

Rethinking Perpetuating Paradigms in Education: Is the Danish System Open for Global
Implementation?

by

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Presented to the

Department of English & Communications

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

American University of Armenia

Yerevan, Armenia

May 15, 2021

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Dedication

This capstone is dedicated to my grandfather, Ararat Kazarian, for always challenging me to be an avid learner and a better human being. I am eternally thankful to him for being my role model and instilling in me the passion for knowledge.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank Dr. Hourig Attarian for her wisdom, constant support, and professional guidance throughout the process. She has been a great motivator who encouraged me to keep going and reminded me of the virtues of education even when I was at my lowest.

I want to express my gratitude to Zara Kevorkova, Daniel Scott Peterson, Christina Scott, Carsten Løye, and Svea Gudrun Hej, whose generous contribution and willingness to share personal experiences became a pivot to my research: I would not have been able to produce the work I did without their assistance.

A wholehearted thanks to Christian Garbis, who inspired me to pursue my studies in English and Communications through his contagiously profound appreciation of writing and narrative artistry.

An honest thanks to the entire AUA faculty for their knowledge, dedication, and for their contribution to our future, as prospective AUA graduates.

Further thanks to my friends who I shared my capstone journey with. Their insights, proposed alternative perspectives, and constructive criticism have been of unmatched value.

I am sincerely thankful to all those who encouraged me to apply to AUA, no matter my unusual academic background.

Particularly thanks to those who invested in my future, believed in me enough to contribute financially when I needed funds to sustain my studies.

Finally, my deepest thanks to my parents and family, without whom, none of these would have been possible.

Abstract

This research aims to rethink the extent to which the Danish education model can be implemented internationally to benefit communities, particularly Armenia. The country's education system has repeatedly ranked as one of the best in the world, consistently being in the spotlight of leading economies. Despite the highest income taxes, Denmark does not cease to provide incredible life satisfaction rates either, with an average of 7,6, exceeding the OECD average. Apart from free healthcare, public education, and other benefits for locals, Denmark offers tuition-free higher education for its citizens, putting quality, inclusion, and contentment at the forefront of its education policy. Yet not all the aspects of the splendidly successful model can be embedded analogously into the Armenian education sector. Therefore, the research focuses on the elements that can be acquired, honed, and delivered as part of the Armenian public school curriculum.

Keywords: Danish education model, public school sector, learning, equity and inclusion, education paradigms, critical thinking, sex education, teacher education, learning competencies, capacity building.

Motifs and Introduction

Learning is an act of palpable awakening; education is where possibility is born. Yet we, as Armenians, are heirs of a self-made culture where weddings capture more attention than marriage, funerals overplay the grief, and education is superior to learning. We repeatedly juggle back and forth between the essence and the outward facade, and yet we are trapped in a closed institutional loop where cause and effect ricochet each other endlessly, gulping in generations. This capstone is a reminder: it invites the reader to ponder over the causes in the first place, shedding light on learning as it is, unvarnished, skin and bone, with a slightly uneven progression, at times free-wheeling, deprived of being shoehorned into a complex set of orders, introspective, self-reflexive, bound to subsequent legal ramifications, emancipatory. My study intends to eradicate the shredded understanding of education in Armenia by taking a look at a successful model in Denmark. Above anything else:

- It challenges all learners to seek out a possibility everywhere and not solely rely on what is expected of them.
- It speaks to those, bold enough to abandon outside validation.
- It beckons you to roll up your sleeves and act upon your knowledge and the ability to identify the issues within the social realm.

Personal Context

If I were asked to define the purpose of education years back, I would likely come up with a cliché interpretation without understanding the sensitivity of the question and unpeeled sub-layers within. Ask me now – I still do not have a concrete response, which this time is rather a conscious and intellectually aware choice. What I am most sure of instead is that education is multifaceted. And that explains the pallet of definitions, all of which could apply. The study conducted is heavily invested in my personal reactions to how education is

perceived and positioned locally, which I opted to deliver in a self-narrative way to better navigate how my insights and comprehension of the matter transform, if at all, in parallel with my findings.

Local Context

Education, nonetheless as all-around as it appears, is prone to be reinterpreted through alternating paradigms that reflect the diminished understanding of democratic education. “Teachers are experts who did not succeed in their field.” The statement pierced my consciousness not because I was being exposed to it the first time, not even because my brother articulated it— that thought pattern puts a red cross on the teacher authority, markedly suggesting that school is a place for the imposter and education is a fraudulent gain. To understand the origins of the former statement, one has to familiarize themselves with the local context.

