

Introduction and article abstracts

The present anthology on children and youth in Greenland is the result of an initiative by the writers of this introduction supported by the MIPI board in the fall of 2005.

The anthology is intended to function as a mouthpiece for individuals who through their work have acquired experience-based and research-based knowledge of the conditions faced by Greenland's children and youth. This knowledge is essential to the well-being of the children and youth of Greenland now and in the future. The articles in the anthology testify that all the authors are professionally and knowledgeably deeply committed to contributing to the ability of the Greenlandic society to offer children and youth adequate living conditions and well-being.¹ Their experiences and reflections on working with topics concerning children and youth in Greenland document a wide range of opinions, ideas, suggestions, criticisms, developments, and future opportunities which might be worth making available to Greenlandic society.

We hope that the readers will use the anthology for the variety of purposes relevant to them. In particular, we hope that the present material may serve as inspiration to people who work in the administrations, institutions, and organizations catering especially to children and youth.

The anthology comprises 23 articles in total and is divided into four parts. The first part looks at children and youth from a political and administrative perspective. The second part focuses on the socialization of children and youth at the intersection between tradition and modernity. The third part deals with family conditions, well-being, and health-related behavior. The fourth part presents examples of methods and concepts applied in the work with children and youth in contemporary Greenland.

The main points of the individual articles are presented in brief below.

The first part of the volume *Børn og unge og det politiske og administrative system i Grønland* (Children and Youth and the Political and Administrative System in Greenland) opens with **Jette Eistrup's** and **Wolfgang Kahlig's** article on *Magtrelationen mellem børn og voksne* (The Power Relation Between Children and Adults). Taking

¹ Due to extensive editorial efforts and translation of the articles, a certain delay between the submission of the articles and the publication of the anthology was inevitable. Please note that most of the articles were written in 2006.

the “invention” of childhood as a societal social category in the early 20th century as their point of departure, the authors demonstrate that childhood was defined by criteria focusing on what a particular group of people “needs” in terms of care, well-being, and societal skills. The most serious omission as seen from a perspective of power relations, however, is the actual opportunities of children and youth to influence and negotiate aspects that are vital to their contemporary and future lives as citizens. But this “lack” is rooted in adult society’s conception of children and youth as a marginal group and says nothing of their actual social and cultural competences. Nor does it say anything about the willingness of adult society to focus on the structural framework for children and young people’s material and financial living conditions.

In his article *Undervejs til grønlandsk selvstyre – de unges politiske socialisering* (Toward Greenland Home Rule—Young People’s Political Socialization), **Aksel V. Carlsen** discusses the preconditions for a sustainable democratic development in Greenland. He takes youth as his point of departure—the age during which one as individual and generation acquires the shared experience and knowledge that will later provide a basis for one’s attitude toward society. A democratic Greenland should thus be sensitive to these preconditions. The current debate on home rule may either lead to the mere implementation of a rational administrative structure, remain a beautiful dream, or contribute to a socially sustainable democratic development. The young Greenlanders’ role as active participants in this process is tied to democratization. Among other things, the article depicts how five younger Greenlandic politicians experienced the imprint of a number of institutions on their childhood and commitment. The need for an active children’s and youth politics which is not formulated only “top-down” is emphasized. Rather, it should be based upon a larger degree of involvement of the young people in political life.

Steen Wulff illustrates and discusses *Barnets ret til en tilstrækkelig levestandard – Børnekonventionens artikel 27 i en grønlandsk kontekst* (The Right of the Child to an Adequate Standard of Living—Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in a Greenlandic Context). After accounting for the content of Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Wulff debates whether the standard of living among children from families in straitened circumstances in Greenland can be characterized as adequate, and what obligations rests with Greenlandic authorities accordingly. Finally, he refers to a number of recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child which supervises children’s rights.

The contribution by **Peter Dahler-Larsen** revolves around *Børne- og ungepolitik i grønlandske kommuner* (Policies Concerning Children and Youth in Greenlandic Municipalities). At the present time, seven municipalities in Greenland have adopted a policy concerning children and youth. The author investigates what such a general declaration of values and goals means. In the article two different perspectives on these policies are discussed, i.e. a so-called institutional perspective and a perspective of self-regulation. The content, objectives, and means of the policies are analyzed more

closely. By way of conclusion some suggestions for future municipal work with policies concerning children and youth are delineated.

