

## **Schools in Denmark: A History of Everyday Life, Conditions, and Visions over 500 Years**

The original project proposal (from October 2008) was prepared by a group comprised of:

Senior lecturer Ning de Coninck-Smith, PhD (Danish School of Education – DPU), Ellen Nørgaard, EdD (DPU), and senior lecturer Charlotte Appel, PhD (Roskilde University).

The following text is a shorter and revised version in English.

### **Idea and background**

The aim of this project is to provide a new, general account of the history of Danish elementary schools (for children up to the age of 15, i.e. corresponding to today's *folkeskole*). Our study in five volumes will offer insights into the broad outline of educational history over more than five hundred years. It will highlight the relations between social changes, educational visions and policies, and local interests and disagreements. But, first of all, it is the intention to capture what “school” actually meant to all the various groups involved by providing concrete and detailed descriptions of different schools and their significance for pupils, teachers, and parents.

To a far greater extent than previously done, we want to apply an everyday and “bottom-up” perspective, placing practice and the members of the school community at the heart of our account of complex and ever-changing schools. The project is also an attempt to challenge the national frame of reference that has hitherto characterised Danish educational history, including the only other attempt at a general account - namely, Joakim Larsen's *Bidrag til den danske Skoles Historie* [*Contribution to the History of the Danish School*, published 1893-1916]. With its assertion of the central role of education in the democratisation of society and its focus on school reforms and school policy, Larsen's *magnum opus* is, of course, a product of its time. Today, we ask different questions and look for other answers, and the fact that there is no cohesive attempt at a history of 20th-century Danish education is constantly felt as a major shortcoming.

Today, schools are everywhere and concern everyone. They are important to society,

to different groups, and to individuals in a number of ways. They are intrinsic to the processes of socialization, education, and the formation of identities. A week rarely goes by without a story from the world of schools making the front pages of newspapers and appearing on the political agenda. And “school” is an experience that most people have in common and, therefore, can relate to and hold an opinion about. A history of schools, therefore, is not just of importance to historians and to experts in the field of educational studies. It is the intention of this project to provide background knowledge and inspiration for all the people who are involved with schools and are active in developing them - teachers, parents, pupils, administrators, and politicians – and, in this way, contribute to qualifying and putting current research and debates into perspective. History is often experienced as an obstacle to renewal and change rather than as a starting point for new ideas and developments. By highlighting both continuities and changes, we hope that our historical account can help turn educational history into a cultural and political resource, when it comes to understanding schools and shaping them for the future.

The three following issues will be investigated and pursued in all volumes:

- How have perceptions of schooling and the conditions for school attendance changed over time?
- Who struggled to influence the development of schools, by which means, and with what results?
- How (and how diverse) are the specific ways in which everyday school life has manifested itself at different times? And what has school meant to pupils, parents, and teachers?

## **2. Analytical perspectives**

Two pairs of analytical tools will be applied to show how (different types of) schools have existed and been shaped by people and their surroundings at different times:

*Everyday life and diversity.* All volumes will apply a practice-oriented and “bottom-up” approach. They will deal with changing school landscapes, including school buildings and their geographical location, and with all the different people involved in everyday school life - individuals as well as groups. The five volumes will, therefore, contain descriptions of selected pupils, teachers, parents, headmasters, pastors, civil servants, etc. and will show how they behaved and reacted in different situations – when new subjects were taught, when there was unrest among pupils, and when parents and authorities interfered. It will be demonstrated that there could often be great discrepancies between educational ideals and legislative prescriptions, on one hand, and daily school life, on the other.

An emphasis on diversity will naturally follow from the everyday perspective. Despite being subject to the same national legislation, there have always been considerable differences regionally and locally and between schools for different social classes, urban and rural populations, girls and boys, younger and older children, and children with special needs or different ethnic backgrounds. We will thus highlight variations and exceptions as well as the basic fact that schooling could be experienced and assessed in widely differing ways, depending on where and for whom schools were organised: in central Denmark, in other parts of the United Monarchy (Greenland, the Faeroe Islands, Iceland, parts of what is now northern Germany, and - until 1805 - Norway), or in the tropical colonies. In this way, our study is intended to challenge the idea of a common Danish school within the framework of a single Danish nation-state. At the same time, it will be shown that educational thinking and ideas do not respect national borders. Many phenomena that are now often understood as distinctly Danish prove on closer inspection to have Nordic, European, or American roots.

