

***APPROACHES, EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF
DIVERSIFICATION OF EDUCATION IN DENMARK***

The Danish Education System

The Danish education system is normally divided into a number of main areas according to level and branch of education. The pre-school class corresponds to level 0 in the international ISCED97 classification, and the basic school to level 1 (1st to 6th forms) and level 2 (7th to 10th forms).

The basic school (primary and lower secondary school)

The basic school comprises municipal primary and lower secondary schools (Folkeskole), and independent elementary schools and continuation schools (efterskole). No distinction is made between primary and lower secondary education in the Danish education system. There is limited streaming.

Apart from the compulsory forms 1 to 9, the Folkeskole comprises a voluntary preschool year and an optional 10th year. Approximately 98% of all children attend the pre-school year, and approximately 61% attend the 10th year (2003).

Education is compulsory for nine years in Denmark: The obligation is to ensure teaching for the child, whereas school attendance is not compulsory. The municipal Folkeskole is responsible for most of the schooling (including special schools for the severely handicapped), and is supplemented by independent elementary schools and continuation schools.

In Denmark, all children between the age of 7 and 16 must receive education but - provided a certain minimum standard is obtained - it is a matter of choice for the parents whether the education is received (1) in the publicly provided municipal school, (2) in a private, independent school, or (3) at home.

Students are taught in classes, and they remain together throughout the entire period of compulsory school. The class teacher — normally the Danish teacher — in principle remains the same throughout the whole or greater part of the 9/10 years. The class teacher cooperates with the pupils on the solution of special tasks in relation to the class, ensures continuity of guidance and maintains maximum contact between the family and the school.

According to the *Folkeskole Act*, the school must provide the children with both subject-specific qualifications and prepare them broadly for their role as citizens in a democratic society. The Folkeskole builds on the principle of differentiated teaching within the framework of the class. Teaching is organized in such a way that it strengthens and develops the individual pupil's interests, qualifications and needs. At the same time, it aims at developing the pupils' cooperative skills.

Evaluation

The students are continuously evaluated, and teachers write progress reports twice a year. Progression to the next form is usually automatic. Examinations are limited to forms 9 and 10. Examinations are not compulsory, however, the majority choose to sit the exams. Standard rules for all examinations have been developed to ensure uniformity throughout the country. For the same reason, the questions in written examinations are set and marked centrally.

The Curriculum

The Ministry of Education lays down general curricular aims and optional guidelines for the individual subjects. Schools are permitted to draw up their own curricula as long as they are in accordance with the aims and proficiency areas laid down by the Minister of Education. However, nearly all schools choose to confirm the centrally prepared guidelines as their binding curricula. There are no prescribed textbooks or methodology.

Private schools

Some 12% of all compulsory school-age students attend a private school. The private schools are called *independent elementary schools*. They are self-governing institutions required to measure up to that of the municipal schools, but the framework for the organisation of the teaching is less restrictive.

There are many different types of private schools, and some are based on a specific philosophy, a special pedagogic line or religious belief (1). The State covers approximately 85% of the expenditure of private schools.

Continuation School

Students in Class 8 - 10 can choose to attend a continuation school (*efterskole*). Continuation schools are State-supported private boarding schools, which put a great emphasis on social learning, sports, music etc. in addition to the normal subjects.

The campaign against streaming

The question of inequality and social injustice has been a main theme in the transformation of the Danish school during the twentieth century. Especially, it has been linked to the discussion about streaming as researchers very early realized that there is a tendency that children of different social groups are being classified differently in the school. The philosophy behind the campaign against streaming is that by omitting to separate and instead introduce a unified basic school system it has been avoided to inflict an unforgettable defeat on a large group of children through the streaming. Research proves that when selected students are tested it appears that their standard is not higher than the standard among the best students in the inclusive school. The gifted students test score is just as high in classes where the students remain together. Add to this that fewer students are left behind (Poul Skov 1984; Torkild Thejsen 1990; Beatrice Schindler Rangvid 2005). Other international studies reveal a similar picture (Hans Böckler Stiftung, Düsseldorf

2006). The ideal of equality does not form a contrast to the demand of quality in education. Also socioeconomically it is sensible aiming at a solid common basic education for all students. Instead, streaming must be replaced by differentiation of education.

