Arts education in Denmark

Quick view
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In school

In Denmark, there is a well-funded cultural policy which aims to ensure that children's culture is valued and supported. For this reason, arts education is an integral part of several levels of Danish education. Even before official primary education starts for children, they are introduced to arts and music as a way of expressing themselves while developing engagement in pre-primary school.

At primary and lower secondary education (Folkeskole), the hours of teaching are divided into 3 general subjects, of which practical/art subjects are included. The compulsory art subjects are music, visual arts and crafts and design. In the 8th and 9th grades, children can also choose from the following art subjects as a core curriculum option: drama, cinematic arts (media arts), photography and media. Various schools also have extra arts education provisions within the school day. These include, annual whole school performances, concerts and exhibitions, or 'creative weeks'.

In 2014, it was generally decided that primary and lower secondary education in the Folkeskole (public school) must integrate local sport clubs, cultural centers or other associations in the school. This has often led to a collaboration between the Folkeskole and municipal music (and arts) schools. As a result, there are ongoing partnerships between schools and arts schools. The headmaster might even allow pupils to fulfil their compulsory education by participating in music lessons at the municipality’s music school.

The upper secondary education in Denmark consists of four programmes, of which an artistic subject is compulsory. The compulsory artistic subjects are chosen from among other visual arts, drama, media studies or music. Apart from the compulsory artistic subjects, each student has the possibility to choose a specialized study programme and elective. Visual arts education, like music, is also part of this. No specific attention is paid to artistic subjects in the other three programmes.

In recent decades, there has been a general decline in the amount of arts, culture and creative education in initial teacher education. The use of arts and creativity as a pedagogical tool in other subjects, like literacy, numeracy and scientific thinking is supported.
Out of school

In Denmark, most local areas have a culture house, theatre or at least a community facility where arts and culture can be staged. There is an extensive network of music and art schools which offer programmes in schools, as well as out of school.

As mentioned above, the Folkeskoler have a mutual obligation to collaborate with municipal music schools. While the programmes of the music schools are not free, they are heavily subsidized by the local government and municipality. These music schools often also offer other types of art. This encourages pupils to take on arts education courses outside of school. Numbers show that arts activities outside of school mostly appeal to pupils who reach their teenage years.

Extended research

Researched and Edited by Kirsten, Reviewed by Ole Winther, Head of Division for Museums.

Denmark is a Nordic country, located in the northern part of Europe. The country covers an area of approximately 42,924 square kilometers and its population comprises approximately 5.7 million inhabitants.

History of Danish education

The Danish education system, as we know it today, has its roots in the 19th century. In the 19th century, there was an immense rise of an urban merchant class. While the education as it was established mainly focused on reading, writing and speaking, this class needed a more practical type of schooling. This has led to a secularization of the State’s school system. The curriculum didn’t only exist anymore of, for example, traditional languages like Latin and Greek, but from then on, modern languages and science were included in the curriculum.

Meanwhile in the 19th century, several developments were going on, like the scientific and technical development, which had a major influence on the education system. These developments led in 1871 to a division of the secondary education into the languages and the mathematics-science line. This division was the backbone of the structure of the Gymnasium. In 1894, the Folkeskole (public school, primary education) was formally established. In 1903, the three-year course of the Gymnasium was connected with the municipal school through the establishment of the Mellemeskole, which later was replaced by Realskole. At half of the 20th century, the influence of the growing working class led to a demand for a more egalitarian school system. In 1975, the Realskole was abandoned and the Folkeskole (primary education) transformed into an egalitarian system where pupils go to the same schools, regardless of their academic merits. During the second half of the 2000s, the Danish government initiated extensive educational reforms, aiming to ensure continue growth and prosperity. The reforms should ensure improved quality and cohesion in education and training, from preschool to higher education and in adult education and continuing training. The participation in lifelong learning is therefore a central pillar in the Danish education system.
The Danish Education System

The Danish education system is mainly controlled and financed by the State and the municipalities. School leaving, as well as the recognition of competences in further and higher education, is almost entirely regulated by the State through the Ministry of Education. However, the educational system includes a range of private institutions under public regulation and funding, and the participation of social interest groups and organizations in governing education is important for the function of the system. Therefore, Denmark is also known for its many local associations and organisations at grassroots level.