The flair for pedagogy aside, why could one be unsuccessful? Or else what are achievable metrics for success the Armenian teacher lacks? One was mentioned earlier, but authority itself is molded by a number of descriptors, from residual elitism partly triggered by obsolete institutional design up until the determined compensation. A given public school teacher receives a below-average salary, making the Armenian State Pedagogical University a less desirable place to get admitted to. On top of that, the local university admissions policy design contributes to massive disinterest towards the only higher academic institution that offers pre-service teacher training: it requires the lowest minimum score of the national admissions exam. Eventually, the university ends up attracting students of the following categories:

1. Students who study for the diploma, no matter the specialization.

2. Students who were offered a seat against their will, not by their first, second, or even the third choice.

3. Students who are determined to become teachers and enjoy working with kids/children/adolescents (not the vast majority).

The last group, despite their genuine enthusiasm and passion for their future job, fall victim to the vicious cycle of an underrepresented institution and ill-equipped generalization on teachers' deeds. Yet as Nel Noddings would put it, education is never a consumer good. It is a public good, hence, should be valued and treasured (Noddings, 2003, p. 241).

Education arms learners with knowledge, but one always has a choice. Their intellectual capacity can be used to disarm the person in front, yet if their education is primarily fueled with morals and values, their knowledge will unlock the potential of others, give them wings and let them taste the liberating nature of education. The purpose of my perceived education is always empowering. And if there is a single way to grant the students academic privileges I did not have as a kid, I will take that path. This internal philosophy of my own inspired me to commit to a project that hopefully brings value to my community. Every other change we pursue starts from acknowledging its need first and then preparing others involved for the succeeding transgression through the delivery of that knowledge, commonly referred to as education.

Key Terms and Definitions

Education philosophy: A critical statement or a set of statements that identify the values, beliefs, and perceptions of an individual, a group, or community with respect to education. In other words, it defines the objectives of the school.

Pedagogic creed: Is coined by John Dewey in his article “My Pedagogic Creed,” 1897, and is used to define the essence, the purpose of education, and pedagogy.

Learning Competencies: Predefined statements that describe the skills and knowledge students are expected to master after certain hours of instruction.

Sex Week: A non-profit sexual education campaign within the Danish school curriculum offered in the sixth week of each academic year, from grades 6 to 10.

Equity in schools: the quality of being fair and impartial in an academic setting omitting the differences in gender, race, ethnicity, social, religious, and political views, sexual orientation, learning disabilities, social status, etc.

Literature Review

I analyzed scholarly literature and news articles addressing various aspects of the Danish and Armenian education models to identify recurrent themes prevalent in my research area. My literature findings culminate in the following categories:

1. Education philosophy and learning competencies at the forefront of the teaching policy.
2. Redefined inclusion and equity on a social level.
3. Not all Danish methodologies can be implemented globally.
4. Reinterpreted teacher education and capacity building.

Education philosophy and learning competencies at the forefront of teaching policy

Having a predefined education philosophy and pedagogical creed is key to an inclusive education system. Both should reflect the ideas of equality in a classroom setting to achieve that on a social level. Denmark, for instance, had to reconsider the entire nucleus of their education to set the foundation of the century-long reform and redefine the learning outcomes in public schools (Bjerg, Callewaert, Elle, Mylov, Nissen, & Silberbrandt, 1995).

Armenia, in contrast, is still under the post-soviet influence, which is vividly expressed especially in the academic arena (Anapiosyan, Hayrapetyan, & Hovsepyan, 2014). One of the trends in the analyzed literature was that Armenian schools do not always provide learning competencies and outcomes for particular classes. These either do not exist or are not accessible to the public, which provides room for misconceptions and misinterpretations of the education quality. This is especially the case in the regions where education is highly polarized, and students have limited resources for learning.

The study conducted by the Open Society Foundation, which encompassed “legal frameworks, international best practices, and qualitative research methods with UN, UNICEF, and UNESCO,” only confirmed the escalating need for solid competencies and effective resource management to attain nationwide growth in academics (Anapiosyan, Hayrapetyan, & Hovsepyan, 2014, p. 4).

Inclusion and equity on an academic level

The Danish experience once more asserts that social inclusion and equal treatment begin at an early age. However, the country delved even further to encourage mutual understanding among its citizens and embedded empathy into the school curriculum (Alexander, 2016). The Danish kids practice and master empathy on par with problem-solving and self-control, thus learning to be respectful of others' senses. They deliberately put students with different capacities, strengths, and weaknesses in the same group to make them realize that everyone has their power. This way, students practice collaboration and teamwork firsthand (Alexander, 2016).

