

The Danish free school tradition

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A short history of the Danish free school tradition

Before Denmark adopted a democratic constitution in 1849, society worked along hierarchical and mostly patriarchal lines. People were considered as being naturally subordinated to their superiors. Everybody belonged to a family dominated by a master, while he, in turn, paid service to his superior, a lord of the manor, perhaps, a duke or a king – with God as the ultimate power. This way of thinking was broken down, however, with the revolutionary movements that swept Europe in the 19th century. Man discovered his independence, his freedom – and his alienation.

In terms of its political history, the 1848-50 war between Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein, supported by the German confederation, and the final cessation of Schleswig-Holstein in 1864 meant a reduction of 40% in the nation's area – and wealth. But Danes responded to these challenges by finding their own identity in the form of a constitution (in 1849), and by establishing a 'free' primary school system and developing completely new types of institutions, efterskoler and folk high schools.

European national consciousness was really awoken in the aftermath of what we now call the Romantic movement. In Denmark, it was headed by the theologian, poet and linguist *N.F.S Grundtvig* (1783-1872). He and *Christen Kold* (1816-70) were both highly critical of the nation's schools, because what they taught children was, they felt, primarily 'dead knowledge' such as knowledge about the Bible rather than knowledge that had a bearing on the life people actually lived. Furthermore, if democracy was to work, people had to be enlightened about life, about the world they lived in and about what it meant to live together and to understand

and accept other ways of thinking. What was more, education was not to be confined to childhood years but was to be life-long.

This emphasis on understanding and acceptance resonated with a majority of the population. As a result Denmark introduced a unique dual system whereby state education and 'free' school education came to be regarded as equal partners, not competitors. To this day, free schools and state schools function as complementary and often mutually supportive systems.

It was not only the subject matter taught in school that Grundtvig and Kold objected to. It was also the methods used. For them, the starting point for teaching should be the child and not a set of dusty texts pre-determined by an 'authority'. Both men saw story-telling as a key to arousing the child's imagination and understanding, and Grundtvig placed enormous importance on 'the living word', and on communication from the heart.

Both Grundtvig and Kold favoured story-telling as a method to awaken and encouraged the child's imagination.

Although Grundtvig and Kold were radical in their critique of school (and of the Church), many Danes had some sympathy with them. Because of this, when in 1855 the Danish parliament passed a law determining that all children should be given an education they did not stipulate that this had to be in a school. Initially, many parents kept their children at home and educated them as they saw fit – but the first 'free school' had opened in 1852 and with time more and more free schools were established. Whether children were educated at home or

at a free school, their educational progress has always had to be regularly monitored by officials.

Free schools developed in various ways, as befitted their liberal-minded origins. In some parts of the country there was a tendency to focus on individual religious awakening to a form of pietism. Other schools nurtured their own freedom of determination, while maintaining the essential qualities that underlay their thinking. Schools had to respect the individual child, and nurture her/his talents, interests and qualities. They had to focus on learning for life and on enlightenment in the broadest sense. And they had to help each child to learn to live in a sense of 'togetherness', understanding their own place in their community and respecting each other.

The twenty years from 1860-80 saw an expansion of the vision of the free school into two new types of institutions – boarding schools called *efterskoler*, where young people aged 15-18 would spend one year, and residential *folkehøjskoler* (folk high schools), where adults over 18 could at any stage of their lives take courses, subsidized by the state, lasting anything from just a week to nine months. Kold and Grundtvig had disagreed as to the 'ideal' age for a young person to leave home and become student at an *efterskole*. Kold arguing that it was best before they were 18, while Grundtvig believed they should be over 18.

In 1949, a teaching academy was founded in Ollerup to develop teachers for the free schools, *efterskoler* and folk high schools. This was a recognition of the fact that the skills required to teach at such schools, to live up to the principles of enlightenment embodied in a free school and to be able to teach children, young people and adults within that tradition, were of a different order from those acquired at normal teachers training college.

Common principles for free schools

Free schools are free not only in fostering a freedom of spirit but in having certain freedoms enshrined in law. These include the freedom:

- To appoint staff with no central or formal qualification
- To deploy their financial resources as they see fit. They determine school fees, but also receive a state grant
- To arrange their own curricula, placing emphasis on subject disciplines as they choose
- To adopt their own teaching methods
- To carry out assessments without using tests and examinations

For those Free Schools that are based on the teachings of Grundtvig and Kold - and they form the great majority - free schools work to a set of common principles. The following statements reflect essential aspects of their educational practice:

- Teaching gives emphasis to the living word
- Through teaching we become familiar with the history that we share with others and are animated to discover the dreams and hopes we harbour for our lives
- School is a living interchange between students and teachers
- School is both enlightening and enlivening; learning is also learning to live and to love
- Learning is life-long
- All people deserve equal respect

The Danish *folkehøjskole*



What is a Danish folk high school?

