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Accountability Practices in the History of Danish Primary Public Education from the 1660s to the Present

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Abstract: This paper focuses on primary education accountability as a concept and as an organizational practice in the history of Danish public education. Contemporary studies of education policy often address questions of accountability, but the manifestations of school accountability differ significantly between different national settings. Furthermore, accountability measures and practices have an impact on both the ways and means by which societies approach their educational systems. Hence there is a need to clarify the characteristics and traits connected with the concept. One way of approaching this endeavor is to turn to the history of education, because the discourse and practice of accountability incorporates numerous historical antecedents, technologies, and arguments. Based on primary as well as secondary sources this article presents the case of Denmark, analyzing the period from 1660 to the present. The article is analytically divided into four chapters,

one treating the period of absolute monarchy, from 1660 to 1849; one treating the era of the nation state, from 1849 to 1933; one treating the welfare state, from 1933 to 1990; and one treating the era of globalization and the marketization of education, from 1990 to the present. The key analytical findings are that changing forms of government are reflected in accountability practices and accountability practices exert strong disciplining effects.

Keywords: accountability; Denmark; history of education

Modelos de responsabilidad académica en la historia de la educación primaria pública en Dinamarca desde 1960 hasta la actualidad

Resumen: Este artículo se centra en los modelos de responsabilidad académica en la educación primaria como concepto y como práctica organizativa en la historia de la educación pública danesa. Estudios de políticas educativas contemporáneas a menudo abordan cuestiones de responsabilidad académica, pero las manifestaciones de la responsabilidad escolar difieren significativamente entre los diferentes contextos nacionales. Además, las medidas y las prácticas de rendición de cuentas afectan las formas y medios por los cuales las sociedades se acercan a sus sistemas educativos. Por lo tanto, hay una necesidad de clarificar las características y funciones relacionadas con el concepto. Una forma de abordar este esfuerzo es volver a la historia de la educación, debido a que el discurso y la práctica de los modelos de responsabilidad académica incorporan numerosos antecedentes históricos, tecnologías y argumentos. Sobre la base de fuentes primarias y fuentes secundarias este artículo presenta el caso de Dinamarca, en el período comprendido entre 1660 hasta el presente. El artículo está dividido analíticamente en cuatro capítulos, uno sobre el período de la monarquía absoluta, 1660-1849; uno que se ocupa de la era del Estado-nación, 1849-1933; uno que se ocupa el Estado de Bienestar, 1933-1990; y uno que explora la era de la globalización y la mercantilización de la educación desde 1990 hasta la actualidad. Los principales resultados de los análisis son que el cambio de las formas de gobierno se reflejan en las prácticas de responsabilidad académica y ejercen fuertes efectos disciplinadores.

Palabras clave: modelos de responsabilidad académica; Dinamarca; historia de la educación.

Modelos de responsabilização acadêmica na história da educação primária pública da Dinamarca dos anos 1960 até o presente

Resumo: Esse artigo centra-se nos modelos de responsabilização acadêmica na educação primária como conceito e como uma prática organizacional na história da educação pública dinamarquesa. Estudos contemporâneos sobre política educacional frequentemente abordam questões de responsabilização acadêmica, mas as manifestações de responsabilização das escolas diferem significativamente entre os diferentes contextos nacionais. Além disso, medidas e práticas de responsabilização têm impacto nos modos e nos meios pelos quais as sociedades se aproximam seus sistemas educacionais. Portanto, existe uma necessidade de clarificar as características e traços relacionados com o conceito. Uma maneira de abordar este esforço é voltar à história da educação, porque o discurso e a prática dos modelos de responsabilização incorpora inúmeros antecedentes históricos, tecnologias e argumentos. Com base em fontes primárias, bem como fontes secundárias este artigo apresenta o caso da Dinamarca, no período de 1660 até o presente. O artigo é analiticamente dividido em quatro capítulos, um que trata do período da monarquia absoluta, de 1660 a 1849; um que aborda a era do Estado-nação, de 1849 a 1933; um que trata do Estado-Providência, de 1933 a 1990; e um que explora a era da globalização e da mercantilização da educação, de 1990 até o presente. Os principais resultados analíticos são que a mudança de formas de governo se refletem nas práticas de responsabilização acadêmica e que estas exercem fortes efeitos disciplinadores.

Palavras-chave: modelos de responsabilização acadêmica; Dinamarca; história da educação.

Introduction: Accountability as a Concept

In this article we focus on education accountability as a concept and as an organizational practice in Danish history of education, with a specific focus on public primary schooling. The intention is to trace and analyze accountability practices from a historical perspective and thus gain a better understanding of contemporary school accountability and its disciplining effects.

Contemporary policy studies of education often address questions of accountability, but nevertheless the manifestations of school accountability differ significantly between different national settings (Ryan & Feller, 2009, p. 172). Furthermore, most international accountability analysts agree that accountability measures and practices change the ways and means by which societies approach their cultural edifices in general and their educational systems in particular (Hopmann, 2008). One example is the emergence of a strong preoccupation with numbers and quantifiable variables, a tendency that has engulfed public sectors across the industrialized world, particularly as a consequence of the New Public Management wave and general inspiration from the business world (Fitz-Gibbon, 2006; Krejsler, 2013; Mirowski, 2009). From the point of view of Foucault (1979), one might say that accountability measures and practices have a disciplining effect, depending on the agents, organization, and techniques used. Hence it is relevant to clarify the characteristics and traits connected with the concept, at both an analytical level and a practice level. One way of approaching this endeavor is to turn to the history of education, because the discourse of accountability incorporates numerous historical antecedents, technologies, and arguments and reflect changes in the historical and cultural context.

Accountability means to be taken into account in activities, whether such activities are of an ethical, moral, economical, or other character. In a broad sense, accountability means to hold someone responsible for something. In public governance, the term involves the state holding its institutions responsible; thus accountability pertains to the relationship between the state and its institutions. Such relationships are complex and they often involve the possibility of conflicting interests between the state, authorities, and politicians, on the one side, and institutions, professionals, and citizens, on the other side.

Having an Anglo-Norman etymological origin (Bovens, 2007), the concept of accountability has no precise equivalent in the Danish language, as indicated by the Danish evaluation researcher H. K. Krogstrup. Krogstrup (2007) describes its meaning in terms of “linking performance and evaluation” and in relation to the activity of holding people, to whom a mandate has been given, responsible according to performance criteria decided for the task, often by the use of numbers and counting.

Ryan and Feller (2009) define accountability as,

A political and legal concept. It denotes the responsibility of an organization or individual (i.e., an agent) to perform within the specified boundaries set by some higher political authority (i.e., a principal) and to report to and justify one's actions to this authority. (p. 173)

Both Krogstrup's and Ryan and Feller's definitions stipulate that the practice of accountability very much depends on the specific context; within the context of education, which is the focus here, accountability might refer to judgments based on different kinds of documentation on the progress of pupils' or students' knowledge, skills, and competencies and to the question of whether schools and teachers generally meet the requirements set for them. In a wider sense, contextual perspectives referring to specific characteristics are relevant in discussions of the concept, because they are

important in the interpretation of accountability issues at different organizational levels, for example, policy and practice levels.

In the tracing of its roots, the concept of accountability seems both historically and semantically related to governance and to the use of bookkeeping and thus to counting (Bovens, 2007). Such thinking in the governance of authorities holding their employees accountable within different kinds of agreements and performances can be identified in historical documents at least since the beginning of the first millennium (Bovens, 2007; Higgs, 2004). While the element of counting seems a recurring characteristic, the meaning of the concept has differentiated and broadened significantly in a diachronic perspective. The meaning of the concept seems to have transformed during the past few decades (Biesta, 2004, p. 234). The rise of democracy has added the meaning of citizens holding authorities and public service officials accountable for their activities, practices, and results and the neoliberal era—with its promotion of public sector marketization and the introduction of New Public Management—has added performance indicators as an accountability measure for governing institutions and even individuals (Bovens, 2007, p. 449; Ryan & Feller, 2009, p. 173). All of these contexts involve unmistakable elements of quantification and counting, which is also the case in contemporary educational accountability practices such as national testing schemes and the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA). However, at the same time, the role of democracy cannot be overrated. All forms of democracy configure a specific relation between stakeholders at different levels of the societal pyramid. Following the high-profile Danish folk high school movement founders Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872) and Christen Kold (1816–1870) in the 19th century and the influential democracy theorist Hal Koch (1904–1963) in the 20th century, Denmark has a strong tradition of consensus through dialogue. This is generally known as deliberative democracy and highlights the need for free public discussion and the formation of public opinion (Togeby et al., 2004). This is important in relation to the configurations and unfolding of accountability because it frames the setting of accountability measures and practices that are evident in the following historical analysis.

