



DANISH GOOD PRACTICES FOR COMBATTING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING: A CASE STUDY FROM COPENHAGENⁱ

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Abstract:

This study focuses on comprehensive measures related to Early School Leaving (ESL) and on effective institutions in the Danish Education System, more particularly, on the everyday practices of the Youth Guidance Centre of Copenhagen (hereafter YGCC) and the Copenhagen Youth School System (hereafter CYSS) by giving voices to participants who work and study there. The research also points out the main role of CYSS in promoting school attendance through the lense of dropouts/at-risk students. For the qualitative inquiry, empirical data were collected from observations conducted in CYSS; a total of 18 interviews with former students; and a total of 20 interviews with a range of stakeholders including policy makers, school management, teachers and guidance counsellors. The qualitative research described herein had the potential to be more sensitive to the micro-processes of students' experiences in education in order to get a deeper insight into the characteristics of the Danish institutional network that adapts flexibly to the needs of students and of a local community.

Keywords: early school leaving, flexible policy environment and education system, social inclusion, comprehensive measures, alternative arenas, individual study pathways

1. Introduction

This study is part of a PhD thesis (written by the present author), which demonstrates a comparative research study of comprehensive measures related to Early School Leaving (ESL) in Denmark, England and Hungary. ESL has been an important societal issue for more than 30 years. Reducing ESL to less than 10% by 2020 was agreed as a key

ⁱ The previous version of this article was more simple and published in Hungarian making suggestions for Hungarian policy makers but it has been updated, improved and written in English for your journal. Some parts of the article are part of the context chapter of my thesis which was completed at the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick in 2018.

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objective of the Europe 2020 strategy and one of the five benchmarks of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (TWG, 2013). Though ESL is a multifaceted phenomenon with multiple causes, according to EU policies, comprehensive strategies should be introduced and implemented to reduce ESL that must focus on the whole spectrum of education and include prevention, intervention and compensation measures (OECD, 2012). Presenting the Danish good practices in this study demonstrates how Danish students benefit from the comprehensive strategies concerned.

This article is based on fieldwork carried out in two phases, first in 2012, and second in the academic year of 2014/15 over the course of 14 months. During my stay in Denmark, I made a huge effort to understand the Danish culture, society and everyday life. The people I met emphasised the importance of equality and of equal opportunity which are represented strongly not only in society but specifically in the education system of Denmark.

2. Research Methods

I applied qualitative research method in order to perceive a subjective dimension. Empirical data were collected from observations; and interviews with former students and with a range of stakeholders including policy makers, teachers and guidance counsellors. For the data analysis grounded theory was applied, which has three main stages: the continuing discovery of emerging themes which guides further data collection; the coding of data and creation of categories; and finally, the contextualisation of findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For this qualitative analysis Nvivo software was used.

3. Career Guidance and Education System in Denmark

The Education for All theory contributes significantly to Denmark's competitiveness and increases the opportunity for innovative development. This perspective is actually supported by one of the government's welfare reforms, drafted in 2006, which declared the ambitious goal that by 2010 85%, and by 2015, 95%ⁱⁱⁱ of all young Danish people complete a youth education programme (equal to the education of secondary educational institutions in other EU countries) (Madsen, 2010). This ambitious aspiration made the introduction of different policy initiatives necessary; one of them was an increase in the role of career guidance to stimulate young people's participation in education (Plant & Thomsen, 2011; NFF, 2014). In Denmark, guidance is clearly stated to be a measure for reducing ESL (Cedefop, 2015).

Lifelong guidance has a long history in Denmark; it can be traced back in the 1880s, when the psychometric test was considered a modern approach (Plant, 2009).

ⁱⁱⁱ This is the 2011 Government Programme (Et Danmark, der star sammen):

http://www.stm.dk/publikationer/Et_Danmark_der_staar_sammen_11/Regeringsgrundlag_okt_2011.pdf

The current coherent advisory system, where young people are in the focus, can be derived from this time.

Decades ago career guidance was not referred to as a separate profession, but it was conducted by those teachers who were interested in the topic, who had reduced number of hours, so they could spend their vacated hours on guidance. There was a significant turning point in 2004, when the Danish government declared – based on the ‘EU Resolution on Lifelong Guidance’ (2004) – that career guidance should be a completely separate, full-time, professional job that requires a degree (Plant & Thomsen, 2012).

