# Chapter 3
# Talent and Educational Differentiation in Denmark


## Introduction

In this chapter, we examine talent and education in Denmark, where the development of a comprehensive and undivided public school for all has marked the education policy throughout most of the twentieth century (De Coninck-Smith et al. 2013). We analyse the educational visions behind the Scandinavian welfare model, which has emphasized an undivided school that postponed selection and definitive choices as much as possible and aimed for equality through education. Following the historical analysis, we analyse how and why talent has re-entered the education political agenda in Scandinavia and in Denmark specifically, and what the visions are behind the 'new' talent agenda.

From a sociological perspective, such analyses contribute to our understanding of power distributions in the field of education; i.e. mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. But they also serve as analytical entries to understand the very workings of the state because the handling of who is deemed as talented and who is deemed as untalented signals the way that the state is enacted – or even crafted – and the societal values present in that process (Bourdieu 1984; Woolford and Curran 2013; Ydesen 2016).

The first part of the chapter presents a brief historical overview of the changing discourses on talent and school in the Danish education system. According to Steinmetz (2011, p. 46) Bourdieu emphasizes that every social object must be understood as historical and that it is imperative to historicize the research object in question in order to achieve understanding (see also Øland and Ydesen 2015).

The next part analyses the contemporary agenda on talent management in Danish education and is followed up by an analysis of the transfer, translation and transformation of the national talent policies in the municipal context. This is where the talent class project that obtained funding from the national talent fund was developed and carried out. The processes linked to this involved political disputes and



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controversies about the school and the role of education in society playing out in the local municipal context.

## Discourses on Talent in the Heyday of the Welfare State

During the twentieth century, the public school system in Denmark gradually developed into an undivided comprehensive school. This development started formally with the 1958 school act, which launched a long-term trend in education policy with gradual and continuous elimination of streaming as a main theme. The 1958 act eliminated streaming of students from 5th to 7th grade and equalized urban and rural schools to give all children 'a real chance' to advance in the school system (Kruchov 1984, p. 146). During the following decades, legislation as well as profound societal changes caused radical changes in the public school system.

Economic and political factors determined what was possible in practice. The 1960s were characterized by prosperity and rising employment, and at the entrance to the 1970s, there was virtually full employment. The ambition was "equality through education" (Hansen 2003, p. 101) and the search was on for "intelligence reserves" (Olsen 1986, p. 83; Hansen 2003) or "talent reserves" (Husén 1974). As pointed out by Swedish educational scholar Torsten Husén (1968, p. 19), the educational system would have to cultivate unexploited talent from all, including the lower, societal strata more efficiently. According to Husén, this would require a flexible educational system in which the definitive choice between different educational streams was postponed as long as possible rather than a system with early selection, which was largely dependent on social background.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the search for talent in the education system was strongly championed by the OECD. But the notion of cultivating talent via the education system reached even further back in time. Originally, it connected closely with a political ambition to muster the resources of so-called 'backward children'. Such an ambition is clearly visible in this 1920 quotation from remedial schoolteacher, Anna Vilsbæk: 'We must do all we can to make the children of the remedial school useful for society in time' (Vilsbæk 1920, p. 323f.).[1] The quotation points to the existence of a utilitarian perspective on education in Denmark and a desire to make use of all available human resources.

In a 1919 lecture addressed to *Pædagogisk Selskab* [the Pedagogical Society] by Denmark's first professor of psychology Alfred Lehmann (1858–1921), we find the same utilitarian perspective on education:

> *If a person is placed in a position where he does not belong, he can cause irreparable damage, and at the same time society has missed out on him in another position where he might have been very useful. Therefore, all countries have attempted to place everyone in their right place.* (Lehmann 1919, p. 68)

[1] All English translations of research literature and primary sources in Danish are made by the authors unless otherwise stated.

