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ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

**ACCEPT**  
PLURALISM

## **(In)Tolerance and Accommodation of Difference in Danish Public and Private Schools**

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Aarhus University

**2011/09**

### ***3. National Case Studies - School Life Final Country Reports***



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
European Research Area



SEVENTH FRAMEWORK  
PROGRAMME

Funded under Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities



EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE  
ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

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Danish Public and Private Schools

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**WP3: National Case Studies of Challenges to  
Tolerance in School Life**

**D3.1 Final Country Reports on Concepts and  
Practices of Tolerance Addressing Cultural Diversity  
in Schools**

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Published by the European University Institute  
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies  
Via dei Roccettini 9  
50014 San Domenico di Fiesole - Italy

**ACCEPT PLURALISM Research Project,  
Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion:  
Responding to the Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Europe**  
European Commission, DG Research  
Seventh Framework Programme  
Social Sciences and Humanities  
grant agreement no. 243837

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## **Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe (ACCEPT PLURALISM)**

**ACCEPT PLURALISM** is a Research Project, funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. The project investigates whether European societies have become more or less tolerant during the past 20 years. In particular, the project aims to clarify: (a) how is tolerance defined conceptually, (b) how it is codified in norms, institutional arrangements, public policies and social practices, (c) how tolerance can be measured (whose tolerance, who is tolerated, and what if degrees of tolerance vary with reference to different minority groups). The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium conducts original empirical research on key issues in school life and in politics that thematise different understandings and practices of tolerance. Bringing together empirical and theoretical findings, ACCEPT PLURALISM generates a State of the Art Report on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Handbook on Ideas of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Tolerance Indicators' Toolkit where qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to score each country's performance on tolerating cultural diversity, and several academic publications (books, journal articles) on Tolerance, Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Europe. The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium is formed by 18 partner institutions covering 15 EU countries. The project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou.

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## **Executive Summary**

In the last 15 years there has been an increased focus on integration of immigrants and the creation a national democratic identity in Denmark. The school has been one of the focus areas for this endeavour. The emphasis on creating a national democratic identity through schooling has been increased in the legislation regulating the public school as well as those private schools which currently account for 13 percent of the student population of the in the 6-15 age group. Where does this focus on integration and identity leave cultural and religious diversity? The school sector is crucial for inclusion of minorities into society. Creating space for minorities within the school system will arguably enhance both their academic achievement and their attachment to society. Moreover, while the state may make legitimate demands on children as future citizens, parents' and children's rights cannot be completely taken out of the equation. Accepting differences may lead to inclusion and integration into mainstream society, but it may also be a question of respecting the legitimate rights of minorities to be 'different'. Public schools have often chosen to accommodate cultural and religious differences at the local level. The Danish law on private schools allows cultural and religious minorities to establish their own schools with substantial state subsidy.

About 10 percent of the students have immigrant background. About 90 percent of these are of non-western origin. The biggest five groups have their origin in Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia and Pakistan. The municipalities with high percentages of immigrant children are with a few exceptions located in the Greater Copenhagen Area (i.e. in and around the capital). 3 percent of public schools and 6 percent of private schools have more than 50 percent children with immigrant background while 75 percent of public schools and 82 percent of private schools have less than 10 percent.

The Danish educational system allows private schools as well as home schooling. The state subsidizes private schools through a voucher system. The public school is run on a relatively decentralized basis. The Ministry of Education defines the individual subjects and sets national targets but leaves the precise curricula to the individual schools and teachers. The organisation of the public schools including hiring of teachers is the responsibility of the local municipalities. Recent years have arguably seen an attempt to centralize the school sector. Canons of literature, history and democracy have been introduced along with more demanding educational targets and national tests. Private schools with the ever increasing share of students have also been put under stricter regulation, both with regard to their academic standards and their obligation to provide students with civic education.

Disappointing academic achievements for the student population generally and for immigrant students in particular as documented in OECD's PISA surveys have been one of the main driving forces in Danish educational policies in recent years. Students with immigrant background are on average two years behind native Danish students and they pursue further education to a lesser degree. These facts stimulate concerns that they may become dependent on the welfare state in the future. A central concern about students with immigrant background has been the segregation of schools into 'white' and 'black' schools. White and black schools are a result of segregation in the housing sector and of 'white flight' from certain public schools facilitated by the existence of private schools as well an ability to choose a public school outside one's own school district. The segregation is considered to lower the academic achievements of the weaker students at the 'black schools', who potentially could be elevated by going to school with a more evenly distributed mix of students. Other efforts have gone



into teaching Danish as a second language. And finally, there has been an increased focus on creating a common democratic identity through civic education in the school system.

### **The focus of this study**

The report focuses on how the Danish school system addresses challenges that arise from the presence of religious and cultural minorities with predominantly immigrant background. It looks at the extent to which differences are rejected, tolerated and recognised/respected in Danish public schools and the extent to which the structure of the Danish school system with its generous support to private schools allows for cultural and religious differences to persist. The report hence contains two case studies. The first investigates how cultural and religious difference in public schools is discussed in the national political discourse and among school professionals and practitioners. The study takes its starting point in a political event in 2010 where a public school was heavily criticised for only inviting women to certain meetings on bullying because it was seen as an illegitimate accommodation of ‘medieval’ cultural norms among immigrant parents. The second case regards the structure of the Danish school system, its institutional toleration of diversity. At the centre is the debate about whether it is legitimate that the Danish rules facilitating the creation of private schools with a large state subsidy are used to establish Muslim or Islamic private schools whose democratic credentials are uncertain. The debate resulted in legislative changes mandating civic education at private schools, regardless of their cultural and religious basis. To some these changes represent reduced (institutional) toleration on the side of the state and the political majority which is likely to reduce diversity in the Danish school sector. The report looks at the debate, the legislative changes and the perception of the new legislative requirements’ effects on schools.

### **Data and methods**

The report is based on desk research as well as interviews with people working with or in the Danish school sector. The desk research is based on media coverage, official policy statements, legal changes and preparatory document, official reports and data as well as handbooks and recommendations issued by ministries and other stakeholders in the school sector. 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who have an informed view on the public and private schools, including three national party spokespersons (MPs) on educational policy, two members of the city council in Copenhagen (including the Mayor for Education), two civil servants working in the Ministry of Education; two civil servants working with education and integration in the municipality of Copenhagen; the two chairmen of the associations of public school teachers and of public school directors, one representative of a local Copenhagen parents’ association; one public school board chairman; a vice headmaster of a private school and two representatives for the private schools in Denmark. As in most cases, the number and selection of interviewees is not entirely ideal.

The first case study is organised around a political event where the Holberg School in Copenhagen had invited only mothers to a meeting to discuss anti-bullying policies at the school because the school thought that a gender mixed meeting would deter immigrant women from attending. The event elucidates various views on what should and should not be tolerated in terms of accommodating cultural and religious minorities in the life of a public school. The second case study regards the developments and discussion over the last 10 years about the regulation of private schools in general and about Muslim or Islamic schools in particular.

## Main findings

### *Accommodation of Ethno-Religious Diversity in the Public School*

In the study of the public school case (the Holberg School), we find that *integration* is the underlying premise for the debate and practice concerning the accommodation of cultural and religious differences in Danish public schools. Danish national politics and public discourse is dominated by a conception of *integration through values*, according to which the public schools should transmit key national and liberal democratic values to students and their parents in a uniform and uncompromising manner. This leaves little space for the recognition or even toleration of difference. The counter discourse of *integration through inclusion* is also in part based on the goal of integration. Pragmatic arguments for toleration and accommodation are however also closely related to securing the well being and education of the individual student. They are followed by more principled arguments pertaining to the concept of *appreciative dialogue* about respecting minority parents as equal and competent speaking partners who are entitled to make their own choices about values and child rearing. The driving idea about integration through inclusion is that integration follows from the kind of accommodation that creates contact and interaction between different groups in society, *in casu* in connection with the school sector. The underlying concept of acceptance does not go beyond a respect conception of toleration as it does not rest on the idea of positive recognition, although it is paired with a principled openness and curiosity towards that to which one objects or rejects. The concept of toleration contained in *appreciative dialogue* – the more principled part of *integration through inclusion* – is some distance from the traditional Danish notion of *liberality* (or ‘free mindedness’ (‘frisind’)) which includes a blunt and confrontational discursive ethos according to which one ‘fights for everything one holds dear’ while recognizing the same right for all. This confrontational ethos may be a specifically Danish feature which does not in its mode of engagement with speaking partners support and enhance their status as (and self-perception of being) equal and competent interlocutors.

It seems clear from the material issued by inter alia from inter alia the ministries and from the interviews with people working with or in the public school professional community that the partly pragmatic and partly principled approach underlying the overall discourse of *integration through inclusion* is deemed to be successful, whilst the stubborn insistence on a uniform transmission of values, including the inherent ‘them and us’ distinctions, is at best irrelevant and at worst harmful to school level efforts to create facilitating conditions for immigrant minority students in the schools.

### *Danish Free Schools – Epitomizing Danish Educational Tolerance?*

The study of the debate regarding (private) free primary schools concerns the structure of the educational system and whether it is necessary to define the parameters of *private school autonomy* more precisely in order to defend key *national liberal democratic values*, *further integration* and ensure *the rights of children* to education that makes them competent individuals and citizens. The proponents of a more precise definition of free school autonomy – which arguably leads to its reduction – have used arguments from the *national tradition* as well as arguments which can be described as *liberal intolerance*. They have wanted to *reduce the space of toleration* by defining its limits more precisely. The recent legislative changes seem to mandate that students are equipped with *democratic ethos* and not just *knowledge* sufficient to live in a society with freedom and democracy, although state monitoring usually is more concerned with the knowledge that schools provide than with their ethos. The discourse of *integration through values* may also be said to be underpinning these efforts.

Opponents of the reduction of the space of toleration through the more precise delimitation of free school autonomy have argued that this goes against the *Danish tradition of liberality* and have furthermore based their criticism on liberal arguments about the *rights of minorities* to make their own choices as well as the need to trust that they as *moral and political equals* will make responsible choices for themselves and their children. Again, the emphasis is more on *toleration* and *respect* than on clear *positive recognition* of particular minority identities and values.

In terms of implementation it is likely that the increased state monitoring and the risk of being closed down have increased the schools' attention to academic standards and to civic education. However, people located at the receiving end of these policies generally feel that they are *not trusted* and their *rights are not secure*. The system may pressure free schools to become more similar to the public school in order to reduce the risks and costs of pursuing a diverse vision of their school and its religious and ideological basis. Moreover, the felt lack of trust may in the end have *counter-productive effects* in relation to the *feeling of belonging* to Danish society and democracy.

### **Concluding remarks**

There are two types of intolerance in Denmark: nationalist and liberal intolerance. Nationalist intolerance is based on the view that certain cultural and religious practices are unacceptable because they may undermine core national values and eventually the identity of Danish society. Liberal intolerance is also seen in the public school case and in the case of Islamic free schools. The first modality of liberal intolerance is expressed in the concern that central liberal norms are undermined (in casu gender equality, democracy and fundamental rights). The second modality is perhaps most easily traced in the free school case and regards the divisive and segregative effects of too many religious (Islamic) free schools. Too much diversity endangers the sociological basis for maintaining a liberal democratic society. The third modality regards the creation of 'liberal people' and/or 'active citizens.' Again this modality is most obvious in the free school case where Islamic free schools are criticised for not preparing students to become competent individuals and citizens in a modern society 'with freedom and democracy'. In the Danish case it can be difficult to disentangle nationalist and liberal intolerance since nationalists often endorse very liberal values which they claim are special Danish values (or a special Danish interpretation of these values) rooted in a (Christian) national cultural tradition.

Conceptions of tolerance are in the Danish case based on both pragmatic and principled reasons. The pragmatic defence of tolerance is in the public school case found, first, in the defence of school autonomy by key government ministers. It is seen as suboptimal and epistemologically challenging to make rules on the accommodation (or not) of cultural and religious differences which should apply uniformly to all schools in Denmark. Secondly, tolerance is defended pragmatically at the school level with reference to the goal at hand: accommodations have to be made in order to ensure the well-being and education of the children. In the free school case, the pragmatic argument for tolerance is less prevalent and atypical in a country which is very concerned about integration: free schools allow the peaceful co-existence of two religions / cultures which are fundamentally incompatible.

In the public school case the argument for toleration on pragmatic grounds in the *integration through inclusion* strategy shades into arguments which mirror more principled liberal arguments for toleration, namely that immigrant parents must be regarded as moral and political equals who are entitled to make their own (even wrong) choices and that their views (as parents) have to be taken seriously as those of equals. In the free school case we find the same kind of argument with regard to the schools' and the parents' use of their freedom of choice. At times, this argument is based on the

Danish free school tradition rather than general liberal principles. This is the part of the ‘free mindedness’ or liberality tradition that underscores the guaranteed equal civil rights (legal tolerance). Underlying these arguments are ‘respect conceptions’ of tolerance.

In the two cases, there are very few instances of something which goes ‘beyond tolerance’ in the shape of claims about positive recognition. In the public school case, the theoretical framework underlying the idea of *appreciative dialogue* stops short of demanding positive recognition of the identities and values of immigrant parents. The recognition / respect of the parents are of them as *people* who hold values, not of the values. The central idea in the appreciative dialogue comes close to and perhaps even goes beyond the notion of civility, since it demands a principled curiosity towards that to which one objects or towards that which one rejects. This arguably implies expanding the range of what is ‘normal’ and part of the ‘public space’ of the local school community. Otherwise claims regarding any need to go ‘beyond toleration’ are sparse.