Upper Secondary Education

Upper Secondary Education programmes for those aged around 16-19 are often called “youth education programmes” in Denmark. This term covers:

- (1) General upper secondary education programmes, which primarily prepare for higher education
- (2) Vocational upper secondary education and training programmes primarily aimed at preparing trainees for a career in a specific trade or industry

In total, 80,3% of a year group finishes a youth education programme (2003). 43,3% complete a general upper secondary education program and 22,8% finish a vocational upper secondary education and training programme. In addition to this, 11,2% completes both types of programmes. The government's goal for 2010 is that at least 85% of a year group complete a youth education programme, and in 2015 at least 95%.

General upper secondary education

There are four academically oriented general upper secondary programmes:

- The 3-year Upper Secondary School Leaving Examination STX
- The 3-year Higher Commercial Examination HHX
- The 3-year Higher Technical Examination HTX
- The 2-year Higher Preparatory Examination Course HF

All four programmes prepare students for further studies, and at the same time, they develop the students’ personal and general competencies. The programmes aim at enhancing the students' independent and theoretical and analytical skills as well as preparing them to become democratic and socially conscious citizens with a global outlook.

The programmes comprise a wide range of both compulsory and optional subjects at different levels. The curriculum and examinations must follow national standards and are subject to external evaluation. Apart from subject-specific oral and written examinations, students must also prepare one or two major written assignments.

The curriculum of the HHX and the HTX differ from those of the STX and the HF in the sense that the HHX instead of some general upper secondary subjects include financial/business subjects and the HTX technical subjects.

The STX and HF programmes are offered by general upper secondary schools called *Gymnasium*, whereas commercial and technical colleges offer the HHX and the HTX programmes, respectively.

Admission requirements for the STX, HHX, and HTX are a Leaving Certificate of the Folkeskole as well as certain subject requirements. For HF, admission requirements are 10 years of basic school or the equivalent thereof. The STX, HHX and HTX are for those aged 16-19, whereas the HF attracts both young people and adults. The HF programme can be taken on a single-subject basis and is also taught in evening classes.

So, all students who have received relevant teaching and passed the prescribed examinations in the basic school may continue in one of the general upper secondary education programme, unless their previous school finds that they have made their choice on an insufficient or unrealistic basis. In such cases, the students in question will be recommended to sit an admission test. Access to the general upper secondary education programmes is thus not entirely free.

In his working paper *The Diversification of Secondary Education: School Curricula in Comparative Perspective* Dr. Aaron Benavot (2006) has described how secondary education in most countries have shifted from being elitist to become more inclusive. Denmark has been through the same transformation since the 1960ties. A new reform of the upper secondary programmes came into effect as of 1st August 2005. The 3-year programmes were changed with the purpose of reaching the same basic structure, i.e. a ½ year common foundation course, followed by 2½ years of study in the direction chosen by the individual student, within a certain framework.

Vocational Upper Secondary Education and training
Vocational education and training (VET) includes a vast range of programmes.

The duration varies from 2 to 5 years, the most typical being 3 1/2 to 4 years. VET programmes are sandwich-type programmes in which theoretical and practical education at a vocational college (approximately 1/3 of the time) alternates with practical training in an approved company or organisation (approximately 2/3 of the time). The dual training principle ensures that the trainees acquire theoretical, practical, general and personal skills, which are in demand on the labour market.

VET programmes are normally completed with a journeyman's test or a similar examination testing vocational skills, knowledge and attitudes.

The majority begin their VET programme with an initial basic programme at a vocational college, but some trainees choose to begin with a period of in-company training before they enter the basic programme. There is a choice of seven basic courses, also called *access routes*:

1. Building and construction
2. Crafts and engineering trades
3. Food production and catering
4. Mechanical engineering, transport and logistics

5. Service industries
6. Technology and communication
7. The commercial field – trade, office and finance.

These basic courses constitute the basis for admission to one of the 121 main programmes of vocational specialisation. In addition to this, there are also specific social and health education programmes (SOSU) as well as programmes within the fields of agriculture, forestry, maritime studies etc., offered by specialised vocational colleges.

