

Principal Sabbatical Report

Schooling in Denmark, France and Sweden, a Comparison with New Zealand

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Executive Summary:

The purpose of my sabbatical was to gain an insight into how schools are governed, managed and led in France, Denmark and Sweden and to compare these with New Zealand Schools. While New Zealand Schools are still held in high regard among the international education community, recently this seems to be diminishing. In the past New Zealand schools have always been innovative and there has been room enough to allow schools to take risks, try new ideas and basically apply the 'number 8 wire' mentality. I wanted to see examples of good practices occurring overseas and to see what ideas I could gain from looking at schools in various locations.

I was impressed with practices I observed in Denmark and Sweden, the importance they place on developing students to become creative and innovative, always approaching tasks from a problem solving angle. This was reinforced by a Danish principal who explained to me that Denmark must produce innovators as it is a small country with very little in the way of natural resources, they are currently one of the world leaders in engineering machinery, furniture, international transportation and renewable energy, hence the importance of producing a nation of problem solvers. Denmark is now one of the richest countries in the world.

Students in Denmark and Sweden are well aware of their place in the global community and their responsibility within it, students are taught from a young age about other countries and develop a global conscience. Denmark is expected to devote about 0.84% of gross national income (GNI) to foreign aid to less developed countries. Also for the purpose of peace and stability, refugee pre-asylum costs, and environmental purposes in Central and Eastern Europe and developing countries, making Denmark one of the few countries that are contributing more than the UN goal of 0.7 % of GNI to aid. In Sweden it is close to 1%. New Zealand's contribution was 0.27% of GNI, mainly in the Pacific.

Denmark, Sweden and to a lesser extent France, place a much higher degree of importance on learning at least one but more often two foreign languages compared to New Zealand. It is no longer important to learn foreign languages merely for travel purposes, it is highly beneficial in terms of trade and foreign relations. New Zealand education needs to place more focus on learning foreign languages from a younger age if we are to be leading, active participants in the international community.

Purpose:

Visit schools in Denmark, Sweden and France to investigate the following:

Key Inquiry Questions:

1. How are schools structured at the Primary level and the system(s) and structure of governance, leadership and management?
2. What is the impact of a liberal education system on student achievement, school climate and behaviour management (particularly in Denmark and Sweden)?
3. What are the specific programmes in these 3 countries to stop students from falling behind?

4. In what way is global and local conscience taught in schools and how does this look in practical terms (particularly in Sweden and Denmark)?
5. How do schools implement teaching students a second or third language? Why is this so successful in these countries (particularly Scandinavia)?

Background and Rationale:

Over the last decade primary schools in New Zealand have been experimenting with various forms of leadership structures. Traditionally the model has been one with senior management comprising of senior management; the Principal and one or two Deputy and/or Assistant Principals, and middle management, usually in the form of Syndicate Leaders. At Parakai School we implemented a new leadership structure in the last year. The senior management consists of me as Principal, the Deputy Principal and a Senior Teacher. Middle management consists of the Leader of Literacy and the Assistant Leader of Literacy, and the Leader of Maths and the Assistant Leader of Maths. As I was also interested in alternative structures I was interested in investigating how leadership was structured in France, Denmark and Sweden, to see whether there were alternative structures in these countries and how decisions were made at the school level, and higher up at a board or government level.

Both Denmark and Sweden are considered liberal in their approach to Education both in the teaching methods and manner they relate to the students. I was interested in observing different styles of teaching and the way the leadership develop programmes that have a positive effect on the climate of the school. I was interested in finding programmes which could possibly be implemented at Parakai School.

Over the last decade there have been various programmes implemented at a Ministry level to reduce the number of students achieving below the expected level in Maths and Literacy. Most of this drive is the result of the long tails shown in the Pisa results. Parakai has gone through both the Literacy and Numeracy Project and despite achieving positive results there is still a group of students who are proving difficult to move from a very low level in both Numeracy and Literacy. These students have been through various initiatives, at a school level and through the Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour, Resource Teachers of Literacy and Supplementary Learning Support Teachers. I wanted to see what support is provided for students falling behind at schools in Denmark, Sweden and France to see what they are doing to help them to reach expected levels of achievement.

