

Resume and explanation of the research project: ”*Dannelse* that works”

(*Dannelse*: a Danish term similar in meaning to the German *Bildung* within Educational Sciences. There is currently no direct translation for either of these terms in English. However, one will often see the translation *education and character formation* used. For the purpose of this translation, the author has retained the Danish term *dannelse* throughout as not to obscure meaning in regards to the source text.)

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Project participants: Niels Buur Hansen
 Christina Hvas Andersen
 Leo Komischke-Konnerup
 Alexander von Oettingen

(*Efterskole*: An independent “boarding school” where Danish and foreign pupils aged 14-18 years choose to spend a year or two of their lower secondary school education before continuing on to upper secondary school. The author has chosen to retain the Danish form *Efterskole* throughout for translation purposes. Most Danish-English dictionaries offer *Continuation School* as a suitable description in English. However, the American English term *Continuation School* is a misleading description of the *Efterskole*’s purpose and form. Therefore, **the Efterskole** will be used throughout to refer to this unique Danish school form, and **an Efterskole** or **Efterskoles** (plural form) will be utilized when referring to the schools as individual or collect entities.)

The Danish Efterskole

In the eyes of many Danes a year at an *Efterskole* is much more than a school year: it is a *dannelse*’s journey, which both in academic and personal terms prepares young people for adulthood. *Efterskoles* often like to cheerfully express, through their marketing, that “a year at *Efterskole* equates to seven human years”.

The Danish Efterskole form does not exist in other countries. Efterskoles are independent “boarding schools” where Danish and foreign pupils aged 14-18 choose to spend a year or two of their lower secondary school education before continuing on to upper secondary education. Efterskoles are popular: each year the ca. 250 Efterskoles attract around 28,000 students from all levels of society. Some Efterskoles have 75 pupils, others 500, but on average an Efterskole has around 100-120 students. Besides the normal compulsory subjects, the schools offer courses such as football, dance, performance, riding, entrepreneurship, and citizenship.

Some schools have a particular profile focusing on gymnastics, music or other subjects, whilst other so-called general Efterskoles offer a range of different courses. As Efterskoles are boarding schools, pupils and teachers are together all day long. This, combined with the particular Efterskole pedagogy, creates good conditions that both academically and socially strengthen the students as well as making them more independent and mature. Previous research has shown that young people, who have attended an Efterskole, are better prepared to do well in upper secondary and higher education.

In the *Executive Order on Efterskoles and Free Vocational Schools* it is stated, “ The Efterskole shall contribute to enlightenment for life, general education and democratic citizenship.”

The Executive Order clarifies that the Efterskole’s task is both general educational and the broader task of supporting students’ *dannelse*. The Efterskole have not come about by chance: they have been established based on a pedagogical need, which necessitated “a school after one’s normal schooling” (Efterskole literally translates to after school in English); a school form, which through enlightenment for life, general education and democratic citizenship, contributes to a common existence and a social cohesion within the society.

Background for the project

The amount of research available that examines and describes the Efterskole’s educative value and didactic instruments is relatively limited. Therefore, the Efterskole Association initiated the research project "*Dannelse that works*" in 2008. The project intended to document and describe the Efterskole’s particular didactics and pedagogy along with the *dannelse*’s process that Efterskole pupils undergo throughout the school year.

Similarly, it would provide proof to the outside world of what added value (*dannelse's* value) the Efterskole has to society. In this context, the Efterskole Association was not only interested in collecting statistical data on students' education, but in particular in documenting the lasting quantitative and normative effects that the Efterskole is able to provide.

Research challenges

There are a number of fundamental issues which arise when researching the Efterskole's *dannelse's* effect and its pedagogy:

- *Dannelse* and *dannelse's* processes are not unique and well-defined concepts. Thus they require definition and a theoretical clarification. The same applies to the didactic methods and teaching methods, which are also wide-ranging phenomenon. However, by limiting the definition of these terms one always runs the risk of losing essential facts and insights.
- *Dannelse's* Processes are lifelong processes, and in order to document the effect, one must be able to identify their value over a long period. This raises the question as to whether one can measure a *dannelse's* effect over a long period of time say 30 to 50 years.
- The Efterskoles have different profiles and target groups. There are general schools, special needs schools and schools with specific profiles (such as sports, outdoor pursuits, theatre, politics, religion, etc.). This means that the various Efterskoles have different normative cultures and didactical and pedagogical concepts.
- As a school form, the Efterskole has a long history which, over the centuries, has resulted in a number of ideological narratives and self-descriptions. These have contributed to the Efterskole's self-understanding and provided its cultural roots.