As argued by Ydesen (2011) the Lehmann quote might be viewed in light of a declining birth rate and the need to make the best use of the available human resources. This decline was rooted in the transition from a farming society to an industrialised society in which having many children was not considered an advantage. The utilitarian perspective can be interpreted in light of "(…) a post-World War I spirit of international competition in which Denmark found itself during the interwar years." (p. 51).

In October 1945, the Danish government formed a commission under the leadership of Professor Hal Koch (1904–1963), tasked with addressing the special problems and needs of youth. Until 1952, this commission drafted no fewer than 26 reports on aspects pertaining to youth and society. One area of focus was the cultivation of the intelligence reserve. The commission had estimated that 10–20% of a birth cohort possessed an IQ greater than 115, which was regarded as a prerequisite for completing a higher secondary level education (Juul 2006, p. 74). Since fewer than 5% of a birth cohort completed higher secondary education (A-levels) in the 1940s, a political demand arose to remedy this discrepancy (Ydesen 2011). An important factor behind this demand was the political connection established between education and economic growth (see Chap. 2). A rise in education levels was recognised as a prerequisite for continued economic growth.

## Away from Streaming

Following visions of the welfare state, the comprehensive school developed in parallel with other democratization initiatives in society. The underlying ideology of equality was widely labelled as a social democratic approach, but it could just as well have been a product of the general democratic development, and some did see it as liberal (Olsen 1986, p. 85). However, the Social Democrats and left-wing parties were the primary exponents of this ideology.

The school act of 1975 introduced the "almost" comprehensive 10-year school. The act preserved streaming in two courses of different content, called basic course and expanded course within four subjects. It was passed by a broad majority of the Social Democrats, the Liberal Party, the Social Liberals, the Socialist People's Party, and the Christian People's Party. The compromise on streaming allowed the Liberal Party's streaming to be adopted as the ordinary arrangement, and the Social Democrats' non-streaming as a local option. The intention was to allow the comprehensive school to gradually become the norm. The arrangement only applied to 8th and 9th grade, but it was an important first step (Kruchov 1984, p. 151).

In the following years, more and more schools abandoned streaming in one or more of the four subjects; not necessarily in a deliberate quest for a comprehensive school, but also based on an assessment of quality in teaching. Moreover, more students than expected chose the expanded course. The result was very small classes in the basic course and so much diversity in student abilities in the expanded course that the classes were de facto comprehensive. Many schools thus found it expedient

to abandon streaming altogether, and in reality, the student trends determined the structure (Olsen 1986, p. 89).

In subsequent years economic crisis politics dominated. From the late 1970s and with increasing force in the first half of the 1980s, the Western countries struggled with imbalances of the economy (see Chap. 2). Unemployment reached interwar levels, and rising public expenses were considered a main problem. The nation state faced unprecedented challenges from globalization and increasing international competition, and the public sector was strongly criticized for being ineffective and for fostering a culture of dependence. The response was a neoliberal turn on the shape of deregulation, which meant fewer rules dictated from the central administration, but more goal-oriented management and thus a clarification of the school's objectives (Telhaug et al. 2002, pp. 92–93).

Under the extended municipal autonomy, expenditure for the primary school had been rising until the 1980s, but this was followed by a series of austerity measures from the Ministry of Education. Increased state control of the entire public sector's economy was introduced with cutbacks as the main economic-political tool. The introduction of tax ceilings, expenditure frameworks and cuts in block grants would force the municipalities to lower the service level. The cutbacks were followed up by a reorganization and privatization plan that legitimized further savings. After 1983, the municipalities saved more than could be explained by a declining birth rate, and enrolment in private schools increased drastically in this period (Windinge 1985).

