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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on selected findings of a major research project (ENCOMPASS) that examines the relationship between national educational values as these are mediated by the school context, teacher beliefs, and classroom processes, and eventually translated into pupil perspectives on learning and schooling. The theoretical rationale for such research is presented and findings are drawn from questionnaires to 1,800 students in England, France, and Denmark, and from individual and group interviews with a smaller sample of students in each country. The paper draws upon a socio-cultural perspective that emphasizes the context in which learning occurs. Student perspectives on the purpose of schooling and learning and on the teaching they receive are examined, and the "constants" and "contexts" of student experience in the three countries are discussed. (Contains 8 figures, 6 tables, and a 37-item bibliography.) (Author/BT)

NATIONAL CONTEXT, EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOLING AND LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN ENGLAND, FRANCE AND DENMARK

by

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National Context, Educational Goals and Student Experience of Schooling and Learning: a comparative study in England, France, and Denmark

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Abstract

The paper reports on selected findings of a major research project (ENCOMPASS) which examines the relationship between national educational values as these are mediated by the school context, teacher beliefs, and classroom processes, and eventually translated into pupil perspectives on learning and schooling. The theoretical rationale for such resarch is presented and findings are drawn from questionnaires to 1800 pupils in England, France and Denmark, and from individual and group interviews with a smaller sample of pupils in each country. The paper draws upon a socio-cultural perspective which emphasises the context in which learning occurs. Pupil perspectives on the purpose of schooling and learning and on the teaching they receive are examined and the 'constants' and 'contexts' of pupil experience in the three countries are discussed.

Introduction

This paper explores the significance of the cultural context in which learning occurs by examining the perspectives of pupils in three European countries on the purposes of schooling and on themselves as learners. It reports some findings from a research project which is currently taking place in England, France and Denmark. These findings suggest that although pupils in different European countries share many common concerns, they also come to school with significantly different attitudes towards themselves as learners, towards school and towards achievement. As a result, their expectations of themselves and of their teachers are also different.

The research reported here traces the relationship between national educational values (as represented in official policy documents and policy statements) as these are translated into the school context and into pupil perspectives on learning and schooling. Using a socio-cultural theoretical perspective (Vygotsky 1978, Wertsch 1985, 1991) the aim of the paper is to explore the social reality of schooling for pupils in the three contrasting educational systems of England, France, and Denmark, and the relative significance of the factors that influence the development of a learner identity in these three national settings.

There are important theoretical reasons for a study of pupilhood in these three national contexts. The differences between the systems and the consequent differential impact on pupils may be decreasing in the context of a united Europe, the internationalisation of adolescent peer culture, and the effects of globalisation (Eide 1992, Masini 1994). The paper explores whether there are significant differences related to the national context or whether pupils' experience of schooling is becoming more similar as they try to construct their identity as learners and as adolescents, and to negotiate pathways which lead to success on the dimensions of academic achievement, peer status, and social conformity (Rudduck et al 1995, Keys and Fernandes 1993).

Continuing differences in terms of school structure, organisation, ethos, environment and learning culture in the three countries may impinge significantly on the creation of pupils' identities and on their views of themselves as learners. Gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity are also likely to be highly significant. Current research evidence suggests that, in England it may be difficult for children to negotiate strategies which achieve a balance between academic success as a pupil, social and peer group success as an adolescent, and success in conforming to school norms for social behaviour (Abrahams 1995, Raphael Reed 1996, Woods 1990, Lacey 1970, Hargreaves 1967). However, the process of negotiation and the strategies required may be quite different in France and Denmark, mediated as they are by different national traditions, school ethos, and structures (Charlot et al 1992, Dubet et al 1996, Frønes 1995, Jensen et al 1992).

Study of policy documentation at the national level suggests that the prevailing educational traditions in each country are very different. In England there is an emphasis on differentiation and individualisation (DfEE 1997, Best 1998), in France on republicanism and universalism (OECD 1997, Osborn et al 1997, Osborn and Planel 1999, Corbett and Moon 1996) in Denmark on collaboration and consensus (Frønes 1995, Jensen et al 1992). As a result the structures put in place by schools to deal with both the cognitive and the affective aspects of children's experience are significantly different.

In Denmark there is a strong concern with the development of the 'whole child' and with the affective dimension of education. In Danish schools pastoral care is emphasised as part of the teacher's role, and there is a focus on participatory democracy and lessons in citizenship (Kryger and Reisby 1998). Children are encouraged to make decisions jointly with teachers about the direction of lessons. In addition, children often remain with the same class teacher throughout their school careers.

In England there remains a dual emphasis on both cognitive and affective concerns. While the existence of a National Curriculum and national assessment emphasise academic objectives for pupils, structures such as the pastoral care system, the inclusion in the curriculum of personal and social education, the emphasis on behavioural and moral norms and the wearing of uniform, reflect a continuing concern with the child as 'person' or 'the whole child' (Best 1998).

In contrast, in France, the main focus of the school is on the child as 'pupil' and on cognitive rather than affective concerns. Academic objectives are emphasised as the school's main area of concern. A distinctive institutional ethos and associated behavioural norms are less important and concern with pastoral care is left to outside agencies (Cousin 1998, Audiger and Motta 1998).

This paper therefore considers pupil perceptions of schooling and of the teaching they receive and the main sources of influence on these perspectives. While the emphasis is on national differences and similarities the relative significance of intra-national differences such as socio-economic status and gender are also discussed.

Methods of Data Collection

The research we report on here draws particularly upon questionnaires, individual and group interviews with pupils collected in a matched sample of secondary schools in each country selected to be as representative as possible of a socio-economic mix. In England three comprehensives, one in an area of relatively high socio-economic status in the Midlands, one in a 'mixed' area in the south-west, and one in a highly disadvantaged area in London were selected. These were matched as far as possible with schools in Denmark, two in Copenhagen and one in the north of Denmark, and with three schools in France, one an area of relatively high socio-economic status in the south-west, one in a 'mixed' suburb of Paris, and a third in a highly disadvantaged suburb of Paris. In these schools all

the qualitative data collection, teacher and pupil interviews and observation was carried out. However, for the questionnaire phase of the study which required a sizeable sample, since English comprehensives are considerably larger than comparable schools in France and Denmark, in order to collect comparable numbers of pupil responses we included twenty additional schools in Denmark and one in France. In both cases these were drawn from areas of 'mixed' socio-economic status.

Data collection at pupil level combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide for both generalisability and richness of data. Approximately 1800 thirteen and fourteen year old pupils in their second year of study completed questionnaires. Careful consideration was given to linguistic and conceptual cross-cultural differences in the construction of the questionnaires. These were extensively piloted and revised a number of times as a result. Production of both French, English and Danish questionnaires took place simultaneously with team members from all three countries present. A sub-sample of 'target'children was then selected for further detailed study over the course of the two years including individual and group interviews and classroom observation. The 'target' group included equal numbers of boys and girls who were chosen to represent a mix of high, medium, and low achievers from a range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.

Each group interview included one target pupil and four friends chosen by the individual target child. Approximately six group interviews took place in each school and eighteen in each country. These were designed to elicit insights into peer group culture and the relationship of this to children's identity as learners and to school culture (Dubet et al 1996). To extend and validate the findings of the questionnaires and individual interviews the researchers fed back findings from these to the groups, based on what children in their school, their country, and in the other countries had said about their experience of schooling. Selected quotations from children in all three countries were used to stimulate group discussion and were followed up with a series of probes designed to explore meaning and to examine some of the influences on children's perspectives.

Findings

The findings presented here focus particularly on pupils' perceptions of their schooling and of their teachers, and compare and contrast both *inter* and *intra*-nationally, looking at children in the three countries and at the influence of gender and socio-economic differences *within* each country on pupil attitudes.

International Differences in Pupil Experience

Overall, many of the findings from both the questionnaires and the individual and group interviews suggest that pupils' perceptions, filtered as they are through the mediation of teachers and the particular interpretations which pupils bring to school with them, do nevertheless resonate fairly closely with the particular emphases of the goals of the national systems. The Danish emphasis on collaboration and consensus and the concern with education for citizenship and democracy as well as with the academic goals of education emerged strongly in the pupils' responses. Danish pupils were broadly the most positive towards schooling, learning and teachers. They saw school as helping them to fit into a group situation rather than emphasising the development of the individual. They did not in general feel that their teachers placed a great deal of emphasis on making them work hard. They were less likely than the other groups to want to leave school as soon as they could or to see school as getting in the way of their lives (Tables I and II).