Research design and results

The project examined both current Efterskole pupils as well as those who graduated 10, 30 and 50 years ago. The aim was both to investigate the effect of studying at an Efterskole, whilst in attendance, and the effect that an Efterskole education has had on pupils many years after their

graduation. In order to cover the Efterskoles *dannelse*'s effect and their specific didactics, the project has made use of empirical studies as well as educational and socio-philosophical theories. Thus, the results of the project are an interaction between reality on the one hand, and normative and hypothetical structures on the other.

The starting point for the project was that the Efterskole's educational and pedagogical practices are neither neutral nor random. On the contrary, the Efterskoles' didactics and student *dannelse*'s processes actually include a number of intentional practices. Teachers and pupils do not act randomly or arbitrarily, but act based upon principles, ideas, choices and motives. It is the determinants of these practices that the project helps to uncover. Within these determinants lies notions of a particular Efterskole pedagogy - and not least the notion of the Efterskole's *dannelse*'s significance.

Theoretical design

The research project has based the theoretical limitation of the definition of the concept of *dannelse* and the Efterskole's special didactics and pedagogy on the general educational and social philosophical research tradition (see for example Dietrich Benner, Axel Honneth, Charles Taylor).

To determine the concept of *dannelse*, the project adheres to the theory of recognition; more specifically to Axel Honneth's theoretical framework.¹ Honneth's impetus is the Hegelian assumption that modern man suffers from Indeterminacy (Leiden an Unbestimmtheit). Man is not born his purpose, but he must struggle for recognition through processes of recognition and *dannelse*.

Honneth's formulation that man suffers from Indeterminacy may sound abstract. What is meant by Indeterminacy, and why does he suffer, might you ask?

Indeterminacy supposes that man is not born with a particular biography. There are no

¹ See Axel Honneth: Von Person zu Person, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 2008; -: Kampf um Anerkennung, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 2003; -: Leiden an Unbestimmtheit, Reclam, Stuttgart 2001; -: Das Andere der Gerechtigkeit, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 2000; C. Taylor: Multikulturalismus und die Politik der Anerkennung.

predetermined roads down which one's existence will lead; what job one will get, which religious and ethical contexts will one adhere to and what cultural interests will one develop. Everything must first be discovered and learnt, and therefore *dannelse's* processes are processes where we learn what we want and what we do not want in life. With Honneth's words we turn "indeterminate" into something "determinate" - but we cannot know for sure that what we decide to do will be better and thus, whether or not we will be happier. Man has to determine his own Indeterminacy in order to give his existence fullness and shape, but whether or not this will be a happy life will first be settled whilst life is being lived.

Therefore, *dannelse* concerns how to "determine one's existence and co-existence" without first being able to know what this will come to signify. Consequently, *dannelse* is not just something that happens to someone. It is not socializing or learning, but it is a process in which one's personality, through interaction with who or what one encounters – (such as *the Other* or *the Others*) - changes one's understanding of oneself and the world. One becomes something “determinate” through *dannelse's* processes. These processes are lifelong processes as throughout life one must constantly consider one's existence and coexistence.

It is with regards to this point that the Efterskole plays a huge role, because an Efterskole can put students on track to determining what *dannelse* means for their future lives.

According to Honneth one can point to three distinct forms of recognition, each of which contributes to a person's social-development (*dannelse*). These are *love*, *rights* and *solidarity* (Honneth, 1995: 92ff; also Honneth 2007, 129-142).

- **The ‘love/affective’ recognition sphere;** the intersubjective, reciprocal and emotional experience with others. An acknowledgment form which also appears in friendly relations.
- **The ‘moral/rights’ recognition sphere;** the experience and experiences of being an autonomous actor.
- **The ‘solidarity/social’ recognition sphere;** the experience and experiences of being involved in a social community.

All three spheres of recognition are essential to the *dannelse's* process and they indicate that the *dannelse's* processes are not self-reliant processes, but processes that are mediated by "mutual recognition" i.e "*the Other*". When encountering the unfamiliar, whether this be the other person or the world one does not know, *dannelse's* processes are realized. When this Hegelian *dannelse's* motif is selected as the point of departure for the analysis, it is mainly because it corresponds to an Efterskole experience which is constituted in the meeting with *the Other* and *the Others*.

