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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Danish program, Folkeskole year 2000, an educational change strategy that involves an agreement between the teachers' union, the Association of Municipalities, and the Ministry of Education to improve education. The Folkeskole stipulates that the municipal council has the overall responsibility for the municipal school system, while individual schools are responsible for the quality of teaching. The program focuses on eight specific areas: quality and development; challenges for individual students (teaching must be planned and organized so that it meets the needs and prerequisites of individual students); knowledge and proficiencies (students in the Danish Folkeskole must be able to read, write, and do arithmetic at high levels); teaching materials and school buildings (which must be of sufficient quality and quantity); a good start as the common basis for future learning and development; parents (parents must share in the education of their children); management (management tasks must be defined, with increased understanding of management between the municipality, school administrators, and staff); and target-oriented use of resources (there must be an awareness of and solutions to promoting better use of resources in the Folkeskole). (SM)

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## Country-note - Denmark

*Joern Skovsgaard, Ministry of Education, head of delegation:*

### **The Folkeskole Year 2000 – a National Strategy for Enhanced Learning**

Schools and school-organisations have for the past years been subject to many reforms and innovative activities. Yet it seems that fundamental and systemic change in this field is difficult to provide. Many ways in which schools are organised and teachers work in the classroom are obsolete and since education has turned into a high policy area it has become necessary to speed up the reform process and enhance innovation.

The school-system as a political organisation has been put under a significant pressure in the media and a quest for a new type of leadership and new ways of interaction between the administrative and the political core are put on the agenda. In our country this process has been rapid and dramatic because the entire paradigm of school-development in Denmark is put into question.

Can sufficient school-development take place as a "down-up" process? We have begun to doubt about that.

Is it possible to make teachers and parents at the local level feel ownership of a "top-down" process? We doubt about that too. So we are in search for alternatives.

Like in many other countries we experience, that our schools suffer from the loss of legitimacy. Schools are no longer mainly an area dominated by authority, laws and regulations from the central administration directed towards the population. Schools have turned into public service institutions and since they are funded by the taxpayers, they need to gain public legitimacy and their activities must be carefully adjusted to the rapidly changing needs of the society.

When Denmark came out with moderately good results in the international surveys - reading, spelling and math - we felt confronted with disaster. Up till now the teachers and school leaders have been self-confident and believed that we - the Danes - had the best school-system in the world. And we felt it justified that we at the same time had one of the most expensive systems. The international surveys torpedoed the self-confidence and the illusions of the best school-system in the world - so far so good - but the professional system also seemed paralysed and we were caught with neither proper answers to the questions raised nor a strategy to cope with the problems.

We also realised, that we could not make any progress without changing the widely accepted paradigm on how schools develop and how pedagogic innovation is implemented. In a time when decentralisation and down-up strategy is accepted as "the way to do it" it is of course a delicate matter for the state level to start talking about leadership, management, state-level evaluation and development of quality in relation to national and international standards.

The programme "Folkeskole year 2000" was meant to be an alternative. The programme was designed as a national strategy however from the beginning taking in account that the real thing is happening in the classroom – that is were the programme should make a difference. This means that in the framework of the programme a new common commitment should be established between the levels in the school-system from the state level to the municipal

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level to the school to the individual teacher. So the first step - after having the plan acknowledged in the national commission of education in the parliament - was to negotiate a common agreement and a plan of action with the national union of teachers and the association of local government.

We were entering a path covered with conflict; however that was what we did - taking one step at a time and solving one conflict before triggering the next.

#### **The making of the "Folkeskole Year 2000" – a short outline of the political history**

As the political situation became difficult during spring and summer 1997 the coalition behind the compromise on the school act were about to break apart.

So in the beginning of September 1997 a group of civil servants from the ministry's department of lower secondary and primary education got together and wrote the first texts on "Folkeskolen year 2000". In fact there is not much new in the programme "Folkeskolen year 2000" it is more or less an implement plan for the intentions and aspirations in the school-act from 1993. The most important aspect of "Folkeskolen year 2000" is, that it constitutes an agreement between the teachers' union, the association of municipalities and the ministry of education. An agreement according to which the three have agreed to join forces in the development of the schools the coming 2 years.

The plan was accepted by the parliament and the political tension was eased - at least for a while.

Of course we have been accused of an attempt to bring back state-control and centralization, but reading the document in its context it is made clear to almost everybody that the success of this program is needed if we want to maintain the decentralized system and make it possible for our children in the future to make educational progress and contribute to further innovation in our society.

"The Folkeskole in the Year 2000" does not cover every aspect of school-life in Denmark and it is not meant to. The text reflects what we think is needed and most of it is in fact an implement of what was new in school-act of 1993.

