



**WHAT WORKS IN INNOVATION IN EDUCATION**

**DENMARK: BUILDING ON A TRADITION OF DEMOCRACY AND  
DIALOGUE IN SCHOOLS**

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## **BACKGROUND/OVERVIEW**

### **The Context**

Primary and secondary education in Denmark is governed by the 1993 School Act, amended in 2001 and 2003. These educational reforms reflect the political move to the right that occurred in Denmark over the last decade and the broadening of the governing coalition to include right-wing parties. However, the traditional educational system and culture are deeply entrenched in Danish society and in the political system and so far there has been no confrontation between those wishing to radically reform the system and teachers defending the status quo.

The Danish 'Folkeskole' consists of an optional one year of pre-school at age six, a compulsory nine-year basic school and an optional 10<sup>th</sup> year. The Acts enshrine the principle of local authority and school responsibility for the administration of schools, within a framework of regulation and pedagogical goals established by central government. This is a reversal of the historical tradition in which schools were more pedagogically autonomous. The role of parents in the Danish system is traditionally strong and it is explicit in the School Act, the first article of which refers to the necessity for co-operation between parents and schools in the achievement of the "all-round personal development of the individual pupil".

The School Act reflects a concern on the part of central governments to improve standards in education. To some extent this concern has been strengthened by international comparative indicators of educational performance, not least the OECD's own PISA publications. Denmark's performance over the last decade and more was perceived as being disappointing in basic subjects in comparison with other Scandinavian countries. One finding was that children of immigrant parents were doing less well than in other countries. In view of the priority given to equity within the Danish system, this was seen as a serious weakness. The Danish government has recently asked the OECD to conduct a study of equity in the *Folkeskole* and the Danish Ministry has begun publishing on its web site schools' average grades in the leaving examinations. Reforms have been directed to improving basic education by raising expectations in the form of goals to be achieved by schools and local authorities.

As early as 1988 a report for the Ministry of Education set out "a comprehensive catalogue of basic knowledge which the school [is to] convey to the pupils" (Eurydice). At the end of the same year the Ministry initiated a Content and Quality Development Project to evaluate the education system and to develop and disseminate methods and tools for school self-assessment and to help them define quality.

In 1997 the Ministry set up a new project called "Quality that can be seen" to identify targets, supplemented by specific indicators and criteria of achievement, for the different sectors of the educational system. In 1999 the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) was established with the brief to carry out systematic and mandatory evaluations of teaching and learning at all levels of the education system. EVA has carried out pilot evaluations of two school districts in order to develop and test assessment methods for the *Folkeskole*, including school self-assessment. EVA has also looked at the school leaving examinations, the first three years, the international dimension in education and English in the *Folkeskole*.

It is in this context that developments in assessment procedures, including formative assessment, should be seen. There is a particular interest in assessment policy at Ministry level. Formative assessment is considered necessary for differentiated teaching that benefits all students. This is clear in the demand that educational planning – including choice of teaching approaches, methods, teaching materials and

content – in all subjects shall meet the objectives of the *Folkeskole* and shall be varied in order to take care of the needs of the individual student.

### **The Ministry's approach to influencing changes at school and classroom levels**

Denmark continues to have a very high level of expenditure – comparatively within the OECD according to a Ministry source – on the professional development of teachers. This was confirmed by the high levels of in-service activity found among teachers in the two case study schools. Efforts over the last few years have been directed to channelling teacher development into areas such as formative assessment where the Ministry has identified a need for reform.

Binding goals have been set for core subjects at key phases. Since the summer of 2003, detailed competencies to be achieved by four different grades have been published. For example, in physics/chemistry goals are grouped under the following headings: The world of physics and chemistry, The use of physics/chemistry in everyday life and society, and Methods and ways of thinking. The knowledge and competencies to be acquired by students are also set out, for example: to know how atomic models have been developed; to be able to formulate simple problems, put forward and test hypotheses, and assess results.

### **The case studies**

One of the two case study schools - SPF – has a rather special status. The other - Snejbjerg - is an ordinary Danish *Folkeskole*. The Spf is intended to be innovative and developmental but in a way that whatever is being developed in this school can be transferred to other Danish *Folkeskoler* without problems. The school has the same financial resources, the same kind of teachers, and is governed by the same Act. The difference is that teachers are allowed a number of working hours per year to communicate their experiences to other schools

The experiences described were developed and assessed in collaboration with researchers from the Danish University of Education's Research Programme on Professional Development and Leadership.