We have now identified two central characteristics in the concept of accountability, namely, the element of counting and the immense importance ascribed to the historical and cultural context in general and the form of government in particular. However, to work meaningfully with the concept, the development of an operationalized definition is necessary to cut across historical and cultural idiosyncrasies and to avoid the pitfall of presentism, a definition that ensures that we are analyzing the same phenomenon in diversified settings and cases. To that end, Burke (2005) was pointing to some all-encompassing and universal elements when he operationalized accountability as “who is accountable to whom, for what purposes, for whose benefit, by which means, and with which consequences” (p. 2).

To make the methodological implications clear, the operationalization stipulates an empirical focus on a relationship in which accountability activities make sense, have a purpose, are to someone’s benefit, are a means, and have a consequence. We find this operationalization useful for our analytical endeavor in this article because it captures the concept of accountability with a specific focus on its relational aspects, making it compatible with an analysis of historical practices from which the actual term *accountability* is absent. For instance, the dimension referring to relationship makes it possible to discuss specific contextual factors, such as forms of government and their impact on the practice of accountability. More specifically, accountability is about the distribution of authority between stakeholders (i.e., the state, the municipality, the church, the market, school leaders, teachers, parents, and perhaps children).

School Accountability under Absolute Monarchy, 1660–1849

Ever since primary schooling evolved institutionally in Denmark in the Middle Ages, legislation has reflected the authoritative relationship between the state, the church, and the school and the institutionalization of various control systems. Following the reformation in 1536, a new church law [*kirkeordinans*] was instituted in 1537/1539. This new piece of legislation also covered the schooling of children as conducted by the religious teachings managed by the church. The law worked for centuries as the backbone of education legislation, making it a valid starting point for this historical analysis.

The church law instituted a system of control in which representatives of the church played a key role. Thus, for at least four centuries, Danish educational authorities controlled the schools and their administration through inspections performed by or involving church officials in various ways (Karlshøj, 1997, p. 123; Skovgaard-Petersen, 1986).

The 1537/1539 church law framed the management, content, and system of control of Danish primary schools and clearly described how such control systems should be practiced, by whom, and for what purposes. The relationship between the authorities, employees (teachers), and citizens was related to a control system with a specific hierarchical structure emanating from the king and involving the whole range of stakeholders, from the bishops and the nobility to superintendents and rural deans to schoolmasters and to children and their parents.

The system can best be characterized as a one-way, top–down system where the higher echelons exerted authority over the lower echelons without negotiation. In the lowest position of this hierarchy was the schoolmaster [*skolemester*], who was responsible for the teaching of the children. The schoolmaster's role is explicitly described in the church law that stated, "Capable and qualified school masters to skillfully educate youth in every way are assigned in market towns and villages" (The church law, 1537/39, p. 62).¹ Above the schoolmaster was the superintendent, who was in charge of "the inspection with all schools and should know how religion and other subjects are being taught, for this purpose he should assign schoolmasters who he and the rural dean have examined" (p. 62).

Thus, the superintendents were tasked with the inspection of schools regarding both religion and other subjects, together with the rural deans. The hierarchical nature of the system and the religious role of schooling were described very explicitly concerning the superintendents and the rural deans, whose obligations were to "keep the church's servants to their office, and make sure that everything is done properly and rightfully" (The church law, 1537/39, p. 63).

Parents and children were generally subjects to a punitive regime where offenses, such as absence from school or impertinence, were punished by the authorities. Sources reveal how inspectors criticized teachings in the beginning of the 18th century, saying of the children that they found "the majority very rude and ignorant" (Magistrate in Copenhagen, 1707, p. 1). But schoolmasters were also subject to the authority of the rural dean and the vicar and were obliged to "conduct public examinations of youth in the churches as often as they are instructed by the rural dean or the vicar" (p. 1). If they did not, it was with the consequence of "forfeiting their public office" (p. 1). The public nature of the examinations testifies to a ritual dimension of testing youth, one of signaling order and perhaps installing a certain work ethic of diligence and a societal structure of recognition. However, it also testifies to clear gatekeeping purposes, since the law and thus also the hierarchy of authority was enforced simply by dismissing employees who did not conform. The church and the state shared a strong interest in the youth learning the proper Christian faith and

¹ All translations by the authors unless stated otherwise.

their place in society. Religion was the power base of the church, but it also justified lawfulness and minding your own business, which was in the interest of the absolute monarchy.

Thus, authorities stated the role and importance of religion regularly and it was clearly emphasized in the body of educational laws. Knowing that a new teacher could impart the “true” version of Christianity without any heretical elements or detours served the function of the state and the church. Any offenses against the law meant punishment, which could be either a fine or even imprisonment (Ordinance about Danish schools and schoolmasters in Copenhagen, 1716):

Anyone acting against this [...] should the first time be fined twenty *rigsdaler*², second time forty *rigsdaler*. [...] and if he makes further offences on the same, he will be sentenced to prison on bread and water for some time by authorities.

School teachers were obliged to teach a specific curriculum of specified subjects (such as religion, reading, writing, and math), but they also had obligations concerning the pupils attending the school, which was regarded just as important. For instance, the 1739 Act on Rural Education pointed out that “if any child is absent from school, [...] he should immediately and as soon as he recognizes their absence, inform the parents and call for a legitimate explanation.” (Instructions for deans and schoolmasters in the rural regions in Denmark, 1739)

Regarding the enforcement and punishment of children, the act stated that teachers were generally expected not to use violence but, instead, punishments such as detention. However, it was up to the subjective whim of the teacher whether corporal punishment was justified. The law stated,

He must not with strokes and knocks severely harm the children; but he should in a permissive way seek to correct their errors. If someone is found lazy in learning, he must keep such a one sitting longer in school than the rest [...]. If his admonitions and permissive punishment of children, keeping them longer in school than the others, does not help, he must inform their parents who should then, in his presence, with a rod punish their child according to his offence. But for blatant ungodliness, swearing, lying, backtalk and deliberate insubordination, committed by children in school, they should immediately be punished with the rod in the presence of the others. (Instructions for deans and schoolmasters in the rural regions in Denmark, 1739)

The use of corporal punishment by teachers and other authorities in school was adopted in educational legislation throughout the 19th century, but after World War I, with the rise of the progressive education movement, intense public debate took place and the use of corporal punishment was gradually reduced, especially in progressive schools (Nørgaard, 2005, p. 109ff.).³

But it was not just parents and children who were subject to punishment for not living up to what was expected of them. Teachers were closely monitored as well. An interesting example from 1754 involves a teacher, Andreas Holgersen Møller—who was also the parish clerk—who faced 31 charges ranging from drunkenness, instigating a fight, and swearing to fouling himself. One of the charges implied that the teacher had not fulfilled his task of teaching the youth and another suggested that he had inappropriately closed the school. Witnesses declared the suggestions to be true and added that the teacher had even been drunk in the classroom (Nørre and Harre shire’s vicar archive, 1701-1786). Consequently the teacher was fined and removed from office.

Following the work of the great school commission established in 1789, the Danish public school system [*folkeskolen*] saw the light of day in 1814, introducing the institutionalization of

² A monetary standard.

