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## **Meeting the other culture**

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Denmark is remarkable both for its small geographical area and for its predominantly homogenous population. According to data from the *European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, Annual Report 2000*, Denmark has a foreign population of just 4.8%, including 1.1% from Asia, 0.7% from Turkey, 0.7% from Yugoslavia and 0.5% from Africa. However, changes in the population since 1960, including the arrival of new citizens, immigrants and refugees, have created problems and challenges for Danish society. These had to be addressed by our education system, and courses in the Social Education Institutes were updated in 1992 to include *International Pedagogy*.

At Slagelse Institute of Social Education our students are required to spend half a semester (10 weeks) studying International Pedagogy as a part of the course to become qualified social educators. Slagelse has planned and developed its courses to focus on subjects such as:

- Multiethnic Denmark
  - Who are the Danes?
  - The needs of the new Danes?
  - Integration in Denmark?
  - The European dimension
  - The Global World
- ...And the meeting with other cultures!

We have taught and developed these courses for ten years, and this has given the Institute a greater understanding of multicultural and international challenges. In Denmark it is thought that 6-7 % of students have a multicultural background, and this reality must be considered in perspectives for integration in Denmark.

## **Integration through education**

Denmark is in the process of becoming multicultural, with an increasing percentage of citizens with a language and cultural origins than Danish. The percentage is expected to continue to rise in the coming years. In 2002 it is hard to locate the 'new' Danes in the labour market or the education sector, although in educational institutions such countries as Palestine, Pakistan and Turkey have been represented for many years, especially in the bigger cities. Today there are many institutions - kindergartens, schools and high schools - in which Danish students are outnumbered by students from minority groups. We need to adapt our education and socialisation systems to meet their special needs for education and training.

When institutions have only a few new pupils, there is a tendency to enforce assimilation - whether or not the parents want it - but when institutions have many new pupils from other cultures we need to consider both the Danish culture and the content of the Danish curricula, asking whether our pedagogy is sufficiently good to cope, and whether we are sure that we should be integrating into the Danish society.

Hanna Ziadeh, Chairman of the Council for Integration in Copenhagen, says

... but the integration of pupils with a certain sense of national solidarity - with a built-in nationalistic reading of the history and the development of their society ... was like a nationalistic story about dangerous travel, in which the survival of the common ship was permanently threatened by other aggressive nations, and this has provided the overall dominating *raison d'être*.

In other words, we cannot continue with socialisation, upbringing and educational systems that reflect only Danish culture and Danish national consciousness.

Education for Social Educators must be seen in the same perspective. When many children in institutions and schools have cultural backgrounds other than Danish, there are challenges in the daily meeting of cultures as well as in pedagogical work: the same will be true when we encounter increasing numbers of foreign students in the Education for Social Educators. This challenge must be seen from the perspective of rising globalisation and internationalisation, and is demonstrated in three ways:

- in public (in the streets)
- in the local area
- in institutions.

All three areas need new ways of understanding cultures, and how they can meet in a democratic and equal way.

In institutions and schools parents meet pedagogues and teachers, children meet pedagogues, the students meet the teachers, child meets child, and so on. These meetings all need a pedagogy and teacher education geared to develop meetings of cultures in a professional way. Knowledge, attitudes and action which challenge the basic assumptions of both the Danish and the foreign about the profession of education and about upbringing are required, and these are the immediately necessary qualifications for an educator in a multicultural context. The knowledge and learning methods of late modernity challenge professionals in education and socialisation to develop an up-to-date and progressive content, research thinking in all subjects. This demands the courage to discard, and to make room for new content and new ideas.

The experiences of our Institute suggest that integration demands profound developments in attitudes and in the specific content of the education system, from the students as much as from the teachers. The current political and ideological climate in Denmark requires that the integration of refugees and immigrants into Danish society includes their admission to the education system, even when there is little knowledge of the Danish language. This new priority can be seen as an acceptance that Denmark is a multiethnic society

### **Language and attitudes**

Foreign students need to develop an adequate competence in communication to manage in the Danish education system and society. They need to speak and write Danish to succeed in schools; there are therefore many Danish lessons each week. These are taught in combination with other relevant subjects, often linked to texts discussing children and young people, such as children's upbringing, children's and teenagers' culture, pedagogy, psychology, society and culture. Teachers must cooperate to ensure their teaching is

relevant to those students who have specific learning needs, but students must also be oriented to their own learning processes, and feel ownership over their part of this process. With such subjects as pedagogy and psychology, the teachers have to know about the values and cultural norms that underpin theory, and which of these might provoke the students.

