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## 1 Introduction

*“Lack of school support from parents with a different ethnic background,” (head teacher).*

This is what a head teacher at a middle sized Danish public school answered to the question of which challenges are the most important at the school when it comes to promoting Equal opportunities and/or counteracting discrimination. The statement has been found interesting to pursue in this pilot study of discrimination and Equal opportunities. For this reason the school from which the statement comes has been chosen as an object of analysis.

A teacher at the school elaborates on the subject of ‘Equal opportunities’;

*“When I think of equal opportunities I think that I hope Equal opportunities do exist, but somehow or the other I am aware that they don’t, and we are a couple of people who have been talking about what we offer our bilingual pupils. It is they same we have always offered our own pupils, and after some years at the school we can see that it is not exactly something they very well pick up, because they are not as skilled at going to school in the way that we do” (teacher).*

The teacher expresses a view that the teachers of the group agree upon, a view that expresses a difference between the pupils at the school, between the Danish pupils and the pupils with another ethnic background than Danish. This is just some of the problems that will be analyzed here.

The school is located in a ‘nice’ middle class neighbourhood, which borders on a school district that in several ways is interesting in relation to the problem. The neighbouring district is socioeconomically one of the poorest in Denmark; more than 50 % of the inhabitants are of a different ethnic origin than Danish, the school of the district has approximately 99 % bilingual pupils, and most of the approximately 20 % bilingual pupils of the chosen school come from this neighbouring school.

All interviewed groups (school management, teachers, parents, and pupils) contrast themselves to this neighbouring school. A discourse of ‘us’ – ‘them’ is expressed in the interviews, upon which the analysis largely rests upon.

In Denmark there is a principle of ‘free choice’ of school. Normally a child enters the school of the district in which the child resides (Law of Public Schools, § 36, sub. 2) but the free choice of school implies that parents can demand their child to be admitted at a

school in a municipality outside of the school district, if it is possible within the law (Law of Public Schools, § 36, sub. 3), e.g. if there is room (max 28 pupils per class). Though it is mainly the head teacher's estimated judgment.

One of the problems the chosen school is facing is that an increasing number of parents from the above-mentioned neighbouring school district apply for their child (-ren) to be moved to the school in the 'better' district. Among other things this happens because the parents assess among other things that the children will learn more Danish at this other school.

This report is an analysis of the chosen school and some of the problems relating to discrimination and Equal opportunities that the school is facing, internally as well as externally. The school has two ongoing activities (a language workshop and a homework club) with the purpose of promoting Equal opportunities and/or avoid discrimination, and we take a closer look at these activities through interviews with different involved parts.

There are two levels of abstraction in the analysis.

- One is about the concrete activities and the social and educational interaction which is taking place at the school.
- The other level is about the recruiting or the intake of pupils at the school.

## **2 Clarification of concepts**

'Discrimination' can be an obstacle to 'Equal opportunities', e.g. if a teacher is more attentive to Danish children than to children with a different ethnic origin in a teaching situation.

To discriminate means to treat differently or separate/segregate (Dictionary).  
Discrimination is;

*"...when a person based on race or ethnic origin, religion or faith, handicap, age or sexual orientation is being treated less advantageous than another person is, has been or will be treated," (Human Rights Institute).*

By the concept of 'Equal opportunities' is meant that there is equal opportunities for everybody regardless of race or ethnic origin, religion or faith, age, handicap or sexual orientation. 'Equal opportunities', that is, means that access is equal to everybody. 'Equal opportunities' is understood as an effort to grant everybody the same opportunities of learning. This is not the same as saying that everybody has equal subjective possibilities or

conditions of learning. Conditions including linguistic, mathematical and spatial intelligence.

### **3 Methodology**

The School is chosen among 57 schools in the county of Aarhus. The School responded to a questionnaire regarding 'equal opportunities' and 'discrimination' in the fall 2002.

The Analysis has used a qualitative approach, including paperwork and interviews. Five interviews have been recorded, the first one with the head teacher, the second one with four teachers in a focus group. Afterwards we made an evaluation of the continuing procedure, and estimated that interviews with two groups of parents at that time would be profitable to enlighten some of the statements of the head teacher and the teachers.

