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KNOWLEDGE-BASED EFFORTS  
FOR SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED  
CHILDREN IN DAYCARE

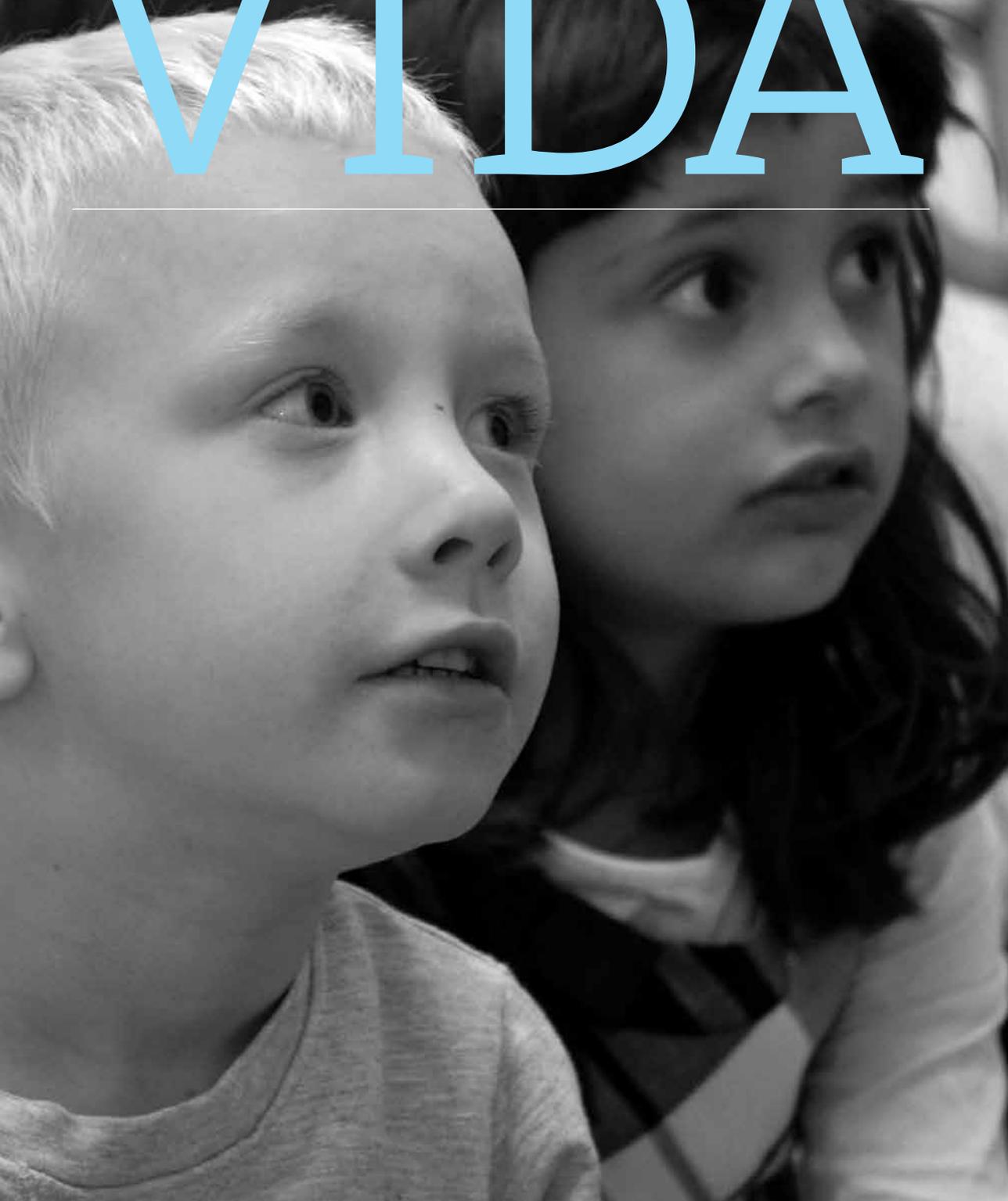
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SUMMARY OF RESULTS  
**2013**

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# VIDA

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VIDA  
Knowledge-based efforts for socially disadvantaged children in daycare  
Summary of results 2013

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## PREFACE

The programme presented in this booklet, *Knowledge-based efforts for socially disadvantaged children in daycare (VIDA)*, is about caring for children. About committed professionals endeavouring to establish social bonds. About ensuring that every child is a valued participant in a child-centred community. About a daycare system in which every child thrives and learns, and in which socially disadvantaged children are included on an equal footing.