Another strategy to minimize the exclusion and artificial hierarchy in a learning environment was put into effect in 2012 and had a goal of reducing the exclusion rates to 4% by 2015 (Egelund & Dyssegaard, 2019). Some Danish schools were still offering classes for

disabled students separately, which was eroding the possibility of interaction with their peers. To address the former issue, the Danish Ministry of Education proposed multiple activities that involved three-year monitoring and research on a municipal level as well as the creation of a Resource Center for inclusion. All these procedures climaxed under the so-called “Inclusion Act,” which was a framework aimed at ensuring a more effective transition towards an inclusive society (Egelund & Dyssegaard, 2019).

Now comparing this to Armenia, a fair amount of local schools have centers for special needs education, where those with limited capacities can take courses or book a consultation with psychologists to keep up with the rest of the class. However, these kids are not always accepted by their classmates and quite often turn out to be outliers because of their underperformance and limited capacity in a particular area. This tendency alludes to the claim that the transition towards equity and inclusion should primarily take place through early education by teaching democratic and all-round thinking, tolerance, acceptance, and empathy at schools (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006).

Not all Danish methodologies can be implemented globally

As powerful as the Nordic model of education is, not all strategic solutions can as effectively be applied elsewhere. Antokainen argues in his *In Search of the Nordic Education* that “education has to be specific and local which is discernable at least culturally, but often also in political and economic terms” (Antikainen, 2006). The Danish model of compulsory education is, first of all, national and conceptualizes local values, practices, and prejudices above anything else. Yet, the challenge of adapting a progressively inclusive system also lies in the fact that the term “inclusion” is perceived differently from one socio-economic group to another. The interpretation differs even among Nordic countries (Lundahl, 2016). Similar multiplicity in comprehension highlights the significance of defining the

desired inclusion first and determining the competencies we aspire to achieve upon the project implementation.

However, the impact of the Nordic model is not as idealistic as it seems to be: the problem with the exalted equity in the Nordic classroom setting is that it prevents those who demonstrate full capacity and keenness towards the subject from progressing the way they would if circumstances were otherwise. In this scenario, it is of equal significance to objectively identify the academic achievement gaps and come up with possible solutions to fill those by bringing the community's voice into play. These and other contradicting hypotheses in Danish schools will be elaborated on in the proceeding sections.

Teacher education and capacity building should be of utmost importance

The policy paper on inclusive education in Armenia by the Open Society Foundation indicated that the ongoing legal framework and the evolving discourse around the topic are too far from encompassing all the diversity, particularly special needs education. The authors reflect on the pedagogical and psychological support and its potential introduction, especially in the regions, most of which are massively neglected by the authorities (Anapioşyan, Hayrapetyan and Hovsepyan, 2014). A similar procedure will ease the burden of needs assessment, too, gradually transitioning towards the curricula built around the individual, as opposed to the majority. On top of that, the revision of the Law on Education to address a broader and more inclusive public should be at the core of the impending change (Anapioşyan, Hayrapetyan & Hovsepyan, 2014).

Equity and inclusion cannot be obtained without capacity building and quality teacher education or training. The Nordic model had been revised to shape the most suitable system for a particular public. Likewise, establishing regional institutional resource centers and revisiting the law alone will not generate societal good. The holistic vision of education is molded upon the exchange of experiences. For that, introspection and a diagnostic way of

perceiving and internalizing the surrounding world is crucial. The prospect of “having full inclusion in a matter of years raises a number of concerns related to the inclusive education reality of Armenia” in addition to its quality (Anapiosyan, Hayrapetyan & Hovsepyan, 2014, p. 13). To that end, multidisciplinary support teams and teacher assistants are indispensable to create an effective learning environment. All of these teams and assistants should ideally be equipped with the necessary methodology and be qualified to teach collaboratively with principal teachers by encouraging immersive learning and classroom engagement of those with special education needs.

Concluding notes

The analyzed literature is a solid foundation for my capstone topic that points at areas to explore further. It focuses on multiple resources that illustrate both sides of the Danish education model and makes it powerful enough to use them for comparative analysis. The provided literature involves not only sources written by the Scandinavian scholars who are part of the system but also external insights from the US and Armenia. This multiplicity of perspectives contributes to the reduction of prejudice from my study.

I looked at only one source from Armenia, mostly because I had been exposed to the Armenian public school system directly: I had a desire to familiarize myself with the Danish model better and explore existent practices in much detail. Nonetheless, a more profound analysis of governmental reports and documentation for Armenia is a gap that I encourage to address for those aiming to further the study. I opted to narrow down the scope of my research into Denmark for this particular project, which is why the Armenian system is not substantiated in depth.