The main question in **Lisa Tøfting's** article *Flere sprog – flere verdener. Døves opvækst i Grønland* (Multiple Languages—Multiple Worlds. Growing up Hearing-impaired in Greenland) is how the hearing-impaired in Greenland can be given the same opportunities as the rest of the Greenlandic population. She sheds light on the living conditions of the hearing-impaired in former times and at present. Sign language is not recognized as an independent language in Greenland, and professional interpretation is not made available to the hearing-impaired. They are reduced to getting by with the assistance of friends and family. Today there is a school as well as a boarding special school for the hearing-impaired in Sisimiut, but by the time the pupils turn 18, their occupational and educational opportunities are very limited. According to the author's assessment, this does not comply with the political objective to provide equal rights and equal opportunity for people with disabilities that was adopted by the Landsting (Greenland's Home Rule parliament) in the fall of 1996.

The second part of the book—*Børn og unges socialisering i spændingsfeltet mellem tradition og modernitet* (**The Socialization of Children and Youth at the Intersection Between Tradition and Modernity**)—opens with an article by **Karen Langgård** who elucidates the problem from a historical point of view. She asks, *Aamma uagut taamaappugut? Er også vi sådan? Meninger i aviser om opdragelse og uddannelse i begyndelsen af det 20. årh.* (Aamma uagut taamaappugut? Are We Also Like That? Opinions in Newspapers on Child Rearing and Education in the Early 20th Century). Subsequently, she analyzes articles in *Atuagagdliutit*, *Nalunaerutit*, and *AvangnâmioK* exemplary of the many conflicts concerning child rearing and education during the second decade of the 20th century. She demonstrates that the debate was characterized by power struggles over secularization and the status of the church. Moreover, the debate became part of the vehement internal negotiation of ethnic national identity in the face of the transition from sealing to a more diverse occupational structure. Progressive opinion-formers pointed out that the level of knowledge and agency would have to increase if material and intellectual progress and development were to be realized. Passive obedience should not be the ideal. The reader is encouraged to consider whether the sociopolitical development in Greenland might have entailed that passive obedience have come to signify something truly Greenlandic—and whether this matter has become very difficult to change by virtue of its link to the ethnic national element despite all the positive visions of *Atuarfitsialak*² of a school of active and well-stimulated children.

The educational opportunities of children and young people are an important parameter for Greenland's future development, and consequently the next three authors

2 *Atuarfitsialak* or The Good School designates the school reform which was adopted and became effective in 2003.

also engage themselves in the topic. First **Jonathan Motzfeldt** asks in his article *Uddannelse og modernisering – hvor er vi på vej hen?* (Education and Modernization—Where are We Headed?) He points to the fact that the future will confront Greenland with major challenges, and that the children and young people of today will be the ones having to tackle these challenges. The long-term political goal is to establish a self-sustaining economy and an enhanced home rule. One of the means is boosting the educational level, not least language proficiency. The article focuses on the obligation of society and politicians to create the optimal conditions for this process to be successful. Motzfeldt emphasizes that stimulating energy and initiative is preferable to attempting to coerce children and youth into completing a certain education.

Jane Buus Sørensen looks at *Atuarfitsialak, Den gode skole* (Atuarfitsialak, The Good School) and asks how a school reform based on Greenlandic cultural values can ensure that children apart from learning about culture may acquire fundamental universal skills? (*Atuarfitsialak – hvordan kan en skolereform, som er baseret på grønlandske kulturelle værdier sikre, at børn udover at lære noget om kulturen kan lære fundamentale universelle kundskaber?*) She shows some unintentional consequences of the Atuarfitsialak model for the pupils' qualifications. The author's main argument is that an ideologically marked one-sided focus on Greenlandic cultural values as the crucial basis for that which is taught can conceal existing shortcomings and thus question the overarching goal of the reform: To produce graduates who are capable of either completing basic vocational training, high school, or equivalent. The article argues that the point of departure for the reform and its implementation risk escaping debate and criticism exactly because of the school authorities' choice of ideological standpoint.