After the interview with the parents we did a focus group with 7 children (all of them bilingual) in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade (13-14 years old). All of the children either had, or had had, a connection to the Homework club or the Language workshop. After the interviews with the head teacher and the teachers it was estimated, that single interviews with extern participants would not be profitable. This decision is made partly because the objects of analysis primarily are the Language workshop and the Homework club, and partly because one of the teachers in the focus group runs a project called "School and leisure time", and for that matter is up to date regarding the existing leisure time facilities of the school.

The duration of the interviews are 40-90 minutes, all of them recorded at minidisks and transcribed. The interviews are semi structured where the moderator starts, followed by the interview person/persons expressing themselves about the topic, and adding topics which by their own opinion would enlighten the questions. The interviews are thereafter analysed on the background of the question with 'Equal opportunities' and 'discrimination'.

At the same time it is important to keep in mind, that from this single pilot study it is not possible to generalize to other schools. This study is to be used as an example of what a common school in Denmark does to meet the 'Equal opportunities' and neutralize 'discrimination', and as an examination of the special problems this particular school has, based on the position in relation to the concerned school region.

## **4 Description of the School**

### ***4.1 General description of the School***

The school is a municipal elementary school, situated in a suburb of Aarhus. The houses in the School district are for the most part dwelling houses. The inmates in the School district are mainly from the middle- or upper middle classes.

The school has approximately 700 pupils dispersed at the 0. - 9<sup>th</sup> class, 3 classes at the most years (corresponding to the age group 6-16 years). However there are few years with 4 classes.

Among the 700 pupils, 120 of them are bilingual corresponding to approximately 20%. The county of origin of these 120 bilingual pupils are Arabia, Turkey and Somalia (questionnaire). Only few of these pupils live in the district of the school, the rest of them coming from the surrounding school districts, primarily from the neighbour school district mentioned in the introduction. Between the school year 1992-1993 and 2001-2002 the school have had a reception class. The pupils from the first reception classes are now to be found in the 9<sup>th</sup> class. The size of the class is approximately 22 pupils pr. class.

The school employs 85 people. Beyond the head teacher and the vice head teacher, the crew of teachers exists of 52 teachers and 3 leaders of the 0<sup>th</sup> class. Secretaries, cleaning personal etc. make up the rest of the crew. In addition to that, an Arabian and Turkish interpreter, a doctor, a health visitor, personal from the school dental clinic and co-workers from the SSP (a psychologist and a speech therapist) are connected to the school. The after-school centre employs 15 educated leisure time teachers incl. the leader. (School plan April 2003).

#### ***4.2 School environment***

According to the interviews and some observations the environment at the school is quit relaxed. There is a big outdoor court, for the pupils to play football etc. in the breaks, and the main impression is, that no particular separation between the different ethnic groups takes place (Arabians, Turkish, Somalia, and Danish). The atmosphere inside is relaxed as well, with happy voices and playing. The decorations at the walls, made by the pupils at the school, give a feeling of cosiness and personality. The staff room is a large room with small tables. Here the teachers use their breaks to drink coffee and reflect.

#### ***4.3. School policy.***

The school does not have a written policy regarding Equal opportunities or discrimination neither in relation to the school's / teachers' treatment of pupils nor regarding pupil / pupil relations. Nor is there a written policy at the school regarding discrimination of and among the staff. However, it is the obligation of the school to live up to The Law of Public Schools, Law against discrimination based on race etc., The Danish Constitution and international conventions ratified in Denmark.

## 5 Description of the activities

At the school there are two activities (ongoing), which seek to meet the problems that the school is facing regarding discrimination and Equal opportunities. The two activities are;

- 1) **A language workshop**
- 2) **A homework club**

In the following the two activities will be described;

### *5.1. The language workshop (takes place during school time).*

The language workshop is primarily directed at the bilingual pupils. It acts as a support centre primarily regarding the learning of Danish. The school management has in cooperation with the teachers taken the initiative to this activity in the mid-nineties. So far the activity has a permanent status which means that unless changes in the financial possibilities regarding the activity or changes in the contentedness (among teachers, pupils or parents) occur, the activity will continue unchanged. This point will be further explored and discussed in the analysis. Principally the language workshop is for pupils up to the third grade but the slightly older pupils are allowed to be there if the form master estimates that it is necessary. It is the target of the language workshop to help pupils who are facing difficulties of a professional character. Mostly boys use the language workshop and it is estimated that approximately 30-40 pupils use it every year – this is among the approximately 120 bilingual pupils at the school.