Finally, there is a lack of novel research on students’ reasoning and perception of inclusion in an academic setting in Denmark, given that it is pivotal to the success of the

model. The one I accessed was conducted a decade back, which does not guarantee high accuracy at this point. Therefore, my methodology will incorporate interviews with students from Denmark to understand their perspectives on it. I do realize that due to the COVID-19 situation, the school system undergoes a fundamental transition phase and that the pandemic might have an unconscious impact on students' reasoning, but it is insistently dictated by the era, and the COVID bias cannot be completely eliminated given the circumstances.

Research Question

The research question for my capstone addresses the following: “To what extent does the success of the Danish education system lend itself to be a model that can be emulated, specifically by Armenia?” My primary focus will be public schools and respective educational practices that resulted in increased inclusiveness in an academic setting. Fast forwarding, I will analyze and compare two drastically different forms of pedagogy and their effects within a certain cultural context: in this respect, Denmark and Armenia. I hope to scrutinize the trends in both models, conduct a gap analysis to come up with findings and hands-on recommendations that will benefit Armenian education.

Methodology

My research methodology is invested in qualitative research as opposed to quantitative, meaning that I preferred to explore the research question, basing my conclusions on in-depth interview results. I deemed one-on-one Zoom interviews with education representatives from Denmark more relevant to my study, given the nature of my hypothesis. To understand the school structure and the features of a culture other than Armenia best, I desired to hear from those directly impacted by that society.

In this respect, I identified 30 representatives that could potentially contribute to the research. The distance made it challenging to connect with them; hence I started a cold email outreach campaign. The addressees included but were not limited to education experts and researchers from Aarhus University, public school teachers and administration, as well as students from multiple academic institutions all in Denmark. Out of 30 contacted, I heard back from 8, of which only 4 agreed to be interviewed. However, all of the participants brought an unmatched value and pointed out the most profound and seemingly bizarre solutions implemented in their schools, offering a parallel perspective.

The in-depth interview allowed for the type of flexibility that other methodologies lack, as a rule. In particular, I could afford to elaborate on the points I found most intriguing. The Interview format made it possible to ask impromptu questions considering the flow and contextual development. None of that would have been feasible with surveys, for instance.

The target group included both genders: 2 men and 2 women. I was lucky to hear from two students, a public school teacher and a principal, which provided the intended diversity. Of course, I acknowledge that small-scale research is not representative of the entire Danish society, so I took rather a self-reflexive stance when analyzing collected data and drawing conclusions. Without being unnecessarily hyperbolic, I suggest the reader perceive this piece as a personal observation. I was initially interested in the equity and inclusion aspect of the system, yet the results of the fieldwork put me in an alternative direction inviting to explore common practices and perpetuating paradigms within the public school system in Denmark. Accordingly, my questions were reformulated to discern multiplying differences between the modern Scandinavian and post-Soviet models. Most of them, however, addressed the school culture, existing policies, pre-service and in-service teacher training, inclusivity, and

academic achievement gaps. Details on interview guidelines can be found in appendices B and C, customized for a school representative and a student, respectively.

Each interview had an approximate duration of 50 to 120 minutes and was recorded for future reference upon the participant's consent. Interviewees were also required to sign consent forms beforehand where they would specify the points they agreed to (available in appendix A, Generic Consent Form). All interviews were conducted in English and were transcribed later to assist the analysis. Out of all the responses collected, I identified five patterns that redefine quality education and shape a model that prides itself in robustness and progressiveness.

Research Findings and Analysis

Out of all interviews conducted, I categorized five recurring elements in them into themes, to analyze them one by one. Following this trajectory, we will witness some of the common practices that ensure the academic success of the Danes. In the end, I will provide a reverse insight into some of the precautions that come in conjunction with these categories and that need to be taken into account when designing a new model.

Teaching Critical Thinking through History: Open Debate and Participation vs. Passive Listening

Opinions split when it comes to teaching History, as it can be studied in different formats. History has sparked my personal interest only in high school, where I got exposed more profoundly to theatre, ballet, and art history. Before that, I had a limited grasp of what exactly perpetuates through centuries and why it is important. When looking at it now, my lack of appreciation derived from unawareness. I was taught the dates and events but was never challenged to think about why they happened and how they could have been avoided. In

other words, History has always been a set of numbers I had to memorize, which, if you ask me now, is a toxic way of mastering the subject. My first introduction to the critical and consequential analysis of historical events took place only in my junior year at AUA. I was pleasantly surprised to find out Denmark adheres to a similar teaching strategy while teaching Danish History. Daniel, one of the younger participants, who studied both at a public and a private school, mentions:

“In history class I’ve never ever been asked to remember a date. I’ve never been said, oh, when did this king die, or who was this king of this year. Okay this happened. Why did it happen? And what can we do to prevent it from happening in the future. What were the societal forces that made this happen and how can we draw parallels when something’s happening like this today?” (Daniel, interview, March 30, 2021).

