

The New Character of Students in Europe

From lecturer to stand-up comedian - from oral presentation
to political rap :
or how to change the scenery and choreography in the
lecture room



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**How to prepare students for changes and developments
in practice by changing the competence of lecturers
employed by the National Institutes of Social Education
in Denmark.**

This article examines the conceptual differences between the ideas and goals formulated by lecturers and what the "practical field" asks for. The analysis has been based on interviews with students and senior lecturers and with social pedagogues from the field. Further on, the article discusses the relationship between (a) meta-theory and research, (b) theory and theoretical knowledge and (c) knowledge about practice and knowledge gained in practice.

Where does education take place? During lectures - or in problem-based learning projects, planned by the students - or during practice placements?

Can lecturers supervise students so that they develop in practice e.g. by focussing on the students own habitues (1)? Is it possible for students to describe and express their own tacit (2) knowledge?

One of the main conclusions is that students use very little theoretical understanding in practice. It seems that students use much of what they learned in practical related and creative subjects such as music, drama and painting workshops. However, the research shows that

while social pedagogues in practice are very interested in their own personal development, they find it difficult to be inspired by theoretical studies.

The article refers to an ongoing three year research project: Socialpædagogisk signalement af den moderne døgninstitution (social educational concept of the modern (residential) institution). It is based on interviews and questionnaires and on case studies (Hegstrup 2001). The interviews were conducted in two public institutions and two private. Sixteen social pedagogues, three directors of residential establishments and a school principal were interviewed. Twenty-eight students from different social education colleges were interviewed. The interviews of the students were not planned. The researcher quite simply met the students in canteens in different colleges. Going up to them during their break, he presented himself and told that he was a researcher and wanted to know their opinion on several questions related to the pictures in the examples given below, inspired by Patton: the qualitative interview. The interview technique was greatly influenced and inspired by a concept developed by a Danish researcher, Ulla Fasting, who interviewed more than 800 persons on the Question: What is a good childhood? She used her research methodology and results in her doctoral dissertation.

Where does education take place?

That man can learn is an irrefutable fact. That man can teach seems to be an interesting hypothesis that still is lacking evidence.

Jacobovic

Where does education in social education take place? That is the question that we until now have no answers to. We still have this idea that education takes place in the lecture room (Hegstrup, 2001). Let us imagine the picture:

Example 1: Wishful thinking

In accordance with the curriculum the students have bought the textbook. They have read the chapters that give a contextual understanding of the topic and the key turning points of the lecture. In his lecture the senior lecturer presents another "meta-contextual understanding" of the topic - and the students afterwards write a thesis on the topic laid down in the curriculum.

Example 2: Actual situation

The students know very little about curriculum. (In Denmark very few know the term.) The students (should) know the name of the course, and they are informed about the topic for the lecture, but they have not bought the textbook. They have not made any photocopies of the text. Actually, they have not read the text. The lecture begins at 08.30. One third of the class are in their seats at the start, with the rest drifting in during the next thirty minutes. One third of the class are not coming. It is

wintertime. Many have not taken off their winter jackets. Some have brought their breakfast. (The lecture room is next to the canteen.) Some are listening to their walkmans. Some are reading magazines and some are reading SMS-messages or chatting.

Example 3: Making the lecture an event - a happening

Søren Kierkegaard is often quoted as having said: If One Is Truly to Succeed in Leading a Person to a Specific Place, One Must First and Foremost Take Care to Find Him Where He Is and Begin There. This is the secret in the entire art of help. (Kierkegaard, 1859) (3) So - if it is not possible in reality to get through to the students - even if they are present in the lecture room - you may meet them virtually - or in a context where they are more reachable. E.g.

The senior lecturer changes his performance from an oral presentation to a stand-up comedian who makes political jokes about social life and welfare, like "anything goes" (Giddens) or by quoting the German sociologist, Ulrich Beck: "Do not be afraid of the heavy traffic - you are the heavy traffic!" The senior lecturer asks everybody to leave the lecture room.