³ Corporal punishment in Danish schools was finally abolished in 1967, although it had already been abolished in Copenhagen schools since 1952 (Nørgaard, 2005, p. 112ff.).

compulsory education. In the area of the education system's inspection, King Frederik VI (1768–1839) mobilized bishops, deans, and vicars as inspectors of the public school system, thus continuing the strong ties between religion and education in Denmark. At the local level, school inspection was divided between the municipal council (the parish council in rural areas and the city council with its school committee in urban areas), in charge of the economy of the schools and the appointment of teachers, and the school commission—tasked with the inspection of teaching and teachers—of which the vicar was the chairman (rural areas) or had a regular seat (urban areas) (Nørr, 2003, p. 34). At the county level, schools were governed by the school directorate, consisting of the dean [*provsten*], the county governor [*amtmanden*] and an elected member. The directorate had inspectorate authority over the deanery schools, had the right to appoint teachers, and served as a mediator between local school authorities (school commissions) and the ministry (Nørr, 2003). Every year the inspectorate sent an account of local school conditions to the ministry (Skovgaard-Petersen, 2000, p. 622). As such, the most critical element in the 1814 school inspection system was the unannounced rural dean inspections (Skovgaard-Petersen, 1986, p. 53). Above the dean was the bishop, who was also tasked with the general inspection of schools in the entire diocese. According to the 1814 Education Act (§42),

The bishops shall continually conduct close inspection with all schools in the diocese entrusted to them and be obliged to investigate the conditions of these schools, both through inspection visits as on any other occasion. They are also entitled to receive all relevant intelligence from the county school directorates and the parish school commissions.

Moreover, they should oversee that the school system is promoted in accordance with my gracious guidelines and that encountered obstacles are cleared. So should they on their inspections examine the youth and file reports about how they have found the youth in each school taught to our Danish Chancellery. (p. 425)

The procedure for appointing a teacher involved the municipal council recommending three candidates and the school directorate or bishop then choosing one of them to be the new teacher. The bishop decided on positions where a dean had formerly been employed and the school directorate decided all other positions (Nørr, 2003, p. 34f.). Normally the ministry did not interfere unless the process resulted in a stalemate.

In conclusion, school accountability through this period was exerted in a system where parents were accountable to the teacher (who could be the vicar or the parish clerk) and had the obligation to have their children attend school and maintain the correct behavior, especially regarding religion. The authority for supervising the vicars and teachers was ascribed to the rural deans and the bishop, who also had the authority to employ and dismiss teachers and an obligation of maintaining inspections. As mentioned, such decisions were top–down, one-way decisions by authorities of greater hierarchy and were not subject to discussion or negotiation. In the form of government at the time, with monarchy based on a close relationship between the state and the church, the king was the formal head of the church. Such a system had the purpose of maintaining social control and the power of the king and of sustaining absolute monarchy. But this was about to change in the 19th century.

School Accountability in the Nation State, 1849–1933

The second revolutionary wave in Europe in 1848 made a significant impact in Denmark in the following decades: The democratic state emerged and control over the educational system became framed by new legislation, gradually putting an end to the role of the church. At the same

time, the conflicting interests of stakeholders, as well as the complexity of the structure and organization of schools, manifested itself in discussions about administrative systems and governance, particularly in relation to the introduction of democracy.

In June 1849, Denmark implemented a new constitution introducing democracy and abolishing absolute monarchy. The opportunity to have an influence on political decisions expanded the political debate on matters of public interest, such as the schools and their content and governance. In 1849, Danish teacher and politician Daniel Eiler Rugaard (1806–1875) published a journal, *Den Nordiske Folkeskole* [The Nordic Public School], in which he often addressed such questions. For instance he raised a critical question in the first issue:

The immediate superior of the schoolteacher, of whom he is completely dependent and obliged to obey, is the parish vicar and those of the parish peasants who are parish council members. [...] Starting with the vicar – is he competent to handle this control?

I could mention several damaging consequences of this control, for example that it deteriorates the required respect for the teacher among the peasants [...]. But it would lead too far to name all the damaging consequences inflicted by the unfortunate local control; [...] I just believe that this control system should be organized in a different way. (Rugaard, 1849, p. 10)

Although strong forces had pushed for abolition of the clergy's role in the inspection of schools prior to the passing of the 1867 Municipal Reform Act, economic arguments for retaining the clerical inspection system prevailed. Employing ministerial inspectors would cost a considerable amount, whereas the vicars and deans would do the task for free (Nørr, 2003, p. 36f.). Not until 1912 would the abolition of the clerical inspection system surface in a bill, a bill that was never passed due a general election and then the outbreak of World War I (Reeh, 2006). This observation testifies to a high degree of pragmatism in the organization of school inspections, although the clergy and conservative forces clearly fought against the proposed separation of school and church. Their main argument was that a separation would lead to a separation between church and state, a highly controversial issue at the time. From an analytical perspective, the union between church and state still produced mutual benefits vis-à-vis governing the country in general and remote areas in particular. But it also meant that the school inspection system reproduced a significant focus on proficiency in Christianity and religious teachings, to some extent neglecting other subjects. Religion still played a significant role as the foundation of values and sense of normality shared by both the state and the church and, furthermore, the state was not yet able to present a rich administrative control network of its own to match that of the church.

In this period, teachers generally grew increasingly weary of the clergy's inspections. A common saying was that “the school might well be the daughter of the church, but that the daughter now had grown up and should stand on her own legs” (Reeh, 2006, p. 166). In 1909, the teachers' union administered a survey of teachers' attitudes about the clerical inspection system. The result was that 2,545 called for abolition, while 860 called for a continuation. Many teachers also worried what would happen if the municipal authorities took over all the school administration, including the inspections (Nørr, 2006, p. 70).

Since the 1814 Education Act, it was the vicar's duty to inspect all schools in his parish every fortnight. It might be important to note that qualified replacements were hard to find in case of teacher dismissals and, besides, teacher's working conditions were poor and their pay low (Larsen, 1899, p. 52ff.). The salary could for instance be paid in or include cereal. The salary of a teacher in

Central Jutland was, for instance, described as “fifteen barrels of barley, ten *rigsdaler*⁴ from church income and board and lodging by the peasants” (Larsen, 1899, p. 52). Often the salary was so low that a family could not possibly live on it. For such reasons, positions were often advertised as suitable for the unwed, as in such write-ups as “a young man living in hope for the better” or “the office is suited for an unmarried person who is not used to good conditions” (Larsen, 1899, p. 52). Teachers did not have high status among the more affluent, for example, being mentioned as “useless charity paupers” by wealthy farmers (Larsen, 1899, p. 70).

The inspection frequency varied considerably between parishes and the historical sources cite numerous complaints to the ministry from parish councils (*sogneråd*) that the vicar did not live up to his inspectional duties and from teachers that the vicar inspected the schools too often, disrupting the teaching progress (Nørr, 1994, p. 350). In addition, the authorities seemed quite indulgent to parents’ complaints (Larsen, 1899, p. 52).

These variations and the fact that the ministry did not intervene significantly shows that, in practice, vicars had a wide degree of latitude in deciding which schools to inspect and how often. This system significantly confirmed clerical influence in the schools. The second leg in the clerical school inspection regime was the dean’s inspections. Even before the 1814 Education Act, deans were obliged to visit all the schools in their deaneries every year. However, as with the vicars, the inspection frequency varied. In the shire of Hornum-Fleskum, just south of Aalborg in Northern Jutland, Dean Niels Vrigsted Blixencrone Albrechtsen (1814–1900) inspected his deanery schools every second year. In 1870 he inspected 16 schools and in 1871 14 schools (Nørr, 1994, p. 360). Prior to the inspections, the deans required information from the schools to be sent in advance, such as lists of the pupils’ names, parents’ names, ages, school days, absences, and teacher’s remarks. As general secretary of the school directorate, deans exerted significant influence over schools, in both administrative and curricular matters. The third and most powerful leg was the bishop’s inspections. Bishops were required to inspect schools every three years, but only very few bishops were able to meet that demand.