One of the counsellors reported on the topic:

“Yes, 2004 has been an important year for us...the changes in the legislation brought a few social controls into guidance, but also made it more professional. I have 15 years of experience at the field, and I can tell that by obtaining the degree a new identity and professional pride was brought to counsellors, moreover, we won recognition of other professions...since in the old system I was teacher and counsellor at the same time, and this position led to a role conflict, furthermore, during the short guidance courses we could not acquire the knowledge we could after 2004 (due to the criterion of having a degree)...in the past we were not prepared enough for this serious job...” (Counsellor 4)

On the basis of the reform, guidance counsellors who work at the different centres can obtain a degree in three different areas: a Bachelor’s degree in the field of public administration that targets educational and vocational guidance; a Diploma in educational, vocational and career guidance; or a Master’s degree in Guidance. The Bachelor’s degree and the Diploma that focus on the education of career practitioners in all sectors can be obtained from university colleges, whereas the Master’s degree is awarded at DPU, Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University and focusses on research, leadership, development, evaluation and teaching (Plant & Thomsen, 2011). Danish guidance counsellors are taught about a number of theories, mainly person-centred and constructivist approaches. Also of importance is the holistic approach that is adopted during their work (Plant, 2009). Trained guidance counsellors do ‘vejledning’, which is the Danish term for career counselling; i.e., guiding someone on their way. This covers personal counselling, school counselling, educational and vocational guidance and counselling, career guidance and development, while counsellors also supervise students during their college and university studies (Plant & Thomsen, 2011).

The 2004 resolution also determined how the guidance counsellor should lead young people to the normality accepted by the society, where the active social participation is based on work and education. This way, from the perspective of social policy the career guidance is a soft governance mechanism, as through guidance people choose a field that meets their own and the society’s, namely the labour market’s interests. However, this mechanism provides little room for alternative options and

clearly demonstrates the role of social control, that is present in legislative initiatives, such as in Youth Action Programme 2010^{iv}.

Another important step in the improvement of guidance counselling was that so-called Youth Guidance Counselling Centres (hereafter YGCC) were established. These are independent institutions that employ guidance counsellors. The primary task of the centres is to mentor the transition period from primary to secondary school, and also to familiarise young people with their own aptitudes, interests and opportunities to help them make valid decisions in connection with their education and employment. The target group of these institutions is primarily young people in primary and secondary schools; and second, also secondary school students and those who have dropped out. However, counsellors are specialised at working with diverse age and target groups (e.g. students with special educational needs, and young offenders). Since 2003 – since the policy environment started to focus on this target group – it is more typical that they concentrate on young people who have dropped out, or who are exposed to the risk of dropping-out (Plant, 2013).

There are 48 youth guidance counselling centres in Denmark, covering 98 local governments. Those young people who finished their secondary education can turn to the 7 regional centres, which main task is to mentor the transition from secondary school to higher education (UVM, 2015).

It is important to note that counsellors are available not only in the centres and the different educational institutions, but in libraries, youth clubs, sports clubs and employment centres as well, cooperating with mentors and other supporting professionals. Young people had positive feedbacks regarding the counsellors' availability and their presence at several forums.

As mentioned above, since 2010 the Danish government has adopted legislative packages – 'Youth Packages' – that target specifically young people between the age of 15 and 24. The measures formulated in the packages principally targeted the reduction of youth unemployment by spending more money on practice/internship, trainings, for the establishment of job-creating services. Of course, the education, training of the target group constitutes a significant part of the packages as well, since they are closely related to employment (Madsen, 2010).

Measures brought changes into career guidance, as guidance was available for young people from 6th grade until they reach the age of 24, and they could decide whether to grab the opportunity or not. Packages, however, changed the character and nature of the guidance, so formally guidance counsellors start working with every single student from the 6th-7th grade. Services cannot be chosen voluntarily any more, but it is the counsellors' task to take care of those young people who belong to them (Plant, 2010).

At the end of the comprehensive school, which is the 9th grade, based on the class teacher's evaluation, his own observations and the personal meetings with the student, the counsellor prepares a summary on every single student. Based on the individual

^{iv} In Danish: 'Ungdommens Uddannelsesvejledning'

skills (e.g. motivation, responsibility, precision, the student's desires), social skills (e.g. cooperation with mates, behaviour in the community) and their academic results the counsellor determines the preparedness for transition to secondary school of the student in question and also indicates the type of school best for the student. This evaluation is the result of one-and-a-half year work that the counsellor starts in the first half of the 8th grade with the student, discussing the plans of further education, that are re-evaluated by the middle of the 9th grade.