At the same time there lies a social-philosophical critique of the development of society in the Hegelian motif, and not least in Honneth's recognition theory also, whereby young people's *dannelse's* options are becoming more and more streamlined and as a result threatened. An Efterskole provides space and time to encounter familiar, moral or social recognition forms to encounter these recognition forms (termed 'love', 'rights' and 'solidarity' by Honneth), which are essential to students' *dannelse's* process.

***Dannelse's* experiences**

The study shows that the Efterskole *forms* young people in three ways, and on the basis of Honneth's three recognition categories, the project has examined these three specific *dannelse's* experiences which the Efterskole in particular creates through various interviews. The ***friendly communities*** enhance students' confidence, ***communities of common interest*** improve students' sense of self-worth and the Efterskole's ***social community*** enhances students' self-esteem.

1. *Dannelse* through friendly communities.

At an Efterskole students stay with their peers around the clock in a pedagogical environment that supports and stimulates friendships. This means that the Efterskole provides space to experiment with relationships in a very open manner, and this has a strong *dannelse's* effect. They will gain enlightenment for life because they generate new and unfamiliar friendships, and through these friendships, pupils build confidence in developing their own identity, as well as responsibility and concern for others. Two current Efterskole students from the study expressed this as follows:

“You build a really special relationship with your friends at an Efterskole as you are with them all the time and that is of course a really big plus” Jan, Efterskole student

"Here there's lots of time to be able to share your life, and it is also here that I think there are emotions at stake, more than elsewhere, I believe." Rune, Efterskole student

From both the qualitative and quantitative material, it becomes clear that friendships are a central phenomenon within the Efterskole and are crucial for the students' *dannelse*'s process. The importance of an Efterskole school as an “experimental area” for friendly relations which has a lifelong and lasting quality, cannot be overestimated.

Helene who graduated from Efterskole 50 years ago:

"Well, I often say that it (Efterskole) is something that has had a huge positive impact on me, and it's probably something you notice more the older you get; how much it means to you. You're really rather very impressionable at that age ... "

By encountering the Efterskole's friendship forms, one gains a feeling of confidence that does not shut out, but rather opens up the world - not unlike what one might call enlightenment for life.

2. *Dannelse* through communities of common interests

As previously mentioned, the Efterskoles offer different courses in which students are given the opportunity to excel in subjects with teaching at a high level, for example, music, entrepreneurship or sports. Through communities of common interest students' self-esteem is strengthened and developed. At an Efterskole, students learn that their interests, for example, languages, science, sports, gymnastics or theatre, can be developed and shared with others. They also learn that teaching can be exciting - they learn that "learning" makes sense. An Efterskole prepares students, making them more robust for Further and Higher Education because it enhances their self-esteem; if you read the different interviews, you discover that the Efterskole's community of common interest helps to develop and increase student's engagement, as well as their freedom and ability to act. Thus, in turn will strengthen them in the future.

Søren, who is currently at an Efterskole, explains that one could perhaps have gone directly to upper secondary after secondary school. But then again:

"I feel that I've gained a lot of independence. Back home, you come home from school and you've got homework to do, so maybe you sit with your mum and dad to do your homework, as mum is always asking if you have homework or not... Here though, you have to go to the 'homework café' yourself, or sit in your room and write your own essay, or do maths on your own; thereby you become more independent."

The community at an Efterskole forces students, in a positive way, to relate to what they are being taught. This is especially due to the respectful nature of teaching, which students partly encounter through the teachers and partly through the schools' rules:

"(...) when there's so much discipline, it's also a motivating factor. For example, if I've got a teacher who can't be bothered then neither can I!"

Marco, current student.

At the Efterskole, students learn in a social community. This community gives them peace of mind so that they can share their scholastic strengths and weaknesses with each other.

"I've improved my grades because I dared to say: I'm bad at this, please help me! So, you're accepted as you are ... Of course, the teaching is the most important part, but it just gives an added bonus that you've got the social life of an Efterskole as well."