Grading Teachers

There is some archival evidence that deans even graded teachers (Nørr, 2006). One example is Dean Frederik Vilhelm Andersen (1820–1910), whose deanery was mid-Zealand. Andersen devised a grade scale from 1 to 3, with 1 being the highest grade. Apart from the main grades, the dean would add a plus sign or a question mark, resulting in the following scale: 1, 1?, 2+, 2, 2?, 3+, and 3. The average score was around 2+. In two cases the dean adjusted the grade scale and assigned the grades 4 and 3?. For example (reproduced in Nørr, 2006),

December 16, 1880, Haraldsted school

In a few subjects, particularly book reading, Haraldsted has improved since last year’s inspection. But it (i.e. the school) has far too many defects and on so many important points that this condition can no longer be tolerated. The inspector held the prospect of an upcoming inspection and recommended, in the presence of the school commission and the parish council, the teacher to work with the greatest possible diligence in the inadequate subjects, emphasizing the inevitable consequence continued standstill or deterioration would have for Rasmussen’s teacher position.

Grade: 3. (p. 85)

It is noteworthy that the ultimate consequence for the teacher was to lose his/her position. From an analytical perspective, this suggests that the dean inspections had a strong disciplining effect on a

⁴ A monetary standard in the 19th century.

teacher's practice, although the picture might be nuanced by the fact that groups and movements adhering to alternative pedagogical, religious, and political views (e.g., progressive education, Grundtvigianism, and unions) were forming in the second half of the 19th century that could have provided teachers with some organizational backing in case of disputes with the established system. On top of that, it is even debatable what the dean was actually assessing. Was it the teacher, the teaching, or the children? It was probably an overall consideration but, beyond doubt, the teacher and his teaching played a crucial role in the grading. Apart from purely educational matters and considerations, it is plausible that religious or pedagogical differences between the dean and the teacher could also play a role in the evaluation. Andersen was known to be critical of liberal Christian ideas (Grundtvigianism) and teachers flirting with progressive education: In 1893, he threatened the teacher at Haraldsted School—a known adherent of Grundtvigianism and progressive education ideas—with the dean's court for dereliction of duty. From a critical perspective, this is testimony of a rather muddled accountability regime incorporating at least two layers of evaluation criteria

In his records, Andersen would summarize his general impression of the inspection. One way of doing this was via comparison of schools. For instance, in 1891 Andersen characterized the schools in Hasle, Pedersborg, and Flinterup as the best in the deanery, while the Assentorp school was “the worst school I have known, at least after Valsømagle” (reproduced in Nørr, 2006, p. 75). Often the dean would blame the teacher for the poor results. For instance, the children's dullness and lack of joy at the school in Ørsløvunderskov were ascribed to the dryness and inertia characteristic of the teacher's personality (Nørr, 2006, p. 75). When the dean found something serious to criticize, he would show up unannounced later that year or the year after to see if conditions had improved or if further steps were appropriate, such as forcing the teacher to hire an assistant teacher. In several cases, the dean coordinated his actions with the Ministry of Education (before 1916, the Ministry of Education and Church, or *kultusministeriet*) (Nørr, 2006, p. 71).

The record was kept for the dean's private use. However, once a year, the dean had to report his findings to the ministry. Adding to his own findings, the dean could incorporate reports from local school commissions. Apart from statistical information about the pupils, classrooms, and school attendance, the dean was tasked with reporting on teachers' education, morals, diligence, and competence, as well as the children's progress. As a result of the reports, an extended correspondence ensued between the ministry and the dean, so that recorded insufficiencies could be explained or pointed out to local school authorities or teachers (Nørr, 2006, p. 79). The dean's reports reflected the school authorities' wish to evaluate teaching to ensure adherence to school legislation. The joint effort of the state and the church to govern the country through the promotion of general standards and the rule of law prevailed. However, the school's accountability system was still very much dependent on subjective evaluations by individual vicars, deans, and bishops, although the ministry played a role in promoting equal practices and legal interpretations nationwide via a dialogue with the inspectors as a result of filed inspection reports and other cases and questions raised to the ministry. In addition, the inspection system's hierarchy mirroring the different administrative levels also helped to avoid arbitrariness in the system.

The Inspection System Hierarchy

A very telling example about the inspection system's hierarchy concerned relations between the bishop and the school directorate, represented by the county dean, on the island of Bornholm in the late 19th century. In July 1885, Bishop Bruun Juul Fog (1819–1896) made an inspection visit to the Østermarie Nordre school. The dean had been rather critical toward the local teacher, who was an adherent of *Grundtvig*. He had previously noted his proficiency as “poor” and the children's educational progress as “middling,” which was almost a condemnation (Skovmand, 1973, p. 60).

When the bishop arrived, the dean completely changed his stance. The teacher's proficiency was described as "impeccable" and the children's educational progress as "satisfactory."

According to education historian Roar Skovmand, the background for this change is not available in the archives but is revealed in a 1964 interview with the teacher's son. During a visit to Østermarie the son met one of his father's old pupils, Emil Hansen, who informed him of an inspection made by the dean in November 1882. According to Hansen, the dean had expressed clear discontent that the teacher did not have the children learn the catechism by heart. A sharp quarrel ensued and at the end of the inspection the dean had threatened the teacher with dismissal if he did not obey orders. Hansen further recollects that, after the inspection, the bishop noted that the children from the Østermarie Nordre school had proven to be the best taught children in the entire parish. However, high rates of pupil absence indicated that the dean had some local backing in his critical views about the teacher.

This example shows that the bishop exerted significant authority in the school inspection system and sent out guidelines to the deans prior to his inspections, which Skovmand (1973) describes as "extremely thorough (p. 60)." But the example is also very telling of the significant lines of demarcation in the Danish school system, lines intimately intertwined with religious differences between progressive Christianity, represented by Grundtvig, and conservative Christianity, represented by the majority of the bishops. In 1856, Grundtvig himself stated in parliament,

The vicars in relation to the educational system are usually a kind of their own, because they, with very few exceptions, are so used to the traditional lane that they are unable to move to neither right nor left, or as far as their influence goes, will allow anyone to move. (Parliamentary negotiations, 1856, column 2156)

But it was not only the clergy who inspected the schools. Two ministerial inspectors in gymnastics [*Gymnastikinspektøren*] and singing [*sanginspektøren*], respectively, were designated to inspect teachers' training colleges [*seminarier*] and urban and rural public schools. Apart from inspections, teaching and learning were also scrutinized on the basis of two annual examinations. Examinations were held in the presence of the school commission. The children were assigned grades according to their oral performance. The examination, instituted with the 1814 Education Act, provided the commission with an opportunity to observe the teacher as well. The school commission protocols contain an abundance of evidence that the commissions held subsequent meetings about the examination results and the teachers' performance. A temporary teacher hoping for a tenure track position drew special attention because the tenure track would limit arbitrary dismissals by the authorities. Copies of the examination grades were forwarded to the school directorate, where they could be included in the dean's reports to the ministry (Nørr, 1994, p. 370).

These examination grades carried significant importance for the individual pupil's promotion to the next grade, which proves the relevance of this instrument as a tool for holding pupils accountable for their own learning. The solemnity of the examination, generated by the presence of the esteemed school commission, undoubtedly added to the disciplining effects vis-à-vis the pupils. The examination results were also important to the children's seating arrangements in the classroom but, ultimately, classroom seating was up to the teachers, who would also often take into account the children's everyday proficiency levels, behavior, and even social ranking (Nørr, 1994, p. 373). From a school accountability perspective, this is interesting because it shows that children were subject to various disciplinary instruments designed to maintain order and create incentives for living up to what was expected of them. Needless to say, corporal punishment was still used at this time.

The Education Act of 1899

In March 1899, a new education act was passed that meant that local curricula had to be approved by the Ministry of Education every 10 years (§§12–13). The act also meant that the ministry would define the number of teaching hours and the overall curriculum (§§10–11). These changes might be seen as a *quid pro quo* for the state paying a bigger share of teacher salaries than prior to 1899, when the municipalities funded the local schools (Skovgaard-Petersen, 2000, p. 619 f). The new act testified to a trend of centralization in the educational system, although local education authorities retained huge influence over the schools under their jurisdiction. However, school commissions were tasked with the production of school plans and curricula, to be approved by the school directorate and ultimately the ministry.