Education is and has been regarded as one of the essential pillars of the Danish welfare state and has contributed to a relatively homogenous population and workforce in Denmark. By international comparison, the Danish educational system today appears relatively coherent, comprehensive, and egalitarian. Excellent development and learning opportunities for children, young people and adults take the central stage. The Danish education system therefore consists of various pathways into further and higher education and training opportunities. The system aims to be open and flexible.

The main objective of the Danish education is to ensure that all young people acquire knowledge and competencies that qualifies them to take active part in, and contribute to the further development of, our knowledge society. Danish education therefore focusses on high quality education at all levels, since this is essential to ensure competitiveness in today’s global society.

The Danish education system consists of integrated primary and lower secondary education, upper secondary education and higher education, as well as a system of adult and continuing education. Education is compulsory between the ages of six and sixteen. Danish is the medium of instruction in schools. However, English is a compulsory subject in the Folkeskole and in general upper secondary school. Most university-level institutions offer various courses and programmes in English. Below you can find an overview of the layers of the Danish education system.
1 Pre-school
Pre-school education in Denmark takes place in different types of schools or day care centers covering the time before children enter compulsory education. It represents the transition from kindergarten or day care activities to primary school.

2 Primary and lower Secondary Education – Grundskole
Primary and lower secondary education is compulsory for children from 6 to 16/17 years old. The first year is a compulsory pre-school year (0th class) followed by 9 years of compulsory education (1st to 9th class). It consists of two grades. The first grade lasts from 1 to 6 and the second from 7-9. Finally, the system ends with an optional year: the 10th class for pupils who need further academic qualification and clarification concerning their choice of continuing in upper secondary education.

The primary and lower secondary education in Denmark is, for the most part, free of charge. Primary and lower secondary education is provided by municipal schools (Folkeskole - public school), private schools and continuation schools. The Folkeskole is the responsibility of the municipalities. On the national level, the Folkeskole is under the Ministry of Education and is regulated by the Folkeskole Act, which provides the overall framework for the school’s’ activi-
ties. In 2015/16, approximately 548,500 pupils attended the Folkeskole. Private schools in Denmark provide, as the name says, private education. It is characteristic of the private schools that they are smaller than the Folkeskole. In 2015/16 approximately 116,000 pupils attend a private school. The continuation school is a special and significant kind of school in Denmark for students between 14 and 17, in which students stay at the school. In 2015/16, approximately 28,000 pupils went to a continuation school. Besides that, Denmark has more than 24 international schools, which are primarily attended by children with foreign parents, who live in Denmark for a shorter period of time.

3 Upper Secondary School – Ungdomsuddannelser
The upper secondary level of education begins at the end of full-time compulsory education (Grundskole). In general, upper secondary education caters for the 16-19 years old’s and can be divided into two types of programmes, covered by the term youth education programmes:

1. General upper secondary education, qualifying for access to higher education
   These programmes primarily prepare for higher education. The programmes are Upper Secondary School Leaving Examination (the Gymnasium), Higher Commercial Examination, Higher Technical Examination and Higher Preparatory Examination.

2. Vocational or Education and Training, qualifying for accesses to a specific trade or industry
   These programmes offer practical training with teaching.
   Youth education programmes provide the student with various levels of vocational training, as well as educational and personal qualification. There are both public and private upper secondary schools. To be admitted to an upper secondary education course, a pupil must have completed nine years of basic education and fulfilled certain subject requirements. In some cases an admission test is also required.

4 Higher Education - Videregående Uddannelser
Higher education is meant for students from 19 years and older. Higher education is offered by five types of higher education institutions: Business academies, University colleges, Maritime Education and Training Institutions, General and specialised research universities and University level institutions. General access to higher education in Denmark requires an Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate or comparable qualifications. Admission to some particular programmes requires entrance examination or submission of a portfolio of artistic work. In Denmark, about 40 percent of all students complete a higher education programme of study and more than 50 different educational institutions offer programmes of varying duration and levels. Students following higher education can obtain financial support from the government to cover their living costs, as well as subsidies for transports costs.

