

Educational scenarios - Denmark as a leading country? On the latest developments in teacher education in Denmark

Based on a comparative study by Hofstede¹, the Danish Ministry of Education in 1997 outlined possible future scenarios of general trends of education in the global society. Not very surprisingly, Denmark was seen in one of these scenarios as a potentially leading country, more or less facing a „golden age“. At the same time Danish teacher education has experienced some new developments which may be seen to be more in line with scenarios influenced or inspired by what Pat Mahony and Ian Hextall have called „new managerialism“². This paper presents a review of the 1997 report from the Danish Ministry of Education, of the latest law on teacher education becoming effective in July 1998 and of some of the very recent initiatives in in-service training as well as in evaluating education in general and in teacher education in particular in Denmark.

1. The Danish tradition of decentralization and „new managerialism“.

Debates on standards, outcomes and assessment in the education of teachers in Denmark have been almost abandoned since the time when Danish teacher education was under the influence of Grundtvig (at the turn of the century). Only very few and very broad guidelines have traditionally been issued by the state or the central government, as Danish teacher education developed from a professional training of people with a background very often in some vocational area into an academic, but still separate and autonomous education in the restructured 18 state colleges of education which were allowed to base their work on their own interpretation of the very general Teacher Education Act of 1991. The four-year courses in teacher education accordingly could be and actually were very different concerning content, by intention to be negotiated between students and teacher educators³. Since the days of Grundtvig, Danish teacher education by tradition particularly stressed the idea of the personal development of teachers and cooperative as well as theoretical competences, all to be put into practice in courses run by the autonomous colleges of education.

In view of this long tradition it was until quite recently not very likely that managerial theory or concepts be considered as relevant, at least not in the field of education. Since 1993 a few steps had been taken in order to evaluate parts of the educational system, especially at the level of upper secondary education. Much of this was introduced as an inspiration from the not very successful attempts at transforming other parts of the welfare state by what may well be called „representing the interests of the customer“⁴. But due to the Danish tradition of decentralization and the priority given to democratic and personal qualities, it seemed very likely from a Danish perspective that the „new managerialism“ was just to be regarded as „a British disease“, as some called it at the TNTEE/ECER symposium chaired by Martin Lawn in Frankfurt in September 1997. This was even more the case when viewing the situation at the organisational level. There was nothing like the British

Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and other bodies assessing educational quality and allocating resources, in spite of the fact that some new bodies in this field had in fact been created in Denmark as well.

2. Decentralization and evaluation.

On the basis of the „decentralizing” Teacher Education Act from 1991 a new development took shape in the colleges of education. A variety of different kinds of courses and projects was introduced as a result of cooperation between teacher educators, teacher students and mentors as well as between students during the time of studies in the colleges. Quite visibly a transformation was taking place, and in some colleges internal evaluation was developed in order to provide the best possible organisation and content of the study programmes. Not only students but also candidates having a job as teachers were included in the surveys and interviews. At the same time experiments and further development of exams were made possible and encouraged by the Ministry of Education. Such developments were then evaluated in some colleges of education.

Much of this work was seen as a kind of action-research concerned with or even regarded as an element of the „self-reflective organisation”⁵ of the new modernity. In fact the 1991 law was seen as promoting the transition of teacher education from tradition to modernity, stressing more than ever the students cooperative and personal development competences that were highly demanded following the new legal basis provided for the „folkeskole” (compulsory comprehensive school) in 1994⁶. From this internal evaluation it could be concluded that the first and more general part of the study programmes had severe problems with the number of exams. This in turn led to a series of experiments with different ways of making the study programmes and the exams more meaningfully integrated, with the aim of enhancing personal development⁷.