So they all leave the lecture room and go to the theatre-cum-cafe. In the corner there is a small scene with spotlights. The lecture jumps "on stage" and gets hold of the microphone. He starts rapping ; some students jump up with him and take over the rap. The rap theme is something that is going on somewhere in the world. You can see it behind the stage where there are 32 monitors that show what is on MTV, CNN, BBC-News, RTL, etc. On the wall above there are 32 monitors with access to the internet. Some are showing web-sites, some are chat rooms or video conferences, and some are sending and receiving e-mails.

Everybody in the room has a small personal computer round their neck or in their pocket. You can be interactive with everything that is going on. In the show room everybody can be interactive with the whole globalise world. Everybody can order his burger and Coke and they come immediately.

After a short break, some students show a music video that they made in a part of the city where there are street workers who are active in a Drug Prevention Project. During the performance another screen is online with the street workers who are "in action". They try to help a junkie who has just had an overdose.

Afterwards, the performance showroom turns into a virtual reality and learning lab. All the students can now go into the street and practise, for example in deciding what to do to prevent the junkie from having an overdose, learning how to contact the authorities and how to co-operate with the medical team that arrives in an ambulance etc.

They can also choose what kind of evaluation they want, whether computerised or undertaken personally by the senior lecturer.

We know very little about what students actually learn from participating in lectures (Illeris, 2002). It is difficult to evaluate because it is almost impossible to draw up evaluation parameters. No two colleges are equal; no two lecturers are equal; no two lectures are equal, and so on. If you look at examination requirements, you will see that the level and extent are very different from college to college. There are popular textbooks that are used in many colleges but there are no compulsory textbooks in any of the subjects. Therefore it is interesting to ask: what kind of learning goes on outside the lecture room?

The effect of problem-based learning

Problem-based learning is nothing but students' exchange of ignorance.
Asger Hansen, principal.

More than 33% of students' study activities take place in groups. The study method is mainly problem-based learning. According to a topic formulated in the curriculum the students are asked to problematise a case for consideration. During group work the students will be supervised by a lecturer, whose main task is to help the students with the technical and methodological part of the work, for example by helping the students with the framework and organising the set up.

We know very little about what goes on when the groups are working but we know a lot about the results of the process (Hegstrup, 2000). Some students find it boring to participate in group work. They want to be taught. They ask for homework as if they were at school : "What are we going to read for the next lecture?"

Others find that problem-based learning is the only way to get useful information and knowledge about practice and that it is a good way to prepare for placements. The important question is whether this way helps students to acquire theoretical knowledge that makes them able to cope with practice, for example on placements. It seems to be the fact that they have difficulty in making abstractions (Nøhr, 2001) and therefore meeting with practice often results in practice shock. Sometimes workers at the placement are shocked in the first meeting with the student:

A female student (aged 21) comes to an assessment centre, a home for young children (aged 0 - 6) whose mothers have alcohol and drug problems. In the hallway the student is met by the principal, who bids her welcome. The student is dressed in a very modern punk style. She has rings and piercing trinkets in her ears, nose and lips. She is wearing military boots. The principal is very tidy and lady-like in her dress.

After the welcome the principal asks the student to take off her outdoor shoes and put on some indoor shoes. The

student replies that she has no indoor shoes. The principal says that she can borrow some from the institution. They always have some extra pairs for this purpose. The student says that she is comfortable with her boots. The principal says: "In this institution we all wear indoor shoes when we are indoors and outdoor shoes when we are out of doors".

The student starts to reason with the principal, who very kindly but definitely tells the student that this is a "must" and if the student is not able to follow this instruction, she cannot begin her placement. The student leaves the institution and contacts the student advisor at the college. The principal does the same. The student gets another placement and the principal gets another student with in- and outdoor shoes. (Hegstrup, 2000)

This little case shows that a student may have prepared for the placement, and maybe had acquired theoretical knowledge about new-born children with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, and may have considered the question whether children should be sent to foster families, to institutions or back to their mothers. However, the student had not prepared for her placement and therefore did not have the required qualities to undertake it. In training for teachers, social workers and social educators in Denmark all students have to have at least two placements during their courses, and in many colleges preparation for placements is methodologically defined as problem-based learning.