In fact, there is one and a half year to determine whether the student is prepared for transition to secondary school. It helps the students' career choice that they can have a 'taste' of secondary school and the working life for two-two weeks.^v During this time they have the opportunity to visit different type of schools and work programmes, in order to decide easier which direction to choose at the end of the comprehensive school. If someone is not 'prepared' for the transition based on his own ability, competence, academic results, then he can participate in another alternative educational programme (see below). On the basis of the interviews with the counsellors, it can be concluded that there are further typical problems (e.g. school phobia, eating disorders) according to which someone is 'not prepared' for secondary school.

The counsellor's evaluations are not just recommendations. The student can attend the type of school the counsellor approves. If the student does not accept it, he can appeal and turn to the school of his choice and the school can decide whether to receive the student or not, based on the school's own admission criteria.

Another obligatory task of the counsellors is to help every 15-16 years old student belonging to them to establish an individual education plan that includes their plans after the comprehensive school. Parents/guardians can also participate in the preparation of the plan and they have to approve them by signing it. Counsellors reported that their cooperation is usually successful.

The other major change after the introduction of the programme packages is that counsellors have to contact those 15-17 years old young people who dropped out for some reason, and counsellors have to find a new form of education or job for them within 30 days.

The job of counsellors to fulfil this important task is helped by a national database where every student is traceable, because schools, tax authority, ergo every agent who got in touch with the youth supply data. Therefore, for counsellors the career of the youth concerned is clearly traceable.

Counsellors urge those who dropped out to return in the education system. As a first step, the counsellor invites youths and their families for a meeting, in order to modify their educational plans, and then it is signed again by all participants. After this, the counsellor keeps track of the youth and if needed, they modify the plan again. In

^v This is the so called Bridge Building that helps young people get a more realistic picture of the life in secondary school and the different workplaces. The organisation of the programmes belongs to the given career guidance centre. During the two week programmes young people can talk to the students, employees at the given institution, they can visit different kind of activities. Almost every student takes part in the two programmes with different profiles.

extreme cases, if the young person is not willing to cooperate with the counsellor despite the multiple attempts and modifications, does not participate in any educational, training form, does not work either, the counsellor is obliged to record it to the social services that forwards the case to the local government which can withdraw the financial aid the family receives after the young person.

One of the counsellors emphasised:

"...it is the will of the politics, which goes completely against the nature of guidance...luckily it happens really rarely, as we have a good relationship with our students...in numbers, in the last two years there were five such cases (two small towns' schools belong to this centre)...this is the task we love about this job the least, we are counsellors, not authorities..." (Counsellor, 5)

As the last element of introducing the Danish context, I am writing briefly about the school system. Regarding the placing of children in the pre-school period (between 0-6/7 years) in Denmark there are several institutions to choose from, such as day care centers, kindergartens and institutions integrated by age, where babies and kindergarteners are together.

The compulsory school attendance in Denmark is 9 years and the student can fulfil this obligation in alternative or private schools^{vi}, even within the framework of homeschooling (UVM, 2015). After the kindergarten, most children attend the so called Folkeskole that is a comprehensive institution supported by the local government. The school begins with a preliminary phase, then comes the 9 year long primary and elementary-secondary education, furthermore, there is a 10th grade which is not compulsory, only optional (UVM, 2015). At the end of the 9th grade, students take an exam in order to attend secondary school, and on the above-mentioned competence evaluation, prepared by the counsellor it is determined whether students are prepared for the next grade.

The upper secondary education primarily consists of the general secondary, high school level programmes and programmes of vocational training of different level. These forms of education are flexible, they are easily interoperable. Most of the students – approximately 46.000 of them, more than 60% of the students in secondary school – choose the 4 high school level programmes, from which 3 (STX, HHX, HTX) can be started after finishing the 9th grade, and one (HF) at the end of the 10th grade (UVM, 2015).

STX and HF programmes concentrate on the humanities, natural sciences and social science. In the framework of the HHX programme business and economic studies are integrated with foreign languages and general subjects. In the HTX programme

^{vi} In Danish private schools – despite that they get significant support from the government – parents have to pay for their children's education, however, this amount is very low, making it available for everybody. Regarding its character, it can be said that they are called private schools either because it follows an alternative pedagogic program (e.g. Rogers School, Rudolf Steiner School, Free school) or it belongs to a church.

students can acquire knowledge in technical, scientific and beside that in traditional subjects. The main target of these educational programmes is to prepare young people for higher education. Most of the students (approx. 7 out of 10) who attend general secondary (education) programmes continue their studies in higher education, which includes highly widespread institutions with different profile (UVM, 2015). There are different types of higher educational institutions: university, faculty of science, another institution offering higher education diploma and non-academic higher education institutions.

