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Educational selection technologies in neo-colonial Greenland

The preparation scheme in the Greenlandic educational system 1961–1976

Christian Ydesen

Introduction

Writing about education in post-colonial Greenland, the Canadian researchers C.W. Hobart and C.S. Brant treat the subject of upholding the same educational certificate standards in Greenland and Denmark. They argue “[...] it will tend powerfully toward the polarization of the populace into a more wealthy and powerful Danish acculturated group, and a rather impoverished, relatively powerless, distinctly apathetic, more traditionally Greenlandic group.”¹ The quotation stems from Hobart & Brant’s 1966 article “Eskimo Education, Danish and Canadian: A Comparison” which was later translated into Danish and published in the Danish journal *Grønland* [Greenland].

In his 1967 critical response to Hobart & Brant’s article, Christian Berthelsen (1916-), then the School Director of Greenland wrote: “[...] it is my view that improved educational possibilities in Greenland itself and improved educational conditions in general - including in small settlements - will negate exactly ‘the polarization of the populace into a more wealthy and powerful Danish acculturated group, and a rather impoverished, relatively powerless, distinctly apathetic, more traditionally Greenlandic group’ feared in the report.”²

¹ Charles W. Hobart & Charles S. Brant, “Eskimo Education, Danish and Canadian: A Comparison”, *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie* 3:2 (1966) p. 47-66. Quotation on p. 56.

² Christian Berthelsen, “Dansk og canadisk eskimoundervisning - nogle kommentarer”, *Grønland* 3 (1967) pp. 89-94. Quotation on p. 90. [My translation].

The disagreement between the Canadian researchers and the School Director of Greenland concerning the effects of educational policies in Greenland raises the crucial question of whether education will function as a remedy or (re)producer of polarisation in a post-colonial society. The central issue in this respect is who can qualify for higher education in a post-colonial society. From this starting point the aim of this essay is to understand the use of educational selection technologies in a post-colonial society. To pursue this endeavour the essay will take a close look at the so-called preparation scheme in the post-colonial Greenlandic educational system, which proved to be of pivotal importance for deciding which children would get a secondary education in the 1960s and 1970s: Why was the preparation scheme launched, how was it carried out in practice, what norms and values were salient in the educational system and in the selection technologies, and were these two sets of norms and values congruent?

In order to address these questions, it is fruitful to take a close look at two analytical fields of the educational system in post-colonial Greenland: the societal field and the field of technology – each throwing a different light on the four questions above.

The Greenlandic educational system 1945 – 1976 and the preparation scheme 1961-1976

With the passing of the 1950 education act, the unity between church and education in Greenland was suspended. Education in Greenland was now headed by a newly established School Directorate consisting of the Danish procurator in Greenland [*landshøvdingen*], a highly placed church official [*provsten*] and the School Director of Greenland [*skoledirektøren*]. With the revision of the Danish constitution in 1953, Greenland ceased to be a colony and it was formally granted status as a Danish county. This meant that the governing of Greenland was conducted by the newly established Ministry for Greenland (MfG) in Copenhagen.

In the field of education, the 1950 education act introduced a scheme of division into A and B classes after the second grade at so-called ‘feasible locations’ (§ 10). Children with an advanced aptitude for learning Danish entered the so-called B classes, where a growing number of subjects would be taught in Danish whereas children in the so-called A classes would be taught in Greenlandic with Danish only as a foreign language in the curriculum.³ The division of the children was conducted by the school without much interference from the parents, but parents were given the option of choosing

³ Erik Sjerslev Rasmussen, "Grønlands skolevæsen – skolepolitikken gennem tiderne", *Geografisk Orientering* 6 (2005, November) pp. 312-316 and Mikael Gam, "Den grønlandske skoles udvikling", in Vagn Skovgaard-Petersen (ed.), *Årbog for dansk skolehistorie* (Copenhagen 1968) pp. 32-48.

the A classes – an option which seems to have attracted very little, if any, attention.⁴ Given the fact that Danish was the key to higher education in Greenland, these B classes had an unmistakable elitist nature. In fact, the 1950 education act clearly states that candidates for lower secondary school were to be recruited among children in the B classes.

During the 1960s, the Greenlandic educational system developed into a structure very similar to the Danish system. In fact, there was a political decision to create as much identity between the Danish school and the Greenlandic school as possible.⁵ This meant among other things that the educational system would make the same vocational demands in both Denmark and Greenland – as also indicated by the opening Hobart & Brant quotation.

The synchronisation between the Danish and Greenlandic educational systems was canonised with the 1967 education act and it reflected unambiguously the tendency towards increased teaching in Danish.⁶ With the passing of this act, the division into A and B classes after second grade was abolished, but a division was made mandatory after fifth grade (§16). The pupils were now divided into an A line, aiming at grades eight through ten, and a B line, aiming at the two-year preparation school established in 1950 that enabled the pupils to enter the lower secondary school (*realskole*). This two-year preparation school was the breeding ground for the so-called ‘preparation scheme’ as the majority of children entering the first preparation class would be sent to Denmark before returning to Greenland for the second preparation class and possibly the lower secondary school.

The preparation scheme 1961-1976

The preparation scheme saw the light of day in 1961 with the so-called ‘sending home’ of 26 Greenlandic children (13 girls and 13 boys) to Denmark for one year of schooling.⁷ During the course of the preparation scheme from 1961-1976, a total of 1,530 children from grades five, six and seven were sent to Denmark (see figure below).

