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Between Freight-shippers and Nordicists – Educational historiography in Denmark during the long twentieth century

1 Introduction

In this article we attempt a somewhat impossible task – to propose a draft and analysis of the history of education in Denmark from the late 19th century to the 21st century. A recently published bibliography of historical works in Danish educational scholarship encompasses over 10,000 posts – and barely spans the latter half of the century.¹ This leaves us a wide and open field to analyze. The most we can do is to provide the reader with a very limited outline of some positions taken in this historiography – and try to frame these in the political context. This attempt builds upon an understanding of the development in scholarly fields as an expression of external forces just as much as internal dynamics. Here we will examine educational historiography as such a battlefield. We claim that the political economy of the educational field has been supported by historians of education trying to deliver and reflect on common premises for a specific group of educationalists.

Secondly we try to frame the Danish historiography of education in a nexus of either references to a continental continuity, first and foremost the tradition of Germanophone *Bildung*, or references to a Pan-Scandinavian area of common egalitarian and naturalistic educational traditions. This Scandinavism (covering only Denmark, Norway and Sweden), is somewhat mixed with a wider Nordic reference (including Iceland and Finland and more recently the Baltic countries). We choose to call this an educational Nordicism. The references to the Anglo-Saxon world are less overt, albeit important for the two most recent trends to be dealt with in this article. We pinpoint five distinct and broad trends in the historiography – more or less in chronological order – represented by recent works in the history of education. Within this framework we have tried to analyze some “grand narratives” from the late

¹ Larsen 2004.

nineteenth century through to the twenty-first century. Our overview of central works in the Danish history of education supports one of these existing cultural-political viewpoints.

Existing literature on this subject is surprisingly limited. We only found four articles available on Danish educational historiography, and they dealt with the writing of history at Denmark's only institute for school history. "Forty Years of Research into the History of Education in Denmark", published by the second professor at this institute, Vagn Skovgaard-Petersen, in the *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, has been the most comprehensive article to date. Other contributions in this issue deal with other Nordic countries and must therefore be recommended to the reader.² The other historiographical overviews will be commented on below.³

To simplify the overall development we will group the literature into five segments. These five segments more or less correspond to similar groupings in international literature on educational historiography. This literature tends to group educational historiography into four groups: 1) conservative; 2) Whig; 3) revisionist; and 4) post-revisionist.⁴ We will be adding a fifth group to this list. The arguments for specific Danish variants to this overall succession will be presented below. We do not however intend to present our five groups in any linear chronological order, because we find new contributions to the Danish historiography of education in all these groups.

Firstly, the neo-humanist tendencies of much education throughout Europe have played a major role in defining the educated elites of Denmark since the breakthrough of these ideas in Northern Europe in the 18th century. The keyword in this tradition has been the term *dannelse* (*Bildung*), along with differing definitions of *almendannelse* (*Bildung*). We choose to call this group both *borgerlig* (*bürgerlich*) and *dannelsesbaseret*, i.e. building on the positive connotations of humanistic scholarship and *Bildung*, but with a somewhat conservative outlook. The continuing importance of specific German pedagogy and educational thinking in the first half of the nineteenth century brought the observer Jørgen Jørgensen to express the calamities of Danish educational thinking in 1848: "Just as much as we lack independent educational writers, the more numerous are the pedagogical freight-shippers that make German works on the field accessible to readers not acquainted with this language".⁵

Early reactions to this trend were the realistic and/or national romantic movements that gained increasing political force during the late nineteenth century. We choose to call this assertive group both liberal and Grundtvigian

² Skovgaard-Petersen 1997.

³ Markussen 1981 and 2001; Degnbol 2001.

⁴ Herbst 1980 and 1999; Green 1994; Depaepe 1997.

⁵ Jørgensen 1848, p.189 cited in Nordenbo 1984, p.87.

– with reference to their central ideology – owing to its being largely framed by the educationalist and Protestant priest Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872). Just as the first group chiefly had continental references, many members of this group were Nordicist – ranging far into the twentieth century. The romantic period in which these ideas were born was the period of a conscious severing of all decisive connections to Germany. Instead, it was a reference to a common Nordic past. This was something new, and although politically insignificant it was culturally decisive. The fact that the native languages formed a central part of the national romantic turn in education and culture provided a natural point of departure for the growing Scandinavianist and Nordicist movements. One of the two national wars occurring in the latter half of the nineteenth century was won and the other lost to the emerging German superpower. Seen from a Danish perspective, the effects of the latter, lost in 1864, were to be quite long-lasting in terms of rupturing Denmark's cultural connections to her southern neighbour. Tendencies in this historiography will be seen to be somewhat Whiggish. In other words, they will tend to be seen as the advent of an egalitarian democracy realized through the educational counterforce of the Grundtvigian and liberal movements of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Moving into the early twentieth century, we encounter in Denmark, as elsewhere in Europe and globally, more radical groups within the progressive movement of educational reform. These tendencies had differing proponents, but the common denominator of their scholars was a positive evaluation of more child-centred pedagogies (along with the democratic urge to include all social groups in this educational form). We choose to call this group both culturally radical and progressive. This group shares characteristics of a Whig interpretation of history as the historiography relates an increasingly child-centred pedagogy and democratization by means of more and better schools. Research on the internationalization of educational thinking seen from a global perspective shows this period to be astonishingly international, not surpassed until the latter quarter of the century, in what many see as the true age of globalization of educational practices and reflection.⁶

Both before and after the ruptures in academia of 1968, a fourth group emerged with considerable expansion into the present field of the history of education in Denmark. We choose to call these scholars socialist and/or emancipatory in their view of the history of education. This group of Danish scholars fits quite well into the international revisionist movement in educational history. We see the Danish revisionists develop from an initially socialist or Marxist view of history in general to a more post-modern, critical and

⁶ Schriewer et. al. 1998.

emancipatory line expressing the aspirations of underprivileged groups or subgroups in what could be considered as advocative voicing. Workers and peasants were the “people” initially to be emancipated in Marxism – women, children, the handicapped, ethnic minorities etc. were later identified as groups who were also in need of emancipation from a more or less well defined power-holding subject. The initial nexus of reference of this group was clearly a child of Cold War Europe. The heroes and heroines of a western Marxist turn (very often German!) could be observed in connection with an anti-capitalist reverence for the Eastern Block. Educational historiography was by no means actively trying to drive Denmark into the communist camp – although the tensions of the Cold War could trigger an intense critique of the perpetual structural inequalities of education in the capitalist block, including little social democratic Denmark.