In some respects, the English children, like those we studied previously at primary level, were still the least enthusiastic about school. They enjoyed school and lessons the least and were the most likely to want to leave school as soon as they could and to feel that school got in the way of their lives (Table I). However, there were a number of positive elements of teaching for this group who

emphasised their teachers' concern with pupils expressing their own ideas and with pupils as people. Encouragingly, they also felt that they had good feedback from teachers about their work and felt that teachers made them work hard (Tables IIIa and IIIb). The English pupils' responses reflected the emphasis at national level on the affective dimension of education as well as the cognitive, and the stress on individualisation and differentiation. The English findings suggested that the dual concerns at national level with both the 'whole child' and the child as pupil, with both cognitive and affective concerns were equally reflected in their school experiences.

In France with its emphasis on universalism and republicanism and on all children being treated equally and with its separation of academic and social/personal development goals, children nevertheless had strong concerns about teachers who do not respect pupils and who do not explain things properly (Tables IIIa and IIIb). The French secondary pupils in our sample did not show much evidence of having experienced an affective or social and personal dimension to their school experience. Neither did they feel that they were getting the guidance they needed to improve or an emphasis on hard work from teachers. There is some suggestion from these findings of a lowering of teacher expectations at secondary level and a drop in pupil motivation.

Although there was continuing evidence from these results of the influence of national context on pupil perceptions of schooling, there was also a clear suggestion of the globalisation of many concerns. All pupils shared a certain number of similar priorities for teaching and a similar concern with the economic function of education and its link to the job market.

Intra-national differences in pupil experience: gender and social inequality

Within each education system gender and socio-economic issues were mediated differently so that the impact of these on pupils' views of themselves as learners varied. There were gender differences in perceptions of schooling in all three countries, but the differences in perceptions of schooling between boys and girls were more marked in France than in the other two countries. In general, French boys were the least likely of all the groups to be positive about school.

In all three countries the girls in our sample were more positive about school and about teachers than the boys. Thus girls were less likely to see school as 'getting in the way of my life' (Table IV). However there were variations in the size of the 'gender' gap from one country to another. For example Danish pupils were positive about their teachers regardless of gender (there were no statistically significant differences between boys and girls) whereas, in both England and France, girls agreed significantly more often than boys that they liked their teachers.

Where the difference in the perspectives of boys and girls was statistically significant in all three countries, the gap was often smallest in Denmark and greatest in France, with England somewhere in the middle (Figs. 1-4). Whereas in Denmark and England, both boys and girls enjoyed school equally, only 45% of French boys did so compared with 67% of French girls. French boys were also significantly more likely than girls to feel that they were wasting time at school, to feel bored by school and to disagree that 'the best part of my life is the time I spend in school'. Of the three countries England was the only one where there was no statistically significant 'gender gap' in pupil views of the future. English boys and girls were equally likely to see school as the first step on the way to their career whereas in the other two countries girls were more likely than boys to see the career uses of school.

In summary, for pupils of this age group, the much publicised 'gender' gap in England was not so striking as might have been expected, given the concern of English policy makers with boys under-achievement and lack of motivation (OFSTED 1998). In fact the most significant gender differences occurred in France where traditionally the under-motivation of boys has not been seen as an issue.

Socio-economic differences in perceptions of schooling were evident in all three countries, but were more significant in England and Denmark than in France, suggesting evidence of a 'long tail of under-motivation' of children from different social groups in these countries. In order to examine socio-economic differences in pupil perspectives, we divided pupils into three groups according to parental employment (either father's or mother's, whichever fell into the 'highest' category). The categories were: professional/managerial, white/blue collar, and unemployed. Table V indicates how pupils in each of these three categories responded to a series of statement about school and teachers. On the whole, for each country, the pattern of difference is fairly consistent, with the children of professional/managerial parents most positive about school, teachers, and learning and the children of unemployed parents the least positive. However there were some exceptions to this and it is striking that in all three countries, pupils from all social groups were equally concerned to do well at school and to use school as a step to a future career.

In England and Denmark there were more statistically significant differences between social groups. The children of unemployed parents were the most likely to see school as a waste of time. or as getting in the way of their lives. There were significant differences in enjoyment of school in Denmark with the children of professional/managerial parents far more positive than other social groups. Although, in France, this group more often liked their teachers than the children of white/blue collar or unemployed parents did, in general there were fewer significant differences in the perspectives of pupils from different social groups than was the case in the other countires (Figs 5-8).
It is possible that the French emphasis on universalism and on a clear understanding of progress through the system, aimed at bringing all children to a common level of achievement, rather than on individualisation and differentiation, may have contributed to the narrowing of the socio-economic gap.

Constant and contexts in the concerns of European Pupils

Part of the value of cross-cultural research is the extent to which it is able to identify both constants and contexts in educational experience (Broadfoot and Osborn 1988). Cross-cultural comparisons of pupil experience identify pupil responses to learning which are more universal to the situation of 'being a secondary school pupil' from those which may be more culturally specific. As the more quantitative findings in the previous section demonstrated, pupils in England, Denmark and France pupils have to engage with school contexts which relate to cultural, philosophical, political and historical differences between the three countries. Thus this section draws upon the individual and group pupil interviews in order to illuminate understanding of the relationship between social and cultural influences and cultural practices, and to explore how these might affect pupil behaviour and ultimately pupil learning. Using the pupils' own voices as far as possible, the key concerns of the pupils are considered under three headings: the teacher pupil relationship; social identity; and pupils' perception of learning.

The teacher-pupil relationship

There were notable differences between pupils in the three countries in how they perceived the teacher-pupil relationship. Pupils in France expressed a strong perception of distance between teacher and pupil. There was a strong difference in status relating to a concept of adult (and particularly teacher as the fount of all knowledge) superiority and pupil inferiority. Adults were *'grands'* (teachers were particularly *'grands'* as their role was to form children), children and pupils were *'petits': 'Des êtres incomplets, encore naturels, parfois dangereux, et qu'il convient de dresser'* (Dubet 1996, p.31). French pupils were very aware of their perceived inferiority:

'Un prof c'est plus grand que nous, il nous apprend des trucs.' *Teachers are bigger (more important) than us, they teach us things.*

French pupils thought that teachers used their perceived superior status to maintain their distance from pupils:

'Les professeurs, ils méprisent les élèves. Nous on est des enfants et ils ne considèrent pas vraiment ce qu'on dit. Ils disent que ça nous concerne pas.' *Teachers look down on pupils. We're children and they don't pay much attention to what we say. They say it's got nothing to do with us.*

Pupils used terms like *'esclaves'* slaves, and *'robots'* robots, to describe their role in relation to teachers. There was also a distance between French teacher and pupil in terms of time and social class. Both high and low achieving pupils from middle class and working class backgrounds, of French and ethnic minority parentage thought that many teachers had not changed with the times and did not understand the needs of the new generation. They thought that teachers were out of touch with their lives:

'Un professeur qui est dans les cinquante ans, c'est plus son temps. Lui quand il était jeune, les élèves il étaient comme ça ... mais évidemment c'est plus comme ça, ça a complètement changé'. *A teacher who's in his fifties is out of step. When he was young children were like that ... but obviously it's not like that anymore* (High achieving girl from Paris)

'C'est pas le même environnement que quand eux ils ont grandi. Eux quand ils ont grandi on leur a toujours dit ..., mais nous on est livré à nous même, c'est dehors qu'on apprend. Il faut comprendre que nous on est jeune, on est d'une autre génération. Il faut qu'ils se renseignent sur ce qui se passe. Ils nous voient pas quand on est dehors ce qu'on subit.' *It's not the same world as when they grew up. When they were little they were always told what to do, but we bring ourselves up, we learn outside school. They have to understand that we're young and that we're from a different generation. They need to find out what's happening now. They don't see us outside school, what we endure.* (Low achieving, half Arab boy from Paris)

The distance between French teacher and pupil was traditional and institutionalised. English pupils were less conscious of the difference between teacher and pupil status. In some cases they acknowledged that there was an imbalance of power: 'Some teachers think they are higher than you', and there was some awareness of time and social distance: 'There still back in the seventies' 'They have to realise there's drink and drugs ... they don't want to believe that's going on; but it is.'

But it was not an issue which overtly pre-occupied them. Instead in most cases English pupils were more concerned with negotiating their own individual status with their teachers. Arguably, this type of individual relationship held by pupil and teacher in England is likely to have a greater impact on the pupil's academic performance. The strength of individualisation and differentation in the English context of education made the teacher pupil relationship more open to negotiation.

Danish pupils, like English pupils, referred to, but did not dwell on, the time distance between teacher and pupils. They were concerned that their teachers be relatively young and up-to-date. As one pupil expressed it 'modern teachers, fairly young teachers who have modern views on teaching and learning'. However, like English pupils, they were more concerned with their personal relationships with teachers which were independent of institutionalised norms. Relationships between teachers and pupils were again open to negotiation and negotiation itself was institutionalised.

The concept of a teacher as a friend was particularly difficult for French pupils to comprehend. English pupils had less difficulty with the idea but were reluctant to identify teachers as 'friends' in any real sense: 'They're just teachers' 'Not someone you would go out with at weekends' 'When you're in trouble they can't forgive you; they've got to punish you'.