The foundations of VIDA are what we already know – i.e. research. On this basis, a change process (intervention) has been developed and assessed. Daycare professionals receive and share knowledge within their everyday practice with a clear objective: improving children's well-being and learning via inclusive pedagogical practices.

In Denmark, 97 per cent of 3-5-year-olds attend daycare. This makes daycare one of the key settings in the lives of children. It is here they learn how to assert themselves and navigate social settings without the support of their parents. Moreover, it is here they learn new skills, satisfy their curiosity, get involved in relationships and learning activities, investigate their surroundings, think, and communicate with their peers and adults.

Well-being is crucial for children's development. Well-being stems from children's active involvement in learning activities; from a sense of attachment.

The opposite is true of unhappy children. They are often outside the group; they do not feel included. These children need the support of competent and professional adults. In professional daycare, pedagogical knowledge and expertise is applied when children who are not thriving are encountered. Daycare professionals analyse whether the education and care they offer supports the inclusion of the individual child. Are the right activities being set in motion? What else could be done? Should a new approach be tried out?

In previous research, including the study "*Kan daginstitutioner gøre en forskel?*" (*Can daycare centres make a difference? – only available in Danish*) (Jensen, 2005), daycare staff have highlighted their need for knowledge, time and the support of the local authorities, if they are to establish a learning environment that embraces all children. These needs are taken into account in the VIDA project, and the project places great emphasis on knowledge, time for reflection, and support from local authorities.

With this booklet, we hope that the results of the VIDA project can contribute to the ongoing debate on quality development within daycare, so as to support the well-being, learning and development of all children.

*Copenhagen, november 2013,  
professor Bente Jensen,  
Aarhus University (IUP),  
project manager*

## WHEN COLLABORATION AND SHARING NEW KNOWLEDGE HAVE POSITIVE CHILD OUTCOMES

A total of 7,000 children at 129 daycare centres in 4 municipalities participated in VIDA from 2010-2013. These children were split into three groups. One group received what might be termed the basic VIDA package, VIDA-Basis, where staff were specially trained with a view to changing their practices. The second group, VIDA-Basis+, combined this training with a focus on parental involvement. The third group was used as a control group.

What is new about VIDA is that daycare staff, managers and consultants from the local authority are all taught to apply the following three perspectives in their work.

- Look for resources. Danish and Scandinavian research has demonstrated that it is difficult to include every child – particularly socially disadvantaged children – in the daycare setting. Daycare staff often view socially disadvantaged children as children who have problems; i.e. their strengths tend to be overlooked. This sort of troubleshooting approach can stand in the way of VIDA's primary objective: that every child is seen, heard and included. Daycare staff within VIDA apply a resource perspective: they focus on what the child can do, instead of what the child *cannot* do.
- Take an active approach to learning. This perspective supports a view of children (and adults) as being active in their own learning processes. The adults initiate an activity, but the children are involved in the development process. This can be witnessed, for example, during assembly situations at the daycare centres participating in VIDA. During assembly situations, children are organised in small groups, allowing staff the opportunity to speak with both the individual child and the whole group, and thereby gain a

good understanding of the children's interests and level of involvement. The activities offered during assembly time are influenced by the children's wishes and knowledge.

- Share what you have learnt with the organisation. This third and final perspective concerns the need for organisation-wide innovation in order to create genuine change. This means that the daycare centre as a whole must work with the same overall objective. All staff members must work with the same theme, e.g. language or learning identities, but the specific pedagogical activities may vary, not least because the children are involved in defining the process.

When all staff members work with the same theme, the risk of exclusion can be counteracted. VIDA requires the daycare centre adapts to new learning objectives. Splitting activities into smaller groups of children creates new possibilities for every child to be heard and included. Daycare professionals can see, hear and monitor the child's needs and development on a daily basis.

### Parental involvement

The VIDA Basis+ parental programme includes an additional focus on how to get parents involved and on how parents can contribute in terms of supporting their child's learning at home. A concrete example of an initiative to strengthen parental involvement is the use of a so-called feelings folder. This folder helps the child to attach words and images to feelings, making it easier for the child to recognise, understand and express these feelings. Children take the folder home with them, thereby creating a dialogue between parents and the daycare centre. This dialogue improves the effectiveness of the learning activity.