We are not keen on defining all subsequent literature under the well-known heading of post-revisionism; however, we do find a new pragmatic and more optimistic view of certain developments in schooling. This is far-removed from defining post-revisionism as Diane Ravitch has done, regarding it as rejecting all reform pedagogy as intentionally defunct. Our version of a post-revisionist approach could be called an all-inclusive, laissez-faire view of educational history-writing. Some choose the view of everyday life, with recourse to materiality or effects, while some focus on a strong state as a positive and progressive actor. Others find some inspiration for didactics in heroes of the past. One could agree with Gary McCulloch in a recent debate with Marc Depaepe that a New Testament is needed in light of the historical Puritanism of the revisionist. We also do not find that Marc Depaepe is completely right in his purist Ten Commandments.⁷

Before we enter into a characterization of the views on educational history of these five groups of scholarship in the history of education in Denmark, we will briefly review institutional developments within the field of the history of education, where it has been shown that Nordic references are dominant in Denmark’s educational self-perception. Secondly, a short pre-history of what has been called the Danish schism will provide a key to understanding the comparative differences and oddities of the Danish situation as opposed to both German and Scandinavian developments at our point of departure: late nineteenth-century Denmark. At the same time, this provides an outline of the first opposition mentioned above: neo-humanistic elites with continental references challenged by assertive national romantic and realistic movements with Nordicist references. These two positions are also described in an influential external view of Denmark. Margaret Archer suggests that, at its incep-

⁷ Depaepe 2010; McCulloch 2010.

tion, the Danish history of education was heavily influenced by the elites and these assertive groups.⁸

1.1 Institutional developments for the history of education

In Denmark, educational research was recognized as a specific field relatively late on. A brief attempt at the University of Copenhagen in the early nineteenth century was soon abandoned. It was only after World War II that a Professor of Education was appointed at the University of Copenhagen.

Danmarks Lærerhøjskole (the Royal Teachers' Training College) was granted the status of an Institution of Higher Education in 1963. In 1965, an Institute for the History of Education was established, with the Scandinavian-based Roar Skovmand (1908-1987) as its first full professor. The institutionalisation at the college meant that there was now an academic impetus and focus on writing a general national history of education, as opposed to the histories of individual institutions. However, this change came about exactly at a time in which history was gaining strength as a social science of broad historical trends, as opposed to the history of actors and ideas. The institute was seen from the start as a Nordic project, and the first three researchers to be appointed positions at this institute covered all of the Scandinavian countries. A Dane, Vagn Skovgaard-Petersen (1932-2006), was supplemented by a Swede, Ingrid Markussen (b. 1938), and then by a Norwegian, Ellen Nørsgaard (b. 1933). The work of Professor Skovmand and these other writers made reference to the whole of the Nordic area. They will be commented on below.

The sphere of activity for the institute was closely connected to the aim of the Royal Teachers' Training College: to serve the interests of the primary school (at tjene folkeskolens tarv), which, however, did not prevent the institute from looking into other areas of the educational system, especially through the yearbook of Selskabet for Dansk Skolehistorie (the Society for the History of the Danish School). The society was founded in 1966 with the aim "of disseminating knowledge and interest in the history of the Danish school", and in cooperation with the institute of ensuring research into this field. They also set out to collect and preserve historical source material from schools. The new society began publishing a yearbook in 1967.

The focus on the primary school underlined the gap between two cultural segments, i.e. between the primary schools/teacher training colleges and the universities/gymnasias. Vagn Skovgaard-Petersen tried to compensate for this in his thesis *Dannelse og demokrati* (Bildung and Democracy), which dealt with the connection between the said institutions. Despite this, a lasting

⁸ Archer 1979.

schism between their respective self-understanding persisted. This is a theme that is emphasized in *Institut – Selskab – Museum. En skolehistorisk hilsen til Vagn Skovgaard-Petersen* (2001). This work underlines the desire that the history of schools should interact with the practitioners of the primary school segment, and raises the concern of this being lost with the new, much larger institution, Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitet (the Danish University of Education), established in 2000. The old schism between folkeligt and elitism is still alive in Danish culture. It had its symptomatic expression in the Danish history of education which neglected the universities, and that only to a limited extent (beside Vagn Skovgaard-Petersen) dealt with the transformation of the gymnasium into an institution of the people. The history of education at this institution largely became the history of the primary school. The history of the university was not seen as part of the history of education until the foundation of Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitet. With some exceptions, the existing history of the university was written by representatives of the university's subjects. This was the case with the great jubilee publication of the University of Copenhagen in 15 volumes.⁹

The institute was closed in 1992 due to financial cut-backs and the staff became part of the new Institute for Pedagogy and Educational Research. Another, more institutional, turn in the story of the history of education in Denmark was the merger of a number of institutions including the Royal Teachers' Training College with Danmarks Pædagogiske Institut (the Institute for Educational Studies) and other smaller institutions in 2000. Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitet was hereby founded. The first rector of this institution, the historian of ideas Lars-Henrik Schmidt (b. 1953), began his work with a disregard for any historical studies in the vein of individual school histories; he considered these to be out-dated disciplines. The new institutes were clearly not performative in outlook, but definitely focussed on the present rather than the past. In a framework of sociology, anthropology, philosophy and psychology, the historically-interested researcher had to find a way to legitimize herself/himself. This was – and we speak from the heart – an uphill battle. It was mostly in the framework of comparative education that work was carried out, and now combining a comparative with a historical viewpoint.