Danish pupils, although held back (in this respect like English and French pupils by the concern that teachers should not be too friendly in case this led to interference with their private lives, did acknowledge in some cases that teachers could almost be friends: 'Not a real friend, but someone who knows something about you .... with whom you feel good'.

An important constant for pupils from all three countries, which prevented them from regarding reachers as real friends and confiding in them, was their concern about their teachers' personal and professional ability to keep confidences.

Another significant constant for English, French and Danish pupils was that there should be mutual respect between teachers and pupils before learning could take place. In the English context respect was not automatic for either party. Teachers could earn their pupils' respect by a combination of listening to pupils and giving them a voice. Pupils were more likely to gain respect from their teachers if they had a positive work attitude. English pupils in particular seemed to be caught by contradictory pressures: the need to negotiate a good working relationship with their teacher by earning his/her respect through their positive work orientation at the same time as the need to not be too positive towards their work for fear of losing their peers' support.

An important cultural difference in how English, Danish and French responded to their teachers and their schools' demands was in relation to the presence or absence of a sense of solidarity within the class. In the English context of classes with changing pupil composition, due to the relative use of banding, setting and streaming in the three schools, there was little evidence of classroom solidarity or even of solidarity with the school as a whole. Internal classroom social relationships were more pertinent to English pupils' sense of social identity. However there were similarities between France and Denmark in the pupils' attitude to solidarity and commonality. In the Danish cultural context of consensus and where the school practice is for pupils to remain in the same class for key subjects over many years, pupils had a strong sense of commonality in their class ''because that's where you spend most of your time'. The class was a collective unit: 'The class holds us together not the school'.

In the French cultural context of universalism and republicanism and where the school practice is for pupils remain in the same class for nearly all subjects on a yearly basis, pupils seemed to use classroom solidarity as a positive strategy for mutual support:

> 'La classe c'est un ensemble' 'C'est à nous de les aider, nous sommes un groupe' *The class is a group. It's up to us to help them, we make up a group.*
>
> 'Il faut se tenir la main pour que ça marche ...il faut se tenir à l'écoute, il faut s'entre aider' *We've got to stand together to make things work .. you've got to be ready to listen, you've got to help each other.*

Teachers were aware of pupil solidarity: 'La classe c'est un groupe, c'est tout un groupe, ils font un bloque' *The class is a group, one group, they're one entity.* Occasionally solidarity seemed to be contrived rather than reflecting reality: 'Il n'y a pas de groupes (dans la classe), il n'y a qu'un seul groupe' *There aren't any separate groups we're all one group* which suggests that French pupils

were responding to the relatively harsh learning environment of the French context by presenting a face of solidarity; in accordance with the French saying, 'L'union fait la force' *There's strength in unity.* Perhaps the strategy of solidarity and the pupils' exploitation of the institutional distance between French teacher and pupil enabled French pupils to protect themselves from entering into more individual relationships with teachers, which in the face of relatively high negative teacher assessment, might have had negative consequences on pupils' 'real' identities

Social identity.

In all three countries pupils were, to a greater or lesser extent, concerned with establishing their social identity. To many pupils, particularly English pupils, social identity dominated and determined learner identity. There was some evidence to show that English pupils divided their classes into groups of three different types of pupils on the basis of their academic achievement: 'One group works really hard, another group doesn't, they mess around in class. Another group works sometimes and messes about sometimes' (English pupil). English pupils' school experience seemed to be dominated by these academic and social groups and English pupils' social identity was defined by membership of such groups. At one school where high attainment was more evident there was a gloss on working hard. 'Keeners', were described as 'not necessarily clever but very interested', 'they work hard, do extra work'. These were distinct from people who generally did good work, tried hard and conformed, and from 'people who don't bother doing their work and behave badly', who, 'had a bad attitude to work', 'often they don't do well with school work and don't try hard', and 'they can be nasty to other pupils.' In the inner London school pupils expressed an even more finely-shaded version:

> 'There's boffins - really brainy, always quiet, always answer the question, always do their work. They know what they're doing, they push hard with their work ... don't talk when they're working, never stop to enjoy themselves, put their heads down in their books even when everyone else is laughing.'
>
> 'Some (other) people talk and mess about in their lessons but they still do their work as well.'
>
> 'There's 'bad' boys - they're popular, like to joke.' 'Some people smoke, drink, bully, get on report for being late and for bad behaviour'.

Group identity in the English schools involved codes for behaviour as well as social and learning identity:

> 'Everything perfect - not just work. The right uniform - not hipsters, not thick soles or jewellery, not a polo shirt, no make-up'
>
> 'Top of the class, always do work, set their pencil cases our tidily, would bring a briefcase if they had the choice'

As might be expected the exact description of these groups was dependent on who was doing the describing and their relationship to this particular sub-set. Something of the flavour of the speaker's own positioning is detectable even in the short extracts above. For pupils in all three English schools the epithet of 'boffin' or 'keener' was not particularly complimentary, though not always unwelcome. For many average and low achievers it was a way of categorising 'the other' as something undesirable. Pupils like Simon in Year 7 did not want to be seen as keener: 'People think you are really good and they don't want to be with you'. Pupils in 'top sets' were often characterised by pupils in lower sets as: 'Clever and boring ... they don't have much of a social life'. They were said to be: 'Nerdish', 'sad', and 'They don't have a good time at school'. However for some pupils

there might have been an element of jealousy in their attitude to high achieving pupils. As one English pupil explained: 'You can use it to tease people because you're a bit annoyed that they have done better.'

The link between social and learner identity was a strong one for English pupils. Boys were in a particularly difficult position as it was more acceptable for girls to work hard than boys: 'For boys there is an image to keep up about not working hard'. The negotiation of social identity required boys to make people laugh, mess around or confront teachers. This quality was though to be particular asset for boys who wished to make themselves attractive to girls. A boy observed: 'Girls would say they liked a hard worker but they would really like one who had a laugh'. Boys with natural charisma could afford to be 'laid back'; others had to establish their credibility by: 'having a big mouth', 'being loud', 'being hard', 'doing the opposite of what the teachers tell you', and generally establishing an anti-work reputation.

There was less evidence in France and Denmark of this division of classes into social groups although some French pupils also acknowledged the existence of friendship groupings which followed a rough division into low, average and high achievers. The French term 'intello' also matched the English 'keener' and 'boffin': 'C'est quelqu'un qui passe ses weekends à la bibliothèque' *It's someone who spends their weekends in the library.* 'C'est quelqu'un qui a tout le temps de bonnes notes, jamais de zéros, jamais au dessous de la moyennne.' *It's someone who always gets good marks, never a zero, always above the average mark.* 'Intello' also had negative connotations: 'C'est en général un terme plutôt perjoratif' *It's generally rather a pejorative term.*

Despite these similarities with English pupils there was evidence that French pupils tended to play down the importance of learner and social differentiation. They tried again to convey the idea of unity. Lower achieving pupils stressed that 'intellos' were not discriminated against by the rest of the class. Pupils claimed that anyone could be friends with 'intellos'. A boy explained, 'Ils sont avec nous' *They're with us.*

Academic performance played an even smaller role in the social identity of Danish pupils. They appeared to be more preoccupied with social behaviour: 'School is not just academic', 'You should behave well and be a good friend'. As one pupil put it: 'You are allowed to do well and be a bit of a 'keener', but you also have to be nice towards others.'

In the Danish cultural context of a philosophy of 'consensus' and a school context of small classes, small schools and classes where pupils remained together for seven years, maintaining, good social relationships and behaving well were perhaps important survival skills as well as learning skills. For Danish pupils, instead of academic achievement, it was personal interests, fashion (also important in England and France) and the degree of freedom allowed to pupils by their parents which seemed to dictate group composition.

Attitudes to Learning

Pupils in England, France and Denmark were in considerable agreement over what constituted effective teaching and learning. The first requirement was that pupils should be active: 'doing something' (English pupil), 'si on faisait que parler et copier sur le cahier personne apprendrait' *If all that happened was (the teacher) talking and us copying it down no-one would learn anything*, 'mixing the dry reading stuff with a film and the like ..... makes you feel more engaged' (Danish pupil). Pupils from the three countries all decried teacher monologues and copying. The second requirement for effective learning was that learning had to be interesting. 'Interesting' was defined in

the three countries as a lesson which had an element of 'fun' or humour: 'Monsieur Giroud est rigolo tandis que Madame Bonnard ..... elle raconte, elle raconte .... elle dicte, elle dicte' *Mr Giroud is funny whereas Mrs Bonnard goes on and on and on, she endlessly dictates.* 'C'est endormant, c'est toujours 'ha hein ha hein ha hein ha hein'. On dirait qu'ils ravagent toujours les mêmes choses, c'est sur mëme ton, toujours monotone.' *It puts you to sleep, it's always blaa blaa blaa. They always seem to go over the same things, with the same monotonous tone of voice.* 'He goes on and on ... reads it out' (English pupil).

