

## Chapter 2

# Denmark: Contracts and Evidence-Based Best Practice



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**Abstract** Foundations for national education governance can be found in history and context. Cultures and policies emerge historically in collaboration and interactions with other states and transnational alliances. In the case of Denmark, we see historical relations with Nordic countries and contemporary relations with transnational agencies like the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). We also see the emergence of diverse societal and educational paradigms like a welfare state with democratic education and a competitive state with aims- and outcomes-based education.

Beginning with a short walk over Nordic relations from the Middle Ages till contemporary times, the chapter focuses on fundamental societal change in the post-World War II era.

Through an analysis of Danish cultural history, formation of the welfare state and education discourse of general non-affirmative education/Democratic Bildung, we find strong common trends in values and – although less so – in practices that characterise the core of Danish society, governance and education: believing in and striving for democracy and local autonomy with self-activity, and the struggle to make all levels of society develop into less unequal communities that respect other people and communities.

Another line of analysis looks into globalization, transnational agencies, formation of the competition state and education policy. Here we also find identical trends. The market-place logics are found in the transnational thinking and initiatives, in the move of states from a welfare state to a state competing for success in the global marketplace. New conceptions of government in nation states change into conceptions of governance on the basis of policy networks. One of the social technologies used for this movement is the contract, which is very commonly used in Denmark as well as management by objective and management by outcomes (The concepts used here: neo-liberal globalization as marketplace, globalization and marketplace

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logics can be seen as parallel concepts to the thesis that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001) developed in analysing the Empire, '*the sovereignty of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule.*' This Empire is de-centred and deterritorialised. It has no centre or territory).

## Early Nordic Co-existence: War and Peace

Present conceptions and ideas about education, schools and governance are built on present conditions and expectations, structures and discourses, and they are also founded in our history, institutions and culture. In this chapter we shall not give a thorough genealogic analysis; instead we only point at some – what we consider – important features. The analysis is divided into three: Middle ages until the 1970s, the 1970s leading to the present day called 'Transition to Neo-liberal Globalisation', and thirdly, an analysis of the current situation named 'Current Modernisation'.

Denmark has – as a more or less well-delimited geographical entity -been living closely with the Nordic neighbours for more than a thousand years, sometimes at war, sometimes in peace and collaboration. We have shared backgrounds in Nordic history, political institutions, society and culture (Nordstrom, 2000). The term Nordic usually refers to the current independent nation states of Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and, Finland, as well as the Faroe Islands and Greenland (parts of the Danish Commonwealth [det Danske Rigsfællesskab]) and the Åland Islands (a largely Swedish-speaking part of Finland), the latter with large amounts of local autonomy. The Scandinavian languages – Danish, Norwegian and Swedish – are national variations of the same Germanic language (Blossing, Imsen, & Moos, 2014). The language community reflects the close political and cultural relations between the Nordic peoples.

The Nordic countries have retained their common features, which were strengthened as a result of Scandinavian movements in the nineteenth century and a strong sense of common historical and cultural heritage: like the other Nordic countries, Denmark abolished absolutism and introduced democratic constitutions. Moreover, they have a long tradition of rule by law. And finally, social inequality was never as pronounced as on the European continent. Strong and self-ruling rural communities characterise all Nordic countries (Blossing et al., 2014; Nordstrom, 2000).

The Nordic history has produced a model – or at least a vision – of Nordic education, with focus on social inclusion of all students, comprehensiveness of education, democratic values and a focus on community (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006; Moos, 2013; Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006).

## *Society and Education*

The development of Danish society was based on agriculture, small-scale crafts culture and ways of living, with only very few big industries and farms until the twentieth century. Until the middle of the nineteenth century most people lived in self-sustaining villages and small towns with small power distances. The nineteenth century brought new crises and solutions. Poverty and hunger caused by failing harvests at several periods made many people react in different ways: During the last quarter of the century more than 200,000 people out of a total population of 1.5 million inhabitants emigrated to America. Many agrarian workers migrated to cities and the industrial plants. Dairies and other small farming manufacturing companies were established and run by cooperative movements.