## VIDA'S RESULTS

### THE RESULTS SHOW THAT:

VIDA had an effect on all children in terms of well-being and socio-emotional development.

- VIDA made a positive difference, particularly with regard to organisational learning within daycare centres in the form of focused, systematic efforts to change pedagogical practices. Over the course of the two-year project, the daycare centres' work undoubtedly became more knowledge-based, focused and systematic, and pedagogical innovation took place in the vast majority of participating centres.
- The initiated change processes had positive effects on several aspects of the socio-emotional development and well-being of all children.
- VIDA-Basis had a distinct positive effect among children from an ethnic minority background

with a significant reduction in problems with peer relationships.

- VIDA-Basis+ had a distinct positive effect among children from low-income families with a significant reduction in problems with peer relationships.
- Parental involvement in VIDA-Basis+ had a positive effect in terms of reducing child behavioural problems.
- Surprisingly, the programme had no visible effect on children's cognitive learning, nor was any particular effect seen among socially disadvantaged children.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH HAS TO SAY ABOUT QUALITY IN DAYCARE

The production of new knowledge about which factors promote quality within daycare and support child well-being and learning through inclusion is a political objective (see e.g. the report from the task force for the daycare of tomorrow, “Task Force for Fremtidens Dagtilbud”, 2012, only available in Danish). Such efforts have been underway for a long time. The focus is on establishing daycare, schools and youth education in which there is greater focus on promoting the well-being and learning opportunities of every child and young person.

The methods used in VIDA draw on knowledge from research that demonstrates the individual and societal benefits of an early pedagogical intervention. One of the most well-known and well-researched interventions is the Perry Preschool Project, developed in the USA during the 1960s with a follow-up study approximately 40 years later. Working to boost children’s social, language and mathematical skills, the Perry Preschool Project demonstrated positive effects on child outcomes, both short- and long-term. The children participating in the project subsequently exceeded expectations with regard to a number of parameters, including school and further education, career and social involvement.

James Heckman, Nobel laureate in economics, has analysed special interventions for pre-school children (including Perry Preschool), and he concludes that early, daycare-based intervention is crucial. Such interventions improve children’s opportunities, both with regard to their schooling and their subsequent professional career. According to Heckman, the economic returns on interventions aimed at the child’s early years (daycare) are multiplied

eightfold compared with later interventions, e.g. offered within a school setting.

However, in this regard there is an important difference between Denmark and the USA. American programmes have targeted a small number of children identified as having special needs. They have been implemented in specific areas by specially trained personnel. Implementing US programmes in Denmark, however, requires adapting them to a Danish context with universal daycare. Programmes would need to be implemented by existing daycare staff at centres where the population is not a few selected children, but 97 per cent of all 3-5-year-olds.

