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Study Visit: 07008, 01-DNK

1st Oct – 5th Oct 2007

Measures to prevent school failure: -

How to make Learning Attractive.



*A*arhus
*D*enmark



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Statue of Breeding Sow outside "The Rådhus" Aarhus

1. Background and Introduction



Denmark is situated between the North Sea to the West and the Baltic Sea to the Southeast. Most of Denmark consists of Jutland, a peninsula that covers 29,766 sq km (11,493 sq ml) which derived its name from the Jutes, a Germanic tribe that once inhabited the area. The rest of the country consists of some 480 islands of which the largest are Bornholm, Funen and Zealand. Far to the North, Greenland and the Faroe Islands are self governing overseas regions of Denmark.

Århus (Aarhus) is Denmark's second largest city and can trace its history back to Viking times when a small settlement was established in this part of Jutland. It was originally called "Aros," meaning "*at the mouth of the river*" and due to its location on Jutland's eastern coast, it became a major seaport. After the Reformation, Århus grew into an important trading centre. Many merchants' houses were built as a result and the 19th century saw the development of the harbour.

The founding of a university in 1928 led to an expansion of culture and today Århus has many outstanding buildings and fine museums, most notably the modern city hall "Rådhus" now a "listed" building, designed by Arne Jacobsen and Eric Møller and completed in 1947, which is a prime example of Danish Modernism. "*The Human Society*" by Hagedorn Olsen is a vast mural, dominating the entrance to the Rådhus, the naked characters transcending age and time.



The Danish education system was conceived by N.E.S. Grundtvig (1789 – 1872) a clergyman poet educational thinker, bard, and politician and it is he who is credited with the visionary genius of the Folkehøjskoles movement. He was concerned with the way his own schooling had been so dry and uninspiring, recognising the importance of universal education, and of the need to make learning attractive. "*but it was most notably Kristen Kold (1816 -1870) who transformed Grundtvig's visionary ideas into educational practice.*"

(Meet the Danish Efterskole: Efterskolernes Sekretariat P. 7)



As well as information on how Denmark is addressing issues related to making learning attractive and an intensive programme of educational visits to both Folkehøjskoles and Efterskole, the study group were given the opportunity to visit "Den Gamle By" an open air museum of houses and shops dating back to the middle ages, "Aarhus Kunsmuseum" with its exceptional collection of modern Danish art.

2. Purpose of Visit

The aim of this study visit was to give participants an insight into the different strategies adopted to make learning attractive and subsequently address issues relating to the prevention of school failure. There was an initial presentation on the structure of the Danish education system, with particular reference to the municipality of Aarhus and opportunities to discuss the similarities and differences of the structure within our host country when compared with the 10 countries represented within the group.

3. Composition of the Group

Bertin Vemeulen	Belgium
Leo Hoffmann	Germany
Helma Kaienburg	Germany
Marta Roca Cabrera	Spain
Pablo Villanueva Serrano	Spain
Christine Bedo-Potier	France
Joce Le Breton	France
Richard Woolford	United Kingdom
Polly Skinner	United Kingdom
Domonkos Németh	Hungary
Elena Borocci	Italy
Albertina Laureti	Italy
Maryla Marynowska	Poland
Elsa Agostinho	Portugal
Cenk Akay	Turkey



Rundhøjskolen Folkeskole



Unge Hjem Efterskole

Facilitators/Leaders



Henrik Neiiendam Anderson
Sunday – Tuesday



Malene Vangdrup
Tuesday - Friday



Teis Trane
Monday & Friday

CIRIUS Study Visit 07008,01-DNK Aarhus, Denmark
How to make Learning Attractive
October 1-5, 2007
The Study Group



Back Row: Richard Woolford; Bertin Vemeulen; Leo Hoffmann; Domonkos Németh
Third Row: Elena Borocci; Maryla Marynowska; Helma Kaienburg; Cenk Akay
Second Row: Albertina Laureti; Pablo Villanueva Serrano; Joce Le Breton;
Christine Bedo-Potier; Polly Skinner
Front Row: Elsa Agostinho; Marta Roca Cabrera

4. Programme Timetable

Day 1. Mon 1st Oct.