In case of secondary schools offering vocational qualification, we can differentiate institutions that offer basic and institutions that offer higher qualification. The vocational schools offer flexible trainings with different profiles for young people from the traditional sandwich-type programmes^{vii} to the personalised vocational training^{viii}.

4. Combatting ESL in Copenhagen

Those professionals who took part in my interviews expressed their commitment to help young people finish their secondary studies. Many of them emphasised that young people need the proper knowledge, competences and self-confidence in order to being able to adapt to the challenges of the volatile labour market.

4.1 Youth Guidance Counselling Centre of Copenhagen

The Youth Guidance Counselling Centre of Copenhagen that was established by the Copenhagen municipality in 2004 plays an important role in the support of young people's secondary studies. In the municipality, the institution belongs to the Children and Youth Committee together with the different agents of the educational system that helps the cooperation between the institutions. 120-130 guidance counsellors work in the centre and they principally serve Copenhagen's primary and secondary schools.

Directors of the centre reported that they have an intensive professional relationship with the municipality; they inform them about their activities, supply data that help the municipality to use state resources more effectively for the development of the education and the related services. The cooperation is eased by that the local government's representative takes part in the monthly meetings of the counsellors, where they can agree on their concepts, possibilities.

Regarding the above, the director of the centre told me:

^{vii} This programme combines the practical training – that usually takes place at a company – and the studying at a vocational school.

^{viii} EGU – it is a 1.5-3 year long, personalised, basic programme, where the practical training dominates, students have 20-40 classes, it is determined in the student's personal plan. Both the training place and the school are chosen based on the student's needs. The target group includes those young people under 30, who are not present either in education or at the labour market, who are mostly practice-oriented and who had weak academic results.

“My colleagues complain a lot about the increased bureaucracy, because they feel like they are spending less time with the youth, that is, by the way, true...however, I constantly emphasise that in order to being recognised, we need to inform the decision-makers, statistics and summaries are required, so they see where money should be spent. Secondly, if we do not make our voice heard they might easily forget about us.”

Besides the compulsory tasks (career guidance from 7th grade until the age of 24, mentoring the transition from lower secondary education to upper secondary education and preparation of individual education plans, and keeping track of the youth) listed above, the centre also participates in the management of other activities, cooperates with another organisations in order to help youth from various sides.

One of the cooperative institutions is the job centre where the guidance counsellor works on a weekly basis in order to prepare an individual education plan – if needed – for those unemployed young people who do not find a proper job. It is important to note that young people can turn to the employment centre from the age of 18 and they can require unemployment benefit from this age as well. One of the counsellors reported that young people use less of this option; they rather search for other alternatives, as there are many options to choose from. It might be appealing to choose education because from the age of 18, if young people are students of any upper-secondary or higher educational programme, they receive SU (student grant from 2000-5000 DK, which is a fixed monthly amount; its measure depends on whether the students’ lives with his family or on his own). Students receive SU until they finish their upper-secondary and/or higher educational studies.

However, if the unemployed young person feels not prepared for returning to education, with the help of the counsellor he can find a temporary workplace where he can work until being ready to start an educational programme. The co-worker of the counselling centre reported that they cooperate with about 50 workplaces that employ those students who are directed there.

The career guidance centre’s holistic approach is demonstrated by the fact that different sectors cooperate to effectively solve young people’s complex problems. Besides the job centre and the social services, the centre works closely with the police. The prevention and handling of juvenile delinquency is part of the local government’s mandated remit. Therefore, a defined form of cooperation – so-called SSP – between schools, social services and the police is well-established. Additionally, there is a counsellor in the guidance centre who is the head of SSP and specialises in helping students who already have a bad record or are at risk. One guidance counsellor reported about this job that:

“Yes, SSP helps a lot, because it is very important that all participants cooperate to find a solution for crime prevention...it is especially hard to help those who are part of a gang and want to break out...for this, we have a particular solution called EXIT which means we move the young person to a place where gang members cannot find him while we help him to return to active life again. Another difficult task is to convince those who traffic

drugs [to stop], as the amount of SU I can offer is nowhere near the amount they earn by dealing. Nevertheless, I feel that any effort is much more effective since we work together with the SSP participants. (Counsellor 6)

Another duty of the SSP counsellors is to support school attendance and the progress of young offenders who are under the age of 18, as the latter may stay in an institution reserved for juvenile delinquents, but during the day are allowed to go to school. He also expressed his opinion on this:

“It is easier to break a criminal career by integrating the youth into a school community, giving him the chance to continue. It is also important to know that in Denmark young people until the age of 25 are not contained in criminal records.” (Counsellor, 6)

In addition to the institutions mentioned above, the guidance centre, following a holistic approach, also cooperates with psychologists, pedagogical centres, dyslexia centres and psychiatric institutions to deal with students’ multi-faceted problems. Many of the counsellors I interviewed confirmed that they have a good relationship with every institution, especially with the schools.