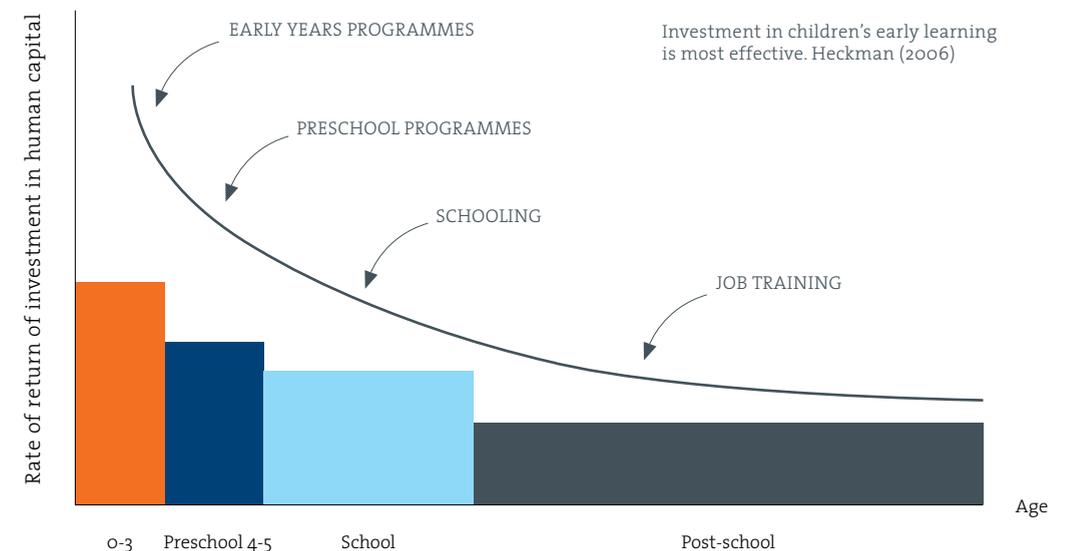
### DANISH RESEARCH

A recent Danish study focused on the effects of daycare participation (Bauchmüller et al., 2011). This study found that children attending high quality daycare (high staffing levels and trained personnel) outperformed their peers in school leaving examinations. Another recent study shows that daycare for 0-3-year-olds with a high ratio of professionally trained staff and good staffing levels improve pupils’ grades in school leaving examinations (Gupta & Simonsen, 2013). The latter study also finds evidence of effects among the most socially disadvantaged children that were not found in the former study.

Only one Danish intervention study, the so-called HPA project (Jensen et al., 2009), considers effects in relation to the content of daycare. The goal of the HPA project was to improve daycare professionals’ qualifications for working specifically with children’s well-being and learning

through inclusion. The concept of *action competence* was developed for this purpose in order to create a new pedagogy of opportunity within daycare. This new pedagogy was founded on a resource perspective. The concept was translated into a tool, the reflection tool, which enabled daycare professionals to visualise whether their practices supported children’s well-being and learning. Moreover, the tool also enabled daycare professionals to assess whether the child acquires more knowledge and skills, achieves a greater sense of identity, an improved ability to take control or a broader repertoire of actions, and thus develops positively.

Project evaluations showed that the children’s socio-emotional competences improved. Furthermore, the children tended to outperform peers in terms of language and mathematical skills; i.e. in comparison with the control group, children in the intervention group developed greater mathematical ability and better understood the meaning of opposites such as high-low, large-small etc.. They were likewise better at recognising their own name in writing, they recognised more letters of the alphabet, and were more likely to experiment with reading or writing.



# THE VIDA INTERVENTION PROGRAMME

The VIDA programme sends daycare staff back to school. Staff then return to the workplace and test new approaches to pedagogical practices based on what they have learnt. This process is repeated over a period of two years, with the programme alternating between research/theory-based and experiential knowledge, between bottom-up and top-down approaches, and between theory and practice.

As any pedagogical changes must be implemented within a local authority context, daycare managers and consultants from the local authority are offered the chance to take part in supplementary workshops.

## FIVE STEPS

The VIDA intervention process is divided into five steps that reflect the interplay between education and practice.

STEP ONE is about knowledge. Participants are introduced to the latest theoretical and research-based knowledge about children, well-being, learning and inclusion. This takes place in a context where the participants are given the opportunity to reflect upon and share knowledge. Everyday experiences are related to a research-based foundation. Experience has shown that the process of applying pedagogical concepts to concrete practical activities is new to most participants.

STEP TWO concerns reflection and analysis. It is in itself a refreshing change for daycare professionals to be afforded the time for thorough analysis of the everyday practices in which they take part. The IT-based reflection tool developed for the project (based on the HPA project) has proven valuable in this context. The tool allows the identification and fleshing out of areas where it would be beneficial to take action,

for example improving the children's social skills and their ability to deal with conflicts as a group.

STEP THREE centres on organisational learning. In more precise terms, this entails that the daycare manager, or other member of staff who has participated in VIDA training, assumes responsibility for sharing new knowledge with the entire daycare centre. Change is created by the whole centre working together.

In STEP FOUR the actual experimental process begins. This involves putting the content of the training into practice by initiating experiments. An experiment lasts as a minimum one month, and the entire daycare centre works together in both the implementation and evaluation phase. In one daycare centre, for example, focus was on conflict management. The conclusion was that the intervention had helped teach the children how to describe their feelings and how to improve their management of conflict situations.

The process concludes with STEP FIVE, a two-day workshop where daycare managers from across the country meet. This workshop trains participants with regard to how to work with more effective staff meetings at their own daycare centre, and how to translate their newly acquired knowledge and methods for collaboration into daily practices.

The five steps were conducted over the space of a year (2011-2012). This process was repeated the following year (2012-2013). This enabled participants to really get to grips with the working methods, management of meetings, knowledge sharing and experiments in such ways that they became a natural part of everyday practices.