Danish language teaching includes methods of text analysis and discussion of texts, in which students demonstrate their ability to read and analyse a text. They must be able to make a written report, and to make a personal introduction from the report for further discussion with fellow students and the teacher.

### **Knowledge and personal choice**

Another demand is for foreign students to understand Danish society and Danish culture. For students from other cultures there are many questions to be answered, such as

- Why do the Danes dress so informally, even when at work?
- Why does the Danish Government support Muslim and other private schools?
- Why do Danish families send all their children to institutions such as kindergartens? (Danes have the highest proportion of young children in institutions.)
- Why do Danish children taught to read so late?

These observations about the culture of modern Denmark need to be discussed and explained. There are no simple answers, although a historical survey will suggest answers that seem reasonable, and provide an opportunity to learn the history of the birth and development of modern society, to the present day. To understand Danish culture it is helpful

- to study Danish Law and its origins,
- to know something about the poet and politician Grundtvig (who had an enormous effect on Danish thinking about the school system and how to learn - and that learning is not always a matter of teaching),
- to understand why the Danes believe in a welfare society and why they agree to pay a fairly high rate of income tax.

The development of Danish society, its economy and its view of welfare, are linked to the development of the ordinary Dane's norms, values and conscience.

Pedagogy and psychology are the main subjects in Education for Social Educators, and the majority of lessons are on these. To understand the theories which underpin these subjects, students need a broad practical knowledge which is gained in daycare homes, kindergartens and youth clubs connected to schools, and in institutions for children with special needs. From daily life in these institutions students learn a great deal about how Danish society functions; they also have the opportunity to observe how children develop in the institutions and the ways in which social educators co-operate with parents.

It is important for students to understand that there are no fixed rules about the way to treat children, and that each child needs to be considered in relation to its specific needs and learning processes. Students are required to clarify how they will create teaching and learning methods and how they work in practice, but also how the practice will fit with the aims that society expects.

## **Skills and creativity**

In pedagogy and psychology the student find certain elements of skills and creativity, but a pedagogue also needs concrete skills developed in subjects such as music, gymnastics, art and craft, drama, Danish literature and fairytales. To possess a skill mean to have both exact theoretical knowledge and the associated practical skills. Creativity is also needed to build further on existing ways of doing things and especially to allow the pedagogue be a good guide and companion for the child and the handicapped.

## **Democratic processes**

Democracy is a key component of the way that Danes live: the way they up bring their children, look upon sex, view education and work, and the informal aspects of their way of life. The Danish education system has a conscious connection between its practice and the democratic culture, and the idea of democracy is slowly developed over the whole period of education. A particular concern is that students should learn that democracy means more than simply freedom.

## **Reflection, identity and strength**

To the student from a background other than Danish, the challenge may be to meet the new culture without denying the old. This demands time, space and courage. Such students are presented with a new world that can be beautiful, provoking, exciting and confusing. The student can react to this in one of three ways:

- building up a psychological shield rejecting all that they find new, or
- uncritically accepting to everything, or
- trying to be open to the new, but also creating bridges from knowledge, values and norms acquired from their original culture.

The third way is, of course, preferable, not least because *all* students need to have the ability to reconcile changing realities, the courage to let go in particular situations, the ability to think freely, to reflect upon their background and ideas, and to see the world in a new perspective. In Education for Social Educator students encounter many controversial subjects: upbringing and pedagogy are so dominated by culture and values that is necessary to focus on the cultural barriers, discuss and analyse them.

Meeting another system of values and the Danish education system with its demands and challenges will often put enormous pressure on the multicultural student's sense of identity. The student may have doubts about his own upbringing, about his relations to other people and his own qualifications compared to the Danes. Our aim is to foster an individual with the strength to cope with the massive pressure from the Danish culture in the education system, to trust in her/his own abilities and experiences, and to acknowledge her/his own background of culture, with both its weaknesses and its strength

## **Conclusion**

Integration through education cannot be described or developed within traditional pedagogies and methodologies. The problems of integration are complex, and we need more knowledge about such issues as multilingual ability, the use of Danish as a second language and of Danish culture as a second culture, etc. There is also a wide network of language, psychology, social, cultural, and political effects to be considered if we are to

rise to the challenge of 'Integrating through integration'. To develop the necessary knowledge, competence and methods is one of the great challenges for Danish Education for Social Educators.

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