Most primary schools were thus established in the countryside and in villages; they were small and organised in ways that also allowed for working on the family farm. Bigger towns had secondary schools. This special parallel legislation with strong municipal rule lasted until the early twentieth century. In the middle or second half of the twentieth century and coinciding with the reform of the Danish Constitution in 1953, Denmark established a public comprehensive school for children between the ages of 7 and 16. The act built on the experience of running schools for 50–100 years. The constitution states, in line with the first Danish constitution from 1849, that all children shall be educated; it does not say that they shall attend school. It also allows for parents to establish schools that can be free of state and municipal governance, the independent school (*friskole*) according to the Danish Friskole Act of 1855. This movement has gained increased momentum with the result that at the beginning of 2020 more than 17% of all students now attend an independent school.

Between the First and Second World Wars democratisation in many of the European nations was threatened by Communist, Fascist and Nazi dictatorships. The power of these movements was limited in Denmark, and subsequently the process of democratisation went on with party coalitions, creating a more stable parliamentary position, and collaboration between labour market organisations. In the period before World War II, the Danish education system was a stable institution serving diverse societal groups in different school forms. In the same period there was a number of small scale educational experiments, often with inspiration from outside the country: The labour school ('Arbeitsschule') with inspiration from Georg Kerschensteiner; the reform school initiated by Otto Gläckel; Mararenko's experimental democratic school in the Soviet Union; Ellen Keys' child-centred school in Sweden and John Dewey's progressivism in the US (Blossing, Imsen, & Moos, 2013). A general trend in the experiments was the move towards a 'School for All' with inspiration from the Danish pastor, author, poet, philosopher, historian, teacher and politician N.F.S Grundtvig (Rasmussen & Moos, 2013). In spite of the numerous educational experiments one should not, however, underestimate the inertia of tradition in a school where rote-learning was still the norm (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The governance of education content, namely the subjects, was for the first decades after the World War II only softly governed by the Parliament and Government: The general purpose and very brief aims for each of the subjects were stated. It was up to the municipalities, schools and teachers to interpret the aims and frames and decide on the methods, materials and social technologies for the actual teaching. The educational thinking was often inspired from German/Nordic Non-affirmative 'Bildung' and Didactics (Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017) and visions about self-activity and activity schools, or the 'living words' and tales, as Grundtvig named this kind of teaching.

### *Building a Welfare State*

History has put its mark on the process of political and social modernization in Denmark and the other Nordic countries from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present: Gradually the idea of the welfare state was born from around the middle of the 1900s. Important foundations were laid including state financed pensions, sickness benefits, unemployment insurance and maternity leave and other welfare issues. It was first and foremost the Social Democratic party that worked hard to secure a welfare state (Danmarkshistorien, 2011). In summary, the state should protect and help its citizens if they needed it in cases of unemployment or sickness.

Denmark developed into a welfare state, characterised by stable a parliamentary democracy, low elements of violence in society, extensive equality between men and women and an organised labor market. The Danish community was more equal than many other societies: the GINI coefficient on equality was 41 out of 100 (WorldBank, 2015), the power distance was 18 out of 100 (Hofstede, 1980) and the general trust in other people was high. For example, within Danish society, 89% of respondents said they trusted other people (OECD, 2011).

Constitutional democracy was introduced in 1848. Centuries of absolutism and autocratic, royal power in combination with nobility and the clerical community were gradually replaced by a more equal parliamentarism: women were given the right of vote in 1908, and the 'Landsting', Parliament's first chamber predominantly represented by conservative nobility and the well-off, was abolished in 1953.