Another noteworthy feature of the 1899 Education Act was that it was the first legal document to use the term *Folkeskole* [people's school]. This change in terminology testifies to the political ambition of creating a public primary school for all people and strengthening the national community. From an accountability perspective, this heralds the beginning of new development induced by improved links between types of schooling, a higher degree of standardization in the educational system, and an increase in the number of school children. These changing conditions called for new technologies to monitor pupils' progress, such as tests and exams, and gatekeeping between school levels, such as the establishment of more specialized types of schools (e.g., remedial education), in the ensuing years.

Another accountability issue involved the role of parents. With the 1899 Education Act, parents were still subject to being fined if they failed to send their children to school. School attendance was closely monitored and teachers were required to send statements of school attendance to the municipal council every other month (§3). However, the act also revealed a budding change in the role of parents. According to Section 15 of the act, the municipal councils were granted permission to expand the number of members of the school commission by two to make room for "fathers of a family or widows who have children in compulsory education." This indicates recognition of parents' interests in influencing the local education system and in contributing to the development of that system. Using a lens of accountability, this is the beginning of a practice where parents could hold teachers accountable for their educational practices in general and their teaching in particular.

Two major issues in the educational system in the early 20th century were teacher influence and teacher job security. These issues were important to the school accountability system because they reflected teachers playing a more active role than had been the case in the 19th century, particularly as a result of newly established teacher unions. In a circular dated October 5, 1900, the ministry made it clear that the head teacher was to call a meeting with the teachers to negotiate pupils' promotions to the next grade, the distribution of teaching hours, the curriculum, and other school issues (Skovgaard-Petersen, 2000, p. 629). According to the 1899 act, local school authorities could recommend a teacher for discharge if they found him incompetent. In such cases, the case went through the school directorate to the minister of education, who would make the final decision. However, teachers called for the establishment of formal teacher councils, which were established with the 1904 Education Act, which significantly increased teacher influence. In 1908 a new law was passed that stated the school commission and the municipal council—with a qualified majority in each assembly—could discharge a teacher without ministerial interference (§8). Between 1908 and 1934, approximately 50 teachers were discharged according to Section 8 and between 1934 and 1949 the number was 24 (Skovgaard-Petersen, 2000, p. 631).

The disagreement about teacher job security reflected a central issue in the vision of the school: Should a school be a local institution where teachers were dependent on parental wishes and local employers? Or was the school a societal organization in which the state guarded against capriciousness and teacher job insecurity?

In 1941, the ministry released a circular that stated, “No attempt to direct teaching in specific directions should be made as long as the prescribed objectives are met” (Ministry of Education, 1941, p. 774). Thus, the ministry claimed that it would not “give any guiding principles on how to teach within the frames of the act of the public school of May 18th 1937” (Skovgaard-Petersen, 2000, p. 631). The ministry would not give details about the content of each subject, only an overall framework—teacher freedom of method had become a reality (Skovgaard-Petersen, 2000, p. 636). In terms of accountability, this shift instituted a stronger focus on results than on method.

In conclusion, the period of the nation state produced significant changes concerning school accountability. The state, in the shape of the Ministry of Education and locally elected authorities, began to play a more active role, compared to the reign of absolute monarchy, when the church was unrivaled in terms of education accountability. The emergence of democracy created legitimate platforms for adherents of diverging political, pedagogical, and religious observations, adding to the plurality of Danish society. This plurality influenced the practices of schools, where religious differences and diverging views on pedagogy became a factor in the assessment of schools and teacher performance; even understandings of democracy in practice has changed through the ages, reflecting an increase in the influence of citizens on public institutions such as school.

However, the plurality also made an impact on the organization of the education system, where teachers came to play a more influential role, particularly as a result of teachers’ unions. Thus, this period witnessed the establishment of teacher councils. Parents were another group that was slowly gaining influence in educational matters. That said, however, the period largely continued the hierarchical inspection system, from the pupil to the teacher, the vicar (the school commission), the dean (the school directorate), the bishop, and the ministry. But the winds of democratization were blowing and the role of the clergy was quickly coming to an end.

School Accountability in the Welfare State, 1933–1990

In 1933, a new structure for controlling the schools and introducing new governing bodies ended the clerical inspection system. Henceforth the parish vicar was only to inspect the teaching of religion (Reeh, 2006, p. 165). Instead, responsibilities were taken over by the new office of the county school inspector, the first of which was appointed in 1935 (Nørr, 2003, p. 334ff.). The county school inspector “is the School Directorate’s educational advisor. It is his task to supervise and be consultative for the schools belonging under the jurisdiction of the directorate” (1933 Act of Inspectorate, §18).

To understand the nature of the new office, it is necessary to look to the region of Southern Jutland/Nordschleswig. The schools in Southern Jutland/Nordschleswig were governed according to a different legislative framework from the rest of Denmark’s. This was due to the area’s special history, having been under German rule between 1864 and 1920. After Germany’s defeat in World War I, the area transferred back to Denmark, which meant a new legislative framework had to be put into effect. One of the significant differences about this piece of legislation involved the area of school inspections. The most significant creation was the office of county school inspector (Nørr, 2003, p. 43). The new office was tasked with frequent—and unannounced—inspections of schools on behalf of the school directorate, as well as providing counsel to the school system’s administration, especially in the transfer from German to Danish schooling (Nørr 2003, p. 43). It

was this office that served as inspiration to extend county school inspectors to the rest of Denmark with the 1933 Act of Inspection. However, only in Southern Jutland/Nordschleswig was the inspector authorized to perform unannounced inspections and he generally had more authority than the inspectors in the rest of the country (Nørr, 2003, p. 447).

The reason for this difference was that many teachers feared the county school inspector, “as an inspector, as a critic of teachers and a whip of new methods” (Ministry of Education, 1935, p. 2). There was a local and regional fear of education system standardization, which called for a certain level of pragmatism on the part of the county school inspector (p. 6). This observation is tied to the local Danish community foundation of public education and the deeply rooted sense of participation in decision-making associated with deliberative democracy mentioned earlier. The position of county school inspector thus called for “tactfulness and human understanding. He must balance between encouragement and caution [...]. He should not be one-track minded and not give direction, but kind supervision” (p. 11). It is, however, noteworthy that there was a general view among the county governors that “on the outside the position of county school inspector must be modest, but on the inside the school directorate can empower the inspector with any authority it sees fit and attach significance to his recommendations” (p. 14).

The county school inspectors also had to deal with problems with local teachers. These were often rooted in problems of cooperation between the teacher and the local community or between the teacher and the school commission or between teachers. Both the school authorities and the teachers often wanted the county school inspector to mediate. On March 24, 1924, county school inspector N. J. Nielsen had a serious talk with the teacher in Nørre Hostrup in Southern Jutland/Nordschleswig because the school commission had complained he had a problem showing up at the appropriate time in the morning and had sent children to buy him cigarettes during teaching hours (Nørr, 2003, p. 203). When the talk did not help, the teacher and the school commission were summoned to a meeting in the city of Aabenraa with the school directorate. The school commission agreed to withdraw their complaint if the teacher promised—with his signature—to apply for a position elsewhere. When the teacher did not fulfill his part of the bargain, however, he was again taken to task in January 1930 with the commission and the directorate. The commission pointed out that on November 18, 1929, the teacher had come directly from the pub to the school, appearing to be drunk. Another indication of his drunkenness had been that his jacket had lain on the ground outside the school the whole day. Another accusation made by the commission was that the teacher had been in a fight in the pub. However, the directorate did not take the accusation at face value. Since the county school inspector had found the teacher’s teaching satisfactory in his reports, the teacher was allowed to remain in his position (Nørr, 2003, p. 204).

Thus, the county school inspector played the role of counselor with the authority of years of teaching experience and general esteem. As evident in the sources found in the Provincial Archive for Northern Jutland, the inspector was tasked with taking a stance in most cases concerning schooling in the county, including curricula and teaching hours. The inspector would then give his recommendation to the school directorate or the ministry (if appropriate) for approval. It is important to note that the county school inspector was not the teacher’s superior; he was an esteemed counselor. The office of county school inspector was established to provide a more professional inspection authority able to cover the whole range of subjects, as well as pedagogical and didactical issues, as opposed to the clerical inspection system more occupied with teaching Christianity and the pupil’s Christian proficiencies.

