

## **Per Himmelstrup's intervention at the LERNPOTENTIALE-meeting in Krakov.**

April 2002

Unfortunately Henning Dochweiler in the last moment was prevented from attending this meeting. Compared to some other countries - and to other participants at this meeting - I may state, that we do not have much research in this special field - and we are not very strong in systemthinking and theory - but we have some experience in learning and there are many practical initiatives in the field we are discussing at this meeting.

I am one of the many people who suffered defeats in school and simply did not like to go to school. It is probably one of the reasons why I have spent most of my working life with education - especially for adults.

I felt that learning is something exciting and enriching and there must be other ways of teaching than the ones I experienced.

From own experiences I knew about learning-difficulties. - Many experts in education have themselves been good and successful pupils and students and unfortunately they risk to become theoretical in their approach to educational issues.

Learning must be a pleasure because it is a pleasure - not fun. Teaching is not a show or entertainment. But you must enjoy learning to keep up motivation.

Teachers have changed during the last few decades. Fortunately.

I am happy to say that my grandchildren - and many others - really like to go to school. And they certainly learn a lot and, very important, they become self-confident.

As our target-group are those not acquainted with participating in learning-processes and with very vague ideas - if any - about lifelong learning I'll leave out the ordinary educational system and concentrate on possibilities and options outside.

Just one introductory remark. Denmark has never had compulsory schooling.

We have compulsory education - but how you get educated is up to yourself - or to your parents.

You can keep your children at home and teach them yourself.

The Danish minister of education in the 1980'ies - now minister for integration and European affairs - Bertel Haarder did not go to school before he got to the secondary level.

Another and quite popular way is that at group of parents get together and establish their own little school according to their educational, political or religious interests and ideas. This possibility is also open to immigrants.

This kind of schools get state-support - but they are still regarded as "private".

10 - 12% of all youngsters attend this kind of schools and they are competing with the normal, public or community school.

That keeps both parts awake - and parents have great influence.

Among other things the competition has influenced the teaching methods also in the public school-system.

The private "little-schools" have always stressed the learning-aspect.

Denmark was one of the last countries to introduce 9 years of compulsory education. People resisted this because the traditional attitude has been that education in principle is the responsibility of the parents - not of the state. This attitude has changed during the last 20 or 30 years.

During this meeting I have become quite fond and proud of our old educational thinker, N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783 - 1872).

He fought in the early 19.th century against the established school-system. He called it “The Black School” dealing mostly with subjects of little relevance to the daily life of ordinary people.

2.

Stressing rote learning and strict discipline and working according to curricula made at remote desks in central bureaucracy.

Real education, said Grundtvig, must as its starting point have the needs and interests of the participants.

It must make use of what he called “the living word”, i.e. a language which people understand - for instance the mother-tongue. Story-telling or biographical teaching was also important.

The aim is to make people self-confident, to make them believe in themselves and their own values and norms.

Or as Immanuel Kant said: People must believe in their own brains.

These remarks may indicate the very important distinction between education and enlightenment.

The term enlightenment is - or has been - much used in Denmark and the other Nordic countries.

It is important to underline that it must be voluntary to participate in educational and cultural activities - in enlightenment. More than one million Danes do that every year - out of a population of 5.2 mill.. The most popular subjects are some kind of fitness (keep fit), languages and the arts. Too few enroll for civics.

But very many adults choose a second-chance education.

It has been surprising - almost shocking - to hear (also at this meeting) as a political aim to get all citizens into some kind of education.

To my mind it is a fundamental human right to be left in peace.

As a tutor I never interrupted students who fell asleep - as long as they did not snore.

It is important to make education so interesting that it appeals to people. That is a challenge to the organisers and teachers - not a task for the participants. But of course it is a question of cooperation between teacher and student.

It has been mentioned at this meeting, that there is an upper-limit to learning.

To my mind there is no upper-limit to learning.

But there are obligations on the shoulders of educationalists to take up matters and themes raised by the press and the media in their normal superficial way - appealing to emotions and often creating fear, confusion and uncertainty.

If educators can catch this type of issues it may be one of the ways to motivate for learning. There is a need for such possibilities to learn about and possibly to understand the world we live in and the life we live.

Often study-circles may be a good method in this case and may at the same time be one of the ways to re-establish the “social capital”, the sense of fellowship and mutual responsibility, we have lost.

Social capital means the process between people which establish networks, norms and social trust and facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.

We have been asked to give some examples of good practice.

I would have liked to do that half a year ago before we got our present government focusing on functional education - profit and modern management also in education - including evaluation.