### **Case study 1**

#### ***The National Innovative Centre for General Education (Statens Pædagogiske Forsøgscener – SPF)***

SPF is a state pedagogical centre, based in Copenhagen, where innovation is the basis for all teaching and learning. It consists of an experimental school and a Youth Town. Teachers have an obligation to disseminate good practice and there is therefore a strong emphasis on professional development and co-operative work. The purpose of Spf is to:

- Develop ideas for teaching the older grades of the *Folkeskole*
- Test the ideas in practice
- Assess and disseminate the results of this work
- Bridge the gaps between the *Folkeskole*, the upper secondary schools, trade and industry, and society at large
- Develop international collaboration

- Participate in educational development

The students of the experimental school start in the 8th grade and can continue for two or three years to 9th or 10th grade, before they move on to higher secondary education, work or other vocational courses. Based at the same site is a Youth Town where students from a lot of schools in greater Copenhagen are introduced to aspects of economic and professional life as well as aspects of democratic citizenship by means of courses conducted by teaching staff and visiting professionals.

The 144 students (48 at each year level) are taught all the Danish subjects required by law. As innovation is integral to teaching methods, all teaching goals are described in the annual project descriptions both for the specific subjects and as an overall plan for the three years.

The students sometimes work in mixed groups where 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders are together as part of the project involving the whole school, called Moving Towards a Project Oriented School. Mixed level classes are considered useful in furthering students' social development. However, for social and administrative purposes they are put into "core groups" classes of 24 of which roughly 16 students which remain relatively stable throughout their school career.

The school has many approaches to teaching and varied teaching methods, such as applying Howard Gardner's theories of multiple intelligences, project oriented teaching, the use of portfolio both in learning and assessment and focusing on different learning styles. Formative assessment is an important part of adjusting and refining the projects at SPF, but teachers feel that sometimes it can be a problem to be both the agent and the subject when evaluating and analysing an ongoing process. The teachers often work in teams both to develop and assess new teaching approaches and sometimes to deliver them in the classroom.

#### *Deliberations on formative assessment*

As in most Danish schools there are student interviews several times per year. Students' progress is discussed and - in dialogue between teacher and student - new learning goals are set. In lessons there are continuous dialogues between teachers and individual student or groups of students on which teachers build up their assessments. Teachers use different assessment forms for the student interviews. Teams of teachers have developed these forms and they focus on whatever the team finds important at any particular time. There are questions on subject matter outcomes, objectives for learning, attitude towards the work and social competencies. Teachers often develop oral or written items for assessment to the actual teaching procedures. Often the questions are about what they have learnt and whether their objectives were achieved. Students also indicate where there is a need for further teaching. Often the teachers' team decides upon the content of the assessment, but sometimes it can be designed in collaboration between teachers and students.

Through questionnaires, qualitative interviews, quick expressions of opinion, teachers evaluate of signs of progress. It is sometimes very hard to formulate precise goals that are assessable. In the teams, teachers discuss how to interpret the results and how to be more objective than subjective (because "one sees what one wants to see"). Teachers say they are on a continuous pursuit for better and more secure methods. It is obvious that teachers at the school are considering how to balance verbal exchanges with students with more robust and written assessment. Teachers utilise the results of assessments to assess whether the intentions and the goals were achieved to a degree that is desirable and acceptable. Students are graded two or three times per year in each subject.

Teachers collaborate with students on what parts of the work they are going to assess. Sometimes students complain about the number of assessment sheets and assessment deliberations. Therefore it is very

important to stress the intentions and the use of the assessments. Every half-year – at school-parents meetings – teachers formulate new goals for the next semester. They try to find goals that can be written in the logbook. Most often teachers communicate the results of assessments orally to students. They explain what the assessment tells them and how the results influence further planning. The results are sometimes posted to parents. Teachers use the results to plan the next focus and new approaches. Students are encouraged to look closely at the results too. At form 9 the school uses the portfolio and logbook as tools for reflection and assessment. Students display their portfolios at the beginning of the school-parents conversation.