When I talked to Christina later, who is a Danish History, and Sociology teacher at a local public school, she mentioned with a unyielding spark in her eyes that History is all about debates. One cannot just blindly believe what has been written decades ago and what cannot be proved entirely. For that, schools have to teach critical and analytical thinking through History. It should be invested in participation, and everyone has to feel encouraged to speak up even if their voice differs from the majority. “And that is how we create History,” she added (Christina, interview, March 31, 2021).

In response to that, Daniel recalls that History used to be one of his most favorite subjects as it made him question the events and occasions that are taken as utter truth by default (Daniel, interview, March 30, 2021).

A reinterpreted teaching methodology of History can be beneficial for the Armenian community, too, as it will foster problem-solving, develop rationality and independence of thought, as opposed to passive listening. In Denmark, the art of debate has been taken to a whole different level: two of the participants agreed that disagreement is highly welcomed

and even encouraged when studying History, and for good reason. How else can they challenge socially accepted paradigms?

Moreover, as Christina indicates, her students practice role-play to understand better historical characters and motifs behind their behavior and decisions. This way, they develop empathy and learn to identify with others' perspectives, even if those are historical characters. On that account, debate, participation, role play, and critical thinking should be compulsory to understand and appreciate History (Christina, interview, March 31, 2021).

Project-Based Learning, Teamwork and Inclusivity

Project work and collaboration is another common feature in the Danish system. "Sometimes students learn much more from each other than from the teacher," Christina mentions (Christina, interview, March 31, 2021). Her classes are accompanied by an abundance of participation-heavy group activities and collaborative projects. Daniel could not agree more that the Danish model is grounded on in participation (Daniel, interview, March 30, 2021). Group activities engage everyone allowing interaction with those who they do not normally communicate a lot and teamwork hones communication skills providing exposure to a multitude of communication styles. This again confirms Christina's belief that students learn from each other way more than we can imagine, and schools have to facilitate that process (Christina, interview, March 31, 2021).

Through project-based interaction, Danish students also understand how to make their knowledge applicable in real-life scenarios. In that respect, practice and applicability of the skills acquired should be the pipeline of a collaborative learning institution, which is again worth considering when developing a curriculum for Armenian schools.

Navigating Sexuality: Sex Week and Menstrual Health Education

What struck me most of all throughout my research was not the alternative way of teaching History, not the lack of grades until a certain point, not even the way the Danes perceive the differences in the private and public sector – Danish students are exposed to sexual education from the first grade. In all honesty, I thought it was a joke when I heard it first, but it was all until Christina elaborated on the matter. Danish students start learning about physiological differences, intricacies of desire, and consent from an early age. The Danes believe that “comprehensive sexual education (CSE) — a curriculum of rights-based and gender-focused approaches to sexuality— is linked to improved sexual and reproductive health, reduced rates of sexually transmitted infection, and less teen pregnancy” (Apolitical, 2019). Most students are familiarized with contraception, porn, and sexually transmitted diseases during the so-called “Sex Week.” The name of the week is based on the number 6 in Danish, which is written *seks* but is pronounced closer to six. Thus, the sixth week of each term (grades 6 to 10) is entirely dedicated to CSE.

“We show them pads, condoms, and sex toys during the class. It’s better they learn it from us and take safety measures than get into trouble,” Christina admits (Christina, interview, March 31, 2021). Interestingly, sex education is not a separate course where both the students and the teacher feel awkward and are impatient to finish the discussion, which is how we covered menstrual health in my Anatomy of Human Body class.

Christina was shocked to hear that Armenian teens turn to the nurse when they are out of tampons.

“But you are not sick! I can't believe it you have to go to the nurse because you aren't sick. all of my colleagues, even male colleagues know that their girls, students, have

their period because the girls would just come and say in the classroom, they would come and say, I have my period” (Christina, interview, March 31, 2021).

Her astonishment pointed at the cultural differences, socially accepted norms, and society’s openness to discuss sexuality, which will be challenging to replicate in Armenia, yet not non-viable. Students have to be taught sexual education, not as anything extraordinary. To achieve that, teachers, in their turn, have to be willing to spark conversations around what is perceived as taboo. That very local taboo is subject to modification through education, and only proper upbringing and instruction can eradicate the stigmatized shame from what pertains to our health. In this context, CSE is the nexus of a versed, self-aware, and healthy society.