The Hierarchy of Authorities

The 1937 Education Act, however, also described the authoritative hierarchy and organization of the compulsory school system, reflecting both democratic processes and the secular state. The church was represented by only a single member (a rural dean) on one of the committees, the school directorate, directly under the Ministry of Education. The act also distinguished between schools outside of Copenhagen and schools within Copenhagen and other urban schools. The administration differed somewhat within these three areas. At the national level, the Ministry of Education organized the authorities and inspections. Beneath this level were the following:

- School directorate (except for market towns)
- School director (only Copenhagen)
- County school inspector (except for schools outside Copenhagen and not in market towns)
- School commission (except for schools in market towns)
- Municipal council
- School council
- Common teachers' council (in counties)
- Head of school
- Teachers' council
- Parents' council

The authorities and committees mentioned above had different responsibilities and authority vis-à-vis supervision and inspection. The school commissions were in charge of the schools in general, including pupils' school attendance, and enforced the legislative body. The democratic process is reflected in several statements and formulations framing the way accountability could be practiced. For instance, the law said that the school commission makes decisions on teaching resources in "negotiation with the teachers' council" (The Act of Inspectorate, 1933, §7, p. 1319).

The 1933 Act of Inspectorate increased the involvement of parents in the equation. Parent councils became a possibility, but they were only mandatory in Copenhagen schools. Parent councils had the right to observe teaching, call upon the school commission, and be heard in the hiring of new teachers. In the 1940s, less than 10% of Danish schools had a parent council (Skovgaard-Petersen, 2000, p. 634). If a parent council existed, its task was to monitor school attendance and enforce the legal framework to counter pupil absenteeism. The parent council had the authority to fine parents for their children's non-attendance.

After the German occupation of Denmark ended in 1945, a new act of inspection was established in 1949. The new act specifically focused on extending parents' influence on the school council and abolished that last remains of the clerical inspection system: the inspection of religious teaching.⁵ At the same time, the law extended the school council's authority. The council was still expected to supervise school attendance and could still fine parents or introduce other consequences. Reports made by the school commissions reflect the negotiations required as formulated by the law. In the example below, from 1950, the school commission of a local rural school negotiated with the school's executive board, which negotiated with the Ministry of Education. The matter in question related to pupil absenteeism, its causes, potential punishments, and the problems related to such consequences. The school commission of the local rural school wrote (Søften-Foldby School Commission, 1950),

For the School Executive Board of Aarhus County

⁵ The parish vicar retained the right to observe religious teaching.

In response to the inquiry mentioned it should be stated that the vast majority of school absence cases derives from two homes. The two homes are considerably sustained by council money. Fines cannot be collected and the imprisonment of the fathers of the families would mean that the council would have to completely take over the support of the two large families. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that the procedure suggested would diminish school absence considerably. A warning from the child protection agency [*Børneværnet*] helped for some time, but one is reluctant to file a child protection case because the parent–children relation is very good. The homes take good care of the children except with regard to school attendance.

Return to the Ministry of Education in reference to the letter dated the 17th of last month, adding the remark that it has been recommended to the school commission to file a child protection case in the two cases in order to assign a legal guardian to the children.

Executive Board of Aarhus County, May 26, 1950 (p. 1)

The correspondence clearly indicates the emerging welfare state in which the public school system often came to play a vanguard role of welfare state intervention in what was seen as problematic conduct running counter to the interests of the national community. The idea was that the state should advance equality—both in opportunity and in economic terms—and help citizens who were unable to cope by themselves. Following Durkheim, modern differentiated societies bring about societal needs that shape moral and educational institutions and quests for systematic socialization. The moral and social powers of the individual are thus cultivated by *professional groups* that act as “state brokers” who negotiate issues between the family and the state, the private and the public (Buus, 2001, 2008; Durkheim, 1975, 1992).

Tests and Assessments

In addition to the new legislative framework, it is noteworthy that a new instrument for administering the schools was implemented in this period, that of tests and assessments. This constitutes a major shift in control instruments, reflecting the surfacing of a new knowledge regime, namely, the intention of objective measurements on the basis of a positivist philosophy of science (Ydesen, 2011). This meant the introduction of tests of claimed scientific value. Intelligence tests were introduced, along with the new profession of educational psychologist, to determine which children should be transferred into remedial education and which could stay in regular school (Ydesen, 2011). There was a sense of needing to optimize the education system and make optimal use of the human resources available to the nation.

The interwar years also reflected the idea that schools needed to be accountable to the state for the way they spent money. Einar Skov, a senior teacher in the town of Ribe, argued that an expensive educational system had to meet the demands of providing value for public money, particularly when it came to qualifying pupils for the labor market (Skov, 1930). This way of thinking was also reflected at the state level. Following the new practice of state intervention embarked upon during World War I, state subsidies for various societal activities accompanied by demands of economic optimization, rationality, and accountability became increasingly frequent in the 1920s (Banke, 1999; Christiansen & Petersen, 2003). The prominent headmaster of *Skolen på la Cours Vej* in the municipality of Frederiksberg—a neighboring municipality of Copenhagen—Georg Julius Arvin (1929) wrote,

It is quite natural that society and the funding authorities ask the question of the school: What are we getting for the money that is given to public education? Which

values does the school give back to society, and are the results of the school justifiable that the business world might be rightly served with them? (p. 101)

The teacher Signe Tørsleff added in 1939, “We owe it to the children and society that we do not fail the fundamental goals” (p. 4f.). This led to demands for a technology able to quantify and accurately measure the educational system’s products, namely, its students. One example of this demand is seen in a 1941 article by the teacher Johannes Søgaard (1941):

From time to time, the business world criticizes the school’s teaching; attacks which especially criticize arithmetic and orthography results; a critique which the school cannot persuasively ignore or leave unanswered—time and time again. With measurements as described here [standardized attainment tests] the school will surely obtain a means that will demonstrate such attacks usually are baseless and built on very special cases. (p. 358)

Thus, standardized tests of various kinds played into this climate, since they were considered scientific, comparable, and empirical. Thus testing found broad political and pedagogical acceptance and support throughout the Danish educational system, the main exception being the folk high school movement (the Grundtvigians), in which any type of exam or test found little support.

By the 20th century, a ministerial inspection system centered on standardized proficiency assessments (tests) distributed to selected schools was introduced and was deemed to play a crucial role in the years 1915–1954. The 1915 circular concerning the ministerial tests dated March 1 of that year noted,

Since the Ministry wants to form an estimate over the proficiency of the public school in written Danish, a common and simultaneous test in the subject mentioned is to be held at the listed public schools in the cities and in the countryside for this purpose. (Ministry of Culture, 1915, p. 1)

In 1933, reports concerning elementary schools and training colleges regarding the introduction of the ministerial assessments stated,

The intention was to establish the level of proficiency at the end of compulsory education—to which skill level the children were actually brought in the basic subjects. Thus, the goal of the school was to be revealed on the basis of experience. (Ministry of Education, 1933, p. 19)

Thus, we see the main reason for this step was linked to accountability issues. Moreover, from time to time, the business world launched a severe critique of the proficiency level of public school graduates (p. 25). In response, the ministry introduced a measure that would document—if only randomly—the actual achievements of the public school system.

In 1915, the first ministerial assessments were distributed to schools—11 urban, four semi-urban, and 100 rural—throughout the country, with the purpose of studying final year pupils’ proficiency in written Danish; after 1917, the ministerial tests also included arithmetic (Ydesen, 2013). The assessments were distributed in March and were aimed at pupils turning 14 years old in the year under consideration. After the introduction of an exam-free middle school with the 1937 Education Act, ministerial assessments were aimed solely at these pupils. While the number of children tested varied over time, they numbered between 1,100 and 3,500 each year. Exam-free middle school was terminated by the 1958 Education Act, but ministerial assessments had already ceased in 1954, probably due to criticism from the stakeholders (Nørr, 2003, p. 152).