The *folkehøjskole* or, literally translated, the Danish 'folk high school' forms part of a unique Nordic school tradition and is a residential college for non-formal adult education. Folk high schools are centres of learning and togetherness for students over the age of 17, providing courses whose primary aims are to improve the individual's quality of life and to promote active citizenship and the common good. These schools have neither curriculum nor exams, and there are no academic requirements for admittance.

Schools for life and society

When Grundtvig developed the concept of the folk high school, he identified a growing democratic need in society – a need for enlightenment among a peasantry that was often both uneducated and poor. This large social group had neither the time nor the resources to enroll at a university and needed an alternative. The aim of the folk high school was to help people qualify as active and engaged members of society, to give them an identity, to bring them together across social barriers and provide them with the means and courage to change society from the bottom up. The first folk

high school opened in Rødding in southern Denmark in 1844.

Today there are around 70 folk high schools in Denmark, situated all over the country, mostly in rural areas. The Danish folk high schools are self-governing institutions, organized in a democratic structure, under the direction of an elected board and usually founded by a group of people with shared values. Furthermore, schools have to formulate and publish their core values.

Alongside these core values, schools have to meet a primary aim, according to which they organize their teaching and social activities. Danish law states that their primary aim is to foster togetherness and to provide courses that promote:

- enlightenment for life
- enlightenment for society at large
- democratic education and training

The educational purpose of the folk high school, then, is broader than courses designed for a specific degree or career. Instead it focuses on enlightening and educating the individual to live a meaningful life, to be able to take part in free and open dialogue about the common good, and to

The Danish *folkehøjskole*

become a responsible and active citizen in a democratic society.

Learning at schools with neither curriculum nor exams

A radical difference with the folk high school is that there is no curriculum. Schools are free to design their methods of teaching and to plan the content of courses and activities at the school to comply with their core values and their stated aims. Nor do these schools have exams or grades. The mark of success is the benefit students feel that they have derived from their course.

While the content of classes at a folk high school is not influenced by the Ministry of Education, the law states that courses should be of a broad, general nature. This means that, while students should acquire specific knowledge and skills in certain subjects, the main purpose of the teaching is not to acquire a particular skill set but to open the eyes, minds and hearts of students and teachers alike to aspects of the human condition and to optimizing the life that we are living, both individually and together.

The folk high schools are very varied both in the subjects they teach and the activities they promote, and courses can vary from one semester to the next. There are various types of folk high school:

- **General schools:** Most of these schools focus on the importance of having a broad range of subjects.
- **Specialized schools:** Filmmaking and cinema; Design and arts; Music and theatre; Personal health and well-being; Communications, media and journalism, etc.
- **Physical education schools:** Sports and gymnastics, outdoor life.
- **Religious schools:** Religious writings, theology.

No formal qualifications are required for teachers at a folk high school. Some have a formal teaching degree, but most are academics or professionals who are passionate about and dedicated to a particular field. Many continue to practise their profession part-time.

Subjects often reflect the teachers' special interests, and it is up to the teacher to make the subject relevant for the students. The student on the other hand has made a deliberate choice of the school and subjects. They are there for the pure joy of learning, not to get a degree or a good mark.

This interaction between passionate teacher and motivated students creates a unique learning environment, where the teachers are compelled to work with the students' motivation, and the students' involvement becomes a driving pedagogical factor. As a folk high school principal puts it:

To be engaged means to be dedicated and committed – and to be emotionally involved in something or someone. To be engaged is rooted in the fact that we are bound up in the world, and that, as such, there are things we have hopes of doing with the world and with each other. This helps make us who we are – it helps form us.

Living and learning together

With one single exception, all Danish folk high schools are residential. They become microcosmic societies with students and staff living and eating together and sharing the same daily routines for the duration of the course. For that reason, teaching and learning take place not only in class but also in conversations continuing from class at dinner or over a game of table tennis.

Teachers and students have regular meetings to plan activities, to generate ideas and to bring them to life in the real world. Many schools hold morning assemblies to start the day with a common starting point,



very often with community singing. There are friendships, romances and break-ups, parties and midnight discussions. Spending time at a folk high school will challenge not only the mind but also social and emotional skills.