In the same period, on the basis of the Reform Pedagogy Movement mentioned above, and upon the experiences of the inhumanities of the world wars, and thus on the longing for a democratic society and for peaceful collaboration with other nations, the dominant education discourse was that of a comprehensive and progressive education, although this was only partially and slowly translated into school practice (Coninck-Smith, Rasmussen, & Vyff, 2015). Many curriculum decisions were therefore left to the professional teachers ('Didactic discretion') instead of prescribing them from the national level. In order to further democracy at school level, relations were built on trust in professional expertise. This was made clear in the Education Parliamentary Report, also named the 'Blue Parliamentary Report' (Undervisningsministeriet, 1958). The democratic vision was also expressed in the

Article on the purpose of the school in the Act of the Folkeskole (public primary and lower secondary school) from 1993:

The school shall prepare the students for active participation, joint responsibility, rights and duties in a society based on freedom and democracy. The teaching of the school and its daily life must therefore build on intellectual freedom, equality and democracy (Authors' translation) (Education, 1993)

## *Government and Governance*

Like society in the other Nordic nations, Danish society was built on the basis of the belief in a strong state and in strong local communities. Links between the welfare state and education in Nordic societies were expressed in this way:

Another key development was the establishment of a safe welfare state. Education for all children was also considered to be the main vehicle for reducing social differences and increasing social mobility among the population. The state was considered to be the legitimate authority to have responsibility for education as a common good. Structurally, the Nordic model consisted of a public, comprehensive school for all children with no streaming from the age of seven to sixteen years. The overarching values were social justice, equity, equal opportunities, inclusion, nation building and democratic participation for all students, regardless of social and cultural background and abilities. The curriculum plans were mainly defined at state level, and schools and teachers were trusted and respected. (Imsen, Blossing, & Moos, 2016).

The labour market was very unstable at the end of the 1800s, with many strikes and lock-outs. The key core of the fights centred around, on the one side, those who were given the right to lead and manage places of work and, on the other side, those who should decide whether employers should be allowed to form trade unions. A general agreement was formed in 1898 with assistance from the Government to form triparty negotiations, the 'September Reconciliation'. Since then the general agreements are formed as triparty negotiations between employers' organisations, workers' unions and the Government. The private labour market has since then been regulated as part of a close collaboration between societal groups.

This model has been the foundation for the Danish flexicurity model: The general agreement provides flexibility for the employer to hire and fire quite freely. On the other hand, the state guarantees employees a unemployment benefits for lost wages. The compensation was around 90% of normal wages up to a certain level at the beginning of the 1980s. This flexicurity model is a combination of labour market decisions and government collaboration (Pedersen, 2011).

The public labor market – state and municipalities – is governed differently from the private market. Up until the 1990s, teachers were employed by the government as civil servants, and their wages and conditions for work were governed at the national level in a straight chain of governance with national frames. Therefore, the general principles were negotiated by the government and the Danish Union of Teachers (DLF).

Gradually, the municipalities and the ‘Local Government Denmark’ (LGD: the association of municipalities) have taken over ownership of schools and teachers – managing employment, finances and working conditions – and thus agreements are negotiated at national, municipal and school level with appropriate political agencies and teachers’ unions.

During the time of the school reform in 2013, the LGD wanted to cancel the traditional form of agreement and ‘modernize’ the teaching profession. As the Danish Union of Teachers could not agree, teachers and students were locked out for 25 days until Parliament enacted a law, Act 409, in total agreement with the LGD’s ideas and thereby ended the lockout. Teachers were made to ‘pay for the school reform’, as the Minister for Education explained it, by teaching more weekly lessons, having less time for teaching preparation, and by rendering much power and room for manoeuvre to the individual school principal (Moos, 2016b).

## Transition to Neo-Liberal Globalisation

An important step in the transition from the Welfare State towards the Competition State was taken when social legislation shifted from assisting needy citizens, towards expecting them to handle their own life. It was also in 1993 that Denmark bought into the European Union’s idea of Global Competition presented at the Copenhagen European Council meeting (Pedersen, 2011, p. 42).

Societal and global developments have many sources but no centre. Even so we want to point out one very important source: The Bretton Woods Agreement (News, 2020). The agreement was concluded at the 1944 conference of the **World War II** Allied nations: USA, Canada, Western Europe, Australia and Japan. Under the agreement, countries promised that their **central banks** would maintain **fixed exchange rates** between their currencies and the dollar. The agreement was the basis for the creation of the **World Bank** (WB), the **International Monetary Fund** (IMF) and other agencies. The Agreement was later on adjusted, but the American dominated global economic world order persisted.

