

## REPORT ON HISTORY TEACHING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DENMARK

### (i) The present status

#### The structure

In the Danish school system we have a comprehensive primary school (1st-9th form, The "Folkeskole"). After that about 90% of the pupils go on in "Upper Secondary Schools". About 40% in the general line ("gymnasium") and the rest in various kinds of vocational schools.

In what can be compared with "lower secondary schools" elsewhere (7th-9th form, age 13-16) history is a subject of its own. The responsibility rests with local authorities, but there are some general guidelines, published by the Ministry of Education. These guidelines are accepted by almost all local authorities, or rather the principles behind - there can be local differences. In almost all schools the weekly number of history lessons in 7th-9th form is 2 in each year. In 10th form - which about 50% of the pupils attend - history is an optional subject.

In the gymnasium at upper secondary level there are three weekly lessons each of the three years. The subject is called: History with civics. 80% of the time spent should be spent on history and 20% on civics. (There is also an optional subject called "social science").

In some of the vocational schools modern history is taught (up till four lessons in one year).

#### Content

In the last years of the "folkeskole" ("lower secondary level") the emphasis is placed on a mainly chronological teaching of Danish history, but European history and global history is also taught, but to a smaller extent.

In the gymnasium the emphasis is on European History. In the aims it says that the pupils should become aware of the European cultural background, defined as more than the EEC-countries and defined as more than European political integration.

The same thing can be said about history in the vocational schools.

In all school forms history is understood as more than political and economical history. It is underlined that social, cultural and mental history should be an integral part of the teaching, and very many textbooks have come out on these aspects. Information Technology is supposed to be part of the teaching everywhere, but reality shows that this is not the case in very many schools. There are too few software programmes in Danish.

As said above the teaching at lower secondary level - but not in

primary school - is mainly chronological. In the curriculum there is a "common core", a list of events, people and concepts which should be dealt with in the teaching.

In the gymnasium there is no such list. The curriculum is a framework within which the single teacher and the single class can make their own "syllabus". You need not teach chronologically although quite many teachers do so. You should only have covered the requirements after all the three years. As can be seen from the enclosed curriculum there are requirements as to the time spent on various epochs, men's and women's different conditions should be treated, and - as mentioned above - political, economic, social, cultural history, and history of the mentalities should be part of the teaching.

It is compulsory for teachers to discuss the contents with the students. The teacher cannot decide by himself what to teach. Within the rules of the curriculum - and of course within the economic possibilities - the content and procedures must be agreed upon by both the students and their teachers.

#### Assessment

There is no exam in history in "the folkeskole" - the Danish school system has very few exams, compared with most other countries.

In the gymnasium and in the vocational schools with history is only oral and therefore completely decentralized. The teacher of the class has to make the questions for the oral exams. He has to make so many questions that each student gets one which is different from the others', and the students get their questions by drawing them.

There is an external examiner/moderator: another teacher from another school from another part of the country. Nearly all teachers are also external examiners/moderators, which means that there is a very extensive exchange of ideas, of ways to teach and of material used.

The student gets 30 minutes to prepare the examination. In this period he/she is allowed to use all books and other materials that have been used over the three years. The examination takes 25 minutes, and after this the teacher and the external examiner agree on a mark, which is given to the student right away.

The examination is not an "oral essay". It is a conversation where the teacher is obliged to ask the student questions so that both his/her strong and weak sides become clear.

To give an impression of the kind of questions, presented in the exam, I quote a few examples:

- Give an account of Alexander the Great's policy of conquest (334-323) and - based based on excerpts from recent

historians that we have read - a discussion and evaluation of Alexander the Great and his impact.

- Give an account of the American involvement in the Vietnam War (1963-1973). Furthermore you should analyze the enclosed document from the Pentagon Papers and on this background discuss the change in the American policy in 1969.

### Teacher-qualifications

In the "folkeskole" all teachers are allowed to teach history. Teachers are educated at special teachers' training colleges. Teachers are educated to teach from the 1st to the 9th grade and internationally speaking the role of the teaching subject is not very important. Danish teachers in the "folkeskole" tend to be more "generalists" than "specialists". The students do opt for special subjects in the two final years. The idea behind the structure is that teachers at lower secondary level should teach the pupils the subjects they opted for in their education, that pedagogical and topical approaches should go hand in hand.

There is, however, perhaps a tendency that heads of schools range the pedagogical considerations above the topical ones: The class-teacher plays an important role - and he/she can have all kinds of subjects - and the idea of a single class having as few teachers as possible is commonly accepted, and these principles seem to be guidelines for schoolheadmasters.

The education takes 4 years.

Teachers in the gymnasium and in upper secondary vocational schools have to have a university degree (MA). They teach two subjects. The education has until now taken about 7 years, but is being cut down now.

It should be mentioned that there are four associations of history teachers, one for each of the educational sections. They each publish a periodical on a very high level - again internationally speaking. About 90% of the teachers of history at upper secondary level are members, and the loose framework of the curriculum is filled in in this way: there is a very lively discussion amongst teachers in these periodicals, and most of the in-service-training is organized by the teachers themselves - and financed by the state. In Denmark we have a very long tradition for decentralization and teachers' responsibility for the actual teaching.

### Teaching methods

Most of the teaching is oral, either in the whole class or in groups - in fact group work is very common. Very little written work is made, but in the "folkeskole" many more "creative"

methods (e.g. modelmaking) are used. Video is much used in all classes.

Fieldwork - domestic, abroad, museums, reconstructions - is common at all levels.