The fact that students and teachers live together and interact with each other, not only in class but also at dinner, for a morning run or at a social event, means that they develop a special relationship that is more than just a student-teacher relationship. Being a folk high school teacher also involves being a mentor, a friend, one human meeting another and together trying to find a way and a meaning in life.

Students make it clear that being seen by teachers not only as students but also as individuals is crucial to their motivation and hence crucial to the success of the folk high school.

Grundtvig said that people should learn through dialogue, should learn that they have a voice and an opinion – and that they matter – and should learn to communicate coherently with other people in the community. These thoughts about folk high schools are at least as important today as they were in the middle of the 19th century.

Attending a folk high school
Over the past few years the average annual

attendance at folk high schools has been around 40,000 students. About 30,000 of the students attend short-term courses, while about 10,000 attend long-term courses.

Schools typically run courses of 5 months during the spring and fall semesters and shorter courses of 1-2 weeks during the summer and other holiday breaks.

Courses at folk high schools must be open for all adults. The large majority of the students attending the long spring and fall courses, though, are young people between 19 and 25. The shorter courses are attended by students of all ages. Two schools are specifically for young people between 16½ and 19, and two schools cater exclusively for senior citizens.

Young people attending the long-term courses at a folk high school are usually in between their further education programme and higher education (university, etc.), but there are also students without further education and drop-out students from universities. International students from all over the world also attend Danish folk high schools, as well as young people with refugee status.

Benefits of the folk high school

Why do young people choose to spend a semester at a school with no formal diploma

The Danish *folkehøjskole*

or exam? There are probably as many answers to that question as there are students. Many young people go to folk high school to get a break from the educational 'highway' and to get friends for life. Research shows that individuals who went to a folk high school are more likely to complete a course of higher or further education than people who did not. Some reasons for this are:

- Young people feel stressed in the formal educational system and feel insecure about their own abilities and desires.
- At a folk high school, young people get time to reflect on and come to terms with choices and opportunities in their career and in life in general.
- The pedagogical environment without grades and exams makes the students feel comfortable and secure.
- Students become more confident in their abilities and in themselves by taking their own decisions and by getting involved in new interests and activities.
- Students feel inspired by their fellow students and the teachers and see themselves and their abilities in a new light.
- Students find out what they enjoy and what they want to study.
- Students rediscover the joy of learning and the motivation to study further.
- Living together in a micro-society with people from different nations, social backgrounds and beliefs, gives students hands on experience with living in a multifarious community with everyday demands of democracy.

The Danish folk high school and the state

The state requires:

- The courses must be open to all who are interested, but it is a requirement that at least 50% of the students on each course are Danish citizens.
- School buildings must be approved for folk high school use by the Ministry of Culture and other public authorities
- Schools must be residential.
- Students must follow at least 28 weekly

class hours.

- No examinations may be held.
- Schools' regulations and statutes must be approved by the Ministry of Culture.
- Students must be at least 17½ years old (16 at Youth folk high schools) at the beginning of the course.