Within the general part of the study other elements were evaluated more positively by students and teacher educators, as is shown by the evaluation report made at one of the largest colleges of education, Blaagaard State College of Education. Here the organisation of the study programme was to a high degree project based with the use of team teaching in large study units of students⁸. The basic motive for organizing teacher education in this way was seen in the idea or principle that students actually had to experience different didactical approaches and learning environments which they then had to practise later in the „folkeskole”⁹. But this way of organising courses also had its background in the Teacher Education Act of 1992 that prescribed parts of project organisation and cross subject studies and courses in some parts of the study programme. Evaluation pointed out that many students and teacher educators found it very positive that the courses were organized this way. Especially team teaching, the particular project organisation and the students’ influence were highly viewed by the students. In a later study of the candidates this was stressed even more strongly. But the same evaluation study showed severe problems in the area of teaching practice as part of the study programme which was only vaguely related to the other elements of the programme and organized in an unclear way, leaving the mentors and students in a difficult situation¹⁰.

3. The professional council and the reform of teacher education.

In 1996 the peer „reviewers”¹¹ of teacher education programmes in the colleges were given a new role. Prior to this, each of the study subjects had a professional consultant, appointed by the Ministry with the task of giving advice to teacher educators and to the Ministry. Among the peer reviewers of exams who are appointed each year by the Ministry from a list proposed by the 18 colleges of

education, one person was now, in 1996, elected as chairman for each subject studied. Among the 19 chairs one was then elected as head of chairs of review bodies. This body, or „professional council” for teachers, found itself in a rather confusing situation, taking up its work in 1996/1997. It seemed to many that the variety of programmes, courses and projects was too difficult to assess or to set proper standards for. Accordingly, this professional council made the request for a more standardised framework for teacher education as a whole.

At the same time, in 1996, an international study of the OECD¹² asserted that the Danish schools, compared with other countries, were to blame for very low standards in mother tongue teaching and learning. Nobody really cared to examine the study further, but if anyone had actually done that, one would have been unable to ignore that the Danish pupils in fact did rather well at the level of the secondary school, indeed with the same teachers as in the comprehensive school. In comparison with other countries it is also not possible to use the argument of cuts in educational expenditure as a factor supporting the theory of low achievement. On the contrary, Denmark is one of the countries occupying a top position in international comparisons of teacher expenditure per pupil at the primary and lower secondary level¹³. Irrespective of the weak factual basis of the OECD assertions, the criticism was eagerly taken up by interested groups and persons. To the politicians this meant both a need for and an opportunity to try to raise standards and to „professionalize“ teacher education. To the newly created „professional council” this meant an opportunity to advocate a more centrally governed teacher education system, or at least to limit the extent of decentralisation which had so far characterized the situation of the 18 colleges of education. The Minister of Education, newly appointed, may for his part have seen this as a perfect occasion and possible opportunity for putting his name to a new act of teacher education. He sent out a new statement proclaiming that he intended to very swiftly pass the law through parliament in order to prevent certain organisations from delaying or obstructing the legislative process. In justifying new legislation, the Minister made reference to rapid changes in society, the need for raising standards and the need for raising the competences and status of teachers through more centralized guidelines and „professionalisation“. Apparently the OECD report and the demands of the professional council had left their mark, at least providing a welcome pretext.

In contrast to this, many representatives of the colleges of education who since 1992 had been implementing a new law on teacher education emphasised the need for patience and a chance to work and to make use of experiences and internal evaluation procedures. Not only the older, more traditional generation which had been anxious about imminent changes for some time, but several of the younger teacher educators were indeed deeply worried¹⁴.

4. In-service training in teacher education, some new developments.

In-service education for teachers is offered at all 18 colleges of education and at the Royal Danish School of Education in Copenhagen. Since summer 1997 a new diploma course has been introduced in in-service teacher education. The general aim is to provide an opportunity of building on the teacher education certificate which gives access to all municipal and private schools from 1st to 10th grade (age 7 to 17), expanding into more subjects, studying subjects at a higher, advanced level or acquiring organisational skills useful for administrators at schools¹⁵. This development may be seen in parallel to the Swedish development in teacher education¹⁶. At the same time a new course programme of „Adult Education” has been introduced by the colleges of education by which different groups outside traditional teacher education programmes are given a chance of upgrading and developing their education into fields of adult education.