In her article *Tilknytning og selvstændighed – unges fravalg af uddannelse* (Attachment and Independence—Young People Rejecting Education), **Janne Flora** proposes some possible reasons why many young people from the villages decide to do without education. The concepts of independence and attachment to family and place are implicated in any child's upbringing. They are central to the child's personal development and ability to make responsible decisions later in life. Seeing these concepts as incorporated parts of the philosophical concept of the person, the article throws light on possible reasons why young people reject education. It is argued that rejecting education does not necessarily denote lack of independence or responsibility. Rather, a discrepancy between the priorities of village communities and political society respectively may be at work.

The fact that modern Greenland leaves room for developing a youth subculture, particularly in the bigger cities, is described by **Jakub Christensen Medonos** in his article *Når subkultur viser tænder* (When Subculture Bares its Teeth).

The article is about New Year celebration and graffitiists in Sisimiut in 2004. The graffitiists occasion a brief discussion of the concepts of youth and creativity. The New Year celebration 04'BAAJ was organized by young people and featured a number of

creative communities within rap, graffiti, and rock music. Furthermore, the article contains a short interview with graffiti artists, their perception of the unorthodox art form as well as its various applications in Sisimiut. A discussion of the concept of creativity concludes the article. It is argued that creativity and youth have much in common.

Susanne Mejer, who lives and works in Tasiilaq, writes about *Socialisation i Østgrønland i nyere tid* (Contemporary Socialization in East Greenland). How are values and elements of the primary socialization connected to modern Greenland as a contemporary secondary socializational goal? Mejer believes that one problem is a severe shortage of professional secondary social agents, which causes primary socialization to reach too far into the secondary sphere. Children and youth are confronted with secondary socializational demands too late. These tendencies are more pronounced in East Greenland than in West Greenland. This is due to the fact that East Greenland was colonized more recently and is isolated geographically and culturally speaking. Some of the multifarious problems are outlined and discussed from theoretical as well as empirical approaches in her endeavor to introduce greater nuance into the picture of socialization in East Greenland.

In her article, **Ruth Blytmann Nielsen** discusses whether the modern Greenlandic self-image is tied to mechanisms of fear and anxiety. (*Er den moderne grønlandske selvopfattelse forbundet med frygt- og angstmekanismer?*) The article focuses on the communicative behavior prevalent among the people of Greenland today. This behavior is thought to be the result of the original method of child rearing which aimed at adapting the individual to a way of life that privileged community rather than the individual person. The method of adaptation consisted in using mechanisms of fear and emotional control. The author believes that this has been and remains the cause of the low degree of self-acceptance characteristic of certain parts of the Greenlandic population. She argues that this type of communicative behavior has had problematic effects on the contemporary population and that it explains in part the high suicide rate in Greenland—especially among young Greenlandic men. Using an empirical study of the communicative behavior as background, the author seeks to confirm or reject the hypothesis that the mechanism of fear and the emotional control are indeed present in the Greenlanders' problem-solving behavior.

The third part of the anthology—*Opvækstvilkår, trivsel og sundhedsadfærd hos børn og unge* (Family Conditions, Well-being, and Health-related Behavior among Children and Youth)—features contributions from two doctors and two psychologists in Greenland who are occupied with family conditions and health-related behavior among children and youth. In addition, an external PhD student at Ilisimatusarfik, coming from Nunavut, contributes knowledge and information on suicide among Greenlandic youth in a circumpolar perspective.

Gert Mulvad's contribution titled *Børn i Grønland, Grønland for børn* (Children in Greenland, Greenland for Children) underscores the fact that children's social, psychological, and health-related family conditions—as well as their family's role and responsibility therein—are decisive factors for the future of the country. There is considerable evidence that causes of disease are to be found at the early stages of life—during pregnancy while all organs are developing and during infancy and adolescence when habits and influences can attain lifelong significance. Even adequate and ever-improving treatment facilities will only partially enable us to treat our way out of the health problems that are present today and which the country can expect to see increase in the future. It is necessary to intensify the preventive and health-promoting efforts and through research gain a better understanding of the relevant diseases' social, cultural, and environmental causes. The article suggests various interventions and priorities when it comes to children's everyday lives as seen in the relation between family, school, and social and sanitary authorities.