Lastly, there is another forum for cooperation between YGCC and all secondary educational institutions, including the schools of the Copenhagen Youth School System (hereafter YSS), which is a major professional event^{ix}. During this event, the aforementioned schools and co-workers of the YGCØ introduce themselves to 9th grade students to support them with their career decisions.

4.2 Copenhagen Youth School System

The Danish folk high school, as an approach, can be traced back to the 19th century, to the concept and work of Grundtvig and Kold, who believed in the voluntary participation in education, in the importance of responsibility towards one another and most importantly, in the ‘school for life’ theory. Its purpose is to find an answer for those constantly changing social, economic, cultural challenges that the individual, community, nation and the whole human race has to face (DfL, 2015). Later, in 1942, during the Second World War it was codified into law that every local government must have a youth school that functioned as a weapon in the fight against the spreading of ideas of fascism and dictatorial systems. It was an aim to keep young people off the streets after school with the organisation of interesting afternoon programmes, in order to become the democratic citizens of the Danish society. The organisation of afternoon free time activities remained the main task of the youth school. From the second half of the 90s, the two main educational structures similar to the current one have been formed, namely the extra-curricular (free time) education and the full-time education. At that time, YSS has been only a small school system, however, today it is a key

^{ix} This takes the form of an open professional forum that is held in the second half of November of every year. It takes place in Copenhagen’s biggest concert hall, the Forum Copenhagen.

character in Copenhagen's educational scene, moreover, according to the director of the network, it became a coherent system and it also represents an approach. The emergence of this approach was highly influenced by the school system's joining to E2C (Association of Cities and Second Chance Schools) as the director reported they have adapted the second chance conception, namely that 'every person's desire is to get a second chance'.

A number of authors have defined the principles of the second chance provision (Brynaa & Johansen, 2010; Cresson at al., 1995; EC, 2001; Lafond & Termsette, 1999) as follows:

- Such schools have supportive staff; they provide psycho-social support and intensified career guidance;
- They give an insight into theoretical and practical education within which students can obtain professional and social competences, employability skills, and discover the world of work (e.g. through interviews with employers, or visits to different workplaces);
- Pedagogical methods are characterised by innovation, flexibility and personalisation, as well as developing the skill of 'learning how to learn';
- Students should respect school rules and obligations, others and themselves, as well as feeling that they are part of a community;
- Programmes apply so-called 'active pedagogy' methods, so students explore cognition, and they also take responsibility for their own studying;
- Models of study and evaluation are based on success-oriented pedagogy with the goal of strengthening the sense of efficiency.

The design and delivery of second chance provision is complex, as providers are seeking solutions to multi-faceted educational and social problems and are influenced by local context and national policy (Cresson at al., 1995; EC, 2001; Lafond & Termsette, 1999). In line with this situation, the interview data from different stakeholders (teachers and other professionals involved in inter-agency work) in this research illustrate how second chance schools create networks with support organisations and employers in their local context.

As mentioned above, the operation of the youth school is the local government's task; furthermore, also its task is to take care of those young people who are not ready for the transition to higher school level after finishing the 9th grade of the comprehensive school, or who dropped out of the secondary education. Besides the youth school network, there are other institutional initiatives for solving this in Copenhagen. Briefly, there are four institutional initiatives: (1) different full-time programmes of the youth schools (2) basic vocational training programmes (3) 10th grade (4) Produktionskole – school focusing on the creation and sale of one common 'product'[×].

[×] Students spend half/one year at this school, working in smaller groups on a given project/product that is made for an external partner's order. Students negotiate about the product's parameters with the partner, and also agree on its price. These projects are complemented with an intensive career planning counselling and a self-improvement;

The figure below well illustrates the institution network that helps the transition from the Copenhagen lower secondary education (end of the 9th grade) to the upper secondary education and also shows the cooperation between the sectors.

