

# Kindness and Empathy in the Danish Folkeskole

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*Hello or "Hej!" as we say in Danish. We're two girls named Laura and Mathilde, who are attending 9th grade in the Danish Folkeskole. In this article we would like to tell you a bit about how the danish folkeskole works. We will mainly focus on the school we're attending, which is Trekronerskolen in Roskilde, but will include facts about the Danish Folkeskole in general. We hope you'll like to read it!*



The Danish Folkeskole is the municipal primary school in Denmark. It is mandatory and takes a period of 10 years to complete. It consists of a 1-year kindergarten class and nine years from 1st to 9th grade. There is, in addition, an optional 10th grade.

The word Folkeskole can be divided into two words, folk and skole. 'Folks' means people and 'skole' means school, you can translate it as 'the school of the people.' This actually describe it really well, in our opinion, since there are all types of children in the Danish Folkeskole.

In Denmark, we also have other types of schools, such as boarding schools and private schools. However, the majority of parents choose to enroll their children in the Danish Folkeskole. As a matter of fact, 81% of the Danish children, at an compulsory school age, are enrolled in the Danish Folkeskole. Something that could explain a big part of this is that the Danish Folkeskole is free of charge and paid by the government. This is, however, only possible due to the high tax rate in Denmark.

In 2014 the Ministry of Education created a new school reform for The Danish Folkeskole. This new school reform changed the 8,070 mandatory school hours to 10,960 mandatory school hours divided across nine years, from 1st to 9th grade. There is also, in addition, an obligatory kindergarten class, a transition phase between kindergarten and 1st grade. This means that the Danish students have the most compulsory school hours than students of any other country in the OECD nations.

If you look at how many hours we are spending in school each day as 9th graders, we're in school around seven hours a day, but of course this number depends on what school you go to and what grade you're in. When you read that, you will probably think that it is not much more than in many other countries, but our holiday breaks aren't as long as in most other countries, therefore we have more school days. Our summer break, for example, is only about six weeks long, which we both think is very short and also when we talk about it with different students from around the world when

we travel or through English class. Instead of having two big school breaks, like in many other countries, we have 5 small school vacations: Summer Holiday (6 weeks), Autumn break (1 week), Christmas Holiday (around 2 weeks), Winter break (1 week) and Easter Holiday (1 week).

Personally, it doesn't really matter to us that we're in school so much. Of course it would be nice with longer breaks or shorter school days, but it's not something we particular long for because we have never tried anything else.

### Teachers and Students

From the very beginning, when we start school, the teachers put a lot of energy into creating a positive and comfortable atmosphere between--not only the pupils--but also between teachers and students. This is the reason why the relationship between teachers and students in Denmark is quite unique. For example we do not call our teachers, and not even our school inspector, by their last name, but by their first name, without any form of address. This reduces the distance we feel between teachers and students so that we feel more equal as individuals. Our attitude towards each other is really down to earth and informal.

### Kindness and Empathy

Kindness and empathy are values we learn about without really knowing it. We learn about it through play and talks. The talks can be something like a thing we call class meeting. We have these class meetings in every grade, in most of the schools in Denmark. However, the younger students have it more often than the older ones do. In these class meetings, all students in the class sit together and discuss a certain topic.



*"We're equal as students and teachers. We can crack jokes together, laugh and talk about things that have nothing to do with school. We have a professional friendship." Tommy Rasmussen, our teacher.*

It can be everything from problems in the class to kindness. If a subject like this is taken up at the meeting, the students typically take turns saying what they think about kindness and what they think when they hear the word.

Other than class meetings and talks, we do special exercises, especially in the younger grades. An example of this is something we did when we were little, which was called "The Warm Seat". In "The Warm Seat" each student takes turns sitting in a armchair and the rest of the class sits in a circle around the person in the warm seat. Then everyone went around saying something they appreciated or liked about the person.

By doing this, we learned how to respect

each other's values and realized that we were all special and that other people liked different things about us. By showing kindness towards each other, we were able to break the "wall" that is between us.

For about five years of schooling, we also had something called "playgroups." The purpose of this was to get students to play with different pupils from the class. We were divided into small groups of four or five, and then we all took turns hosting play dates. Other than play dates at the different pupils homes, we also had to play with our group during school holidays sometimes.

When we became older and felt like we were too mature to play, the teachers

changed it to something called dinner groups. So instead of playing together, we met to cook and eat dinner together while chatting with each other. When everyone in the group had hosted either a play date or a dinner date, the teachers would make new groups so that we managed to be with as many pupils in the class as possible.

We both personally think these groups were a really great idea. This was part of what made the environment in the class so great because you got to get to know all of your classmates better.

Our favorite memory that relates to learning about kindness and empathy is "The Warm Seat". This is because it made the environment in our class really

friendly and open. We think that because we did this exercise back in 1st grade, our class has a really good cohesiveness and a comfortable atmosphere.

We really hope that you enjoyed reading our article just as much as we enjoyed writing it. We also hope that you feel like you know a little more about the Danish Folkeskole.