Aarhus City Hall

"The Rådhus"

Arne Jacobssen & Erik Møller

- Welcome to Denmark
- The Danish Education System
- Tour of the Rådhus
- Participants Presentations
- Planning and discussions at Hotel



"Denmark is considered to have one of the most expensive education systems in the world and people rightly want to know if they are getting value for their money."

(Teis Trane Advisor for International Integration Dk)

Day 2 Tues 2nd Oct



Folkeskole and Efterskole

Den Gamle By

- Visit to Rundhøjskolen Folkeskole
- Guided walk round Den Gamle By
(The Old City)
- Visit to Unge Hjemets Efterskole
- Planning and discussions at Hotel

"In the light of yesterday, you have to act today, working for tomorrow"

(Mogens Toustrup Head Teacher Rundhøjskolen Folkeskole)

Day 3. Wed 3rd Oct

Frijsenborg Efterskole

- Visit to Frijsenborg Efterskole
- Continue study of provision at Frijsenborg Efterskole
- Report discussions at Hotel
- Visit to ARoS
Aarhus Kunsmuseum
- Planning and discussions at Hotel



"A golden thread through the school's education and togetherness is the following: trust democracy and community as well as mutual respect and responsibility."

(Frijsenborg Efterskole)

Day 4. Thurs 4th Oct



Nørbæk Efterskole

- Morning Assembly Nørbæk Efterskole
- Tour of Nørbæk Efterskole meeting staff and pupils
- Lunch at school
- Free time to look round Aarhus
- Planning and discussions at Hotel

Continuation Schools (efterskoler) are private boarding schools for pupils in forms 8 – 10. In addition to normal subjects, emphasis is on social learning and such fields as sports, music, nature or ecology.”

(The Danish Education System CIRIUS p. 2)

Day 5. Fri 5th Oct

Aarhus City Hall

- Introduction to the Pedagogical resource centre (Poal Tang)
- Summing up and identifying good practice
- Future Co-operation possibilities
- Lunch
- Presentation of the Group Report
- Visit ends approx 15:00 hrs



“We provide training and resources, 95% of Danish teachers have experienced 120 hours of in-service training related to ICT.”

(Poal Tang ICT specialist)

5. The Educational Setting

Denmark has had compulsory education since 1814 and approximately 84% of all children attend public schools, with 15% attending private schools. Less than 1% are taught outside school (*figures based on 2005 data*). The average class size is 19.6, and school usually starts at 08:00 hrs with younger pupils finishing at 12:00 hrs or 13:00 hrs and older pupils continuing until 14:00hrs or 15:00 hrs. Many pupils stay on after school in municipal leisure time care or at recreation centres, both of which are free of charge. Examinations are limited to form 9 (leaving certificate of the Folkenskole) and form 10 (advanced leaving certificate of the Folkenskole) Examinations are compulsory and pupils are also required to write a one week project assignment.

“Apart from the compulsory forms 1 – 9, the Folkenskole comprises a voluntary pre-school year and an optional 10th year. More than 99% of all children attend the pre school year and 58% attend the 10th year (2004)

(The Danish Education System CIRIUS p. 1)

The widest possible choice of schools is ensured by publicly subsidising schooling outside the state and municipal systems an example of which are Efterskoles that aim to provide an alternative style of learning for students approaching the end of their compulsory education.

“No two Efterskoles are alike. Some are more than one hundred years old-and some reside in castles much older than that. Just a few have been built from scratch.”