Theory and theoretical knowledge - knowledge about practice and knowledge in practice.

In Denmark the French concept *habitudes*, as used by Pierre Bourdieu, is employed very often in social psychology, pedagogy and sociology. Students are very fond of using the term. Asking them why, they answer that it is very useful for them to explain the kind of tools they use in practice, because the concept of *habitudes* is a combination of everything: theory, meta-theory, theoretical knowledge and knowledge in practice.

Very often they use the picture: "My *habitudes* are in my backpack". In this sense, they themselves are the tools. What they need is to put in order the contents of the backpack, and the contents are "their whole life and the experience life gives".

What methods can senior lecturers advise the students to use? Is there any meta-theory that they can use to put things in order? Are there any pedagogical, psychological or sociological theories? The careful answer is that the most popular subject in pedagogic is sociology. Looking at curricula and examination requirements you will see a predominance of sociological topics, mainly with references to French and German sociology schools with sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Émile Durkheim, Michel Foucault, Ulrich Beck, Wolfgang Bergmann, Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann

and Thomas Ziehe (and from United Kingdom, Anthony Giddens).

In students' minds these schools of thought are all seen as scientific, sociological or pedagogical theory. Furthermore, the theories are all about practice, or they are theories about knowledge in practice. The fact is that there seems to be a conflict in contrasting between (A) theory about knowledge about practice and (B) knowledge in practice. (A) seems to be based on scientific research, while (B) is based on common knowledge and common sense, in some cases in grounded theory.

Backpack as the pedagogical tool

If the contents of the backpack are the students' individual life stories, students may think that life stories and habits are of the same standing. In a sense it is so - although you have to define these habits in their emotional, psychological, cultural, historical, political and educational context. Doing so, it gives good personal characterisation, but - and there is a but - can the student, for example in a certain situation on placement, say, "Now I have to use a certain tool from the backpack"? Probably not; the student will act, and maybe afterwards think, or reflect, in current popular terminology (Schön 1983).

In a way it is an obvious conclusion that many students are using the tools from their backpacks, together with what they have learned in the lecture room, what they have read in textbooks or what they have heard other students say in discussions during the problem-based learning process. It is an obvious conclusion to say that knowledge about practice is referring to the study of social education and knowledge in practice is referring to what you can reflect about in practice.

Can you bring knowledge in practice into the educational process within the college? Many lecturers believe so and try to do it. In many social education colleges in Denmark students' introductory course is based on the topic: life story (the story of the student's life). Students are told to write short exercises or essays about their own life stories, about where they were born, about their families, schools, leisure-time and so on.

They are also asked to write about their psychological and emotional lives. Very often a student writes as if it were a heart-to-heart talk about things and experiences that are very controversial: alcohol and drug problems, sexual assault or incest and so on. The writings are then used as a teaching medium for the whole class. Some students subsequently feel that they have been trapped into giving out information about things that belong to the "private part" of the backpack.

It is proper to question whether these controversial tools should be used in practice. Should controversial personal knowledge be used as a pedagogical tool? Should a social educator who has been a victim of sexual

assault stand up and be counted, for example in front of children in a residential home for sexually abused children? There are no clear answers to questions like that.

The students' tacit knowledge

Of course, students cannot voice their tacit knowledge. If they could, the knowledge would not be tacit. But what they can exercise is to get a supervision of knowledge that are not untold. And they can rehearse writing about their reflections. They can practice to be reflective practitioners (Schön 1987). Students seem to have success with using what they learned in subjects like music, drama and painting workshops, for example through using instruments and singing in a kindergarten, making a musical in a residential home for young people, or using pedagogical drama with mentally retarded people. It seems that students can make the transfer from the workshops at the college to workshops in the real world without difficulty. In that sense, students do not need to have a deep understanding of theory. It is more a question of using the pragmatic phrase: "learning by doing, acting in practice", inspired by John Dewey's Experience and Education, 1938.