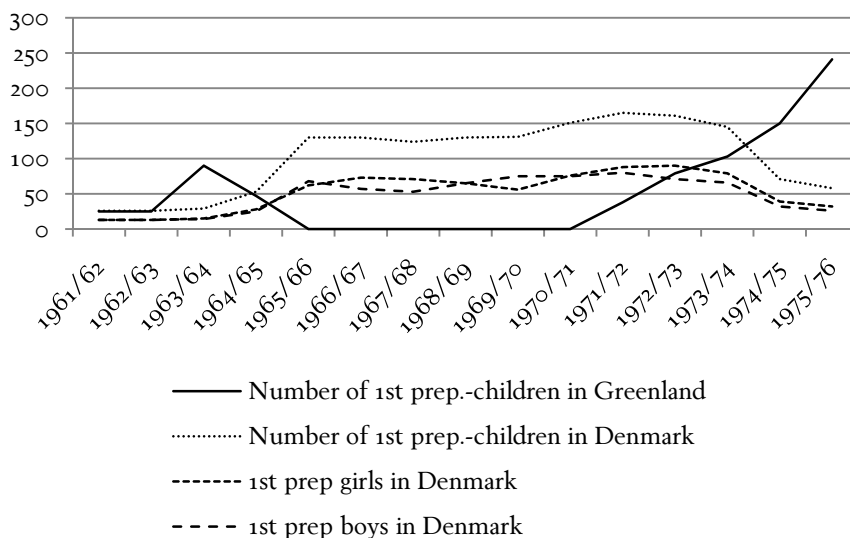
⁴ Ernst Jensen, *Langt hjemmefra – grønlandske børn på skoleophold i Danmark i 1960'erne og 1970'erne* (Nuuk 2001) p. 177.

⁵ Ministeriet for Grønland, *Den grønlandske skoles fremtid* (Copenhagen 1971) p. 4.

⁶ Jensen (2001) p. 171f. and Christian Berthelsen, *Den grønlandske skole gennem 20 år* (Skoleinspektøren for Grønland 1972) p. 14.

⁷ Minutes from a Ministry for Greenland (MfG) meeting with the county School Inspectors on 19 June 1961, Kultureqarnermut, Ilinniartitaanermut, Ilisimatusarnermut, Ilageeqarnermullu Naalakkersuisoqarfik (KIIN) (Department for culture, education, research, and church) archive, record 949.3, sheet 2, 1961.

Figure 1 Number of children in different preparation schemes in Denmark and Greenland



The purpose of the scheme was to improve the children's Danish language skills in order to enable them to pass the lower secondary school exam (*realeksamen*) faster than children who went to school in Greenland.⁸ Because of the language barriers, it took two-three years more to produce a lower secondary school graduate in Greenland than in Denmark.⁹ According to the 1950 education act, the Greenlandic school system consisted of a four-year lower secondary school on top of a seven-year mandatory public school. But it had proven necessary to add a one-two year preparation school between the two modules, finishing with an entrance exam.¹⁰

From 1967 the one-year school trips to Denmark were formalised as the first preparation class for the lower secondary school and there were no real alternatives to the preparation scheme and the trips to Denmark between 1965 and 1971.¹¹ As Kirsten Gynther, the teacher supervising the preparation scheme in Denmark, wrote in a 1967 letter to the School Director: "If parents in Greenland want their child to have an academic education they are forced

⁸ Memorandum for the Minister for Greenland dated 15 August 1968, Danish National Archive, Ministry for Greenland, records 1957-89, no. 1203-07-00.

⁹ Minutes from a MfG meeting on 19 June 1961 with the county School Inspectors, KIIN archive, record 949.3, sheet 2, 1961.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ingmar Egede, "En grønlandsk folkeskole eksisterer ikke", *Information* (11 November 1971). See also: Holger Henriksen, "Skole og kultur møde i Grønland II", *Grønland* 3 (1970) pp. 85-96, p. 90.

to send their child on a one-year school trip to Denmark and during that stay let their child be in the care of complete strangers.”¹²

However, during the later years of the scheme, its *raison d'être* and aim changed significantly. This was due to improved schooling conditions in Greenland, which made it possible to recruit pupils for the lower secondary school without them having to go to Denmark. Thus, the trips to Denmark were increasingly reserved for pupils from small settlements and remote areas where no advanced schooling was available.¹³ However, the shift also indicates that the preparation scheme was part of a post-colonial civilising and rearing process, given its explicit focus on children from small settlements and remote areas.

The preparation scheme was finally abandoned in 1976. By then the “[...] political, educational, technical and economic conditions of the scheme [had] changed fundamentally. The learning and relief factors that led to the stays in Denmark [were] no longer present.”¹⁴ This development reflected that the position of the Greenlandic language was strengthened among Greenlanders during the 1970s since new political winds blew with an aim of making the Greenlandic educational system less dependent on the Danish language and prolonged stays in Denmark. This development culminated with the introduction of Greenlandic home rule in 1979.

The social field

After five years of interruption during the German occupation of Denmark from 1940-1945, qualitatively different ties between Greenland and Denmark were established. This was due to increased focus in the United Nations in the late 1940s on colonies and colonial administrations as well as increased demands among Greenlanders and administrators for the modernisation of Greenlandic society.¹⁵ Thus, Greenland's isolation and monopolised contact was gradually reduced after this time, and Greenland began to enjoy a higher level of openness in the cultural and economic fields. On the other hand, Greenland was still far from home rule, and powerful Danish organisations like the Royal Greenland Trading Company (*Kongelige Grønlandske Handel* (KGH)) and the Greenland Technical Organisation (*Grønlands tekniske organisation* (GTO)) continued to exert significant influence in Greenlandic

¹² Letter from Kirsten Gynther (MfG) to the School Director dated 20 December 1967, KIIIN Archive, record 0670-05-01, sheet 1, 1967/68. [My translation].

¹³ MfG draft about one-year school stays in Denmark dated 13 January 1976, KIIIN archive, record 0670-05-01 IX, sheet 3, 1972-1976.

¹⁴ Ibid. [My translation].