Pupils in all three countries appreciated teachers who, 'have a laugh', 'can make a joke', liven it up'. In the event of the teacher not being able to fulfil these conditions it was pupils who provided the interest. As a French girl explained: 'Dans le cours il y a toujours quelqu'un là pour mettre de l'ambiance' *There's always someone in the lesson who'll make it interesting* and that role was generally occupied by a boy. Pupils from the three countries also thought that they learnt more when teachers brought in themes from contemporary life.

Danish pupils differed from English and French pupils in that they felt they had a considerable degree of choice in the content and organisation of their lessons and that this helped their learning. For example, Danish pupils reported having a say in the history issues they wanted like to work on, the form a biology report was to take, or whether pupils wanted to work in groups or as a class. In German a pupil reported, 'It's almost up to us to decide what to do'. Two Danish pupils summarised their degree of choice: 'To my mind we have a say in learning in this school', 'We can choose to say if we want or not ..... if we don't want, the teacher can't do anything.'

Effective teaching and learning in Denmark implied a certain amount of pupil choice. A Danish pupil explained: 'There is no reason for the teacher just to go on in one particular way'. French pupils differed from English and Danish pupils in their criticism of how their teachers differentiated between low ('mauvais élèves') and high achieving pupils ('bons élèves') in the same class. French pupils of all levels of achievement thought that many of their teachers neglected lower achieving pupils with negative consequences for their learning:

> 'Les professseurs ils s'occupent que des élèves qui travaillent, mais les élèves qui travaillent pas ils les abandonnent' (Low achieving girl in a Paris school). *Teachers only relate to hardworking pupils, they don't do anything with those that don't work*
>
> 'Les professeurs ils mettent les mauvais élèves à part. Ils n'essayent pas tous. Il y en a qui les laissent à part. J'avais une prof de français et franchement elle mettait ceux qui ne travallaient pas au fond de la classe et elle les laissait dormir, elle ne faisait pas d'efforts.' (High achieving girl from Bordeaux). T*eachers put the weak pupils to one side. They don't all try to help them. They leave them out. I had a teacher of French who quite honestly put those that didn't work at the back of the class and she let them go to sleep. She made no effort..*

This common criticism of French teachers is another example of French pupils' expression of solidarity.

Discussion

What can be learnt from the similarities and differences of the school experience of English, French and Danish pupils and their attitude to learning? In terms of pupils' own perceptions about effective learning there was striking unanimity about the definition of an 'interesting' lesson and a 'good' teacher, despite the national and institutional differences in pupils' school contexts. What is less clear is the relation between pupils' contrasting national, social and cultural responses to the school

context and pupil learning. Does the French pupil response of solidarity help to motivate pupils, particularly lower achieving pupils? Does the English pupil response of complex social interactions and negotiation of group identity divert and de-focus English pupils from a learning objective? Does the Danish pupil response of downplaying academic objectives in favour of social relationship objectives have a negative effect on pupil learning? At this stage of the study it is only possible to hypothesise what might be the possible consequences of the English, French and Danish pupil responses to their school experiences.

What is clear, however is that that in spite of the many pressures towards greater homogenisation of educational systems, the national culture and educational traditions of the three European countries under study continue to lead to significant differences in the way in which pupils define their relationship to school. Overall the study emphasises the importance of understanding how pupil attitudes to teaching, learning, and schooling are situated within a wider cultural context.

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NOTES
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The ENCOMPASS project team who all contributed to this paper are:
Birte Ravn and Thyge Winther-Jensen, University of Copenhagen; Olivier Cousin, CADIS, University of Bordeaux II; Marilyn Osborn, Patricia Broadfoot, Elizabeth McNess, Claire Planel, Pat dTriggs, University of Bristol.

TABLE I. **My Feelings About School.** Here are some statements of what you might think about your school. Please show how much you agree or disagree by filling in the appropriate bubble.

		Strongly agree / agree (%)		
		Denmark	England	France
1.	On the whole I like my teachers.	64	69	63
2.	School gets in the way of my life.	21	30	31
3.	I enjoy school.	67	54	56
4.	I really enjoy most lessons.	63	52	54
5.	I want to do well at school.	92	96	96
6.	I feel as though I'm wasting my time at school.	10	7	13
7.	The best part of my life is the time I spend in school.	11	17	18
8.	I'd like to leave school as soon as I can.	17	23	17
9.	School is the first step on the way to my career.	85	91	85
Totals		n = 610	n = 577	n = 444

TABLE II. **My Feelings About School.** Here are some statements of what you might think of school in general. Please show how much you agree or disagree by filling in the appropriate bubble.

		Strongly agree / agree (%)		
		Denmark	England	France
1.	School teaches you to understand other people's feelings.	33	58	42
2.	An important thing about school is meeting up with your friends.	66	79	86
3.	School helps you to sort out your life.	65	67	58
4.	School helps you to become mature.	57	76	75
5.	School is boring.	36	36	27
6.	An important thing about school is learning to co-operate with others.	91	84	78
7.	School is all about getting jobs when you leave.	75	70	84
8.	An important thing about school is that it helps you to get qualifications.	80	95	75
9.	An important thing about school is learning new things.	94	95	97
10.	School makes you aware of your own strengths and weaknesses.	78	79	86
11.	School is a place where you learn to obey rules.	45	78	80
12.	School is a place where you can express your own ideas and opinions.	59	73	48
13.	School is a place where it is difficult to succeed.	25	20	43
Totals		n = 610	n = 577	n = 444

TABLE IIIA. **Teachers.** Please read the statements below about teachers and mark a bubble in each row to show whether you think this applies to: most of your teachers / many of your teachers / only a few of your teachers / hardly any of your teachers.

		Most / many teachers (%)		
		Denmark	England	France
	I believe teachers			
1.	are there to help pupils pass exams.	75	71	65
2.	are there to help pupils learn.	92	92	84
3.	aren't really interested in pupils as people.	33	24	57
4.	make all the decisions about what happens in lessons.	71	79	72
5.	give challenging work.	66	74	64
6.	really want their pupils to do well.	85	79	74
7.	live in a different world from their pupils.	49	35	40
8.	encourage pupils to say what they think in class.	62	65	47
9.	will have a laugh with pupils.	47	43	23
10.	make pupils want to work hard.	49	73	39
11.	are understanding about pupils' problems and worries.	54	45	34
12.	give pupils a say in how they learn.	67	36	37
13.	are only interested in their own subject.	46	51	51
14.	will be helpful if pupils go to them with a problem.	71	64	37
Totals		n = 610	n = 577	n = 444

TABLE IIIB. **Teachers.** Please read the statements below about teachers and mark a bubble in each row to show whether you think this applies to: most of your teachers / many of your teachers / only a few of your teachers / hardly any of your teachers.

		Most / many teachers (%)		
		Denmark	England	France
	I believe teachers			
1.	make pupils feel they aren't good enough in their work.	24	25	58
2.	are a good example for their pupils.	52	57	53
3.	are interested in pupils' opinions.	68	61	42
4.	treat all pupils equally.	50	53	48
5.	are more interested in pupils who can do well.	43	48	57
6.	show what they really think and feel.	30	43	29
7.	are interested in building friendly relationships with their pupils.	71	45	49
8.	are respected by pupils.	54	52	47
9.	make pupils feel they can be successful.	72	67	59
10.	like and enjoy their job.	69	61	65
11.	provide good guidance about how you can improve your work.	72	74	58
12.	trust pupils.	63	48	35
13.	do not listen to pupils.	27	23	30
14.	try to make pupils get on well as a group.	80	77	52
15.	spend too much time with pupils who need extra help.	36	32	18
Totals		n = 610	n = 577	n = 444

TABLE IV. **Gender and Attitudes to School.** Here are some statements of what you might think about your school. Please show how much you agree or disagree by filling in the appropriate bubble.