### **Keywords**

Tolerance, respect, accommodation, integration, intolerance, school autonomy, educational policy, private schools, segregation

## **1 General Introduction to the Danish School System and the Two Case Studies**

Denmark has 10 years of mandatory education from age 6 to 15. Denmark offers free education in public schools and parents can choose to send their children to state subsidized private schools, so-called free primary schools. The state subsidy makes them affordable to most parents. Home schooling is also allowed, but very rare.

### *Private Schools: Free Primary Schools*

Private schooling is based on a constitutional clause from 1849 which reflected discontent with state schools (Balle 2006). First, starting from 1787 the bourgeois class had established private schools to educate their children to enter into the (modern) trades of the estate, including international commerce, and to bestow them with bourgeois virtues (Balle 2006: 4). Secondly, the school movement led by N.F.S. Grundtvig and K. Kold saw the state school as repressive and reactionary ('the school of death', Grundtvig). It pleaded for 'the school of life' which should raise the children of especially independent peasants/farmers to a life in freedom, (national) enlightenment and self-determination (individually and collectively) by teaching history, languages, poetry, singing and storytelling. The schools were established in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and defied the formal strictures of tests and exams (Balle 2006: 5).

The constitutional protection of home and private schooling can be construed as democratic minority protection. In terms of educational policy it places a strong emphasis on the rights of parents (and not the state) to have their children educated according to their preferred ideological outlook (Balle 2006: 6). The freedom of free primary schools peaked in 1979 when the state subsidy was at about 85 percent and the schools' only formal obligation was to fulfil the general aims of education as stipulated in the law on the public primary school. This allowed minorities to make use of their minority rights, determining the content and form of education for their children. The schools hence incarnated Danish liberality or tolerance.

However, in the last 13 years more conditions for the reception of state funds have been placed on free primary schools and they are increasingly seen as a part of a common educational system. This reflects the increased number of students attending these schools (now 13 percent of all students) as well as concerns about their academic quality and about religious and cultural diversity. The schools are monitored more closely by the state. They have to teach in Danish and their staff and board all have to be proficient in Danish. Moreover, in 2002 and 2005 civic education became obligatory for the schools:

According to their purpose and in all of their work [the schools] shall prepare the students to live in a society like the Danish one with freedom and democracy and develop and strengthen the students' knowledge of and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, including equality between the sexes (Law on Free Schools, article 1.2).

Students in private schools must receive liberal civic education and not taught political, religious and cultural doctrines that are socially and politically divisive. The state (the political majority) will no longer fund schools that do not teach democratic virtues. Moreover, both government and opposition are currently considering how to induce predominantly 'white' private schools to take greater responsibility for the 'integration task' by recruiting more students with 'weak family backgrounds'.

*Public Schools: The People's School*

The public primary school, literally 'The People's School,' must familiarise the students with 'Danish culture and history' and give them an understanding of 'other countries and cultures'. It should create national awareness if not identity but not necessarily appreciation of other cultures. Moreover, the school should induce the students to 'learn more' and 'educate themselves', promote the 'well-rounded development of the individual student' and provide the framework for the students to develop 'cognition and imagination (...) confidence in their own potential and a basis for taking a stand and acting' (Law on the People's School, art. 1.1. and 1.2). The Danish public school hence rests on a rather strong (liberal) perfectionism when it comes to the development of individuality and personal autonomy. Also civic education is emphasised:

The People's school shall prepare the students to participation, mutual responsibility, rights and duties in a society with freedom and democracy. The work of the school shall therefore be characterized by intellectual freedom, equality and democracy (Law on the People's School, art. 1.3)

The general aim of the public school was revised in 2006. Arguably, the revision represented in part a change towards the development of a more opportunistic personality type who should be able to compete in a (global) labour market and increase the wealth of the nation (Pedersen 2011). In the new 'competition state' (as opposed to the welfare state) the school is once again instrumentalized for national (economic) purposes and is no more the sanctuary for the general education, *Bildung*, of the individual's character that it had been from 1958 to 2006 (Pedersen 2011). As for democracy and civic education, the emphasis has arguably shifted from a perception of the school as a site for the practice and constitution of (school) democracy to a place where students are taught how to act in a democracy which is pre-constituted or 'already given' (Pedersen 2011).

The municipalities are responsible for running the public schools in Denmark. Since 2005 parents are allowed to send their children to schools outside their school districts. Bilingual children with deficient Danish language skills can for 'pedagogical reasons' be sent to schools outside their school district. In Aarhus (Denmark's second largest city) bilingual students are forcefully redistributed via bussing. In Copenhagen city, a number of places are especially reserved in predominantly 'white' public schools for bilingual students who wish to attend a school outside their own district. In both cases, the intention is to ensure an more equal distribution of bilingual children and diminish the segregation of schools into 'black' and 'white' schools.<sup>1</sup>

There are national descriptions of the subjects taught in the public school, but no nationally set curricula. However, central control with what is being taught in schools arguably has increased over the last decade with the development of 'canons' of literature, history and democracy and with the introduction, in light of disappointing PISA results, of 'common national goals' and national tests as well as mandatory individual student evaluations and development plans for all students in all ages in all taught subjects (Nielsen et al. 2011). The responsibility for the curricula and teaching methods lies with the school director, supervised by the locally elected school board, but in practice often with the individual teacher.

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<sup>1</sup> The Copenhagen Model is currently under revision, because it, perhaps unsurprisingly, is bilingual students with the least need for school relocation who use its opportunities. Copenhagen now wants to conduct 'firm supervision' of parents of students who really need relocation to a more Danish dominated school environment to acquire sufficient Danish language proficiency.

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Parents are (also legally) required to be ‘actively involved’ in the schooling of their own children (including doing homework with them) and in the daily functioning of the classes and the school. This is seen as peculiar to the Danish educational system and the Ministry of Education has issued brochures in several languages listing parents’ rights and responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> The school board (one per school) is elected among the school’s students (2 reps), parents (5 to 7 reps) and staff (2 reps).

Schools, directors, teachers, parents and school boards thus have considerable autonomy in deciding how the school should be run in order to fulfil its tasks. As a ‘school community’ they are able to make flexible interpretations of the content and form of education. This includes decisions about how to accommodate cultural and religious diversity, which are (may be) based on local experiences and experiments.

*Number and Composition of Schools*

In 2009 there were 2,306 primary schools in Denmark: 1,529 public primary schools, 513 free primary schools and 264 so-called continuation schools (private, publicly subsidised schools for school primary school graduates 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade) (Ministry of Education 2010a: 50). The number of public schools has decreased slightly, while the number of free primary schools has increased in recent years. This also reflects a ‘migration’ of students from public schools to private. The number of students in public schools has dropped 3 percent from 2005 to 2008 while the number of students in free primary schools has risen 6 percent (Ministry of Education 2010a: 50). There are in total 719,000 students in the Danish school system (2008 numbers); 581,000 (81 percent) in public schools, and 95,000 in free primary schools (i.e. 13 percent, the rest are in continuation schools and different special schools).<sup>3</sup> Public schools have about 376 students on average while free primary schools have about 189 students on average (Ministry of Education 2010a: 53).

About 10 percent of the students are of non-Danish ethnic origin, and about 90 percent of these are of non-western origin.

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<sup>2</sup> The Integration Ministry has issued a Handbook for School-Home Cooperation to strengthen the inclusion of New-Dane parents (i.e. parents with immigration background) into the daily life and work of the primary school, URL: [http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/5DA0130F-8591-4CBA-A2E6-CC7A329C13CC/0/1020101\\_Detgodeskolehjemsamarbejde\\_samlet.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/5DA0130F-8591-4CBA-A2E6-CC7A329C13CC/0/1020101_Detgodeskolehjemsamarbejde_samlet.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Source: <http://statweb.uni-c.dk/Databanken/uvmDataWeb/ShowReport.aspx?report=EGS-bestand-skoletype>

**Table 1: Students by country of origin, 10 largest immigrant groups (2009/10)**

	Public schools	Free primary schools	Total	Percent
Turkey	9,691	1,207	10,898	15.3
Iraq	5,810	862	6,672	9.4
Lebanon	5,538	1,009	6,547	9.2
Somalia	3,975	642	4,617	6.5
Pakistan	2,817	400	3,217	4.5
Bosnia-Herzegovina	2,892	118	3,010	4.2
Afghanistan	2,898	86	2,984	4.2
Vietnam	2,186	426	2,612	3.7
Yugoslavia	2,292	113	2,405	3.4
Sri Lanka	1,856	486	2,342	3.3
Other countries	20,450	5,443	25,893	36.4
Total non-Danish	60,405	10,792	71,197	100.0
Denmark	516,485	85,062	601,547	
Total*	576,890	95,854	672,744	

Source: <http://statweb.uni-c.dk/Databanken/uvmDataWeb/ShowReport.aspx?report=EGS-bestand-land-herkomst>

\* The number does not include students at 'continuation schools', cf. above.

In some municipalities the concentration of immigrant children is much higher than the 10 percent average (see table 2). Except for Aarhus and Odense, the municipalities with a high percentage of immigrant children are in the Greater Copenhagen area.



**Table 2: Municipalities with high percentage of immigrant children (2009/10)**

	Danish	Immigrant	Total	Percentage
Ishøj	1,678	1,018	2,708	37.6
Brøndby	2,470	1,247	3,720	33.5
Copenhagen	31,181	14,008	45,342	30.9
Albertslund	2,582	1,081	3,676	29.4
Høje-Taastrup	4,705	1,690	6,403	26.4
Aarhus	27,803	6,739	34,557	19.5
Herlev	2,425	582	3,008	19.3
Odense	18,099	4,066	22,168	18.3
Vallensbæk	1,707	342	2,056	16.6
Rødovre	3,425	666	4,096	16.3
Hvidovre	5,061	939	6,005	15.6
Frederiksberg	7,091	1,220	8,373	14.6
Glostrup	1,886	300	2,188	13.7

Source: <http://statweb.uni-c.dk/Databanken/uvmDataWeb/ShowReport.aspx?report=EGS-bestand-kommune-herkomst>

As table 3 reveals, 8 percent of the public schools have no immigrant children. For the free primary schools the percentage is 16 percent. 75 percent of the public schools have less than 10 percent immigrant students, while this applies to 82 percent of the free primary schools. 42 (3 percent) public schools and 30 (6 percent) free primary schools have more than 50 percent students with immigrant background.

**Table 3: Distribution of immigrant children in different school types**

Percentage of children with immigrant background	Number of schools				
	Public schools	Free primary schools	Continuation schools	Special schools	Day treatment programs
None	134	80	65	43	101
0.1-9.9	1,070	332	190	73	35
10-24.9	239	44	3	49	34
25-34.9	65	8	2	6	12
35-49.9	41	9	0	5	3
50-74.9	27	5	0	3	2
75-99.9	15	25	0	0	1
100	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1,591	503	260	179	188

Source: reproduced from Hornbek 2009: 12.  
<http://www.uvm.dk/~media/Files/Stat/Folkeskolen/PDF09/090914%20herkomst.ashx>

About 83 percent of all students continue education after the first 10 years of mandatory education. However, more girls than boys pursue further education. Moreover Danish children pursue further education to a greater extent than immigrant children. 17 percent of the ethnic Danish boys compared to 22 percent of the immigrant boys do not continue education. 17 percent of the ethnic Danish girls compared to 23 percent of the immigrant girls do not pursue further education.<sup>4</sup>

#### *The Educational Quality, Segregation, and School Choice Anxiety*

Disappointing rankings in the OECD PISA surveys have been an important driver of Danish school policy in the last decade both generally and in relation to bilingual children. The last decade has seen some improvement, but despite a strong focus on raising the competences of immigrant students, 43 percent of first generation and 32 percent of second generation immigrant students have not acquired the skills deemed necessary for further education (compared to 13 percent of ethnic Danes) (Egelund et al. 2011). On average immigrant students are almost 2 years behind Danish students. Statistically, the one third of the educational deficit of immigrant students compared to ethnic Danes can be explained by their socio-economic and cultural status (i.e. OECD's ESCS<sup>5</sup> measure, not 'ethnicity') (Egelund et al. 2011: 10-11). Other explanatory factors are language spoken at home (Danish or not), whether parents read to their children and whether the immigrant children attend schools where

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.uvm.dk/~media/Files/Stat/Folkeskolen/PDF09/090914%20herkomst.ashx>

<sup>5</sup> Definition of ESCS: 'The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) index of economic, social and cultural status was created on the basis of the following variables: the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI); the highest level of education of the student's parents converted into years of schooling; the PISA index of family wealth; the PISA index of home educational resources; and the PISA index of possessions related to 'classical' culture in the family home.' Education at a Glance, OECD, Paris, 2002, Glossary. URL: <http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=5401>

immigrant children make up the majority. The latter may be explained by special dynamics at schools with a high percentage of immigrants which makes the teaching challenge different and more difficult (Egelund et al. 2011: 10). Also, the teachers' (and the parents') low expectations to students at schools with high immigrant concentration may contribute to low achievements as may lack of respect among students for teachers since it obstructs teaching generally (Egelund et al. 10-11).<sup>6</sup>

Better educated Danish parents and immigrant parents who speak Danish at home tend to avoid public schools with more than 30 percent immigrant children (Rangvid 2010).<sup>7</sup> While Danish parents choose a public or private school with fewer immigrant children, immigrant parents pursue a two-pronged strategy. Either they send their children to schools with fewer immigrant children or they send them to pure immigrant private schools.<sup>8</sup> The rejected school generally has lower academic achievements than the one chosen. All in all this means that school choice increases both ethnic segregation and segregation between students with poorly and well educated parents and between more and less language proficient immigrants (Rangvid 2010: 327). In general figures indicate a large degree of socio-economic segregation of students (both Danish and immigrant) between different schools (cf. Egelund et al. 2011: 10).