### *Developing verbal competencies*

Students must feel self-confident in class if they are to dare to show and use what they are able to do. Activities to facilitate this in this school are: reading and telling stories, writing stories, logbook, diary, listening to music, interviewing other people, inviting guest teachers. Humour and fun are developed through play, games, video production, role plays etc. In one class students were working in small groups on the working conditions of the 1950's. The teacher went from group to group listening to the dialogue. Every now and then she asked students to clarify their statements and to reflect on the relevance of them to the theme of this module.

The verbal competencies are considered important for many reasons. One of them is that this is the way in which much goal-setting and feed back of assessment is given in the day to day education in class, in study groups and individually and also at the more formal occasions like student-parent-school conversation. This school doesn't give more weight to tests and grading than is prescribed by regulations, but it stresses the explicit goal setting and feedback in various forms. Great effort is put into displaying the products of many kinds – writings and pieces of aesthetics (artwork), scientific models and other products in the portfolio and the logbook. But the verbal communication is by far the most important means of information about students' intentions, goals, assessments, reflections and feeling and about teachers' goals, intentions and assessment. Oral rather than written assessment is used because it is quick and flexible and permits students to initiate or respond to dialogue. In this way it is possible to detect and correct misunderstandings and ambiguities.

The intentions in this school are to develop complex competencies such as collaboration, flexibility, social and affective competencies on top of/or as a foundation for, the instruction in and acquisition of basic skills like literacy and numeracy. Teachers need to develop concepts and language for detecting, describing, interpreting and discussing those competencies.

This means among other things that teachers are concerned with students' motivation and commitment in order to be able to develop their understanding and values. Being competent, for teachers in this school, is not solely about being able to remember texts and facts by heart but also to relate the information to themselves and to their experiences. One aspect of this interest is what the teacher looks for when teaching: Do students look and appear to be committed in absorbed by the work?

In the same way the concept of discussion between students, teachers and school leaders is broad and encompassing in this school. Discussion of teaching and learning issues is not confined to the student-teacher dialogue. Peers are involved in many ways, one of those being the core groups, and parents are being involved in student-parent-school conversations. Both kinds of dialogues are intended to be about important issues in school: students' learning and teachers' professional development.

It takes many competencies on the part of students and teachers as well. Teachers need to be competent in describing both subject matter goals and assessment but also affective and social competencies.

For example a teacher tells us that she varies the forms of instruction, the ways desks are placed and the material used according to the theme they are working with. Sometimes she does whole class instruction, sometimes students work in small groups and sometimes they work individually. Project work is the most common working method. However, regardless of theme and working method she assembles the cohort at the beginning of the module and in the few minutes before ending it. She wants to know what students are going to do in the next ninety or more minutes and how they are going to do it. She wants to reflect with them at the end of the working period on what they actually did, what they gained and learnt and what they want to take up next time.

Over the course of the module she sometimes stops student activities in order to reflect on the work: How does what they find out fit the intentions of the module? Can they utilize the model or concept presented to them as a learning tool? For example the teacher has introduced a narrator-model as a means of analysing and interpreting short stories and she has asked class to try it out on a short story and on a video movie. Often students get involved in interpretations and in differences in interpretations. They are often stopped and asked to reflect on the usefulness of the model.

### *Formative Assessment Methods at Spf*

SPF describes more aspects of formative assessment in a PowerPoint presentation of the school. (This presentation is an example of how Spf performs its dissemination function: the Power Point package is designed for use in developmental activities in other schools.) There are five sets of concepts and practices of formative assessment that are integrated in the processes of learning:

1. The student profile which is about theory of learning.
2. The log book which is about the processes
3. The portfolio which is about the outcomes and products
4. The core groups
5. The student-parents-school conversations

#### *1. Student profile*

Students in grade 8 are new to the school and unknown to the teachers. Therefore there is a need for students to reflect on their expectations of the work at this school and at the same time a need for teachers to get to know the students as closely as possible. At the beginning of the school year students are introduced to basic learning theory/learning styles concepts and among these to Howard Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences. On that basis students write a profile that is both a self-description in relation to the multiple intelligences and a description of their expectations and goals for learning for the next two years in this school. The profile is a basis for a conversation between student, his/her parents and teachers in the autumn term.