As one daycare manager put it: *"This type of knowledge sharing and exchange of experiences has been really positive and has become a new professional standard when we work with joint experiments"*.

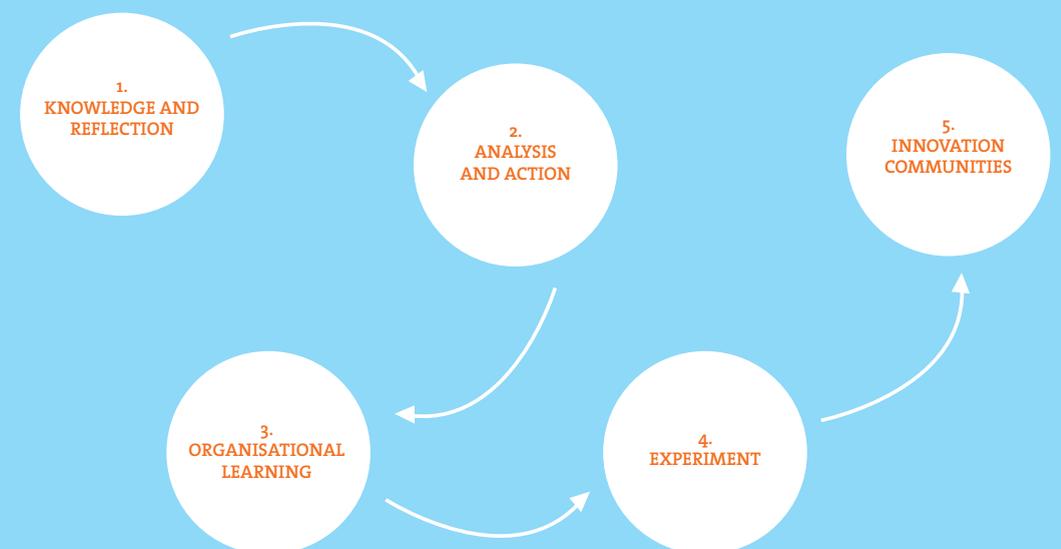
## BOTTOM-UP AND TOP-DOWN

The type of quality development proposed by VIDA builds on the concrete current (local) political situation and the daycare centre context. This foundation fits well with the Scandinavian approach of working from a bottom-up perspective where ideas emerge from practice. This bottom-up perspective is combined with a top-down perspective, giving daycare professionals access to the latest research-based knowledge via VIDA's materials and tools.

The publication *VIDA i praksis (VIDA in practice)* – only available in Danish) describes how such processes develop within the everyday activities at the individual daycare centre, following participation in the VIDA programme.

As an example of this, the daycare centre, Villa Maj, can be mentioned. Villa Maj developed a long-running process based on the knowledge from VIDA regarding the concepts of 'action competence' and 'learning identity'; through analysis using the VIDA reflection tool, Villa Maj succeeded at creating new learning activities for the children based on their newly acquired knowledge and the VIDA materials, while remaining firmly rooted within the local context.

## PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION – 5 STEPS





## VILLA MAJ – AN EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE

Villa Maj is one of the daycare centres that worked with VIDA in practice. The daycare centre takes in children from 0-3 years of age (nursery) and children from 3-6 years of age (kindergarten). The kindergarten consists of three, non-age specific groups that work closely together. However, the centre divides the children into four age-specific groups that work with age-specific activities for periods of one week.

### LEARNING IDENTITY

In conjunction with the VIDA programme, Villa Maj worked on enhancing the children's learning identity. This is a new concept that the staff developed themselves, inspired by the VIDA reflection tool. It is defined by two elements: firstly that all children come to see themselves as someone who is good at learning; secondly that the children can identify with the learning objectives of the groups in which they participate.

Villa Maj's experiment *The Roots* deals with learning identities through focused, systematic work with singing games and child peer massage. The goal is that the children learn how to learn in a group, and experience that they are actually good at learning. Through this experiment with this particular group, including song and movement, the specific needs and interests of both the individual child and the group were put centre stage.

### EVALUATION

According to the daycare centre's own reports, clear development could be seen in every child by the end of the experiment. The simple format and clear structure, in particular, had a positive effect and was appropriate for the age group. The children felt sufficiently challenged and felt that they were good at something. The experiment gave the children a common task; helping one another to sing and give massages,

thereby strengthening the sense of community and group identity.