¹⁵ Dansk Institut for Internationale studier (Danish Institute for International Studies), *Afvikling af Grønlands kolonistatus 1945-54 - en historisk udredning* (Copenhagen 2007) p. 294f. See also: Finn Petersen, *Grønlandssagens behandling i FN 1946-54* (Odense 1975).

society. But Greenland had experienced a wider degree of autonomy during the German occupation of Denmark - especially due to contacts with Canada and the United States - and thus the geopolitical turmoil of World War II created new demands for modernisations in health care, education, and private enterprises in Greenland.¹⁶ These demands were articulated in the political arena by among others the Greenlandic politician and teacher college instructor Augo Lynge (1899-1959) and they can be seen as indicators of a change in societal norms and values with an explicit emphasis on modernisation, progress, industrialisation, economic growth, and prosperity. Combined with a call for qualified Greenlandic participation in the development of Greenland, this change in societal values and norms is highly important in relation to the introduction of an elite school system and new educational selection technologies in Greenland. But in order to grasp this connection it is necessary to take a closer look at these salient societal norms and values in Greenland in the post-war period and their relation to Denmark as well as the societal development in Greenland.

After 1953 Greenland emerged as a post-colonial society with new and more diversified bindings to Denmark. Danish society increasingly functioned as a role model for Greenland – the educational system being a very good example of this – and this testifies to a more subtle form of Danish influence in Greenland. For instance it is noteworthy that the importance of the Danish language in the Greenlandic educational system grew in strength from the 1950 onwards, at just about the same time as Greenland ceased to be a Danish colony. One might call this new sort of Danish influence an ‘educated desire’ among the Greenlanders meaning that the economic growth and welfare in Denmark came to function as an ideological carrot for Greenlanders to strive for; Greenlanders were promised wealth and prosperity if they would just learn Danish and follow in Denmark’s footsteps. In other words, Danish industrial society was the yardstick against which Greenlandic progress and modernisation was to be measured. A hierarchy was therefore established between traditional Greenlandic society and Danish industrial society – at least among administrators and decision makers. However, given the fact that many ordinary Greenlanders continued to appreciate their traditional culture and practices, it is fair to say that a new hybrid post-colonial culture emerged, which expressed Danish middle class values of modernisation, progress, industrialisation, economic growth, and prosperity applied in a Greenlandic context focusing on industrial and commercial development.

This post-colonial culture was rhetorically supported and backed by leading educators and administrators in Greenland. One example is the Dane Finn Gad (1911-1986) who was a historian and lecturer at the teacher’s college in Nuuk from 1937-1946. Gad wrote about Greenlandic culture: “Just

¹⁶ Dansk Institut for Internationale studier (2007) p. 24.

as the material culture has been able to evolve to a certain point and then come to a standstill, it is typical that also the spiritual culture has evolved to a certain point and not one step further.”¹⁷ The quotation reveals a clear evolutionist and hierarchical view on culture that clearly places Greenlandic culture in an inferior position.

Thus, the post-colonial prominence of Danish middle class culture permeated the administrative and authoritative echelons of Greenlandic society. In fact, it became an internalised discourse generating certain sets of values according to which politicians and magistrates acted. Thus, magistrates – both Danish and Greenlandic – often subscribed to this post-colonial logic. One example stems from the Danish examiners’ report from May-June 1969 following their visit to Greenland that states: “[...] it has been rewarding for the implicated teachers in Greenland to receive advice, instructions and guidance – in particular in regard to standards, demands, and testing [...]”¹⁸ The quotation expresses the view that Danish teachers visiting their Greenlandic colleagues found themselves more qualified and knowledgeable about the rights and wrongs in education.

This new hybrid post-colonial culture consisting of an ‘educated desire’, a canonisation of Danish middle class values of modernisation, progress, industrialisation, economic growth, and prosperity, coupled with the post-colonial logic described above are necessary preconditions for understanding the educational system in Greenland and it is closely connected with the privileged position of the Danish language in the Greenlandic educational system. These post-colonial societal norms and values in Greenlandic society took root as a paradigm in the administrative echelons of Greenland and thus shaped the imaginations and anticipations of decision makers when they were faced with challenges and problems. One significant challenge in the educational field in the first decades of the post-war period was the dramatic drop in the infant mortality rate in Greenland in the 1950s, which put tremendous pressure on the logistics of the educational system in the 1960s because the number of pupils rose accordingly.¹⁹ In fact, the number of pupils in compulsory education more than doubled between 1950 and 1970 and the number of pupils above compulsory school attendance rose from approximately 100 in the beginning of the 1950s to around 1,200 in 1970.²⁰ These logistic problems, garnished with the above-mentioned norms and values as well as the increased interest among Greenlanders in education, were behind the MfG and the School Directorate coming up with the

¹⁷ Finn Gad, “Grønlands historie - en oversigt fra ca. 1500 til 1945”, *Det grønlandske selskabs skrifter* XIV (Copenhagen 1946) p. 37. [My translation].

¹⁸ Letter from Bent Gynther, the MfG School Inspector, to the School Director containing the Danish examiners’ reports from May-June 1969, Danish national archive, Ministry for Greenland, records 1957-89, no. 1201-08. [My translation].

¹⁹ Christian Berthelsen, “Ønsker om at lære dansk”, *Grønland* 4-5 (2008) pp. 1-19.

²⁰ Berthelsen (1972) p. 16 and 30.

solution of sending children who were candidates for lower secondary school to Denmark in order to relieve the pressure on the often dilapidated and inadequate Greenlandic schools.²¹

Furthermore, when trying to understand this solution it is important to note that there was precedence for similar practices in the Greenlandic educational system on several levels. First and foremost, centralised teaching of children from remote areas was very common due to the vast geographical distances in Greenland.²² For instance, a residential school established on the basis of a Canadian example for grades three and four was founded in Thule in 1955, and in 1960, a similar school was founded in Angmagssalik.²³ In 1958 the first of several residential facilities for city schools was established in Holsteinsborg for gifted children from remote areas.²⁴ This meant that the whole idea of sending children away from home to receive education was by no means new in the Greenlandic educational field. Second, 22 children aged between five and eight were selected by Danish authorities in 1951 with the aim of sending them to Denmark where they would receive a Danish upbringing and be immersed in the Danish language. The purpose was to create a Danish-speaking Greenlandic elite that would function as the vanguard in the transformation of Greenlandic society.²⁵ This meant that there was a precedence for sending Greenlandic children to Denmark. Third, other countries with colonies or ethnic minorities had followed a similar path of centralised education, removing children from their home environment and enforcing majority culture norms and values in education. One example is Swedish educational policies vis-à-vis the Sami minority from 1913 until 1980; another example is American educational policies towards First Nations;²⁶ a third example is the educational system employed in Canada towards the Inuit population.²⁷