*Struggle and construction* will be another important pair of analytical tools. The purpose of

schooling has always been (the attempt) to turn children into future fellow citizens. A history of schooling will, therefore, be inextricably bound up with the formation of identity for individuals, for groups and, in some cases, for entire generations of Danish children. For the very same reason, school is often contested. The five volumes will document that there have always been highly conflicting views concerning schools and education with regard to curricula and teaching methods as well as the values and worldviews that they should impart. Who had which educational policies and why? Which interests gained predominance and by what means? By focusing on the conflicts, negotiations, and compromises that have shaped schools – in national and local politics, on school boards, and in staff and class rooms – we want to demonstrate that the development of schools is a result of dynamic processes, involving many players and interests. In such processes, political and educational visions and controls always interact with the existing cultural and social realities of schools and society. The development of schooling and everyday life at school can only be planned to a limited extent. In our opinion, school must be interpreted as something that happens and is negotiated between the different groups of users and players involved.

It will be crucial to understand the phenomenon of school as construction in another sense of the word, too. School is not only a matter of cultural anchoring and collective processes but also of individual experience and subjective learning. So, what “the school” has as its official goals is one thing. What it actually does is quite another! When children learn, they change, and they handle the learning process in very different ways. It will be the ambition of this study to make use of insights from recent research into education and subjectivity and to present examples of how schools have shaped (or have been *unable* to shape) the identities and self-perception of children in different historical periods.

### **3. Paths and priorities**

A history of schools covering more than half a millenium will be faced with a number of special challenges. The central concept and phenomenon of “school” changed dramatically over the course of this period, and so did social conditions and educational visions. Some threads can be traced throughout all of the centuries in question, while we must let go of others and gather up new themes and connections, as we follow changes in schools. We are convinced, however, that it is precisely this long time perspective that will make it possible to open up new insights with regard to when, how, and why certain types of socialisation and instruction developed into special learning environments known as “schools”, and how “schooling” has interacted with other types of learning.

Chronologically, the project will cover the period from the Middle Ages up to the beginning of the 21st century. We will have the first volume take its point of departure in the earliest references to schooling (at cathedrals and monasteries), but every century in the history of schooling will obviously not receive the same amount of attention. We have had to prioritize and will give the description of the last two hundred years relatively more weight, partly due to the great public interest in and debate about recent school history and partly because the phenomenon of “school” gained more importance in the life of the individual and in society as a whole during the 19th and 20th centuries. (The dates given below for each volume are only approximate, as the volumes will not follow the conventional chronology of school history as seen from above.)

Geographically, this history of Danish schools will not be limited to the area that constitutes the Kingdom of Denmark today. We shall take into account the changing of borders and constitutional law since the Middle Ages, since these things have influenced practical experience and tradition as well as educational horizons. In order to capture such developments over time – and to ensure consistency throughout the volumes – we have selected eight local areas to which we return in each volume in order to study changes and continuities throughout the centuries. Our studies of school conditions and everyday life are intended to cover both rural and urban areas, the capital and provincial towns, outlying areas, border regions, and the colonies, as well as districts with both limited and more extensive experience of educational experimentation.

The following regions (for the most part, including urban as well as rural schools) have been chosen: 1. the capital of Copenhagen; 2. the city of Aalborg in northern Jutland with Hornum and Fleskum hundreds; 3. the city of Odense on Funen and Odense hundred; 4. Østre Flakkebjerg and Vestre Flakkebjerg hundreds in southwestern Zealand; 5. Bølling hundred on the west coast of Jutland; 6. the island of Bornholm (in the Baltic); 7. the town of Aabenraa and surrounding hundreds in southern Jutland (close to the German border and formerly part of Schleswig); and 8. the colonies - in particular, Greenland and the Faeroes.

The focus will be on different kinds of schools for children up to about 15 years of age, i.e. corresponding to the present-day *folkeskole* with ten forms. Given the great variation in types of teaching and the changes in compulsory education age, it will be necessary to work with a flexible definition of “primary” (and lower secondary) schooling. The teaching that younger children received at grammar schools, for instance, will thus be included. All five volumes will also look at school teaching in relation to pre-school learning (private instruction, kindergartens, etc.), and to the subsequent continuing education and job functions of children and young people. Many educational changes have been made with reference to the needs of upper secondary schools, high schools, vocational schools, etc. But education preceding or following what corresponds to today’s *folkeskole* will not, as such, be included in this project’s field of study. Finally, the background, education, and vocational training of teachers will be integrated into the general account – for, without teachers, there is no school.