Parents with children attending Villa Maj were invited to two workshops lasting 30 minutes where they were introduced to the daycare centre's activities, and they were encouraged to support these activities at home. Parents were also asked to evaluate the experiment, including interviewing their child about the massage experiment. The results were clear: parents were happy to be involved in the experiment and experienced greater coherence between activities offered in the daycare centre and activities at home, and they felt that they better understood the pedagogics behind the activities.

### LEARNING IN THE DAYCARE CENTRE AS A WHOLE

Staff also felt they had learnt something. They had a better understanding of learning in relation to the concrete group of children at the daycare centre, and of how to change practices in such a way as to benefit the entire organisation.

Three main points emerge from the evaluation of the experiment:

- Smaller groups and focused activities made it possible to better support children's development.
- The most socially disadvantaged children in particular formed new relationships and came to see themselves as good at learning within the group.
- The active participation of parents in the experiment allowed support in the home for the child's development of learning identities.

## RANDERS MUNICIPALITY – BROAD IMPLEMENTATION OF VIDA

The Municipality of Randers in eastern Jutland is one of the four municipalities that piloted the VIDA project during 2010-2013. Almost one third of the children aged 3-5 living in Randers were directly involved, in addition to daycare managers and staff at the participating daycare centres.

### KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND COLLABORATION

Randers Municipality decided to prioritise VIDA. Participating daycare centres were allocated additional resources, enabling them to, for example, hire temporary personnel. Moreover, two consultants from the municipality worked with the daycare centres on all the project's initiatives and processes, and the municipality maintained close cooperation with the project group (researchers from Aarhus University), other municipalities and the training providers throughout the project. The researchers met with municipal managers. The consultants organized cross-municipal network meetings in which the project steering committee also took part. The municipality faced certain challenges with regard to participating in the project: as a politically governed organization, political logic sometimes clashed with the project's objectives. However, in part due to the efforts of the two consultants, it was possible to make adjustments and communicate between different levels of administration.

### THE CONSULTANTS' ROLE

The municipal administration elected to base the work with VIDA on the three VIDA principles. One of these principles – look for resources – is a rejection of a troubleshooting perspective. The administration worked with this principle from several perspectives in order to support motivation and commitment in the participating

daycare centres. This is not a new way of thinking in the municipality, as Randers Municipality has focused on working with a resource perspective for a number of years, for example by promoting a social psychological approach in the support of children. This has taken the form of working with positive social relationships between children and adults in daycare, recording video footage of situations that can shed light on these relationships and children's reactions to various situations. As a result, daycare staff have become aware of their own role in these kinds of interaction. A strong foundation therefore already existed in Randers upon which to base VIDA.

The second principle – take an active approach to learning – led to shared reflection among daycare managers and staff, both during training and at subsequent network meetings, regarding how best to implement VIDA in the context of their own centre. In VIDA, learners compile their own manual. The consultants were dedicated to offering assistance when participants expressed difficulty in motivating and involving colleagues. They also assessed that visits to the individual daycare centres could help support the process.

Daycare managers and staff were highly preoccupied with the third VIDA principle – share what you have learnt with the organization. The consultants supported managers' efforts to put the knowledge acquired at workshops into practice with regard to effective meeting management. At network meetings with managers of the participating daycare centres, the consultants supported managers in developing a process to ensure all staff had a sense of ownership in relation to VIDA, that all

staff participated in collaborative experiments on an equal footing, and that all staff became active learners in the process. The VIDA reflection tool supported these efforts by basing the experiments conducted at the daycare centres on thorough analysis of the children's needs; thus the tool became a crucial element in the successful implementation of VIDA.

### THE PERSPECTIVE FOR PARTICIPATING DAYCARE CENTRES IN RANDERS

At municipal level, the administration became aware of the importance of involving daycare staff in development projects in close partnerships with centre management. Innovative work with experiments within the daycare centres resulted, according to the administration, in high levels of energy and commitment among both staff and parents, benefitting the children.

As the consultant from Randers Municipality put it, "There is a desire and a determination to continue working with continuous innovation based on VIDA. More specifically, Randers Municipality has decided to use the reflection tool in the future and to implement the VIDA approach in the remaining municipal daycare centres over the next few years. VIDA's innovative approach, which invites translation to different contexts, has made a lot of sense for both daycare centres and the administration."