Recruitment to the language workshop: every form master in the first, second and third grades are asked if they have any pupils whom they believe need extra support in learning or the like. The pupils, that is, are selected by the form master. Then the pupils are divided into groups of 2-4 pupils per teacher. The groups work in a separate calmer class room, and several groups can be in the same class room. Initially the pupils are in the language workshop for three to four months. Then the form master and the leader of the language workshop jointly estimate whether each student must stay in the language workshop or return to his or her class. The professional contents of the language workshop is closely related to the teaching otherwise taking place in the classes in the manner that the pupils in the language workshop are introduced to subjects that will later be taken up for treatment in the class. Thereby the pupils gain a pre-understanding of the subject and the goal is that they will feel more secure in relation to this subject and will experience an easier time following the usual teaching. Usually the pupils are in the language workshop for two to three hours a week.

The language workshop has earlier on been financed through hours allotted to the school in relation with the pupils who came to the school in reception classes ('earlier on' because the school no longer has receiving classes). When the school received a pupil to the reception class it automatically released a weekly lesson for the school for the following two years. That is, if the school received ten pupils in the reception class it meant ten weekly lessons for two years. The financing and the future possibilities of the activity will be discussed in the analysis.

### ***5.2 The Homework club (takes place after class hours).***

The Homework club is also a special contribution to bilingual pupils. It works as a voluntarily contribution, taking place after class hours, for all classes, with access to get assistance to homework. The service is mainly for the bilingual pupils at the school, but sometimes the Danish pupils also participate. Also in this activity the teacher group and the leaders have taken initiative. It is done in 1999, and the status of the activity is, as for the Language workshop, permanently.

The recruiting for the homework club pass off with the teachers considering whether a particular pupil could use some help with homework. The reasons can be many; if the pupil does not have the necessary peace to do the homework at home, if the pupil can not concentrate because the friends plays instead of doing homework, or if the parents, due to lack of knowledge of the Danish language, can not help with the homework. This is only few of the possible reasons.

So the pupil gets an offer to participate in the Homework club, and contact to the parents will be taken to get their acceptance and signature. The registration is binding. This means, that when the parents have signed and are informed with their child participating after class hours, the pupil is obliged come. The Homework club takes place after class hours - and it is prompted to take place directly after class hours, so that the pupils does not have to go home first (most of the pupils in the home work club lives outside the school district, so the most convenient situation is if they can join the homework club directly from the ordinary class hours.

Both the Language workshop and the Homework club takes place outside the classroom, the Language workshop takes place contemporary with the class hours, and the Homework club after the ordinary class hours, as mentioned.

Beside those two activities the school has as special offer existing of a teacher joining the class to support pupils with special needs. This means that an extra teacher is present in the classroom some of the class hours. The reason can be a high level of noise in the class, which might be lower with two teachers present. In addition to that some pupils may be strong enough to manage the ordinary class lessons, but in need of extra individual support in the class situation. The class quotient at the school is relatively high, with an average of 21, 9 pupils per class, so the opportunity for an extra teacher is well liked for both the teacher and the pupils.

### ***5.3 Causes for the emergence of the activities***

The activities have emerged as a course of the acknowledgement that the bilingual children are not able to follow the class lessons in a fruitful way. The teachers have experienced that the pupils' level of knowledge of the Danish language is too poor, and that there is a large distinction between the Danish and the foreign pupil's level of knowledge of the Danish language.

One teacher states that:

*"... the picture I usually gives, is if we teaches our own pupils in the level of 3. g (last year at the gymnasium) they would rapidly show low spirit, and my guess is, that most of the bilingual pupils feels as if they are taught stuff at the 3. g level. They would feel out of things," (teacher).*

The emerge of the Language workshop took place because the teachers, while the school in 1992-1993 started the reception classes, experienced that the transition from reception classes to the ordinary classes was too sudden for the pupils. In many ways it was too demanding to the pupils to switch from reception class to normal class. The reception classes typically subsisted of 8-9 pupils and the average in normal classes was approximately 22 pupils. Naturally this meant less possibility for the teacher to help each pupil. The Language workshop is, as mentioned in chapter 5.1, primarily for pupils up to and including the 3<sup>rd</sup>. class, because at that time being it was considered that the pupils in the first school years should have acquired knowledge to hereafter join the normal class education. The experiences have shown that this is not the case, and therefore the older pupils with special needs also have the opportunity to enrol the Language workshop. As a matter it is now clear, that most of the bilingual pupils necessitate the Language workshop also after the 3<sup>rd</sup> class.