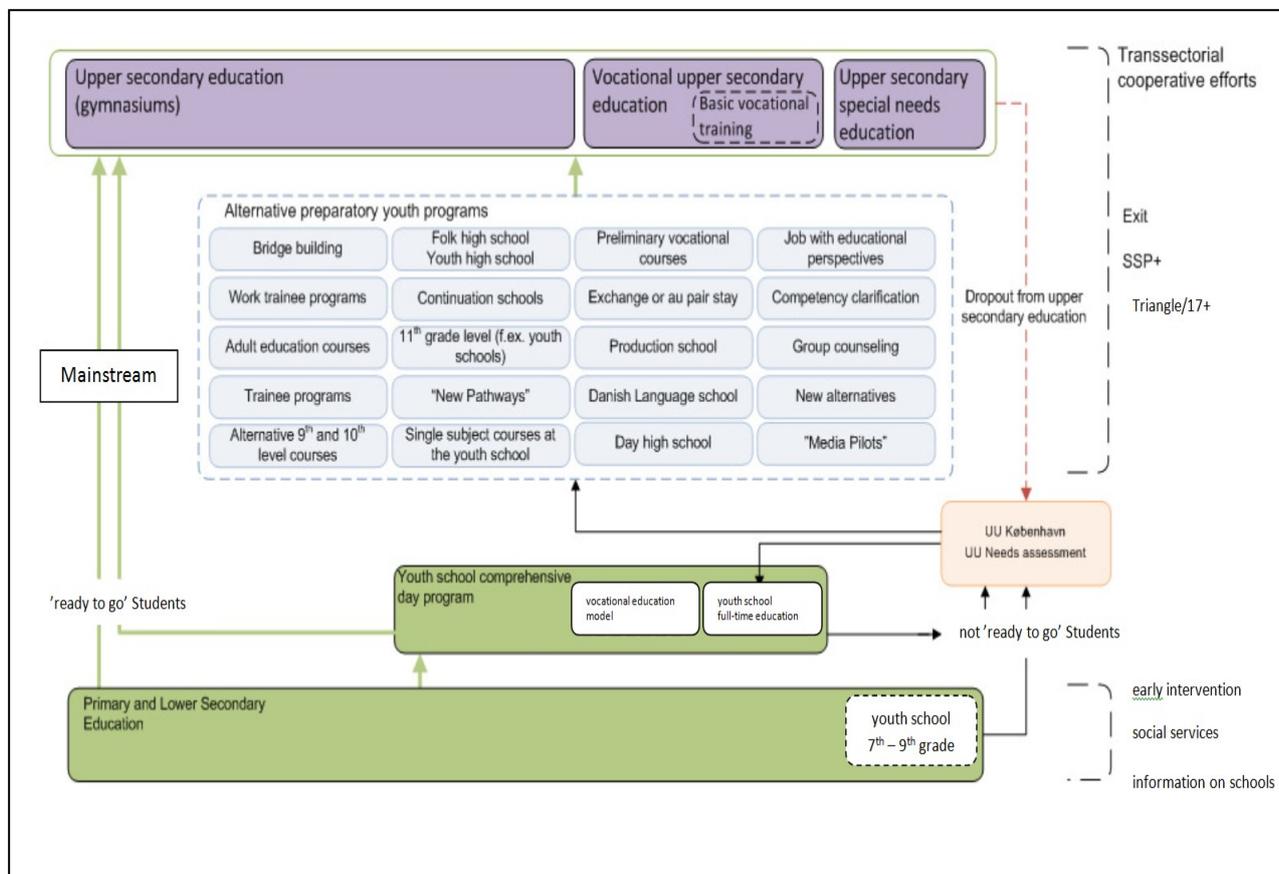


Figure 1: Transition from lower secondary education to upper secondary education.
 (Source: Brynaa, power point presentation, slide 5 (2010))

As it can be seen, there is an entire spectrum of possibilities for young people of Copenhagen. An alumnus declared: *‘The nature and offer of the alternative courses changes constantly and flexibly, reflecting Copenhagen’s needs’*. The principal claimed: *‘with the offered courses we constantly need to serve local needs, we need to consider decision makers’ and youth’s expectations when preparing the programmes. All of the programmes have been created when there was a demand for them.’*

Employees at YSS launch programmes with new educational contents and methods as a supplement to the traditional school system in order to lead back young people to the field of acquisition that seemed as a scary world for them.

YSS’s alternative school programmes:

1. Extra-curricular (free time) education at 5 places in the city
2. Full-time education:

moreover, in the framework of ‘Bridge Building’ young people can visit different secondary schools and workplaces in order to make easier their career choice.