The ministry did not use the ministerial assessments to compare schools or teachers but solely to ascertain whether the pupils leaving compulsory education had achieved a reasonable level in the basic subjects of Danish and arithmetic. However, school directors, head teachers, and teachers from the classes selected for assessment often requested the results from the ministry,

because they wanted to know the proficiency levels of their schools and classes (Danish National Archive, 1937-1972). Examples abound of local school commissions that used the results “publically or to assess or compare different classes, school forms, or teachers’ work” (Ibid. The quote stems from a letter dated February 7, 1945 from the School Director in the provincial city of Aalborg to the Ministry of Education).

Following a complaint from the teachers’ union, the ministry changed its practices in 1938. Henceforth the results were no longer to be handed over to local school authorities or schools, but teachers from the participating classes could still access the results. A ministerial letter dated June 21, 1938, stated, “It has not been intended that school commissions should use the results to assess and compare the work of particular schools” (Letter dated February 7, 1945).

Despite this new stipulation from the ministry, the teachers’ union retained its critical stance toward ministerial assessments and when the ministry called for reviews among the stakeholders in November 1947 concerning whether the practice employing biannual ministerial assessments should continue, the teacher’s union wrote the following in their answer:

On this occasion, the board wishes to express that it finds the value of these assessments highly doubtful. They give no reliable impression of the proficiency level reached in the public school system, in some cases they even generate a distorted picture of the school’s standard, and add to this that they are used to assess the matters of both the school system and particular schools, of course that has never been the intention, but it is impossible to avoid. The board must therefore recommend that the ministerial assessments be terminated. (Letter from the Danish teachers’ union to the Ministry of Education, May 27, 1947)

County school inspectors, on the other hand, generally expressed positive comments toward continuing the ministerial assessments. Some even suggested that the county school inspectors should always receive a copy of the results to compare schools and teachers. One county school inspector referred to a previous complaint made by a parent over a teacher whereby he had dismissed the complaint with reference to the ministerial assessment results (Letter from the Danish teachers’ union to the Ministry of Education, May 27, 1947).

The history of the ministerial assessments strongly resembles contemporary debates about national tests, where, among other things, the use (or misuse) of test results is a key sticking point. Then, as now, the need to know a given school’s results was promoted by critiques of its standards, along with a growing awareness of international competition. During and after World War I, a strong mindset of both utility value and international competition in education was in evidence in Denmark (Ydesen, 2013). One such example and its impact on Danish education are seen in the 1920 call by the teachers’ unions to establish an experimental school and laboratory, since “through the ability to stay in contact with the best produced abroad, such institutions will be able to contribute significantly to keep our educational system at an equal level with theirs” (Tybjerg, 1920, p. 97).

Thus, the history of the ministerial assessments also reveals an unmistakable international dimension. According to Valerie Borer and Martin Lawn (2013, p. 50), data were increasingly considered the most objective way of understanding reality after World War II. At the same time, this shows how differing agendas among stakeholders involved with school accountability permeate the educational field, with consequences for governance across all levels of the educational system. Finally, it indicates that testing—and, more specifically, the value of testing—is a key battleground for these diverging interests in the educational field.

School accountability in the welfare state is characterized by a fundamental reshuffling of the configuration between stakeholders. The most important development was the ejection of the clergy

from school matters in general and school inspections in particular. This development was facilitated by the expansion and strengthening of state power closely connected with the emerging welfare state. The strengthening of state power is clearly indicated by the rollout of county school inspectors across the country and the ministerial assessments, which testify to an expanded state presence at both the local and national levels. However, the period also reveals a more pluralistic picture vis-à-vis school accountability stakeholders, with teachers and parents playing a more prominent role via separate institutions—such as teacher and parent councils—and more direct involvement in decision making and in the interplay and inclusion with established education authorities (school commissions and school directorates). To a wide degree, teachers and parents were also mobilized in the formation of the welfare state and sense of national community. In addition, the period introduced new accountability technology, namely, quantitative tests in the shape of standardized proficiency tests and intelligence tests, accompanied by a belief that it is possible to generate quantitative knowledge about education progress and proficiency to optimize education. Both of the latter developments should be seen in the light of the strong sense of international competition prominent in the interwar years and perhaps even more so after World War II, when the Cold War with its dichotomist worldview formed the dominant paradigm. In 1989, a new law passed that instituted school boards with a parental majority at each school to replace the school commissions and the office of county school inspector.

School Accountability in the Competitive State, 1990–2014

Since the late 1980s, accountability practices in Danish schools have become influenced by tendencies dominating school systems worldwide. It was tendencies originating from practices initiated by international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), and, not least, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that became influential after World War II. Since the late 1980s, “indicators of performance, institutional competition, public data and accountability, and reporting systems became a new American norm, and through the OECD, a European norm” (Lawn, 2013, p. 118). The development was promoted by the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the rise of economic globalization. However, there were strong historical antecedents for this development.

Ever since the interwar period, education was considered an important economic resource for nations to ensure economic stability and growth (Ydesen, 2011, p. 49ff.). After World War II, UNESCO decided to establish an international office to collect data to compare schools systems in member countries (UNESCO, 1948, p. 17). This decision initiated the processes of designing and conducting large international quantitative assessments of pupils’ academic skills in different subjects such as reading and math. The so-called School Effectiveness and School Improvement Movement, which had some influence in the Western world since the 1960s, based its activities on these types of tests and comparisons. In addition, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), which was founded in 1967—even though its activities were initiated in 1958—was involved in similar activities (Andersen & Andreasen, 2012).

The IEA conducted large international evaluations of pupil academic skills. One of them provides a good example of how such assessments were used in political argumentation and processes. In the late 1980s, Denmark participated for the first time in an international comparative survey and its results were very disappointing: Danish pupils did not perform as well as pupils in the other Nordic countries. A report of the results of the Danish pupils was published under the title “The Ugly Duckling and the Swans,” where the ugly duckling referred to Denmark and the swans to

the other Nordic countries (Mejdning, 1994). The results of this report caused immense debate. On the one hand, the report questioned national ideas about the school system and pupils' skills; on the other hand, experts questioned the results of test-based international comparisons.

The political climate at the time meant that Danish politicians chose to integrate such ideas of assessment, which had gained currency, in practices of accountability. Inspired by such tendencies, in 2005 the conservative-liberal government decided to introduce the national mandatory standardized testing of all pupils in selected subjects a number of times throughout their basic schooling. In 2010, these tests were run nationally for the first time. The intention of this practice was to try to estimate pupils' performance to improve quality in the schools. On the other hand, the education system could also be said to be guarding itself against criticism by adopting measurements, optimization, and the use of business methods (Lawn, 2013, p. 113). In this respect, the ministerial tests might be seen as a historical precursor of this practice.

The 1989 Law of Administration and Control

In 1990, the new law of the administration and control of basic schooling passed in 1989 took effect. Besides granting more authority to the head of the school, a new practice relating to accountability was introduced. The national tests became integrated into systems of control, as schools from 2006/2007 became obliged to write so-called quality reports and related action plans, both of which were to be made public and accessible at each school's homepage for anyone to read. These documents are processed and approved by the local municipal council.

A new government agency, the Quality and Inspection Agency [*Kvalitets og tilsynsstyrelsen*], was established in 2011. This new agency plays a central role in the contemporary Danish school accountability system:

The minister for children and education follows and evaluates the quality in the public school on the basis of the schools' academic results. The Quality and Inspection Agency is responsible for assisting the minister in this task. This is done by the agency screening the schools' results, including the average school-leaving examination grades in the mandatory examination subjects at the school-leaving exam.

If the agency encounters signs of continuous poor quality at a school, it initiates a dialogue with the responsible municipal council about how to improve the academic level of the school.

If the dialogue does not lead to the municipal council taking initiative to improve the quality of the school, the minister for children and education can instruct the municipal council to sketch out a plan of action to improve the academic level.