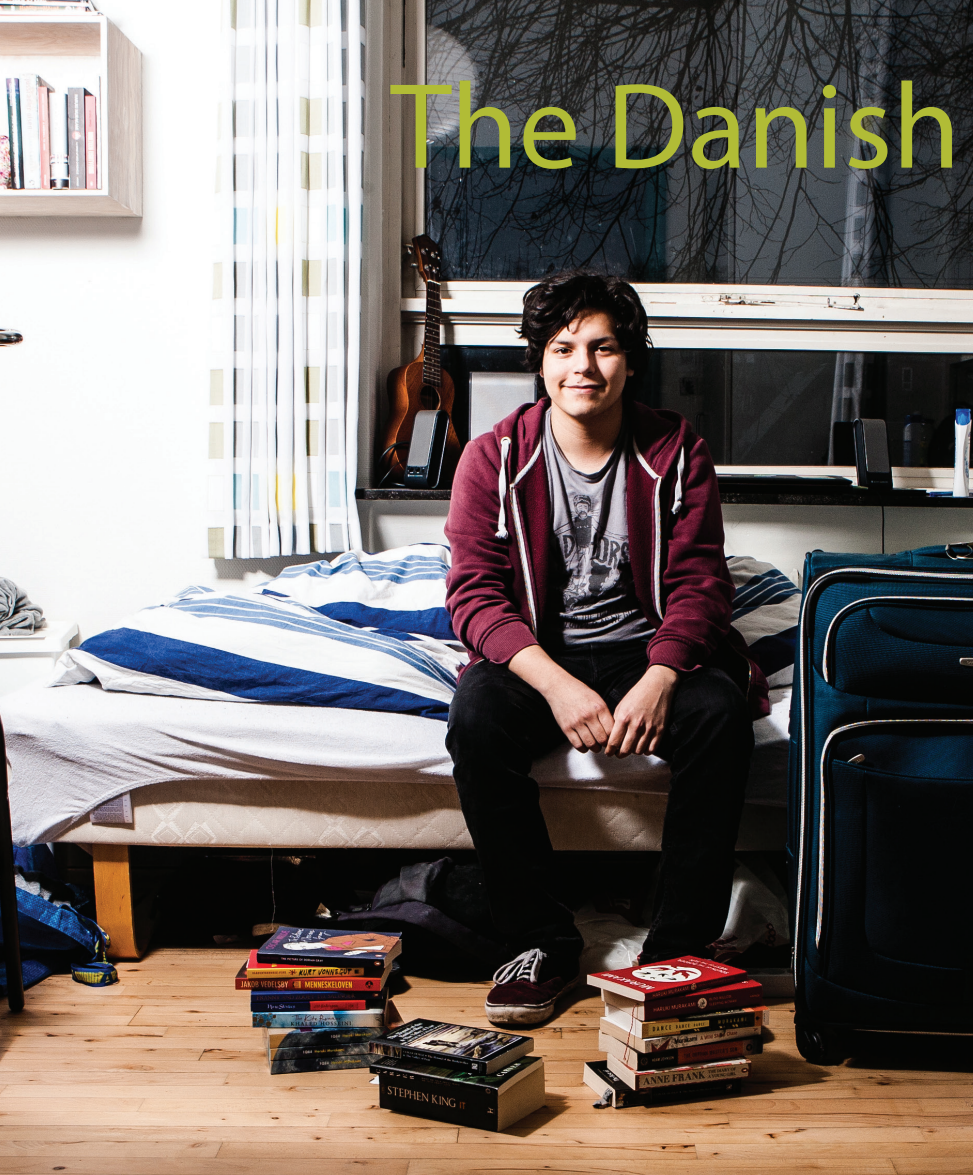
The state provides:

- The state subsidy covers about half of the average school's total budget (taxes, building maintenance, heating, salaries of teachers and other staff, provision of meals etc.). The rest comes from student fees and the school's own revenue from hiring out its facilities.
- The folk high schools receive grants from the state for each student on courses lasting one week or more.
- The government has also established special financial incentives to support young people without formal education and with special needs.
- The schools receive the same amount in subsidies for international students or people with immigrant or refugee status as they do for Danish citizens.

For more information, go to www.danishfolkhighschools.com

HØJSKOLERNE

The Danish *efterskole*



The Danish *efterskole*

The *efterskole* is a form of boarding school unique to Denmark. Here, students from the ages of 14 to 18 can choose to spend a year or two of their lower secondary school education before continuing on to upper secondary education.

About 20% of all Danish teenagers attend an *efterskole*. The number of students has increased every year for the last 25 years. Currently there are about 245 of such schools attracting around 28,000 students from all levels of society.

The size of an *efterskole* can vary from 35 to 500 students but is on average 100-120 students. Most schools are located in rural areas or near provincial towns with only a few being located in a city.

History

The first *efterskole* was founded in 1851 by Kristen Kold and based on the educational ideas of the famous Danish poet, philosopher and priest N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872), who founded the Danish folk high schools for adults and who wanted schools to provide enlightenment for life rather than formal vocational training.

Grundtvig wanted schools to foster in the students an understanding of themselves and their place in life. Narrative and 'the living word' were given the favoured position previously allotted to books, and teachers would inspire students by talking about life, history, poetry and mythology.

While Grundtvig intended the folk high school to be for adults, Kold wanted to reach young people when they entered puberty. "Once the students turn 18, they start having girlfriends and smoking tobacco", Kold argued. Today the *efterskole* is still for students age 14-17.

The Danish efterskole

Funding

An *efterskole* is a private school that receives substantial state subsidy, about 66% of the school budget being covered from central government and 33% being paid by the parents.

The amount parents pay is regulated to reflect their parents' income, so that families with a high income pay more than families with a low income. There are also variations between schools in the resources they use per pupil and therefore in the fees charged. The average fees parents pay are between €5.000 to €9.000.

For students living outside Denmark the fees are about €10.000, because students without Danish citizenship will not receive support from the Danish government.

Special subjects

An *efterskole* will typically choose to offer the same compulsory subjects and final examinations as state schools.

In addition to this, many schools focus on special subjects such as sport, music or outdoor life, while others offer special education of various kinds.