		Strongly agree / agree (%)					
		Denmark		England		France	
		Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy
1.	On the whole I like my teachers.	66.9	63.6	*71.3	66.7	*68.1	59.4
2.	School gets in the way of my life.	*18.1	25.3	*22.0	37.0	*26.3	35.1
3.	I enjoy school.	71.3	63.6	59.4	51.8	*66.8	44.7
4.	I really enjoy most lessons.	66.9	61.0	54.9	50.6	59.7	51.0
5.	I want to do well at school.	94.6	92.8	98.0	97.7	97.5	97.4
6.	I feel as though I'm wasting my time at school.	6.5	12.4	3.3	9.3	*7.3	18.2
7.	The best part of my life is the time I spend in school.	*7.9	13.0	15.0	19.3	*24.2	11.0
8.	I'd like to leave school as soon as I can.	13.6	18.9	21.1	24.7	14.0	20.8
9.	School is the first step on the way to my career.	*89.3	83.0	92.3	91.3	*87.8	83.2
10.	School is boring.	31.0	42.3	34.7	38.8	*18.8	36.7
Totals		n = 280	n = 324	n = 244	n = 311	n = 233	n = 199

(* = differences within each country which are statistically significant)

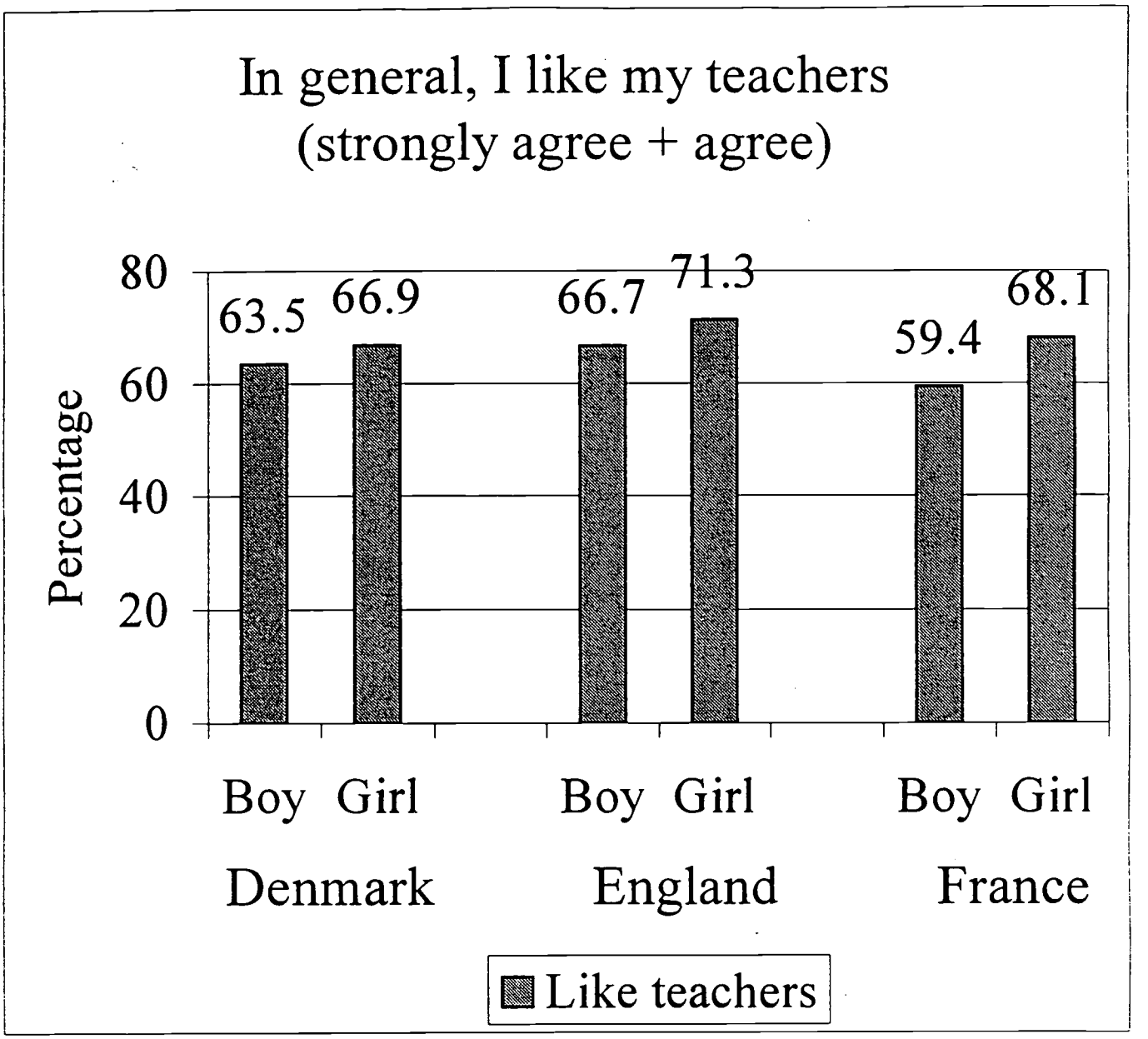
In general, I like my teachers
(strongly agree + agree)
Percentage
80
60
40
20
0
63.5
66.9
66.7
71.3
59.4
68.1
Boy Girl
Boy Girl
Boy Girl
Denmark
England
France
Like teachers

Figure 1

TABLE V. **Socio-Economic Status and Attitudes to School.** Here are some statements of what you might think about your school. Please show how much you agree or disagree by filling in the appropriate bubble.

		Strongly agree / agree (%)								
		Denmark			England			France		
		P/M	W/B-C	Unem.	P/M	W/B-C	Unem.	P/M	W/B-C	Unem.
1.	On the whole I like my teachers.	*80.6	58.7	62.5	*71.1	74.2	68.6	*79.1	53.8	52.9
2.	School gets in the way of my life.	*13.2	23.5	29.5	*28.0	28.8	40.0	26.4	33.8	31.3
3.	I enjoy school.	*83.9	61.0	65.1	52.7	54.9	54.3	60.2	53.6	70.6
4.	I really enjoy most lessons.	72.3	60.1	67.2	47.6	54.6	51.4	52.6	55.3	62.5
5.	I want to do well at school.	95.5	92.8	95.3	98.4	98.1	91.4	97.6	97.2	100.0
6.	I feel as though I'm wasting my time at school.	*5.8	9.6	15.6	*2.7	5.1	17.1	10.4	14.3	18.8
7.	The best part of my life is the time I spend in school.	5.2	11.3	17.2	15.0	17.6	20.0	18.1	19.0	17.6
8.	I'd like to leave school as soon as I can.	8.4	18.8	20.6	18.7	23.0	34.3	22.7	25.0	8.8
9.	School is the first step on the way to my career.	85.9	86.0	85.9	93.0	92.1	91.4	87.9	83.9	94.1
Totals:	n =	155	293	64	108	125	16	172	208	17

(* = differences which are statistically significant)

(P/M = Professional/Managerial W/B-C = White Collar Unem. = Unemployed)

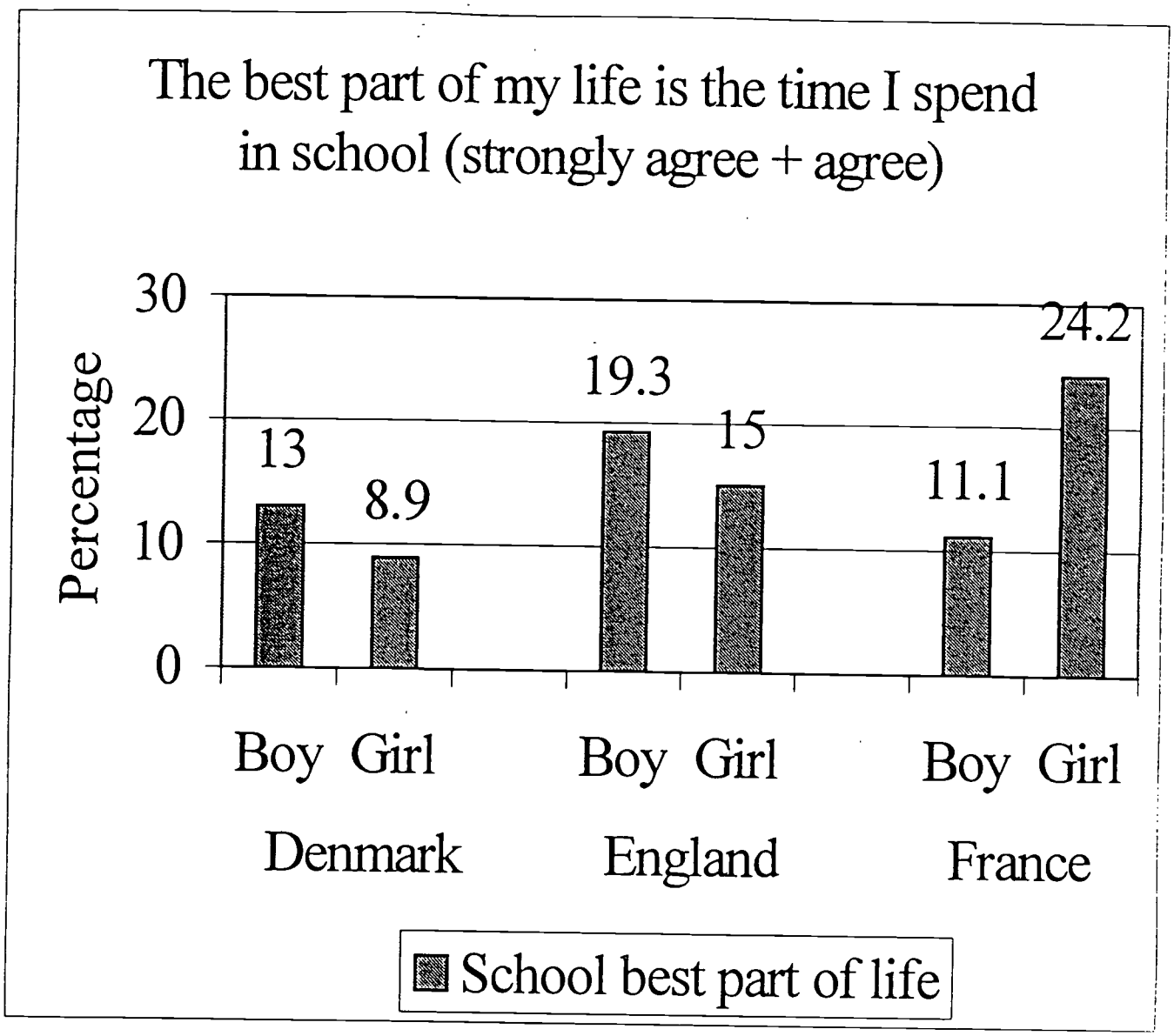
The best part of my life is the time I spend in school (strongly agree + agree)
Percentage
30
20
10
0
13
8.9
19.3
15
11.1
24.2
Boy Girl
Boy Girl
Boy Girl
Denmark
England
France
School best part of life