The teaching quality of public schools has been under fire in recent years (in light of the PISA results). A general discourse on the difficulty and necessity of finding the right school for your children has emerged and is likely to push towards further segregation. Continued segregation is problematic since a low concentration of students with 'weak family background'<sup>9</sup> (at least below 30 percent) in schools significantly elevates the academic achievements of 'weak students' and increases their tendency to pursue further education (Olsen 2009: ch. 3). This creates a collective action problem: It is individually rational to pursue a strategy with segregation effects, while it is collectively irrational because it lowers the academic achievements of some (in particular those with 'weak family backgrounds') without necessarily raising those of others.

To sum up, initiatives to handle cultural and religious diversity in the Danish school system should be seen in light not only of cultural and religious differences, their accommodation and potential integration, but also in connection with concerns about the segregation of the student population into high and low academic achievers. While there is – as in many countries – a strong concern about academic achievement generally, there is a particularly strong concern with the academic achievements of students with immigrant background, not only for their own sake, but also because of the cost they might incur on the welfare state.

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<sup>6</sup> In a qualitative study of the differences between the successful Finnish school system and the less successful Danish system, Andersen (2011) points to norms of respect for the teachers and of 'always doing your best' as central to the Finnish success.

<sup>7</sup> Rangvid's study is based on data from Copenhagen only.

<sup>8</sup> In Rangvid's model the explanation would be that this strategy is chosen because the option to choose a public or private school with fewer immigrant students is not available. The private immigrant schools are hence seen as a better option – a second or third best – than staying in the local public school. This is supported by a survey revealing that immigrant parents' applications to schools with lower immigrant concentration have been turned away at a higher rate than the applications of ethnic Danish parents (Rangvid 2010: 330).

<sup>9</sup> A 'weak family background' obtains when a student displays at least two of the following three characteristics: 1) neither parent has any education beyond upper secondary education or vocational training; 2) at least one of the parents' main income is based on social welfare payments; 3) the student does not live with both parents.

*Policy Initiatives*

In a short overview, there are a number of initiatives in education that relate to cultural and religious diversity either entirely or partly. One consists of strong focus on Danish language acquisition for immigrant children, since language is seen as a presupposition for learning. This has entailed language screening at the age of three and mandatory language stimulation for children who do not attend preschool care. The kindergarten class (grade 0) has been made mandatory for all (as of 2009) and there is also a mandatory language screening here.<sup>10</sup> Efforts have been made to raise the expertise among teachers and extra resources have been invested in teaching Danish as a second language. As mentioned, the municipalities of Aarhus and Copenhagen try to redistribute immigrant students with low language skills on a mandatory or a voluntary basis. These are in a certain sense desegregation measures. In late 2010, the government introduced the idea of redrawing school districts in order to avoid segregation into white and black schools and it wants to increase state monitoring of immigrant free primary schools to make sure they meet academic standards including Danish classes (Danish Government 2010a: 23). It would also allow schools with many immigrant students to extend the school day to further their academic development (*ibid.*). Finally, as mentioned, it is being discussed how white free primary schools may contribute to ‘integrating’ students with immigrant background (Danish Government 2010b).

A second initiative has been to more closely monitor the free primary schools, in particular those with a high percentage of immigrant students. One concern is their academic standards; another whether immigrant Islamic schools teach fundamentalist and divisive anti-democratic doctrines as evidenced in the introduction of mandatory civic education in these schools. State monitoring of Islamic schools is now also connected with government anti-radicalization programs. Similarly, staff at public schools is required to report on students with radical outlooks.

A third set of initiatives directly addresses the question of cultural and religious diversity in school life. The Ministries of Education and Integration have developed handbooks and tools for dealing with such differences and resolving conflicts among pupils and between teachers and pupils (e.g. Ministry of Education 2008; 2003). As mentioned a separate effort has been directed towards establishing the right connection between school and immigrant parents and turning the latter into active participants in school life according to the Danish ideal of parent involvement.

A fourth concern has been the increased focus on civic education for all children in the school and on establishing a stronger national and cultural awareness/knowledge if not identity among students in Danish schools. From different sources, teaching material has been developed that can be used in civic education. Civic education is not a separate subject but is thought to be part of other subjects, mainly social sciences, but also history, Danish, and Christianity studies. As mentioned there has been a move away from the idea that democracy is taught through practice at the schools towards seeing it as cultural knowledge that students should acquire in school to be able to participate in a pre-constituted democracy (Pedersen 2011; Jensen 2010). This is crafted especially with immigrant youth in mind (Jensen 2010). Furthermore the transmission of Danish national identity has been given a stronger emphasis by the centre-right government (Jensen 2010).

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<sup>10</sup> In Denmark Kindergarten is for the 3 (sometimes 2½) to 6 years old. Kindergartens are separate institutions. Kindergarten *class* is for 6 years old and is placed as the entry level at public and private schools alike and is also sometimes called grade 0. You are allowed to enroll your children already as 5 years old in the kindergarten class if they are deemed to be sufficiently mature. But normally children are enrolled when they are 6 or turn 6 within the first semester of the kindergarten class.

Finally, addressing problems of bullying it has been made mandatory for each school (board) to formulate an anti-bullying strategy based on a value set for good behaviour. It should create student welfare and a good learning environment of 'respectful relations between the school students and between students and school staff' (Ministry of Education 2010b: article 1.2). Transgressions of norms of good behaviour in and outside the school can be sanctioned.

## **2 Toleration, Recognition And Integration**

Many issues regarding non-toleration, toleration and recognition have emerged in the context of the above developments. The strong focus on integration has worked against the acceptance of differences either negatively (toleration) or positively (recognition). There is a general concern that the school system transmits civic values and in the public schools also a common (national) identity and development of individuality and autonomy. It is feared that some free primary schools teach divisive ideological (religious) doctrines. Generally there is a concern with segregation along not only ethnic but also social and academic lines, due to the legislation on free primary schools and free choice between public schools.

In this study of toleration issues in the Danish school sector, we focus on two particular cases which cover most, but not all of these issues. With regard to the transmission of key values through the school system, we have focused on the permissibility of individual schools to accommodate culturally and religiously founded demands of students and parents with minority background. The case concerns self-representation and interaction in the public school system and the relation between principled boundaries of tolerance and pragmatic accommodation so that the school provides education for all students on a daily basis (in collaboration with their parents).

The other case regards the institutional structure of the educational system and in general the creation of free primary schools by religious minorities, in particular Muslims. The Danish rules on free primary schools can be construed as a right for minority parents to choose the kind of (ideological and religious) education they want for their children. As such it epitomizes Danish (institutional) toleration. However, increased state control and monitoring of free primary schools can be seen as restriction of the space of tolerance.

## **Case 1: The Accommodation of Ethno-Religious Diversity within the Public School**

### **1 Introduction**

A controversial issue in the Danish public debate has been the extent to which the public schools should accommodate demands for special treatment and exemptions for immigrant students and parents based on their cultural and religious sensibilities.

As accounted for in the introduction, public schools have relative autonomy to decide the content and form of education and the individual school boards can make decisions on how to run the schools. This autonomy can be used to accommodate cultural and religious differences. However, the need for schools to transmit key liberal democratic values and a common (national) identity has been strongly emphasised and accommodations have been controversial when they are perceived to conflict with core values.

Accommodations in the form of exemptions have been discussed in relation to Christianity studies in the public schools, gym classes including swimming as well as music and arts classes. Special treatment has been discussed in connection with the selection of teaching material, creation of prayer rooms, shower curtains facilitating privacy, dietary requirements, special days off in connection with Ramadan and the resort to religious authorities, imams, in keeping discipline in schools. This type of cases predominantly concerns identities and practices in schools and to what extent they should be prohibited, discouraged, tolerated, or recognized as valuable and accommodated.

The present case study concerns a recent event in February 2010 that represents discussions of this kind. A debate erupted about whether it was legitimate for the public Holberg School in Copenhagen to hold parent meetings only for women on the grounds that some immigrant women did not turn up to meetings open to both sexes and the school had difficulty creating contact with those parents. To some this was a pragmatic measure to create the kind of parent involvement that is needed in order to get the daily life of the school to function. To others, it was a fundamental breach with the key norm of gender equality and a submission to Muslim intolerance and ‘medieval patriarchal norms’, etc. The fact that certain groups of parents cannot work within the framework of mixed-gender parents’ meetings should not be taken into account because it would undermine clear norms of gender equality, interpreted to mean no separation between men and women at common meetings with the school as well as identical responsibility of both sexes for the education of their children.

The initial complaint that started the event came from a father who felt unjustly excluded from the women-only meetings on bullying among students. The complaint was reported by a national newspaper. High-ranking national politicians intervened. Some demanded that the politically elected head of the Copenhagen School administration should correct the headmaster of the Holberg School and have him change the decision regarding the meetings. The Danish People’s Party developed a national plan for schools to counteract initiatives of this kind. One suggestion was that children should only be allowed to speak Danish in Danish schools (no Arabic and Turkish!). The Liberal Minister of Education said that he found the initiative to hold women-only meetings ‘horrible’, but still defended the autonomy of the school’s board and headmaster to make such decisions. Some politicians, also from the Liberal Party, demanded a national investigation on how widespread these (illegitimate) accommodations of cultural and religious differences were. They were turned down by the Liberal Minister of Integration, who preferred to spend her money on integration instead – as she put it. The leader of the left-wing Socialist People’s Party got in trouble with sections of his own party, especially those in Copenhagen, for his initial hard line opposition to the women-only meetings, and had to

retract his ‘condemnation’ of the meetings. Some of the high-ranking politicians were invited to and visited the Holberg School. Curiously it turned out that the meetings were part of a state-subsidized, local ‘integration project’ with funding sanctioned by the same national parties who were criticizing it.<sup>11</sup> The women-only meetings were held and continued as planned. There was no immediate action at any political level (national or local) to change this type of accommodation.

There are two interesting aspects in this case with regard to toleration in education: the (lacking) effect of principled national discourses on every day practices at individual schools and the underlying approach to making accommodations in the daily life of schools. There is a prevailing (pragmatic) interest in getting the school life to work, especially ensuring that the students receive the relevant education and that schools create good communicative relations with immigrant parents. Sometimes the ‘big questions’ about fundamental values and identities are bracketed in order to reach an understanding about the very concrete concerns of different parties involved in the individual student’s schooling. This may also involve not only toleration but the employment of norms of interaction that imply respect for immigrant parents as competent and equal participants in communication with the school and in the ‘school community’ in general.

Nonetheless, there are limits to the kinds of accommodation that can be made. Some have pointed to the (unintended) negative consequences of accommodating, for instance, religious demands. Accommodating religious practice within school hours can, for example, lead to peer pressure on students ‘nominally’ belonging to a specific religious group to conform to religious norms that they reject or are disinterested in.

The case study is mainly based on three sources: (1) media coverage of the Holberg School debate; (2) interviews with people connected to the event at the national, municipal and local levels, representing different points of view and interests. Interviewees who are differently placed with regard to the case (see list in annex 1) are prioritized; (3) examples of policy guidelines and tools developed at different levels (national and local) for dealing with cultural and religious diversity in school life, including communication with immigrant parents.

## **2 The Media Debate**

The concern about integration is almost all-pervasive in Denmark and this was also reflected in the debate about the Holberg School. Both supporters and opponents of the women-only meetings used ‘integration’ as an underlying premise in their argumentation. Opponents saw them as undermining central Danish values in school practices and as a form of ‘performative’ contradiction by a central Danish (value, cultural) institution. They would undermine the ability to transmit key values to children and, not least, to their parents. The parents ought to adapt to the modern Danish values and leave old-fashioned patriarchal cultural and religious norms behind. Among the strong opponents of the women-only meetings, there was no talk of recognition or toleration.

Supporters claimed that such pragmatic measures would establish contact to parents – and in general to groups – that could not be established through other means. By including groups through pragmatic measures communication would be established and communication would lead to ‘integration’. It is evident in the interviews, that this perspective is dominant in the professional world. It also clear from the guidelines or ‘inspiration catalogues’ / handbooks published by the Ministry of Education. While the introductions/forewords by the minister may emphasise the centrality of ‘Danish values’ the body

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<sup>11</sup> The funding came from a special pool of money, Satspuljemidlerne, distributed to social projects with regular intervals and decided upon by most Danish political parties in common.

of the publication is based on the notion of intercultural dialogue and places great emphasis on recognising all students and parents as equal and important irrespective of their cultural and religious background. It is also underlined that the cultural backgrounds of such students should be seen as a 'resource' in teaching and school life. However, there is no talk of recognising people's particular identities as valuable as such – and great efforts are made not to reduce the explanation of behaviour and conflicts to culture (/religion). Similarly, while there is focus on the fact that people legitimately may hold different values and the publications advise on conflict resolution, there is no admission of fundamental and permanent value conflicts. There is in this sense little focus on 'tolerance' as a possible means of dealing with cultural and religious conflict. More about this below.

The opponents of the women-only meetings claimed that such meetings were unacceptable. There were various lines of criticism and reactions. A key concern was the undermining of modern Danish gender equality norms:

It is a completely ridiculous decision. We shall not sacrifice gender equality and the rights of fathers to participate in the school life of their children out of consideration for some entrenched religious convictions. (Villy Søvndal, Leader of the Socialist People's Party, quoted in *Berlingske Tidende* 04.02.2010)

According to Villy Søvndal, the school should not promote and legitimize reactionary gender roles based on the notion that the education and well-being of children were only the responsibility of women. This line was generally supported by the members of the Social Democratic Party (at the national level), members of the governing Liberal and Conservative Parties and of course the Danish People's Party:

It is deeply grotesque that a Danish people's school holds such a medieval conviction that men and women cannot be in the same room in the year 2010 (Pia Adelsten, DPP Spokesperson on gender equality, quoted in *Berlingske Tidende* 04.02.2010)

Pia Adelsten (DPP) summarized the main expectation behind this view

In Denmark men and women are equal and we will not change our society to the demands and norms of immigrants. The immigrants should adapt to Denmark and not the other way round. It is completely unreasonable that a single father or a father who wants to, cannot participate in a parents' meeting at the school of his child. It is sex discrimination and gender equality has to apply both ways (Pia Adelsten, in *Berlingske Tidende* 05.02.2010).