The 1993 Primary Education Act was implemented in the context of a long economic recession. In the years prior to the implementation, the political consensus on social equalization and economic growth as each other's prerequisite and the social role of the school had evaporated. The comprehensive school with the class as the basic unit was one point of contention, and the unifying compromise was found in the principle of differentiated teaching. According to this principle, the students' different abilities, potentials, needs and motives would be included to support individual and common goals for teaching, which according to § 1 "must be planned in relation to the individual student's abilities and needs." The principle of differentiated teaching, which rested on the belief in possibilities in the community, was one reason the 1993 act was called "the school for all" (Nielsen 2006, p. 33).

The aim mentioned in the Salamanca Declaration of providing adequate challenges *for all* students had, in principle, been adopted in the Danish primary school's requirement of differentiated teaching. The principle of differentiated teaching was legally implemented with the Primary Education Act of 1993, which states that teaching must "be varied to correspond to the individual student's needs and abilities" and thus "contain challenges to all students" (18, § 1–2). With the 1993 Act, the last remnant of streaming in primary schools disappeared, and a gradual process in the twentieth century towards a comprehensive school was completed.

The following years were characterized by increasing globalization and neoliberal reform. In the education policy agenda, this meant a focus on the individual and human capital. Focus moved from the community to the individual's personal development. With reference to human capital and the PISA reports, a comprehensive

evaluation wave was launched to control that the schools complied with the academic goals and that the children acquired sufficient subject knowledge. With the increased focus on academic competences, milestones for primary school subjects were formulated, and it became important to achieve a high score compared to other countries in International Large-Scale Assessments (Ministry of Education 2002). These factors contributed to the implementation and contents of the 2006 primary education act.

The basic premise for all other changes was the new preamble for the primary school. It toned down the democratic and personal *Bildung* and defined the school's foremost task as disseminating knowledge and skills (Hermann 2007). The recommended learning objectives were changed into obligatory intermediate and end goals in the form of binding learning goals for the students' proficiency at specific stages. Teachers' and students' collaboration on the content of the teaching would thus have to focus on reaching the centrally defined goals, which implied a reduction of the teachers' free choice of method and an individualization of the students.

## New Ways of Differentiation

The 2006 act reintroduced the option of streaming across classes throughout the school process, although only for limited periods. Collective teaching was still the norm, but student differentiation based on gender or academic level now became an option. It was thus possible, in parallel to the principle of differentiated teaching, to gather students with special needs in classes within the framework of general education, when this was deemed practically and pedagogically justified (Nielsen 2006, p. 36). However, the 2006 act still emphasized the principle of differentiated teaching, but despite many years as a fundamental principle, it proved difficult to carry out in practice.

In an evaluation of differentiated teaching at eight schools (EVA 2004), teachers and leaders mentioned teamwork and flexible planning as factors that especially promote differentiated teaching and insufficient resources as barriers. This includes resources or factors like more group or workshop rooms, more computers and dual teacher arrangements – all of which demand more resources for the primary schools. In addition, the teachers would like more time for activities like pedagogic discussions, common planning and student dialogues (EVA 2004, p. 71). They pointed to a general lack of resources, which was claimed to obstruct differentiated teaching. The question is, however, whether teachers make it possible to differentiate teaching and avoid streaming or if they have simply found new ways to divide the students. Streaming seems to be increasingly inspired by American theories of learning styles and multiple intelligences or tests of academic skills, which amounts to a reintroduction of streaming (Olsen 2004; Nielsen 2006b).

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (2002) has allegedly inspired a new form of differentiation. It encourages teachers to sort students in a class based on their predominant type of "intelligence". This is an attempt to recognize and clarify

the multitude of opportunities available to students and seems to be a positive point of departure. However, a categorization based on such criteria requires testing of the students and overlooks that not all potentials are equally valued in society. But the risk in allowing the students to concentrate on practicing specific forms of potentials is that these students are socially side-tracked early in life. Even though Gardner's theory represents a "softer approach" to IQ testing students, it is part of a growing tendency to IQ test and describe children in school, and focus is currently on highly intelligent children (Bendixen 2009).