Admission to vocational education and training requires completion of compulsory education. All programmes qualify trainees for labour market entry as skilled workers. In addition, most programmes qualify trainees for direct admission to certain types of higher education programmes.

Vocational Basic Training

A special option for young people in difficult educational or employment situation is the individual vocational basic training programme (EGU). The EGU is an individually designed programme focused on a specific trade, or composed of elements from several trades/programmes.

The EGU alternates between school-based periods and periods of practical training in one or more companies. The main focus is on practical training, and an individual programme is designed for each trainee depending on his or her needs and interests. Trainees are offered individual guidance during the entire programme.

In most cases, the trainees finish their EGU after two years but it may be extended by up to one more year.

A complete EGU gives vocational qualifications and also allows the trainees to continue in a VET programme.

Production Schools

Production schools are schools for young people under the age of 25 who have not completed a youth education programme. The purposes of the production schools are to enhance the pupils' personal development and to improve their future possibilities in the education system and on the labour market.

Production schools are based on practical work in workshops, ranging from carpentry or metalwork to media or theatre workshops. Teaching is aimed at providing the young people with qualifications that will enable them to complete a vocationally qualifying education programme after leaving the production schools. Pupils are offered individual guidance on a day-to-day basis to support their efforts to clarify their future choice of education, training and job. There are no examinations at production schools,

Production schools have continuous intake. Pupils typically stay for an average of 5 months; about 30% for more than 6 months.

Challenges of education

It is widely held, that in Denmark there is a special thinking that is reflected in the relation between the teacher and the students, in the content of the curriculum, and in the methodology in the classroom, as well as in the in-class instructions. At present this thinking is under heavy pressure from the government. Policymakers argue that the educational thinking does not live up to the standards of high scores achievement in international tests, and that therefore, it is necessary to standardize the curriculum and evaluate schooling through continuous testing. Teachers are criticized for exaggerating social activities and “democracism” in the school, and the progressivism of the 1970s and 1980s is accused of having ruined the school discipline. Therefore standards and results have to be raised.

Voices from many critical educators and scholars have been raised: Focusing on control and steering in school may destroy the humanistic core values of the school: The idea of the reflective, social-flexible human being, *the educated man*, as Kant, Herder and Humboldt called it. To destroy or corrupt these values will be all the more annoying as we are in a strong position internationally but also because forward-looking business people and analysts anticipate that the future will demand such values. Jobs like engineer etc. will soon be outsourced and will be replaced by demands of competences and values like a “softer” complex problem thinking and a willingness of taking independent responsibility in flat democratic structures to provide continuous growth in our part of the world.

The rearmament has already started by implementation of national tests and standardized curricula. There is a rising tendency that the changes will bring education into line with neo-liberal and neo-conservative management and economy thinking. Here international comparative studies increasingly have set the agenda of the initiatives in Danish education.

Challenges are at different levels:

A new education strategy must be developed that both addresses the need of a well educated labour for the global market and at the same time reflects the democratic aspects of education.

Education must be improved – especially for minority children who will make up the work force of the future.

Notes

(1) Denmark has a tradition of private schools with a substantial government subsidy. This tradition mainly originates in the ideas and initiatives of the clergyman, poet and politician, N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872), and the teacher, Christen Kold (1816-1870). On the basis of their ideas about "a school for life based on the living word", the first *folk high school* for adults was founded in 1844, and the first *free school* (private independent school) for children was founded in 1852. They were in particular meant to serve the rural population.

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Financing

Annex

The Danish education system is financed either by the State, the counties or the municipalities. Some institutions are self-governing, while others are owned by the State, the counties or the municipalities. The table below illustrates the sources of funding and forms of ownership for selected groups of institutions. In addition to public financing, tuition fees are charged at private schools, and there is user payment for a number of adult education programmes.