Figure 2

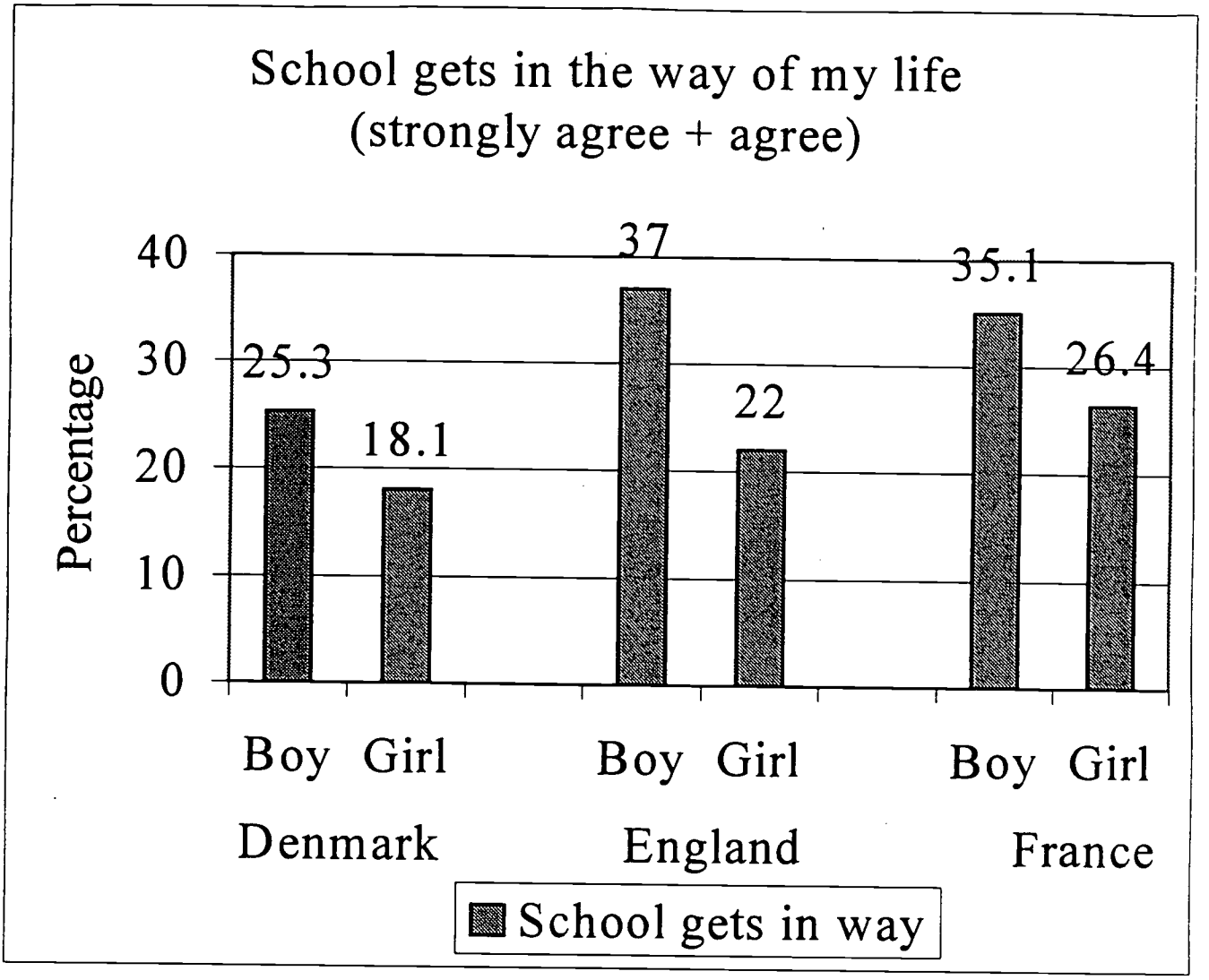
School gets in the way of my life
(strongly agree + agree)
Percentage
40
30
20
10
0
25.3
18.1
37
22
35.1
26.4
Boy Girl
Boy Girl
Boy Girl
Denmark
England
France
School gets in way

Figure 3

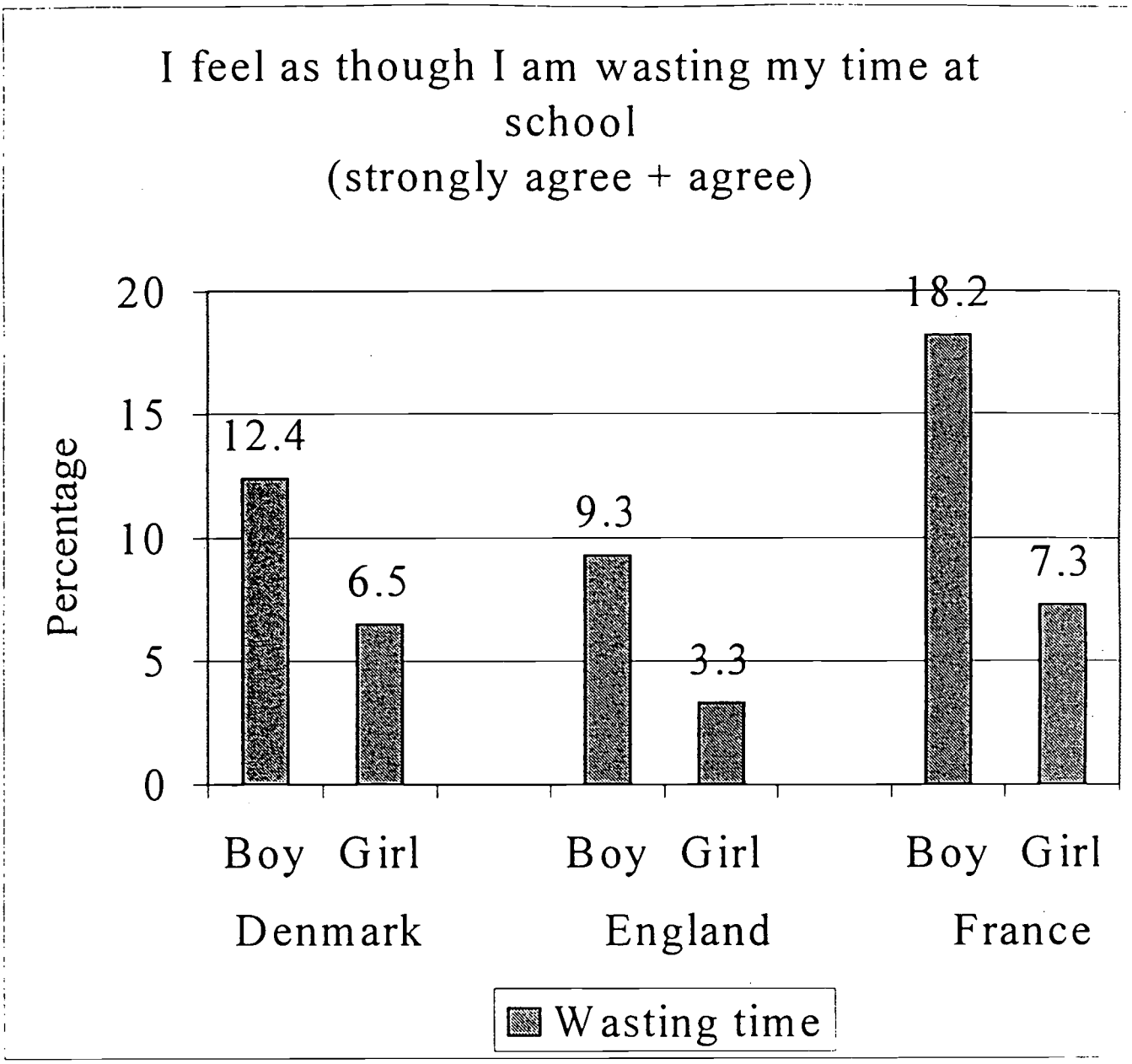
I feel as though I am wasting my time at school
(strongly agree + agree)
Percentage
20
15
10
5
0
12.4
6.5
9.3
3.3
18.2
7.3
Boy Girl
Denmark
Boy Girl
England
Boy Girl
France
Wasting time