These examples of different precedent occurrences create a situation of path dependency, which was strengthened by the fact that Mikael Gam (1901-1982) – the originator of the preparation scheme – functioned as an expert on the Danish government Greenland Commission 1948-1950 and took active part in the administration of Greenland from 1950 as School

²¹ Ernst Jensen, "Langt hjemmefra - grønlandske skolebørn i Danmark i 1960'erne og 1970'erne", *Grønland* 4 (1997) pp. 150-154.

²² Hobart & Brant (1967) p. 39. See also: "Beretning om det grønlandske skolevæsen 1963-64", (Nuuk 1965) p. 8.

²³ Jensen, J. E. (Former school director for Greenland), C. Ydesen, Interviewer (8 September 2009). See also: Hans Ebbesen, "Den grønlandske skole er stadig dobbeltsproget", *Grønland* 8 (1961) pp. 281-288, p. 284.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Anne Kirstine Hermann, "Børnene, der var et eksperiment", *Politiken* 9 August 2009. See also: Tine Bryld, *I den bedste mening* (Nuuk 1998)

²⁶ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence 1995).

²⁷ Hobart & Brant (1967) p. 44f. See also: Ebbesen (1961) p. 286 f.

Director until he was replaced by Berthelsen in 1961 when Gam became Danish Minister of Greenland. This path dependency is also visible in the fact that apart from the preparation scheme covering the grades five through seven, several other schemes came into existence with the purpose of enhancing the Danish language skills of Greenlandic children as well as easing the pressure on the Greenlandic educational system.²⁸

Thus, the launching of the preparation scheme calls for a meticulous understanding of the interplay between the post-colonial culture in Greenland and the presence of several path dependencies which created a powerful frame of reference for the leading actors when they faced severe logistical problems and had to come up with viable solutions. The solution of sending Greenlandic children to Denmark presented itself and called for the implementation of selection technologies in Greenland.

The field of Technology

If we shift our focus to the specific selection technologies employed in the preparation scheme as well as their internal relations, a different perspective emerges with explanatory power in regard to the norms and values of the selection technologies as well as the practice of the preparation scheme.

The overall selection process can best be characterised as a tripartite process consisting of a centrally devised standardised testing battery, a teacher evaluation of each individual child accompanied by a prioritised school recommendation list, and a final decision on the future of the child by the School Director taking numerous aspects into account (including the financial situation and the number of Danish foster homes available).²⁹ The ambition was to handpick the children with the highest academic potential as well as the required “[...] *physical and mental stability*”.³⁰ The children were solely selected from the B classes of grades five through seven, which testifies to the elitist nature of these classes.³¹

This tripartite selection process is in itself an interesting construction with several potential problems; one problem being the divergence between the test results and the teacher evaluations. A glance at the sources reveals that there are numerous cases where teachers made remarks intended to modify the test results. There are thus several letters from teachers complaining about the weighting of the tests compared to their own evaluations in the

²⁸ MfG draft about one-year school stays in Denmark dated 13 January 1976, KIIN archive, record 0670-05-01 IX, sheet 3, 1972-1976.

²⁹ MfG briefing about the preparation scheme dated 17 May 1968, KIIN archive, record 0670-05-01, sheet 3, 1968/69.

³⁰ Minutes from a MfG meeting on 19 June 1961 with the county School Inspectors, KIIN archive, record 949.3, sheet 2, 1961. [My translation].

³¹ The 1967 education act §19 (act no. 152 dated 10 May 1967).

final decision of the School Director. The criticism often pointed out that the tests contained too many words and concepts unknown to the children.³² Thus, the tests were often seen by teachers as biased, which made it highly doubtful whether the best suited children would in fact be selected.

The taxonomic norms and values of the test battery

The test battery of the preparation scheme after 1961/62 consisted of a number of achievement tests:

1. Dictation in the Greenlandic language
2. Greenlandic picture essay
3. Dictation in the Danish language
4. Danish question essay
5. Danish picture essay (introduced in 1968 to replace Danish reading essay)
6. Arithmetic 1-4

The language tests (1-5) were produced in Nuuk by a number of teachers whereas the arithmetic tests (6) were imported from the Copenhagen school system.³³ The marking was done by a test committee appointed by the School Director and points were given to the papers on the basis of error frequency or content comprehension, language correctness, orthography, and punctuation. Finally, grades were given on a scale from 1 to 5.³⁴

Starting in the school year 1969/70, the so-called Greenlandic Non-Verbal Test Battery (GNVTB) was included in the test battery. The GNVTB test was characterised as a culture neutral non-verbal ability test and designed to give an impression of the intellectual capacity of the children. The result was an IQ score. The validity of the GNVTB test was based on a correlation with John C. Raven's norms for group and individual tests as well as a relatively high correlation between the GNVTB test and the Danish 1943 revision of the Binet-Simon intelligence test (0.71) and the Danish military psychological intelligence test BPP (0.78).³⁵

From an analytical point of view, the norms and values of this test battery centred on the following traits: abstract thinking, logical reasoning, grammatical understanding, creativity, consistency, and comprehension – traits that are in no way culture neutral but in good harmony with the values of an industrialised society. In other words, it seems like the post-colonial

³² Jensen (2001) p. 201. See also: Letter from Jørgen Lehrmann Madsen (Jakobshavn School) to the School Director dated 24 February 1968, KIIIN archive, record 0670-05-01, sheet 3, 1968/69.

