.

Prices vary from one town to the next, 0-3 years provisions being a little bit more expensive than 3-6 year.

Opening hours
Nurseries are open from 7-17 typically. Latest meeting time is around 9 most places. Both parents typically work full time in Denmark.

The 'teachers'
The main staff in nurseries – 'teachers' – are called 'pedagogs' here. They are trained as social educators – an entirely different educational programme than that of teachers. Thus pedagogs do not have a particular subject specialism the way teachers do. We will visit a Pedagog Training College.

A good part of the staff is often untrained assistants. Eg. young people taking a sabbatical, earning a bit of money before they go on to higher education.

Within the last few years a new educational programme has been set up to train pedagog assistants.

What do they do in all these hours of care?

They arrive between 7 and 9, and are often given breakfast
Then they play until 10 where they gather in groups, (sometimes in age groups, sometimes across age) for 30-40 minutes of ‘circle time’.
Sing a little, listen to a story, answering to what day it is, where they live etc.
Sometimes they will go for a walk or work on a project like: “My home town” or “My body”
They are having lunch at 12 and then the youngest (<3½) sleep and the rest is on the playground (regardless of whether)
Then another little meal around 14.30
The rest of the day they play with each other until the kindergarten close at 17

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