The Danish university reform of 2003 led to what, in polemical terms, could be called an “informed absolutism” taking over from the “constitutional democracy” of the faculty laws of 1970 and 1973. Inspired by the OECD, a top-down management of the universities and research policies has had the consequence of strongly personalized management. After the merger of Dan-

⁹ Ellehøj; Grane 1979-2005.

marks Pædagogiske Universitet in 2007 into the faculty “Danish School of Education” under Aarhus University, the history of education again became a legitimate endeavour, at least when funding was found outside the institution itself. Now, in 2011, the faculty has been merged together with the Aarhus Faculty of Theology and the Aarhus Faculty of Arts into the Aarhus Faculty of Arts and become a department within the enlarged faculty. This raises a very important question: What does this mean for the field of educational research and the field of education history?

Explaining the metamorphoses of Danish institutions of research in education history, and as part of the new age of cognitive capitalism, must be the endeavour of future historians. Here we will suffice with mapping the long twentieth century of grand narratives of education. Before each of the five mentioned viewpoints are analyzed, a view of the situation in late nineteenth-century Denmark could be helpful in understanding the oddities of Danish educational historiography. This will enable us to view ourselves from outside, as it were.

1.2 The Danish Schism – the situation in the late 19th century

To begin with a slightly strange statement about Danish educational history: the light had already turned upside down on entering the 20th century. This statement from the educational historian Ove Korsgaard refers to the large political and “bottom-up” influence of liberal, peasant movements in late-nineteenth-century Denmark and the metaphor will be elaborated on later in the article.¹⁰ Landowning peasants formed an alliance with the Grundtvigian movement in both Church and politics. Grundtvig was a theologian and priest, as well as being the most productive poet in the Danish standard book of Psalms for Church life. In an educational context, his quite aggressive attack on the established institutions of learning was to be decisive in Denmark’s educational self-understanding. His attacks were inspired by Johann Gottfried Herder’s view of the people’s organic growth into a cultural unity. This view brought him to the conviction that the predominant Latin and Greek impetus in the gymnasia (secondary education) should be supplanted by a national educational curriculum, placing new emphasis on the Danish language and history. His own idiosyncratic hatred of Latin and German was an extra impetus to work for new institutions of education. A trip to Great Britain in the 1830s inspired him to form a programme of folk high schools (folkehøjskoler). His idea gained royal attention, and he managed to persuade King Christian VIII (1786-1848, King 1839) to establish a royal folk high school in Sorø, south west of Roskilde on the Island of Zealand. As an irony

¹⁰ Korsgaard 1997.

of fate, democracy ran faster than this grand plan. In 1848 the new King, Fredrik VII, bowing to political pressure, accepted a democratic reform establishing a two-chamber parliament. The second-first government had a national liberal politician and famous Latin scholar as the minister for Educational and Ecclesiastical Affairs (Kultusminister), Joakim Nicolai Madvig (1804-1886). With the words: "There shall be no educational institutions in Denmark that form a monopoly on Danishness",¹¹ he discontinued the plans for the royal high school. Grundtvig was disappointed with the rush of democratic reforms; somewhat ironically, as history grants him a reputation as one of the most important democratic thinkers in the Danish tradition.

Despite these moves, the folk high school movement continued with financial support from the state (awarded in later legislation), but freely and without much central state guidance, or royal influence. The proliferation of folk high schools in the late nineteenth century was to change the scene of Danish education with a strong reception whose effect has lasted right until the present day with regard to Danish politics of knowledge. The romantic notion combined with the British college model formed a new cultural movement, where young peasants found a year or more to spend in these boarding schools, best-described as half church, and half institution comprising Danish song-culture, historical culture and mythology. This was present to an extent when a Danish writer wrote in the 1880s to, Georg Brandes (1842-1927), another famous cultural radical, that the "Danish schism lies between wet, thoughtless Grundtvigianism and dry, non-intuitive Madvigianism." The former had its own institutions in the folk high schools, independent (free) schools (friskoler) and to some extent private teacher-training colleges. The latter had its institutions of learned (secondary) schools, later to be renamed "gymnasia" and the stronghold the University of Copenhagen, at that time the only Danish university, where Madvig was rector magnificus for some time and Professor of Latin for a lifetime.

This brief history should outline the most persistent grand narrative of Danish educational historiography: a liberal peasant cultural story of the "light from below". A song written by Grundtvig expresses that, in his view, "The sun rises with the peasant – not at all with the learned." Until the 1960s, both the liberal party (Venstre) and the Social Liberal Party (Det Radikale Venstre) emphasised that seven years of primary schooling was sufficient to equip every boy and girl for adaptation to adult life. There was almost a fear of educating too many high school and university graduates because they would not want to work on farms or in industry. During the debates concerning the 1958 School Act, the Minister of Education Jørgen Jørgensen from the Social

¹¹ Larsen 2004, p.97 ff.

Liberal Party said that he saw no reason for expanding the mandatory seven years of schooling. He pointed to his own background as evidence. With only seven years of schooling in a small village school, he declared, he had made it to the position of government minister. At the teacher-training colleges, politicians were reluctant to have high school admission examinations on the grounds that they would exclude “the man of the plough” (Manden fra ploven): a central phrase in Danish educational politics until fifty years ago. The other early strand has been a long-term current of the concept of *dannelse*, especially *almendannelse*, connected to individual institutions. This was exemplified in the learned schools, later gymnasia. This “Herder-narrative” has been the guiding narrative of Danish education, with the other classicist strand somewhat in the shadows in discussions of defining the nation. It should be added that, being a very well educated person, Grundtvig was himself a humanist, and in addition a Nordicist. His plans included the establishment of institutions of higher learning on a more international – for the time being inter-Nordic – level. He foresaw a true university institution in the Swedish town of Gothenburg, where learned scholars could develop his programme of a science scholarship (Videnskab) “for life”, as he expressed it, in opposition to a dead culture. This was a university in the old-fashioned style, but it was also supposed to move beyond what Grundtvig termed *Dreng-Videnskab* (boy science). Instead it was to be *Videnskab*: a broad-ranging education for life. An institution was founded in 1947 as a result of the later pan-Scandinavian reception of the folk high school movement and a new interest in Scandinavianism after World War II, but never as a full university. The University of Gothenburg today does not follow in this tradition. This conflict between Madvig and Grundtvig was also, as already indicated, a battle to define Danish *dannelse* (*Bildung*) as either classical and Continental (Germany having the closest present affinity to this), or as Scandinavian or Nordicist, with a pan-Scandinavian view of a common culture (which had no hesitation in tracing its narratives of continuity back to the Vikings). When Madvig declared in 1844 that we are “human beings before we are Scandinavian”, and therefore our *Bildung* should follow the long line of cultural developments originating in ancient Greece, he was referring to a high culture doctrine of Continental universalism from antiquity that stretched to the present day and to privileged European cultural nations.¹² Grundtvig, on the other hand, consciously wished to free Danes from their “inner Germans” and argued in favour of exchanging the dead languages of the “black school”, such as Greek and Latin, for the living languages of “the school for life”. The curious conclusion he drew was to propose modern Greek for the secondary