- a) Byhojskolen – City school (approximately 120 students): It has three creative courses, such as music, art and design. Besides that it also has two programmes focusing on the alignment of students in different subjects, as follows: Basis and Turbo10 (for more details, see below).
- b) Nye Veje – New Pathways (approximately 30 students): those young people between the age of 15 and 21 spend a half/one year at this school who lost their contact with the school system long before due to their school failures. This programme primarily focuses on the development of social and personal competences.
- c) The 8th + 9th Grade: those students who dropped out (14-17 years) from the comprehensive school or those who are vulnerable attend this school for 2 years. At the end of the 2 years, they can continue their studies or can start to work. The programme was launched in 2007 as part of the local government's crime prevention programme package^{xi}.
- d) Dagkursus- Daily Course (approximately 120 students): it is a full-time course for dropped out students between the age of 15 and 19. These students could not finish their lower secondary education in the traditional school system, therefore, at this course they are supported to obtain exams closing the 9th grade. Students study in groups of 12 people and 2 teachers are in every class (two teacher model).
- e) Hindergade Skole- Language School (approximately 90 students): school for foreign-speaking students, who are helped in acquiring the Danish language, in order to ease their integration by being able to start their education in Denmark as soon as possible.
- f) U-Turn (12-13 students in the school): a centre combined with a school^{xii} - employing a multidisciplinary team, with holistic views – for students who use soft drugs (the age between 14-25) and turn to the institution willingly, in order to quit drug use. Students at this centre can finish their lower secondary education.

The Copenhagen model is a good example of how the integration at school and society of those burnt-out students who are tired of the mainstream system can be helped. Their strategy can also be considered effective because the institutions are differentiated according to the young people's needs.

In the followings, let me give a detailed review of the two full-time programmes (Byhojskolen, Nye Veje), where most of the interviews and observations were made:

^{xi} The target group of this programme includes those students who dropped out from primary school due to their constant absence. It is also a characteristic feature that their parents do not cooperate with the school. Successful application has different criteria; both the students and parents have to fulfil expectations. These expectations are included in a contract that both the students and the parents have to approve and accept.

^{xii} Only those schools belong to YSS that employ four teachers for 12 students (14-18 years). Students spend usually 6-8 months here, and they not only catch up but follow a special weekly order that consists of individual conversations, therapeutic group activities and they also learn the tricks of how to have a healthy lifestyle, eat healthily and participate in sports. There are therapeutic groups for parents as well, where they can share their problems.

4.2.1 Byhojskolen- City School

'The school of graffiti and equality' (picture 2) as described by most of the students when I asked them about what the institution means for them.

Byhojskolen was established at the end of the 90s – under a different name then – and launched creative 10th grades (drama, photo-film, design, art, music) for students who finished 9th grade but were not ready yet to start their higher education or for some reason dropped out from secondary education. During the years – especially since the establishment of Youth Programme Packages – the number of creative classes was reduced to three (music, design, art), as in the Danish education system the importance of subject knowledge came to the fore. Therefore, in 2010, two more classes were opened, the so called Basis and the Turbo10.

In particular, those young people get into Basis (picture 9) who experienced repeatedly failures in school and fell behind in several subjects (Danish, Mathematics, English). In the Basis class the two teacher model is applied, so the students get as much attention as needed. The first semester focuses mainly on team-building and the development of self-confidence, so students can feel that *'they matter, indeed'*.

Turbo10 (picture 1) accepts students who are elder (between 17-21 years) and whose primary aim is to prepare in six months to take the exam that closes the 10th grade. For many of them it is the last chance to get into a secondary educational institution, and because they chose this programme willingly, they are extremely determined to perform as successful as possible at the end of the intensive semester.

Students of the creative classes such as music, design, art (picture 4-8) have 16 lessons per week in their chosen specialisation, in the remaining time they attend English, Danish and Mathematics lessons that meet the level of their knowledge and are therefore able to develop.

Every student group consists of 15 students and students have lessons from 9 to 2.30. The school's faith is that everyone should be taught how to know their own and others' values and also how to appreciate them. Besides that, it is also important for teachers that they use creativity as a tool for making learning interesting, so students can also be active participants of a creative process. Due to the school's holistic nature the creative learning-teaching process is complemented by the intensive career guidance counselling. There are two guidance counsellors in this institution; one of them is working part-time, the other in full-time. Ulla works in full-time, *'to whom all students can turn for advice'* as she is the key figure of the institution. If needed, she connects them with other institutions (e.g. dyslexia centre, pedagogic institute, psychiatry, social services). Ulla mentors students' career choice during the school year by following all students' individual project, that all have specific milestones and tasks. Students, therefore, will be able to choose confidently at the time of career choice.

Besides that, Ulla meets both individually and in groups with students, sometimes she also visits group lessons, moreover, she has guidance lessons. She also helps a lot during administration – together with her colleague – of students whose mother tongue is not Danish and/or who are not living with their parents.