As part of the quality screening the Quality and Inspection Agency also goes through the municipal quality reports. Information from the quality reports may also be included in the follow-up on schools showing signs of continuous poor quality. (Danish Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 1)

Whether the results of the national standardized testing system should be made public or not has been a subject of great discussion. A key question relates to accountability, since the authorities in a democratic state have different and in some ways less ability to inflict any consequences to schools if they do not—in the state's opinion—live up to certain criteria. Being criticized in public, however, can have severe consequences for schools. Ranking schools on the homepage of the ministry's website has been tried, but this practice was stopped due to the fact that too many mistakes could be identified in the data collection, thus leading to erroneous rankings. The quality report, however,

also reports school performance in the standardized tests and some schools even supply this report with diagrams to indicate their improvement through the years.

Recent Legislative Changes and International Influence

New legislation concerning basic schooling introduced in recent years reflects new demands to teachers concerning the collection of documentation about pupil academic performance and achievement. In 2006, the government decided that teachers should draw up a so-called pupil plan in the first to seventh grades once a year. The pupil plan should describe each pupil's achievement level in all subjects and include different kinds of documentation, including the results from the national standardized tests. The results are to be reported using specific categories (average, below average, above average, etc.). Thus grading was reintroduced at these levels of schooling, after its abolishment in 1958. In addition to the pupil plans, teachers should also develop an "education plan" for pupils in the eighth and ninth grades. The pupil and education plans should be used in relation to the "current evaluation and the decision-making related to this and contribute to pupils' decisions on school and/or educational path following grade 9" (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 1). This process reveals the tendency of teachers to require documentation to maintain transparency in their authority toward other stakeholders, such as parents, the municipality, and the state (Bjerg & Knudsen, 2012, p. 90).

At the same time, a host of experts and international organizations have emerged, such as the OECD, UNESCO, and the European Union (EU), all of which create data "through common tools and categories" (Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm, & Simola, 2011) and move toward transcending national policy debates, because these data enable cultural exchanges across borders and places, creating a new type of virtual and borderless policy space (Lawn, 2011). This development has induced a shift from state-based government to the networked or co-produced actions of many actors and agencies working on behalf of and across different nations (Lawn, 2011, p. 260). The existence of this new space implies controls without apparent political intervention. In other words, standards and benchmarks created by these organizations are used to govern several countries' educational systems across a different kind of policy space, removing the necessity for legislation and reducing education politics through creating seemingly comparable services (Lawn, 2011, p. 261). This, then, is the climate in which accountability has gained favor as a way to govern education, one that is viewed capable of providing the system's requirements, namely, standards in schooling. For Denmark, these globalization and marketization trends have resulted in the government losing its monopoly over the public education system, along with its attendant description of school practices and outcomes. This prerogative has instead been delegated to a disparate group consisting of international organizations, reporters, and research institutions (Dahler-Larsen, 2006, p. 61). The rise of accountability in Danish education has thus generated a new governance situation.

Accountability in 21st-century Danish public education is closely linked with national tests originating from the Danish Ministry of Education and annual quality reports regarding education compiled by the municipalities. A distinct trend toward international comparisons is also in evidence, most explicitly manifest in the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and the PISA. Comparable results at various levels have become the dominant means by which researchers and politicians describe school performance and accountability has become a central component in the steering and management of Danish schools. Since the passage of the Danish 2002 Act on Transparency and Openness in Education (L414), the year-end examination results of each public school in Denmark have been published on the Internet. Although a new center-left government took office in September 2011 and suspended league table publications

based on national tests, the previous government aimed at the full transparency of the national test results of schools (Danish Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 10). According to a survey from the autumn of 2011, however, some 17% of Danish municipalities still publish the national test results of their local schools (Berlingske Research, 2011).

Conclusion

Accountability is a broad concept consisting of multiple layers and numerous relevant perspectives dependent on the number and position of stakeholders in the equation. Our analysis has focused on different historical contexts, using the analytical questions put forth by Burke, asking “who is accountable to whom, for what purposes, for whose benefit, by which means, and with which consequences?” Based on this analysis, we find that accountability practices in Danish primary schooling within a historical perspective reflect both very diversified practices and significant diachronic changes. The analysis clearly reveals accountability practices as being highly dependent on different kinds of contextual factors, although some features are recurrent.

The influence and importance of contextual factors in the practice of accountability are very significant in relation to systems of school control in all four state formations covered. Under the reign of absolute monarchy, accountability was instituted in a very top–down, one-way system serving to uphold the power base of the two dominant institutions: the monarchy and the church. When democracy was introduced in 1849, accountability measures underwent a gradual softening process, leaving more room for the introduction of local authorities and other stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, into the field. This created budding routes of alternative accountability orientations. In other words, the state and the church were joined by other relevant interests in the way schools, teachers, and pupils were held accountable. Generally, democracy seems to require new ways of practicing accountability compared to absolutism, since both the relationship and configuration between the involved parties, their means, and their consequences changed. In the heyday of the welfare state, the protagonists of school accountability changed significantly, adding to the process already started in 1849. The clergy was taken out of the equation, whereas teachers, parents, and even pupils began to play a more prominent role. Finally, in the competitive state, school accountability has begun to incorporate an external logic intrinsically linked with international comparisons and priorities in promoting national competitiveness. This forceful logic, which was already in evidence in the interwar years, although in a premature form, seems to serve as a point of orientation for all stakeholders involved, permeating the entire field of school accountability and, not least, turning the state into a different actor hinging on international comparisons.

To sum up, the history of Danish primary education reflects an interesting evolution of accountability practices clearly following the different types of government in the Danish state. In this process, four periods can be identified, characterized by shifts depending on who has the authority to exert power through accountability: in the first period, the church and the state (with the church as the supreme authority); in the second period, the state and the church (the state had supreme authority); in the third period, solely the state; and in the fourth period the market and the state.

However, the analysis also reveals a strong recurring presence of the disciplining effects of accountability. In this respect, accountability as a practice works as a means by which the state exerts control over institutions not solely according to what they “produce”—as to what can be counted and measured—but also, and perhaps more important, as to the agency of the individuals comprising these institutions. As Foucault (1979) points out, such practices work as a means of disciplining individuals and institutions. Even in a responsive and democratic state where the

consequences of accountability can be negotiated, individuals and institutions tend to adapt their activities to what is the “object” of the counts and measures. However, this situation cannot be understood as a mere top–down exertion of power; instead, the disciplinary effects are strongly influenced by the composition of the social field, that is, movements, allies, antagonists, and interests. Societal power structures, the political climate, the distribution of resources and authority, and even the character of technologies available especially play a role. For instance, the development of the modern technologies of data collection and international quantitative surveys has influenced the impact and use of such surveys by politicians and authorities and thus also the practice of accountability.

As such, advances in technologies of communication and information have also played a significant role in recent years. An international dimension has become increasingly dominant in the arguments for implementing accountability practices. Both historically (since the beginning of the 20th century) and currently, a strong sense of international inspiration, competition, and comparison is conducive to test-based accountability practices, which has also promoted a bureaucratic accountability wave focusing on schools and institutions as a supplement to parallel individualized accountability measures.

Both the consequences of accountability practices and the means by which documentation is procured have been the object of critique and discussion within a historical perspective. We mentioned the example from the 1849 journal “*Den Nordiske Folkeskole*” [Nordic Basic School] in which a politician and a teacher criticized the process and consequences of such practices. Such a critique is also reflected in recent debates in Denmark in relation to whether schools should be ranked in league tables based on the scores of the national standardized tests on the homepage of the Ministry of Children and Education’s website. In this debate two arguments dominate, as was the case in the debate surrounding the ministerial assessments: the negative consequences to schools and teaching and the lack of validity of the results of such testing, which makes ranking most unreliable.

Outside critiques from various angles concerning the educational system’s proficiency standards are a strong driver of educational accountability. For instance, such critiques have worked to promote test-based accountability measures at least since the interwar years. Criticism creates proponents of accountability measures both inside and outside the educational system. Thus, political persons or parents, with their children’s interests at stake, might express such demands, as well as education management and policy agents.

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