Thirty years later the neo-liberal states were developed in some front-runner nations: New Zealand, USA and England, and many others followed. In Denmark a newly elected right-wing government led by Poul Schlüter (from the Conservative People’s Party) agreed on a Modernization-Programme along those lines and the Minister for Education, Bertel Haarder, wrote education policies with OECD roots: aims- and outcomes-based teaching, national standards and accountability, and strong strategic leadership (Haarder, 1988). The political majority in Parliament did not agree with these ideas and decided on bottom-up initiatives in line with the former welfare state logics. But slowly, over the next two decades, these ideas were recognised: National aims and tests were agreed on and gradually developed.

Since Bretton Woods, the capitalist economy is being developed towards a world economy: huge marketplaces with free access and no barriers to the members’ transport of goods, services, finances and citizens. The development was supported

strongly by several big agencies like the World Trade Organization (WTO) (replaced General Agreement of Trade and Tariffs in 1995), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the EU, the OECD, and of course as mentioned the IMF and the WB. Those agencies were constructed on the basis of neo-liberal economy thinking and logics. This means that the marketplace is being developed into a global way of thinking: marketplace logics focus on producers, commodities, competition and customers.

The transnational agencies cannot formally issue regulations and legislation, also named 'hard governance', to their member states. Therefore they work to set the agenda for policymaking when they use 'soft governance' to advise or encourage reflection. The OECD names this 'peer pressure' and the European Commission (EC) calls it 'open method of coordination'. The EC funds research or dissemination projects, such as the European Commission Framework Programmes and the Erasmus Programme (Krejsler, 2018).

The OECD uses different forms of soft governance, mainly discourses and social technologies like comparisons, standards and measures (Dean, 1999). Many of their campaigns are a mixture, like the autonomy campaign: It has been obvious that governments struggle with balancing their power-relations with local authorities and citizens, between centralization and decentralization (OECD, 1995). In order to raise this discussion in member nations, the OECD constructed a graph of decision-making models at the national level as well as at the other levels like regional, municipal or organisational. Responses from member governments was the basis for forming an image of the situation in the OECD member states (OECD, 2008).

The graph suggests that a de-centralisation of more than 50% is preferable. This is in line with the rest of the OECD education advice, but it is up to the national governments to decide if they are happy with the position as it is or if changes should be made. The OECD only want to set the educational governance discourse agenda using a 'naming, shaming, framing and faming' strategy (Brøgger, 2016).

As mentioned, Denmark, like other nations, produced political and economic programmes for the modernization of societies and states. The fundamental principles for this were grouped together under the term New Public Management (Hood, 1991), which meant governance – including governance of education – built on:

1. *market thinking*: decentralisation, competition, freedom of choice
  - independent schools had been important since the mid-eighteen hundreds, but since the mid-1980s, gained more importance. The contract is widespread in the de-/re-centralisation of education governance.
2. *product thinking*: outcomes, benchmarks, standards and accountability
  - one aspect of this is the transformation of education from the field of culture towards the market place with the commodification of education and the contract in education (Lugg, Bulkey, Firestone, & Garner, 2002).
3. *customer steering*: free choice

- around the year 1990, governance of schools was decentralised from state towards municipalities and individual schools began to have a parental majority on their school board (Andersen & Thygesen, 2004).
4. *new governance and leadership forms*: low trust, plans and documentation (Moos, 2016a)
- school leadership was made more important with the decentralisation of schools. Also ideas of social technologies were produced (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 2001; Rose, 1999). This is a very large and not-focused category of governing by contracts, leadership technologies, self-leading technologies, evidence-led practices, best practice packages, commodification and output focus in education to mention but a few. Here they will be introduced and used for the analysis of Danish policy development.