One teacher described how students were introduced to Howard Gardner's theories of multiple intelligences, and were asked to fill in a questionnaire where all 8 intelligences were represented and to mark all the expressions that applied to them. They were now getting a clearer picture of their own intelligence profile, and ended up making a circle divided in eight pieces, where they put all statements about themselves in the right area of the circle to visualise the profile.

When students become aware of being “body smart” or “number smart” or any of the other ways of being smart, they also learn something about their own learning style. Do they prefer to work alone or in groups, to have details or an overall view, to look at or to listen, to move about or to sit quietly?

The same group of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students had a topic in English called “How do I learn new words?” They were given a certain number of new words and told different approaches on how to try and learn them. All approaches represented the different intelligences, and after they had all tried all approaches and activities, they were asked what method they had enjoyed the most and what had worked best for them.

Linguistic students prefer to write the words into a text, make flashcards and construct games. Logic/mathematical students make systematic wordlists, look for similarities or compare with other meanings or make up ways of testing. Spatial students like to combine word and picture, to use mind maps, colours and varied layout and writing, visualise the words. Musical students like to use the words in rhymes, music or rap, to say the words out loud both seeing and hearing the words. The interpersonal students prefer to do the activities in groups while the intrapersonal prefer to work alone. The more conscious they become of their own preferred learning methods the more efficiently they learn and remember new words.

## *2. Log Book*

The intentions of working with the logbook are to facilitate and support students in reflecting on the effort and goals for learning. It gives more students the opportunity to be heard. Teachers may enter into written dialogue with students and discuss teaching and the outcomes. In this work teachers can strengthen the effort to develop students’ writing as a springboard for more active participation in oral discussions. One student’s log book includes the following description: “We had a visitor from an Indian tribe. He told a lot about, how Indians live. And all the time in English. It was very interesting. He told how you could work with your self to become a better person. You are good enough as you are, he said. I think I learnt something like: Love yourself”

## *3. Port Folio*

Portfolios are a basis for student-parent-teacher conversations – sharing reflections and setting new targets and goals in collaboration with parents and teachers.

Parents get, when working with students’ portfolio, a better, a more concrete background for entering into dialogue with teachers and their children. They can see for themselves some of the outcomes of students’ learning and therefore they can better see, in what ways they themselves can support and encourage their children’s education.

In one class students were handed this instruction:

### *Portfolio*

It’s time to reflect on what you want to display in the first portfolio exhibition. You will have an ordinary desk and a space on the walls at your disposal.

Reflect on your work in the first period:

- The camp school
- Themes from the core-subjects period

- The work on the logbook

For this exhibition you shall:

- Show something that you have enjoyed working with and that you have improved in
- Show something that you felt was difficult and that you have to work on
- Show a picture of you in the work situation that you prefer the most

You may quote your own logbook. We are looking forward to seeing your outcomes.

In one class the core groups were asked to discuss the criteria for selecting material for their portfolios. Teachers handed this sheet out:

“Which criteria would you choose for selecting materials for the last school-parents conversation?”

It could be:

- Products that are not known to our parents
- Focus on one subject
- Focus on what I will emphasise in my work over the next few month, that means a work plan
- Focus on my collaboration competencies
- Focus on the issues that were in the core of the last student-parent-teacher conversation
- Are there any indications on how I could improve my working habits
- Focus on next year
- Anything else.

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- Focus on next year
- Anything else

#### 4. Core Groups

The students' groups are intended to be fora for student reflection. Students help and support peers in reflecting on effort, outcome and goals. They help each other to choose what material should go into the portfolio.

To prepare the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students for enquiry-based and project-oriented learning they were given a certain number of lessons to define something that puzzled them and then to come up with an answer by doing independent research. They were asked to present their answers orally to the rest of the group. We then had formative assessment on many levels. The students gave each other oral feedback after each presentation and also wrote their opinions in their logbooks. They were asked to comment both on the content and the way it was presented. The students received a written assessment on process, content and presentation by the coaching teacher, and had been told in writing beforehand what we as teachers found important in this specific exercise.

#### 5. Student-parent-school conversations

In each class there are two of these conversations every year. The basis for the conversation may change: the portfolio exhibition, the student profile. In one class students were asked to prepare the conversation in this way:

##### Student-parent-school Conversation

You should refer to this when looking back on the past semester in preparation for the conversation.