Both these recent types of education are being organised under the auspices and financial arrangement of the Open University which means that they are financed by the students themselves or by an employer. It is still too early to judge the outcomes of this recent development. The start has been rather modest with only a few courses being offered, but it seems to be a field of possible expansion in the future, since there is a parallel development in the wage systems towards more a more hierachical structure. In order to organize the diploma courses, the colleges have found it necessary to cooperate regionally in such a way that applicants from one college of education where a course is not possible due to a low number of applicants are advised to attend corresponding courses at a cooperating college.

5. Denmark as a “leading country” in the field of education?

In his annual report dating from 1997 the Minister of Education elaborated different scenarios for the future of Danish education in relation to education in other countries in the year 2025, that is one generation ahead of today¹⁷. As this elaboration of scenarios was made prior to or during the process of enacting the new law on teacher education, a brief overview may contribute to understanding some of the underlying conditions and ideologies of the new developments.

Based on a comparative study of Hofstede¹⁸, four scenarios for Denmark were constructed. Hofstede had tried, on the basis of an empirical study, to identify four different educational cultures or groups of cultures and values in the world of today. The idea was that by identifying different positions of countries on the scale, or along a continuum, of individualism/collectivism and equal distribution of power/unequal distribution of power within the educational systems in different societies it would be possible to identify the most important similarities and differences between the national educational systems today.

The Danish Ministry of Education now simplified this structure by distinguishing between two extremes: on the one side a „dragon-type development“, that is a more centralized, less democratically organized educational system, and on the other side the „Danish“, more „democratic” tradition. This distinction was then combined in a matrix distinguishing between possibilities of a diverging and a converging global development at the level of education during the next thirty years:

	Dragon countries in harmony with global development	Danish values in harmony with global development
Educational systems diverging, remaining specific	(A) Danish education being marginalised in relation to dragon countries	(C) „Golden age“ of Danish education
Educational systems converging, harmonisation	(B) Danish education converging with that of dragon countries, moving away from democratic organisation	(D) Denmark as a „leading country“ in the field of education

There could be very little doubt which kind of development, among the four possibilities, the Ministry would regard as desirable and which kind of consequences that could have for future policy

developments of the Danish education system. "Denmark as a leading country" stressed both professionalisation, effectiveness and the need for more reflective, democratic values in education in general. Since the 1991 Act, Danish teacher education consisted of a general two-year part of the study programme in combination with and followed by a more specialized two-year study programme of two subjects. But after examinations all teachers were then qualified to teach all subjects from age 7 to 17 up to the end of lower secondary school.

The Minister now suggests four special subjects to be studied by everyone in order to raise standards and a stronger emphasis on teaching practice and on the relation between subject theory, didactics and teaching practice in order to professionalize teacher education. To make sure that standards were raised generally and made assessable, the Minister also suggested that a set of specific guidelines should be elaborated for each subject studied at the colleges of education. The body to be in charge of this task was decided to be the new „professional council“ for each subject¹⁹.

But the Ministry intends to go much further than this in implementing policies linked to the idea of „Denmark as a leading country“. At this year's „Sorø meeting“ the new Minister of Education had invited two teachers having recently graduated. They both strongly advocated more detailed guidelines and standards in education in Denmark. One suggestion was that in order to reconstruct common values a centrally decided new subject might be introduced in the schools²⁰. At the same meeting the Minister announced that in the near future she intended to propose a law on the establishment of an Evaluation Centre being responsible for all higher education in Denmark in order to improve standards²¹. Just recently, a national committee on quality improvement in the education system has published its report on education from primary school to universities and adult education²². On September 18th the Minister put forward the proposed law on evaluation suggesting that from January 1999 onward 23 million Danish kroner and from the year 2000 onward 43 million kroner (=approximately 4 million pounds) be spent for the activities of a new National Institute of Evaluation. At the same time the first report on the entire field of teacher education has just been evaluated by the Evalueringscenteret (Evaluation Centre). The report suggests that essential parts of Royal School of Education have to be closed down in order to adjust to the policy of the Ministry of Education today²³.