The same experience led to emerge of the Homework club and as an extra service primarily for bilingual pupils, but also for Danish pupils, and that is, cf. chapter 5.2, for all classes.

Therefore the activities have sprung up because the understanding of the teachers that the bilingual pupils' level of knowledge of the Danish language was, and is, too poor. However it is not only the level of knowledge of the Danish language that is too poor, according to the sayings of the teachers. Also the level of knowledge of the children's native language is insufficient.

## 6 Analysis

As mentioned there exist two levels of abstraction, which must be considered in the analysis. One of them being the superior level, or the outer circumstances connected to the recruiting of pupils. The other one is the specific activities, the inner life at the school. The structure of the analysis is based on first analysing the inner life at the school, and thereafter involving the outer circumstances.

### *Lack of domestic support*

The school in this report is partly chosen at the background of the comment from the head teacher, that the domestic support from parents with different ethnic background is an essential barrier for Equal opportunities.

The teachers agree that the lack of domestic support is a major problem:

*"We can not disagree that it [the lack of support] is very important. It is the fact, that we only see some parents when they are being forced to come here, and often we have to call them at home, and write to them 'are you going to come tonight'. These parents are experienced as careless about the school by their children. The children sees this, hears this, and then why should they get a feeling of this as being important" (teacher).*

Many explanations of the absence of the parents, or the lack of support, exist among the different groups interviewed. The explanations are divided in 5 groups;

### 6.1 Explanations:

1. **Black box.** A perception that the school is a 'black box' where to send the children to be educated. The school alone has the responsibility, and therefore the parents will not involve.

2. **Essentiality.** The assessment of the parents to how essential the meetings are, for example how critical they find the topics, or that the meetings deal with topics that, according to themselves are not of their concern.
3. **The dilemma between the domestic hospitality and the obligation to be present at the school.** That the parents rather cancel a meeting at the school, than reject unannounced guests visiting contemporary with a meeting for the parents at the school.
4. **A linguistic obstacle.** Some parents do not understand Danish, and miss what happens at the meetings.

Below the different explanations will be elaborated further, and supported by the interviews of the analysis. After that a list of some potential solutions to the problems will be presented.

### **Re 1) Black box**

There exists a perception between the head teacher and the teacher that the bilingual parents have another relation to the school as an institution, than the Danish parents do. This is the perception, that the school is a 'black box' to which the parents send the children to learn something. The school alone has the responsibility, and therefore the parents will not involve.

*"That a school is at place to send your children, then something happens to them, and then they come back home," (head teacher).*

He expresses an 'us'-'them' discourse with an assumption that the bilingual parents holds an old-fashioned perception of the school, a kind of old-fashioned authority to the school as an institution, and that the teachers represents this picture. The school is a place where the children get an education, and parents are not competent to question the process. Therefore the school holds the responsibility, and as a parent you do not interfere with the school matters. This hypothesis is neither being disproved nor proved by the other interview groups, and the head teacher confess that he skates on thin ice, why this explanation must not carry great weight in the analysis.

### **Re 2) Essentiality**

Another explanation of the parents' lack of commitment at the school is their understanding of the essentiality of the meetings and their priorities regarding the meetings. Some of the parents prioritise the meetings highly because they are about their

children's everyday life and at the same time they view the meetings as information and a possibility to learn more about the Danish society.

In the quote below a parent talks about the importance of the meetings at the school;

*"It depends on what they discuss. We also have our opinions. There are some things that are very important to us. If the children see that the parents attend the meetings they feel safe, they don't feel different from the other children in the class. In that way I think we help them. Another thing is that by virtue of the meetings we understand what is going on in the Danish society and listen to the others discussing. In that way I find it important that we attend the parents' meetings," (parent).*

It is of importance what is being discussed at the meetings. If the parents find the subject in question relevant there is a greater possibility that they will attend the meeting. Other parents hold the same view as most of the Danish parents; the meetings at the school are about the children's everyday life and future and therefore it is important not just to attend the meetings but also to join and make demands if necessary.

*"To me it is important to attend the meetings because it regards my children and that is why I go down there," (parent).*

The quote below is an example that according to the parents some subjects are irrelevant because of the cultural or religious belief that they hold.