- In which areas of strength did you grow?
- How did you challenge your weaker fields?
- How do you assess your relations to class?
- What plans do you have for next year?

You can do it in one of these ways:

##### 1. Make a sheet with:

- A cartoon that shows the period and you
- Cue for the conversation
- Cartoon fields with your thoughts
- A poem with your thoughts and feelings

- A mind map giving an overview.
2. Bring an item that could serve as a starting point for what you want to tell
  3. Bring an item you have produced or worked with

You may bring your logbook.

### *How do we know when it's working?*

School leaders felt that it was difficult to point to specific effects arising from the use of formative assessment. The principal described the main effect as being a cultural change; students are more competent at seeking and handling information and are more socially confident. Teachers focused more on the value of setting goals and the feedback loop: goal setting-formative assessment-revision of goals. Both teachers and students were more than usually aware of learning goals. Some teachers felt the approach was rewarding but time-consuming.

Some students also were critical of too much discussion and reflection. In general, though, students were very positive about their educational experience and quite clear that this school was different from others they had known or heard of. They focused on two aspects: better relations with teachers resulting from different approaches to teaching; and formative assessment procedures. They felt that instead of getting “just grades” they now were involved in a process with teachers during which they got to know the teachers better and learnt why they had not got as high a grade as they might have wanted or expected. There was some effect of formative assessment on planning future lessons but this was greater in some subjects (Danish, humanities) than in others. They found the various assessment processes (logbooks, etc) stimulating and felt that formative assessment involved more commitment from teachers. One described a novel approach to assessing a mathematics project of 10 lessons. Students had been told to write a letter to their grandmother explaining what they had learnt in the project and were assessed on the basis of this letter. She said that this had made her reflect on how to explain the mathematical concepts involved in a simplified way and had helped her understanding. Students were less positive about the portfolios. One said that the portfolio added nothing that his parents didn't already know about his work.

The parents' representative confirmed that the aspects selected by the pupils were the essential differences in this school's approach. She described how her own son's logbook had improved over three years from single sentence factual statements (“Today we had maths”) to quite sophisticated analyses of what teachers want compared with what he had done. She had also seen improvements in his approach to problem solving. She confirmed that the school's emphasis on social and personal development worked and that her son and other pupils she knew had grown in self-esteem since they had been at the school.

Those pupils interviewed were articulate and very positive about the school's innovative approaches to assessment. These were very able students, chosen for interview partly for their ability to communicate impressively well in English. The parent representative and at least one of the teachers interviewed were convinced that these approaches were working well for good students but wondered whether they would work as well for all. Where there was reference - by parents, teachers and pupils - to achievement in subjects it tended to be implicitly (and in a few cases explicitly) critical of innovative approaches to team-teaching and cross-year or cross-subject groupings. One ambitious cross-year team-teaching project had been progressively cut back from an original seventeen weeks to four weeks this year and two weeks next year as a result of this kind of reaction. Innovative approaches to teaching and formative assessment within subjects tended to be seen more positively.

## **Case Study 2**

### ***Snebjerg skole***

Snebjerg Skole is a part of the educational system in Herning, a town of about 55,000 in Jutland. The school is situated in a prosperous village-suburb that sees itself as a village community. Thus, pupils and their parents consider Engbjerg Skole and Snebjerg Skole to be their schools as both schools are situated in this area. After the sixth class, all pupils are transferred from Engbjerg Skole to Snebjerg Skole where they follow the curriculum for grades seven, eight and nine and 70% continue at the school for the optional grade 10.

### ***Development has a great value to the school***

The school has established an organization that focuses on learning and on all round personal development of the individual pupil. The head of the school has an important role in this. The development of the school is regarded as something concerning the whole school. Evaluation is essential to this development, and also the parents participate actively in this evaluation (e.g. evaluations of the first three years and the transfer from sixth to seventh class) and moreover at class level (e.g. evaluations of parents' consultation evenings that take place twice a year). The development of the school complies with the development section in the organisation plan.