I am very happy that to-day, as a retired person, I am an observer and an advisor, but not part in the fight.

But anyway - briefly a few examples. Without figures as conditions are changing.

### 3.

Dayhighschools. They started about 1970 based on the ideas of the folkhighschool and in most cases run by the Educational Associations - i.e. providers of education for adults.

They were meant for unemployed people with modest education and 75% of the participants are women - most of them between 18 and 35 years of age.

They have been very popular - and successful as a starter. About 30% continues in some kind of education or training and about 20% get a job afterwards.

Important subjects are Danish, Mathematics and Computer. But also general subjects and civics.

The starting point is always the participants - their level of knowledge, their interests and aims.

As the rate of unemployment is decreasing in Denmark the economic support is reduced very much so that dozens of Dayhighschools have closed down during the last 2 or 3 years.

Production-schools were started in the 1970'ies for young school-leavers dead-tired of any kind of education. They were organised and worked as workshops of different kinds for instance joiners', car-making. The young people work in the field, get some theoretical knowledge mixed in, learn about the labour-market and about the market. The products are sold.

It has proved to be a good mixture of practical work, production and theory. The average age of the participants is about 19. The courses are from 2 to 12 months.

About 40% of the participants continue in education or training.

Another type of offer or provision for young people tired of systematic education but interested in learning in their own way has been the Free Youth Education .

It started in 1995. The young people could compose their own education according to their individual wishes, interests and talents. It could include a stay in a foreign country (not necessarily at an educational institution), at a folkhighschool, or some kind of practical work. The main-purpose was to get experience and mature. The programme lasted 2 or 3 years.

This project has now been stopped.

A project of a very different type is the Ølgod-Opera.

It has been started and run by a private person, a music-teacher in the small town of Ølgod in West-Jutland. He was very fond of opera and wanted people in his remote municipality to share his interest. In stead of taking people to operas in Århus, Copenhagen or Hamburg his idea was, that "we can make our own opera". He chose "Carmen" and succeeded in recruiting most of the local people in the project. The performers were trained, some people made costumes, others made the stage and all the wings and set pieces a.s.o. Hundreds of people were involved and worked more than two years preparing the opera. Few of them knew the opera in beforehand; fewer had ever been to an opera anywhere. - Simultaneously lectures on music and on opera was given - they made visits to the operahouses in Århus and other places, heard operas and met "colleagues" and learned how professionals work.

Finally they performed "Carmen" in Ølgod - not once but a whole week and the public came from most of the country and included many professional singers and musicians. They have continued every 3 or 4 years.

From my own corner of Denmark I can mention one example of good practice.

Every year the Nordic Council (the official organisation for the cooperation among the 8 Nordic countries) awards a prestigious Literary Prize to a fictional piece of work. For that a special jury nominates two writers from each country and one from the regions or smaller languages.

The idea is of course to make readers interested in literature from the other Nordic countries. It does not, however, automatically work that way.

4.

Therefore the Helsingør-branch of the Extra-Mural Education (called the People's University) decided to do something about it.

We run a series of lectures introducing all the nominated books (novels, short stories, poetry) - by lecturers from the different countries. We met every second week (to give time for reading) all winter at our local library; learned about the countries, their literature and of course especially about the nominated writers and their work. The library may arrange small exhibitions.

And it works. The participants - 25 - 30 - not only get interested in the writers on the programme but get motivated for reading and learning about the literature and the culture in the neighbouring countries.

My last example is also from the extra-mural work in my hometown.

Denmark has been a member of EU for about 30 years but the general debate is still mostly dealing with economical and political issues and as a rule with problems and conflicts. Very little about issues of common interest.

During the last 30 or 40 years Denmark has had a perceptible immigration. The previously homogenous country is becoming multicultural.

We wanted to show something about European multiplicity and community.

We selected the island of Sicily as a good example. For almost 3000 years this small area has been strongly influenced by numerous cultures - Greek, Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Spanish, French, Germans and finally Italians. The islanders have been marked by them all; you can still trace them all; but Sicily has even to-day an identity of its own.

We organised a series of lectures on Sicilian history, literature, film a.s.o. We had about 40 - 45 very committed participants. A third of them took part in a study-tour to Sicily to see in reality what we had heard about. We visited all corners of the triangular island and experienced the mixtures of cultures - and how it has ended up in harmony and in a Sicilian identity.

I think it was very instructive to all people who are worried about immigration, europeanisation and globalisation.

I hope by this intervention to have given some examples of good practice how to make learning a pleasure and thereby motivate people to widen their horizon by continued learning.