The idea of evidence came to Denmark from an OECD report on quality in the Danish education system, the Peter Mortimore review (OECD, 2004b) and the review on Danish education research (OECD, 2004a). The main recommendations in these reports were to strengthen the culture of evaluation – because the institutions and agencies should be held accountable for their outcomes – and to focus more on evidence in education, because aims should be based on more solid generic knowledge. This was the first time evidence was used in connection to education (Moos, Krejsler, Hjort, Laursen, & Braad, 2005).

Parallel to the evidence movement was the establishment of the Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research (Krejsler, 2017). It made little impact on educational discourses in the beginning, but with the move towards the school-model of the outcomes-based school, it has gained some influence, often in connection to ‘what works’ phrases or ‘best practice’ evidence-based programmes or procedures. The idea is that the concept of evidence is being made *the* generic expression for robust and best knowledge all over and in all contexts.

## **The Current Modernization: The Contract**

One very important tool of public governance in Denmark is the social contract (Andersen, 2003; Bovbjerg, Krause-Jensen, Wright, Brorholt, & Moos, 2011). The Quality Report (Undervisningsministeriet, 2007) is one such example of a contract between schools, local education authorities and the Ministry of Education. The format for most of these contracts has been described in national regulations. Contracts also exist within schools, such as annual plans, developed by teacher teams or individual teachers and the school leadership, and individual student plans between students, parents and teachers. Specific contracts have been developed in public governance and organisational leadership and management over the past 30 years. The inspiration for this came from the OECD (OECD, 2016). The contracts are part of public governance, and thus part of the relationship between



governments and organizations and individuals. They are not always legally defined and symmetrical contracts; they are governance contracts and thus special in that the superior level defines the frame of resources, the values and the indicators, while the acting level signs the contract and thereby indicates that it intends to comply with and implement the expectations and indicators.

There are distinctive forms like vertical, top-down contracts between political-administrative masters and local and institutional agents. They encourage actors to compete for contracts both within the public administration and with outside private enterprises or consultancy firms. There are also horizontal contracts within agencies or authorities. The agency is divided into departments who compete with each other and outside actors for contracts.

One kind of contract is written in such detail that there is a need to use social technologies such as international and national comparisons or governance packages (manuals or planning prescriptions). This kind of contract is often described as excessive bureaucracy that takes practitioners away from their core functions, such as teaching, because they must spend time and effort on documenting and testing.

Another kind of contract is softer and thus leaves decisions of implementation to the practitioners as long as they stay within the overall framework. In most cases, a degree of self-evaluation is built into the contract. Such contracts leave decisions to the practice level, where people must manage themselves and their own work. This type of leadership, through values, means that organisations and individuals must take over the values and norms laid out at the superior level (Andersen, 2003). They must do so to such a degree that they make them their own values by leading themselves. For the practitioners, a set of givens exists that includes frameworks, values and indicators as well as a set of choices to be made concerning how effective performance can be reached.

The contract governance is basically a model for separating goal setting from production and measuring of results. For those purposes, there is a need for clear and measurable goals/standards and reliable measurements of results/outcomes.

The neo-liberal model of governance has been characterised by diverse combinations of social technologies in three themes (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2005): *disintegration* of public sectors, *competition* for contracts and *incentivisation* (see the description in section about New Public management in the Introduction chapter.)

Contracts can be seen as an opportunity for importing benchmarks, social technologies and procedures into the governance process:

- *Objectives and outcomes*: These are described clearly and detailed by the contractor who often refers to standards and scores in international comparisons like the PISA test (Programme for International Student Assessment), both as an objective and a benchmark. Hereby the social technologies support global standardisation and homogenisation of education (Moos & Wubbels, 2018). The Danish school reform (2013) will be analysed later on.
- *Numbers*: More often than previously, Danish policymakers argue for the need to comply with global or international standards or best practices in education. One

reason for this is that the results of this kind of comparisons are given in *numbers*, and numbers are often seen to be precise, accurate and full of relevant information. Numbers are thought to be crossing the lines between the fluffy and imprecise field of education into the concise field of natural sciences (Nóvoa, 2013). The OECD and the Danish policymakers thereby reduce learning to the acquisition of economically useful skills for employability. In order to be able to compare outcomes, the PISA set of aims and skills was produced. The competencies included are not taught anywhere as a complete set (Labaree 2014).