Next, **Birgit Niclasen** presents her knowledge of children in Greenland in an exposition of medical literature. In the article *Sunde børn i Grønland – hvordan når vi målet?* (Healthy Children in Greenland—How do We Achieve Our Goal?), she provides a survey of the available knowledge on health, medical problems, and health-related behavior in the children and youth of Greenland. Greenlandic children have become taller, and their health has improved. The health problems found in Greenlandic children are similar to the ones described in children in other parts of the world, even though the scope of these problems may differ. Infant mortality remains high compared to the Nordic countries. The acute disease pattern is dominated by infections, but injuries and after-effects of accidents are also frequent. Inflammation of the middle ear and its consequences continue to be a problem. We are witnessing a rise in chronic diseases such as allergy, asthma, obesity, and disabilities. Excess weight and obesity have tripled during the past 25 years. This poses a threat to health along with unfavorable habits pertaining to smoking, alcohol, and sexual health. Many diseases contain a social element. Social and economic inequality as well as cultural change have affected the disease pattern, but as of yet the degree of significance to children has been insufficiently researched. The article concludes that better data on children's health in general are necessary to ensure a more adequate prioritization of resources for future health promotion, and the author suggests constructing a coherent set of indicators for children's health and monitoring their development over time.

In her contribution *Sammenhæng mellem tidlige opvækstvilkår og trivsel i skolen* (On the Relation Between Early Family Conditions and Well-being in School), **Karen Marie Nathansen** argues that the idea behind *Atuarfitsialak* should be enlarged to comprise an idea of the good life, starting in the day nurseries. In 2004, the author conducted a survey on well-being among 8-9-year-olds in Sisimiut. She intended to procure a backdrop against which a discussion of the implementation of *Atuarfitsialak* might take place, especially within the subject of Personal development. In the survey

on well-being the general well-being of the child was examined by taking three parameters into account: Day nursery début, contact to grandparents, and whether the child had experienced his or her parents break up. The results show that both boys and girls that age do better if their parents do not split up, and if they have had contact to their grandparents while starting day nursery only after one year. The author concludes that Greenlandic society should stake on postponing children's day nursery début for the sake of their emotional development while at the same time allocating much better funding to day care services.

The article *Børns og unges kropsbevidsthed* (Children and Young People's Body Awareness) by **Naaja Hjelholt Nathanielsen** deals with the significance of the body to the formation of a well-balanced personality. The author ventures that too many children and young people in Greenland suffer from poor body awareness, which exposes them to a host of serious risks while they are growing up. The cause of the poor body awareness is to be found in an instrumental view of children which fails to pay sufficient respect to children as independent individuals. The article contains cases and calls upon adults to intervene in a number of areas and thus help children to develop a healthy body awareness. The depicted cases have been made anonymous.

Jack Hicks' article *Selv mord blandt grønlandske unge i et historisk og cirkumpolart perspektiv* (Suicide by Greenlandic Youth, in Historical and Circumpolar Perspective) can be seen in relation to the work of PAARISA (Office of Health and Preventive Measures) toward comprehensive national suicide prevention in Greenland. The article imparts knowledge of suicide based on work with statistical data. It supplies a brief survey of the available (and unavailable) scientific knowledge of suicide among Greenlandic youth and places the current suicide rate among Greenlandic youth in a historical and circumpolar perspective.

The fourth part of the anthology—*Modeller og redskaber for arbejde med børn og unge* (**Models and Tools for Working with Children and Youth**)—is written by practitioners and presents models and tools which are already applied or ought to be tested in the work with children and youth in Greenland.

In her article *Refleksioner fra en sundhedsplejerske* (Reflections of a Visiting Nurse), **Vibeke Storm Vollerup**, who has worked as a visiting nurse in the municipality of Ilulissat, focuses on socially vulnerable children and the professional cooperation that supports them. A tool for categorizing children's well-being, Børnelinealen (The Child Ruler), is employed in order to render visible the number of threatened children. A class of children born in Ilulissat is measured against this ruler, and the share of threatened children is found to be high. The article features two family descriptions concentrating on the early mother-child relationship. It argues in favor of the necessity of a constructive interdisciplinary collaboration and singles out various initiatives

in the municipality which may hold new potential for development, especially to the young mothers.