¹² Larsen 2002, p.75 ff.

school curriculum, along with the ancient pan-Nordic language. The only common feature was that Danish *Bildung* was kept strongly humanistic and language-based, in contrast to the hard line of realistic reformers on the Danish scene at that time.

The folk high schools were not only part of a Grundtvigian movement, but could also be further classified into Grundtvigian folk high schools (1844 ff.), Inner Mission high folk schools (1889 ff.), Social Democratic folk high schools (1910 ff.), and Socialist folk high schools (1970 ff.). Amongst the independent schools and local teachers-training colleges we also find Grundtvigian schools, Christian schools, and Socialist schools. This means that there are many versions of folk high schools and free schools: Grundtvigian, Socialist version, Christian, etc. and this has an influence on how the history of the folk high schools and the independent schools is being taught. The local teacher-training colleges founded on Grundtvigian, Christian or other specific values have lost those values over the last 5-10 years as they have been merged into larger university colleges (*professionshøjskoler*) run by an NPM person/technocrat.

2 The establishment side of the Danish schism – neo Humanism

A Danish historiography of education with a more top-down, positive notion of higher learning and *dannelse* has of course developed throughout the twentieth century. Examining the influences of central proponents, however, illustrates our view that opposition is still active in present-day historiography.

In the interwar period, the archivist and historian Dr. Bjørn Kernerup (1896-1957) published histories of individual institutions in the learned neo-Humanist vein. His two most ambitious works were histories of the two institutions: Ribe Cathedral School (in Jutland) and Frederiksborg State School (on Zealand, north of Copenhagen).¹³ Both examples celebrate the learned tradition of neo-Humanist *dannelse*. The line of teachers is mentioned to praise the high academic standards and traditions of scholarship. The “spirit” (“*Geist*”) of the individual institution is narrated in a long historical perspective with a focus on great personalities from learned culture at the gymnasium and the University of Copenhagen. The ethos of learning and upbringing are connected in the definition of a high-brow local tradition. Learning and *dannelse* are both seen as valuable in themselves. Certainly this fits the model of history discussed above. The functions of this type of educational history can be seen to create or stifle the elite identities of students and teach-

¹³ Kernerup 1933; Kernerup 1947-1952.

ers from these unique institutions and the University. Dr. Kornerup actually copied large passages on the history of Danish learning between the two books and his contribution to the 5-volume history of the Danish church.

Kornerup shares elements of the Whig interpretation that the number of students and schools lead to a larger inclusion and higher levels of quality. Being conservative, however, largely separates him from the Whig side of historiography. Indeed, the learned schools have undergone growth, as seen internationally. Until the end of the 1950s, only 5 % of a cohort graduated from a gymnasium, and a large percentage of them had parents with an academic degree or parents working as civil servants etc. Only 10 % came from the working class. The enormous growth in this level of education came after Kornerup's oeuvre.

The neo-Humanist tradition of celebrating knowledge in the *kulturation* (*Kulturation*) as an intrinsic value of high culture in itself, actually survived well into the post-World War II period. The politicians and new national research councils continued to argue over the relevance of Humanist scholarship being regarded as high culture. The high culture argument must be understood as reminiscent of the neo-Humanism that dominated university life throughout most of the nineteenth century. Humanist scholarship was considered to promote the moral culture of nations. An elitist view of a moral *avant garde* was connected with vague ideas of a national dissemination of high culture, but these views were strongly contested following the student revolts of the late 1960s. By then *Dannelse* was seen as a carrier of bourgeois ideology and the ideals of *kulturationer* were exchanged for concepts of researching "society" (*samfund*). However, the long tradition of neo-Humanist *dannelse* and *almendannelse* in the Danish context actually survived more strongly in Denmark than in either Norway or Sweden. Due to a drive for upper secondary gymnasium education to become more and more inclusive, currently about 50% of a cohort, this development did not lead to a total break with the neo-Humanist curriculum; something that had, of course, become available in a modernised version by this time.

As a reaction against the leftist vogue of the 1970s and 1980s, a new, somewhat post-modern, notion of *dannelse* emerged to reignite interest in historical re-evaluations of the learned traditions. In his book on the concept of *dannelse*, Jesper Eckhardt Larsen (b. 1967) shows how Madvig consciously picked the opposition to Grundtvigian educational history: this position is a recurrent theme throughout his book.¹⁴ At the turn of the 20th century a strong argument for the continuing importance of *almendannelse* was proposed by the educational historian and former gymnasium teacher Harry Haue (b.

¹⁴ Larsen 2002.