### ***The Overall values for evaluation***

The head of the school had been involved with a European project on Evaluating Quality in Education six years previously which coincided with changes in the role expected of heads by the Danish Ministry of Education. She used formative assessment as part of a strategy for change. There is a strong emphasis in the school on the professional development of teachers and on spreading good practice by example. Some of the principles guiding the school's approach are:

- Students are always informed of the purpose of the evaluation before commencement.
- As a minimum, the evaluations are made public to the people involved before further publication.
- Results from formative assessment are only used for the agreed purposes.

### ***The School basis***

- During the last decade, the school has been involved in several school development projects, in which evaluations have formed part of the process of development actively.
- Generally, the management is very obvious and explicit as to collecting and using the evaluations in the organisation.

### ***The cooperation between the school and the parents***

In the planning of the parents' consultation evening, parents take part – through a board of parents – in working out the interview paper. It includes issues such as: How do you assess your own work (commitments, outcome)? What is the social climate in your grade? What will you do differently in the next period of time? Often, the types of evaluation involve conversation based on a questionnaire. Tests may be a part of the preliminary work for evaluations. The school tests pupils in several classes in the subjects Danish and mathematics. In a few classes the school has started using portfolio for evaluation.

### *Expectation meetings*

As a part of the co-operation between the school and the families, the school holds expectation meetings. At the start of the school term first grade children's parents are invited to a meeting where they have the opportunity of comparing expectations – to each other as parents and to the school. Because of the admission of many new pupils from feeder schools in the locality of Herning a new expectation meeting is held at the start of seventh class as the existing classes are split up.

The following points are from the expectation meeting with parents of first class children in August 2002:

What do the parents expect from the school?

- Good and energetic teachers, who are (being) positive and well prepared
- An efficient and innovative school
- A school that cares for the children all day
- An open dialogue between all participants, i.e. outwardly to the parents and internally to the pupils and among the teachers.
- That the teacher on playground duty keeps a lookout for teasing and
- Ensures a social gathering and community.

What do the parents expect from each other?

- Backing at joint events.
- Parental support for teachers.
- Openness among each other.
- The children to be taught good manners at home so that they can be good to one another.
- To discourage bullying.
- To take care of one another's children.
- To inform one another of each individual child's problems.
- To observe the arrangements agreed between the parents, for instance the amount of money for birthday presents.

What do the parents expect from the teachers?

- Ensure the rules of good form in classes and mutual respect.
- To set their own boundaries.

- To give reliable response at parents' meetings.
- To create a good social gathering and comfortable settings.
- To teach excitingly.
- To give feedback if problems occur.
- To be aware of the children's different bases.
- Professionally competent.
- To teach the children the curriculum and challenge the pupils individually.
- Discourage bullying.

What is expected from the parents' role?

- To be open to criticism.
- To ensure that their children are prepared.
- To encourage the children to be independent
- To be engaged in the education.
- To create good conditions for their children to be in good form.
- To be loyal.
- To take responsibility and
- Back joint events.

At meetings held later on the parents are to evaluate their expectations: 'have our expectations been fulfilled and do we live up to our roles as parents?'

From the same consultation meeting the teachers have expressed the following expectations:

- The child is there on time every day
- The child arrives rested and
- The child has brought along his or her things, such as pencil case, pointed pencils, rubber, sports wear, library books and a packed lunch and so on.

Expectations of the parents

- Show interest in child's schooling.
- Speak of the school, the teachers and classmates positively.

- Be prepared for and accommodating to solutions of possible conflicts.
- Communicate with school directly instead of letting questions go through the child.
- To have the main role of the upbringing of the child.

Expectations to the teachers

- To communicate knowledge, technical and social skills to the children.

The formulation of these expectations is an important part of the process of formative assessment in the school. In formulating the expectations teachers and parents create a necessary basis for the formative assessment of the extent to which they have been met at the end of the period. This produces a concrete and constructive starting point for school-parent collaboration.

### *Pupil dialogues*

Once a year, pupils go through a dialogue with the teacher individually. Included in this dialogue the social environment in class is to be discussed. Moreover, the dialogue is to evaluate objectives and to set new ones.

Here is an example of social objectives drawn up by the pupils in 7.c:

- We all are to get on with one another
- We are not to bully one another
- We are to think of others before we think of ourselves.
- We are to listen to one another – both pupils and teachers.
- We are to concentrate in class – or to try to concentrate.
- We are to be positive
- We are to respect one another as we are.
- The teachers are not to berate for any reason.
- We are to be in school on time so that we do not disturb the other pupils.
- We are to take responsibility for ourselves and for one another.