Meta-theory and research

In Denmark there is an ongoing debate on the question, "Who can do research in social education"? A lot of qualitative research has been done during the last ten years. There have been interviews, questionnaires and investigations which have been said to be qualitative, but when you look at the interviews and the questionnaires you will find that the research methodology is not qualitative but purely quantitative. Very few qualitative evaluations have taken place in institutions. (Patton 1990) There have been a lot of sociological investigations and field studies in institutions, but looking at the results you can hardly call it research on scientific ground. (Andersen 2001)

In the field of social education practice, practitioners seem to under the influence of psychology and sociology, and - for the time being - a lot of (American) management and communication theory. A lot of the popular mantras are inspired by the way these theories are using old philosophical and theological terms. This matter will be discussed below.

Are young people in general and students in particular rootless and faithless?

If you ask the Employers' Association, they will say that young people are rootless and faithless. They do not know what education they want. They are zapping in the whole educational system. They do not choose their education according to the field they want to work in later on. They are very individualistic and are not able to make realistic choices.

If you ask the Director of the Student Advice Office at the University of Copenhagen, you are informed about the positive side: students are very careful about their choice of study. They are very critical, and are acting just as they were instructed : Examine the options, be critical and make your choice. You might say that this is the result of the educational phrase from the seventies - formulated by the students' parents - who now try to fight against the same phrase. Maybe students are rootless and faithless and critical and reflective at the same time. Perhaps it is a question of what kind of context the students are in.

Democracy without solidarity is a dangerous cocktail

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

(Matt. 7/12) The Golden Rule.

When you fly to Athens, the first welcome you get is a big public notice: Welcome to Greece - 2000 years of Democracy. You start reflecting. Can you really preserve a concept formulated by an old disillusioned philosopher who wrote the most famous work on education?

If you ask Danish students, very few have read Plato, and very few know who he was or his concepts of education. Some students know who Socrates was. They maybe remember how he died and perhaps one or two anecdotes. Very few know that he actually was a "true believer" in the Golden Rule, although he was not a Jew and died 399 years before Christ. Plato and Socrates have inspired a lot of philosophers and theologians, such as Augustin, Thomas Aquinas, Rousseau and Kant, Heidegger and Løgstrup (Danish theologian and philosopher).

There is no answer to the question, "Can you preserve an old concept of the term democracy"? If you could, it would be pure anachronism. However, there should be an answer to the question, "Do we have a European concept of democracy"? We have a European Parliament that "runs the big business, the European Union."

CiCe was formulated as a Socrates-programme. The purpose was to find out whether children and young people have concepts about the future Europe. Until now it seems to have been very difficult to keep a finger on the pulse of Europe. There seem to be a lot of right-wing movements emerging, some with strongly racist undertones. We have seen the ugly heads of Medusa in Austria, Denmark, France, Holland and Italy.

In Denmark students seem to be divided in two revival camps. There is a very individualistic student body that is right wing oriented, a smaller group that are in the middle of the road, and then a small group of students that are left wing. The students' associations are having a hard time. Compared with the situation thirty years ago, few students find it necessary or even relevant to be a

member. Let us imagine the picture:

Example 1 A:

The first of May, the day of the working class. All workers are gathering at the local union office. They are listening to a politician who talks about their proud traditions. They eat Danish pastries and drink coffee (and a small glass of hard liquor called Old Danish). They sing some working class songs and end by singing the Internationale. Then they all go out into the streets and walk round the town or city, and meet with all the other union members. The leader of the social democratic party makes a speech, telling them that now it is the right time to stand shoulder by shoulder and fight against the right wing. If you look at the participants, you will see that the average age is over 50. Actually, the majority of the participants are retired persons.