With New Zealand being so isolated in the world I have always been concerned about the students' lack of knowledge about the world outside their own country and their lack of global conscience. I wanted to see ways global conscience was taught in schools in Sweden, Denmark and France and to take from the schools I visit ideas which I could implement at Parakai School. With technology improving the ease of communication around the world it is important for students at Parakai School to have knowledge of global issues

and empathy for those who are experiencing hardships in other countries and what they can do to make a difference regardless of how small this can be.

It is not uncommon to hear children from Denmark and Sweden, and to a lesser extent France, speaking a language, usually English with fluency by the time they leave Primary School. Often by the time they finish their compulsory schooling at 16 it is not uncommon for students for students to speak 3 or even 4 languages. Foreign languages at the primary level in New Zealand has been lower down on the list of priorities for schools, despite the requirement to teach foreign languages at the Years 7 and 8 level. I wanted to investigate how students are taught English and other languages in France , Denmark and Sweden and how these methods could be implemented at Parakai School.

Methodology:

I made appointments with Principals at the schools listed below and interviewed Principals and on some occasions members of the management or teachers and at most of the schools I was able to observe classes in action

France:

Ombrosa, Lycée Multilingue de Lyon, Lyon
Private Bilingual School Grades Nursery – 12
Approximately 1200 students
Meeting with Head of Primary School
Interview and observation of classes

Logie Ecole, Paris
Public School Grades 1 – 7
Approximately 500 students
Meeting with Principal
Interview and Tour of School

Denmark:

Langebjergskolan, Humlebaek
Public School Grades 1 – 9
Approximately 450 students
Meeting with Principal, Deputy Principal and Senior Manager
Interview and Observation of classes

Humlebaek Skole, Humlebaek
Public School Grades Preschool – 9
Approximately 700 students
Meeting with Head of Senior School (Grades 6 – 9) and English Teacher
Interview and Observation of Classes

Sweden:

Kunskapsskolan, Helsingborg
Private School ('Free School') Grades 7 - 9
Approximately 420 students
Meeting with Principal

Interview and Tour of School

Raus Plantering, Helsingborg
Public School, Grades Preschool – 6
Approximately 170 students + 190 Preschool students
Meeting with 2 Principals
Interview and Tour of School

Högstensskolan, Helsingborg
Public School, Grades Preschool – 9
Approximately 400 students
Meeting with 2 Principals
Interview and Observation of Classes

Findings:

Context:

In the French public school system the curriculum is the same for all students at any given grade. As with New Zealand students must attend school from 6 to 16 years old. Most parents will enrol their students in preschool (maternelle) from age 3 through to 6. French Primary school (école primaire) runs from age 6 to 11(5 grades). From 11-15 years old they move onto middle school (college) for 5 grades. At the age of 15, pupils move on to high school (lycée) where they prepare for their baccalauréat examinations (known as le bac). Most public schools have no school on Wednesday but they go to school for longer hours than in New Zealand and sometimes go to school on Saturday. Schools in France are under the jurisdiction of the city and it is the city that provides funding for the school. The city provides everything the school requires so the school sees no actual money. The city organised and employs its own workers for lunches, maintenance, cleaning, lunch time and after school care (including Wednesdays). Private schools are partially funded in France.

Students usually enter the Danish education system at preschool (børnehaver) from age 3 through to 6 although many children attend crèches from 6 months through to age 3. From age 6 through to 15 or 16, students attend Folkeskole, public school and unlike New Zealand there is no distinction between primary and lower secondary education and consists of 10 grades, commonly occurs in one school. From that point on school is not compulsory and students may choose between the more academically oriented gymnasium and the more practically oriented training institutions. All education is free to students all the way through to tertiary education. As with France it is the local municipality which provides funding to the school based on the number of students, but unlike France the school receives all the funding, including funding to pay teachers directly.

Education in Sweden is compulsory for all children from year 1 to year 9, generally from the year of the child's seventh birthday to the year of the child's

16th birthday. The school year in Sweden runs from mid/late August to early/mid June. From the age of one, children can be enrolled in pre-school (förskola). During the year before children start compulsory school, children may enrol in a pre-school class (förskoleklass), which combines the methods of the pre-school with those of compulsory school. Between ages 6/7 and 15/16, children attend compulsory school (grundskola), commonly divided in two schools, Grades 0-6, and 7-9. The vast majority of schools in Sweden are municipally-run, but there are also autonomous and publicly-funded schools, known as "free schools". The curriculum in free schools and public schools is the same, but free schools tend to have an orientation that differs from that of the municipal schools. As with Denmark all funding is received by the school based on the number of students and the socio-economic status of the students. All education is free, including lunches, school trips and student stationery.