³³ Various correspondence between the MfG and the School Directorate, Danish National Archive, Ministry for Greenland, records 1957-89, no. 1201-03, 1201-04.

³⁴ Jensen (2001) p. 200.

³⁵ Kaj Spelling, *Miljøets indflydelse på intelligensudviklingen - specielt med henblik på "racemæssige" forskelle*, (Copenhagen 1963) p. 44 and 151.

values of modernisation, industrialisation, economic growth, and prosperity described earlier permeate the test battery.

This point is rendered probable in a 1968 MfG memorandum on education in grades eight and nine which states: "The aim is to provide teaching that will enable the pupil to live up to the demands of the test and thus the demands of society."³⁶ The quotation testifies to a direct link between a test used in Greenland and the external demands of society.

When trying to analyse a high-stakes test battery like the one used in the preparation scheme it is useful to be aware of some central characteristics of testing. First and foremost, testing *per se* is based on the traditional psychometric view that everything is measurable in some way. In this way testing uses a sample of items to represent performance across the entire domain that the test is intended to measure. This implies that testing subscribes to the idea of objective and well-defined knowledge domains - e.g. reading comprehension ability, and mathematics problem solving ability - or more abstract traits - e.g. intelligence, competence, or aptitude - as particular and well-defined areas of knowledge.³⁷ These underlying assumptions are decisive in relation to the test design and they encourage a certain way of sorting the world both ontologically and epistemologically. For instance such assumptions force a division between language and mathematical skills conducive to the composition of the test battery, the evaluation of the test scores, and the weighting of the test components in the overall evaluation. In this case it becomes obvious in relation to the arithmetic tests, which are perceived to be culture and language neutral, for which reason they were imported from the Copenhagen school system. The language tests on the other hand were seen as bound to the Greenlandic context and consequently, they were produced in Nuuk. However, it is noteworthy that these tests were still designed by predominantly Danish teachers.

Thus, the notion of knowledge domains that prevails in the test battery of the preparation scheme refers to the societal division of labour where some skills are useful in one area and other skills are useful in another area. This is not culturally neutral and it certainly is in stark contrast with the habitual Greenlandic society where the need for skills did not necessarily follow the same lines of division. This point is reflected in a 1963 letter from a western Greenland settlement: "Please observe that the tests are very difficult for a pupil from a settlement."³⁸ The quotation points to the fact that knowledge

³⁶ MfG memorandum on education in grades eight and nine, Danish National Archive, Ministry for Greenland, records 1957-89, file number 1253-22. [My translation].

³⁷ George Madaus, Michael Russell & Jennifer Higgins, *The Paradoxes of High Stakes Testing* (Charlotte 2009) p. 38f.

³⁸ Letter from Qoornoq school to the deputy School Inspector in Nuuk dated 23 May 1963, KIIIN archive, record 943.3, sheet 3, 1963/64. [My translation].

domains are historically and geographically constructed.³⁹ Certainly, educational testing in general and high-stakes testing in particular have special importance in an intercultural context because the non-native test taker often does not have the same frame of reference as a native test taker.⁴⁰ This is so because educational high-stakes testing incorporates at least two culturally held values: “The first is that achievement is an individual accomplishment. The second value is that individuals must display their accomplishment publicly.”⁴¹

The cultural imbalance of educational tests in the Greenlandic context is reflected in the failed introduction of the so-called Uppsala school readiness test, which was terminated in 1964. During the course of the work with the test it proved impossible to translate abstract mathematical concepts adequately into Greenlandic.⁴²

It is striking that the GNVTB test claims to be able to transcend exactly these cultural biases and artificial variances in knowledge domains by probing the inherent intelligence level of the children. In other words, the GNVTB test seeks to transcend culture and knowledge domains of attainment with a knowledge domain of intelligence perceived to be more fundamental and overarching. The GNVTB test conceptualises and anticipates precisely the existence of some kind of invariant and/or path-dependent unique characteristic - intelligence - in the individual, that is, an essence that can be identified accurately in relation to a pre-constructed notion of a knowledge domain. The fact that the GNVTB test correlates with other similar tests does not prove the validity of the instruments because they are based on the same assumptions and hypothesis regarding knowledge domains, correlations, causal effects, society, and human nature. It is in other words a circular argument bound to the norms and values of psychometrics.

Instead it is reasonable to stress the problematic aspect of any test that systematises and denies the test takers their uniqueness because they must live up to the pre-constructed logic of the one-size-fits-all test.⁴³ In other

³⁹ David N. Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place – Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago 2003).

⁴⁰ Elana Shohamy, “Assessment in multicultural societies: Applying democratic principles and practices to language testing”, in Bonny Norton, & Kelleen Toohey (Eds.), *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning* (Cambridge 2004) pp. 72-92.

⁴¹ Madaus, Russell & Higgins (2009) p. 62. See also: Kurt Danziger, *Constructing the subject - Historical origins of psychological research* (Cambridge 1990) p. 186.

⁴² Jensen (2009)

⁴³ This problem has been investigated by the researchers Walther Haney and Laurie Scott using both an empirical survey and a thorough review of existing research in the field. Walther Haney & Laurie Scott, “Talking with children about tests: An exploratory study of test item ambiguity”, In Richard P. Duran, & Roy Freedle (Eds.), *Cognitive and linguistic analyses of test performance* (Advances in Discourse Processes, vol. 22) (Norwood 1987) pp. 298-368. They quote among others D. Roth’s 1974 conclusion: “When the child is encouraged to verbalize about the pictures and words, we find that he knows much more than the test score indicates.” (p.303). Another telling quotation comes from H. Mehan’s 1978 article: “These answers did not

words, testing canonises mediocrity because it is pre-structured to incorporate a scale of values - a field of tension between genius (good) and idiocy (bad) – but only as certain forms. The test designer must have been able to anticipate all kinds of genius in order for genius answers to be credited. But since this is impossible there is only a certain room for deviation and thus there is no room for spontaneity and surprise; testing tests only one kind of genius and one kind of idiocy. This goes for the GNVTB test as well and when it is used as a high-stakes selection technology it is necessarily rooted in the past (retrospect) whereas it prescribes actions directed towards the future (prospect).⁴⁴ The test taker is merely assimilated, embodied, and taxonomised on the basis of the test and his/her own past.