1941) with his thesis *Almendannelse som ledestjerne* (Allgemeinbildung as a leading star). In a span of over two hundred years, he believes that the neo-Humanist concept of *almendannelse* has been of central importance in defining the special role of the Danish gymnasia. In his last book on the subject, published in German, he surprisingly states that *almendannelse* should still, in spite of more than two hundred years of usage in Danish, be considered a “German” concept.¹⁵ This is, we believe, an attempt to bestow a more high-brow level of importance on a concept that certainly has had its own life in the Danish context. The publication of another recent volume on the concept of *dannelse* in Denmark, however, shows a clear (and not particularly German) line of Danish thinkers’ views on *dannelse*. A more existential and less curricular sense of the word has flourished among Danish educators and philosophers from Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) to Knud E. Løgstrup (1905-1981).¹⁶

To sum up: the neo-Humanist and thus highbrow history of education as the history of *dannelse* is still of some importance in supplying educators of all kinds with a strong educational ethos, but it may be especially strong in secondary education. At a time in which PISA surveys and an ideological war against supposed left-wing teachers waged by the liberal-conservative government threatens to destroy all self-esteem among teachers and educators in Denmark, this is a stronghold which has not yet been abandoned. As mentioned, this tradition is clearly stronger in Denmark than in our Nordic neighbours, which have all undergone stronger reforms in secondary education by Social Democratic and modernists, severing the bonds to traditions of *allgemeine Bildung*.

2.1 The Grundtvigian and liberal stream in Danish educational historiography

Grundtvig has, as already indicated, played a central role in defining the specific national narrative of Danishness throughout most of the twentieth century. Originally connected to what Margareth Archer calls the “assertive” groups of liberal peasants, Grundtvigian notions of nationhood have influenced both left- and right-wing movements in Denmark through to the present day. A social democratic historian, Henrik Nissen (1933-2005), could still write in 1983, that “Grundtvig is the sea the little Danish pixie sometimes chooses to be reflected in, whenever he feels the urge to see himself as something special”.¹⁷

¹⁵ Haue 2008.

¹⁶ Garff 2008.

¹⁷ Nissen 1983.

A quite critical article on the more direct political impact of Grundtvigian notions of education suggests, by contrast, that this role is often overestimated. Entitling it “Making Danish School History Myth”, Susanne Wiborg (b. 1969) and Ove Korsgaard (b. 1942) strike a balance between references to historiography that argue truthfully for the Grundtvigian impact, and other historical works that seem to attribute Denmark’s entire liberal, egalitarian unique educational *Sonderweg* to one person and his followers.¹⁸

As a historiographical reference that is positive with regard to Grundtvig’s indisputable centrality, these two authors cite the first Professor in the history of education in Denmark: Roar Skovmand (1908-1987). His works suffered the fate of landing in the midst of fierce disputes over how to define Danish national identity. His first works were published before WWII, but his first major significant work on the Danish democratic tradition of Folk High Schools in the Grundtvigian tradition was published in 1944 during the German occupation of Denmark. Another major work on the Nordic democratic traditions of Folk High Schools in the same tradition was published in 1983.¹⁹ During the war, a new democratic consensus found support in the “bottom-up” view of educational reform that was connected to Grundtvigian movements in all the Nordic countries. The overt anti-German cultural self-definition of cause gained new “relevance” in war-time. Another important figure in this definition of democratic resistance on a cultural level was the religious historian Hal Koch (1904-1963), who left his university position to travel all over Denmark. He presented talks on the democratic national identity that he regarded as the result of long and strong development both in the biography of Grundtvig’s own views, and of Denmark itself. Political historians such as Henrik S. Nissen have often made the point that Grundtvigian influence made the Danish peasantry more resistant to National Socialist tendencies at a time of severe crisis during the 1930s and during the German occupation of Denmark from 1940-45. In a micro-study of North Zealand, the education historian Søren Ehlers presented another quite critical view of the social and cultural developments of Grundtvigianism.²⁰

In spite of more critical reappraisal of Grundtvigian influence, Ove Korsgaard cites his own works from 1997 and 2004 as works that support a view of the central importance of Grundtvig himself and Grundtvigian movements in the special narrative of Danish national identity. He emphasizes the unique Danish *Sonderweg* of democratic and inclusive educational institutions that somehow managed to create an assertive takeover of Danish educational identity, as well as democratic definitions of the term *folkelighed*, and how

¹⁸ Korsgaard; Wiborg 2006.

¹⁹ Skovmand 1944; Skovmand 1983.

²⁰ Ehlers 1983; Ehlers 2000.

this stood in marked contrast to the special German National Socialist definitions of the term *völkisch*. In what we see as an extremely self-satisfied view of this unique Scandinavian *Sonderweg*, the Norwegian historian, Rune Slagstad (b. 1945), who also includes the history of education in his very well-known works on the “national strategists”, writes: “democratic folkishness (*folkelighed*) is the Scandinavians' gift to the modern world”.²¹ It is very clear that this line of historiography in education has certainly played a central role in Danish, Norwegian and (to some extent) Swedish nation-building processes. Historians such as Eric Hobsbawm have illustrated how the national romantic turn in education served democratization purposes in many western countries. This has shaped an assertive line of educational historiography dealing with heroes and heroines of equality, national reforms in content, and a democratic view of disseminating knowledge to the folk (the people). Or, to summarize, this is why peasants are not considered to be unlearned or barbaric in Scandinavian countries. On the contrary, they are the heroes of national educational reforms. We have interpreted this tendency in historiography to be somewhat Whiggish – tending to celebrate the advent of egalitarian democracy realized through the educational counterforce of the Grundtvigian and liberal movements of the second half of the nineteenth century. Andy Green’s analysis of Whiggish historiography includes these traits. Protestant affinities, and the celebration of democracy antedated to times in which this word was hardly so well celebrated, mark a clear affinity to a Whig interpretation of history.²²

We choose to include Joakim Larsen’s three volumes of school history in this category of works.²³ Larsen (1846-1920), a pioneer in Danish historiography on education, was the head of schools in the large Copenhagen suburb of Frederiksberg. In his work he does not deal with Grundtvig’s importance as overtly as Skovmand, but rather acts as the Whiggish liberal historian who narrates the history of primary schooling in Denmark around 1900 as a steady victory of increasingly inclusive, modern and democratic schools. The sheer volume and lightness of the new schools – buildings and curriculum – were, for Larsen, signs of this steady victory of liberal school politics. As a sign of the absence of overviews in Danish school historiography, his works were republished – photocopied – from the originals during the 1980s. They appeared at a period in which another educational atmosphere reigned, described below as an emancipatory line of educational historiography.