- *What works*: When describing objectives and outcomes, references are frequently made to ‘what works’ or ‘best practice’ evidence-based programmes or procedures. The designation, the concept of evidence is being made *the* generic expression for solid and best knowledge all over and in all contexts. The municipal educational authorities often refer to this and they often purchase education programmes that claim to be evidence based – even if the evidence has not been produced in the Danish education system.
- *Educational programmes*: Individuals, associations and consultancy firms develop and offer best practice packages on an international basis and with the international, generic arguments: The number of schools or individuals who have been successfully served is very high. The fact that they are often coming from cultures and systems so very different from the Danish education system is seldom mentioned.
- *Neo-liberal development*: The construction of numerous contracts is built on neo-liberal market logics. Thus, education is seen as a commodity which is produced by producers, teachers and schools. The services/goods are delivered to consumers (students/parents) once the provider wins the tender competition. The aspect of ‘employability’ was the only amendment to the Act on school in 2006, and it is also in the School Reform (2013).
- *Incentives*: Many contracts are connected to promises of pecuniary reward or pay off to the provider based on meeting the objectives stipulated in the contract.
- *Privatization*: In most cases the contractor can make the open bidding optional for public and private agencies or institutions. This model has been adopted for governing free basic schools, high schools, university colleges and universities. These institutions have an individual board of governors who are under contract with the ministry or one of its agencies. Private and independent associations or companies can therefore manage education.
- *Consultancies*: National and international, private or **philanthropic** consultancy firms are increasingly finding their way into educational governance. The Maersk McKinney Møller Foundation donated a large sum of money to the professionalisation of teachers. They were the sole manager of the projects (Moos, 2016b). The consultancies provide individual investigations and advice as well as overall procedures and programmes. Some of the biggest consultancies (like Pearson and Mackinsey) are the cornerstones of the global eduBusiness (see discussion later).

## *Discourses in Educational Policy and Theory*

Discourse here is understood as a way of argumentation and a way of structuring the world. At present, we see two prevailing education discourses in Denmark. One of the two emerged from the welfare state thinking in countries like Denmark post World War II and may be called the “Democratic Bildung Discourse” based on works of theorists like Wolfgang Klafki (2001), John Dewey (Dewey, 1916/2005) and Geert Biesta (Biesta, 2011). We name this understanding of general and comprehensive education Democratic Bildung because the intention is to position children in the world to allow participation in democratic communities and societies in ways that make them competent in understanding the world and other people, and in deliberating with other people (Moos & Wubbels, 2018).

Peter Kemp (Kemp, 2011, p. 6) takes the discussion further by writing that as education is part of civilization, the educational system is responsible for socialising (or forming) children to become well-functioning citizens in the society in which they are being brought up. Educational systems have this dual function: on the one hand, they further the optimal development of a child’s competence, and on the other hand, they teach children to be effective, well-functioning citizens. In this way, educational systems have always played a part in societal governance, which is about both building structures and institutions to maintain the dominant culture, and simultaneously socialising citizens who willingly cooperate in this effort. Children also need to be able to think critically and creatively about alternatives to society’s norms and dominant discourses.

The other discourse is attached to the neo-liberal, competitive state, and is called the “Outcomes Discourse” (Moos, 2017) because it is first and foremost interested in students’ measurable learning outcomes. In this system, education is being constructed along ‘management-by-objective’ lines: The government draws up detailed aims and measures of the outcomes, while schools, teachers and students need to learn to answer the test questions correctly. Very often, the curriculum that is developed in this situation has a scientific structure. Experts know how to attain their ends, and they describe every step for schools, teachers and students to be followed in detail. In this orientation, there is a focus on ‘back to basics’ and ‘back to skills’ because these are what can easily be measured (Blossing et al., 2013). The School Effectiveness movement has for 40 years been a prominent proponent of this trend (Normand, 2016). Students’ curiosity, critical sense and participation and experiments find little place here.