*"some people – I have heard – will not join in the Danish society, in the debates, because some of the problems at the school don't regard the Arabs. For instance, I have been to a parents' meeting twice where they talk about alcohol and the like and the Arabs don't believe it matters to them," (parent).*

The quote shows that some parents 'deny' some of the subjects that are important to pay attention to if you have children in the school age in Denmark. For instance, it is a fact that many young people consume alcohol and the parents do themselves a disservice by not paying attention to this subject.

The quote below shows us another example of how important the parents find it attending the school.

*"For example I have Khaled in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. I called him at home at the first parents' meeting and then he tells me. 'I can't make it, a friend is coming over'. Then I say; 'but*

*can't you just change that appointment?'. He says 'No, it's been a month since I made that appointment with my friend, can't you just change your meeting?'. And in my head it is 30 people we are talking about, and I have booked the interpreter. This is just to say that he has no understanding for the fact that it is important, he can't just re-schedule his meeting with his friend," (Teacher).*

There is a clear priority of interests in the quote above. The appointment with the friend in question is planned a month ago but parents' meetings and other gatherings at the school are not arranged with a day's notice. Meetings at the school are planned and noticed a long time ahead, the interpreter is booked etc.

Again there is an understanding of an 'us' - 'them' differentiation. The head teacher and the teachers consciously or unconsciously split the parents into 'the Danish' who are interested in their children's school attendance and 'the others' who in some cases are interested in the children's school attendance but in most cases are not. A teacher says that Danish parents are interested in their children's school attendance, they ask about teaching and if there are any problems they either call the teacher or show up at the head teacher's office at once to get an explanation. Sometimes they are a bit too interested;

*"But also there is a bit of culture in it because Danish parents - very young parents - are very busy following their children's school attendance very closely and in case of the smallest problem they interfere in the way things are going and I think that many immigrants has the opinion, dependent on which country they come from, that you put your children to school and then it is the school's responsibility that everything is well. So they don't have this need to involve themselves, the responsibility is the school's and they just have to do it to the best of their abilities," (teacher).*

### **Re 3) The dilemma between hospitality in the homes and the obligation to come to the school**

The head teacher expresses a dilemma between the hospitality of the immigrants and their obligation to come to the school. The parents will not appear at planned meetings if the neighbour 'happened to drop in' at the moment where the parents had to leave the house for a meeting at the school. According to the head teacher and the teachers the parents' lack of support at the school has to do with cultural differences. It has to do with the fact that for some cultures it is difficult to say 'no' to unexpected guests, and then it is 'just bad luck' if the guests happen to arrive at the very same moment as a planned meeting.

*"If plans cross, if the neighbour comes visiting, it bids against decency, and other things will have to wait," (head teacher).*

Both the head teacher and the teachers in the group point that they are not sure that is the reason, and that it is outside their reach, if the explanation is to be found in cultural differences. Thus it is only sporadic expressions, which according to themselves is not based on other analysis or theories.

#### **Re 4) Language barrier**

When the school arrange parents' meetings or the like an interpreter is present. An explanation of the parents' lack of appearance at the school could be related to the lack of language skills that many of the parents hold. They don't understand what is going on at the meetings. However, this is not the case, or at least it ought not be the case because there is the possibility to have the things they do not understand translated. None of the interviewees express that language problems are a hindrance to their appearance at the meetings. The teachers express that they put a lot of effort into getting the parents to attend meetings at the school, providing for interpreters and have at some occasions offered to take care of transportation to the school. Nor do the pupils see their parents' lack of language skills as a hindrance to their appearance at meetings at the school because there is an interpreter at the school. At the same time they say that their parents attend the school a lot. The interviewed parents speak Danish and this may mean that they are a bit more resourceful and therefore it can create a certain bias relating to their expressions on this subject. However, the interviewed parents agree with the other interviewed groups that lack of proficiency in Danish should not be a hindrance to understanding the meetings. Not all parents of the interviewed children speak Danish but according to the children this is not the reason why the parents don't show up.