5 Adult and Continuing Training
As mentioned before, Denmark has a long-standing tradition for lifelong learning. Therefore, there are number of opportunities for adults wishing to receive education and to refresh their competences. A division is made between non-formal and formal adult education:

1. Non-formal education
   Non-formal education focuses on individual choices and is characterized by a lack of grades and exams. Non-formal adult education is provided by study associations/evening classes (about 1800), Danish universities, Day Folk High schools (about 50) and High Schools (about 80).
2 Formal adult education

Formal education comprises both vocational and general adult education. It concludes formal exams. Formal education can be followed at among others Adult Education Centres, Language Centres, technical schools, business schools and universities. Most of them are self-governing state institutions.

EQF

The Danish National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong learning (NQF) can be compared with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Figure 2 shows this comparison.

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Figure 2 EQF vs. NQ

In figure 3, an overview of the qualification of the NQF can be found. By comparing this figure with the EQF in figure 2, it becomes clear how the Danish education system can be interpreted within the context of the EQF.

Figure 3. Overview over qualifications in the NQF
Main facts about Danish Education

There are a few elements that characterize the Danish education system:

1. Grading scale
   The Danish marking scale is a 7-point scale. This means, the Danish are graded with a -3 (F), 00 (Fx), 02 (E), 4 (D), 7 (C), 10 (B) or 12 (A). This grading scale was introduced in 2007 to make Danish grades more comparable in an international context.

2. Self-governing
   The Danish education system is based on self-governing institutions and an independent, decentralized responsibility for education, although education is mainly regulated and financed by the state.

3. Lifelong learning
   In Denmark, there is a tradition of taking part in education through all phases of life. This means, most people participate in education in order to improve their knowledge and skills in order to advance professionally or change career. This results in a constantly upgraded workforce, to meet the needs of the labor market.

4. Active participation
   Students at Danish institutions are encouraged to play an active role in their learning process and take responsibility for carrying out projects independently or in small groups. In addition to attending classes, students are expected to participate in discussions and continuously develop their critical and analytical skills.

5. High standards
   The quality of Danish education is assured in many ways. It is mainly regulated and financed by the State, and all public educational institutions are approved and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

Art and Culture in Danish Education

Below, it is described how arts education is incorporated in the different levels of education in Denmark.

1. Pre-primary Education
   In the pre-school year (0th class), the children are introduced to the school environment and primary education. Children reach, throughout the activities in the first year of compulsory school, linguistic, mathematical and scientific competencies. The young children will also be introduced to physical exercises and activities, art and music as a way to express themselves and develop engagement and a sense of community. There is a particular focus on a playful approach to learning.

2. Primary and Lower Secondary Education
   The arts curriculum in primary and lower secondary education is a combination of two types: an integrated curriculum and separate subjects. On the Folkeskole, the hours of teaching on Danish primary education is divided into 3 general subject categories: humanities, natural science and practical/art subjects. Below, the aims of each of the art subjects are described.

   1. Music education
      The aim of the music education is to make the pupils develop their ability to experience music and express themselves through music. The teaching should give the pupils the basis
for a lifelong and active participation in music life and give them the opportunity to relate
to the varied music styles of society.

2 Visual arts

The aim of the visual arts education is that pupils – by creating, experiencing and analyzing
paintings and drawings – should be able to view and sense the world in a more rich and
balanced way. They should also learn how to use and understand visual art as a personal
medium of communication and expression.

3 Crafts and design

The aim of the subject is that the pupils – by doing crafts work – will acquire practical expe-
riences and develop their ability to design and produce things with aesthetic and functional
value.

Besides these compulsory subjects, children can choose from the following art subjects as a
core curriculum option in the 8th and 9th class: drama, cinematic arts (media arts), photog-
raphy and media. In addition to these subjects, drama is incorporated into the subject of Dan-
ish, while elements of dance are sometimes part of the curriculum for idræt (PE).