The PISA surveys along with other international comparisons like ‘Trends In International Mathematics And Science Study’ (TIMSS) and ‘Progress In International Reading Literacy Study’ (PIRLS) have been ground-breaking tools for governing education. The programmes are packages of standards or indicators for learning, measurements for outcomes, and tools for comparing students, schools and countries. This is not unexpected, as a working paper of the OECD shows (Wilkoszewski & Sundby, 2014).

The competitive- and outcomes-oriented discourse and associated practices are subject to more national social technologies than we have ever seen before in the history of Danish education and educational theory. Social technologies can be seen as silent carriers of power. They are made for a purpose – often hidden from the practitioners – and also for specify ways of acting. Therefore, they point to a non-deliberative practice which is steered and managed from the top down (Dean, 1999) and often times ‘deliver more than they promise’ because some important effects are invisible (Cour, Waldorff, & Højlund, 2017).

### *The School Reform 2013*

Many aspects of the outcomes discourse were developed over time, and a coherent and comprehensive version of that discourse was presented in the School Reform (2013) of the Social Democrat-led government (Moos, 2016b).

The school reform stipulated changes of regulation in the number of lessons in certain subjects, the creation of supporting education and that students should be physically active for 45 min every day (Regeringen, 2012). It is worth mentioning here again that the Government issued an act of legislation, Act 409, that changed the teachers’ relations to leaders and authorities fundamentally (Regeringen, 2013). The Act strengthened the powers of school principals to make decisions concerning teachers’ working conditions in terms of workload, work area (subject and class grade) and so forth. Up until this act, this process had been negotiated between teachers and representatives of Danish Union of Teacher and school leaders and employers.

Most importantly, however, the act and following regulations prescribed that the Primary and Lower Secondary school should be a ‘learning outcomes managed school’ with more than 3000 national aims falling under four main categories: learning objectives, competences, skills and knowledge (Undervisningsministeriet, 2015). The number of national tests was increased to 42 of which 14 were compulsory from 2013 onwards.

A social technology which is compulsory for all teachers is the ‘student plan’. Each teacher in collaboration with each student must devise a plan with individual academic and social goals for the student, the stage of learning/progression and the actions that need to be taken every year from kindergarten class through to 9th class.

This outcomes aspect of the reform made explicit reference to Danish students’ performance in PISA surveys, which policymakers claimed was unsatisfactory. That parameter was used as the benchmark for a school’s success. A school is perceived as successful if it ranks amongst the top five nations in the PISA league table. Policymakers and a number of educational academics claimed that too much teaching was based on tradition and normative and philosophical educational ideas that were not evidence-based, which they found unacceptable. Teaching should be based on empirically based knowledge about what works in relation to national aims. That meant it should be evidence-based. This idea initially came from an OECD report

on quality in the Danish educational system, the Peter Mortimore review (OECD, 2004b) and the review on Danish education research (OECD, 2004a). The main recommendations in these reports were to strengthen the culture of evaluation, because the institutions and agencies should be held accountable for their outcomes, and focus more on evidence in education, because aims should be based more on generic solid knowledge.

There have been many critical voices of this aspect, both from academics and parents. The current Social Democrat-led Government that resumed power in 2019 has begun to make some of the aims optional and promised to look thoroughly at the rest. However, one should neither be optimistic nor worried, because the act was passed in parliament through bi-partisan compromise and no changes can be made without the consent of all participating political parties.

## *Digitalisation and Business*

Another important aspect of the reform was the expressed intention to build a shared digital learning platform to further students learning and collaboration between the school and parents.

A thorough digitalisation of the basic school ... shall support students' learning and a flexible planning and carrying through of education independent of time and space. (Denmark, 2015)

Several companies established platforms for schools and municipalities to choose from (e.g. it's learning, meebook, student-intra, aula). In 2019, the Ministry chose the collaborative communication platform Aula as the standard. The learning parts of the platform were naturally built on the national aims.