Figure 4

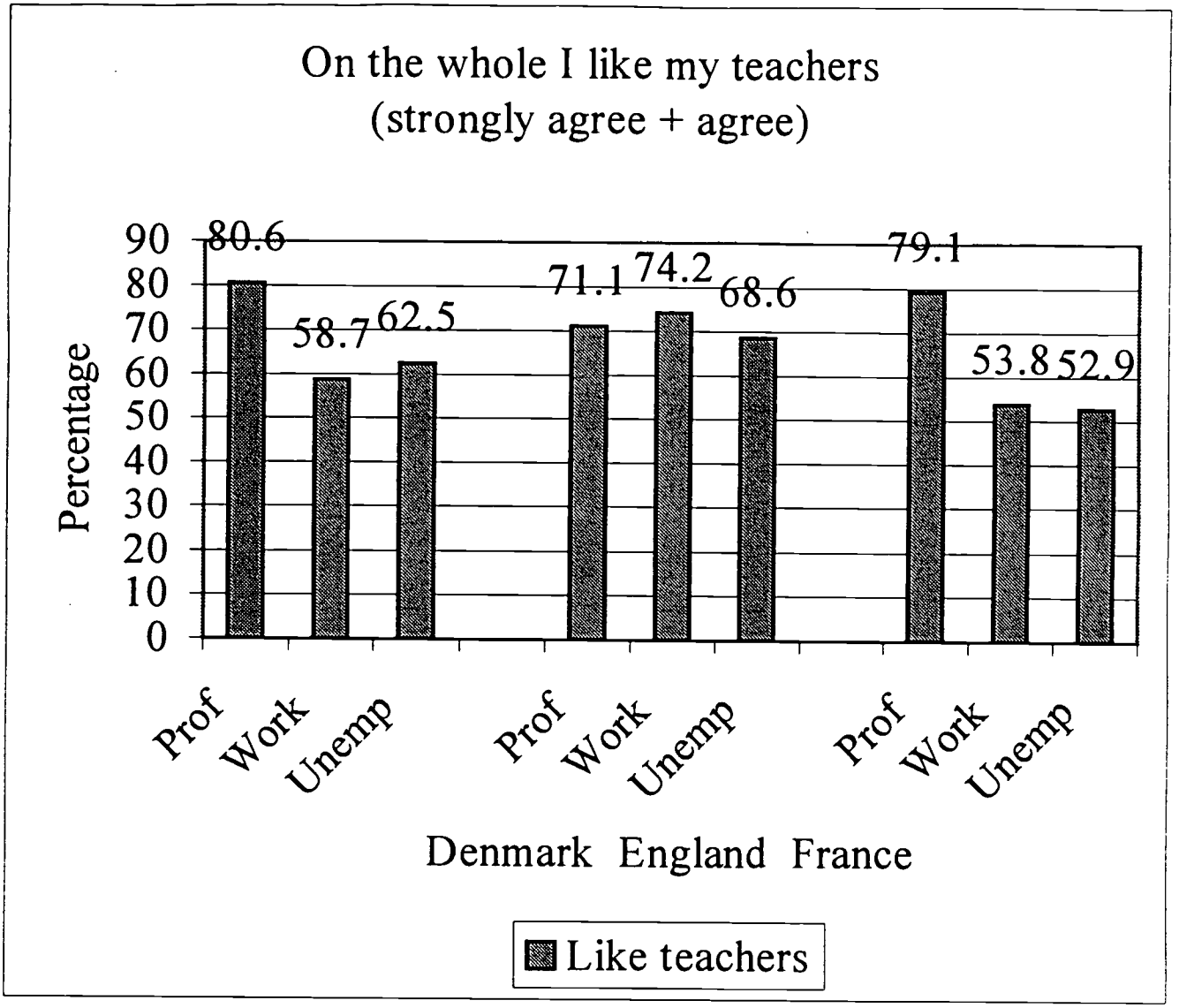
On the whole I like my teachers
(strongly agree + agree)
Percentage
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
80.6
58.7
62.5
71.1
74.2
68.6
79.1
53.8
52.9
Prof
Work
Unemp
Prof
Work
Unemp
Prof
Work
Unemp
Denmark England France
Like teachers

Figure 5

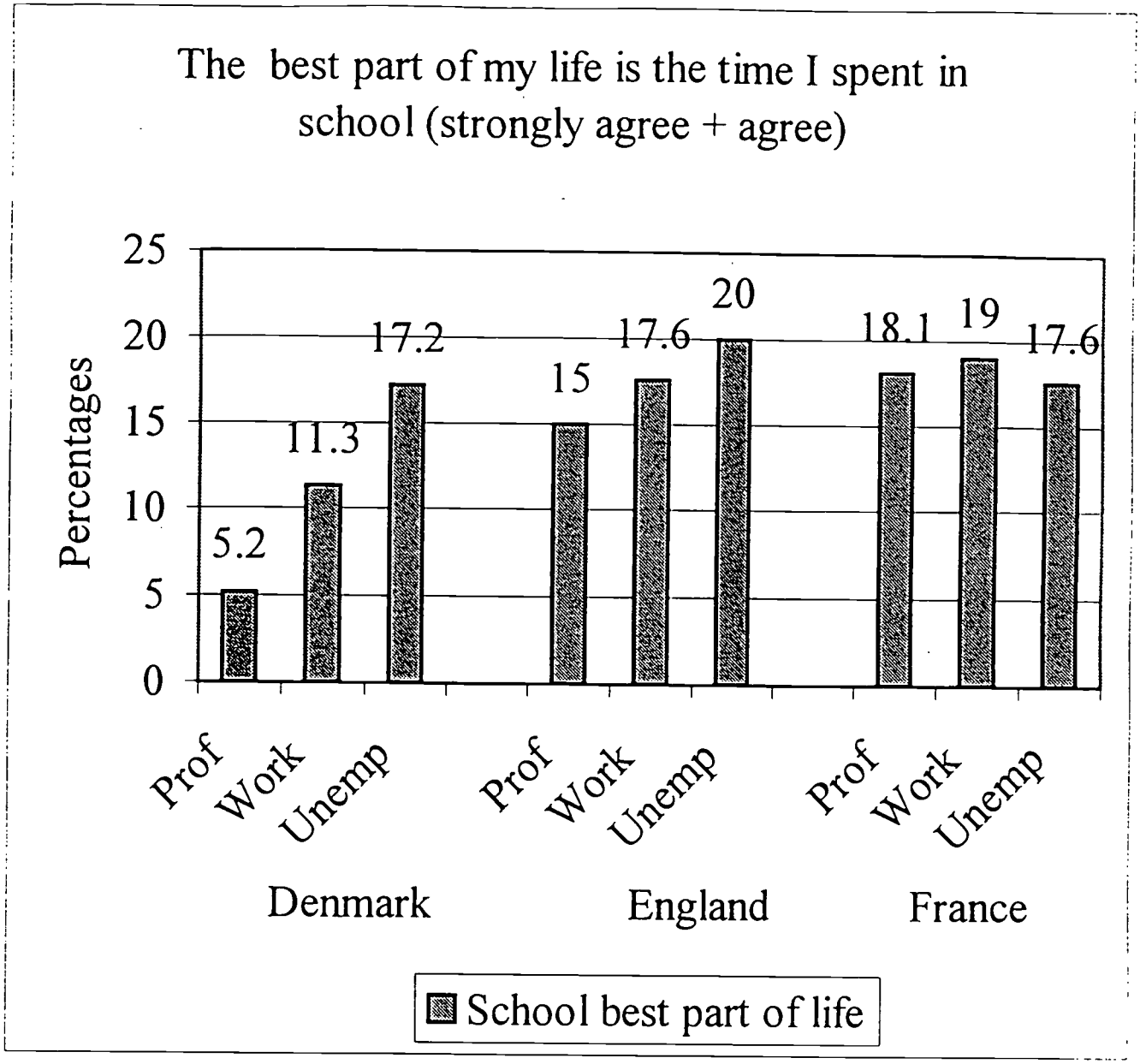
The best part of my life is the time I spent in school (strongly agree + agree)
Percentages
25
20
15
10
5
0
5.2
11.3
17.2
15
17.6
20
18.1
19
17.6
Prof
Work
Unemp
Prof
Work
Unemp
Prof
Work
Unemp
Denmark
England
France
School best part of life