It is obvious that for most of the opponents, this is the limit of toleration:

If more school directors – in misunderstood tolerance – contribute in this manner to undermining the necessary integration process, which the Prime Minister several times has defined as the government's focus area, the Minister [of Education] must join the debate clearly demarcate the boundary of toleration (Editorial, *Berlingske Tidende* 05.02.2010).

One concern is that accommodation of particular demands of immigrants is a slippery slope that may end in an irreversible state of affairs:

Every time people insist on special accommodations of Muslim fellow citizens, and every time these special accommodations are extended also obligate others besides Muslims, another slice of the salami is cut off – another slice of the Danish basis of democratic culture (Editorial *Jyllands-Posten*, 05.02.2010).

There is a risk that it becomes much more comprehensive and once something like this is established it is difficult to change (Karen Jespersen, Liberal Party, quoted in *Jyllands-Posten* 05.02.2010).



This is paired with the claim that it is really only the most extreme segments of Muslim minorities that make such demands and that accommodations really are accommodations of the extremist and not of the ordinary Muslims (N. Khader, Conservative Party, quoted in *Jyllands-Posten* 05.02.2010).

The reaction was in favour of having the school director stop the meetings. Another action was to have the extent of such accommodations mapped with a view to regulation. The DPP went furthest. It was not content with a general debate about values leaving school autonomy intact, and therefore suggested prohibiting sex-separated classes and parents' meetings in Danish schools (*Berlingske Tidende*, 05.02.2010) as well as a ban on languages other than Danish in schools (*Information*, 06.02.2010).

The middle ground was covered by Liberal ministers, predominantly the Minister of Education. He argued for toleration based on local school autonomy and reluctance to have the Danish state regulate in detail how individual schools should be run. The minister is reported as saying that he had never heard anything as 'horrible' in his fifteen years as Minister of Education and he encouraged the school director at the Holberg School to get a hold of the immigrant fathers, give them a scolding and tell them that 'this is Denmark and here you can go to a meeting even if there are people of the opposite sex present.' However, he added:

It is definitely not something that we have to decide for all of Denmark. We have to strengthen the management responsibility [of the individual schools], not weaken it. I am neither minister for headscarves, shower curtains, liver pate sandwiches [traditional Danish lunch dish containing pork], invitations to parents' meetings nor questions about what you are allowed to say in the school yard (*Politiken*, 05.02.2010).

The Social Democrats and the Socialist People's Party sided with the government. They also did not want to ban or regulate this type of accommodations in individual schools.

Supporters of the women-only meetings generally took a pragmatic stance and argued that if these meetings would facilitate communication that otherwise would not take place, then they were in order. A second premise is that the overall principle is to make sure that the school communicates with and includes all groups. In fact, it transpired that the meetings were not really parents' meetings in the strict sense, but rather special theme meetings organized in the context of a general integration project financed by the government and authorized by the same parties which were condemning it in public.<sup>12</sup>

The supporters' argument was that this was a pragmatic measure and was justified on the basis of the aim of the meetings

If that is what it takes to ensure that the students have a safe and good day in school without bullying, then I respect the decision. (Anders Bondo Christensen, Chairman, Teachers' Union, quoted in *Berlingske Tidende* 04.02.2010)

This kind of medieval view on women has to be fought, but that is not the purpose of this coffee meeting. Nor is it the responsibility of the school. The school must focus on the children; on their well being and education. (Mette-Line Thorup, commentary, *Information*, 05.02.2010)

A good suggestion: Relax, let the individual school directors decide. If they can help the children by holding meetings only for mothers, only for siblings or only for fathers, then let them do it as long as the

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<sup>12</sup> In fact, members of the SPP, SD and the Liberal Party retracted some of their initial criticism when it became public that the meetings were part of an integration project for women and that they were not parents meetings in the strict sense. They claimed they had been misinformed.

regular school-parent cooperation is observed and respected. The meeting at the Holberg School was not actually part of the value struggle. (Editorial in *Politiken*, 05.02.2010)

As the last two quotes reveal there is a conscious distinction between the principled political value debate or ‘culture/value struggle’ – a household term in Danish politics in the last 10 years – and pragmatic measures. Not all things could possibly be the responsibility of schools and their efforts to create contact with groups of parents.

Also the chairman of the board of the Holberg School lamented that the politicians had lost contact with reality:

You simply have to relate to how the real world is. The politicians completely miss the point and escalate the whole thing into a very populist debate (Britt Vorgod Pedersen, quoted in *Information*, 05.02.2010)

While the critics of the meetings were afraid that the Holberg School was going to set a bad example for other schools, the supporters, many of whom belonged to the professional community, argued for allowing schools to experiment with different solutions adjusted to their individual conditions and experiences.

The experiences of the Muslim Schools underline yet again that there are differences between schools and that it is up to the teachers and directors at the schools to establish a meeting culture which takes into account the interest and well-being of the children in the best possible manner. (Bondo Christensen, Teachers Union, *Kristeligt Dagblad*, 05.02.2010)

Testing different ideas is positive. The most important thing is that one does what is best for the children (...) The schools in Denmark are very different and it is therefore important that the schools are able to manage problems individually. (Benedikte Ask Skotte, national parents’ association, School and Society, quoted in *Berlingske Tidende* 06.02.2010).

I propose that one experiments with what works and what does not. (A. Balle, School Directors Association, quoted in *Berlingske Tidende* 06.02.2010).

One university expert pointed out that schools had to work with the parents as they actually were and not how they ought to be:

One can hope that that is what the Holberg School does: that it takes its starting point in how the parents actually are and listens to their perception of the problems. It can benefit the school because it gets new information. It can also benefit the parents because they are taken seriously. And it can benefit the students because the school and the parents in this manner together can solve some problems instead of being mutually disappointed in each other (H. Knudsen, Dept. of Education, Aarhus University, quoted in *Kristeligt Dagblad* 05.02.2010).

The pragmatic defence of the meetings reveals an implicit concept of tolerance. As with the liberal minister of education, there is no positive acceptance of the alleged difference – different interpretation of gender equality (or patriarchal norms). However, contrary to the minister it is here argued that this difference has to be tolerated in order to achieve an overriding goal: the well-being and education of the children. The medieval norms should be changed, but parents’ meetings about bullying are not the time or the place. To the minister, tolerance is towards school practice out of respect for school autonomy and in a rejection of the notion of a detailed central state regulation of school life. In defence of pragmatic solutions there also a second conception of toleration which is less pragmatic and more principled. This is evidenced in the last quote: the parents have to be taken seriously as persons and parents even if they endorse wrong perceptions of gender roles. The parents are not only conceived as objects of toleration, but also as subjects of toleration: they are seen as moral and ‘political’ equals.

The endorsement of local experiments can be seen in the same vein; as a way for power wielders – school, board and staff – to best develop working relationships with immigrant parents as objects of manipulation; or, in a more democratic interpretation, local solutions consider the interests of all involved to ensure the well-being and education of the children.

In the debate, few directly addressed the need for recognition. A participant in one of the meetings (on bullying) pointed to the negative view of immigrant groups produced in the debate and how this misrecognition may have negative consequences beyond their immediate target group (immigrant fathers allegedly subscribing to medieval patriarchal norms):

One thing is that some of the elected politicians haven't bothered to study the purpose and idea behind the meeting, another is how they talk about Muslims, while they with their words of condemnation dig the chasm between 'them' and 'us' deeper, deeper and deeper. It is thought provoking and perhaps not so strange that the children in the schools have difficulty treating each other with dignity and respect. There are in any case clear threads back to the exclusion mechanisms which are drawn all the way down from the highest level (Ditte Dalum Christoffersen, in *Politiken* 06.02.2010).

Another critique of the politicians' reactions pointed to the potentially negative consequences of the initial harsh criticism of the school's initiative to seek new solutions in cultural and religious diversity questions: Who would bother or even dare to take new initiatives if one risked being attacked in this manner (letter to the editor, *Jyllands-Posten* 09.02.2010).

Behind the defence of the pragmatic approach to accommodating cultural and religious diversity is another partly competing, partly supplementary perception of what leads to integration, the overriding concern in Danish politics. This approach may be termed 'integration through inclusion' as opposed to 'integration through values' (i.e. through the transmission and acquisition of central (Danish) values). Integration through inclusion is based on the idea that it is better to make accommodation which pulls various groups, predominantly women, out of their isolation and establish contact, than to insist on a very definite and uniform understanding of what central Danish values entail (e.g., that all meetings should be gender mixed):

The inherent beauty of the mothers' meeting at the Holberg School was that in addition to resolving the problem of bullying at the school, it would get the mothers out of isolation and give them an opportunity to get in contact with and integrate with society (Anita Bay Bundegaard, editor, in *Politiken* 06.02.2010).

One of the very popular words of the day is parallel society. We are really getting a parallel society if the Muslim girls are kept at home because they cannot participate in activities together with boys. Now the girls are together with Danish girls and girls with another ethnic background (Maria Bondo Gravesen, responsible for Girls Clubs in the library Vollsmose, Odense, quoted in *Information* 06.02.2010).

The code words here are pragmatic integration solutions. It does not make the medieval darkness descend over Denmark that 25 women meet and drink tea. (A. Vang, Mayor for Education in Copenhagen, quoted in *Information* 09.02.2010).

As mentioned, integration through inclusion seems to be the favoured approach by most members of the professional community (i.e. municipal school administrations, teachers' and school directors' associations as well as parent representatives). Obviously, the details of this approach did not emerge in the media debate, but material from the professional community, including the highest levels of the Ministries of Integration and Education, give more evidence for this approach as do many of the interviews.

However, the approach lives side by side with the integration through values approach and in particular with the requirement contained in the legal framework that the public school imbue the

students with certain values and virtues. The next section will look at publications issued by the Ministries of Integration and Education in which the approach is spelled out and in which tensions with other concerns can be seen.

### **3 Integration Through Inclusion: Dialogue and Respect**

As mentioned, curricula in the Danish schools are determined locally. However the state governs the school sector by setting goals and targets for all school subjects. Moreover the ministry (ministries) issues optional guidelines and handbooks on topics such as cultural differences in schools. While the final editing is in the hands of the ministries, production of the material is usually outsourced to professionals and based on research projects and experiments in schools in Denmark.

These publications evidence a tension between integration through values and integration through inclusion. A good example is a 2003 publication from the Ministry of Education *Inspiring Better Integration in the People's School* (see also Ministry of Education 2008). The Minister of Education writes in the foreword that 'the school should ensure that the values upon which the school is based is known and respected by staff as well as students and parents' and mentions the three values 'intellectual freedom, equality and democracy' (Ministry of Education 2003: 8 cf. above) and have other statements to the same effect. The rest of the publication is nonetheless mainly dedicated to the idea of integration through inclusion and the discourse on 'values' recedes to the background. The publication hence underlines the need to create understanding of the purposes of the schools and the expectations on both sides of the cooperation between schools and parents. For example, it is important that 'the school is interested in the [the parents'] ideas and expectations and views the parents as important co-players, who have to be included in the cooperation as early as possible' (Ministry of Education 2003: 15). It is underlined that there may be different ideas about schools and schooling among immigrant parents and that it should be taken into account in the communication that there are different expectations in Danish schools about certain norms, for example the perception of authority, the need for discussion and argumentation in class as well the informal dress of students and teachers (ibid.: 21). It is emphasised that all misunderstandings and conflicts are not necessarily based on culture and identity, but may have personal or social reasons (ibid.: 15). The publication discusses how certain accommodations on the basis of inclusion of immigrant students and parents can be made in connection with for example cooking classes (selection of meat, possibility of taking the produced food home and eating it after sunset), gym classes (showering dressed), sex education (separate classes for boys and girls), school excursions (separate sleeping arrangements, food selection, no alcohol) and in connection with religious holidays, exempting students from school and planning key school events.

Integration through inclusion is also prevalent in a recent publication from the Ministry of Integration on School-Parent cooperation with 'New-Danish Parents' (Ministry of Integration 2010). It is initially underlined that it is important to convey the purpose of the school-parent cooperation and the school's demands to the parents. However, the actual dialogue between teachers and parents (i.e. the actual participants in the cooperation) emphasises mutual respect. Teachers and parents have common interest in the academic success of the child:

The purpose of school-parent cooperation is to unite the school's and the parents' view on the child and achieve a common understanding of the child as a student. (ibid.: 11)

The dialogue thus has one overriding purpose: the education and well-being of the child. The publication then underlines the importance of mutual respect and how ‘the appreciative dialogue’<sup>13</sup> can ensure such respect:

Parents and teachers have different roles and see the child from their respective perspectives. Mutual respect is a critical condition for good cooperation. The parents want to be respected for the values they give to their child and for their effort to raise the child in such a way that he/she will be able to take care of him/herself as an adult. The parents are emotionally tied to their child and view the child from experiences and contexts which include much more than just the child’s school-life. The teachers want to be respected for their competence as teachers. The teacher is the professional, who sees the child as a student and as part of a bigger group of students. (ibid.: 11)

The appreciative dialogue is based on the notion of focusing on future directed actions and possibilities rather than on identities and problems. It is seen as a dialogue in which mutual recognition of others as equals is established and where differences in views are recognized (ibid.: 11). The dialogue is intended to establish relations and transforming them and the field available for action. In terms of practical advice it is underlined that it should be made clear that parents are able to contradict the teacher and express disagreements. The focus should be on dialogue and concrete issues and not (just) on the transmission of information from teacher to parent. Similarly, and strikingly, it is underlined that ‘speaking inclusively’ excludes expressions such as ‘This is how we do it in Denmark’ (ibid.: 18).