The school considers important the contact with parents, therefore, besides the usual talks, office hours; they are invited to different events. One of these events is the 'Parents' evening' (picture 3), where every programme introduces itself through different shows or exhibitions.

The director reported that generally, they have a good relationship with the parents, they can count on them. Besides that, the director also mentioned that many parents reported keenly how motivated their children are and how much they enjoy going to school.

Interviews with alumni highlight that they find *school's strength in the teacher-student partnership, in other interpersonal relations, in care and the experience of belonging to a community.*

With their methodological preparedness, reflectivity, openness, commitment for young people and devotion teachers help a lot in the stimulation of students' interest towards studying.



Picture 1: Students individually work on their projects; **Picture 2:** The main entrance of Byhojskolen; **Picture 3:** Parents' evening; **Picture 4-5:** Music lessons; **Picture 6-7:** Art classes, **Picture 8:** Design class; **Picture 9:** Basis class (Pictures taken by the author)

4.2.2 Nye Veje – New Paths

Co-workers of Nye Veje and Byhojskolen constitute a professional team, in spite of the fact that the two schools are located in two different points of the city (until 2014 the two schools were in buildings next to each other).

Students (between 15-21 years) here, due to different reasons (addiction, being gang-member, psychological problems, difficulties related to behaviour and

integration) have been completely alienated from the school system. Therefore, this type of institution focuses primarily on the development of social and personal competences, instead of studying academic subjects. In this way they try to integrate young people into the world of education or work.

Students constantly arrive to this institution and usually spend half a year (a few of them one year) here, during which they are provided with an intensive guidance counselling. Regarding the group sizes, a group usually consists of 14-15 students. Six statuses are available for the school that are occupied by seven teachers and two guidance counsellors share one and a half status, but their work is supported by co-workers as well (psychologist, yoga teacher).

As the timetable clearly shows, acquiring academic knowledge is not the central aim of this programme:

- Gathering in the morning, having breakfast that is followed by a talking period.
- During the day, workshops and individual school tasks are rotating.
- The 'subjects': different type of sport activities, visiting museums, watching movies, reading in the library.
- Schooltime starts at 9 a.m. and ends at 2 p.m. and there is a 30-minute lunch break between.

The initiative's efficiency is supported by numbers, as 54 of the 80 students finishing their studies here in 2014, continued their studies in vocational school or in other secondary education educational programmes, 14 students found a job and the others dropped out.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, it can be seen that the basic objective of these full-time programmes is to help students pass the exams that are important for their further studies, or that facilitate the process of finding employment. In order to find the desirable career pathways, every student at YSS is given an individual educational. Teachers' mission at YSS is to develop students and help them progress. The individual study pathways and the limited class size of the programmes enable students to catch up, and to improve their social skills and competences (Schmitsek, 2010). In addition, YSS programmes make an important contribution to achieving the ambitious 95% graduation rate from secondary school. The director of YSS reported that 85-95% of students from their programmes continue with their education.

The findings of this research highlight a number of issues that might help policy makers and educational experts in other countries who have responsibility for supporting young people's careers in education and in the labour market. First, in line with Danish lifelong guidance good practices, supporting transitions until the age of 25 would benefit all young people, especially those who are at risk of dropping out. More precisely, mandatory personalised career guidance should be made available during the phase of transition to secondary education in different settings, preferably in face-to-face or small-group-session format. In order to help career practitioners work with

challenging youth, a national database and longitudinal studies on young people's careers could be used to effectively trace young people's career changes. Further transitions later in young people's lives also need to be supported.

Second, the positive effects on students of second chance provisions represent good practice. More specifically, more innovative and student-friendly methods, tools and smaller class sizes should be implemented in secondary education to create encouraging learning environments and make students motivated about knowledge acquisition and to increase their retention in schools. In addition, it is also important to deal with issues and challenges that influence education more effectively to reduce the number of failures in students' lives and keep them motivated. Third, similar to Danish good practices, financially sustainable, flexible secondary education programmes should be implemented and customised to students' individual needs and desires to educate those young people who have left education early due to systemic failures. These programmes could focus on the development of social and personal competences as well. Fourth, the rigid mainstream education systems that are currently in place in most European countries need to adopt methods that are more flexible and trained teachers to work with challenging youth to reduce ESL, and to enhance the integration of young people into the labour market.

Finally, it can be summarised that Danish good practices can set a good example as school dropout-rate in Denmark presented by the Eurydice data is currently 8%. Not only had they achieved their target in advance by 2015 but had as a result lowered the target across the board to below 10% as part of the action plan for EU countries (Cedefop, 2015).

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