Thus, it becomes clear that none of the tests of the preparation scheme test battery are purged of cultural norms and values. Even the GNVTB test is unable to escape this critique, and the analysis shows that the GNVTB test to a large extent subscribes to norms and values of abstract thinking and logical reasoning like the arithmetic tests. There seems however to be a significant difference in relation to the essay language tests in that they retain certain qualitative characteristics. These tests were not formally standardised and they were evaluated not by a rigid binary true/false dichotomy but by a teacher evaluation. This made it possible to take creativity into consideration. But even though the language tests were evaluated from a more holistic point of view they still canonised the taxonomic values of abstract thinking, logical reasoning, grammatical understanding, creativity, consistency, and comprehension.

It should be duly noted that the analytical critique put forth here is solely rooted in a perspective of immanent characteristics of the tests employed but its characterisation of the norms and values of the tests is further augmented by the fact that there was a strong desire to synchronise the tests in Greenland with the tests used in Denmark and – as we have seen – with the external demands of society.⁴⁵

result from a lack of knowledge; rather, they resulted from a substantially different interpretation of test materials. Students who answered test questions incorrectly were often performing the very cognitive operation being tested by the questions.” (p. 304). Haney & Scott’s own pilot study revealed that “(...) different children seem to see different things in the same picture, and what is seen sometimes influences how children answer test questions.” (p. 344). Haney & Scott conclude: “Ambiguity in children’s interactions with test items is a phenomenon which occurs in a significant number of cases.” (p. 361). And a very interesting question is raised to test designers: “How is it that an unintended answer alternative or distractor can be “wrong by any standard” but still be attractive or plausible to those not knowing the intended answer?” (p. 365).

⁴⁴ J. Raymond Gerberich, “The development of educational testing”, *Theory into Practice* 2:4 (1963, October) pp. 184-191, p. 191.

⁴⁵ Letter from the MfG to the School Director dated 16 May 1964, Danish National Archive, Ministry for Greenland, records 1957-89, no. 1247-00-00, 1964.

The taxonomic norms and values of the teacher evaluations

Having critically analysed the taxonomic norms and values of the test battery it is time to take a closer look at the second dimension of the tripartite selection process: the teacher evaluations.

The teacher evaluations consisted of the following information: giftedness, Danish language skills, the stance of the parents, psychological stability, grades, and a general evaluation.⁴⁶ What is particularly striking is that the giftedness as well as the psychological stability was entirely based on teachers' opinions/guesstimates. Apart from teacher evaluations, the school recommendations also contained comprehensive information on the children's home environment, their medical status and even if the child was a bed-wetter.⁴⁷

The sources contain an abundance of teacher evaluations of individual children. In the following table I have selected a few of them in order to demonstrate the comprehensive nature as well as the taxonomic norms and values which stand out distinctly. It has proven necessary to sort the evaluations in a number of categories in order to gain an overview of the specific areas which the evaluations took into consideration. The following captures the type of information recorded about different children recommended from different school districts in different years.

⁴⁶ KIIIN archive, record 949.3, sheet 1, 1961.

⁴⁷ MfG briefing about the preparation scheme dated 17 May 1968, KIIIN archive, record 0670-05-01, sheet 3, 1968/69.

Table 1 Teacher evaluations – examples between 1961 and 1965

School district	Year	Giftedness	Body and appearance	Home environment	Work ethic	Traits
Julianehäb ¹	1961	Mediocre giftedness, smart, above average giftedness, possibly very gifted, pretty well gifted.	Decent appearance, physically robust.	A bad home, drunken dad.	Always decent in his work, hard-working.	Independent, reliable, a quiet leader boy, nervous, self-assertive, independent mature, independent.
Holsteinsbor ²	1962	Gifted, Very good abilities, bright, very gifted, probably very gifted.	Could be used in a commercial for both toothpaste and oatmeal.	Spoiled by parents, reasonable home.	Hard-working, careful.	Shy, timid, sulky, charming, pleasant, cheerful, well prepared, stable.
Sarqag and Narssak ³	1964	Very good abilities.	Clean, bodily development not beyond 6 th grade.	Average home, very bad home, the father is a fisher but ill and unable to work. Both parents are unable to work and drunkards, father is still "unable" to go sealing.	Hard-working, likes to work.	Careful, girly, giddy, very restless, lazy, modest, honest, probably homesick, phlegmatic, exceptionally decent and well behaved for a boy, conscientious.
Sukkertoppen ⁴	1965	Gifted, very gifted, averagely gifted.	Clean and neatly dressed.	Good home, 6 siblings, very good home, financial difficulties, drunken father, parents do not have the sense to put the right pieces of clothing together, good upbringing, home very well kept.	Hard-working, careful with his work, careless in his work.	Good behaviour, decent and nice, talented and nice, talented, timid, nice and friendly, shy, a little too cheeky, nice, skilled, a pretty nice girl but sometimes a bit grumpy.
Claushavn ⁵	1965	Bright, gifted	Sense of hygiene and dressing	Small house with only one room.	Hard-working, stable.	Very shy, good temper, grateful, honest, reliable.
Källor:	¹ KIIN archive, record 949.3, sheet 1, 1961. [My translation]. ² KIIN archive, record 949.3, sheet 11, 1962. [My translation]. ³ KIIN archive, record 949.3, sheet 1, 1964/65. [My translation]. ⁴ KIIN archive, record 0670-05-00, sheet 1, 1964-1969. [My translation]. ⁵ KIIN archive, record 0670-05-01, sheet 2, 1965-1966. [My translation].					

This selection of teacher evaluations amply demonstrates the very comprehensive nature of the teacher evaluations. It is not an overstatement to say that teachers aimed at a holistic evaluation of their pupils as can be deduced from the categorisations employed here.