As a result, many students at an *efterskole* share interests with their fellow students and as well as with the teachers, and common interests of this kind promote a powerful sense of togetherness and shared values at the *efterskole*.

The fact that there are many specialized subjects on offer also means that these schools have teachers with very specialised skills and with an overriding passion for the subjects they teach.

Although most *efterskole* teachers have a teaching diploma, this is no requirement and the principal is free to hire teachers from all walks of life. This allows the schools to appoint teachers who have special qualifications in a particular focus area. For instance,

an *efterskole* that focuses on sports can appoint a former top athlete, or one that specialises in music can appoint a professional player to be a music teacher.

Teacher-student relationships

One of the things that is unique about the *efterskole* is the relationship between teacher and student.

Teachers at an *efterskole* are responsible both for teaching and for supervision outside school hours. This dual nature of the teacher's role means that teachers and students are together at all hours of the day from the time the students wake up until they go to bed. On those weekends when the students stay at the school, there are teachers on duty who play, talk and have fun with the students.

This often paves the way for close, personal and non-formal relationships between students and teachers. As the students and teachers get to know each other better, mutual respect and understanding grow, and this in turn has a positive effect on the classroom, where the students and teachers work together for a common goal.

The positive effects of the teachers' dual role is also reflected in the teacher acting as tutor outside the classroom, discussing schoolwork with students while they are eating or playing a game together in the afternoon. In the same way students can ask for help with homework in the afternoon and evening.

The results of the *efterskole*

Many students acknowledge that the positive learning environment and good relationship with their teachers at an *efterskole* give them a new appetite for learning. This positive motivation remains with the students when they continue on to upper secondary education, where both their teachers and researchers testify to the significant effects of the *efterskole*.

The Danish efterskole

Research has shown that young people who have attended an *efterskole* come better prepared to upper secondary and higher education: They get higher grades than the students who have not attended *efterskole*, and they are less likely to drop out from upper secondary school.

The lower dropout rate is a result of the students being more mature and having the deeper insight necessary to make the right choices in their secondary education. A number of politicians have pointed out that the *efterskole's* role in reducing the rate of secondary school dropout is a major contribution to society in general and something that has a high political priority.

In addition, the students who have attended an *efterskole* complete their higher education faster than students who have not, and this represents a reduction in the government's spending on education.

In the eyes of many Danes, a year at an *efterskole* is much more than a school year. A majority come to see it as the best year of their lives. It is a 'journey of self-discovery' that both in academic and personal terms prepares young people for adulthood. It is commonly said that, "one year at *efterskole* equates to seven years of human life."



The Danish efterskole

Democratic citizenship

A central element of any *efterskole* is the notion of democratic enlightenment that goes back to their earliest roots. They embrace a common educational focus on enlightenment for life, and democratic citizenship.

Solidarity, community and togetherness are key concepts within the *efterskole*, which is based on the idea of combining academic education with a deeper learning about the world, oneself and others as a way of preparing for all aspects of life, including understanding the place of the individual in a community.

The students at an *efterskole* all perform practical chores for themselves and for the common good, cleaning their own accommodation, making their beds, helping to prepare the meals, washing up and so on.

Students are grouped and are given tasks that contribute to the community of the *efterskole*. For example, one group might have to wake up an hour early to prepare breakfast for the other students. This gives them first-hand experience of making an important contribution for the rest of their friends at the school. Without breakfast, the day would have been ruined for their friends. The community has relied upon them to complete this task. And from this experience grows a sense of responsibility and an appreciation of the meaningfulness of contributing to the common good.

Many parents mention this as one of the more noticeable effects of the *efterskole*. Suddenly their teenage daughter or son is offering to help do the dishes after dinner, and they know how to make their bed. The parents are surprised and proud to see how considerate and helpful their teenager has now become, and how they appreciate their position and their responsibilities in the family community.

The *efterskole* has enabled the ugly duckling to grow into a beautiful swan. Once so insecure, their teenager is now a mature young person ready to take on the world.

For more information about the Danish *efterskole*: www.efterskole.dk/english



The Danish *friskole*



The tradition for compulsory education

Danish parents are free to choose whether they send their child to a state school or to one of the many types of free schools (*friskoler*) or private schools subsidized by the state. If they have the courage and perseverance, parents can even get together and set up a new free school of their own, based on their agreed principles, or they can teach their children at home (an option important in principle but rarely made use of). Such free schools can identify themselves with particular religious, political or educational ways of thinking. There is room to be progressive or traditional, or to cater for the elite; and there are schools for the minority populations and for immigrant groups. Diversity is very much in evidence.