### *Evaluation of a subject course*

In the light of the set objectives, the teachers evaluate subject courses. The participation of the pupils takes place in different ways. The objectives are set collaboratively within the context of the curriculum, binding goals, etc.

The evaluation is a part of the planning of the activities that strengthen the social community at school level. This means that in advance it is agreed (via intermediate aims) on which points to be attentive in the

evaluation – the form has also been agreed on in advance. Also, there is always the opportunity of discussing the course and the objective in proportion to new, possible and unintended results.

The evaluation takes place through conversation in groups or jointly in class and joint conclusions are reached. The involvement of the pupils varies in the planning.

The teachers evaluate the subject courses in subject teams. The evaluations are a part of the written minutes from the meeting. Previous to the parents' consultation evening team meetings are held. Here each individual pupil's level of attainment and engagement is discussed. The class teacher takes the minutes.

### *Assessment in teacher teams*

Assessment in teacher teams has the advantage that teachers can assess the work of individual pupils across a range of subjects. If a pupil is making better progress in Danish than in mathematics this approach permits a reflection on why this is so and what different approaches might be used in mathematics. As pupils react differently in different instruction situations teachers will find it natural to compare these different approaches to instruction. In this way teaching, as well as pupils' progress is assessed. The key question is: What approach best facilitates the learning of individual pupils?

### *How do we know it's working?*

The head and teachers are convinced that the new approaches based on formative assessment are working although some of the teachers said that this relies on a much greater workload for teachers. Teachers confirmed the importance of professional development in implementing the changes. Both the students and the parent interviewed focused on students' self-esteem and social development as the main differences between this school and others. Objective evidence of success is difficult to pin down. The municipality publishes and compares the results of its schools but teachers and school leaders agree that the results reflect school intakes (e.g. the proportion of non-Danish speaking students) as much or more than school performance. There is no attempt to do a "value-added" assessment.

### *Assessment in the Danish school*

In the present Act on the *Folkeskole* articles 13 and 14 set out parents' and pupils' right to be informed of "the pupils' benefits from their school attendance" and require "regular assessment of pupils' benefits from the teaching". However, only at grades 8 through 10 are marks required to be given. At this stage there is also specific reference to written examinations for the first time.

There is therefore a distinction within the Act between "summative assessment" (marks required in grades 8-10) and the kind of assessment required in the first seven grades which, by inference, is to be different in kind. The requirement for formative assessment is very clearly stated in the Act. The Ministerial programme published in 1999, *Quality in the Folkeskole*, developed a number of self-evaluation methods and tools and put them onto the web for schools to use at their discretion. It also encouraged schools to promote dialogue with parents and to develop clear educational goals; plans for assessment were to be developed in this context.

According to the Act it is compulsory to make comprehensive and versatile assessments of the benefit of students' schooling. This assessment shall take place at all grades and shall be integrated in teaching. It shall form the basis of guidance that teachers give each student and the basis for the further planning of teaching. The assessment therefore shall inform teachers, students and parents about the impact of teaching and shall be the basis for planning further teaching and education. Examples of this kind of assessment could be tests, questionnaires, observations and dialogues. The Act stresses that students should be active participators in the assessment.

In Denmark formative assessment is seen as an integral part of teaching and learning. The interest is on facilitating students' learning and as part of that to facilitate teachers' teaching, in order that they experience growth in competencies and proficiencies.

Therefore formative assessment must

- Collect data in a way that is sensible in the context of the learning process (often they will build on the expertise and empathy of professional, experienced teachers – most tests don't come up to this demand)
- Give student feedback that contains information on how to continue or develop the learning activities (must be detailed on the subject matter, the issue at hand and knowing what kind of feedback is appropriate to this individual child in this situation)
- Take place during the learning process, not afterwards (only feedback that is felt by the student to be of use for his/her learning will be accepted. An example is the difference between grading an essay, which very few students really listen to and giving feedback in the process, like in creative writing processes, where feedback can be utilised to make a better essay)

(The same criteria can be applied for formative assessment in respect to teachers' teaching).