Another publication lays out the principles and steps of the appreciative dialogue (Navigent 2008) based on the idea that the truth must emerge as a result of negotiations between different perspectives, none of which can be said to be correct or true beforehand (ibid: 9-10). The parents must be accepted and recognised with a view to developing mutual respect:

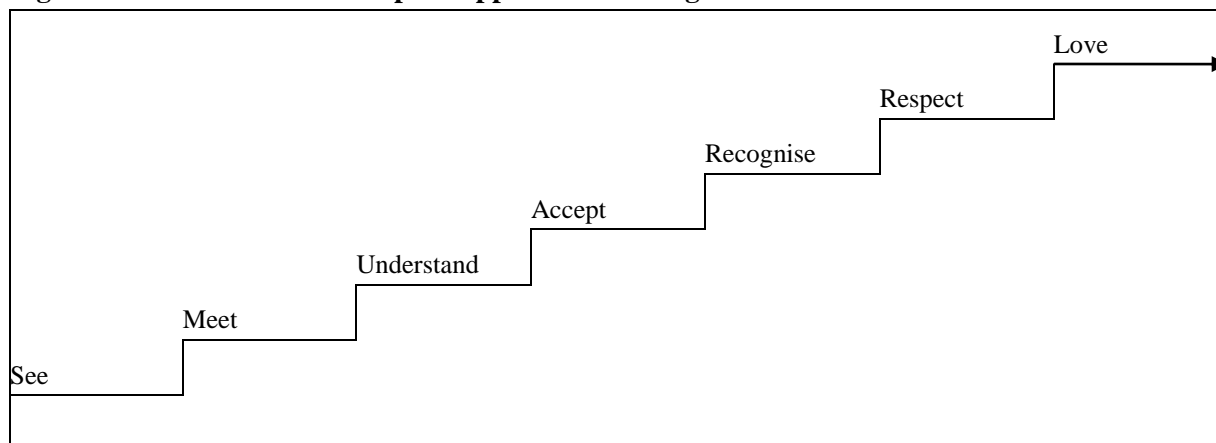
When you understand and accept the parents, it is also possible to recognise and appreciate them. Even if they have a different world view than you and have other convictions, you can talk about it with them and create the possibility of changing some things – simply because they feel recognised. (ibid.: 13)

Recognition leads to ‘mutual respect’ (see figure 1) and this entails recognising and respecting the differences among parents and teachers. For the teacher this is important to remember because the risk is that ‘integration takes place as cultural adaptation where some people are incorporated [assimilated] into your culture and the dialogue takes place on your premises’ (ibid.: 13).

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<sup>13</sup> A adaptation of the concept of ‘appreciative inquiry’.

**Figure 1: Illustration of the steps of appreciative dialogue**



**Note:** It is emphasised that the last step, ‘love,’ is only relevant in the relation between child and parent, not in the professional relation between teacher and child/parent (Navigent 2008: 12).

Now, the underlying theory, and principles and practical measures of the appreciative dialogue are some distance from the idea of integration through values. There is no scolding of fathers with antiquated patriarchal norms and telling them that ‘in Denmark we do so and so.’ Similarly, there is no idea that there are some key values that are necessarily privileged at the outset (however, see below). On the other hand, it is not clear that it is based on positive recognition of the values and identities of other people. Rather it is the respect and recognition of others as people who hold other values and convictions. And again there is a warning against reducing people to their cultural and religious background because it can ‘impede the dialogue’ (ibid.: 23).

In this sense ‘integration through inclusion’ contains an implicit notion of tolerance, which entails more than objection, namely a form of curiosity and openness, but still less than a necessary embracement and ‘positive recognition’. Openness and curiosity even apply when the limit of toleration is reached:

Acceptance is impossible in those rare cases when utterances of the parents are in conflict with the law or our society’s fundamental values of democracy, gender equality, freedom of religion etc. Here it is necessary for you as a teacher to hold your ground. But do it in an appreciative manner. Ask what it is the parents wish for, what they hope for and dream about, and go on from there instead of problematizing their statements. (ibid.: 12)

So there are limits to toleration and tension between equalizing all perspectives and key values does arise. Dialogue-based integration through inclusion has its limits. On the one hand, it is geared towards reaching common solutions and discussing disagreements, e.g. about the school’s role in influencing the children in the area of ‘values and life attitudes’ (Ministry of Integration 2010: 41). It seeks solutions that ‘fit the school and parent group in question’ (ibid.: 41). On the other hand, the solutions must be ‘in agreement with the school’s view on learning and its value basis’ (ibid.: 41), including for example the notion that students are required to ‘take responsibility for their own learning’, ‘that the school is based on student democracy and co-determination’ and that the ‘students are expected to express their views’ (ibid.: 10), i.e. ideas closely related to the Danish People’s School’s emphasis on personal autonomy and development and reflexive democratic virtues.

In the publications the dialogue-based integration through inclusion and related practical measures are generally presented as things that have been proven to work because it creates communication and because it motivates immigrant students and parents for participation where they are taken seriously as equal and competent communication partners with legitimate interests, views and values. The same

impression comes from interviews with members of the professional community. It is underlined that the political discourse on key values and drawing on the idea of 'integration through values' at best is irrelevant and at worst harmful, either because it produces risk adversity in the school sector with regard to new experiments and accommodations or because it pollutes the efforts to establish contact and communication between school, parents and students. The latter because the identities created in the national discourse on values, including the prevalent 'them' and 'us' distinction, become interpretative schemes through which parties interpret each other and each others' statements, making communication even more difficult. Interviewees from the professional community reveal that the big questions about 'values' are often bracketed in view of the need to find concrete solutions to concrete challenges of making the school life of individual students work. The effort is in other words to distance themselves somewhat from the principled political discourse on values and prioritise the goal at hand: the well-being and education of the student.

#### **4 Conclusion**

An underlying premise of the accommodation of cultural and religious differences in Danish public schools is integration. Danish national politics and public discourse is dominated by a conception of integration through values, according to which the public schools should transmit key national and liberal democratic values to students and their parents in a uniform and uncompromising manner. This leaves little space for the recognition or even toleration of difference. The counter discourse of 'integration through inclusion' is also in part based on the goal of integration. Pragmatic arguments for toleration and accommodation are however also closely related to securing the well-being and education of the individual student. They are followed by more principled arguments pertaining to the concept of appreciative dialogue about respecting minority parents as equal and competent speaking partners who are entitled to make their own choices about values and child rearing. The driving idea about integration through inclusion is that integration follows from the kind of accommodation that creates contact and interaction between different groups in society. The underlying concept of acceptance is a respect based conception of toleration emphasising the need to respect others as moral and political equals with the right to make their own choices. However, it does not go beyond this notion of respect. It is paired with a principled openness and curiosity towards that to which one objects/rejects, but does not rest on any requirement of positive recognition.

At the same time, the concept of toleration and respect contained in 'appreciative dialogue' – the more principled part of 'integration through inclusion' – is some distance from the traditional Danish notion of liberality which includes a blunt and confrontational discursive ethos according to which one 'fights for everything one holds dear' while recognizing the same right for all.

It seems clear from the material issued from e.g. the ministries and from the interviews with people working with or in the public school professional community that the partly pragmatic and partly principled approach underlying the overall discourse of 'integration through inclusion' is deemed successful, whilst the stubborn insistence on a uniform transmission of values, including the inherent 'them and us' distinctions, is at best irrelevant and at worst harmful to school level efforts to create facilitating conditions for immigrant minority students in public schools.

## **Case 2: Free Schools – The Epitome of Danish Educational Tolerance?**

### **1 Introduction**

The Danish tradition of free primary schools is often seen as an expression of (institutional) tolerance in the Danish educational system. The free schools are seen as privileging the rights of parents to choose education for their children in accordance with their own ideology and pedagogical convictions over the right of the state and the democratic majority. As such it can be construed as a democratic minority right which furthermore is made effective through a large state subsidy (a voucher system) which makes it affordable for most parents to send their children to these private schools.

In the 1990s a number of schools were established for Turkish, Arabic and Urdu-speaking children. In 1998 the free school legislation was tightened so that only free schools teaching in Danish would be eligible for state subsidies. German minority schools and some international schools were exempted. A post-9/11 debate on Muslim free schools and concerns that their teaching may not teach in support of democracy and human rights led to a change in the legislation in 2002 so that the free primary schools are required to teach democracy and human rights. In 2005 the regulation was tightened yet again emphasising that the schools should ‘develop and strengthen the students’ knowledge of and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, including equality between the sexes’ (cf. above). The basis for monitoring the schools’ ability to live up to these requirements and to academic standards equal to those of the public schools was improved. Recently, monitoring of free primary schools was included in the Government’s 2009 anti-radicalization plan (Danish Government 2009: 18).

Another criticism against the use and establishment of free primary schools is that they facilitate ‘white flight’ from the public schools based on ‘intolerance’ against weak and bilingual (i.e. immigrant) students and that this leads to segregation and increased intolerance between groups because social and cultural groups do not mix. As mentioned, it is currently discussed how free schools may be economically induced to take more responsibility for the ‘integration task’.

Together the two criticisms and the ensuing policy development can be seen as a restriction on the minority right and the space of tolerance partly to ensure tolerance in the future. In this sense, what some see as the epitome of Danish (institutional) tolerance (or liberality) others see as its opposite. It should be added however, that tolerance and integration are not the only concerns. The academic effects of segregation also play a role for some of the critics.

The case study concerns the ‘structure of the education system’ and it is about the boundaries between what is unacceptable and what is tolerable. To some degree it also concern issues of interaction – or rather lack thereof – between different groups in the overall Danish school system with regard to development of tolerance and respect/recognition.

The case study is based on newspaper coverage in the last 10 years and policy documents pertaining to the 2002 and 2005 revisions of the law of free primary schools. The main actors in the debate are national politicians, school sector professionals, commentators and members of the general public. The report is also based on interviews with people from the free primary school sector, politicians and employees in the Ministries of Education and Integration.



## **2 The Free School Debate in The Danish Press**

The attitudes to the free schools and their role in Danish society can be divided into different types of tolerance and intolerance. A nationalist intolerance argues that the establishment of Islamic free schools undermines fundamental Danish values and traditions. In addition, new forms of principled liberal intolerance come in three modalities relating respectively to the liberal divide between public and private; the perfectionist requirement to become 'liberal people'; and the protection of cultural cohesion and homogeneity i.e. a societal intolerance of 'too much diversity' including concerns about segregation.

The arguments in defence of the Islamic free schools and their right to teach in Denmark are based on the Danish free school tradition, on notions of tolerance and the democratic rights of minorities as well as on pragmatic arguments about maintaining peace through a *modus vivendi*. In general the debate is about tolerance and the limits of tolerance. However in a single case (and perhaps somewhat rhetorically), it is argued that the fact that the Muslim minority has acquired the Danish 'free school tradition' should be celebrated and recognised as valuable.

### *National Intolerance: Islamic Schools Destroy the Danish Free School Tradition*

To people in the DPP and others, the establishment of Islamic free schools is an abuse of a Danish tradition that requires the rules to be changed. It undermines Danish values. Members of the DPP have argued that while they are for the free school tradition, it should be against the law on free schools to teach the Quran: 'it is completely out of place that children growing up in Denmark are given state subsidies to be taught in any other religion than Christianity' (Chr. H. Hansen, DPP, *Jyllands-Posten*, 12.11.2001). Another commentator argued along similar lines:

There is no warrant in the Danish constitution for giving other cultures equal status to the Danish culture and turning us into a country of immigration. In addition, it costs us money to give these people human rights which we ourselves do not need, and which will destroy our culture. (A. M. Engel, commentator, *JP*, 05.06.2001)

The view that Islamic free schools lie outside the Danish tradition is perhaps most evident in a relatively recent comment from DPP party leader Pia Kjærsgaard:

The utilization/abuse of the Danish free school tradition by the Muslim private schools makes it necessary to tighten the rules concerning free schools and the rules concerning the duty to monitor [the free schools], and it destroys a good Danish tradition for being able to establish free schools and teach in accordance with the value set of the parents. (*Berlingske Tidende*, 12.10.09)

The statement implies that it must be ensured that the parents' values are within the realm of the acceptable before they can establish their own schools. Or at least that it should be ensured via the legislation that the schools teach within the limits of what is acceptable. The view is that Islamic free schools must be viewed with a general suspicion and monitored. They are furthermore to be regretted because they are undermining a good Danish tradition which would function well in their absence.