The following is a summary of the program:

**The Folkeskole in the Year 2000 (Summary):**

The text is an agreement by:

Danish Ministry of Education, Department of Primary and Lower Secondary Education

National Association of Local Authorities

Danish Union of Teachers

#### ***The Folkeskole in the Year 2000***

The Danish Parliament adopts the common national framework of the Folkeskole. The Act

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on the Folkeskole stipulates that the municipal council has the overall responsibility for the municipal school system. The responsibility for the quality of the teaching is placed with the individual school.

The school is to give the pupils knowledge and proficiencies. It is to develop awareness, imagination and an urge to learn, and it shall introduce the pupils to the Danish society. This broad concept of education is fundamental to the Danish Folkeskole.

There is general agreement about the necessity of

- General subject-specific skills, e.g. in reading/writing/arithmetic, foreign languages and the use of information technology
- Personal qualifications such as creativity, cooperation, independence and intellectual skills
- Specific competencies related to working life.

At the same time, it is characteristic that it is not a question of choosing between various kinds of qualifications but of perceiving these as a prerequisite for each other. It is not enough to have general subject-specific skills, it is also important to have a sense of cooperation and a capacity to carry out independent assessments.

The globalisation and the transition to a knowledge and learning society will have an influence on the qualification requirements of the future and intensify the need for life-long learning. At the same time, it will intensify the demands on the Folkeskole as a community- and equality enhancing factor.

The Act on the Folkeskole from 1 august 1994 has created the framework for this.

The Ministry of Education, the National Association of Local Authorities, and the Danish Union of Teachers have individually and together taken a number of initiatives to support the work carried out by the individual municipality and the individual school with the overall aims of the Folkeskole.

At the same time, it must be recognised that it is a recurrent theme in the public debate whether the school lives up to these aims and expectations and gives the pupils a sufficient ballast for their further life and education. The debate on the one hand deals with the basic knowledge and proficiencies, and on the other hand it deals with the use of the new possibilities created by the Act on the Folkeskole.

The political parties in the Danish Parliament, which are behind the Act on the Folkeskole from 1994, confirm that the act with its weighting of basic knowledge and proficiencies, personal qualifications and community qualifications is still the right basis for the work of the Folkeskole.

Within the financial framework, which has been agreed upon by the government and the National Association of Local Authorities, it is the municipal council which is responsible for making priorities and weighting the financial basis for the performance of the tasks of the Folkeskole. An increasing number of pupils, state-of-the-art teaching aids, changes to be made in relation to school buildings etc. will in the years ahead lead to an increasing

expenditure-load on the Folkeskole. At the same time, the government is planning a tightening of the spending both with regard to the operational expenditure and the cost of construction etc. in the years to come. This will intensify the need to utilise the resources of the Folkeskole in the most expedient way.

The local priorities are made in a balanced interaction with the other municipal tasks in such a way that the school-political targets of the individual municipality and the earmarked resources support each other. Municipal variations imply that municipalities and schools have proceeded at a different pace in compliance with local desires, needs and financial circumstances.

After four years with the Act on the Folkeskole, there is a need for adjustments and clarifications in order to have the act fully implemented. At the same time, there is a desire to make the work with several of the central tasks of the school more visible.

Therefore, the Ministry of Education, the National Association of Local Authorities and the Danish Union of Teachers have, in a committing cooperation on the programme: "The Folkeskole in the Year 2000", decided to focus on a number of areas within the Folkeskole, which are to contribute to strengthening and rendering the quality development of the Folkeskole visible.

The programme is implemented in such a way that the municipal financing takes place in accordance with the financial framework laid down in the local budget agreements between the government and the National Association of Local Authorities, including the IT-agreement from 1996.

Furthermore, the programme is implemented in such a way that, unless otherwise agreed - it is effected in accordance with the existing agreements between the National Association of Local Authorities and the Central Organisation of Danish Teachers. In this cooperation, no limitations have been made on the topics, which can be taken up at the pending collective bargaining between the Central Organisation of Danish Teachers and *inter alia* the National Association of Local Authorities, and it does not contain any solutions with regard to specific negotiation themes, which may come up between the parties.

The work with the focus areas will clarify expectations, make demands and provide the necessary support to continue the development of the school. It will follow up on ongoing initiatives, but it will also require new ones.

The parties have agreed that objectives have to be drawn up for each focus area, and that assessment and evaluation methods have to be agreed upon subsequently. It will also be agreed between the parties how they can - in cooperation - follow and support the work with the chosen focus areas.

The duration of the programme is two years, and in the year 2000 it will be assessed how the development of the focus areas has proceeded.

The Danish Parliament will follow the programme during the next two years.

The programme will focus on the following areas in the school:

1. Quality and development - expectations and results

According to the Act on the Folkeskole, the municipal council has the overall responsibility for the municipal primary and lower secondary schools, and it lays down the targets and framework for the activity of the schools. Targets and framework may for instance comprise quality and development in the entire school system as well as at the individual school. The responsibility for the quality of the teaching is placed with the individual school.