(Meet the Danish Efterskole: Efterskolernes Sekretariat P. 19)

The study group were given the opportunity to visit four different schools; meeting students and teachers in Rundhøjskolen Folkeskole and Unge Hjem, Frijsenborg and Nørnbæk Efterskoles. While each school had a very individual character, the study group noted a number of similarities which included:-

- The homely feeling in every school, with a sense of family grouping; this is especially true within the Frijsenborg Efterskole.
- The setting of the infrastructure for the schools we saw, which were well landscaped, with plenty of grass and showed a close affinity to nature.
- The relaxed manner between staff and students.
- Integration of citizenship and the importance of taking responsibility for personal action being a recurrent theme in every aspect of school life.
- Student access to the teachers including the Head Teacher, exemplified by an “open door” policy in the schools we visited.
- Environmental issues, recycling cleaning, keeping the school tidy and conservation being core aspects of whole school life.
- The importance of healthy eating, (which in one school was an aspect especially worthy of note, with students receiving six meals a day to maintain blood sugar levels; the students themselves being closely involved in the preparation of food which where possible was organic, and freshly made, including their own cakes, bread) was a natural part of the curriculum.
- A commitment to healthy exercise with some schools even timetabling early morning walks/runs.

For students who find learning difficult, considerable efforts are made to try and identify the problems and then address the causes of those difficulties. “Plan B “at Rundhøjskolen Folkeskole is just one example we encountered:-

This school has two classes for learners with special needs, investing in care for learners who can't take part of daily school life for a variety of reasons which may include family, personal, social or psychological issues. While taking part in “Plan B”, students live in an apartment with a teacher and a social worker who try to get them to participate in school life again. These staff can be contacted, round the clock, including weekends if necessary. The “Plan B” teacher has a reduced teaching commitment to allow them to liaise with a wide network of professional people such as doctors, psychologists etc. in order to support their students. Students enter “Plan B” for different lengths of time depending upon their individual needs, staying full time, or just mornings as they gradually re-integrate into the main stream school.

As an adjunct to “Plan B,” “Plan A” has been designed for both students and their parents and operates before and after school. It provides many activities on the same site as the school. Children from socially deprived families can get breakfast, a shower or help with their homework. Parents can receive assistance and guidance

for filling in forms, consulting social workers etc. There is a parents' café as well where they can meet and talk and where some even organise trips for the weekend.

It was noticed that where schools have a specialist focus, the provision in that specialist area is also often used to enhance opportunities for the rest of the students. In Frijsenborg Efterskole a focus to help students with hearing difficulties and the whole school attention to healthy living has resulted in:-

- Equipment for the disabled being particularly good with microphones and hearing loops installed in all class areas which staff and students use as a matter of course.
- Every classroom has access to media, music, and computers, with most young people having good access to lap tops or PCs, which they appear to make good use of.
- It was noticed that there seem to be very few text books within this school, with much of the work being provided through electronic means.
- A building design with excellent thoughtful use of light and space makes a significant contribution to ensuring that learning is attractive.
- The Frijsenborg Efterskole School is the first Danish school to be a totally non smoking area, there is a ban also on alcohol and sex.

The Efterskoles have a community feel with regular singing and meetings which students enjoy enhancing their social skills, their sense of responsibility and their learning. Access to television is limited to the Danish channels in the schools we visited, but students say they have little time for TV with so many other opportunities to engage them. Some members of our study group, through exposure to the Efterskole system, began to recognise how their understanding of the term "learning" seemed to concentrate very heavily on the academic aspects, while in Denmark as in some other countries represented by our study group, "Citizenship" and "Social Learning" were recognised as being of equal importance to the education process. Some members of the study group were surprised by the reticence of schools to talk about any progression data and felt that this might be an outcome of the limited levels of tracking and monitoring currently required by the Danish education system.

6. The Role of the Teacher

In introducing and welcoming the study group to Aarhus, a description of the historical development which produced the current Danish education system demonstrated how a relaxed, informal and self-moderating social structure built on mutual respect and trust was core to the school life we were going to observe throughout the week.