### *Liberal Intolerance*

The nationalist intolerance of Islamic free schools as a threat to *Danish values* and *tradition* of tolerance or liberality (see Danish WP1) shades into a more liberal concern with the fact that the teachings of Islamic schools may go against fundamental liberal and democratic norms. Paired with a form of Christian intolerance against Islam in Europe, one commentator, a retired priest, hence saw far-reaching consequences of the establishment of Islamic free schools. They

are emerging all over Europe and lay the basis for an Islamism which will become a serious political factor in the future, a political factor that does not know of religious freedom (John W. Hørbo, *Jyllands-Posten*, 15.10.2002 )

At a less apocalyptic level, the concern is that the Islamic free schools do not teach the values of democracy and human rights or in accordance with them:

The whole point of the free school is that there is space for thinking and believing in a way that is different ... but conversely this should not mean that this becomes a sanctuary for a belief and a way of thinking that is characterised by intolerance and opposition to the surrounding society. (K. Sejr, *Social Liberals, JP* 15.11 2001)

Commentator Lone Nørgaard perhaps took this point the furthest:

As far as my (failing) tolerance is concerned, I am no longer prepared to be tolerant towards values that I deeply and utterly oppose: the repression of women, discrimination, and the reading of the Quran that elevates the Quran to the highest authority ... if tolerance means that I have to observe from the side line while Danish society step by step is transformed in a direction that I do not want, well, then I do not mind giving up that version of tolerance. (*BT*, 12.07.2003)

This is a version of not being tolerant of groups with illiberal values: a case for the intolerance against the intolerant. Nørgaard also used a second modality of liberal intolerance. The point is that allowing parents to send their children to Islamic free schools is really to let down the children and their interest in achieving a good life: 'The freedom and rights of parents should not take priority if the price is that the children are left in the lurch.' (L Nørgaard, *JP*, 12.05.2003)

The unambiguous opinion is that Islamic free schools produce 'losers' unable to function in society. It is reminiscent of liberal perfectionism and its 'intolerance' of non-autonomous living. Free schools are to give their students the education they need to live autonomous lives. By not giving children this type of education they harm their interests (rights).

This argument is connected to the third modality of liberal intolerance, according to which the Islamic free schools produce too much diversity to the detriment of the sociological preconditions for maintaining a liberal society. Islamic free schools undermine liberal integration. They represent an unhealthy segregation of society.

#### *Free Schools Lead to Segregation Generally*

As mentioned, this point is taken further by some commentators who apply it to the free primary schools generally (not only Islamic or religious schools). The targets for criticism are not only immigrant Muslim parents, but all parents who choose to send their children to free primary schools for no other reason than to avoid the allegedly low quality of public schools with many 'weak' students, in particular those with immigrant background:

It was never the intention with the free school law that resourceful families would send their children to private schools at the taxpayers' expense to avoid the weakest pupils. (Ritt Bjerregaard, *Social Democrats, JP*, 16.04.2005)

The use of the free primary schools can be seen as a form of escape option that is based on intolerance of the weaker students. This is really a break with the free school tradition which is about ideological and pedagogical experimentation and about democratic protection of minorities:

The original idea behind the free school tradition was to develop a diversity of teaching which reflected the right of minorities which was part of the idea of democracy ... we risk that the alternative school sector is

### *(In)Tolerance and Accommodation of Difference in Danish Public and Private Schools*

replaced by a protest school sector ... that it becomes an attractive alternative that enables people to avoid those children nobody really wants play with. (C. Antorini, Social Democrats, *Berlingske Tidende* 19.05.2005)

The problem is that these private schools are subsidized by the public but do not accept a social responsibility: 'it is a reverse Robin Hood, the state's money is redistributed from the poorest in the country to the richest' (JJ. Steen & K. Barsøe, CEVEA, *JP*, 03.06.2010). As mentioned, some of the concerns here regard the ability to ensure quality teaching in the public schools to increase the academic results of the weakest learners who are affected by the 'flight' of strong learners from the public schools. A second point is that segregation is not only based on intolerance, but that it fosters intolerance because different groups do not mix:

I think it is easier to have a community with people you know. And for me, the People's School is the core. It is a central building block in our welfare society. Because this is where we meet each other and get the [sense of] community. If we don't meet each other because the top and the bottom are taken out, then we have a problem. (interview, A. Vang, Mayor for Education. Copenhagen).

In sum, some find that the free school tradition is being abused to create free schools which teach intolerant doctrines which go against central Danish values and/or the values of liberal democracy and create intolerant (and uneducated) children. That is seen as a threat to integration and the ability to maintain a liberal society. Moreover, the resulting segregation has been under attack for undermining the academic results of the weaker learners and for fostering intolerance among social groups. The demands have ranged from banning Islamic free schools over increasing the demands for civic value education and state monitoring to creating new economic incentives to make free primary schools take more social responsibility and contribute to integration. Regulation and increased monitoring have been the main policy reactions, which has arguably reduced the space of toleration. However, other people have defended the freedom of the free primary schools in the name of tolerance and the Danish tradition of liberality.

#### *In Defence of the Free School Tradition*

A relatively unusual defence of the Danish free schools and the ability to establish religious schools within this legal framework is based on the pragmatic idea that it allows different religious and value sets to exist side by side. This is unusual in a country where the integration concern has been so predominant. One commentator hence defended Islamic free schools on the following grounds:

The path school director Abdul Wahid Pedersen has chosen with his [Islamic] free school is the only way to prevent that two great cultures collide in insoluble conflicts. The Muslim culture will not adjust to the Christian. And the Christian will not adjust to the Muslim. (V. Madsen, deputy school director, *JP*, 1008.2001)

This argument is reminiscent of a classic pragmatic argument for tolerance. It creates peace through *modus vivendi*. Remaining arguments in defence of the free school tradition is first that it is a venerable Danish tradition of toleration or 'free mindedness' (liberality, see Danish WP1). This is construed as a democratic minority right, which again is connected to the idea that the choices of others should be respected as the choices of moral and political equals. It is part of the conception of liberty that state regulation of and intervention in the free schools should be opposed. B. Haarder, Minister of Education at the time, expressed this first argument, which he shares with his colleague and later Liberal Integration Minister B. Rønn Hornbech:

Precisely the free schools are a special Danish value since nothing like them can be found anywhere. The fact that we not only give equality to the minority, but give them extra support is unique for Denmark. The

free school legislation means that one has the right to send one's children to a school that fits one's ideas of what a good school is. (*Information*, 06.07.2009)

The point is that this is something special pertaining to Denmark. This is not necessarily based on universal values, but rather a part of Danish national history and culture. Others take the same route and underline the paramount values of democratic minority protection:

Liberality [free-mindedness] has always been a capital point in questions of schools and churches ... A democracy must be evaluated based on how it treats its minorities ... we have ended up in judgmentalism – the foulest enemy of liberality. (Asger Baunsbak Jensen, priest and writer, *JP*, 20.07.2009)

T. Balle, former headmaster of the Free Teachers College (educating teachers for free primary schools), also points out that there is something more at stake than just forbidding Muslim schools, namely the rights of parents and the democratic protection of minorities: The free schools 'are a key cornerstone in what you could call the special Danish values' (T. Balle, *Information*, 14.12.2007).

Muslim commentators who defend Islamic free schools also used a combination of liberal arguments and arguments based on the Danish tradition.

Denmark boasts about its unshakable values, including freedom and tolerance. It is tragic that it does not take more than a couple of Muslim immigrants to shake them and turn them into empty rhetoric. (O. Shah, *JP*, 18.05.2003)

To Shah it is evident that the Islamic free schools cannot be disconnected from the surrounding society and have to teach their students about it and how to function in it, however,

to demand that they have to preach all those values (or the lack thereof) which characterize society in all its aspects, is a dictatorship of opinion and contrary to the values that Denmark claim for herself. (O. Shah. *JP*, 18.05.2003)

Shah offers a different explanation of the creation of Islamic free schools and their popularity. They are not the product of Muslim disdain for Danish society or intolerance of the Danish majority, but rather of the lack of tolerance and consideration for Muslims by the Danish public and public school:

Like other parents, Muslim parents simply wish to have their children seen and treated as students who have to be taught, rather than as some sorry creatures who (in the best case) have to be saved from repression or who (in the worst case) are seen as cultural enemies to be fought ... if the Copenhagen public school reflected realities, and tolerance and consideration were not seen as submission to fundamentalism, then many of the children who today end up in the free schools would most likely stay [in the public school]. (O. Shah *Information*, 10.01.2006)

Another Muslim commentator, Safia Aude, also claimed Muslim parents had all good reasons for sending their children to Islamic free schools including the fact that the grades are higher there than in the public schools (*JP*, 15.05.2003). In a relatively recent comment Z. B. Hussain asks why nobody can see the positive in the fact that Danish Muslims have learned from the Danish tradition of organizing in voluntary associations and created their own nurseries and free schools (*Information* 31.07.2010).

These views link back to the discussion about cultural and religious accommodation in public schools and the different concepts and effects of integration through values and integration through inclusion respectively. It is also evident that the conception of who is tolerant/intolerant and who is breaking with Danish traditions is reversed. The Islamic free schools do not represent intolerance. Rather the criticism of them represents intolerance and shallow commitment to key liberal principles. And

finally, it is pointed out that critics are not even able to recognise the value of something they usually value, just because the people involved are Muslims.

People directly connected with Islamic free schools tried to remove criticism by pointing out that they were indeed committed to integration (J. Hansen, Ahi International School, *Berlingske Tidende*, 02.10.2001). One school director described how the school had moved in a more secular direction by introducing sex education, natural science and religions other than Islam. He also described a school excursion to a Christian (Grundtvigian!) Church:<sup>14</sup>

It was a very positive experience to see and hear the engagement of the children. The priest said that it was exciting to have us visit and that we were welcome another time, if we wanted to. (D. Anik, Sealand's Private School (Islamic), *Information* 21.11.2001)

The strategy here is to show that the Islamic schools are oriented towards and engaged with the surrounding society in a positive and open-minded manner to deflate the picture of them as sanctuaries for fundamentalism or for cultural and religious isolation and intolerance.

### **3 Policy Changes**

There is widespread political support for the Danish free school tradition and it is unlikely that it will be changed fundamentally. However, in recent years defenders of free school autonomy have lost to the extent that free autonomy has become increasingly conditioned and circumscribed. There has been an increased emphasis on the need for free schools to ensure academic quality equal to the public school (and through this regulate the subjects taught in the schools) including the demand that schools operate and teach in Danish. Similarly the free schools are now explicitly required to transmit the values of freedom and democracy to students.

In 1998 it was stipulated that free primary schools should teach in Danish in order to receive public subsidies, and the monitoring of the quality of education was increased. In 2002 and 2005 two major changes followed. In 2002 it was introduced in the law that 'the schools shall prepare the students to live in a society with freedom and democracy'. The legislative bill was motivated by reference to integration of bilingual children. It furthermore stated that

It has hitherto been an underlying presupposition for the freedom to establish and run free primary schools with state subsidy that the schools respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Of late, doubt has emerged as to whether the freedom is utilized to run free primary schools on value bases which are so fundamentalist that they disable the students to function in a society like the Danish one with freedom and democracy. (2001/2 LSF 163)

Originally, the new clause contained a reference to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), but this was taken out in the legislative process due to concerns about readability. The clause (and its motivation) set the outer boundaries of toleration (for schools receiving state subsidies). The bill continues:

It is not the intention ... to mandate that the free primary schools express specific views on ethical, religious or political questions, etc. On the contrary, the schools shall prepare the students to function as citizens in Denmark, including acknowledging and respecting that there can be different views on such questions, which is a presupposition of democracy. (2001/2 LSF 163)

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<sup>14</sup> N.F.S. Grundtvig was an influential priest and educationalist and one of the (two) 'founding fathers' of the Danish free school tradition, cf. the general introduction to the report.

It furthermore states that the schools are to give the students understanding of the underlying principles of the ECHR and that the clause entails a prohibition of teaching based on the notion that the ECHR is not respected, for example through religious and racist discrimination or the violation of freedom of speech and association. It unclear whether the clause demands that the schools transmit a democratic ethos to their students or only that they are provided with knowledge about the basic principles of human rights and democracy in order to function in Danish society.

Only two parties did not accept the 2002 revision. The DPP thought it was too slack and the Red-Green Alliance (far left-wing party) rejected it on other grounds. In the 2005 revision the democracy and freedom clause is expanded:

According to their purpose and in all their work [the schools] shall prepare the students to live in a society like the Danish one with freedom and democracy, and develop and strengthen the students' knowledge of and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, including equality between the sexes. (Law on Free Schools, article 1.2)

The 2005 revision is seen as a specification and expansion of the 2002 clause to include not only teaching per se but all activities connected with the school. The expansion is made to ensure

that fundamentalist or extremist actions, which are justified on religious grounds, etc., but which contradict human rights and fundamental freedoms, including gender equality, cannot take place *at or from* a free primary school. (legislative bill 2004/2 LF 105, emphasis added)

The government underlines that this clause is consonant with the ECHR because the ECHR *only* protects 'associations, statements/utterances and gatherings, etc., which respect democracy and the equality between the sexes' (legislative bill 2004/2 LF 105). This arguably restricts the freedom of schools and students to express opinions which diverge from endorsement of democracy and gender equality and come close to demanding a democratic and sex-egalitarian ethos in free schools. It hence seems to construe the space of toleration even more narrowly than the 2002 revision.

The 2005 revision also requires that teachers and board members are proficient in Danish and that the schools set goals for their own subjects or adopt those formulated for the public school, publish them and evaluate them continuously. The latter would increase the focus on academic standards and facilitate external monitoring of the schools.

The 2005 revision was opposed by the Social Liberals, The Socialist People's Party and the Red-Green Alliance on the grounds that it took the freedom out of the free school tradition. They saw it as undermining the rights of educational choice and as revealing distrust in the ability of parents and schools to use their freedom responsibly. As such it represented centralism and paternalism.<sup>15</sup>

The most recent initiatives for free schools are a) monitoring of their activity as part of a 2009 government action plan on anti-radicalisation; and b) increased discussion about how to induce 'white' free schools to take on more responsibility for 'the integration task'.

#### **4 Policy Effects**

State monitoring of free schools has led to the closing of a few schools. Before the 2002 legislative change three Muslim free schools were closed (i.e. their state subsidy was taken away). Two because of failing academic standards and one because it was suspected that it was not an independent unit (as required by the free school legislation), but a school run by the Lebanese organisation A.I.C.P. After

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<sup>15</sup> Betænkning afgivet af Uddannelsesudvalget den 21. april 2005.

the 2002 legislative change one Muslim school has been closed (in 2011) due to concerns that it did not live up to the requirements in the freedom and democracy clause.<sup>16</sup> The same applied to one Christian school belonging to the Pentecostal movement. Two other Muslims schools and one Scientology school have been closed due to failing academic standards. In terms of school closings, the monitoring effects have not been very strong.