Our studies will be based on extensive and varied sources. A special priority will be given to sources that can help us describe everyday practices (such as diaries, memoirs, letters, minutes, reports, and accounts). We will also study buildings, schoolbooks, paintings, photos, etc., not only as illustrations but as sources of insight. With respect to more recent school history with its overwhelming amount of material, the focus on the selected local areas mentioned above will be used as a criterion for the choice of material.

## **4. Schools in Denmark: A History of Everyday Life, Conditions and Visions over 500 Years (Vols. I-V)**

**Editors-in-chief: Ning de Coninck-Smith, PhD, and Charlotte Appel, PhD**

**Special consultant: Erik Nørr, PhD**

**Academic assistant: Svend Ranvig-Christensen**

**Volume 1. *When Teachers Kept School.***

**Subtitle: *Church Schools and Schools for Practical Skills Before 1780***

**Authors: Charlotte Appel, PhD, and Morten Fink-Jensen, PhD**

This volume will describe the earliest known settings for schooling: the convent and cathedral schools of the Middle Ages and the variety of small reading, writing, and arithmetic schools that gradually took shape along with more informal methods of schooling through itinerant and private teaching. School buildings were a rarity throughout most of the early modern period, as were educated teachers. Wherever there was a need for instruction, a literate person could take up the challenge as teacher and “keep school”. Cultural and social changes - in particular, the spread of writing and print culture, the Reformation, and the growth of centralized state power - influenced the need for instruction in the Protestant religion and functional literacies. It will be analysed how clerical and secular authorities, as well as various social groups, attempted to shape the emerging schools. But it will be just as important to describe what school actually meant to the children who attended - including the fact that, by the end of the 18th century, the majority of Danish girls and boys had acquired basic reading skills, and many boys had learned more advanced writing and arithmetic as well.

**Volume 2. *When Schools Were Shaped.***

**Subtitle: *Schools of Patriotism and Enlightened Rural Society, c. 1780 – c. 1850***

**Authors: Erik Nørr, PhD, and archivist Pernille Sonne**

Agrarian reforms, the Enlightenment, and growing patriotism placed schooling on the social and political agenda. Among the results were the establishment of teacher training colleges and a number of experimental schools under the auspices of the state as well as private estate owners.

These experiences formed the background for the Education Act of 1814. Volume 2 will look into the underlying preconditions for this development: social processes as well as new pedagogical ideals, many of which came from abroad. Central players and important experimental schools will be described. Furthermore, there will be a discussion of issues connected with the implementation of new legislation in different parts of the United Monarchy and the colonies. Some of the most striking features of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century schooling in practice were the widespread building of schools, arrangements regarding child labour, the demand for (but limited supply of) qualified teachers, and a variety of clashes between existing local traditions of learning and the new, state-authorised system of elementary schooling.

### **Volume 3. When Schools Multiplied.**

**Subtitle:** *Schools for Farmers, Workers and the Middle Classes, c. 1850 – c. 1920*

**Authors:** Anette Faye Jacobsen, PhD, and Anne-Katrine Gjerløff, PhD

During this period, an abundance of private and public initiatives dramatically changed the educational landscape. These included private independent schools in rural areas, private independent lower secondary schools in provincial towns, and public primary schools for the majority of children in the capital and other major cities. The school was transformed into an institution that neither children nor adults could ignore, and school attendance took up more of children's time, especially in towns. Children's health and leisure pursuits were placed on the timetable along with medical attention: "lice mistresses" or school nurses, school baths, school meals, and children's holiday camps, etc. This volume will describe the social preconditions underlying these changes in the school system and everyday school life and look into the emergence of a new, self-conscious profession of teachers of both sexes. Many schoolteachers came to occupy key positions in local communities, particularly in rural areas. It will also be shown how ideas about education (from discipline to the form and content of teaching) were exchanged between the various kinds of school. A central issue throughout the volume will be the role of schooling in the further development of the nation-state and democracy.

