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## **How to educate pre-school teachers so they are capable of working towards the social development of children**

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### **Københavns Socialpædagogiske Seminarium - background**

Our college is a national institute for social educators offering general courses in education, which means that students gain qualifications across the whole of the social and pedagogical fields. These include the education of children and young people in day-care institutions, young people and adults with special needs and elderly people. The aim of the course is described in a law passed by the National Department of Education; the law is written in very general terms, but defines the parameters within which the final exams must be assessed. The institute has to devise a curriculum showing how the aims of the course can be realised.

There are two versions of the course, Ordinary and Adjusted:

- The Ordinary course is mainly for young students who have been accepted for training on the basis of their general school qualifications. No job-oriented qualifications are required. The length of this version of training is 3½ years, with placement periods of 15 months in total.
- The Adjusted education course is for students with a minimum of 5 years of social or pedagogical job-oriented training and qualifications, and they have to be working in the social or pedagogical fields during the course. They must also have general school qualifications. Because of the requirement for job-oriented qualifications, the length of this version is 3 years with a placement period of 3 months. The student takes a leave of absence from employment during the first year (when they are able to obtain financial support from the Union). For the second and third years of the course the student is a part-time student and a full-time social worker or pedagogue. During the second and third years the student is at the institute two evenings and one day each week, and there are some whole weeks and weekends when they also have to attend.

For convenience we shall refer to the students from these two versions of the course as ‘young students’, and ‘older students’. Depending on the make-up of each group of students the actual content of the course can be diversified. Later in this paper we will give a closer description of this.

We have mentioned that ours is an institute for social educators. In this paper we will concentrate on the education of pre-school teachers, although the institute also has a department for courses for social educators and pedagogues from the working field and a department for the education of pedagogical assistants.

#### **The course**

The training is vocational, which means it is oriented directly towards the social and pedagogical fields. There are two ‘learning-spheres’; the student is for periods of varying length either at the institute or on placement. On one level these two spheres correspond; for instance they are both integral parts of the course, and the student must qualify from

both spheres. On another level the respective logic and conditions of each sphere means that they operate in parallel, that they exist individually and are not (necessarily) connected.

Even though it is necessary to look at both 'learning-spheres' in trying to paint a complete picture of the way we understand the education at our institute, in this paper we are mostly focused on the periods when the student is at the institute. Analysis and comprehension of the current pedagogical field is the basis on which the institute approaches the course. One result of this analysis is that it is expected that the pre-school teacher makes relationships with and takes care of the child. At the same time the child is considered to have competencies and resources making it capable of managing its own life. This means that the student has to gain knowledge about and competence in handling a dual role; the student must gain knowledge about and understanding of the child and, moreover, must gain knowledge about and understanding of their own role and its meaning within this dual position.

The current pedagogical field is complex and manifold, and this aspect of our understanding means that it is impossible to give unambiguous answers to problems or to behaviour patterns. It is therefore crucial that the student throughout the course gains further competencies in making choices, for instance about literature and methods.

In the light of this, important aspects of the course are autonomy, the ability to develop a critical attitude based on analytic grounds, and a responsible attitude to the course. You might say that we try to be student-centred and at the same time the course is based on the independence of the student, in other words the work of the student is a crucial basis for the course. We emphasise that the students and lecturers co-operate together in this.

#### **Students and the dual role**

Throughout the course the students are in a dual role - they are learning both at the institute and on placement, and at the same time they are 'teachers' during the placement periods. At the institute we are working with this dual position in many ways according to the actual focus of the role. When we focus on the students when they are at the institute we work with different ideas about learning.

Meta-cognition is one of the ideas; the student must gain awareness of the conditions under which their learning is at its best. We also concentrate on the student's acquisition of competencies towards becoming an active, reflective and responsible student. The focus is on how to be critical and reflecting, how to interpret and understand one's surroundings and how to (try to) give this a personal meaning, and how to make choices and decisions.

It is a central tenet in this work that the student has to do it: not for moral reasons but because it is a suitable approach, and because it is the student who has to learn. Besides working with ideas of learning and learning processes, the student works with methods and the use of these, with how to learn and work with fellow-students, with how to speak in large forums etc. We are of the opinion that all this is necessary in order that the student can be responsible for and in their education, with the necessary skills. We are also of the opinion that we are in a period where there is no 'authorised sum of knowledge' and it is necessary in modern education to be able to act independently in relation to the pedagogical job.

When we focus on the student as a ‘teacher’, we work with questions relating to the desire ‘to do something for others’. For instance we approach this by making the conditions under which this can happen visible, that is which conditions must or can be present before ‘the others’ actually learn. It is an aspect in this work that the student sees that ‘the others’ must accept their side of the dual role, and accept that the student is the teacher - and that the student focuses on motivation and how to motivate ‘the others’ (and possibly themselves too), so that the learning can ‘succeed’.

We can conclude that the dual role is constantly the student’s ‘reality’, both in relation to their course and to the relationships they will be a part of later when they enter the pedagogical field. Work with this dual role is a part of the introduction to the course. Subsequently it is an aspect that is analysed and discussed throughout the course, and as the student gradually learns from their experiences at the institute and on placement, more nuances are added to this dual position.

How we approach this topic varies, depending on whether we are dealing with the ‘younger’ students or the ‘older’. With ‘older’ students the starting point is the experiences they bring to the course - experiences from school (often many years in the past) and job-related experiences from the social or pedagogical fields. For us it is an important question how all these can become part of their education, so that it is possible for the students to link their experiences to new knowledge. At the same time another important question is how it is possible to move beyond these experiences, so that the student is actually more qualified at the end of the course than at the beginning, and able to gain new knowledge or new ways of looking at the pedagogical profession. With ‘young’ students the central point is the experiences from school they bring to the course, often an important aspect being how to transform themselves from pupil to student. Since this group of students does not necessarily have any job-related experiences at all, we focus on their experiences from life (from their own childhood, from the family etc.) and connect these to the pedagogical profession.