If the Ministry of Education (in cooperation with the Ministry of Integration) finds shortcomings at a school, it can put it under ‘special monitoring’ – a sort of probation period. Schools are selected for monitoring because a) they lack clearly stated goals and policies for civic education; b) a general concern that students are part of isolated groups and social environments which exclude others because of religion, skin colour or political views (e.g. ‘ghetto schools’); and c) information (e.g. through the press) that creates concern in the ministry that a school’s civic education is failing. This implies that it is rather easy to fall into the categories of schools put under monitoring. Recently, 25 free primary schools were selected for monitoring in connection with the Government’s 2009 anti-radicalisation plan to establish whether new changes in the law on free primary schools are required (Danish Government 2009: 18).

The ministry has a flexible approach to evaluation. It can use a 140-indicator model as guide relating to whether the school has clearly formulated goals, the goals and intentions of its teaching, the concrete teaching (content and learning processes), the results, and the overall culture of the school (Ministry of Education 2009b). One of the intentions behind model is that there ‘are many ways in which one can prepare the students to live in a society’ with freedom and democracy and ‘that there can be a lot of [different] signs that [the schools] live up to the requirement’ (Interview A. Andersen, Ministry of Education).<sup>17</sup> The evaluation is hence based on a ‘general assessment’, not on a strict list of criteria that must be fulfilled (ibid). Furthermore, the ministry’s general experience is that problems in relation to the freedom and democracy clause are predominantly due to the fact that schools have not provided the students with sufficient *knowledge* about society and its fundamental principles, not that the schools transmit controversial *convictions* and *attitudes* (ibid). Although the ministry does not see itself as conducting ‘loyalty tests’, it does not exclude that controversial convictions and attitudes could make schools fall short of the freedom and democracy requirement (ibid).

Interviews with people from the free school sector (The Free School Teachers’ Union and the Free School Association)<sup>18</sup> reveal the perception that the monitoring of free schools represents a lack of trust in Islamic free schools. The latter have felt discriminated against, also in connection with ‘random’ selection of 25 schools for monitoring in continuation of the 2009 anti-radicalisation plan (cf. above). The two interviewees generally think that the increased monitoring is unnecessary and is an example of symbolic politics. Lastly, it is suggested that although the legislation continues to allow for large degrees of freedom, some schools are inclined to copy the subjects and the teaching methods from the public school in order not to have to defend themselves in connection with state monitoring. Documenting that they live up to standards in alternative ways is too costly and too risky for individual schools.

Two school directors of monitored schools generally express great uncertainty about how to demonstrate that the school and its teaching is really democratic and non-extremist. They describe

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<sup>16</sup> In fact the school closed itself before the formal process came to an end.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with A. Andersen, former consultant in the Ministry of Education, responsible for the monitoring of free schools.

<sup>18</sup> A. Pedersen, chairman of The Free School Teachers’ Union and E. Lilliendal, chairman of the Free School Association.

how their school and staff make great efforts to come across as democratic (Kjærgaard & Larsen 2010: 68-75). They also express great concern about the method and feel that it is random whether or not a school is found to be failing in regard to civic education (ibid.). They furthermore see it as (part of) a general suspicion of (or construction of suspicion) Islam, Islamic free schools and Muslims (*Generalverdact*). They point to the ensuing feeling of discrimination and exclusion, especially among the students:

It makes them feel 'but we are not a part of this society anyway, they don't regard us as equals after all' (School Director 1, interviewed anonymously in Kjærgaard & Larsen 2010: 73).

I think this has gotten a real negative ring to it because by now radicalization and extremism are simply connected with Islam. I think they have used the words – really grabbed them and used them so that one cannot use radical or extreme without people thinking: Islam, terrorist or whatever. ... And I think it is sad that we have to sit here and defend ourselves like this. (ibid.)

It is an attempt to articulate an agenda, saying that there are some really dangerous, there are some young people, who are latent terrorists. (School Director 2, interviewed anonymously in Kjærgaard & Larsen 2010: 75)

The closing of schools and the effect of the perception of being under general suspicion suggest that the policies have a knock-on effect in the free school world. Most likely schools are and will become more alert to the possibility of being closed if they do not come across as sufficiently democratic. Another effect is that they reduce their diversity in order not to have to defend their own alternative standards (i.e. definition of subjects and teaching methods) and hence become more similar to the public school. In addition, monitoring may have exactly the opposite effect of what this version of 'integration through values' approach aims to achieve, namely alienation of Muslim students from society. The interviewees do not convey a feeling of freedom and an experience of secure rights and tolerance from the Danish state. It is hence questionable that the policies can be regarded as unequivocal successes.

## **5 Conclusion**

The case concerns the structure of the educational system and whether or not it is necessary to define the parameters of private school autonomy more precisely in order to defend key national liberal democratic values, further integration and ensure the rights of children to education that makes them competent individuals and citizens. The proponents of a more precise definition of free school autonomy – which arguably leads to its reduction – have used both arguments from the national tradition and arguments which can be described as liberal intolerance. They have wanted to reduce the space of toleration by defining its limits more precisely. The recent legislative changes seem to mandate that students are equipped with democratic ethos and not just knowledge sufficient to live in a society with freedom and democracy, although state monitoring usually is more concerned with the knowledge that schools provide than with their ethos. The discourse of integration through values may also be said to be underpinning these efforts.

Opponents of the reduction of the space of toleration through the more precise delimitation of free school autonomy have argued that this goes against the Danish tradition of liberality and have furthermore based their criticism on liberal arguments about the rights of minorities to make their own choices as well as the need to trust that they as moral and political equals will make responsible choices for themselves and their children. Again, the emphasis is more on toleration and respect than on clear positive recognition of particular minority identities and values.



In terms of implementation it is likely that the increased state monitoring and the risk of being closed down have increased schools' attention to academic standards and to civic education. However, people at the receiving end of these policies generally feel that they are not trusted and their rights are not entirely secure. The system may pressure free schools to become more similar to the public school in order to reduce the risks and costs of pursuing a diverse vision of their school and its religious and ideological basis. Moreover, the experienced lack of trust may ultimately have counter-productive effects on the feeling of belonging to Danish society and democracy.

### **General Conclusions from the Two Case Studies**

This section draws some general conclusions from the two case studies. It discusses differences and similarities between the two cases and asks whether the cases represent continuity or change within Danish school traditions before it addresses the various Danish forms of acceptance and non-acceptance that the cases represent. Finally, the section points to some of the lessons that can be learned from the two cases.

#### *Similarities and Differences between the Two Cases*

In both cases the focus on integration is very central. There has been a lot of emphasis on transforming parents and students into democratic citizens with the right values. This is integration through values. There is in both cases strong emphasis on democratic citizenship as an ideal that has to be taught and practiced in schools among parents, students and school representatives. While the free primary schools are not under the same formal obligation to develop students into autonomous persons in the private and professional realm, they are under some obligation to create democratic virtues which in fact come very close to this (in particular if one takes a close look at how it is operationalized in the state's 140 indicator model). This is reminiscent of liberal perfectionism, or even better a strong republicanism, i.e. the civic integrationism which is very dominant in Denmark and which extends to the private life and the family. Becoming an 'active citizen' is regarded as a category which is and should be accessible to all. It represents the framework of the good life, including a reflexive relationship to one's own life style and life choices encompassing family relations. There is here no conscious distinction between political and comprehensive liberalism (even though the latter two are difficult to distinguish in practical terms, cf. Gutman 1995).

The two cases are to some connected the other way around. The lack of tolerance and respect (but not necessarily positive recognition) resulting in an alleged lack of accommodation in the public school system partially explains why immigrant students feel forced to leave it and attend Islamic free schools. This relates to the general discussion whether it is better to make exemptions to religious fundamentalists to keep them within realm of the public school (e.g. Brighouse 2008: 259-62). The alternative of having them leave and create their own private schools may on balance be worse because of the disintegrative effects etc. However, this is a balancing act that Danish politicians have not entered into. They have decided to make sure that also private schools are required to teach civic education.

Another similarity is that both public school autonomy and private school autonomy is defended, while increasingly circumscribed by central state regulation (goals, civic education). Two other competing steering rationales blend into the discussion about school autonomy and the rights of parents to choose school for their children. One relates to the concern about the academic effects (on weak learners) of segregation, and segregation's effect on the feeling of community and the acquisition of tolerance of others. The other relates to New Public Management ideas in the governance of the school sector: the schools compete for students and parents as customers (the

money follows the student). The schools' ability to deliver educational service is measured on centrally set goals. This is a question of creating a *market* rather than a question of ideologies, culture and religion. It is not clear that the market necessarily protects or leads to diversity: the same reduced number of models may be pursued with more or less success and resources.

In both the public school case and the Islamic free school case we see instances of nationalist and liberal intolerance although the distinction is easier to track in the Islamic free schools case (see below).

The counter discourses are different in the two cases. In the public schools case there is a pragmatic discourse which ultimately rests on a conception of toleration and respect which views others as moral and political equals (even when they endorse the 'wrong' values). This is far from the Danish liberality tradition and close to a concept of civility (Lægaard 2011). In fact it even seems to go 'beyond civility' as it entails a form of curiosity towards that to which one objects. At the same time, it is less than positive recognition of differences, identities and values as valuable per se.

The other counter discourse invokes the Danish tradition of liberality. Sometimes it shades into a defence of free school autonomy and parents' choice based on universal liberal principles and on the notion that people (parents and schools) should be trusted to use their freedom responsibly. In the universalistic version, it relies on the concept of regarding others as moral and political equals who can make these choices for themselves.

#### *Staying or Breaking With the Tradition?*

Public school autonomy has been reduced in the recent years despite a strong preference across the political spectrum for continued school autonomy. The permissibility of local accommodation according to experiences and conditions lie well within the tradition. As mentioned, part of the defence comes from a *New Public Management* perspective championing marketization. In fact, the possibility of being able to choose a public school outside of one's assigned school district seems to undercut the idea that the school is tied to a specific local democratically constituted 'school community'.

The pragmatic approach in the public school system to differences is also in line with the Danish tradition where 'cooperation' between different groups at the local level across differences has been seen as a virtue. On the other hand, the theoretical underpinning of 'appreciative dialogue' seems to be rather far away from the critical and confrontational ethos contained in the Danish idea about liberality.

In the free school case both proponents and opponents of more regulation see themselves as protectors of the Danish free school tradition. For the opponents, the political ambition to control and monitor what free schools teach students is a radical break with the tradition. Indeed, in the tradition of the Danish liberality, the rights of the parents/schools should be protected from the majority, while the majority – or anybody – would have the right freely and bluntly to criticise views and practices they find wrong.

In another interpretation, the free school tradition (the legacy of Grundtvig and Kold) is founded on a democratic movement against a repressive and anti-democratic state, meaning that the whole 'purpose' of the tradition was to create democratically engaged citizens. The right of the minority (parents) to form their own school is seen as a *democratic* minority right. Accordingly, those who use this right do so out of respect for fundamental democratic principles. This can be seen in the Danish Government's justification of its introduction and expansion of the 'democracy and freedom clause' in

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the law on free primary schools in 2002 and 2005. Educationalist and school historian Ove Korsgaard describes this break with the tradition as a way of defending it in these terms:

Recent years' tightening of the control represents a break with a tradition that goes way back in time. But the reason is that we now have a number of schools which do not place themselves in the classic free school tradition. Earlier some schools built on a different cultural or pedagogical foundation, but there were not a lot of schools whose support for the democracy we live in could be questioned (Ove Korsgaard, *Kristeligt Dagblad*, 20.09.2005).

Of course, opponents of the restricted school autonomy would say that this represents a lack of trust in the ability of parents and schools to use their freedom responsibly and hence a lack of respect for minorities as moral and political equals who are entitled to make their own decisions, even 'wrong' ones.

#### *Danish Conceptions of Acceptance*

There are two types of intolerance in Denmark: nationalist and liberal intolerance. Nationalist intolerance is based on the view that certain cultural and religious practices non-acceptable because they may undermine core national values and eventually the identity of Danish society. Liberal intolerance appears in the public school case and in the free school case. The first modality of liberal intolerance is seen in the concern that central liberal norms are undermined (in casu gender equality, democracy and fundamental rights). The second modality is perhaps most easily traced in the free school case and regards the divisive and segregative effects of too many religious (Islamic) free schools. Too much diversity endangers the sociological basis for maintaining a liberal democratic society. The third modality regards the creation of 'liberal people' and/or 'active citizens.' Again this modality is most obvious in the free school case where Islamic free schools are criticised for not preparing students to become competent individuals and citizens in a modern society 'with freedom and democracy'. Of course, it can be debated how 'liberal perfectionist' this criticism really is. Some non-perfectionist strands of liberalism would also be concerned about the potential harm done to the fundamental interests/rights of children by not providing them with the preconditions for a life independent of others and/or of the pursuit of collective political goals of different groups, minorities as well as majorities (Gutman 1995; Brighouse 1998).

In the Danish case it can be difficult to disentangle nationalist and liberal intolerance since nationalists often endorse very liberal values which they claim are special Danish values (or a special Danish interpretation of these values) rooted in a (Christian) national cultural tradition.