This development is in line with the emergence of *eduBusiness* (Williamson, 2017). This discourse and practice are built on two foundations. The first one is the commodification of education that brings education into the centre of the global marketplace (Ball, 2004, 2012), and the second one is the rather new interest in education that is being taken by international and national private agencies such as large consultancies and private foundations. Here, the players are interested in profit as well as the influence they can gain from data and on the education market.

Many consultancies and enterprises construct learning programmes for subject- or social-learning for all subjects offered by a school. Some of them are known evidence-based programmes like PALS (in English: Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)) with evidence from predominantly American schools (Socialstyrelsen, 2016). These and similar programmes are administered from the National Board of Social Services to municipalities which means that the schools are strongly advised to use them. This scenario could raise at least two issues: Is American evidence relevant to Danish schools? And is a programme that manages teachers' practices in detail actually going to support school development and teacher professionalism?

Global education programmes and learning platforms are most often constructed to use and harvest big data. The use of algorithms to produce mega/big databases from globally used tests and learning programmes (Williamson, 2016) helps the companies to claim that their programmes are evidence based. Thereby they support downgrading or neglecting the importance of national and local cultures.

Consultancy firms, agencies and governments use digital solutions for a multitude of purposes. Some of them are to gain ‘algorithmic governance’ of citizens’ everyday lives (Williamson, 2017) in combining thinking, institutions, technologies and activities that can be used to monitor, control, form and regulate human activity and behaviour (Foucault, 2001).

An emerging discourse about platforms says that the portal should not only contain learning material, assignments and tests, but it should also:

ensure access for parents, teachers and students to individual student profiles and daily/weekly/yearly class plans, assigned activities, learning processes, assignments, results from national tests and learning objectives (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014, p. 2)

The Aula platform is being seen as a complete universe or environment that encompasses all aspects of school life of the students and teachers from learning to well-being and forgotten outdoor activities (Cone, 2020 (forthcoming)). This brings standardizing, monitoring and controlling of actors to a new, higher level because standards and practices are being issued on a general, national level.

Another step in the eduBusiness development has emerged during 2019 when municipalities began to collaborate with Google Suite for Education (Council, 2019). Google has negotiated low prices for different laptop models, where the programming and storing facilities are located in the Google Cloud. The cloud facilities are being given for free to the municipality. Thus, for example, they can give free laptops to all students in the school district of Aarhus. Google does not earn anything, money wise, but gets a lot of big data on students and learning in the district. The municipal authorities have not yet found any problems with this arrangement (Interview with Lucas Lundbye Cone in Jyllands Posten, November 8th, 2019).

Aarhus is the second largest city in Denmark, and more municipalities are following this arrangement. Worth noticing with this set up is how Google is following and building on the OECD and Danish Reform’s focus on the individualistic student learning that neglects a focus on teaching in communities. So maybe we should change the label from eduBusiness to *learningBusiness*.

## ***Discussion***

In this chapter we have illustrated how Danish cultural history, policies and educational governance have for centuries been connected to the development of other Nordic countries, but for the past 40–50 years increasingly been influenced by transnational trends. Parallel Nordic efforts to build welfare states and thus Democratic Education are being modified by transnational tendencies towards more

neoliberal inspired governance as we see with contract governance. Aspects of the contract are management by objective and management by outcomes, that entail more focus on national objectives and outcomes and thereby What Works and evidence technologies.

Educational governance was thus directed more towards neoliberal models of management. At the same time education itself was shaped towards relying more on digital technologies.

The traditional chain of governance is being transformed into policy networks. Professional actors, policymakers and administrators increasingly welcome global and private enterprises to get involved in parts of the education discourses, practices, materials and finances. One general trend in this development is to move educational discussions and decisions from local and national levels to transnational and global levels as the constructor and builders of digital and social technologies are global for-profit enterprises. The focus on evidence based and What Works technologies has inherent trends towards homogenization of education across cultures and towards moving focus from educational philosophy towards educational governance. This produces considerable challenges for maintaining a national directed school policy and threatens the room for professional discretion.

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