Please note that my findings are based on the schools that I visited and should not be generalised for all schools in that country.

Research Questions:

1. How are schools structured at the Primary level and the system(s) and structure of governance, leadership and management?

France: I visited one public and one private school in France. In both schools there are no governance boards of parents although in the private school there is an association of parents who are there to ensure the school remains non-profit. Overall responsibility for schools lies with the Inspector de le National. The governance of the school lies at the municipality level. For the city of the public school I visited there are 36 schools and 30 inspectors are assigned to monitor the schools and preschools. The school is assigned one inspector so that there is a relationship developed with that person. The inspector could arrive at the school unannounced and look at any area, teacher or class within the school. The school has one principal who is the overall leader and manager of the school. The Principal is the sole leader of this public school of 500 students with no deputy or middle managers and does not even have a secretary. All class teachers are at the same level with no system of hierarchy. At the private school I visited there are senior managers at the school in addition to the Principal; a Head of the Maternelle (preschool), Head of Primary, Head of High School and Head of Lycée. There are no management positions under the Heads (who are non-contact) either at a syndicate level or for curriculum areas. The private school, in addition to partial funding by the state also receives tuition and fees from parents which would account for these senior management positions.

Denmark: There are some similarities between Denmark and France with overall responsibility of schools at the city level. There are Boards of Governance made up of 6 parents, 2 teachers and 2 students. The Board is elected every four years with a chairperson leading the Board. Boards in Denmark have little power as provided in New Zealand through legislation. Boards in Denmark can set the direction for the school but has no

responsibility for staff, finance or property. The local municipality has overall responsibility for the school who in turn reports to the Ministry of Education. The city provides schools in its jurisdiction with reports which compare each school with relation to everything from achievement to professional qualifications of staff and inclusion of special needs students. Schools are ranked and schools are provided with recommendations and areas of good performance. It is interesting to note that all information contained in the report is provided by the school and at no time does the city actually inspect the school. At one of the schools I visited there is one Principal, one Deputy Principal, responsible for the day to day management of the school and one other senior manager responsible for student welfare and any matters relating to students. All managers are non-contact. There are no other forms of leadership or management at the school. At the other school a special situation began in July this year with the joining of 2 schools together, so the school has 2 campuses in different areas of the town. One campus provides for the lower grades 1- 5 and the other for the older grades 6 – 9. There is an overall principal for the school, who interestingly has an office at both schools and there are 2 senior managers at each campus. Again, there are no other leaders or managers in the school. For the meantime the school has 2 Boards, from the previous 2 schools, which are working together as one. All Principals are appointed by the city Mayor.

Sweden: The structure in Sweden is slightly different. The city employs an overall manager who is responsible for all schools in the city – under this person are 4 supervisors who have more personal contact with the schools. public schools were directed 2 years ago to have Boards of parents, although I got the impression that these were very ad hoc and do not have any authority in the school, but rather acted as a group for consultation. For public schools in Sweden it was decided several years ago to eliminate deputy principals, all DPs were directed to be appointed principals, so at many schools in Sweden it is common to have 2 principals who are equal in status. Aside from these 2 principals there are no other managers or leaders in public schools. Responsibilities are divided between the principals. At one school I visited the principal is responsible for all the finance and 2 preschools and the school (grades 1-6) and the other principal is responsible for 5 preschools and health and safety. It is important to note that at this school, as with many schools in Sweden, preschools within a school zone are under the direction of that school. At the other public school I visited (which went up to grade 9) one Principal is responsible for Grades 0-6 and the other for grades 7-9. The third school I visited is known as a 'Free School' which still receives funding from the state but has more autonomy with regards to the school direction and leadership structure. The school has 'Owners' and is viewed as a company with schools in various areas of the country as well as abroad. At this school there is one principal, a deputy principal and Team Leaders, similar to the structure in New Zealand. There is no School Board at this school, but 3 regional managers in the country with the Head office in Stockholm.