### Teaching resources

There are no obligatory textbooks in the Danish school system. Neither the ministry nor any other body has to accept books and any other kind of material. Teachers and students are allowed to use any kind of material they find appropriate. Photocopies are widely used. Over the last 15 years about 350 different textbooks meant for the gymnasium have been published. A vast number of books compared to the number of students: about 20 000 per year. Nearly all these books have been written by teachers, and nearly all of them have a high scholarly standard. The number covers both books on documents, books describing longer periods of time, and purely skillbased material.

In all cases the material used must be analyzed in the classes - knowing a book by heart is not enough.

The idea behind this concept of material is the same as expressed in the report from the conference in Braunschweig 11-14 September 1990, organized by the Council of Europe. The conclusion of this conference was: "Textbooks have long been and are likely to remain a necessary support or crutch which all teachers have at some time needed. But the object of using a crutch is to abandon it as soon as possible. If the medical metaphor can be extended, let us accept textbooks as crutches to be thrown away as soon as possible rather than as drugs which may create a permanent dependence."

We fully support this conclusion.

### **(ii) Approaches to the teaching of the history of Europe**

As mentioned above teaching in the "folkeskole" is mainly on Danish history. The idea behind this is the same one as you find in most curriculum-thinking all over the world: young kids should begin with their surroundings, what is near, and later on they should move further out in the world. But the world outside Denmark is also treated at this level.

Europe is part of the programme, often in connection with a Danish starting point. It can either be single events or countries, but especially in modern history Europe as a whole is treated. For some years it was EEC-Europe, but the events in the last years have widened the scope, and Eastern and Central Europe play a certain role.

At upper secondary level the emphasis is on European history.

National history and global history must be treated as well. About half of the time in the "gymnasium" should be spent on the time after about 1945, and all classes should treat current affairs, that is up till the present day.

This means that very many themes are common to all Europe. This goes for many themes in the Middle Ages, during Absolutism, the Age of the Revolutions, the 19th century, and especially this century.

### **(iii) challenges, trends, and problems**

The history of history teaching in Denmark during the last decades has been characterized by elements that you find in some other countries. Up till about 1965 the textbook was in focus. The teaching consisted more or less of a reproduction of a textbook, based on a political - and partly - economical viewpoint. It was very much a national history. Not only a Danish history, but a history of single nations. There was a time after about 1945 when a global viewpoint played a certain role, but on the whole the teaching stuck to the well-known fashions.

As that kind of teaching became obviously impossible, the emphasis was shifted to that of skills, and social, cultural themes became more and more important. Inspiration from "New History" in the UK and some American curricula was obvious. An enormous number of textbooks with documents came out and were used.

But pretty soon a discussion rose: are we atomizing history. If we spend 40-50 lessons on how Danish farmers lived in the 1780ies, on monks in the middle ages, on women in Athens, on the Cuban crisis, and so on, what is it that pupils learn? And if we jump from theme to theme without any connection, what is left behind in the pupils' minds?

Therefore teachers began to change the emphasis within the loose framework of the curriculum.

First the concept of skills as connected with "documents" was questioned. It is important that pupils meet with documents from the middle ages and other times. But it is at least as important that they meet with other kinds of presentation and application of history: Various interpretations, textbookanalyses, newspapers, tv-programmes, and so on.

Then the idea of historical development came into the teaching again. Not a return to the reproduction of a textbook, but it can be dealt with in many other ways: through pictures, maps, oral history, fieldwork, various interpretations by various historians, tv and video, and so on. And perhaps the idea of historical development is not presented through a chronological approach. Themes can be traced backwards from to-day. There was

a very wide range of experiments.

On the other hand it was still regarded as important that the advantages we had reached through the phase of skills should be maintained.

It also became clear in the discussions that the aim of history teaching is to work with historical consciousness. I shall return to that later on. But this consciousness is brought to the pupils in many other ways than through the educational system, a fact which has also been pointed out by some English researchers and educationalists who have found out that the contribution from schools is probably only 10-15%. The consciousness is influenced as much by conversations with members of their families, by the media, by museums, by landscapes, buildings, and many other sources.

And this should be taken into account in the teaching of history in schools.

The ideas behind the recent (enclosed) curricula are therefore:

History teaching should comprise

both skills and knowledge

both breath and depth

The overarching aim is to develop the historical consciousness of the students. The definition we have used of this concept is the one that has been "invented" by some German "didacticists":

interpretations of the past	)	first of all: the inter-
understanding of the present	)	action between these
expectations for the future	)	three ingredients.

This means that you cannot construct a strict and fixed curriculum where somebody (the ministry/committee/some other body) tells you what is important, what students should learn in details. History is not a package that can be delivered to the students by somebody else. The teaching should be flexible: our point of view changes all the time according to our understanding of the present and our expectations of the future. History is a dynamic process that changes all the time.

What is the function of historical consciousness?

It is to establish and maintain various collective identities. Another function is to mediate insight into one's own social-cultural background.

Therefore history is not only politics and economics. If pupils should use history in building their identities other aspects must be included: social, cultural, and mental issues. This is

not least important in connection with the development in Europe, especially in the last few years. And you don't have to be a prophet to realize that in the coming years the development in a Europe characterized by new states, by clashes of interest, and by multicultural issues will make this more important.

Pupils should become aware of the fact that they are part of history and have a chance of influencing it.

For the same reason the role of the textbook must be reduced, and we must trust the professionalism of teachers. They should be responsible for what they are doing - they should not be able to refrain from this responsibility by pointing out that somebody else have decided in all details what they should teach and mean.

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