### SOCIAL INNOVATION THROUGH COLLABORATION



# THE EFFECTS OF VIDA

VIDA gauged effectiveness by asking daycare staff to complete a questionnaire for each child. This questionnaire included questions regarding the child's socio-emotional development taken from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which is an internationally used and recognized tool. SDQ measures five dimensions: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer relationship problems and prosocial behavior. Each of these five dimensions is treated as a separate outcome and the first four dimensions can be combined to generate a total difficulties score. SDQ also provides a basis for calculating a difficulties index (SDQ impact score). Cognitive competences were measured according to learning objectives inspired by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), focusing on children's learning within areas relevant to daycare curricula such as written and oral language skills, mathematical understanding, understanding of nature etc.

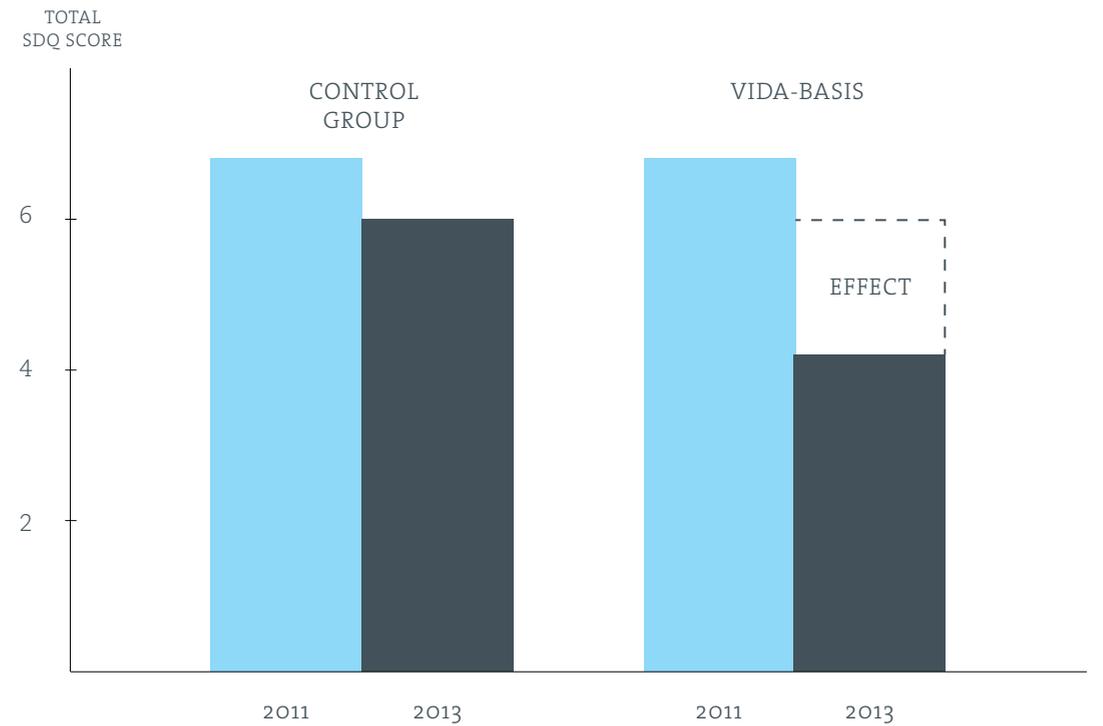
NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN EACH ROUND OF DATA COLLECTION, AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN ALSO PARTICIPATING IN THE PREVIOUS ROUNDS		
ROUND	TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN THE ROUND	NUMBER OF CHILDREN ALSO INCLUDED IN ALL PREVIOUS ROUNDS
1	6,833	-
2	7,472	4,602
3	6,911	2,160

Children were measured in three rounds. The number of children participating in each of these three rounds is illustrated in the table above. As shown, 2,160 children participated in every round.

### EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

In broad terms, the VIDA intervention had positive effects in relation to several SDQ dimensions. Firstly, the VIDA-Basis intervention resulted in significant positive effects in two SDQ dimensions: emotional symptoms and conduct problems. There were also improvements in the remaining three dimensions: hyperactivity, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behaviour; however, these effects were not statistically significant. There was also a significant improvement in the total difficulties score (combining the first four SDQ dimensions) for the VIDA-Basis intervention (as illustrated in the figure).