2. What is the impact of a liberal education system on student achievement, school climate and behaviour management (particularly in Denmark and Sweden)?

France: French public schools are not considered liberal. All subjects are allotted hours of instruction which must be fulfilled each week. French and Maths must be in the morning. There is very little flexibility in the system.

Denmark: Denmark follows a National Curriculum however there is a considerable amount of flexibility the school has to develop its own programmes. At the first school I visited they have developed a unique system where for 3 periods, 3 times each year (and twice for older students) there are no subjects in the school. Three or 4 teachers join their classes together and the students form groups and choose topics to research which may involve an amount of time out of school on excursions. Teachers act as facilitators for the students. The school often involves local businesses to present real problems they have encountered and asks students to help them to solve these problems. They aim to teach children that there are more ways than one to solving problems. Much of the time is to be used by the students to manage and use as they see best. They use their home grown brand Lego as an example of what they are trying to achieve. Lego was experiencing a real downturn in sales so management took action to free up 20% of their workforce time, allowing them to use this time to explore and experiment. This resulted in an 80% increase in productivity.

The school believes this creates a climate of co-operation, open-mindedness and collaboration; students take risks because they are taught that it is important they make mistakes. Students have become innovative and creative in their thinking, which is a direct reflection of the innovation and creativity you see in Denmark.

In the second school in Denmark students are grouped in threes or fours for the whole year. When students have a problem, whether that be academic or social, they try to solve this as a group first then they ask teachers to help and the final point of help would be parents. This occurs in all classes except for German or French. By the final year of school I was told the students have an excellent ability to solve problems, have great co-operation skills and have a stronger resilience. There is a considerable importance placed on the democratic process. Whenever teachers talk to parents, students are present and 1 student from each team has one vote. The question is always asked by the staff and students 'Why are we doing this'. At all schools in Denmark students complete a survey on their attitude towards school, their teacher, lessons and then the results are sent in. Where problems are identified then the school is required to address these. The students therefore have some influence in how the school is run.

At both schools I saw students doing learning outside the classroom. I saw one group of very young students running around the school in small groups counting items which were shown on a picture and in another class of older students I observed them doing multiples of 6 by forming the numbers by lying

on the floor and creating the shape with the body. It was obvious that the Principal encourages this form of learning, from his enthusiasm while we were watching.

Sweden: Similar instance of the above were observed in Sweden. In both Sweden and Denmark students address teachers by their first name, and in fact many staff doubted whether students even knew their surnames. The schools see it as important that everyone greets each other and that there is a culture of openness where it is OK to tell. It was clear that the schools have developed close and respectful relationships between students and teachers. One school said they have a philosophy of being kind, calm and peaceful.

At the Free School I visited, a whole different philosophy is the foundation of how the school runs. All students are responsible for their own learning. Students meet with teachers frequently in conference situations to discuss goals and levels which must be achieved in each subject. Students keep a log of what actions they need to complete each week and what lessons they choose to attend to achieve these goals. If a student has not met a level in a certain subject they would need to put more maths into their timetable for the following week. For new students it takes 3 months at the beginning of the year to teach this system of learning to the students. This has developed a culture where students feel in control of their learning and have become very goal oriented. This form of learning is what we would call Individual Education plans, but at this school they are developed for every student and the student is much more integral in the process. The Principal emphasised this when he said "The individual student is always the focus".

3. What are the specific programmes in these 3 countries to stop students from falling behind?

France: At the private school I visited, the Head of the primary told me that they felt lucky to have dedicated staff who use their lunch time and after school between 3.30pm and 4 pm (called the remedial period) to assist students who are having learning difficulties. They also have an 'extra teacher' with no class responsibilities called a 'Flow Teacher' who may withdraw students for extra help. The school also has some parents who come in to listen to the children read.

In French public schools resources seemed to be more stretched. The school I visited has access to 2 psychologists. One called Master E; looking at learning difficulties, and Master G: focussing on changing behaviour by working with small groups and developing rapport with the student. These two psychologists however, serve many schools in the area and there is talk in the Ministry that they may no longer fund these psychologists. At this public school the teachers are required to give 2 extra hours over 1 week, outside normal teaching hours to assist students who need extra help. This means the school has 60 hours per week to assist students. This must be done either in the morning, before school, at 12 noon or after school. This is part of the teachers' job description.