Conceptions of tolerance are in the Danish case based on both pragmatic and principled reasons. The pragmatic defence of tolerance is in the public school case found, first, in the defence of school autonomy by the ministers. It is seen as suboptimal and epistemologically challenging to make rules on the (non) accommodation of cultural and religious differences which should apply uniformly to all schools in Denmark. Secondly, tolerance is defended pragmatically at the school level with reference to the goal at hand: accommodations have to be made to ensure the well-being and education of the children. In the free school case, the pragmatic argument for tolerance is less prevalent and atypical in a country obsessed with integration: free schools allow the peaceful co-existence of two religions/cultures which are fundamentally incompatible.

In the public school case the argument for toleration on pragmatic grounds in the 'integration through inclusion' strategy shades into arguments which mirror more principled liberal arguments for toleration, namely that immigrant parents need to be regarded as moral and political equals who are entitled to make their own (even wrong) choices and that their views (as parents) have to be taken

seriously as those of equals. In the free school case we find the same kind of argument with regard to the schools' and the parents' use of their freedom of choice. At times, this argument is based on the Danish free school tradition rather than on general liberal principles. This is the part of the 'free mindedness' or liberality tradition that underscores the guaranteed equal civil rights (legal tolerance). (The other part of liberality promotes a frank and confrontational ethos combined with the development 'think skin' and enables you to 'endure' 'scorn, mocking and ridicule' (Mohamed Cartoon crisis), is not very salient here). Underlying these arguments are 'respect conceptions' of tolerance.

In the two cases, there are only very few instances of something which goes 'beyond tolerance' in the shape of claims about positive recognition. In the public school case, the theoretical framework underlying the idea of the 'appreciative dialogue' require respect for the status of immigrant parents as moral and 'political' equals, but stops short of demanding positive recognition of the identities and values of immigrant parents. The recognition of/respect for the parents concerns them as *people* who hold values, not their values. The central idea in the appreciative dialogue comes close to the notion of civility and perhaps even goes beyond, since it demands a principled curiosity towards that to which one objects and even towards that which one rejects. This arguably implies expanding the range of what is 'normal' and part of the 'public space' of the local school community. In the free school case one commentator noted that it was strange that nobody could recognise the positive value of immigrants acquiring Danish traditions for collective self-organisation in associations and free schools. Otherwise claims regarding any need to go 'beyond toleration' were sparse.

### *Lessons Learned*

From the public school case it seems evident that the dialogue-based integration through inclusion and the related practical measures seem to be effective in ensuring the welfare and education of the students. Conversely, the more principled and symbolically laden 'integration through values' discourse can be counterproductive for the involved parties' motivation and mutual communication.

In the free school case, it is unclear whether or not policies are necessary and/or should be regarded as a success. Undoubtedly they prevent schools from teaching openly divisive and fundamentalist doctrines and they are likely to have reduced the number of schools with low academic quality and deficient civic education strategies. However, the unintended consequence of state monitoring may be alienation rather than integration. The price to be paid may be that students, parents and teachers feel that they are under a general suspicion of not being full and trustworthy citizens; a suspicion they will never be able to remove. Moreover, the method for establishing whether or not a school lives up to the freedom and democracy clause is intransparent to the target group and gives them the feeling of not having secure rights.

It is difficult to gauge the long term effects on toleration, feeling of community and reciprocal understanding of the general segregation that results from the existence of free primary schools and the free choice of public school. However, there is no doubt that segregation can have serious effects on the academic achievements of weak learners in particular. On the other hand, for some minority students Islamic free schools may give a more secure learning environment where their identity is positively reinforced or just not 'an issue.' This may improve their academic achievements. In fact, measured on their teaching effect the top 20 schools in Denmark include four Arabic/Islamic free schools ([undervisningseffekt.dk](http://undervisningseffekt.dk); see the general introduction to the report).

*Key Messages for Policy Makers*

*Public Schools*

In relation to the public schools it is advisable to continue to spread the ideas of the appreciative dialogue between the schools, the parents and the students. This ought to be the task of the Ministry of Education as well as the municipal school administrations. One risk pertaining to the local school autonomy in Denmark is that it can be random whether schools adopt best practices. Or even make the effort to seek out information and learn about new methods. At the same time it should be remembered that the appreciative dialogue itself presupposes local autonomy since solutions found through appreciative dialogue require local decision makers to act in a flexible manner. It is procedural and not a one-size-fits-all approach.

*Private Schools*

For national level policy makers wanting to maintain a diverse free school sector it is important that the costs of establishing and maintaining a free primary schools with an alternative philosophy and pedagogy is not too high in terms of having to document and monitor academic standards and the requirement to teach freedom and democracy. The apparent uncertainty that schools some schools feel about what it takes to live up to requirements and their reluctance to run the risk of not being found to live up to them may well lead them to not use the degree of freedom that the current law actually allow them. While there is a dilemma contained in forcing a limited definition on how schools ought to teach in line with the freedom and democracy clause because it invariably will reduce the flexibility in how the requirement can be met, a more simple and transparent evaluation model could increase the feeling of certainty. Moreover, it would be fairer to schools if the model was mainly oriented towards the kind of *knowledge* that should be transmitted through lessons since a requirement to create a specific democratic *ethos* among students arguably is much more difficult to measure. When does for example criticism of certain aspects of democracy as a form of government represent lack commitment to democratic values? After all criticism of democracy abound, even among people who carry no totalitarian convictions. The emphasis on knowledge rather than on ethos also seem to be in line with the experience of the Ministry of Education has had with monitoring, namely that is usually lack of knowledge transmitted through lessons that is the problem, not attitudes towards democracy and freedom. Moreover, increased certainty among schools may also lessen potential alienating effects of monitoring, resulting from the experience of being under general suspicion.

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## **Annex 1 List of interviews**

1. Marianne Jelved, Spokesperson on Education, Social Liberal Party (MP), interviewed 22 July 2011
2. Christine Antorini, Spokesperson on Education, Social Democrats (MP), interviewed, 5 August 2011
3. Peter Juel Jensen, Spokesperson on Education, Liberal Party, (MP), interviewed 5. August 2011
4. Rasmus Jarlov, Member of Copenhagen City Council's committee on Education and former Spokesperson on Education, Conservative Party (MP), interviewed 28 January 2011
5. Anne Vang. Copenhagen Mayor for Education, Social Democrats, interviewed 11 February 2011
6. Tine Fehrmann, Special Consultant, Ministry of Education, interviewed 17 March 2011
7. Anders Andersen, former Special Consultant for Monitoring of Free Schools, Ministry of Education, interviewed 21 June 2011.
8. Carsten Dahlerup. Copenhagen School Administration, Head of the Section on Pedagogic Professionalism, interviewed 17 March 2011
9. D. J.. Copenhagen City's 'Integration Task Force', interviewed 18 February 2011
10. Mette Kirk, Chairperson of the Copenhagen Parents' association 'Use the People's School', interviewed 10 March 2011
11. Britt Vorgod Pedersen, Chairperson of the School Board of the Holberg School, interviewed 11 March 2011
12. Anders Bondo Christensen, Chairman of the Danish Teachers' Association, interviewed 10 May 2011
13. Anders Balle, Chairman of the Association of School Directors, interviewed 17 March 2011
14. Arne Pedersen, Chairman of the Free School Teachers' Association, interviewed 22 June 2011
15. Ebbe Lilliendal, Chairman of the Danish Free School Association, interviewed 23 June 2011
16. Ulla Tirsted, Vice Director of the Caroline School, Jewish Private School in Copenhagen, interviewed 20 June 2011.

## **Annex II Examples of Interview Guides**

The interviews were semi-structured interviews. The interview guides were differentiated according to the interviewee's knowledge and position in relation to the specific case or event. Some interviewees were interviewed both with regard to the Holberg School case and with regard to the discussion about free primary schools.

### **Interviewguide for the Holberg School Case**

1. What was at stake in the Holberg school case?  
Do you think that others agree with your interpretation of the case?
2. What was the result of the debate, how did the problem get solved?



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Are you satisfied with this ending, with how the problem got solved?

3. What were the considerations behind the manner in which the problem was solved?  
Why did you/they continue to hold the women only meetings as planned?  
What were the considerations / concerns underlying this decision?

Did it have any effect on the school's work with the management of cultural and religious diversity that the women-only-meetings got so much attention in the media / the political debate? Which effect?

Do you think it has had any effect in general on how schools in general (in the Copenhagen area) relate / deal with this type of questions (including also for example halal meet, separate showers, gym classes, the language spoken among pupils, accommodation of religious holidays)? Is this effect beneficial?

4. Is the case finally resolved or does the conflict/problem persist? In which way?
5. Could you have found another/better solution to the problem?

Is it important that all the schools handle questions like these in the same manner?

How important is it to leave the solution of such questions to individual schools and let it depend on the specific circumstances they work under as well as their experiences and convictions?

Which/whose concerns should be included when one makes decision on such questions, for example regarding women-only meetings? Which concerns should be given the most weight?

Who should be included in the decisions? Are they included in the decisions?

6. Some thought that the women-only meetings represented misunderstood tolerance towards un-modern, male dominated cultural and/or religious norms. Do you agree?

What does tolerance mean to you? Is tolerance an important value?

What does practising tolerance in the context of schools mean?

Why should we (not) be/practice toleration? Do you think that others see this in the same way?

How do you think the school (the public school in general) should relate to beliefs/attitudes, for example religiously based, which prima facie seem in conflict with the value basis of the Danish public school (i.e. in the law on the public school) [Cues: ignore them, criticize them, prohibit them, try to understand them better].

Can you give an example of such beliefs/attitudes? What about demands for separate gym classes for girls and boys. Demands for exemption from music lessons, sexual education? Demands about not using teaching materials which is seen as offensive? Do we need to expand the boundaries for what is seen as 'normal' or acceptable? What are the limits for what can be accepted? Why do you set the limits there?

Do you think others see it in the same way?

One thing is beliefs/attitudes. Another thing is actions/practices. How should the school relate to practices which which prima facie seem in conflict with the value basis of the Danish public school (i.e. in the law on the public school). Can you give an example? Specific ways of dressing? Social pressure towards practicing religion.

Do we need to expand the boundaries for what is seen as ‘normal’ or acceptable? What are the limits for what can be accepted? Why do you set the limits there? Do you think others see it in the same way?

On different occasions Jews have been given the well-intended advice not to send their children to the public school on Nørrebro (the inner city area in question with high percentage of (Muslim) immigrants). The advice has been given because of fears of (anti-Semitic) bullying of Jewish children). Do you have any comments on that?

7. How do the schools in general handle cultural and religious diversity?  
Are there some guidelines that are generally followed / should be followed?  
What motivates these guidelines? Do they work well? Can you give me examples of solutions to problems regarding cultural or religious differences which have been successes – and some which have been failures?

Should we teach the pupils to be tolerant? How do you/would you do that – can you give examples?

Are (social) cultural and religious differences in the school a good thing or a bad thing? Examples of if/when good/ bad thing? Why good /bad?

For some toleration is about not forbidding what one finds wrong, that is, for example different culturally and religiously based beliefs and practices that one finds wrong. Do you share this understanding of toleration?

### **Interview Guide for the Free Primary School Case**

1. How do you view the changes of the law regarding the free primary schools in the later years?
  - Freedom and democracy clause, gender equality
  - Definitions of targets for the individual school subjects
  - Rules on school monitoring
  - Demands that targets descriptions are publically available at the schools’ webpages
  - The requirement that access to upper secondary school is based on the People’s Schools school leaving certificate

2. Is this a reduction in the autonomy of the schools? Does it represent a lack of trust in parents and schools? What do you think has been the primary concern?

[If less autonomy:] What constitutes the greatest reduction in autonomy? Is it for example more in the target descriptions for the individual taught subjects, the requirement regarding the school leaving certificate than the rules on monitoring?

3. How easy is it to keep one’s own value basis, special pedagogical approach and identity with these rules? Has/have the school / the free primary schools become a part of the People’s School, – a public school system?
4. What effect has it had on the staff, the parents and the students that there are now more precise demands?
5. Oftentimes the free primary schools are associated with the Danish concept of liberality. How do you view that? What is meant by liberality?

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6. Do the legislative changes of the later years represent a break with the Danish tradition of free schools and in what way?
7. More specifically, what is the content of the Danish Free School Tradition? Do schools have to be fundamentally democratic in order for them to be established? Or is it possible to imagine that some schools think that democracy and participation in society is not what should be one's key concern in life? What about schools which might be critical towards democracy?
8. Do the legislative changes of the later years represent a reduction in liberality or tolerance on the side of the state / the majority?
9. Some schools, in particular the religious ones, have been criticised for not educating their students to become tolerant towards those who are not like themselves and/or that they do not respect them. Is this a legitimate criticism?

There is also some concern that the students are taught conservative norms, e.g. as regards gender roles, homosexuality. Is this a justified criticism?

10. What does one do to prepare (educate) students to a society with freedom and democracy?
  - What does tolerance imply?
  - Where's the limit of toleration?
  - What does it mean to respect the principles of freedom and democracy?
  - How does one deal with extremism among students?
11. Would it be fair to demand that the free primary schools reflect the surrounding society in terms of the composition of its group of students and hence that their recruitment policy reflects this – or would this run up against some basic principles in the free school tradition?
  - Would it be disruptive for the ability of the school to maintain its own special identity?
12. How do you view the acceptance of diversity at each individual school?
13. One point of criticism is that the schools are not tolerant towards religious differences. Another point of criticism is that the Danish system with free primary schools results in lack of understanding and tolerance among groups who attend internally homogenous schools. What is your opinion of that?
14. The state, the Ministry of Education, has in certain cases run special monitoring of a number of free primary schools. What do you think the consequences are of this special monitoring – i.e. both the possibility/risk of being subjected to such monitoring and the actual monitoring?
  - Does it lead to a feeling of insecurity?
  - Is it clear what is required to meet the demands?