Bringing up and educating children poses existential questions. Who has the right to determine the formation of a child – of any human being – as an individual and as a citizen? This has always been a philosophically controversial question. In Denmark we

have elected to have compulsory *education*, not compulsory *schooling* – and this emphasises the fact that it is the parents who are responsible for their child's education.

The rights of the minority

Since 1849, when Denmark's democratic constitution was ratified, the rights of the minority have been enshrined in legislation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and his political allies fought for this principle, insisting that the minority should not only have the right to think and act as they wish in opposition to the majority, but that the majority (the state) should also provide them with economic support to live in accordance with their minority opinions. Here, in essence, is the approach to minorities adopted by Danish democracy. The protection of the minority is a right of the minority, and this was a statutory right that was particularly relevant to school legislation. The minority should not be subordinated to the majority but must be

The Danish *friskole*

able to uphold both their political and their economic rights – and even to make use of this right to oppose the majority. This view of democracy ensures considerable freedom to schools that are established by the minority.

The fundamental principles of freedom

The freedoms relating to *friskoler* can be assembled as five interdependent principles of freedom. Regardless of its ideological foundation, a *friskole* approved by the state has the right to receive state subsidy and to be protected by these five principles of freedom.

- **The principle of ideological freedom**

It is parents who have the responsibility, and thereby also the right, to decide how their children are to be brought up and educated. Essential to this principle is the freedom to foster diverse viewpoints through education and upbringing, and this in turn implies the freedom to oppose other viewpoints – as long as this takes place in ways that do not contravene the law of the land.

- **The principle of pedagogical freedom**

The state has only relatively general requirements as regards educational content and none as regards methodology. In practice, schools are given considerable freedom with respect to the choice of educational content and the organization of school life.

- **The principle of financial freedom**

Although state funding is quite high in Denmark, parents have to contribute financially for their child to attend a *friskole*, the amount varying from school to school. Schools have to have students in order to exist, of course, but they do not want financial considerations to be a decisive factor for parents considering sending their child to a *friskole*. Therefore, schools try to keep the payment at a relatively low level.

- **The principle of freedom of employment**

Ideological freedom and pedagogical freedom result in schools themselves determining who has the appropriate qualifications to teach their pupils. No one outside the school, whether it be the state, the unions, or other authorities unconnected to the school, can determine what type of educational background and training their teachers should have.

- **The principle of freedom to admit pupils**

Just as no authority outside the school can intervene in the employment of teachers, so there is no official authority that can require a particular child to be admitted to the school. It is assumed that those parents who enter their child for the school agree with and will conform to the school's ideology.

Diversity as a trademark

Friskoler offer parallel education to state schools all the way through from pre-school to 10th grade (from the age of 6 to 16), the two systems existing side by side to create an overall educational landscape that is richer and more colourful as a result of their differences and their common aims.

Friskoler have formed into a variety of groupings based on their history, educational principles or cultural identity. By far the largest group among the private primary (and secondary) schools are those *friskoler* founded on the thinking of N.F.S. Grundtvig and Christen Kold. Being rooted in the principles of freedom, these schools are, as would be expected, very different from each other in their curricula, their traditions and how they organize the daily education. Despite this, they have many common characteristics, which can be traced back to views of man, nature, society and education derived from Grundtvig and Kold. Essential and commonplace elements of these schools are their deeply-rooted trust in democratic principles, their respect for oral traditions, and their belief that personal enthusiasm is more important than rote-learning.

The Danish *friskole*

The structure of a *friskole*

All *friskoler* are non-profit institutions, meaning that a private person may not own a school, and the school must not be run for private profit. If there is a surplus, it remains in the school's account. All schools must have a board of governors as the supreme arbiter of all the school's activities.

Many *friskoler* have as their highest authority a 'School Circle', consisting of the pupils' parents and others who wish to support the school. From this circle, a board of governors is elected. The board of governors is responsible to the Ministry of Education for the running of the school as a whole.

It is a characteristic of *friskoler* that parents are actively involved in the school, by participating, for example, in the maintenance and cleaning of the school. In general, staff, parents and heads work closely together for the common good and to ensure the best possible development for each individual child.

Facts about *friskoler* in Denmark

About 18% of all children at primary school level from pre-school to 10th grade attend *friskoler*. The number of *friskole* pupils has increased over the last 15 years. One of the main reasons for this is that state schools are changing. Over recent decades, smaller local schools – with pupil number under 200 – have been closed or amalgamated by local authorities in favour of larger schools.

When the local state school closes, parents often establish *friskoler* instead. The reason for this is that many parents can appreciate how much a small local school has to offer.