Differentiation and focus on children with special gifts like intelligence or talent also reflects an individualization trend. As outlined in the historical review, the act on differentiated teaching was implemented as streaming was abolished. As a result, the span of student abilities within one class might grow, which in principle increases the demand for differentiated teaching.

The current focus on talent and excellence could be seen as an education policy countermeasure to a historical orientation towards equality where the concept of talent seemingly played a completely different role. In the contemporary discourse, talent primarily points in the direction of increased individualization coupled with economic growth. This coupling is not necessarily logical, since there are no indications that the focus on and development of a strong comprehensive school culture in the Scandinavian culture has reduced these countries' international competitiveness. In contrast, comparisons with countries with selective and divided school systems document that the former countries are characterized by social equality and cohesiveness (Green et al. 2006; Wiborg 2009), which can in fact be very conducive to economic growth.

## The Talent Agenda Under the Reign of the Neoliberal Competition State

Since the turn of the millennium, changing ministers of education have put talent on the political agenda. At the annual Sorø Meeting[2] in 2004, then minister of education in Denmark, Ulla Tørnæs, expressed her belief that plenty of talent has been hushed up in the Danish primary schools and raised the question whether it is not up to the school system to create stars. Addressing the school system, she asked: "How do we make sure that potentials in special talents are exploited?"

The following years, talent manifested itself on the education policy agenda via the following initiatives:

- 2005: Talent Camp 05
- 2006–2007: Talent fund of DKK 10 million
- 2008: Talent report to the parliament

[2]Yearly meeting where politicians, practioners and researchers gather to discuss the Danish public school system.

- 2009: Establishment of the Maersk Science Centre for Talent Development
- 2010: Working group on talent established, report published in April 2011

*Talent Camp 05* was a 48-h "innovation camp" organized by the Ministry of Education to gather ideas for better talent management in Danish education. The participants were representatives from different educational institutions, research, businesses and sports. After the 48-h camp, a working group was formed to look at project proposals and discuss their implementation.

The Ministry of Education's Talent Camp 05 defined talents as:

> *Children and young people with special abilities in one or more areas who attend regular schools and institutions. A talent is a person who is good at something and has the potential to be one of the best if the talent is stimulated.* (Ministry of Education 2008, p. 3)

This definition associates talent with abilities and potential. Talent is thus described as something inherent that can be developed and place a person among "the best"; as a personal inherent quality that contributes to personal or individual competitive advantages. There is a strong element of a hereditary connotation, fitting a conception of talent as given by nature. However, the potential has to be stimulated for a person to benefit from these advantages. In other words, something exterior is added to the inner quality for the talent to unfold and thus places it somewhere between nature and nurture as an ongoing discussion about the origin and development of talents that is running among psychologists (Feldhusen 1998; Gardner 2002; Winstanley 2004).

*The Talent fund* really consolidated the current political focus on developing and incorporating talent development in the Danish educational system. It was established in 2005, under then minister of education in Denmark, Bertel Haarder, to help ensure that differentiated teaching also benefited gifted students. DKK 5 million were allocated annually for 2006 and 2007 to support talent development in the schools. The special allocation and the funded projects had followed in the wake of Talent Camp 05.

The establishment of the Talent fund secured resources to carry out talent development projects like the ones mentioned above. The Ministry of Education's (Ministry of Education 2008) justification for the talent fund was that differentiated teaching would also benefit gifted children and young people.