#### **6.2 Summary of 'Equal opportunities' and 'discrimination'.**

Regarding Equal opportunities the different interviewees express some problems at the school, which are not specifically related to the school that is here the object of analysis nor related to the teachers' skills in teaching. The problem – according to the teachers – has to do with structural problems that 'the school' in Denmark is facing regarding the understanding of how to teach bilingual children. The teachers express that bilingual children do not necessarily learn in the same way that Danish children do. This is not the case for every child but it is the case for a relatively large part of the bilingual children and these are the children that create the greatest difficulties in the system because they fall outside of 'the normal' and demand extra attention.

'Discrimination' on the other hand is not a noticeable problem at the school. Anyway, that is the teachers' assessment. They don't experience discriminating behaviour neither in the situation of teaching nor in the hallways during breaks. Earlier on the teachers have discussed the subject at meetings in the 'educational board'. This has mainly been to clarify how to relate to the concept and how to treat the bilingual children. It can be discussed whether this in itself is discriminating. The bilingual children are pupils like the Danish children and why do the teachers have to discuss how to treat them? The children experience discriminating behaviour to a higher degree from the teachers, for instance in the classes. They experience being treated differently – and more unjust – than the Danish children. Also they describe occasional episodes between bilingual children and Danish children. However this doesn't happen every day and at the same time it can't be described as gross discrimination.

### **6.3 Possible solutions**

First and foremost the two activities (the language workshop and the homework club) has been started to meet some of the problems the school is facing. The purpose of the activities is first and foremost to help the pupils to improve their professional level. Then the interviewees provide possible solutions to some of the problems the school is facing. In this section the success of the two activities in relation to 'equal access to learning' and 'discrimination' as it is described by the interviewees is depicted. Then different possibilities of solutions to some of the problems the schools are facing, as described by the interviewed groups, are listed.

#### ***The success of the activities.***

The success of the activities are dependent on the eye of the beholder and his position.

*The head master* is satisfied with the effort put into the two activities. His considerations and criteria for success are related to the activities' economic resources that he is responsible for. Every year the activities are taken up for a revision where it is discussed whether the resources should be spent otherwise and so far it hasn't been changed.

*The teachers'* criteria for success naturally are influenced by the fact that they work with the children every day and see there victories and defeats. In this light the teachers are far from satisfied with the activities and their outcome.

*"But the language workshop from my point of view is a place where you take care of the small ones, to give emergency aid in some way so that they get started doing any Danish at all and then it is a scarce resource again. When there is talk about pre-*

*understanding and a bunch of other stuff, when they really need it, then there is no damned language workshop. And I think that is bad for them. So this is what the language workshop is to me right now. Right now I have many pupils attending it [the language workshop] and they have gotten the necessary so that they can cling on with the tip of their fingers but we are not able to give them anything that will help level them, and anyway, the language workshop hasn't," (teacher).*

The teachers' satisfaction with the activities are influenced by what they see every day. The teachers often experience that the bilingual children can not follow the classes, that the class simply moves so fast that they can't get anything out of it. This is seen in almost every class but they experience that more pupils are 'lost' when they enter 7<sup>th</sup> grade after the summer. The pupils also confirm that the professional level rise in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

*"We haven't been able to teach them to think in an abstract manner so that they can begin to understand what they learn when they enter 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade and thereafter," (teacher).*

The parents' understanding of the activities (both the language workshop and the homework club) is more positive than the teachers'. They understand the activities as an extra help offered to their children if they need it. They see it as an extra help to concrete homework. Sometimes the parents have a hard time helping with the homework because of their lack in proficiency in Danish and therefore the activities at the school is seen as an extended help.

*"There are some things that she [the daughter] don't understand in class and then she asks the teacher again what it means and then she gets help and she has been pleased with that," (parent).*

The pupils' understanding of the activities is mainly positive. They view the language workshop and the homework club as places where they have the possibility of making their homework for the next day, for instance getting someone to explain some maths that they didn't understand in class or being introduced to a new subject that will later be taken up in class. They are not completely satisfied with the offers but talk about both activities in a positive manner.

***Suggested solutions.***

The interviewed groups suggest different solutions to some of the problems they are facing – the parents' lack of attendance and the making of homework every day are some of the problems. The suggestions are;

- More intense school-home cooperation, including more home-visits.
- Obligatory home-visits.
- Information – both verbal and in writing.
- More homework.
- More workshop teaching.
- More resources.
- Ask the teacher more in case of questions.