Denmark: There are no specific programmes to assist students falling behind that I could find aside from those who are most needy who get a support teacher. This teacher will help students, mainly with reading. This is generally available to younger students in the school. One of the schools did have several students who were often absent from the school which then caused them to fall behind. The priority for the school was for these students to be attending every day. The solution for these individuals was to place them with a group of students who were responsible for supporting the student to be at school every day. The group would problem solve different ways that would assist them, like picking them up on the way to school and giving them lots of encouragement when they are at school.

Sweden: With the way the programme is so individualised in the 'Free School' there is no real requirement for specialised assistance or special programmes for students falling behind. Each teacher has 5 hours per week (outside their usual lesson time) which are dedicated to conferencing with students and it would be during this time that difficulties and problems could be addressed. There is a social worker (75% full time) who would work in the homes if the problem is rooted there.

In the two public schools I visited there is a considerable number of students whose first language is not Swedish. In one school this accounts for 86% of the school and the other it has 68%. The city provides considerable amount of funding for ESOL students and the school can employ teachers who will support these students with their learning, usually in the class. It was interesting to note that one of the schools has a large group of Kurdish students, a culture which has no written language, so students also have to be taught about written language. All students in the school are screened (by way of testing) to identify students requiring support. One of the schools has a special parent education evening taken by a specialist teacher, held every other week at the school. Where parents do not speak English the city provides the school with translators for parent/teacher meetings and suchlike.

Maths is also an area of focus in Sweden as shown by the pisa results and they are receiving in-service support. A teacher identified as a high performing maths teacher at another school provides this support.

4. In what way is global and local conscience taught in schools and how does this look in practical terms (particularly in Sweden and Denmark)?

France: Although I did not observe this, at the private school every class has a daily 'circle time' whereby the class talks about issues, local, national and international. All students from the age of 8 also have the opportunity to travel abroad for 3 weeks every year. Students currently have the opportunity to travel to schools in Canada, Germany and Spain. Students spend time with a local family so they are completely immersed in the culture and language.

Denmark: At one of the schools I visited they taught global conscience through the topics they teach during 'Feature Weeks'. The topics are based around another culture and encourage intercultural dialogue during these

weeks. These topics could also be studied in other languages; German, English and French. Students in the 8th grade make contact with students in Holland and begin by writing to each other in German, then English and then they have the opportunity visit each others country and home. The school also has visiting teachers from around the world. While I was there they had visiting teachers from Poland and Tanzania, Students in the school are taught about the countries these teachers come from (taught in English).

Sweden: Every day begins at the Free School with the class viewing the news on TV. This is followed by a discussion by the class. Topics covered are both local and international. At times, magazines, radio or newspapers are also used. This occurs in all Free Schools in this group as it is something the owners of the schools require.

The two public schools are very multi-cultural and the schools ensure programmes are in place which develop understanding and empathy towards each others culture; however no structured programmes were in place.

5. How do schools implement teaching students a second or third language? Why is this so successful in these countries (particularly Scandinavia)?

France: The success of foreign languages at the private school is largely due to the very nature of the school, being bilingual French and English. Of the 1,200 students at the schools 20% are Anglophones (native English speakers) 70% are native French speakers and 10% are International where neither English nor French is their native language. Students alternate spending one week in the French block and then the next week in the English block. During the English week the students are split depending on whether the students are native English, French or international. The idea is complete immersion during these weeks. When students are 11 years old they choose an extra language, then at 13 they have the option of choosing a 4th language. Many of the teachers at the school are native English speakers.

At public schools in France students receive one and a half hours each week of French. All teachers are instructed to teach English but this has limitations as it is up to the classroom teacher to teach English and often the English of these teachers is poor. In the past, the city has provided an English teacher but this is no longer the case.

Denmark: English is taught from the 3rd grade, receiving 3-4 lessons per week (a lesson is 45 minutes). Often 2 lessons are joined together to give 1 ½ hours of instruction. The students have a specialist English teacher for these lessons. Observing a grade 6 class I saw a considerable amount of dialogue in pairs and small groups – the focus was more on listening and speaking rather than writing. There is currently a lot of discussion as to whether students should begin learning English from Grade 1. From Grade 7 students pick up a third language which is usually German, French or Spanish. Denmark does have the benefit of being surrounded by countries where the common language spoken is English. Even between Sweden and Denmark, where there is only 6 km separating them, the common language is English.