The special allocation funds targeted primary school, high school, vocational and higher education. The largest share of the funds went to the primary school where the projects typically focused on upskilling teachers to be able to spot talents and to develop educational offers, especially in science, targeted at gifted students. Large grants were allocated to the following projects (grants under DKK 100,000 are not included; place name in the projects is omitted; size of the grant in parentheses):

- Talent training in physics and chemistry for the older grades (DKK 150,000)
- Talent training in physics and chemistry for the older grades (DKK 100,000)
- "Young Scientists". Subsidy for research competition, including science/technology (DKK 250,000)
- Talent training in science and English/social studies (DKK 272,000)

- Upskilling teachers for talent spotting (DKK 406,800)
- Special educational offers in science for gifted students in 8th–9th grade across 27 schools (DKK 374,500)
- Talent training in physics and chemistry for the oldest grades (DKK 100,000)
- Continued talent training in science and English/social studies (DKK 272,000)
- Continued upskilling of teachers in talent spotting (DKK 406,800)
- Special educational offers in science for gifted students in 8th–9th grade across 27 schools (DKK 374,500)
- Subsidy for "Young Scientists" competition for primary school students interested in science/technology (DKK 250,000)
- National talent camp in mathematics, science and English for 9th grade (DKK 158,194)
- Three-year development project targeted at specially gifted children (DKK 741,150)
- Research competitions in science/technology subjects (DKK 250,000)
- Talent training offer in physics/chemistry for students in 8th and 9th grade (DKK 150,000)

The list illustrates that many of the funds were allocated to projects at primary school level. Certain project names appear multiple times because the list includes grants from 2006 and 2007. Some projects applied and won several times. A relatively large share of the funds was spent on establishing talent classes, most of them in Copenhagen and Northern Zealand and only a few in Jutland.

All projects listed as having obtained funding, included activities that took place after normal school hours, and some of them were specially planned educational offers for gifted students or for children with special abilities. This goes for the talent classes, as well as talent camps and talent training, especially within science subjects. The Ministry's talent fund thus awarded two of its largest grants to Special educational offers in science for gifted students, as they were officially called by the Ministry.

To be gifted or talented in the definition of the Ministry varies between being described as good at something and having special skills. Thus a talent is either a good student who already performs particularly well in a subject – preferably in natural sciences due to their assumed economic growth potential (Regeringen 2010), or the talent is a potential that can be developed under the right circumstances.

In a report on talent development to the parliamentary committee on education the Minister of Education explained the background for the talent initiative as follows:

> *In recent years, we have seen an increasing focus on making an extra effort for talents in the Danish educational system so that we can maintain and develop Denmark as a society in continued growth and prosperity. We cannot afford that young people with the will and talent to make a special effort lack challenges in our educational system and perhaps lose interest in taking an education.*

> *Denmark's competitiveness in the global knowledge society depends on our ability to develop talents. We therefore have to give the most gifted room to perform so that they can exploit their potential to the benefit of society and their own future.* (Haarder 2008, p. 1)

Talent development is justified as benefiting young people with will and talent as well as the country's economic growth, international competitiveness and development as a knowledge society.

*The Maersk Science Centre for talent development* in science was another major initiative; it involved the collaboration between the Danish government and shipping magnate Maersk Mc-Kinney Møller. The center was placed in Sorø on Zealand and opened in 2009. The A.P. Møller Fond donated DKK 130 million, and the Ministry of Education subsidized operations.

According to the centre's vision and strategy, the objective is "… to make extra curricula provisions for the talented pupils in science between 12 and 20 years" (Science Talent n.d.). The centre define itself as the physical framework for national talent development in sciences. It offers activities for young talents and their teachers in primary school and high school. It defines science talent and talent development as follows:

> *Science talents are students who are good at science and have potential to be among the best if that potential is stimulated.*
>
> *Talent development is about giving gifted students more challenges and develop their potential. Talents can contribute to improving the academic environment at the schools.*
>
> *The target group is children and young people with special gifts in one or more science fields and who attend regular schools.*

With its definition of talent as special abilities within one or more science fields, the knowledge centre aligns itself with the national strategy in education policy. It is implicit in the general discourse on talent development that talent is not sufficiently accommodated in the current school system, in which it is alleged that the focus on equality and inclusiveness has been detrimental to talent. This discourse of the neglected talents and that the public school system in Denmark is sacrificing talent in the name of equal access to education is similar to the ones found elsewhere in Europe (Ball 2008; Tomlinson 2008).