Several teachers estimate that more contact to the home and if possible more contact during the beginning could be a solution to the problem regarding the parents' activity at the school. One teacher believes that the importance of the parents' involvement with the children's school attendance has to be made clear from the first day at school regardless if the children enter preschool class or 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

*"For Hassan who enters 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Hassan and his mother and father must show up at the head master's office and then the head master has to go through the brochure and get them to understand that if you want to go to this school it is very important that you show up at meetings etc.," (teacher).*

*"There is no doubt in my mind that if you want a good class that functions well it is very important that the parents, all the parents, show up and back up and that a lot of parent cooperation is being made in the young classes...It is also very important if a bilingual family gives it up, then you have to go to them and talk to them," (teacher).*

The amount of the teachers' home visits depends on the number of hours they are being assigned (out of the total budget) for this purpose. It is a volunteer arrangement that the teacher can use if he/she finds it fruitful. A teacher expresses that there might be a 'tighter grip' regarding the home visits so that it would no longer be voluntarily.

*"It can be that there is a diktat for us. 'You can decide for yourselves whether to go on a home visit, you must go on a home visit'. It can be like that as well. For instance I don't go on home visits unless I have to, and it would be fair enough if it came to that," (teacher).*

The interviewed parents agree that a more intense school-home cooperation can increase the parents' commitment. They believe that an intense cooperation in the beginning, including phone calls and home visits will get the parent to attend the meetings. Then, they believe, the parents' attendance at the school will be normal and at the same time they will feel more secure.

*"you have to contact them, call them...It has something to do with the fact that some of the parents are afraid to interfere. If they don't show up the teachers will have to come to them. If they attend the school two or three times it will be normal. The teachers or the school must help them, the family to come," (parent).*

The teachers suggest a sort of workshop-learning parallel to the normal teaching in the class. According to the teachers one of the problems is that several of the children are unteachable in a normal class and that they don't get anything out of the normal classes. The idea is to take some of the pupils out of class for some lessons a week and give them practical teaching combined with theory instead. The teaching has to be related to the normal teaching, cf. the following that is a hypothetical example from a teacher;

*"The maths we have now is geometry, some bilingual students – and maybe some Danish students – don't understand it. Then we send them to a workshop where the teacher shows them a model, a model of a space shuttle for example, where they have to calculate on it's size etc., then they are connected with this project, and when it is over maybe they have understood some more geometry," (teacher).*

The parents suggest more homework for the children and perhaps more possibilities to ask the teachers.

*"Our son for example doesn't always understand the exercises but has no problem doing them when they are explained to him and then we also think about the future, when he enters 9<sup>th</sup> grade or high school what is he going to do if he doesn't understand it. For instance if they have more homework they can work more at home and that might help," (teacher).*

The teachers also suggest that the children spend some of their free reserves – some of their spare time – to do their homework.

*"Maybe they can spend some of their free resources they have to actually learn some Danish but I don't know if when it comes down to it are good enough to tell them how important it is for the rest of their schooling," (teacher).*

### **Recruiting to the school**

The majority of the bilingual children that attend the school start in preschool class or at any rate in the earlier classes. Only a few pupils come to the school after 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The head master has the final word when it comes to the decision about which children to accept at the school. In principle there is a free choice of school, cf. the introduction. The head master's decision is based on several circumstances. At the school there are approx. 20 % bilingual children and some of the Danish parents think that is too many and other parents think that more bilingual pupils will be too many. Even though the Danish parents can't decide how big a part is too many it influences the head master's decision anyway. The Danish parents can take the consequence and move their children to a different school. Therefore it is a weighing that the head master includes in his considerations. The head master estimates that the parents who apply for their children to enter the school are parents who have some sort of resource. The teachers partly agree but they don't believe it is the strongest children from the neighbouring school who apply at their school and at the same time it isn't the weakest. Some of the children may have been the strongest at their earlier school but are definitely not at this school. An explanation why the parents apply is depicted in this quote;

*"We don't exactly know but some parents say that they have to come here because they will be better integrated with some Danish children, and there is the possibility for that here. And the people who keep their children at the school [the school of the neighbouring district] that may be fear of integration. That is how I see it a little," (teacher).*

To the parents the choice of school partly has to do with the fact that there are more Danish children at the school, they learn more Danish, learn more generally, they get Danish friends and at the same time it is a good chance to be integrated, cf. section 6.2. Likewise the pupils' explanation is that they learn more and have more homework than at the neighbouring school.