Secondly, there were also positive effects of the VIDA-Basis+ intervention. However, in this case, there were only statistically significant effects in one of the five SDQ dimensions: a reduction in conduct problems. The effects of the VIDA-Basis+ intervention were generally smaller than for VIDA-Basis. In addition to the SDQ dimensions and the total difficulties score, a separate supplement was used in which daycare staff responded with their overall assessment of whether the individual child had issues within the social and personal areas included in the SDQ questionnaire. These responses were used



Stylized illustration of VIDA-Basis effects.

to calculate a difficulties index (SDQ impact score). Analysis of the effects of the VIDA-Basis and VIDA-Basis+ interventions using this index confirmed the positive effects.

In summary, analysis showed that VIDA had positive effects for all children in terms of well-being and socio-emotional development.

In addition to these overall results, analysis demonstrated a significant reduction in peer relationship problems among children with ethnic minority backgrounds for VIDA-Basis. Finally, VIDA-Basis+ had a separate positive effect among children from low-income families with a significant reduction in peer relationship problems for this group.

### CASE STUDIES

Case studies concerning organisational learning demonstrated further positive effects of VIDA, particularly in three areas: more focus on knowledge-based, focused and systematic work with children's well-being, development and inclusion; changed management approaches and organisational learning capacity; and greater expectations for the short- and long-term effects of VIDA.

Case studies concerning parental involvement within VIDA-Basis+ demonstrated a more development-oriented approach to working with parents. As a result, parents came to regard daycare staff as sparring partners in relation to child development and behaviour issues.

## FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

There can be a number of explanations for the absence of the expected effects on children's cognitive learning and of particular effects among the most socially disadvantaged children. One possible explanation is the relatively short two-year intervention period. Several leading researchers in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care have stressed the importance and relevance of longitudinal child studies and of examining long-term effects.

American research has shown that children's life chances are rooted in the conditions of their very early childhood (see e.g. Cunha et al., 2006), and that early interventions are most effective. There is also evidence demonstrating that children's well-being, i.e. their socio-emotional competences, are just as important as cognitive competences when understanding the foundations of children's life chances and ongoing development (Heckman and Kautz, 2012). It is important that children develop competences that prepare them for school and contribute to their well-being and identity formation. These competences include language skills, cognitive skills, and the ability to participate in social relationships with others (Almond & Currie, 2011). Thus, supporting children's socio-emotional development and well-being can positively affect children's further education and outcomes later in life.

Recent register-based Danish research suggests the possible long-term effects of high quality daycare; for example a study has shown that children who have attended a daycare centre for 3-6-year-olds that had a high staffing level and well-trained personnel have higher scores in the school-leaving examination compared with their peers (Bauchmüller et al., 2011). However, no effects are found among the most socially disadvantaged children. Similarly, a later study has shown that high quality daycare for 0-3-year-olds also improves student grades in the school-leaving examination (Gupta & Simonsen, 2013). In this study, there were also effects for socially-disadvantaged children, suggesting the effectiveness of early interventions aimed at the very young child (0-3-year-olds).

Based on the results of these two Danish longitudinal studies, the VIDA programme is also expected to have long-term effects.

The results of the VIDA programme give cause to consider monitoring children over time; i.e. studying whether VIDA has long-term effects measured in terms of children's grade averages in the school-leaving examination. It is also worth considering whether VIDA should be implemented from an earlier age, i.e. in day-care for 0-3-year-olds.

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#### DANISH PUBLICATIONS:

Regarding research on quality in daycare and preliminary results of VIDA – see VIDA *statusrapport 1-4* (VIDA-status reports 1-4).

For more on the activities at Villa Maj as well as 12 other examples of VIDA in practice – see VIDA *modelrapport 3: VIDA i Praksis* (VIDA model-report 3: VIDA in Practice).

For more on VIDA training and materials – see VIDA *modelrapport 1-2* (VIDA model reports 1-2).

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The VIDA project was commissioned and funded by The Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and Integration. The project was developed and implemented by researchers from the Department of Education (IUP), Aarhus University (AU) and evaluated in partnership with researchers from the

Department of Economics and Business, AU. Three University Colleges: UC Northern Denmark, UC South Denmark and UC Lillebaelt formed a partnership for training VIDA participants. The programme was implemented in four municipalities: Randers, Horsens, Broendby and Gentofte.

#### Project website:

<http://edu.au.dk/en/research/research-projects/vida/> (English)

<http://edu.au.dk/forskning/projekter/vida/> (Danish)