Today *friskoler* receive 76% of the funding given to state schools, which is about €5.700 per pupil per year. The governors of a *friskole* must send annual accounts to the

ministry, and they must pay their teachers on a nationally agreed scale. Apart from this, *friskoler* are free to administer their funds in almost any way they like – provided they use the money for the benefit of the school.

The actual grant per pupil varies from one school to another depending on three factors:

- the size of the school (number of pupils)
- the age of the pupils (pupils over the age of 13 receive a higher subsidy)
- the location of the school.

Supervision and evaluation

There are three levels of supervision/evaluation in *friskoler* in Denmark:

1. The primary supervision lies with the parents. They have to oversee the practical running of the school as a whole.
2. The board of governors – together with the parents – have to appoint one or more inspectors, who must be approved by the state. The inspectors have the responsibility of overseeing the pupils' standards in Danish, Mathematics and English. Furthermore, the inspectors should use a review of the school as a whole to ensure that the quality of the education provided is at least as good as at a state school. The board of governors and the parents can also decide to evaluate the school themselves instead of appointing one or more inspectors. In that case, the Ministry of Education has to approve the method used for self-evaluation.
3. The Ministry of Education monitors whether *friskoler* comply with the law. A school can be placed under closer scrutiny if the ministry considers this necessary. In the final resort, the school can lose its state funding and the right to be a *friskole*.

The Danish *friskole*

Friskoler – a successful alternative

There are various ways of measuring the success of a school. One is to look at the wellbeing, happiness and overall development of pupils. Though these are not easily measurable, whether they go to a *friskole* or a state school, Danish children can expect these aspects to be prioritised.

When it comes to grades, *friskoler* are more successful than state schools. Pupils in *friskoler* score almost one score point higher than pupils at state schools, although several studies have shown that there are no significant differences in socio-economic background between pupils attending *friskoler* and those at state schools.

Pupils from *friskoler* are also more successful when they enter high school level and go on to formal education at college and university.

Many elements contribute to success in education: professional skills, teacher commitment, cooperation between school and parents, pupil autonomy and responsibility, the nurturing of independence and responsibility, of interdependence and collaboration, mutual respect between teachers and pupils, and so on. The success of Danish *friskoler* is in large part due to their having roots deep in a culture that nurtures and sustains such elements, and that values the shared freedoms and responsibilities that are at the heart of the Danish constitution.

For more information about the Danish *Friskole*: www.friskoler.dk/english

DANSK
Friskoleforening 



The Independent Academy for Free School Teaching



The success of the Danish educational system is arguably down to the longstanding marriage between mainstream education and the "Free School" system. Free Schools may be seen both as an alternative to state schools and also as a complement - a vital reminder that education is not primarily for work but for life, and that learning is individual, life-long and concerned with the whole person.

While it is deeply rooted in traditions of democracy, community and individual development, Free School thinking is constantly at the cutting edge of educational development and provides a model for teaching and learning that is respected the world over. Much of the developmental work on didactics and teaching method takes place at the Independent Academy.

Situated on the southern coast of the island of Funen in Denmark, the Academy was founded in 1949 and has since been the centre for the nurture and development of Free School thinking and practice.

It is a unique institution devoted to training teachers capable of fulfilling the needs of all three categories of Free School. It says something for the strength of the tradition it embodies that to this day the college remains independent, 'free' to determine its own curricula, staffing, teaching programmes and methods, to appoint staff and allocate funds, and to evaluate the abilities of students without recourse to examinations. Despite receiving central government funding, the academy is subject to no central government control in planning its activities. It is, however, subject to regular assessment and results are monitored.

This is where those wishing to become qualified as Free School teachers develop the skills and knowledge they will need to do so. The course is residential and lasts for five years. This may seem a long time by some standards, but students here learn much more than their subjects and the relevant educational theory. They are involved in democratic processes at every level, acquire

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a deep insight into social dynamics, develop a wide range of what some might see as extra-curricular skills, and are constantly challenged personally, socially and didactically. They also complete three periods of teaching practice, one of which occupies their entire third year of study.

This is also where practising teachers come to find new energy, inspiration and ideas.

And this is where knowledge and research about the Free School movement are stored and developed.

According to its statute, the aims of the academy are:

1. To prepare teachers for the three forms of free school
2. To promote public awareness, active citizenship and global understanding
3. To provide inspiration for participation and leadership in the work of associations and networks
4. To provide and develop courses of further education and in-service training

Syllabus

The course syllabus at the Independent Teachers College is devised in close cooperation between students, teachers and the principal. No external body – not even the Ministry of Higher Education & Science – has influence on the content of the courses taught at the school.