To sum up: the liberal peasant movements have played a very key role in Danish political life, and often in connection with Grundtvigian thought re-

²¹ Slagstad 1998; Slagstad 2003.

²² Green 1994.

²³ Larsen 1984/1916; Larsen 1984/1893; Larsen 1984/1899.

garding Danish educational self-understanding. The hostilities between liberals and conservatives were once central in defining Danish politics, but somehow Grundtvigian views on education have had an appeal to all political groupings from the far left to the far right. In the politics of knowledge, hostility towards the learned university elites can – in our view – be traced back directly to Grundtvig’s populist sarcasm with regard to the “black schools” and high-brow neo-Humanist universities in the vein of Madvig. Danes tend to love everything that is not elitist – to view learning as dull and dead – but at the same time love a speech in an open and liberal spirit in a summer course at a Folk High School. The identical content of a humanities department at a highly-esteemed university is regarded with the utmost contempt by the very same people for using tax money to support the self-realization of – in their opinion – self-indulgent learned elites.

2.2 Cultural radicalism and the progressive line in educational historiography

Proceeding chronologically into the early twentieth century we encounter, here as elsewhere in Europe, more radical groups within the progressive movement of educational reform in Denmark. Such tendencies have had various proponents, but a positive evaluation of more child-centred pedagogies, along with the democratic urge to include all social groups in this educational form, serves as a common denominator for these scholars. The group is diverse but the connection between the modern breakthrough in literature and intellectual history, known in Denmark as *kulturradikalisme* (cultural radicalism) and associated with the Danish intellectual Georg Brandes (1842–1927), and the progressive movement in education, is relatively stable throughout the twentieth century. The political party *Det Radikale Venstre* (the Social Liberal Party) represented small farmers and to a certain extent the city-educated left wing of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Through their close collaboration with *Socialdemokratiet* (the Social Democratic Party), they managed to influence Danish educational politics much more than their numbers would indicate. Generally speaking, Danish politics throughout the short twentieth century was dominated by the combination of a Social Democratic Prime Minister and a Social Liberal Minister of Education. While social liberal historians have written a large proportion of general Danish political historiography through the twentieth century, more than a few of the social liberals were also loyal to Grundtvigian views of Danish culture and education. This helps to explain why we chose to define five groups in this paper, and not the four commonly used in international literature. As mentioned above, this group shares characteristics of a Whig interpretation of history, as

a historiography narrating an increasingly child-centred pedagogy and democratization through better schools.

The first obvious example in this group of scholars, Sofie Ribbjerg (1886-1981), was a practitioner who wrote her own educational history. The title alone *Træk af den moderne opdragelses historie* (Trends in the history of modern education) indicates that she saw herself as the Danish pioneer of progressive movements of reformpædagogik (Reformpädagogik). Basing her story on her international precursors Montessori and Freinet in Europe, via school experiments in the UK and USA, she tells how she brought the ideas back to Denmark. From 1926-1931, the so-called Vanløseforsøg (the Vanløse experiments – Vanløse is a suburb of Copenhagen), based on progressive methods, represent a key defining event for this group of scholars. Here as elsewhere in Europe, the progressive educational movement was dedicated to opening up new paths for individual pupils in the light of child-centred methods and/or the more egalitarian and class-driven ways of presenting children with art, music, movement and expression.

Later in the twentieth century, the scholar Ellen Nørgaard (b. 1933) chose to write her doctoral thesis on precisely these developments in reformpædagogik. She combined the individual pedagogic self-understanding of the reformists with a critical view of their supposed “liberation” of children from discipline and harsh schooling.²⁴ The second Professor of education history in Denmark, Vagn Skovgaard-Petersen (1931-2006), was more interested in the modern, broad and democratic dissemination of *dannelse* to all groups of society, but he too chose to combine a positive view of the individual reformist politician or school-holder with a critical re-evaluation of the true impact of the democratic reforms from the period around 1900.²⁵

Seen in retrospect these scholars all exhibit some degree of sympathy towards the reformist actors whom they chose to describe. Skovgaard-Petersen phrased this view as follows: “This book can be read as the story of how some people have tried to change both the school system and teaching and thereby change society.” This view also gives this group of scholars a certain Whiggish tendency: this is the loyal story of how better schools and more democracy came about as a result of individual progressive agents engaged in a political struggle against existing structures.

²⁴ Nørgaard 1977.

²⁵ Skovgaard-Petersen 1976.

2.3 From Socialist to emancipatory historiography – revisionism in Denmark

Scholars of both history and education from the other Nordic countries tend to see the left-wing dominance of academic life following the student revolts as significantly stronger in Denmark than that in either Norway or Sweden. The cry was for emancipation and equality in education throughout the whole educational system, and scholars were urged to do research for “society”. This was most often defined as forskning for folket (research for the people). Both before and after the ruptures within academia of 1968, a fourth group emerged. We choose to label this group as Socialist and emancipatory in their view of the history of education. In international literature, this group of scholars would be seen as radical revisionists.²⁶ We see the development of this group moving from an initial Socialist or Marxist view of history in general to a broader post-modern critical and emancipatory viewpoint. What characterizes all of these scholars as “emancipatory” rests on the views they shared that almost any group or subgroup of society was supposed to receive its share of emancipation. Workers and peasants were the “classes” to be emancipated in Marxism – women, children, handicapped, ethnic minorities etc. have later been groups in need of emancipation from a more or less well-defined power-holding subject. It is not our intention to scorn this endeavour, but rather to refer to the very broad reception in Danish academia of the German Frankfurt Schule of societal thinking. Jürgen Habermas was of central importance in calling the knowledge interest of the social sciences “emancipatory”. Scholars such as Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu have also had a very large impact on this stream of Danish educational scholarship. Furthermore, the idea of a history of education has moved significantly into that of a social scientific self-understanding as opposed to a humanistic one. The 1970s were the time in which humanists tended to copy the methods and outlooks of the social sciences, be they Marxist, structuralist and/or quantitative.

