

Education Research supporting the current structure of Asyl, Kesser's Hus & Gadevang Skole

More specific data can be supplied, but this is a summary of the research¹.

Current research conducted in the field of education shows strong support for the current structure of Asyl, Kesser's Hus & Gadevang School. I will henceforth refer to the institutions of Asyl, Kesser's Hus and Gadevang Skole as the 'Gadevang Learning Community'. Aside from the programs implemented in these institutions, the focus of the following report is on the impact the school/institution has on student learning (aside from the quality of teachers/carers). In John Hattie & Associates publication 'Visual Learning', studies were taken from over 800 meta-analyses from 'Western' countries world wide and his findings have been accepted and implemented by countries including Denmark. For the purposes of this communication, I have focused on 'The Contributions from the School' section where the learning environment and school values are analysed. The following report clearly shows that the learning environment provided by the Gadevang Learning Community is best positioned to deliver and provide the children of Gadevang with a high quality education that will therefor lead to them being high level productive members of the Hillerød community.

The most influential area on student learning is the tone created within the classroom/learning environment. When schools provide an environment where student behaviour is effectively managed and there is a sense of 'Classroom Cohesion', there will be strong learning outcomes achieved. Classroom cohesion is when students possess optimal attributes for coexisting; goal directness, positive interpersonal relations and social support. As the children in Gadevang have moved through the Gadevang Learning Community, they have been exposed to the same values, consistent behavioural management strategies and in an environment where they feel safe and secure. Students have a strong sense of belonging within the Gadevang community and this then leads to greater respect of the community itself, therefor reducing the occurrence of antisocial behaviour. This all relates to 'Classroom Cohesion'. If the council decides to close Kesser's Hus and/or Gadevang Skole, this cohesion will be broken and have a negative impact on the learning of the students as well as their sense of belonging within the community.

Classroom management also has been found to have a significant impact on learning outcomes. This further highlights the necessity of the community structure of the Gadevang Learning Community as the staff have a close professional relationship with each other allowing them to share knowledge and behavioural management strategies regarding specific children. Children who have behavioural issues are best placed in this environment as they are not 'lost' or 'swallowed up' in a larger classroom/school setting. One of the most challenging situations for children is a change of teacher/school. The new teacher(s) has to learn the right behavioural strategies for them and this takes time. These children will usually fall backwards in their learning and behaviour during this adjustment period impacting not only their own learning but disrupting that of their classmates. In the Gadevang Learning Community, children don't have this as there is a continuity between each section and children are able to continue on a positive learning pathway. Whilst it is possible for larger schools to provide 'behavioural management plans' for each child and share knowledge of effective strategies, the way in which this is done is usually 'routine' and sufficient time and resources are not always present to provide the kind of intimate communication the Gadevang structure allows.

The smaller, more intimate learning environment of the Gadevang Learning Community gives teachers and carers the opportunity to identify the needs of their students and react to them appropriately. Whilst Hattie suggests that smaller class sizes don't always result in increased student learning, the staff at Kesser's Hus and Gadevang Skole are specialists in working in this environment providing the type of learning opportunities students need to succeed, such as small groupings and opportunities for acceleration.

¹ Hattie, J. A. C. (2009) *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge

Hattie identifies that multi-age grouping of students has very little, if no benefit to student learning, however, there are no significant negative effects either. What the multi-age environment in the Gadevang Learning Community does allow for is more effective small group learning which has been found to have a highly significant effect on learning. Students learn to work collaboratively and teachers have the opportunity to teach this skills specifically. Students are able to be grouped according to like skill level or ability, similar interest or mixed ability, enabling students the chance to work with those achieving above their level. Because of the relationship between staff and students within the Gadevang Learning Community, these groups can be created to maximum effect. Skills, interests and behavioural management strategies identified by the staff at Kesser's Hus are passed on to the staff at Gadevang Skol to give all children the chance to learn effectively.

In addition, the opportunity to accelerate the learning of particular students is easier. Offering opportunities for students to move through levels more quickly when the need arises has been found to be extremely effective. Staff are sensitive and more aware of the behaviours these students exhibit and provide learning opportunities that suit them. Due to the close professional relationships between the staff of both Gadevang Skol and Kessers Hus, they are able to collaborate and monitor individual learning opportunities for these students.

From a parent perspective, the current structure means high level communication and confidence that a real partnership exists between home and school. Parents in Denmark put an enormous amount of trust in the carers of their children as the majority of children go in to full time care from the age of 1 year (not the case for other 'western' countries), so to be able to have a local institution where you know your child's needs are being met is a great comfort. The relationship between home and school is extremely important in the success of a child's learning and the current Gadevang Learning Community meets this need.

As an Education Professional in Australia, I personally find the structure and quality of education here in Gadevang to be excellent. It is widely accepted that providing high level, quality early childhood education is exceptionally important to future learning outcomes and I feel privileged to be able to give this to my sons. As a teacher, I found that close relationships with my colleagues, the school management staff and the parents were imperative to providing 'our' students with a high level education. As they say, it takes a village to raise a child, and Gadevang most definitely provides this. As a lecturer at The University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education, I studied and taught the importance of differentiated learning and providing students with opportunities to develop their 'thinking' skills and dispositions. The current Gadevang structure allows for this to happen.

Hillerød Kommune should be looking to structures like the Gadevang Learning Community to inform them of 'best practice' in other areas of Hillerød. Closing Kesser's Hus would not just have a small impact on the overall structure of the Learning Community, it will take away the most powerful influencing factor of student success, the ability to appropriately monitor and manage the educational and behavioural needs of each child. Managing this structure of schools is challenging from an administrative perspective, but in times when the performance of Danish students is dramatically slipping worldwide (refer PISA results) now is the time to focus on the quality of the education provided and not just on the amount of kroner it takes to continue to provide the same old education. There should be more institutions like Asyl, Kesser's Hus and Gadevang Skol, not less.

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