Within the school day, various schools have extra arts education provisions. These include
annual whole school (or several grades) performances, concerts, assemblies and exhibitions.
Other schools have ‘creative weeks’ where the usual timetable is suspended to allow for the
investigation of creative projects within the arts across subjects and involving different age
levels.

Based on a comparison of time spent on the arts in primary education in OECD countries, ap-
proximately 10% of the instruction time is spent on arts subjects.

3 Open School

In 2014, a reform of standards in the Danish public school (primary and lower secondary edu-
cation in the Folkeskole) among other things meant that schools must be more open towards
the surrounding community. This will be accomplished by integrating local sports clubs, cul-
tural centers and other associations into the school day by committing municipalities to such
cooperation. Besides that, the Folkeskole and municipal music and (arts) schools must commit
to a mutual collaborating. However, it is up to the individual school management to decide how
collaboration is put into practice. Besides supporting the subjects and general objectives of the
Folkeskole, the aim of this collaboration is to ensure local cohesion and make pupils familiarize
with the activities of various associations and the opportunities they offer.

The headmaster may allow pupils to fulfil their compulsory education by participating in mu-
sic lessons at the municipality’s music school or by participating in elitist sports at a sports
club, e.g. in lieu of elective subjects. The school board may establish principles for getting time
off to participate in elitist sports training. Furthermore, the headmaster may permit a pupil to
fulfil his/her compulsory education by taking lessons at the municipal youth school in subjects
that also exist within the Folkeskole.

On private and continuation schools, there might be special attention for the arts, depending
on the private or continuation school. Normally, the choice of the school depends on what the
students/parents like, and arts can be one of those interests.

4 Upper Secondary Education
As mentioned before, upper secondary education consists of four programmes. In the first programme (Upper Secondary School Leaving Examination / Gymnasium), an artistic subject is compulsory. The compulsory artistic subject is chosen from among other visual arts, drama, media studies or music. Apart from the compulsory artistic subject, each student has the possibility to choose a specialized study programme and elective. Visual arts education, like music, is also part of this. In the other three programmes, there is no specific attention paid to artistic subjects.

Assessment
The assessment of art activities is similar to that used in other objects. In the Folkeskole, there is a regular assessment of the pupil’s benefit from the teaching in arts education. Besides that, every pupil has a pupil plan, that must contain the results of the continuous evaluation of the teaching in every subject and must contain information on follow-up strategies in relation to the results of the continuous assessment.

Challenges
In Denmark there is a well-funded cultural policy aimed at ensuring that children’s culture is valued and supported. To achieve this policy aim, there is general cooperation between the national, regional and local levels. The local governments in the municipalities provide substantial support to the arts and where a locality has a good arts and culture ‘scene’ this gives a positive impression of a place and encourages families to live where there is a good cultural life. The voluntary sectors, including sports, churches, gymnastics, scouts, local bands and others, provide after school programmes that often include arts and crafts activity.

Most local areas also have a culture house or theatre or at least a community facility where the arts can be staged. Similarly, there is an extensive network of music and art schools offering programmes in and after school. As mentioned earlier, since 2014, the Folkeskoler have a mutual obligation to collaborate with municipal music schools through ‘Open School’. The programmes of the music school are not free, although heavily subsidized by the local government in the municipality. Besides that half of the music schools are also culture schools offering a wide program of different types of arts besides music.

Children tend to leave after school provisions when they reach their teenage years. At this stage, youth centers and self-generated arts activities are more likely to be popular.

There is a general decline in the amount of arts, culture and creative education in initial teacher education over the last (decades), but also in the use of arts and creativity as a pedagogical tool in other subjects, such as numeracy, literacy and scientific thinking.

Open School is an attempt to reinstate arts and culture for children in the school. It’s a new initiative that does not necessarily deal with this decline in culture and creative education, but it is interesting to see the results in the future.
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Angloinfo. 'Information on the system of schooling in Denmark, from pre-primary to higher education.' Accessed November 30, 2016. https://www.angloinfo.com/how-to/denmark/family/schooling-education/the-school-system