The policy agenda on talent development in the school system initiated by the Ministry of Education further involved the forming of an expert group to follow-up on its work programme, Denmark 2020 (Regeringen 2010), including prominent figures from education and research institutions, business and sports. The task that the expert group had been assigned by a parliamentary committee was to formulate strategies for talent development in the educational system and in the ensuing 'talent report', the parliamentary committee justified the increased focus on talent as follows:

> *Talent development is necessary in order to increase Danish competitiveness and thus preserve and develop the country's prosperity and welfare; because the gifted students inspire classmates, fellow students and teachers; and because too many gifted students, who have the right skills, have become demotivated and tired of school. A greater focus on talents will benefit all.* (Ministry of Education 2011, p. 5)

The link between talent development and a necessity to increase national competitiveness clearly emphasizes education as an economic vehicle for growth in which the development of gifted and talented is crucial. The economic logic behind this, however, is a move away from the focus on a rise in education levels generally to a focus on the few individual students considered gifted and talented – though emphasizing that this focus will be of 'benefit to all'.

## Translating Talent Class Activities in a Local Municipal Context

The national education policy objectives for talent development translated locally, by the ministry grant awarding of projects, in local municipalities and schools. In the following, we zoom in on the case study of such a project of talent classes, in one municipality and how, in this local context and on several occasions, the idea of the project was presented before the actual application and implementation of it. The specific design of the project in the form of talent classes and various practical issues were only finally agreed and determined after the grant had been awarded. Other models were discussed before the final model for talent classes was settled on.

The original idea was to offer 12–14 students with special talents and interests in the school extra teaching 1 day per week. The plan for admission to the talent classes was that interested students would write an application and then be invited to an interview. Applicants would be young people with a high academic level, outgoing personality and open for greater challenges, e.g. a study trip to another country. Deadline for applications was first set for early June 2006 but was extended until after the summer vacation to allow everybody to apply. The project group also explained to the media that the deadline was extended to make sure that the message reached all parents (local newspapers – June 1 and June 29, 2006).

The concept behind the project met some resistance among local politicians and school people. They objected to the idea of strengthening inclusiveness in primary schools by putting more focus on the most gifted students and especially to the original idea that the students who were selected would be removed from their regular classes once a week to attend the talent classes. The critics saw this as an elite move and a reintroduction of streaming, as a threat to the students' social fellowship at their home schools, as a way to spend a lot of money on few students, and as disrespectful of hardworking primary school teachers. They suggested spending the resources on introducing other forms of teaching in general in 8th–10th grade, which the students are calling for, and that experimental teaching should be conducted at a municipal primary school instead of the high school (local newspapers – August 11, August 14, and September 14, 2006).

The steering group accommodated parts of the criticism; in particular, the concern about the students being affected if they were removed from regular teaching 1 day a week to attend the talent class. By placing the talent classes outside normal

school hours, to the extent possible, they ensured that the students did not have to miss regular class. By doing so, they also countered the criticism that participation in talent class might harm the social ties to their regular classes.

By deadline, August 11, 2006, 91 young people had applied for enrolment in the talent class. The applicants came from 8th and 9th grade at 18 different schools from the entire municipality, although the majority (57) came from the main town in the municipality and larger urban schools, including 19 from the private school in the main town. In the media, the initiators expressed satisfaction with the high number of applicants, which meant that they had to select the best of them. The original idea was that selection would be based on an interview with each applicant, but due to the large number, the steering group decided to make the selection based on tests.

During the week of the tests, all applicants and their parents were invited to an introduction and information meeting at the high school. The initiators presented the project and its underlying philosophy, and the future talent class teachers introduced themselves and their views of the project. The local school politician, the chairman of the municipality's child and education committee, who had supported the project throughout the application phase and its dissemination and critical reception in the community, also expressed his visions for the talent class.