Public vs. Private Schools Reinterpreted

The next theme to explore is rather a personal observation and encompasses more subjectivity than the rest. My choice to embed it into the capstone was driven by own fascination. The questionnaire designed initially comprised a question that was meant to gauge conceptual differences of public and private schools (see appendices B and C, question #4). I was beyond astonished to find out that all of the participants stood firm in their faith that there is no difference in the quality of the education between public and private institutions: the only distinction is that in private schools, parents are more involved in the lives of their children as students. Quite naturally, you might wonder, why would they claim otherwise? Do they not represent the public sector? Christina, the public school teacher, who also had the experience of teaching in private school, claimed that they both provided the same quality. There was no special treatment or way of knowledge delivery in private school, and learning outcomes were pretty much the same (Christina, interview, March 31, 2021).

Daniel, a recent graduate, attended both private and public schools, and he preferred his public school experience over private (Daniel, interview, March 30, 2021).

Living and studying in Armenia, my definition of a private school was primarily invested in the notion that private equals quality. The logic behind this thought pattern is fairly self-explanatory when considering that private schools are restricted to a certain social group, that the number of students in the class is a lot less than that of the public schools, that teachers do not receive the same compensation, that resources and technology available in the classroom is in no way close to what public schools possess and finally that the overall architecture of a given private school is way more inviting and modern than those of most public schools, especially in regions. Long story short, my perception of a public school was constricted to the Armenian context, while the participants of my study made me redefine the school types. My paradigm shift kept me wondering how many more believe that the difference between private and public academic institutions lies in quality? I acknowledge that this is not a solution I purpose, but students have to have an appreciation of the institution they spend most of their time in. They have to sense the value the school provides them with and that they give back to the school. This, in turn, will increase their motivation to attend the school, embracing their major growth opportunity.

Evaluation and Assessment in the Danish School System

Education is compulsory in Denmark for those below 16. Children typically attend *folkeskole* – Danish municipal primary and lower secondary school that covers 10 years of compulsory education. My next interview participant, a public school 8th grader Svea, mentions that they do not receive grades up until the 6th grade. She assures they are constantly reminded that grades do not define students, and interpersonal relationships between her peers are not dependent on how they perform in a particular course. Everyone

has their strengths and weaknesses. “I might be good at History, the other one at Math. We can’t be equally good at everything,” and that’s what the teachers keep reminding them. She later recalls that grades stop being as stressful as they might seem to be in the beginning when everyone is aware of their powers (Svea, interview, April 2, 2021). Before grade 6, students used to receive reports on their performance as an alternative to grades, which helped them shape a positive image of themselves. Indeed, a similar strategy contributes to equal treatment and inclusive classroom environment. Thus, restricted use of grades is a practice local authorities in Armenia might want to consider looking into establishing a more inclusive system.

However, one thing I noticed throughout my experience as a student in an Armenian public school is that assessment is one-sided and polarized. Students feel inferior to teachers, and the feedback loop only flows towards one direction. There is no teacher or course evaluation option, which disregards student opinions. My experience was solely in a teacher-centered classroom, which contributed to the transmission of hierarchical knowledge that hinders students’ intellectual growth and is so much entrenched into the idea of a banking education model by Paulo Freire (1970). I have always felt subordinate because of the assessment methods as well, which fortified my experience in a setting where teaching and grading are standardized test-oriented and are not built around the needs of the student. The student-centered, dialogue-heavy, problem-solving model fosters contextual knowledge construction. As such, schools need to come up with an effective feedback mechanism that takes students’ voices into account and makes them feel valued and treasured members of the community.

Apart from the assessment on teachers’ end, students have to be able to evaluate themselves objectively, gain independence and self-direction in learning. They will not

always have advisors by their side, after all. With increased awareness and a constructive approach towards their intellectual possession, they will become more successful decision-makers in the future. Accordingly, schools have to assist students in practicing self-evaluation and self-consciousness from the earliest years.

Learning Precautions

On another note, precautions should be taken when adopting the strategies above, and we have to be just as prepared to also deal with consequences. Because of increased inclusion and equity rates in Denmark, there are also learning achievement gaps pertaining to those with uttermost capacity if adequate attention is not paid to high achievers. Those gaps widen, especially in communities with lower average reading and literacy scores. Finland, for instance, “has a high average reading score, a small gap between high and low attainers and comprehensive schools and a policy of choice. Germany, on the other hand, has a much lower average reading score, a large difference between high and low attainers, and a tiered system of selective schooling” (Gorard, & Smith, 2004, p. 25). Back to Denmark, Christina did not deny the existence of attainment gaps in the Danish school system, yet she thinks that those are compensated by higher overall literacy scores and impartiality in conduct. Both of the students interviewed also confirmed that students with more knowledge in the area are likely to get bored, at times even lose motivation because of the way the system is designed. That being said, there is a thin line between equal rights policy and anti-discrimination vs. drowning out the cerebral thirst of others. Consequentially, there is extra place for caution to find the balance and make sure everyone’s intellectual needs are met.