Gunhild Nissen (b. 1936), with her thesis in 1973, provides an early example of a more materialist or Marxist view of Danish school-history.²⁷ She places her work *Bønder, skoler og demokrati* (Peasants, School and Democracy) in the context of a transition from works dealing with named, more-or-less influential historical actors into more anonymous, broadly defined social trends. She includes statistical work in her view on democratisation and social inequality. She writes: “In opposition to earlier research in the history of

²⁶ We are conscious of the broad usage of the term revisionism by Jurgen Herbst (Herbst 1980) but we tend to agree to a development of the revisionism in Denmark as from a harder neo-Marxist revisionism into a softer broadly emancipatory revisionism.

²⁷ Nissen 1973.

Danish schools that primarily viewed schools from above, the present problem (in her research, CL/JEL) indicates that the schools are viewed from below and from outside".²⁸ This tendency was reflected by the sociologist Erik Jørgen Hansen (b. 1935), who created a fairly influential piece of contemporary history by following a cohort from its youth into adulthood and tracking life-long economic and educational status development, thereby confirming the unequal distribution of educational opportunity. Denmark, he showed, was still a society constructed around the concept of class.²⁹

The trends in recent historical work covered here include a reappraisal of traditional historiography by examining the viewpoint of underprivileged groups. For example, the history of women's education was central to the female historian Birgitte Possing (b. 1952), who used the genre of biography in order to show an individual's fight against structural sexism. The story she told concerned the late nineteenth-century female pioneer educator Nathalie Zahle (1827-1913).³⁰ The issues of another underprivileged group were studied by Birgit Kirkebæk (b. 1938) in her works on the educational treatment of mentally handicapped children and adults.

Finally, one could include Ning de Coninck-Smith's (b. 1953) work on child history. De Coninck-Smith, who has published more than fifty articles, books etc. over the last two decades, has been very active internationally. Her focus is also on examining history from below using methods of historical anthropology and micro-studies with international references to the French and Anglo-Saxon scholarly communities. She is not interested in looking at a school curriculum and its history. Her focus is, instead, on aspects of everyday life at school from the length of the school day to school buildings, school meals, youth centres, parents' evenings etc. In her doctoral thesis from 2000, she shows how new definitions of childhood, disciplinary practices and urban physical surroundings fundamentally changed the lives of children around 1900. Her thesis is that the new state school came to play a central role in the democratization, i.e. universalization, of what has been described as middle-class childhood. Childhood became a phase of life in its own right and was invested with an independent significance for later adult life.³¹

In her latest book, de Coninck-Smith examines the history of school buildings in Denmark over the last 300 years. She is inspired by Philippe Ariès, but where Ariès emphasizes the objects, de Coninck-Smith emphasizes the spatial aspects of childhood history and their meanings as a way of illustrating changing conceptions of good childhood as well as societal expectations,

²⁸ Nissen 1973, p.14.

²⁹ Hansen 1995.

³⁰ Possing 1992.

³¹ Coninck-Smith 2000.

norms and values. She describes her book not as an architectural or pedagogical study but as socio-material. “I will think thoughts through space”, she says, as a way of examining the threads between architecture, the view of children’s upbringing and education, and social changes over time.³²

A large work in progress is to rewrite the entire Danish history of primary education. Led by de Coninck-Smith, and including eleven historians, the collaborative project is to be a history written “bottom-up”, in contrast to histories of jurisdiction and politics which view schools from above. Three issues will be investigated and pursued in all volumes: How have perceptions of schooling and conditions for school attendance changed over time? Who struggled to influence the development of schools, by which means, and with what results? Finally, what (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?³³

To sum up this historiography: there is a focus on groups in society which are looking for their own legitimacy, autonomy and voice. The emancipation is of gender, sexual orientation, life phases, handicaps etc. The function of this historiography is a political attempt to carry out a critical analysis of modern society and power-holding elites. Continuity from the 1970s practice of ideology-critique is obvious. The demythologizing attempt reflects international revisionist historiography. Marc Depaepe is the foremost active international proponent of this view of educational historiography: a conscious departure from hagiography and stories of progression, into a conscious demythologizing of the educational past.³⁴

2.4 Post-revisionism – everything goes?

With this fifth category we are, as noted above, not interested in defining all subsequent literature under the heading of post-revisionism; however, we do find a new pragmatic and more optimistic view of certain school developments. We agree with Gary McCulloch that a “New Testament” is needed instead of the historical purism of the (self-declared) revisionist Marc Depaepe’s Ten Commandments that we here consider in the tradition of revisionist and emancipatory historiography.³⁵ This is a radical departure from defining post-revisionism as the project of the right wing, as for instance seen in Diane Ravitch’s production. Our version of a post-revisionist attitude could be

³² Coninck-Smith 2011, p.13-15.

³³ See:http://www.dpu.dk/fileadmin/www.dpu.dk/forskning/projekter/danskskole-historie/20100512091403_schools-in-denmark---final-version.pdf.

³⁴ Depaepe 2001.

³⁵ See the highly relevant discussion on “good practice in educational history writing” between among others Marc Depaepe and Gary McCulloch (Depaepe 2010; McCulloch 2010)

called an “everything goes” view of educational historiography, or to phrase it differently: it is acceptable to address both professionals, historians, the general public, social scientists etc. as interested constituencies with their legitimate but broadly differing claims to relevance. Some choose the view of everyday life, with a turn to materiality or effects, some focus on a strong state as a positive and progressive actor, and again some find inspiration for didactics in heroes of the past. The following examples from Danish historiography may outline too broadly what we find to be post-revisionist; hence, the addition of a question mark after asking “everything goes?”