In his speech, he described the project as an "experiment" that is based on the concept of inclusiveness in the school in the sense that as many students as possible are adequately challenged. With reference to the three-digit millions that are spent on helping the weakest, he said that this project would spend a fraction on the most gifted. Inspired by elite studies in sports and music, the project asked questions like: Can we go further? What happens to children and young people when they are allowed to immerse themselves in a subject? When they are allowed to follow a tangent as far as it goes? Finally, he expressed appreciation that the high school had agreed to participate in the project "to lift the academic level" (Field notes from the information meeting, August 21, 2006).

In addition to the reference to (the lack of) inclusiveness in the primary school, the project implied a political prioritization of science subjects. This is evident in the effort to assume a strategic position in a broader context and secure broad political support. Reinforcement of teaching in science subjects is an element in the government's education policy, which at this time was supported by the opposition. At the local level, the school renovated and expanded its science classrooms right before the project started.

## Concluding Discussion: The Talent Agenda and Competing Policy Rationales

The public school in Denmark up through the twentieth century gradually developed into an undivided comprehensive school system, which was to provide education for all children regardless of social origin. This development started formally

with the 1958 school act, which launched a long-term trend in education policy with gradual and continuous elimination of streaming as a main theme. It was based on the thinking of the welfare state that the educational system would have to cultivate unexploited talent from all, including the lower, societal strata more efficiently, and that this would require a flexible educational system in which the definitive choice between different educational streams was postponed as long as possible.

In the early 1990s, the "specially gifted" figure emerged in discourses about inclusiveness in education internationally (UNESCO 1994) and nationally. The principle of differentiated teaching is intended to ensure inclusiveness in Danish schools and give all students adequate challenges in relation to their abilities (talents). This principle was introduced with the 1993 Primary School Act, which abolished the remnants of streaming in the primary school. The act followed a new education policy, which over the past decades has been characterized by a focus on social justice and equal access to education for all. In contemporary education, talent is associated with an objective to educate the intelligence reserves in the segments with lower education, to allow the collective "talent mass" to grow. The discursive logic of this argument is closely affiliated with the human capital theory of what among others Stephen Ball has called 'the competition state' (Ball 2009).

In the late twentieth century, increased globalization and international competition caused a shift in education policy where individualization and human capital gained significant influence in education policy objectives. International rankings and comparisons were used to legitimize the 2006 school act, which toned down democratic and personal education and prioritized knowledge and skills as the primary purpose in school. The earlier recommended teaching objectives were changed to mandatory end goals and milestones in the form of binding learning objectives for the students at specific points in time. More goals and more measuring summarize the most important changes in the school area where the equality-minded and inclusive school was criticized for promoting mediocracy at the expense of talent.

With inspiration from abroad, especially the USA, the individualization trend becomes increasingly pronounced in education policy objectives. From 2005, different initiatives to promote talent development in the school and the educational system in general appear. Via prizes and competitions, the school will stimulate cultivation and nurture of all potential talents, who according to the rationale are a precondition for Denmark's international competitiveness. Similar to American and British models for talent development, the rationale behind the talent initiatives is thus primarily economic motives based on optimal development of each individual's resources (rather than the group's) as a prerequisite for national economic growth. In that sense the rise of what has been called 'the global testing culture' (Smith 2016) signifies a shift in the way education is enacted; which in a wider sense is an indication that the very workings of the welfare state have changed.

The national rhetoric on talent development breaks through to local contexts. However, a more democratic rationale can be identified at the local level where the fellowship of the class – the rub-off effect on the other students – is used as an argument for the talent class. In the Bourdieusian conception of state this finding indicates a discrepancy between 'the higher state nobility' and 'the lower state nobility'

even if it is also a clear confirmation of the power struggles going on within the bureaucratic field of the state. As such – and in addition – bridging and competence development for teachers are elements that can be seen as both economic and pedagogical rationales.

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