

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Danish case study report 1 Reaching 95 percent Successful Completion in Youth Education

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Reaching 95 percent successful completion in youth education

Summary

The government aim is to include 95 percent of the youth generation in the youth education system. To facilitate this, the government provides changes in concrete obligations; like guidance, bridge-building, the 10th class, target-oriented production school education, mentorship, and modernisation of the “EGU”.

Danish title: *Ungdomsuddannelse til alle*.

Theme: Ethnic minorities, gender, linguistic minorities, socio-economic disadvantage

Background

The Danish government (in 2007) put in special efforts to maintain equal opportunities for children and youths with focus on those with unequal possibilities and problematic childhoods. This strategy may be seen as an example of a policy inspired by the discourse of “negative social heritage” and the supposed possibility of compensatory educational measures in order to level disadvantage in education. It may also be seen as recognition of the heterogeneity among pupils.

The aim is to strengthen the children’s and youths’ personal abilities in order to make it easier for them to facilitate life possibilities; get an education, develop a social network and to relate to society. Four main targets are mentioned: support in early childhood, education, social network and parents’ liability.

This case study is about youth education and it is the vocational education that is focused. More than 95 percent of a youth generation in Denmark continue in formal education after finishing compulsory school level. However, only 80 percent of them fulfil their education. Since the other 20 percent do not get a formal competence they are at risk as grown-ups not to be employed because of the increasing competition in the labour market. The dropout rate from vocational training is high. Almost every 3rd pupil does not complete their education and an even higher rate is found among male immigrant pupils, where 6 out of 10 drop out. Since no uniform system to report dropout from school exists in the various schools, the Ministry of Education does not know the exact rate and neither does the school (<http://www.fm.dk/>). In some schools with mentorship the dropout rate is reduced.

Aims

The governmental initiative (2007-2015) focuses primarily on the youth school education system and especially the vocational education.

The overall aim is that at least 95 percent of young people shall not only be able to start but also to fulfil a competence-giving youth education in year 2015.

The pupils shall stay longer within the education-system than nine years even if the compulsory school age according to law ends with the 9th class.

The aim is to form an including formal education. The 20 percent mentioned above represent a heterogeneous category with different needs. According to the government plan this aim demands changes in the youth education-system. In these changes the focus is on including pupils with low

levels of achievement and pupils with vague interests and goals. These categories are identified as being at risk of dropping out.

Funding

The Danish Government has budgeted 150 million DKK (about 20 million Euro) for 2007 and 300 million DKK (about 40 million Euro) per year from 2008 until 2015.

Description

In the Danish system the elementary school is a responsibility for the local authority of each municipality. Even if, in general, governmental initiatives are implemented on a voluntary basis, the municipalities are obliged to do so if the initiative is part of a law or amendment. This initiative is part of an amendment. However, to be part of the project and to receive the funding, the municipality has to put in an application.

In this initiative the Danish Government clearly points out that it is the responsibility of the local authority that young people start and are enough prepared to fulfil a youth education. To facilitate this, the Government provides changes in concrete obligations that shall be used as tools; like guidance, bridge-building, the 10th class, target-oriented production school education, mentors, and modernisation of the “EGU”. EGU is a vocational education combined with theoretical education on a low level (see <http://tilgaengelighed.emu.dk/English/> or <http://www.european-agency.org/site/nationalpages/denmark/>).

If a pupil is “tired of school” and has no motivation for an education or because of other circumstances do not benefit from education in the compulsory school, he/she may leave elementary school earlier and carry on within a production school (<http://www.fm.dk/>). The local authority is obliged to provide study and vocational guidance and, when necessary, occupational and integrating activities.

The local authority is also obliged to have knowledge about pupils who, after compulsory school, do not continue into youth education at all, pupils who drop out from youth school, and pupils who are at risk of dropping out. Each local authority shall create an overview containing knowledge about all youths who do not fulfil a youth education and why they fail. Furthermore the school is obliged to form a written action plan on how to reduce the dropout rate. If a school fails to fulfil this obligation the Government may initiate a co-operation.

Pupils who do not fulfil a youth education often fall between chairs, that is to say, no authority feels responsible, therefore lines of duty must be cleared and authorities must co-operate when necessary. The elementary school is the responsibility of the local authorities but the Government means that employers, parents and young people themselves must have a clear and larger liability.

