# **Abstract**

The purpose of this master thesis is to examine the innovation concept from a critical theory perspective by analyzing the pedagogical implications of innovation-based teaching of social and health service assistant students in Denmark. Our study takes place in two social and health care colleges, which offer innovation-based teaching from different pedagogical approaches. The first school offers innovation as a course, while the other incorporates innovation as a pedagogical method implemented in all courses.

The development of innovation within the Danish educational system should be seen from a wider perspective that includes the general development in society. Due to globalization, our society has changed from a welfare state to a workfare state. This includes a new perspective on the education system and its role as a competitive factor in the Danish position in a globalized world. The transition to a workfare state has affected the education system through two opposing discourses – an evidence-based discourse and an innovation-based discourse. The evidence-based discourse is rooted in an international standard of comparability in the education systems. Meanwhile, the innovation-based discourse is rooted in the expectation that innovative students can contribute to the competitive position. The innovation-based discourse challenges the premise of comparability in the evidence-based discourse because innovative skills cannot be measured as easily as knowledge and test results.

The implementation of innovative teaching is a result of the innovation-based discourse, which requires a development of innovative skills among social and health service assistants. Innovation can be viewed as the process of translating an idea or an invention into goods or services that create value. In this master thesis, we present different definitions and a variety of notions of the innovation concept. Hence, we examine how the concept is transformed into a pedagogical praxis and how it affects the teaching of social and health care assistants.

On the one hand, our analysis identifies how the education system has become an integrated part of the economic politics and the implementation of innovative teaching indicates that the government has increased its focus on innovation. On the other hand, it also shows how national and global actors are increasing their influence on the innovation discourse and hereby the education system.

As a result of our analysis, we identify how both colleges strive to implement social innovation, which can be defined as the process of translating an idea or an invention into a service that creates social value which distances itself from economic value. However, this social understanding of the innovation concept does not clearly manifest itself in our observations of the innovative teaching. One of the challenges of innovative teaching is that innovative skills are complicated to evaluate and therefore both schools struggle with evaluation. Especially at one of the schools, they struggle with evaluation because of their structural binding to the communal system Adult Vocational Training Programs (AMU). Further, our observations show that the social and health care assistant students associate the concept of innovation with welfare technology, which can be seen as a threat to their future employment. This negative association is increased by the use of radical innovation as an evaluation method, which relates to an economic understanding.