This understanding is part of the Danish understanding of teaching: Teachers are facilitators of students' learning processes: motivating them, presenting new issues to them, assisting them to understand and work on understanding and unfolding new knowledge. Only secondly they are product-controllers, monitors, graders.

Looking at formative assessment from the students' point of view, it is reasonable to ask whether the formative assessment will provide the students with an insight from which they can profit in their further work. Thereby it is stressed that an essential condition for a successful formative assessment is an open cooperation between the student and the teacher. In order that the students can actively participate in such a cooperation it is necessary that they know what the formative assessment is all about and how it is going to be used. Thereby the students can take part in finding reasons for good or not so good results and at the same time be more conscious of the succeeding teaching. This can only be done if the students are aware of the goals of the teaching. That is if the students know what to be developed and learnt in the individual lessons and courses i.e. not only a general knowledge of the goal of the teaching for instance to improve their knowledge in English or mathematics. If the formative assessment can result in an increased consciousness of the students of the intention of the teaching, this alone can be of great importance for the profit of the teaching.

Formative assessment should not only include the students' development, but also involve formative assessment of teaching. Among other things this is important because knowledge of the students' development obtained from formative assessment, of course, is dependent of the possibilities given in the teaching for the students' development. It is about the breadth of content of the teaching, and it is about the variation of the kinds of challenges for the individual student. If the education is narrow in content and students' working methods insufficiently varied, then only a limited part of the students' potential will be developed. The formative assessment will therefore give a limited picture of the potentials of the students, whether it is about knowledge, professional skills, or development of personal and cross-disciplinary qualifications. On the other hand, if the education has great professional breadth and many different challenges for the individual student, the assessment will probably give a more varied and adequate picture of the student's abilities.

Formative assessment will thus be able to give completely different results about the same student dependent on the kind of education given to the student. It is most important to pay attention to this fact when the results of the assessment are to be used as basis for the planning of the succeeding education. In this way teachers avoid working from the false presumption that formative assessment can be limited to looking at the achievements of the students.

## Summary

There is an implicit tension between the innovative approaches to teaching and assessment observed at the two case study schools – which are grounded in the very strong “teacher culture” of Denmark – and the political demands for higher standards and more accountability. In other countries facing such political demands the result has been the earlier introduction and the intensification of summative assessment rather than an extension of formative assessment. However, the two case studies describe innovative approaches to collaborative teaching and formative assessment that attempt to meet the requirements of the 1993 Act within the traditional Danish educational culture.

Denmark has a strongly “teacher-led” educational system in which the *Folkeskole* – staffed almost exclusively by teachers from teacher training institutions - is the central institution. University-trained teachers are largely excluded from the *Folkeskoler* and teach mainly in the upper secondary schools. The culture of the *Folkeskole* results from a history of pedagogical autonomy, a degree of concern for students’ social development, and a strong parental involvement which are relatively unusual compared with most other lower/middle secondary systems within the OECD.

Specifically, external summative assessment has played a minor role in the Danish educational system, especially in the *Folkeskoler*. Headteachers traditionally do not promote examinations within their schools, failure is almost non-existent and differentiated teaching and assessment are the norm. There has been a tradition of continuous assessment backed by a strong tradition of reporting on a regular basis to parents on individual student progress.

There have been moves by central government over the last decade to challenge this culture and to introduce centrally determined educational goals and competencies to be achieved by schools and local authorities.

The case studies show how innovative teaching approaches involving formative assessment have been developed within these schools, partly in response to the Ministry’s request for more accountability and the development of an assessment culture. The “assessment culture” that has been cultivated within these two schools shows that the system can respond to central government demands for more accountability on standards. Teachers, parents and pupils agreed that formative assessment as they had experienced it had helped pupils to clarify their goals and objectives and to understand how they could progress towards achieving them. However, the main effect identified by parents and students, and to a lesser extent by school leaders and teachers, was in the personal development of the students.

The experience of these two schools can be used as the basis for the further development of formative assessment within other state secondary schools – indeed the dissemination of educational development is one of the Spf school’s functions. The larger question that remains unanswerable at this stage is whether these approaches will suffice to meet the Ministry’s demand for higher standards, greater accountability for educational performance and the meeting of specific targets, all of which would appear to require more summative, and written, assessment.