Responsibilities and tools of the municipality

Guidance

Each local authority shall provide personal guidance for youth education in Youth Guidance centres (UU) to:

- pupils in compulsory school year 6-9
- pupils in 10th school year

- youths of 19-25 years living in the municipality who need guidance about study and work (<http://www.ug.dk/>)

The guidance has not been sufficiently goal-oriented, according to the Government (<http://www.fm.dk/>). Therefore an amendment of the Act on Guidance in Relation to Choice of Education, Training and Career was made in 2006, Career guidance at an early stage in compulsory education shall be strengthened and focus on weak-achieving pupils. Another criticism on previous guidance was that it did not focus on the pupils who needed it most. Some categories of pupils are specifically targeted in the amendment: pupils with non-Danish background, pupils with Danish background living in “non-study-experienced homes”, pupils with low level of educational achievement because of other reasons. These categories need another type of information and guidance than other pupils, for example about choices and possibilities and the relation between certain diplomas and job careers. The content in guidance can not be the same for pupils with sufficient school results and for those with low levels of achievement because their needs differ. Hence a change in study and vocational guidance in the 8th and 9th school year are of great importance. Guidance must change and differ between categories of pupils and furthermore be individualised.

According to the amendment, career guidance shall start already in the 6th school year when starting the “education book”. As early as possible shall weak-achieving pupils be identified and the guidance shall focus on them. When needed, pupils shall get special tuition as soon as possible, especially pupils who are at risk not to pass the exam in 9th school year or at risk of dropping out of school.

The Guidance needs an adequate following-up system that must be developed.

Furthermore, according to the amendment, the municipalities will be obliged to provide assistance from social advisers to all young people below 25 with inadequate contact with adults and in need of help. If they have not completed a youth education the aim is to motivate them to fulfil an education. They shall be continuously contacted until they agree to a youth education programme.

Bridge-building

Bridge-building is included in the new act. The bridges shall be links between elementary school and vocational training through visits at various youth education programmes. This will make it easier for pupils to choose a youth education career. The pupil will follow the education for one or two weeks in some youth education programmes. The institutions are obliged to accept visiting pupils. Bridge-building can take place in the 10th school year as well in the 9th. A mentor is part of the tool and will be of help, especially for weak achievers or insecure pupils, to mitigate difficulties. (Project DK143: [Mentor Project – Folk high school studies](#)).

10th school year

In the 10th school year the pupil shall get vocational guidance to choose further orientation or it shall prepare the pupil for a start on a vocational education in a production school.

According to governmental aim the voluntary 10th school year shall be an important school year for pupils who fail 9th exam. The transition plans shall be specified and clarified so that the teaching will focus on the individual need of the pupil in order to supply possibilities to get another chance to pass exams.

Production school

In a production school, after 2 years of education, the pupils shall achieve formal vocational competence. This education lasts about 1.5-2.5 years and it alters vocational training with theoretic lessons. It has a strict focus on the blue-collar labour market. Mentor guidance shall be an important instrument to reduce dropout. For pupils with personal problems, social or psychological counselling shall be provided.

However the number of trainee places is too small. The government will investigate the lack of trainee places in various occupations related to the need in education. The result can be in a limit to the number of pupils who may attend the most popular choices. This will be to avoid pupils starting an education they will not be able to finish because lack of trainee places. The limit will be set also relating to future work possibilities, for example in creative jobs and media jobs. A new sector grant will lead to 10-12 common new fields of study that will form the entrance in vocational training. Then the pupils will be granted a trainee place and be able to finish their studies. However, the school may form new flexible individual specialisation including different types of trainee places. The vocational training shall be able to include different categories of pupils, both high achievers and weak achievers. This challenges both structures and pedagogical methods.

Erhvervsgrunduddannelse – EGU

EGU focuses on young people between 16-25 years of age who are not employed but looking for a manual job. The EGU consists of short educational courses with less theory. For those who for any reasons cannot manage production school, the EGU represents an alternative education. The two-year education can be individualised. Four out of ten pupils find their way into the labour market after finishing EGU. Some municipalities do not offer EGU but it is the Government opinion that this possibility of education should increase.

For pupils with disabilities and if they cannot be included in ordinary vocational training, a 3-year education may be more suitable.

Evaluation

Schools shall be systematically evaluated according to the fulfilling of their obligations and school results. http://www.globalisering.dk/multimedia/55686_kap2.pdf

In the Danish case study report 4, The Danish Evaluation Institute and its work are described.

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