Cecilie

3. Dannelse through social communities.

Through Efterskole communities students' self-esteem is developed and strengthened. The Efterskole community should be understood as the community that goes beyond friendship and interest-based communities and include the wider community at the Efterskole. At Efterskole students experience that there are valuable associations which stretch far beyond their friendships

and interests into a larger social community. Through this Efterskole community students learn to transcend their personal interests and specific relationships, and learn to actively participate in larger communities. Therefore, they feel that the social integrity that they experience along with *the Others* at the school, also has an important social and democratic integrity in society. This act of participation is preparation for adulthood as well as being part of a public and democratic community as a responsible citizen. It is therefore appropriate to say that the community at an Efterskole makes a distinct contribution to the wider democratic community.

Karen feels that because pupils are together with their friends around the clock, they learn to accept their eccentricities:

- *“ We’re together here all the time. This makes it easier to accept other people, who are different, because we are, in a way, forced to be together here.”*

Efterskole leads to a social authority and experience of a different type than what they have previously experienced.

Here Sylvester highlights this social aspect of the Efterskole as the identity developing trait:

“We’ve learnt a lot about being an individual. You learn a lot about having your own opinion and standing by it, as well as saying no and opening your mouth when you have an opinion. ”

Interaction/togetherness

Generally, one could say that the Efterskole’s distinct contribution to students’ *dannelse* occurs primarily in three *dannelses*’s spheres, each of which develop students’ general *dannelse*’s experiences. Students are *formed* by participating in friendly communities that extend and refine their self-confidence, communities of common interest which develop and refine their self-worth and Efterskole communities that enhance and fine-tune their self-esteem. All three *dannelse*’s processes are in play at an Efterskole, each of which contribute to the students’ future. However, in the meantime it is their active and mutual interaction that makes the Efterskole a “*dannelse*’s pressure cooker”.

The Efterskole's *dannelse's* didactics

Regardless of whether you ask current students, 30- or 50-year-graduates, it is apparent that what is special about the Efterskole is the close relationship between teacher and student. It is essential that the students and teachers meet each other in different contexts, in addition to the actual boarding school element where they are together all day long. As a form of boarding school the Efterskole offers a special pedagogical structure. This can be seen, for instance, in the daily routine where there are rules and social practices that must be observed and respected. These structures allow students and teachers to step into a educational fellowship with some special conditions to create meaningful and engaging lessons and learning. Students experience what it means "to learn" and "to live" together, and it is precisely this combination which is the secret to the Efterskole's special didactic principle.

The Efterskole has a unique opportunity to combine and connect learning to pupils' own lives, so that they learn that this can increase their self-confidence, self-worth and self-esteem. However, this concrete lifestyle along with the learning processes that are encountered at an Efterskole, are "artificial" processes. They are didactically organized and by no means arbitrary.

The crucial role that the combination of interaction and coexistence with teaching plays in the Efterskole's didactics is described both directly and indirectly through the different interviews with teachers:

- *“ I think we make a lot out of the fact that they are sort of entering into a small community. Because that's sort of what we are here. We pretty much eat, sleep, wash our clothes together and get up at the same time and we even go to bed at the same time. You could say that we are “borrowing” the children and it's our task to get them to function in a smaller community. We really believe that they might become better prepared to go out and do well in maybe 2-4 years' time, when they'll leave home. And can therefore cope in other communities than those they have been accustomed to.”*

- Lars

In the study of the Efterskoles' didactics and pedagogy, the project relates to the general pedagogical tradition, developed, in particular, by Dietrich Benner. Benner has three pedagogical forms. This didactical tripartite division is based on three pedagogical actions: ***Structured social contact and interaction***, ***Educational interaction*** and ***Communal guidance***².

The distinction is made between three didactical areas that are aligned with the three *dannelse's* categories.

1. Structured social contact and interaction

The boarding school form supports a structured interaction around the students' *dannelse's* processes. However, these structures do not dictate how life should be lived and experienced, but rather organize and enable learning and *dannelse's* processes. The structured interaction creates frameworks and trust to ensure that life at an Efterskole does not end in chaos and anarchy.

2. Educational interaction

At an Efterskole teachers and students are part of a number of different social practices that constantly have to be worked with. Teachers guide students through conversation, by asking and encouraging them to consider both professional and practical contexts. The educational interaction at the Efterskole unfolds in many different contexts and frameworks - both inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers are not just teaching, they are also didactically present as well as conducting serious and meaningful "learning" with knowledge, expertise and understanding as well as various viewpoints both inside and outside of the classroom. Through this educational interaction, pupils come to see that their lessons make sense and they see a value in their lessons that they have not yet encountered before, which in turn creates authority and freedom.