Figure 6

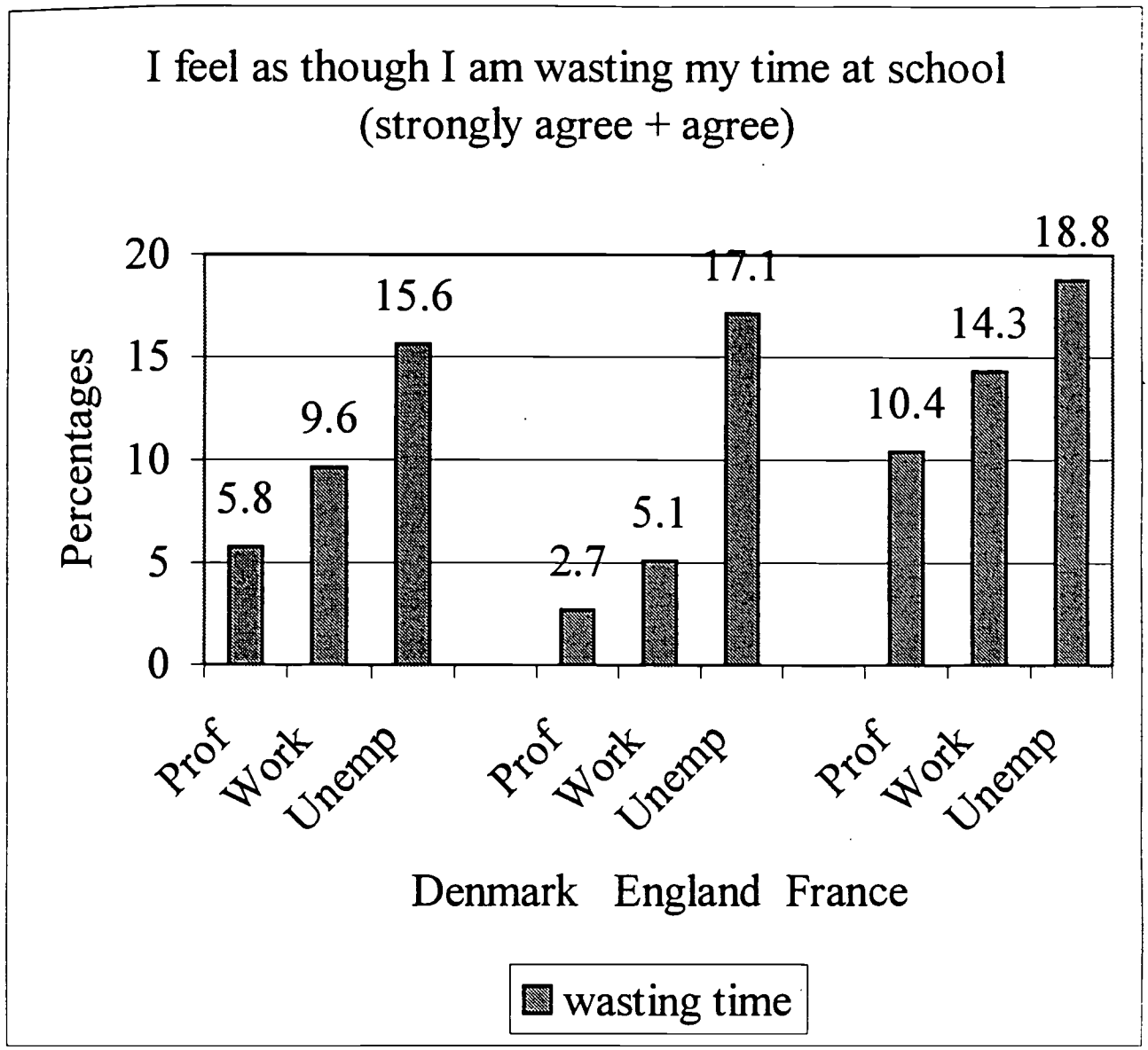
I feel as though I am wasting my time at school
(strongly agree + agree)
Percentages
20
15
10
5
0
5.8
9.6
15.6
2.7
5.1
17.1
10.4
14.3
18.8
Prof
Work
Unemp
Prof
Work
Unemp
Prof
Work
Unemp
Denmark
England
France
wasting time

Figure 7

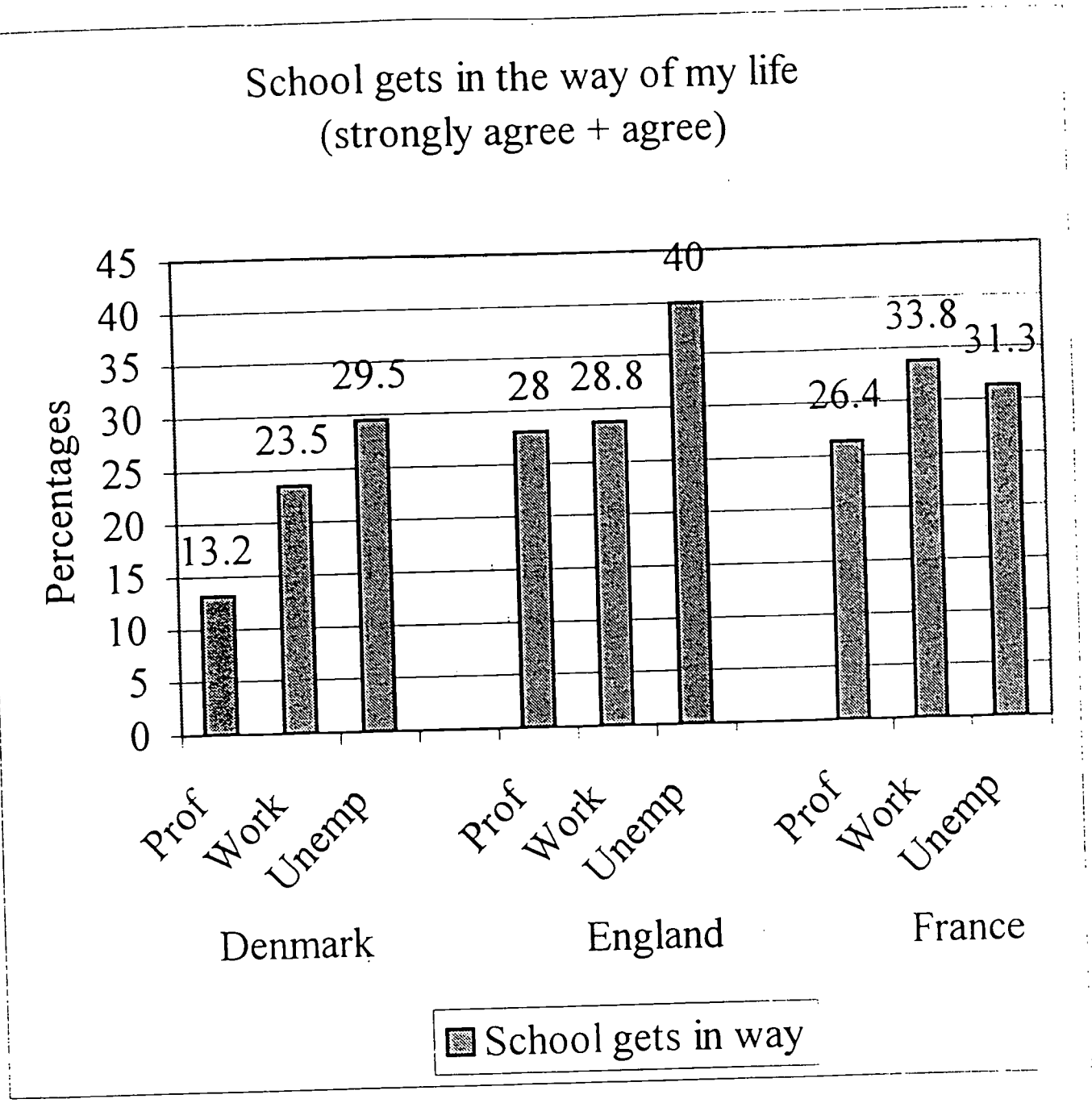
School gets in the way of my life
(strongly agree + agree)
Percentages
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
13.2
23.5
29.5
28
28.8
40
26.4
33.8
31.3
Prof
Work
Unemp
Prof
Work
Unemp
Prof
Work
Unemp
Denmark
England
France
School gets in way

Figure 8

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