Moving ahead, each academic institution has its individual approaches towards crisis management. Moreover, the proposed solution might work for one society yet seem peculiar to the other one conditioned by cultural comprehension. One thing my research made clear

about Denmark is that their COVID-19 crisis mitigation response is fueled by trust, just as the entire education system. The latter is as true for homework policy as it is for the public schools' choice to eliminate courses such as Chemistry, Biology, and Physics, as students are not capable of conducting laboratory experiments on their own without the teacher's direct assistance. A great deal of Danish natural science education is imbued with experiential and active learning, which makes it a challenge to reproduce and master curriculum requirements at home. Thereupon, as Carsten, the school principal, mentions, they do not offer natural science courses to graduating students. To my question as to how would the utter course elimination affect students' career choice, Carsten responded with unyielding optimism, alluding to the feasibility and effectiveness. How can they learn Chemistry without using chemical elements on their own? How do you learn Physics without experiments? "The value is not the same," he mentions, but they still encourage students to pick whatever they love no matter they studied it at school or not (Carsten, interview, April 9, 2021). The way I see it, a similar strategy poses the risk of students being less prone to pursuing careers in natural sciences because of insufficient knowledge in the sphere.

If we think this through, I highly doubt whether a similar approach would be welcome in Armenia, as Armenians have a profound appreciation for science and technology in general, given the way the country is positioned as the world's next tech hub (Shepard, 2020). This again reaffirms the earlier statement that cultural discrepancies should be thoroughly considered when adopting an action plan.

Limitations and Avenues for Further Research

Beyond doubt, my research was accompanied by a few limitations, and if anyone takes an interest in a similar study, I would recommend taking the following into account. First and foremost, the study would have been more comprehensive if it encompassed opinions of not

merely the public sector. All the participants interviewed were representatives of a public school in a specific region in Denmark, which does not eliminate the public vs. private school bias. In addition, the policies and teaching methodologies are subject to variations within public schools as well; meanwhile, my study concentrated on a single academic institution. Hence, a diversity of locations and academic institutions, would have been a worthwhile contribution.

The hypothesis itself assumes a further limitation: reaching out to a particular community while living in a different country is almost as unpromising as a cry into the void. I had to start a cold outreach campaign, but initially, I doubted whether I would receive a single response. After a while, when I heard back from a few, I had to connect with them through online conferencing. Given distance constraints, I did not have much choice to a wider psychographic, let alone demographic segmentation, which made me lean towards a qualitative analysis.

Last but not least, the COVID-19 bias has definitely become an asset, which can be deemed in various ways. On the one hand, participants attempted to provide both perspectives, sharing their experiences before and after the pandemic. Denmark also, along with a handful of other countries, had to abide by the proposed lockdown policy. Thus, every participant was still bearing the impacts of psychological and physiological aftermaths of social isolation. However, it is difficult to draw a clear-cut line as to where that bias begins and how exactly it affected the study. Some of the questions still remain up in the air leaving room to ponder over the hypothesis within the one unraveled by this research. How would this study be different if there was no COVID-19? Would there be a change in comprehension, if at all? What was the extent to which the understanding of the role of the school and learning

was altered? How do we measure that? Does it differ from one society to another? Why and how?

Conclusion

To sum up, my research had the purpose of analyzing and reiterating the methodologies that define the success of the Danish education system highlighting the ones that could potentially be acquired by Armenia, where sediments of post-soviet influence reappear periodically. The analysis of the Danish system above made it clear that some of the strategies present in the Scandinavian model can be reshaped and implemented locally. The latter include teaching critical thinking through History by encouraging active participation and open debate, project-based learning to stimulate inclusivity and teamwork, sex and menstrual health education as part of the school curriculum, reinterpreted private and public schools, as well as revised evaluation and assessment. This is only a fragment of what could be reconsidered for Armenian schools. As idealistic as it might sound, we need to demonstrate foresight. School officials have to make sure that the students and their parents are ready for possible changes in the school climate and curriculum. On top of that, school representatives always need to be aware of their students' needs and wants to make the school a desirable place to be. Thus, pre-screening, evaluation, and in-service monitoring of educators should be of utmost importance.