Most TV programmes are in English and, unlike most European countries, movies are in English with subtitles rather than dubbed. English is well understood and spoken by adults in all areas of society in Denmark.

Sweden: Students at the private school must do English and 2 other languages; French, Spanish or German. French and Spanish being more popular than German.

At the public schools in Sweden the students also must learn English from the 3rd grade and again this is taught by a specialist teacher. Teachers of the lower grades may also teach their students English if they have the skills to do so. From the 6th grade students may take a 3rd language, French, German, Spanish and in the case of one of the schools, Chinese. With the schools being so multicultural many of the students also have the language they speak at home. Like Denmark, the students in Sweden also have the benefit of English exposure outside of school.

Implications and Conclusions:

The structure of leadership and management in New Zealand has progressed considerably beginning with the introduction of salary units. There is now flexibility for a school to offer teachers areas of responsibility and leadership. In New Zealand there is a career pathway towards Principalship. In France I saw nothing in place at public schools which allows for this. I saw the Principal as being the sole leader in the school and the Principal expressed that he was working from one burn out period to the next. In Denmark there were areas of senior management, although there were no areas of middle management and this would be largely due to the bulk funding nature of the school. The flat system of leadership may also be a reflection of the socialist society. In Sweden I saw merits in having two Principals in schools. This could be a worthwhile option in New Zealand, particularly in larger schools. Somehow I feel that limited funding and spreading ultimate responsibility to more than one person may be reasons for this to be a no-go area for the Ministry of Education

Valuable lessons could be learnt from liberal programmes in Danish and Swedish schools if we are to develop students who are innovative and creative problem solvers. The idea of having periods of the year where classes join together and students work cooperatively to research and solve problems which are not restricted to the classroom would be worth exploring whether this could work in New Zealand schools. Teachers act more as facilitators of learning. Teachers regularly conferencing with students on their goals and the action plans for their goals can only have positive outcomes. It is evident that in Danish Schools students have more voice and have an active role in how a school is run, finding solutions to problems, whether that be in the classroom or in the wider school. In New Zealand this tends to be restricted to a group of students labelled school leaders or councillors. I also feel there is merit that students have a more active role at the governance level, as with Denmark and secondary schools in New Zealand. There could be ways to facilitate this in New Zealand without the need for students to become trustees.

It is encouraging to note that what is being carried out in New Zealand schools to assist students falling behind is generally better than what is provided in all the countries visited. There are two aspects of their systems worth further investigation. First, all those providing assistance are fully qualified teachers and secondly there is a wrap around service for those students who have learning difficulties where social workers, Psychologists, health workers, teachers and parents are all involved in developing the best course of action. In New Zealand, I feel we do this well for special needs students and students with challenging behaviour needs, but not necessarily for students who are 'falling behind'.

With regards to developing students with a global conscience, we may not be able to send students to different countries as they do in Europe, I feel there is more which can be done within the school and classroom. For older students, starting the day with a discussion on current local and global issues would be highly beneficial.

It is clearly evident that schools in Denmark, Sweden and to a lesser extent, France, rate foreign languages much higher in importance than schools in New Zealand. It is evident that beginning to learn a language at a younger age will produce much more competent students by the time they leave primary school. This can only occur when there is an acknowledgement of the school to see the importance, further training of teachers and more funding to resource this, however where teachers have an interest in this area, foreign languages could be introduced in these classes at younger levels. Also placing a focus on speaking and listening first and creating activities which are fun and interesting for students will help to improve levels of fluency. Connecting students with others in foreign countries through technology could also act to facilitate learning.

It was validating to confirm that much of what we are doing in New Zealand is still highly thought of and we continue to be one of the models of good teaching practice in the world. However I heard time and time again that many teachers from Sweden and Denmark had gone to New Zealand 7 to 10 years ago, but not since then and I am beginning to feel that we may be losing our edge as leaders in education. It is important to take the best from what we can see working in other countries while continuously reflecting and improving what we are currently doing and not being afraid to risk trying new methods of teaching and learning.