### **The us / them discourse.**

In most of the interviews a notion of an us-them is expressed. The notion is clearest in the teachers' sayings. The teachers divide between 'us' and 'them' is a divide between Danish

and bilingual children as well as parents. Overall the starting point of their notion is the cultural differences that they see between the Danish culture and 'the other' cultures. Among other things they experience that the parents of the bilingual children act in accordance with a rationality that is not consistent with the rationality they see at Danish parents and know from themselves. In different situations the teachers are unable to understand the choices or priorities 'the other' parents make because they differ a lot from what they themselves see as rational. In the classroom situation the teachers experience that it can be difficult to teach some of the bilingual children and state the reason for it to be that they as teachers in the Danish society don't know how to teach these children. According to the teachers one of the problems is that all the children from the beginning is being taught after the same methods, but these methods don't always correspond to the needs of some of the children. Therefore the teachers' solution is a change in the teaching methods that they use with the children.

Morten Ejrnæs has in an analysis examined the concept of 'social heritage' and the field workers' use of it. The usual understanding of the concept of 'social heritage' among teachers is that "social problems are being transferred from parents to children". Ejrnæs' examination shows that there is a considerable overestimation from teachers among others that children will get social problems when the parents have social problems. One of the effects of this overestimation is that the teachers' expectations can contribute to a starting of 'self-fulfilling prophecies'. There is a sort of determinism and reductionism in the use of the concept. There is an indication that it is the same idea the teachers of the chosen school have of the bilingual children. The idea that the parents are having a hard time in Denmark and therefore the children will as well, and the notion that when many of the parents are not well educated then the children also will not be well educated. The thoughts are connected to Bourdieu's theories on field, habitus and capital. Regarding education the educational capital for the child is dependent on the family's position in society. In this way it only a few children are able to remove themselves from 'the field' where they are born. In this way the concept of 'social heritage' is used in a negative and deterministic perspective.

## **7 Conclusion**

The intention of this paper has been to describe some of the experienced problems a Danish public School is facing regarding 'equal opportunities' and 'discrimination', as well as to give examples of the activities the School has developed to overcome some of these problems. The starting point for the analysis is the head teacher's comment on the lack of parent's showing up at meetings at the School as a serious obstacle to equal

opportunities. This comment has been investigated in the analysis, just as the two activities have been objects of investigation. The comment from the head teacher shows one of the problems that the School is facing, and as it appears in the interviews these problems are not unique for this School. The problem with the parent's lack of appearance at the School is explained mainly in cultural differences between the implicated ethnical groups.

Another problem the School is facing is the difficulties the bilingual children have both according to the content of the teaching as well as to the methods being used by the teachers. The teacher's are giving the impression that 'the School' as an institution in Denmark is not capable of providing the right teaching methods for the bilingual children. The offers the School give match the offers the School have always given the Danish children, and according to the teachers there is a lack of understanding as to how the children get the best possible teaching. The perception the teachers give is that traditional teaching is not the best method to teach majority of the bilingual children, and that a more practical oriented teaching will be better for their needs. The Language workshop and the homework club are two activities this School have started to meet some their needs. The teacher's have several suggestions to more activities that can approve the teaching and meet more and different needs for the bilingual children. The suggestions all have to do with practical teaching in combination with normal class teaching. The present activities and there effects are being called 'damage control', because they think they just accurate help the bilingual children. Even though the teacher's call the activities 'damage control' the rest of the interviewed are overall satisfied with the activities and their outcome.

The problems that the School is facing can be summarized in these;

1. Parents not showing up to meetings at the School

Causes are;

- Perception of the School as a black box.
- Essentiality in attendance.
- The dilemma between hospitality in the homes and the obligation to come to the school.

2. Learning problems for the bilingual children

The activities to help overcome this problem are the Language workshop and the Homework club.

The conclusion to this analysis is that the School is facing more problems with 'equal opportunities' than with discrimination. The teachers are aware of this problem and are anxious to be better at solving the problem. The most obvious obstacle in promoting 'equal opportunities' is the limit of the financial resources. After this the question can be popped of whether the real obstacle for 'equal opportunities' is the discourse of 'us' - 'them', not just on this School, but in the School in general in Denmark. The question can be asked whether this discourse is an obstacle to integration in the society as a whole, but that is outside the reach of this report.

## 8 Literature

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