A closer look at the taxonomic logic of the first category concerning giftedness shows that it is apparently rather unambiguous. "Very gifted" is better than "gifted" which again is better than "averagely gifted". Giftedness is clearly a recurring quality in the recommendations of children for the preparation scheme. However, it remains very unclear how different teachers

in different schools employed these appellations. In the second category about body and appearance, hygiene, the ability to dress neatly and to some extent, robustness and general appearance are of value in the recommendations. The children selected simply needed to be good and healthy ambassadors of Greenland when going to Denmark. The third category about home environment is rather peculiar. It is striking how both coming from a “bad home” and coming from a “good home” are used as arguments for recommending children to the preparation scheme. This shows that teachers had different agendas and emphasised different values in their recommendations. The fourth category about work ethic is quite unambiguous. “Hard-working” is a recurring value, which testifies to the values of an industrial society. The fifth and last category is on the other hand quite ambiguous. The subjectivity, values and to some extent the prejudices of the teachers are very striking in this category. For instance we learn that boys are normally not very well behaved and girls are not supposed to be grumpy. However, it should be duly mentioned that when a child is evaluated with a lot of negative character traits they are normally compensated by virtues in other categories, which indicates a hierarchy between the categories – but a hierarchy completely subject to the whim of each school. For instance, some schools seem to put little emphasis on the giftedness of the children and strongly emphasise the character traits of the child whereas others do the exact opposite. Moreover, the adjectives employed clearly reveal a very vague definition throughout all categories. What is for instance the exact difference between ‘very gifted’, ‘gifted’, and ‘averagely gifted’ and how do these terms relate to ‘talented’, ‘bright’ and ‘very good abilities’? The subjective elements in the evaluations are palpable.

From these reflections it is fair to say that the taxonomic norms and values are rather ambiguous because the teacher evaluations most likely contain different agendas set in the local community of the respective schools. However, the analysis has also shown that there seems to be some common ground centred on academic aptitude and work ethic. This is in alignment with the initially stated ambition of picking the best suited children with an academic aptitude and the required physical and mental stability. Compared to the taxonomic norms and values of the test battery, it is clear that the teacher evaluations take a much more holistic view. Apparently there is no direct antagonism between these two sets of taxonomic norms and values at the surface level but their nature is fundamentally different. As demonstrated, the teacher evaluations are saturated with local conditions, individual teacher values, and agendas and thus the teacher evaluations are nowhere near as prosaic as the test battery. With this analysis in mind I will proceed to discuss the interplay between the three dimensions of the selection process.

The interplay between the three dimensions of the tripartite selection process

Having identified an essentially different nature between the taxonomic values and norms of the test battery and the teacher evaluations it is no surprise that there often seems to have been a marked schism at the practice level between teacher evaluations and test results. In a 1967 letter from the teachers' council of Egedesminde to the School Directorate regarding the selection process of the preparation scheme it is stated:

“[...] the Danish language test results have been attributed more weight in the selection process. [...], we cannot help mentioning that we feel our work overridden. When we have evaluated a pupil and worked out a priority list it is done with our best conviction and our knowledge about the individual child. [...] School recommendations must be seen as based on such a knowledge of the abilities and talent of the individual child as can only be obtained through day-to-day work with them and should only be deviated from in exceptional cases – and then always with a clear motivation.”⁴⁸

The antagonism between test results and teacher evaluations revealed in the letter raises the question of what criteria the School Director used when making the final decision about the children. Numerous sources reveal a strong tension between the school recommendations and the final decision of the School Director as is evident in this letter from Frederikshåb teachers' council to the School Directorate dated 15 May 1970:

“It is with great regret that we from the School Directorate receive the information that only four pupils out of 20 recommended from a school of the size of Frederikshåb have been accepted for a one-year school stay in Denmark [...]. We do not find it in accordance with the wishes of the Danish people and their knowledge of Greenland that qualified pupils are held at a lower level of education than they are entitled to according to their abilities because the Danish state cannot afford to educate them. [...] It is a violation against these children's future prospects and a mockery of our work to send us a list with four names and leave it to us to break the news to the 16 homes that have all expressed their interest in the scheme that there was not money to educate their children. [...] Who is going to argue the case of these children? [...] Must everything happen in the press before something happens? We expect this case to be considered without delay or we will have to seek a political indication of whether discrimination in Greenland in areas well within the economical frame of possibility is openly acknowledged.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Letter from the teacher council of Egedesminde to the School Directorate dated 20 April 1967, KIIIN archive, record 0670-05-01, sheet 2, 1967/68. [My translation].

⁴⁹ Letter from Frederikshåb teachers' council to the School Directorate dated 15 May 1970, KIIIN archive, record 0670-05-01, sheet 2, 1970/71. [My translation].

The letter might be an indication that the School Director in fact put a lot of emphasis on the test results which were calculated by the test committee in Nuuk outside the reach of the teachers. A close look at the school recommendations from Sukkertoppen in 1965 in relation to the School Director's rejections reveals no pattern, which also might indicate that the test results or some other criteria were at play in the final selection. Occasionally, test results were openly used as an argument for rejection or acceptance by the School Director when he had to defend his decisions to disgruntled teachers.

One of the problems with teacher evaluations was that they were often poorly founded due to a high turnover rate of Danish teachers in Greenland, which meant that the memory and knowledge of the pupils left the school. Testing was simply seen as a way of responding to local teacher bias. In a letter to the MfG School Inspector dated 3 December 1968, Berthelsen wrote: "From the point of view that school recommendations always are unstable factors in a compiled evaluation at the central level, school recommendations have always been supplemented with direct tests in the major subjects."⁵⁰ Thus, it is fair to say that test results played a role in the selection process – at least when deemed appropriate by the School Director.