Ann Andreasen, principal at the children's home in Uummannaq, and sociologist **Jean-Michel Huctin** tie care to Greenlandic culture when dealing with neglected children. Based on the authors' long experience at the children's home in Uummannaq, their article *Børn på tynd is* (Children on Thin Ice) argues that a family-like environment affording the child the necessary loving care—inserted into an inspiring framework of Greenlandic culture—has a therapeutic effect on neglected children. When working with children and Greenlandic culture one should on the one hand avoid a narrow-minded ethnic conception to prevent the children from becoming too culturally self-centered. On the other hand, expressions of the specific Greenlandic culture as they are reflected in mentality, feelings, and general behavior should figure in all considerations, with all deference to the person under treatment as well as to the effects of the social work.

Psychologist **Conni Gregersen** presents a set of fundamental socioeducational assumptions that should be incorporated into the practical socioeducational treatment of Greenlandic children and adolescents in care. In her article *Indhold og metoder i det socialpædagogiske behandlingsarbejde for anbragte børn og unge* (Contents and Methods of the Socioeducational Treatment of Children and Adolescents in Care), these socioeducational assumptions are illustrated by two examples taken from the socioeducational practice at two children's homes. The examples highlight the children's need for a thoroughly structured practical socioeducational treatment, and this need forms the occasion for presenting some fundamental considerations regarding structured pedagogy. A description of excursions and summer camps pinpoints the positive effect of a structured span of time for Greenlandic children and adolescents in care. The author wishes to convey the message that the child should stay at the center of our attention. Only by building a relation to the child will his or her difficulties relating be solvable, and only through important and positive experiences will the child be able to learn from experience rather than repress or forget it.

In her article *På vej mod en grønlandsk pædagogik* (Toward a Greenlandic Version of Pedagogy), **Rikke Høgh Olesen** recommends that day care centers apply a kind of pedagogy that takes Greenlandic conditions as its starting point. She argues in favor of creating a Greenlandic version of pedagogy that respects the values of the past, is based on Greenland's unique cultural and societal norms, reevaluates the existing practice, and considers the future qualification requirements that children and young people in a modern and multicultural Greenlandic society will be expected to meet. The author outlines such a version of pedagogy which should be characterized by professionalism and cultural awareness and be developed in a central forum with regulatory powers. Otherwise pedagogical practice risks turning into a product of external expectations and cultural standards.

Kirsten Ørgaard's article *Socialt belastede børn og unge – vilkår og muligheder* (Underprivileged Children and Youth—Conditions and Opportunities) is based on Greenland's rapid societal development during the past 50 years, the result of which has been massive social problems and neglect of children and youth. She points out that the parents' own social problems combined with alcohol abuse often are the direct and visible cause of widespread child neglect. She refers to data from her own study "Børn og unge i politiets døgnrapporter – hvem og hvorfor?" (2003) ("Children and Youth in Police Reports—Who and Why?"), indicating that far too many children in Nuuk have been in contact with the Nuuk police—either as victims, perpetrators, or involved parties in an incident. She emphasizes the importance of an interdisciplinary and holistic effort in connection with neglect of children and youth and suggests concrete measures within the Greenland Home Rule and the municipalities. Finally, the author remarks that we should all cooperate to combat neglect in order to prevent the negative social and psychological inheritance from being passed on to certain groups of children and young people.

The anthology closes with **Kirsten Olesen's** contribution *Tværfagligt samarbejde om børn og familier i den offentlige sektor* (Interdisciplinary Collaboration on Children and Families in the Public Sector), in which she advances proposals and recommendations of methods applicable to interdisciplinary collaboration on children and families in the public sector to professionals, politicians, and civil servants.

We hope that the anthology will be used as a source of inspiration by all who take an active part in building a Greenlandic society with adequate living conditions for children and youth.

Nuuk, June 1, 2007

Wolfgang Kahlig and Nina Banerjee