



1st December, 2005

The Danish Parliament
The Education Committee (Uddannelsesudvalget)
Christiansborg Slotsplads 1 DK 1240
Copenhagen Denmark

Dear Sirs/Madams,

In March 2005 I had the privilege of visiting the Innovative Centre for General Education (SPF) and Youth Town as part of a tour of northern European countries researching innovative schools and applications of ICTs in the classroom, on behalf of Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. I was very impressed not only by the concept behind SPF, but by the reality and the very evident success of the programs.

Since returning, I have had many opportunities to talk about SPF & Youth Town and the forward-thinking program that the Danish Government has chosen. I am now very concerned to hear that such an outstanding program has been mooted for closure. It would be yet another example of highly regrettable Government action to consider closing something that works simply and so well.

Apart from providing a great school, the real benefits of SPF and Youth Town are two-fold:

- The opportunity for an education system to benefit from on-going classroom-based professional development, with a workable structure to feed back any ideas or strategies into the broader education field
- The opportunity for thousands of Danish teenagers to engage in worthwhile skills programs through Youth Town.

The program is outstanding in concept and provides a benchmark for other countries and systems.

I include below some comments on SPF from my Macquarie University Research Report, published in August this year. That Report (viewed via www.scil.nsw.edu.au) has gone to a number of governments around the world:

Statens Pædagogiske Forsøgscenter (SPF)

The National Innovative Centre for General Education (SPF) is a state demonstration/experimental school that develops new strategies and programs, testing the methods and passing on the results to the Danish education system. The initial concept for SPF originated in the 1960s, when the compulsory age of schooling was increased beyond Year 7. The school was to develop, trial, evaluate and circulate pedagogical approaches to support extended compulsory schooling.

The school is a "folkeskole" (Danish comprehensive school) given the task of developing innovative educational ideas. SPF is engaged in theories on multiple intelligences, modern brain research, learning principles and ways of perception. As a separate enterprise, SPF hosts Youth Town where courses for 8th to 10th year pupils are held. The Youth Town has around 25,000 visitors a year - consisting of pupils and teachers from different municipalities attending one- or two-

day courses. Students from upper secondary and students from Danish teacher training colleges also take courses here.

The school component of the National Innovative Centre for General Education is for Years 8 to 10 only, with 48 students per year – 144 maximum.

SPF operates as a selective school, with a quota of students from prescribed ranges:

- All intellectual levels
- Behavioural spectrum
- Mixed gender

Teachers

- Exemplar teachers
- Expected to do more/paid more
- Teachers in SPF are expected to create their own unique mix of pedagogical development

The school has two classes for each of Years 8, 9 and 10. There is a clear focus on verbal literacy, small group work and the use of IT skills and web-based work. The open plan Resource Centre is at the heart of the school's philosophy and operation, providing spaces for independent study and also adjacent to an easily accessed and open plan staff work area. There are no physical barriers shielding staff areas from students. Student work is regularly presented to parents, by the students, in the form of a presentation or as web-based documents.

SPF is supported by the Youth Town project on the same site –

Youth Town provides 1 or 2 day courses for students from across Denmark in multiple areas:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| o Career related | e.g. bank/army |
| o Life skills related | e.g. conflict resolution and mediation |
| o Employment related | e.g. business skills |
| o Problem solving related | e.g. international relations |
| o Spiritually related | e.g. church |

The Youth Town and School are independent yet closely linked. Students from all over Denmark attend Youth Town with their teachers for one or two day seminars hosted and led by one of the Youth Town business or community partners e.g. the Post Office, the Ministry of Defence, a local bank, a church etc. The seminars are run by educators from the businesses or government agencies. The seminar focus is on career options within that industry as well as educating the visitors about related topics, e.g. the economy, role of peacekeepers. The business sponsors maintain building infrastructure. The school provides educational support for the business and government agencies, as well as staffing one specific course on peer mediation, anti-harassment and conflict resolution skills for adolescents.

The National Innovative Centre for General Education and Youth Town projects are as the title suggests, very innovative and interactive, providing an excellent resource and service to the Danish Education system and a model well worth emulating elsewhere.

I would respectfully urge the Danish Government to consider very carefully any suggestion to close such a great program. It is quite rare to see something in action that has cohesion both in terms of concept, practice and impact.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen Harris
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Director, Sydney Centre for Innovation in Learning