But tests also played an indirect role in the selection process given their influence on teacher strategies and teaching; teachers in Greenland certainly reacted to the use of tests in their everyday practice. One reason is that it was often considered very prestigious for teachers to have their children accepted for a stay in Denmark and thus rejections were often perceived as a defeat by teachers.⁵¹ Another reason is that teachers usually wanted to secure the best education possible for their pupils.

One indication of teachers' reactions to tests is the 1965 ban on the sale of tests to teachers in Greenland imposed by the MfG.⁵² This testifies to teachers trying to take tests into account when teaching in order to give their pupils a head start (teaching to the test) – a point which is strengthened in the minutes from the 1968 school leader meeting:

"One of the delegates urged that everyday teaching should not pay special regard to the imminent tests aiming at the acceptance into the prep.-classes, but there was a general consensus among the other delegates that the schools in Greenland in the period before these tests were held put a lot of emphasis on preparing pupils specially for these tests."⁵³

⁵⁰ Letter from the School Directorate to the MfG dated 3 December 1968, Danish National Archive, Ministry for Greenland, records 1957-89, no. 1201-05. [My translation].

⁵¹ Jensen (2009).

⁵² Letter from the School directorate to MfG dated 30 November 1965, Danish National Archive, Ministry for Greenland, records 1957-89, no. 1201-04.

⁵³ Danish National Archive, Ministry for Greenland, records 1957-89, no. 1253-22, p. 44.

With these words in mind it is fair to say that testing exerted indirect influence on education in Greenland. In the words of Michel Foucault, tests functioned as 'a disciplinary power' and thus the content and inherent values of the tests became impossible to dismiss in the daily practice of the educational system.

However, the sources also reveal numerous other criteria apart from test results and teacher evaluations. A letter dated 29 November 1967 from Christianshåb School to the School Director states:

"As a consequence of the difficulties in getting foster homes in Denmark for the first preparation pupils, the number of pupils who can be sent to Denmark will not always correspond with the number of qualified pupils. Since a number of concurrent difficulties are involved in sending the slightly older pupils from grade seven on a stay in Denmark, the intake of this group is sought to be minimised as much as possible. This means that children who are adequately gifted but who do not reach the maturity, attainment levels, and language proficiency required during the course of the grade six are left with very small chances of being accepted into the preparation school. Since their delayed development usually is due to involuntary causes this situation induces a distortion of opportunities for the individual. [...] Moreover, there might even be a distorted distribution in gender since the requests of the foster homes in this connection might cause an imbalance to one side or the other."⁵⁴

The letter from Christianshåb is interesting because it tells us that non-academic criteria were used in the selection process. In this case it seems that a pragmatic age criteria, the wishes of the foster homes, and the number of available foster homes in Denmark were sometimes decisive for the intake to the preparation scheme. These dark horse criteria were sometimes even exacerbated by a certain element of coincidence in the teacher evaluations and ensuing school recommendations.

Concluding discussion

The aim of the article has been to understand the use of educational selection technologies in a post-colonial society using the preparation scheme in post-colonial Greenland as a case study. This analysis of the societal and the technological field it clearly shows that numerous aspects on different levels may have explanatory power.

The analysis of the societal field demonstrated that a particular post-colonial culture emerged in the administrative echelons of Greenlandic society after World War II. This post-colonial culture - consisting of an

⁵⁴ Letter from Christianshåb school to the School Director dated 29 November 1967, KIIN Archive, record 0670-05-01, sheet 1, 1967/68. [My translation].

'educated desire', a canonisation of Danish middle class values of modernisation, progress, industrialisation, economic growth, and prosperity, and a post-colonial logic - formed a very benevolent environment for the introduction of an elitist educational system combined with educational selection technologies – a development that gathered momentum due to demographic challenges and a marked presence of path dependencies regarding sending children away from their homes in the name of education. The preparation scheme was the finishing touch in this development. The analysis revealed that there was a strong case of path dependency in the decisions made by the School Directorate – a path dependency that was in alignment with the post-colonial culture salient in the administrative echelons.

The analysis of the field of technology showed that the test battery and the teacher evaluations were on the surface not antagonistic in terms of their taxonomic norms and values, but that they differed fundamentally in nature. At the same time, both sets of norms and values were revealed to be culturally dependent and tied to the values of an industrial society. The analysis of the dynamics between the tripartite dimensions of the selection process indicated that teachers often saw testing as an external technology that would potentially undermine their professional expertise and they sought to counter this threat by teaching to the tests and making a number of complaints to the School Director. In contrast, the School Director saw the tests as a useful technology to counteract perceived teacher evaluation inflation and to strengthen his own position in regard to disgruntled teachers. This use of educational selection technologies contained certain structural problems which exposed themselves in dark horse criteria of selection like age, foster home gender wishes and the number of Danish foster homes available.

An intersection of the two analytical fields reveals that there seems to be congruence between the taxonomic logic of the selection process and the post-colonial norms and values. This indicates that educational selection technologies are closely linked with the post-colonial norms and values in society as well as the organisation of the educational system both in regard to purpose, practice, and technology. The shift of *raison d'être* and aim of the preparation scheme in the later years of the scheme clearly shows that a shift in the motifs of selection carries significance in relation to the selection technologies.

In relation to the use of educational selection technologies in Greenland in a perspective of agency the intersection also indicates that a distinction can be made between intentions – a synchronic perspective - and effects – a diachronic perspective. Teachers sought to provide the best education possible for their pupils and the decision makers wanted to educate the Greenlandic populace. In intersection with the societal field, this testifies to the trend of mobilising the intelligence reserve in conjunction with the

winding down of the colony. Greenlandic children were to return to Greenland after their school stay in Denmark and make a difference by ensuring modernisation, progress, industrialisation, economic growth, and prosperity in Greenland. But the effect of such ideals was the establishment of a post-colonial culture with an increasingly strong adaptation of Danish middle class norms and values because advancement in society had to be accomplished on Danish terms and conditions. Thus an elitist educational system emerged that to a large extent produced class divisions and created a polarisation of the populace as also indicated by Hobart & Brant in the opening quotation.