

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Danish case study report 3 Collaboratively Improving the Value of the Public Elementary School

This report was written by the Swedish team:
Margareta Cederberg and Svante Lingärde



MALMÖ UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Health and Society, School of Teacher Education
Malmö University, Sweden

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Collaboratively improving the value of the public elementary school

Summary

This is a partnership between the 34 municipalities and the national organisation of municipalities (2007-2009). The aim is to improve the quality and image of the public elementary school.

Theme: linguistic minorities; disabilities; ethnic minorities; socio-economic disadvantage.

Background

The *Partnerskab om folkeskolen* (Partnership Concerning the Public Elementary School) was formed in early 2007 by 34 municipalities and Kommunernes Landsforening, KL (the interest organisation of all the 98 municipalities/local authorities of Denmark). It will function during the years 2007-2009. It consists of two similarly structured partnerships, each of which consists of 17 municipalities and KL. Below, however, we will use the term Partnership to refer to the whole arrangement with 34 municipalities. In all, there are about 620 public elementary schools with about 220,000 pupils in the member municipalities. Political decisions within the framework of the Partnership are taken by a committee with one leading political representative of each municipality.

Aims

The official aim of the Partnership is, firstly, to support ambitious results, possibly to document, in the local development work with the public elementary school. This work shall increase the value of school education for the pupils and develop their subject knowledge, creativity, innovative competence, problem-solving competence, and ability to work together. The Partnership shall also give the partners experience of this kind of cooperation, where the diversity of experience among the member municipalities shall be used systematically as a resource in a focused and mutually demanding sharing of experience. Finally, the Partnership shall strengthen the image of the Public Elementary School. Experiences shall also be shared with municipalities outside the Partnership, since all of them are members of the KL (KL 2007).

Funding

Each member municipality contributes 50,000 DKK (about 6,500 Euro) per year (150,000 DKK or about 19,500 Euro in three years) as a Partnership fee to the KL. Consulting and other practical help financed by the central Partnership resources may be combined with local project resources. Hence, the total amount of available funds for interventions within the framework of the Partnership is unknown.

Description

The Partnership is focused on three intervention areas:

- Management
- Evaluation routines
- Subject knowledge, inclusion and special pedagogy

A “pre-intervention” status report was made based on data collected in September and October 2007. The data was collected from questionnaires to pupils, parents, teachers, school leaders, and the head of the local school administration of each municipality. The design of questionnaires on pupils’ knowledge and competences was partly inspired by the PISA studies. The main results for the three intervention areas were as follows.

Management:

There is some relatively large variation between teachers’ and school leaders’ evaluation of how “far away” the desired outcomes are in various respects. According to pupils, it will be a long way to go before there is a safe and productive working environment at school.

Evaluation routines:

There are big differences between teachers’ and school leaders’ evaluation of the quality of education, and of whether teaching is based on evidence on learning outcomes. Moreover, there is evidence of a potential for more parent support for the pupils’ learning, and for more communication between school and parents in this matter.

Subject knowledge, inclusion and special pedagogy:

Both teachers and school leaders see a need for an early identification of the individual pupil’s needs and follow-up on this. Pupils report a lack of individual recognition and appreciation. As regards the pupils’ knowledge and competences, pupils give a more positive picture than the teachers do. According to the teachers, the pupils generally are relatively good at working together and relatively bad at problem-solving. In relation to nationally standardised measures and tests, pupils are relatively good at oral tests in Danish and English and in project work. Their results are not so good in written examinations, and the worst results are in physics and chemistry. (The comparisons are between the subjects and include the member municipalities, ie member municipalities are not compared with other municipalities or other countries. The intention is to make a comparison over time in a later phase of the Partnership).

Planned interventions

The concrete focal points of interventions vary between the municipalities. From a sample of local authority homepages, the following examples can be mentioned: teaching of pupils with special needs due, eg, to disability; integration and teaching of bilingual pupils; early support to pupils with reading difficulties; development of the cooperation between schools and parents; cooperation around the transition from elementary school to upper secondary education. The development of evaluation routines is an important theme generally. See also the description of the Partnership Project: DK 144, [Egedals folkeskoler skal styrkes](#).

Evaluation

Two more status reports will be compiled later on in the process and compared with the pre-intervention report described above. The Partnership members cooperate with Ramboell Management, a private international company specialised in management consulting.

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