Studies show that the work of setting targets and framework has been initiated in the great majority of the country's municipalities, whereas most of the municipalities are only now about to start the follow-up and assessment of the targets set. To this should be added that no methods have as yet been developed to follow and assure the quality of the teaching of the Folkeskole at the national level.

In the year 2000, the work with quality development is to be a common phenomenon at all schools, in all municipalities as well as at national level.

*It means*

- That the ongoing work of setting municipal targets, drawing up plans and deciding on evaluation methods is to be intensified
- That the individual municipality is to ensure the dialogue, coordinate and act on the basis of information compiled about the work with targets and evaluation
- That the individual school's work with targets and evaluation is to focus to a greater extent on the teaching
- That a national compilation of information is to be commenced which can be used as a basis for the further development of quality in the common Folkeskole.

## 2. Challenges for the individual pupil

It follows from the Act on the Folkeskole that the teaching shall be planned and organised so that it meets the needs and prerequisites of the individual pupil. At the same time, the teacher and pupil are required to cooperate on a continuous fixing of objectives for the work of the pupil. Decisions regarding working methods and the choice of subjects are also to be taken in a cooperation between teachers and pupils.

Experience shows that the schools have acknowledged this task, but it is still necessary to strengthen and develop the effort.

In the year 2000, it must be rendered visible that the needs and prerequisites of the individual pupil is the point of departure for the organisation of the teaching.

*It means*

- That the school management is to initiate and follow up on the cooperation and ensure a flexible organisation of the school year and the work of the teachers.
- That the teachers are to cooperate on the organisation of the teaching with the point of departure in the individual pupil's needs and prerequisites

- That team formation is to be used as a pedagogical method
- That there is to be a dissemination of relevant school experience relating to the adaptation of the teaching to the needs and prerequisites of the individual pupil.

### 3. Knowledge and Proficiencies

The pupils in the Danish Folkeskole must be able to read, write and do arithmetic at a high and confident level. Good knowledge and proficiencies in these areas constitute the basis of all the work of the school.

Studies carried out at the beginning of the 1990s have pointed out that Danish pupils did not attain a satisfactory result in for instance reading. Many municipalities and many schools have focused on the learning of basic knowledge and proficiencies, but there is a greater need for a statement of objectives for the learning and for an earlier action in relation to pupils with special needs.

In the year 2000, objectives must have been set for the pupils' development of the basic knowledge and proficiencies, and these objectives must form the basis of an earlier action in relation to pupils with special needs.

#### *It means*

- That the municipalities are to see to it that objectives are set for the teaching both in general and at the individual school, and that an assessment is furthermore to be made as to whether the outcome corresponds to the objectives set.
- That the school management is to take the initiative to concretise the school's work with the implementation of the aims, the central knowledge and proficiency areas as well as curricula and guidelines
- That good teaching methods are to be developed, disseminated and anchored on a continuous basis
- That it is to be analysed whether the nationally set central knowledge and proficiency areas need to be specified
- That an early target-oriented action is to be initiated for children with special difficulties.

### 4. Teaching materials and school buildings

The teacher organises the teaching, gives advice and assesses the work of the pupils. The teaching supports the individual pupil's development in an independent learning process. This learning concept is contained in the Act on the Folkeskole.

A teacher role subject to constant changes, new teaching aids, the use of information technology and modern media all contribute to assisting the school in achieving its objectives.

The government and the National Association of Local Authorities have entered into an agreement, which establishes the rate of extension for the IT-area in the coming years.

Concurrently with the technical extension of the IT-area, there is a need for continuing training for the teachers which will enable them to integrate IT into the teaching.

The increasing number of pupils in the Folkeskole means that new- and rebuilding of schools will be carried out in some municipalities in the coming years.

In the year 2000, a development must have been initiated, which creates coherence between the development of the teacher role, the teaching methods, the buildings, teaching aids and IT.

*It means*

- That the knowledge and experience of the teachers are to be extended when it comes to the integration of IT into the teaching
  - That the school library is to function as the pedagogical service centre of the school
- That knowledge and experience are to be developed in the teaching aid industry as to how new teaching aids can integrate the modern technology.
- That experience with well-equipped and contemporary school buildings is to be compiled and disseminated with a view to establishing a decision-making basis in those municipalities, which have a need for new- and rebuilding of their schools.

#### 5. A good start - the common basis

School start is the basis for the individual pupil's learning and further development. Almost all children start school in a pre-school class, when they are about six years old. The central activity of the school is teaching, but in addition to this a great number of the children from the pre-school class to the third form level are being looked after in school-based leisure-time facilities, in recreation centres etc. after school.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, leisure-time schemes were established at a number of schools, but when it comes to the establishment of a greater coherence in the everyday life of children, general, overall targets and framework, including a more flexible view about the time when the more formal learning is to begin, are in short supply.