Individual courses are designed by teaching staff in collaboration with their students and approved by the principal.

The overall curriculum is divided into:

Common subjects

Thematic courses designed to develop students' professional identity, and courses in collaboration and communication, narrative and pedagogy, psychology and didactics. Common subjects are obligatory for all students.

Specialist subjects

Danish, Maths, History/Sociology, Religion, English, German, Physics/Chemistry, Nature and Science Studies, Outdoor Life, Drama, Media, Music, PE, Art and Craft and Handicraft. Each student has to take at least four specialist subjects.

Options

Music across the curriculum, Swimming, Sexual education, Active citizenship, Philosophical method, Basic IT, Aesthetic learning processes, Grammar, Written presentation and Pedagogical method for outdoor instruction. In addition, students are offered four courses in didactics aimed at particular groups: teaching children, teaching young people, teaching adults and teaching students with special needs. Students must choose at least two of these.

Special courses

These consist of:

A three-week introductory course

Four study weeks

A four-week project period

A group dissertation under supervision

Two week-long assignments

A major assignment in a special subject

All these are obligatory

As has been said, the Academy develops its own subject descriptions for individual subjects and courses.

In addition to such academic instruction, the course at the Academy requires students to take active part in the following:

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Active democracy

Through obligatory participation in the school's parliament, year group meetings and committee work, students are trained in democratic involvement and decision-making. One day each week is devoted to such activity.

Community activities

The academy places considerable emphasis on social cohesion or 'togetherness' and the celebration of community, and these form an integral part of the school day. In addition, every year group plans, carries out and evaluates one large-scale social event at the academy each year.

Teaching practice

Students are on teaching practice for three weeks in their first year, three weeks in their second year and for a whole year in their third year, when they are employed on the same conditions as ordinary teachers

Teaching certificate

In their final teaching certificate all four elements of the course are assessed. In addition, there are specific assessments from the board of studies as a whole, from individual subject teachers as well as an assessment from the school where students have carried out their teaching practice.

Community activities

Being a teacher at a *Friskole*, *Efterskole* or *Højskole* involves much more than simply teaching a subject. It is almost a way of life in which teachers devote themselves entirely to life at the school. They organize meetings and parties and they take part in the cultural and leisure activities of the school. To live up to this form of teaching requires a wide range of talents.

To prepare its students for this area of their work as a teacher, the academy sees it as being important for all students to take part in a variety of activities outside their teaching. These are known as Community Activities.

These might consist of major events organized by a whole year group, of concerts, of manning and maintaining the school's full-sized Viking ship, of conducting daily assemblies, of masterminding an international literary festival and much, much more.

Those who complete the course are not subjected to examinations but receive a report detailing their engagement, competence and achievements in all areas of activity at the academy.

Post-graduate courses

Other courses for teacher development and training

The Independent Academy for Free School Teaching offers courses and conferences on further development in line with its view of humanity and education. Courses are designed primarily for teachers, head teachers, care workers and school governors at Free Schools, but educationalists from other areas have also benefited from these courses and are very welcome.

Courses and conferences take place at the academy itself or at other institutions. They can be arranged to suit particular needs but typically take as their focus issues related to education, learning, school and human development in a contemporary context.

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Course categories

1. Diploma in 'The Free Schools: tradition and pedagogy' (in conjunction with University College, Lillebælt)
2. In-house courses for schools
3. Conferences
4. Subject-specific courses
5. Ollerup courses (intensive one-week residential courses for practising teachers, head teachers and care workers)

The international dimension

Although centered around this small town on a small island in one of the world's smallest countries, the Academy plays a very active part in promoting innovation in schools all around the world and in encouraging democracy in and through education. Visiting educationalists from all over the world regularly come to see how this unusual system works – and go away inspired. Free schools have been established in many

countries and there are plans to set up international courses for students and teachers from abroad.

At the same time it is the Academy's policy to encourage its students to take some of their teaching practice abroad and so to encourage cross-fertilization between different school cultures.

Funding

The Academy receives the same per capita grant as any other teachers' college. This subsidy covers the essential running costs of the Academy. For Danish and EU students, tuition on courses of further education is free. In addition, Danish students receive educational support for a total of six years to cover their living expenses.

Den frie
Lærerskole 
Lærerruddannelsen til de frie skoler



Højskolerne


efterskolerne

DANSK
Friskoleforening 

Den frie
Lærerskole 
Lærerruddannelsen til de frie skoler