EXPLORING STUDENT AND STAFF PERSPECTIVES ON FREEDOM AND AUTONOMY: A CROSS-SECTORAL CASE STUDY FROM DENMARK

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This paper is grounded in empirical data from a small-scale qualitative study of one school and one university in Denmark. Both of these institutions are counter-hegemonic, even within the Danish context, which is in itself far more flexible and less concerned with performativity than the UK (McNess, 2004). The university case study outlines staff and student perspectives on the benefits and challenges of being in a highly distinctive environment which operates according to principles of student-led enquiry and student-led governance, where these philosophies genuinely drive the entire systems and pedagogy of the institution (Dewey, 1916). The school case study explores the student experience of being educated in an innovative secondary school which offers freedom to students to choose how they learn, within a building with no internal walls or formal classrooms.

The case study will be presented not as an uncritical showcase of these Danish examples but as a means of gaining new perspectives on the issues and challenges of learning in autonomous, counter-hegemonic structures (MacBeath and Moos, 2004). The challenges that these institutions experience within their own context will be discussed, in particular, in relation to the theme of reducing inequalities within education (Jaeger, 2009). The exploration of the Danish case will also provide contrasts to the prevailing philosophy which dominates the agenda in British schools and universities (Ball, 2008).