Another development in relation to standards and quality is the question of the size of the 18 colleges of education in Denmark. Just lately the Ministry of Education announced that during the next 3-5 years the colleges of education should develop into considerably larger units, from the present size of ranging from 400-1300 students to that of around 4-5000 students in order to raise standards in fields like research and development which today is of limited though growing importance for these institutions.

The questions remaining to be answered against the background of such developments are simple: To what extent will the values of the traditional democratic Danish teacher education system, with its emphasis on personal development of teachers and cooperative competences in order to meet the demands and challenges of the Danish „folkeskole“, still be important features of the colleges in the future? To what extent will this reform seriously contribute to an educational system where Denmark might be seen as a „leading country“ at a global level? Are we facing developments where Denmark is in the process of giving up parts of the Grundtvig heritage of combining education and democracy? This question is even more relevant in the light of the fact that this heritage has so far been regarded as playing an important role in creating the prosperity of Danish society. The answers are not obvious.

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Notes

- ¹ Hofstede, G. (1991) *Kulturer og organisationer. Overlevelse i en grænseoverskridende verden*, København
- ² Mahony, P. and Hextall, I. (1997) *Transforming professionalism: The TTA and the National Professional Qualifications in England and Wales*. Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, Frankfurt, September. (Published on the TNTEE website: http://tntee.umu.se/tntee/bulletin_board/symposium.html#keypaper)
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- ³ Website of the Danish Ministry of Education: <http://www.uvm.dk>. General introduction to Danish teacher education.
- ⁴ Clarke, J. and Newman, J. (1997) *The managerial state*, London: Sage publications, p. 116.
- ⁵ Bendixen, C. and Willumsen, J. (1995) *Evaluering*, Blaagaard Tidende.
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- ⁷ Evalueringgruppen Blaagaard Statsseminarium (1998) *Rapportering om examens-forsøg m.v. Blaagaard State College of Education*, Januari.
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- ¹⁰ Bendixen, C. and Willumsen, J. (1995) *Evaluering*, Blaagaard Tidende.
- ¹¹ In Denmark, it has been a long tradition in all parts of education from the „folkeskole“ to the university to have colleagues function as external evaluators/co-examiners in examinations.
- ¹² OECD (1996) *Education at a glance*, Paris: CERI. See also: *Den grimme oelling. Om danske elevers læsefaerdigheder*, København, 1995.
- ¹³ OECD (1997) *Education policy analysis*, Paris: CERI, p. 27.
- ¹⁴ DM (Danish Masters Association) (1997) *Undersøgelse af seminarielærere*. Roskilde Universitet-rapport (1995) *Omstilling på seminarierne*, Roskilde.
- ¹⁵ <http://www.uvm.dk/lov/bek/0000619.htm#K3>.
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- ¹⁷ Undervisningsministeriet (1997) *Uddannelsesredegørelse*, p. 39.
- ¹⁸ Hofstede, G. (1991) *Kulturer og organisationer. Overlevelse i en grænseoverskridende verden*, København: Schultz Erhvervsbøger.
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²¹ Ibid.

²² Undervisningsministeriet, Arbejdsministeriet, Forskningsministeriet, Økonomiministeriet, Erhvervsministeriet, Statsministeriet og Finansministeriet (1998) Kvalitetet i uddannelsessystemet, September (available at <http://uvm.dk>).

²³ The results are roughly indicated on the website of the Ministry: <http://www.uvm.dk/news>.