The group were impressed with the interaction between students and teachers both within the Folkeskole, and the Efterskole, and it was considered by many in the group that the relationship between the teacher and the student was far less formal than might be considered typical within their own countries. In relation to Efterskoles, the group quickly recognised that the personal and professional requirements of these teachers demanded a particular balance of both dedication and interpersonal skills which

"calls for personal involvement amongst the teachers, and the Efterskole teacher's profession are without question both very demanding and rewarding."

(Meet the Danish Efterskole: Efterskolernes Sekretariat P. 21)

Much of the role of a teacher could be considered to be universal, but in looking at how to prevent school failure, address student disaffection and make learning attractive, the group considered that the following were central to educational success:-

- Identification of good practice, which recognises student need and what interests them, stimulating students to participate and take ownership of their learning.
- The ability to create an atmosphere of confidence which supports and encourages the student, allowing them to make mistakes from which they learn while supporting and building self-awareness and self-value.
- Recognition that the emotional needs, the physical and mental care of each individual contributes at least as much to the education process as the dissemination of facts and specific subject material; in this way showing respect for the process of learning.
- Awareness that they as “Teacher” are not necessarily the centre of learning, but partners and facilitators of an education process which has many centres and should involve as wide and diverse a variety of partners as it is possible including students within the class to stimulate achieve and maintain real engagement.
- Through professional commitment and dedication ensure good relationships with parents so they have complete confidence in the school to meet all the needs of their children, securing the triangular partnership of highly effective learning, which is made up of Parent; Pupil; and Teacher.

For many of the group, the lack of emphasis on formal testing and monitoring observed within the Danish education system raised questions in relation to the role of the teacher with regard to monitoring, quality assurance, robust evaluation and target setting, but as previously stated this also raised questions about an over emphasis on academic achievement which seems endemic in a number of our education systems in Europe.

It was universally acknowledged by the group that the ability Danish teachers have to initiate projects they are enthusiastic and committed to, once they had gained the support of colleagues, was a real benefit. The concept of “burners;” teachers with real enthusiasm; was something everyone recognised as core to making learning attractive. The perception of the role of teachers by students is also something that the group felt had a significant impact on making learning attractive, reducing school failure and addressing disaffection. While referring to their experience at an Efterskole, the following student comment succinctly identifies the need for attractive learning to be facilitated by enthusiastic teachers.

“The lessons were very much like ordinary school, but what was new was that teachers were with us after school. They didn’t just act as educators behind a desk.”

(Meet the Danish Efterskole: Efterskolernes Sekretariat P. 30)

7. The Student Perspective and role of the Learner

In most of the schools we visited, student’s demonstrated self-confidence and self-esteem. They had built good relationships with their peers and this was especially noticeable in the Efterskoles even though most of the students had only been together for about 5 weeks! There was evidence of fluent communication in the English language with us and between the learners. The concept of an enhanced extended family environment is a characteristic in all schools, evident in student progression within the comprehensive system through the primary levels to year 10. The students showed that they are mature and responsible; they care and appear to

understand individual responsibility for each other and for the whole school. This is most evident in the Efterskoles which demonstrated an enhanced family atmosphere. The schools in most cases showed links to the community.

There is much active learning and some students talk enthusiastically about helping and supporting each other in their learning. With both formal and informal learning taking place in the schools, learning is made attractive in a variety of ways. The comprehensive system has what the group recognised as more traditional classroom teaching. However, the Efterskoles combine a range of teaching techniques with small and larger peer group work. Expectation is focused on the learners responsibility for their own education, e.g. to produce homework within a given timescale whatever other tempting activities are taking place. The school environments support creative outcomes with students' participation the most important element, especially noticeable in the Efterskoles where the entire concept is responsive to the student experience.