The scholarly environment around the project rewriting the history of the Danish schools includes several turns in its approaches. Lisa Rosén Rasmussen in her PhD dissertation represents a turn to materiality by analysing everyday school ethnography. Helle Bjerg is a representative of the affective turn in a similar ethnography of everyday life in modern Danish schools. Ning de Coninck-Smith recapitulates this development as a succession of turns: from linguistic and cultural turns into material and visual turns.³⁶

A more general societal focus that also had special attention in the 1980s was literacy studies, where there were a number of contributions on levels of literacy among the general population from circa 1550-1900.³⁷ Charlotte Appel has continued this trans-disciplinary development in her work on literacy and book-markets in seventeenth century Denmark.³⁸

Another tendency in more recent historiography is a turn to a more international outlook. In his PhD dissertation, Christian Ydesen looks at international networks of educators and pedagogical theorists on testing. Susanne Wiborg analyses the uneven development of comprehensive schooling in Europe, and Jesper Eckhardt Larsen’s PhD dissertation looks comparatively and with a contemporary historical approach at discussions on the humanities in higher education.³⁹ Yet another tendency among some historians is consciously seeking policy relevance. In his PhD dissertation, Christian Larsen looks into the Danish education system between 1814 and 1923. He traces the development with an increased recognition that education was a public amenity and not a private business, and that either the borough or the state was ultimately responsible for its provision. Public schools were seen as the only natural place for youth to develop and be educated. Education was a task for the state and the local authority, available to all according to their ability.⁴⁰

³⁶ Rosén Rasmussen 2010; Bjerg 2011; de Coninck-Smith 2002.

³⁷ Markussen et al. 1981.

³⁸ Appel 2001.

³⁹ Ydesen 2010; Wiborg 2009; Larsen 2006.

⁴⁰ Larsen 2009.

3 An overview – thoughts on the long development

One can view the five positions we have examined here as part of a long societal development from Classicism to Romanticism, and from modern to post-modern societies. The first steps in the process of democratisation of reality suggested by the sociologist Alwin Gouldener were taken in the transition from Classicism to Romanticism: “The Classical view of the world had generated excluded enclaves of underprivileged reality, whose neglect it had no hesitation in justifying. The Romantic view believed that the insignificance of things was born of a failure of imagination: reality was now democratised”.⁴¹ One can criticize this view by observing that Romanticism (not least as exemplified by Grundtvigian ideas), to the same extent as Classicism, created new groups of underprivileged reality: the non-native and the Creole, for example, were not welcome in the Romantic notion of social reality. Modernism was hoping for the equality of all in a uni-linear historiography of more and more, better and better schooling. In a radical sense Revisionism was modern society’s critique of itself on its own terms of egalitarian and rational politics. It seems as if the last developments find a new plurality of voices with equal claims to legitimacy – and this actually takes us full circle to the place in which old bourgeois values and *dannelse* (*Bildung*) can – in the name of post-modern pluralism – serve individual self-constructive needs in the twenty-first century. Now – everything goes. The total democratization of reality has been accomplished, at least in politically correct sections of academia.

To reiterate, we do not attempt a full prophecy of what will be an analysis of the present situation. A few projections will have to suffice.

In the vogue of the globalisation discourse, a new curiosity on the part of many in the field may consciously let go of purely national narratives. Secondly, lessons for praxis tend to be gaining new legitimacy in the vein of either politically relevant or otherwise performative knowledge – or, more simply put: *historia magistra vitae*. To assume any linear relation between the “lessons” of historical works and praxis is not what is suggested, but rather, as in other educational research, “to inform social praxis, not to guide it”.⁴²

It is equally clear that the nexus of reference countries that we have indicated as creating our national educational self-understanding - German *Bildung* or Nordic democratic *folkelighed*, and concepts such as *almendannelse* and *folkeoplysning* - is under severe pressure from a very strong globalization

⁴¹ Gouldner 1973, p.331.

⁴² As the educational comparativist Jürgen Schriewer cites Meinolf Dierkes in Schriewer 2003, p.52.

orientation – both Anglo-Saxon and supranational. The language of power in the Danish educational field looks more to PISA and the London Institute of Education than to either continuities of the Humboldtian idea of *Bildung durch Wissenschaft* (Education through Science) or to the happy experience of a summer spent at a non-examination Nordic folk high school.

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Das Jahrbuch für Historische Bildungsforschung ist im Jahrgang 2011 zwei Themenschwerpunkten gewidmet.

Die Beiträge des *ersten Schwerpunktes* „Verfall, Erosion und Scheitern in der Bildungsgeschichte“ geben Einblicke in verschiedene Subjektivierungs- und Institutionalisierungsprozesse mit ihrer jeweiligen Verarbeitungslogik und Bewältigungsstrategie. Thematisch reichen sie von der Rolle des Bildungsromans bei der Verarbeitung von Erfahrungen des Irrtums und des Scheiterns über das ambitionierte Projekt einer psychoanalytischen Pädagogik und die Untersuchung britischer Schulgesellschaften im 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Geschichte der Blindenbildung in Preußen in der Mitte desselben Jahrhunderts.

Die Texte des *zweiten Schwerpunktes* „Demokratisch legitimiert. Öffentliche Kontrolle im Bildungswesen in historischer Perspektive“ sind an der Interdependenz von öffentlicher Bildung und demokratischer Gesellschaft interessiert. Dargestellt werden die Rolle der Schule für die Ausbildung eines Nationalbewusstseins in der Helvetik, Delegitimierungs- und Relegitimierungsprozesse der Schulaufsicht in der Geschichte und Gegenwart der Schweiz sowie im 19. Jahrhundert in Luxemburg und die Bedeutung ökonomischer Faktoren bei der Durchsetzung von Reformen in der Schulpolitik.

In der Rubrik *Abhandlungen* geht es zum einen um die Bedeutung des 19. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland in der Bildungsgeschichte sowie zum anderen um den Beitrag Sozialer Arbeit zur Entwicklung rekonstruktiver Forschungsmethoden in den USA 1890-1925.

Der Abschnitt *Quelle und Kommentar* widmet sich dem in der deutschen Pädagogikgeschichte viel diskutierten Problem der körperlichen Züchtigung und geht sodann der Frage nach, wie sich in der nach 1945 geteilten deutschen Bildungsgeschichte einerseits Schulpolitik und Pädagogik in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der DDR positionierten und wie andererseits die Rechtsprechung in der alten Bundesrepublik darüber entschied.

Der abschließende internationale *Ein- und Ausblick* widmet sich der Entwicklung der pädagogischen Historiografie in Dänemark im 20. Jahrhundert.



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