#### **Volume 4. When Schools Became Part of Daily Life**

**Subtitle:** *The Development of Schools in the Welfare State, c. 1920 – c. 1970*

**Authors:** Ellen Nørgaard, EdD, and Christian Ydesen, PhD Scholar

Economic growth, increased migration, new media, and an improved communications network gradually cancelled out the differences between the provinces and between town and country. There was a general political agreement that “school” should be regarded as a communal and unifying project of the democratic welfare state, and that the objective was greater uniformity with respect to qualifying young people and heightening the general level of education. This volume will describe how small schools were closed, big central schools were organised in the countryside, and new schools in the expanding suburbs were built. A broader curriculum, new aptitude tests, as well as budding special education programs, also became part of everyday life throughout Denmark. During the years leading up to and following the Education Act of 1958, new ideas about schools and reforms resulted in heated discussions about the balance between curriculum-related learning and the harmonious development of the child. At the end of this period, the national and religious education traditions were questioned by forces both inside and outside the school system.

#### **Volume 5. When Schools Were Challenged.**

**Subtitle:** *Danish Schools between the Local and the Global, c. 1970 – c. 2014*

**Authors:** Ning de Coninck-Smith, PhD, and Lisa Rosén Rasmussen, PhD Scholar

A comprehensive school system and a heightened level of general education were among the most central political goals of the established welfare state. But disagreements about objectives and means were noticeable in educational and school policy debates as well as at individual schools. This volume will take a closer look at the many discussions dealing with social relevance and indoctrination and at new views of knowledge and learning in a globalised world. It will deal with the educational experiences of ethnic minorities and immigrants, and it will describe how everyday school life manifested itself in school buildings that were larger, fewer in number and, as time went by, in a poor state of repair. Social conventions changed under the influence of the youth rebellion and a new understanding of children and young people as agents in their own right. In this process,

teachers were met with new and more demanding professional, cultural, and social expectations. And the view of pupils changed accordingly. Danish schools increasingly became the object of central political initiatives at the same time that social, gender, and ethnic differences among pupils became more outspoken. The widening gap in the meaning of “school” for privileged and less privileged parts of Denmark was, perhaps, one of the most striking features of going to school in Denmark in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **5. Organisation and publication**

The school history project was launched in the fall of 2009, and all five extensively-illustrated volumes will be published by the Aarhus University Press by the end of 2014 (the bicentenary of the Education Act of 1814, traditionally seen as the founding of the Danish *folkeskole*). It will be possible to buy the volumes individually. The text will be in Danish, but summaries of each volume will be published in English on the project’s website, [www.dpu/skolehistorie](http://www.dpu/skolehistorie).

Each volume will be written by a team of two historians. Between them, they are free to organise their work as they wish, but the project as such is based on the idea that exchanges and discussions will enhance the quality of both research and communication. In order to assist the teams in their archival work and in tracing relevant materials in museums and on location, two special consultants and a number of student assistants will be employed.

Two editors-in-chief (Ning de Coninck-Smith and Charlotte Appel) will be responsible for the publication as well as the project as such. This includes the organisation of about eight joint seminars and workshops with invited guest speakers for all members of the school history team, starting in October 2009. General approaches and methodologies in cultural and educational history and their relevance to the project and to the individual volumes will be discussed. More specific topics and angles, such as Danish colonial and post-colonial politics in education, will also be dealt with at special seminars. The various teams may also arrange additional meetings or seminars with specific reference to their period in Danish educational history. Work-in-progress seminars and meetings between the editors and each team of authors are

planned throughout the process to ensure consistency between the volumes and to make sure that deadlines are met. A code of conduct has been written in order to make our intentions and the practical framework for a constructive process of collaboration as explicit and transparent as possible.

A reference panel, comprised of eight distinguished scholars from Denmark and abroad, will assist the project throughout the process:

Professor Gro Hagemann, Dr.Philos., Oslo University, Norway

Professor Ove Korsgaard, Dr.Paed., The Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark

Professor Daniel Lindmark, Ph.D., Umeå University, Sweden

Professor Anne Løkke, Dr.Phil., Copenhagen University, Denmark

Professor Pirjo Markkola, Ph.D., University of Tampere, Finland

Emeritus Professor Ingrid Markussen, Dr.Philos., Oslo University, Norway

Ass. Professor Birgitte Possing, Dr.Phil., University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Professor Knut Tveit, Dr.Philos., Oslo University, Norway