The central government's system of financing education and training is almost exclusively based on the so-called taximeter system, a comprehensive financing system based on per capita grants (cash-per-students). The grants are calculated primarily on the recorded pupil/student activity measured as their participation in courses/examinations. The taximeter rate varies according to subject field and level of education.

	State institutions	State-funded/supported self-governing institutions	Institutions funded by the counties	Institutions funded by the municipalities	Tuition fee
The Folkeskole				x	No
Independent elementary schools		X			Yes
Continuation school		X			Yes
Gymnasium			X		No
Commercial colleges		X			No
Technical colleges		X			No
Maritime schools	X				No
Schools of marine engineering	X				No
SOSU colleges			X		No
Academies of professional higher education		X			No

Specialised colleges and university colleges		X			No
Universities		X			No
Schools of architecture	X				No
Academies of Music	X				No
Adult education centres			X		Yes
Labour market training courses		X			Yes
Folk high schools		X			Yes
Night schools				x	Yes

Adult Education and lifelong learning *Annex*

Denmark has a long-standing tradition of lifelong learning building on the idea that a prerequisite for active participation in a democratic society is the provision of learning opportunities for all citizens throughout life. According to estimates from the Ministry of Education, more than 400,000 people participated in some form of adult education in 2002.

A parallel system for adults

The adult general education and vocational education and training system is basically parallel to the ordinary system and ranges from the level of lower secondary school to higher education. Generally, the syllabus and examinations are adapted to the experience and interests of adults, and in some cases they may get recognition for prior formal and non-formal learning.

Adult courses leading to formal qualifications include:

- (1) General adult education (general education at lower secondary level. For adults who do not have sufficient qualifications to follow these courses, preparatory adult education is offered to improve basic literacy and numeracy skills)
- (2) Single-subject HF (general education at upper secondary level)
- (3) Labour market training courses (short courses directed at specific sectors)
- (4) Adult vocational education and training programmes (special adult courses within the ordinary VET programmes)
- (5) Further adult education corresponding to the level of academy profession programmes
- (6) Diploma programmes corresponding to the level of bachelor programmes
- (7) Master's programmes corresponding to the level of candidates programmes

Non-formal adult education

A wide range of different schools operates within the framework of liberal and non-formal adult education (*folkeoplysning*). The most well-known are the Folk High Schools, which are residential schools providing general and liberal education.

Courses last up to 36 weeks and are attended by adults of all ages. They are non-qualifying courses meant to broaden general, social and democratic competences.

Other possibilities are offered by night schools and university extension courses.

Higher Education Annex

In Denmark 52,5% of a year group move on to higher education (2003). There are three types of institutions offering higher education programmes, each with well-defined profiles and qualities.

Academies of professional higher education

Academies of professional higher education offer 2-year academy profession programmes in fields such as business, technology, and IT. They combine theoretical studies with a practically oriented approach and are usually completed with a project work of 3 months' duration.

Colleges

Specialised colleges and centres for higher education/university colleges offer 3 – 4 year professional bachelor programmes in fields such as business, education, engineering and nursing. Theoretical studies, practical training through work placements and a bachelor project are always part of the programmes.

Universities

All teaching at universities must be research-based. Some universities are multifaculty institutions covering many disciplines, others are specialised in specific fields.

Universities offer 3-year bachelor programmes (BSc/BA), 2-year candidatus programmes (MSc/MA) and 3-year PhD programmes. A bachelor degree qualifies for a professional career and for further studies. Most students choose to continue in a candidatus programme.

The candidatus programmes usually include one or two of the major fields of study of the bachelor programme. Independent research activities and a Master's Thesis (equivalent to 6 months of full-time studies) are required. The candidatus programmes qualify students for a professional career and for scientific work.

The PhD degree is obtained after 3 years of research, participation in research courses, teaching and public defence of a thesis.

Admission

General access requirements to higher education are one of the general upper secondary school leaving examinations. Many 3 or 4-year VET programmes also give access to professionally oriented higher education programmes. Access may also depend on specific requirements such as specific subject combination in upper secondary school or certain level of grades.