Wholeness and coherence must be created in the everyday life of children. This can be done by qualifying and structuring the cooperation and the dialogue between institutions and staff groups. Parents should be involved in this cooperation and assume an active responsibility for the development of the children.

In the year 2000, a basis must have been created for deciding on the overall targets and framework of the pre-school, in-schooling and the school-based leisure-time activity areas.

*It means*

- That work is to be carried out to extend the cooperation between pre-school institutions and the school and also between pre-school classes, the first form levels and the school-based leisure-time activities.
- That innovation and development projects concerning the contents and organisational

planning of the work in and around the in-schooling phase are to be initiated in preparation of a quality development of the content and the coherence in the everyday life of the children.

- That the point of departure is to be taken in the different tasks of the school- and leisure-time activity pedagogy in order to utilise the different educational competencies of the staff groups more expediently.

## 6. Parents and school

Parents have a share in the responsibility for the teaching of the children. The parents and the school must therefore cooperate on giving the pupils a good schooling. This is among other things done through conversations about the individual child and through joint meetings with all the parents of a class. The parents also meet the school at events organised for the entire school and through the work on the school board.

It is important that the work on the school board is experienced as essential and meaningful. The dialogue between the school and the parents should be precise and target-oriented, and to a greater extent than before it should deal with the central tasks of the Folkeskole.

In the year 2000, the dialogue between the parents and the school must to a greater extent involve questions relating to the teaching of the school and the assessment of the work of the school.

### *It means*

- That the municipal politicians and the school boards are to enter into a mutual dialogue about the central tasks of the Folkeskole
- That the management, teachers and parents of the individual school are to discuss the expectations they have in relation to the teaching of the school and the cooperation between the school and the parents
- That the school boards are to be given support in how to perform their tasks and fill their competencies
- That the management and teachers of the school are to take the initiative to a further development of a professional cooperation between school and home
- That parents are to recognise their responsibility for the schooling of their children.

## 7. Management - challenges and responsibility

School management plays a decisive role in the development and realisation of the tasks and objectives of the school. Increased decentralisation and focus on quality development require that the school heads in the Folkeskole perform a series of new tasks. The tasks of school management among other things comprise quality in the teaching as well as resource- and staff management.

In the light of this, there is a need to define the management tasks and thus also increase the understanding of management between the municipality, the schoolheads and the staff of the school.

In the year 2000, the management in the Danish Folkeskole is to include modern principles for administrative, pedagogical as well as human resources management. The management must be visible both at municipal and at school level, and it must be in accordance with the requirements set for the development of the Folkeskole.

*It means*

- That the management concept in the Folkeskole is to be concretised
- That municipal targets for school management are to be set with the point of departure in the Act on the Folkeskole
- That there is to be a further development of school management programmes
- That management at the individual school is to be conducted in relation to the tasks of the school and good staff policy practices.

### **8. Target-oriented use of the resources**

The Folkeskole is facing great challenges, i.e. an increasing number of pupils, the introduction of new teaching methods, the provision of state-of-the art teaching aids and, in some municipalities, changes in relation to the school buildings, to mention some.

In the present context, it is not a question of finding more or less money for the Folkeskole, it is a question of making the best use of the resources available at any given time.

It is therefore necessary to develop planning methods, which can create the best possible coherence between the targets set and the use of available resources.

In the year 2000, there must be an awareness of - and solution models which can promote - a better use of resources in the Folkeskole.

*It means*

- That the resources of the school must be viewed as a whole
- That analyses are to be carried out, which can elucidate the existing connections between the resources which are at a school's disposal, the ways in which it uses the resources and the subject-specific and pedagogical qualities of the school
- That innovation and development work are to be initiated, where flexible use of human- and financial resources are tested in order to further the subject-specific and pedagogical objectives.

The full text contains a prologue and statements on which specific actions that we are to be taken. However we considered this to be far too detailed and of minor interest for a foreign audience - but of course we welcome questions concerning this.

**Epilogue:**

The programme is now moving to conclusion and we are waiting for the conclusive evaluation being made by independent consultants organised in a coalition of private and

public research institutes.

However there is no doubt that the programme has had a significant impact on the development that our school-system has undertaken during the past years – not to speak of the emerging of new productive networks across the borderlines of organisations, associations and administrative levels in which important entrepreneurs in educational development and innovation works.

We believe that the presentations and workshops will clarify how each member of our delegation reflects – from his/ her point of view – the importance of “The Folkeskole year 2000”

Fredensborg 7<sup>th</sup> of October 00  
Jørn Skovsgaard, head of division



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