Student responsibility is highlighted throughout all educational settings/activities, forming the basis of the whole educational system. Timetabling is flexible and responsive to the learner which is recognised and valued by the students who considered the following aspects most important and valuable:-

- Flexible timetabling
- Individual responsibility for attendance
- Everyone is responsible for one another and are accountable to one another
- Everyone shares the general cleaning and day to day chores of the buildings
- Student self choice to be in the institution
- We want to learn, we want to stay.
- You have to show others respect and be considerate.

The learning environment is explicitly structured in the comprehensive school. However, in the Efterskoles while this structure is implicitly in place, it is often adjusted and made even more flexible to meet immediate individual learner needs. Learning is made attractive by developing life and personal skills within the students at an individual level. Students enjoy a subtle embedding of knowledge through experimentation and practical experience. There is a wide and broad approach to learning and the contrasts are significant not only between the Comprehensive State and the Efterskoles system, but the Efterskoles themselves.

“The Efterskoles can determine their subject profile, lessons and teaching methods themselves as long as they abide by the broad educational requirements specifically outlined in the Efterskole act.”

(Meet the Danish Efterskole: Efterskolernes Sekretariat P. 23)

- Learning is made attractive to life skills and personal development which appears to enable the process of learning and makes learning attractive.
- Open, honest relationships in clean and modern buildings are conducive to attractive learning.
- A wider, broader approach to teaching facilitates engagement.
- A praise culture positively supports and enables motivation.
- Once negotiated, teachers are strict and homework deadlines quite tight.
- The learning environment is designed to facilitate active learning.
- The whole school acts as a learning environment; it is not just confined to the classroom.

Student personal development skills are central in all of the schools we visited, the culture being expressed concisely at one school by both students and teachers using terms such as trust, jealousy, joy, passion, sadness to describe their vision for education. The following points give an outline sketch of how those personal development skills are embedded:-

- Nurture is strong with 'I can, I will and can manage' being a recurring mantra.
- Democratic culture, how to live in this world is a recurrent theme.
- Raising of self-esteem and confidence are central tenets of the education process.
- Interdependency model is core to the educational philosophy
- The Efterskole was described by a student as an 'Extra-ordinary year'.
- At one school, they sit around a table called brotherhood.
- Personal skill development is based on mostly social activities rather than academic skills.

Student centred learning is evident in the collective responsibility demonstrated by the student board. The strong focus the system places on "soft" skills and the way the school and the teachers serve the interests of their students; not allowing these interests to be sublimated to the needs of the school exemplifies this.

Students do not consider that they lose a year or two but rather value the opportunity to broaden their life experience, not choosing an Efterskole because they want to be a doctor or to embark on a specific profession but because they consider this system gives a general education which will be of value whatever they choose to do later.

"I have learned so much from the experience I had at my Efterskole which have helped me in later life,"

(Meet the Danish Efterskole: Efterskolernes Sekretariat P. 31)

Although discussions with parents do take place, the decision to attend Efterskole and which Efterskole to apply for is very much a student's personal choice. For many, Efterskole means singing, discussing, talking to each other and debating as they prepare for the next step in their education. They believe it prepares them to adjust to another community or school and for our study group; the success of Efterskole in addressing issues such as students "dropping out of education" was very evident. What we have observed is that where the learners are fully integrated into the school any physical or psychological challenges appear to be less important and can be considerably reduced when ably managed. This appears to support the young people to best effect and learning becomes attractive and exciting. Learning is transformed and becomes active and not passive where all students accept responsibility for each other. In most cases the contagious enthusiasm of the teachers impacts on the students, they are happy, relaxed and demonstrate progression in learning.

8. Conclusion

The individuals who made up study group 07008, 01-DNK; examining measures to prevent school failure and how to make learning attractive, came from 10 different European countries and a very disparate educational background both in terms of

experience and role. From the initial meeting and the subsequent presentations which took place on the first afternoon, it became evident that the group possessed a deep rooted commitment to, and passion for the education process and the importance of making learning attractive. The common theme which came through every presentation was that teachers had to demonstrate an enthusiasm for the lessons they were teaching and effective education had to engage the learner. Education and learning required an effort which at times could be difficult but that did not mean it had to be “dry” or unattractive, a view the group are confident that Grundtvig would have agreed with.