3. Communal Guidance

² Se D. Benner: Allgemeine Pädagogik, Juventa, München 2010, A. von Oettingen: Almen pædagogik, Gyldendal, København 2011.

The Efterskole also allows for a generational meeting on issues that go far beyond lessons and into life's diversity. Teachers and students are part of an *indicative togetherness* where the answers and solutions are not known in advance. The *indicative togetherness* is the intergenerational process around "the Indetermined dialogue." The teachers are authentic interlocutors, who take the questions young people have about their lives and future seriously, and who also guide them in relation to matters they might not yet even know the answer. The intergenerational dialogue is, in a post-modern life, more and more important because it creates a *dannelse's* context.

Empirical design

The research project's empirical component consists of both quantitative data and several types of qualitative data.

The point of departure for the empirical study was a comprehensive study of documentation from previous studies, legal texts and so forth. Through studying this documentation, the project aimed to gain insight into how the concept *dannelse* has been previously operationalized, how the Efterskoles have been characterized and how their social function has been represented. This study has helped to define and focus topic areas. At the same time, the study illustrated the need to include multiple sources and use several methods. Therefore, the four empirical elements are as follows:

- Discourse analysis / website analysis
- Questionnaires
- Focus Group Interviews
- Employer Surveys

The purpose of *discourse analysis* was to gain insight into how *dannelse* is expressed at different Efterskoles, i.e. across a range of interests, sizes and geographical locations. Twenty Efterskoles' websites were selected for this analysis in order to cover a broad spectrum of Efterskoles.

Questionnaires were aimed to provide an overall picture of what an Efterskole education means for students. The study was conducted at six schools. On average, fifty-seven students from each Efterskole completed the questionnaire.

In contrast to a questionnaire the *focus group interview* is characterized by being a very low structured method of data collection, which gives a better opportunity to gain a more comprehensive insight into some causalities. Four Efterskoles were selected and each provided eight students for a student interview as well providing a group of teachers - consisting of eight teachers on average. In addition, the project sought out individual graduates from Efterskoles where the only requirement was that the graduates had completed their Efterskole education 10, 30 or 50 years ago.

Employer evaluation involved educational managers and department heads at various educational institutions (Upper Secondary Schools (Gymnasium)/Higher Preparatory Exam (HF), Business College, the Military and Vocational Schools: Social and Health Care College (SOSU), EUC.) In all a total of ten have contributed. Communication with the employers aimed to provide an external perspective on the Efterskole; the local community might view the Efterskole in a different way and therefore, may provide a different outlook on them.

Brief overview:

The Efterskole cannot create a social agenda, but it can make a difference in equipping the emerging generations to meet and manage the complex modern society. There seems to be much to be gained here in the *dannelse's* didactics and unique Efterskole pedagogy that we have tried to document and describe in “*Dannelse that works*”.

Our overview of the Efterskole's pedagogy can be illustrated as such in full here:

Main aim	<i>Dannelse's</i> experience	<i>Dannelse's</i> sphere	<i>Dannelse's</i> periods	<i>Dannelse's</i> institutions	<i>Dannelse's</i> didactics	Efterskole's pedagogy
Enlightenment for life	Self-confidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shifting identities • responsibility • care 	<i>Dannelse</i> through friendly communities	Period of self-confidence: Expansion of horizons	The family's school: conservative dissemination	Structured social contact and interaction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trust building • familiar infrastructure • life enlightening 	Friendship-pedagogy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contextualisation of and perspective on life
General education	Self-worth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expansion of interests • educational readiness 	<i>Dannelse</i> through communities of common interests	Period of Self-worth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to develop and qualify the school 	The educative school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • changing dissemination 	Educational interaction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pedagogical practice • respectful lessons 	Authority-pedagogy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contextualisation of and perspective on knowledge and opinions

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assured decision-making 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learn to learn 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> meaningful education popular enlightening education 	
Democractic Citizenship	Self-esteem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> social maturity social integrity 	<i>Dannelse through the social community at the Efterskole</i>	Period of Self-esteem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to expand and qualify interests 	The generational school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> innovative dissemination 	Communal guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> closeness and distance immediate future introduction into an open and decomratic existence 	Intergenerational pedagogy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> contextualisation of and perspective on the Indetermined Dialogue