The increased inclusion and democracy in the classroom should not put a brake on the capabilities of a certain group of students, nonetheless. Hence, school officials have to integrate solutions that would decrease or ideally eliminate attainment gaps triggered by a particular teaching methodology. What is more, given the continuously changing environment and social restrictions, schools have to be more flexible in terms of their crisis mitigation response. Their proposed solutions might differ depending on society's norms and common

mindset, yet that in no way should hinder learning. Now, coming to an end, each of the findings discussed can be a distinct topic for more profound research, and I hope this study helps eradicate the hardened norms and pedagogical approaches at local schools, offering a novel insight into the compulsory constituents of an effective learning environment.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Generic Consent Form

Consent to participate in a capstone project conducted at the American University of Armenia (AUA). This is to state that I agree to participate in the capstone project conducted by Ani Ghazaryan (email: ani_ghazaryan2@edu.aua.am). The capstone director is Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: hourig.attarian@aua.am).

PURPOSE: I have been informed that the purpose of the project is exploring the success of the Danish education model. Within the bigger context of the project, the interview conducted by Ani Ghazaryan is meant to focus on understanding the equity and inclusion of the Danish system.

PROCEDURES: I understand that the interview will be conducted on Zoom or another online platform and might be recorded on video. As a participant, I will be asked to explore different elements of education in Denmark, particularly policies and practices of the inclusion of children in an academic setting. The interview will last from 40-90 minutes, however, I am free to stop at any time, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the project at any given point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: I understand that the interview involves the sharing of my personal views and opinions, which will be treated with the utmost care and consideration. I have been informed that I am free to stop, take a break, or discontinue at any time. There are no risks involved in partaking in this interview.

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION: As a participant, I will have access to all the recorded material for verification purposes. Throughout the project, if and when the material produced is in Armenian, I will have the opportunity to review and verify the English translations.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

I understand that the data from this project may be published in print or digital format for academic purposes.

In terms of **identification and reproduction** of my participation:

I agree to **disclose my identity**. I understand that my identity may be revealed in any publications or presentations that may result from this interview.

I agree to the reproduction of sound and images from this interview by any method and in any media for academic purposes (which may include webpages, documentary clips, etc..)

OR

___ I understand that my participation in this study is **confidential**. My identity will be concealed. I will be given a pseudonym in any publications or presentations that may result from this interview.

___ I agree that while data from my interview may be published, no sound or images from it may be reproduced.

When photographs, artifacts or documents are scanned or photographed

___ I agree to let the student researcher copy family photographs and documents for use in the student project only.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

INTERVIEWEE:

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

INTERVIEWER:

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a capstone project participant, please contact Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: hourig.attarian@aua.am).

Appendix B: Interview Guidelines for a School Representative

1. What is your area of expertise? Could you elaborate on your experience in education?
2. What is your perspective on/how would you describe the student vs. teacher relationship in Denmark?
3. What is the curriculum like in your school?
4. Do you think there is a tangible difference between public and private schools?
5. How many students are in an average classroom (in middle schools)?
6. What is the school's perspective on discipline?

7. What is the school/ district policy on homework?
8. What technology is available in a standard classroom for teachers to use? Is there anything you wish you had to assist the learning process?
9. How would you describe the culture of your school?
10. What is the school's policy on pre-service teacher education or training?
11. Is there in-service teacher education to assist further professional development?
12. How involved are parents usually in the school?
13. What are the schools' measurable goals around equity and inclusion?
14. How do you think students think/feel about equity and inclusion?
15. How might some groups of students be experiencing the school climate differently than others?
16. What academic achievement gaps might exist between groups of students?
17. Are there any major issues that the school is addressing this year? What are the district's crucial issues this year?
18. How does the school district stand out from other districts?
19. How do families of different ethnicities, races, or cultures perceive your school?
20. Is there a state/local policy to address issues of equity?
21. How ready and equipped do teachers and staff feel to address issues of diversity?
22. Is there anything I didn't ask but you are willing to elaborate on?
23. Do you know anyone else who you think I should talk to for the purposes of this project?

Appendix C: Interview Guidelines for a Student

1. Could you elaborate on your experience in a Danish school?
2. What is your perspective on/how would you describe the student life in Denmark?
3. What is the curriculum like in your school?

4. Do you think there is a tangible difference between public and private schools?
5. How many students are in an average classroom (in middle schools)?
6. What is the school's perspective on discipline?
7. What is the school policy on homework?
8. What technology is available in a standard classroom for teachers to use?
9. How would you describe the culture of your school?
10. How involved are parents usually in the school?
11. Do you think the school has measurable goals around equity and inclusion?
12. How do you think students think/feel about equity and inclusion?
13. How might some groups of students be experiencing the school climate differently than others?
14. What academic achievement gaps might exist between groups of students?
15. Is there a state/local policy to address issues of equity?
16. In your opinion, how ready and equipped do teachers and staff feel to address issues of diversity?
17. Is there anything I didn't ask but you are willing to elaborate on?
18. Do you know anyone else who you think I should talk to for the purposes of this project?