#### **The perspective of the child**

Earlier we mentioned that the pre-school teacher is expected to develop relationships with and take care of the child. To do this it is necessary for the pre-school teacher to be able to understand the perspective of the child, by allowing the child to express itself. For instance we currently look upon the child as competent, rich in resources and capable of taking care of its own life (in suitable co-operation with the adults around the child, that is parents and pre-school teachers). This means that as well as needing to be aware of the child's resources and competencies it is necessary to be aware of your own position as an adult in relation to the child. You must observe a differentiation between the child and the adult, for instance what is intended and what motives are behind the relationship. In this way the child has an opportunity to choose from what the adult is offering.

One way in which the student can try to differentiate their own perspective from that of the child is to be aware of their own resources and competencies, and compare these to guesses about the resources and competencies of the child. This process is one of self-examination, and has implications for the student’s ability to co-operate with fellow students, and later with colleagues.

The students work throughout their course with an awareness of this dimension of the dual role. There are no special variations in the way of working with the ‘younger’ and the

'older' students. This topic is partly treated independently and is partly included within other subjects, discussions etc.

#### **Project-oriented work**

Danish education for social educators includes pedagogy, psychology, sociology, social law, health education, communication (organisation and management) and experimental work. In addition we have a large number of creative subjects, e.g. drama, sculpture, music etc.

In the teaching at our institute we focus on different topics and themes and these are illustrated through the different subjects comprising the course. The subjects thereby contribute to an understanding of the pedagogical field through their different discourses. A great deal of the course is project-oriented. This method is based on problem-orientated thinking; the interesting part is not to find solutions or answers, but continuously to look critically at the conditions and the organisation of the pedagogical field and the profession.

The institute wants to present a method of working to the students, partly as a means of dealing with the enormous amount of information and knowledge which is a feature of the modern world and partly as a method suitable for the pre-school teacher following the course itself. The nature of this method is that the student, both alone and in co-operation with fellow students, selects, chooses and forms pedagogical questions and then illustrates these through the subjects that make up the course. This work takes place in groups, and a written report must be made. Additionally, the question the group has worked on must contain an expression from the creative subjects as well. The students receive tuition from the lecturers in periods for project-oriented work. At the end of a period the students have to present their work before fellow students and lecturers.

The following perspectives are taken into account during the presentations:

#### *A perspective based on the profession*

Here the purpose is to support the students in gaining experience and competence in presenting their profession, so that they are capable of organising and presenting their analysis, knowledge and discussions to a public.

#### *A perspective based on the course*

Here the purpose is to be certain of an awareness of the many varied aspects of the pedagogical field. The students are able to become acquainted with the ideas their fellow students have worked with.

#### *A perspective based on learning*

This means that students are able to test themselves in relation to the knowledge they have gained in the period; they have the possibility of finding out how to present and discuss knowledge in a nuanced manner.

The project-oriented work and the presentations are evaluated by students and lecturers.

#### **Learning agreements**

The student's responsibility for and in the course is considered very important at the institute. Of course the student is not the only one who has responsibility - the lecturer

also has a part to play. The lecturer is responsible for - in co-operation with the students - organising and generating a dynamic climate for the course. Additionally the lecturer must see that the aims of the course are followed and that the parameters within which the final exams are assessed are observed as well. For this purpose a learning agreement is useful.

The learning agreement is an individual tool. The purpose is to focus on the student's learning processes during the course, with the object of making it clear to the student in which direction their education needs to be organised and planned. The learning agreement is also used as a starting point in discussions between the student and the lecturer in relation to evaluations etc. This dialogue also makes it possible to be continuously aware of the student's path to the final exams.

The learning-agreement is non-static and is regularly amended, typically in connection with periods of project-oriented work, with courses etc.

#### **Elements of the learning agreement**

##### *Professional perspectives*

The student focuses on what is of interest to them, and which courses would be relevant to choose in relation to this. They also focus on the resources they already have and those that need to be developed.

##### *Learning perspectives*

The student focuses on what they want and need to learn, how they will achieve this and also considers available resources and where they might need new methods.

##### *Co-operation and planning perspectives*

The student focuses on the demands and expectations placed on themselves and their fellow students. They also give consideration to how they will spend their time, and how they will prioritise studies, job, family etc.

##### *Self-evaluation perspectives*

These are perspectives the student works out at the end of the periods. They focus on how they have learnt, how they planned and organised their study, which experiences they have drawn on - and which direction they will be taking in the coming period.

#### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have described some of the aspects that our institute finds important in the training of teachers. From our understanding of the pedagogical profession we find it necessary for the course to concentrate on the meta-cognition of the students. This point of view also finds its justification in the fact that the course must cater for the whole extent of the social and pedagogical area and we find that the features attached to meta-cognition takes this into account. From our point of view the dual role of the student and understanding the perspective of the child are (some) meta-cognitive aspects, and the project-oriented work and the learning agreements are (some) ways to work meta-cognitively.

With this we want the course to contribute to the critical point of view which the student gains - critical towards the pedagogical profession and towards the conditions and

organisation of the pedagogical field, conditions that are constantly connected to the demands of change. Besides this we want the training to have a long durability; meaning that it remains usable even though new knowledge, new conditions etc. are added. If the student can achieve this, they are ready to meet current and future professional problems.

We also hold the view that in this way the student is qualified to play a part in the social development of the child - with a respect for the child's own resources and competencies. The child stands to gain a great deal - it can build self-confidence, dignity, autonomy etc. These qualities, we presume, are not only necessary for the present but for the future too.