For many of the group the relaxed and informal relationship between teachers and learners and the social interaction between all partners in the education process was more pronounced in Denmark than in their own countries so that subsequently throughout the week recurring questions included:-

- How do you know what the students have learnt?
- How do you measure progress?
- In what way is accountability for learning monitored?
- How does student self regulation ensure appropriate levels of challenge?
- Is the supervision of the students adequate to protect the potentially more vulnerable?

There was much within the Efterskole system which the group recognised made a significant contribution to attractive learning including:-

- A broader, more practically based curriculum.
- The commitment to personal responsibility and development of respect.
- The freedom from a regime of continuous external testing, written evaluation and target setting
- The ability for students to directly influence their learning and the subsequent ownership of it.
- The opportunity to mix, live, discuss and work with a wide social peer group.
- Teachers who were themselves free from the stress of regular inspection monitoring and performance evaluation which has increased in many systems.

At its best, the Efterskole system studied by the group would meet the vision of Grundtvig to provide enlightenment for life rather than formal or vocational training,

“creating in young people a receptive attitude and bringing the students into a concrete relationship with the practical aspects of life.”

(Meet the Danish Efterskole: Efterskolernes Sekretariat P. 8)

The success of the process of learning depends very much on the enthusiasm and the professional skills of a good teacher and educator, without which that process of necessity must suffer regardless of the quality of resources available to the school. The group did feel that in some cases, a lack of focus by the learner combined with an unwillingness or inability by the teacher to provide an appropriate and suitable level of challenge could mean that the unique opportunities presented by the Efterskole system were not used to their fullest advantage. The group also felt that at present, in the very limited time available to us and consequently the small number of schools we were able to visit, there were no structures or systems in place which could warn of potential difficulties in time to address possible issues or prevent future students from

encountering similar problems. It was viewed that in cases of most concern, contributory factors may include one or more of the following:-

- Poorly trained or unqualified teachers,
- Complacent staff lacking enthusiasm.
- Management lacking detailed focus
- Poor preparation and/or insufficient thought regarding the learning process
- Learners left too long without an effective adult presence (both during the day and at night)
- Insufficient consideration given to the wider aspects of safeguarding

Throughout the week we were able to see at first hand the excellent use schools made of modern technology and the ICT aspect of the resource centre demonstrated Denmark's commitment to ensuring schools did not fall behind in this fast changing area. The group recognised ICT can and does make a significant contribution to ensuring learning is attractive, but every one of them also expressed concern for the inherent danger of it being used for visual impact and entertainment rather than the contribution ICT can make to the education process. It was deemed important that in the education situation ICT always served to make learning attractive, rather than being a technological aesthetic which allowed learners to disengage

That having been said the group were throughout their visit immensely impressed with much of what they saw and experienced both within the schools and the wider Danish community, in particular:-

- The self confidence and motivation of many of the students we met.
- The mature, open and friendly attitude displayed at many of our meetings.
- Student awareness of both local, national and international issues
- The general friendliness and apparent lack of stress in schools and the wider community

It was observed that:

“If schooling is intended to prepare young people to take their place in society and contribute to the common good, then the evidence in Aarhus of a generally contented law abiding community with mutual respect and trust for each other showing little anxiety or stress would indicate that education is very successful.”

(Bertin Vermeulen Study Group Member)

Thanks

All members of the study Group wished me to extend our thanks and appreciation to everyone who made this visit successful. It was particularly requested that these thanks were passed on to the students, staff and schools who made us feel so welcome throughout our visit; to our Danish hosts from the education department, and to CIRIUS and the European Study Group for presenting us with the opportunity to participate in this study visit.

(Dr. Richard J. Woolford on behalf of Study group 07008, 01-DNK)