Example 2 A:

The first of May, the day when young workmen meet and help each other. For example they may be meeting in a house that needs reconditioning or a new patio. Outside the house you can see all the company vans and pick-ups are parked. If you stop and look at the scene, you will witness a group of young men having a good time. They will help each other: the carpenter will help the plumber with something, the glazier will give the bricklayer a helping hand and so on, something that would never happened on a building site. There the plumbers only help plumbers, and so on.

Example 1 B:

In a the social education college they are planning a project day. The topic is democracy and solidarity. If the students who are registered for the course turned up, there would be 300, and if all the staff members were there, there would be 350 people in all, but the situation is that 30 students and 10 staff members participate.

Example 2 B:

Six students are preparing for a forthcoming six-month placement. They are all going to practise with people with learning difficulties who live in a shared house where the social educator comes once a day to help the residents to cope with the tasks of daily life such as cleaning, shopping and cooking.

The students are using problem-based learning as their study method. They are examining the residents' problems with sexual life. They discuss the use of pornography and prostitution. They meet every day, sometimes at the college and sometimes privately. Once a week they meet with the tutor. They study very intensively. Each group member reads a book, an article or a thesis on the topic. They write small summaries and introductory presentations. Everything is prepared on their personal computers. They have access to the college server and the intranet, so that wherever they are, they can cooperate.

If somebody is ill or cannot be present, the group takes over and s/he is taken care of. During this project they

come to know each others' private lives. If somebody is having a hard time - a momentary or temporary private problem - the group members help all they can. They are psychologists, social advisors, social educators, teachers and "sisters and brothers" to each other. The student with dyslexia gets by with a little help from the group members. The student who is in the process of divorce gives vent to her/his feelings. The student who needs a babysitter next Saturday is helped by somebody from the group.

These two pictures show that democracy is having a hard time in Denmark. When it comes to the general election for Parliament (Folketing) we often see a heavy poll, but when it comes to local elections we often see a low turn-out. Furthermore, when talking about democracy within organisations, such as firms, there is very little activity. Many big firms know this, and so instead of democracy they try to encourage their employees to show esprit-de-corps by acting loyally towards the objectives of the company. They train newcomers to behave in a certain way, to dress in a certain way. to talk decently and respectably, and to admit that the customer is always right. Loyalty to the firm is a must. Every month there is a picture of the monthly paragon of virtue. This type of loyalty is dictated by the management as a top-down process, and has in this context nothing to do with democracy.

Solidarity as practised in Example 2 B is something that can not be dictated. It just comes - as if it was inertial guidance. K. E. Løgstrup said that "because existence is fundamentally unjust, solidarity is a necessity". He talked about what he called "the sovereign manifestation of life". His opinion was very clear: all men can act like the Good Samaritan. Løgstrup was educated in theology, but travelled to Freiburg in Germany to study philosophy. His professor was Martin Heidegger. Løgstrup has written many books about ethics that are used as textbooks in philosophy and pedagogy studies at university level. Some of the books are on Immanuel Kant, who also was intensely concerned about "The Ethical Demand". He used the phrase "categorical imperative".

The powerlessness of abstraction

Democracy as an abstraction seems to be very difficult for young students to handle. Some students have stated that they have no time for participating in democracy in college. Some say that there is no democracy at all. The lecturers are doing what they want to and do not listen to the students. The principal never listen to the students; s/he is just running the business and never has time to listen to the students. If the democratic process is not as concrete as stated in Example 2 B, students seem to have reduced or denied the power of abstraction. They very often emphasise that they have chosen this type of course because they want to work with other people, not in the sense of a vocation, but because involvement in pedagogy or education gives them a lot of satisfaction.

What is practice? What is acting in practice? (questions and answers from the research)

According to the answers given by students, practice takes place in institutions, in houses, in apartments or in the streets, - everywhere that social pedagogues are in action, - in day nurseries, in kindergartens, in residential homes or in institutions for people with special needs,(deaf, blind, physically or mentally disabled, drug and alcohol addicted, criminal, prostituted, not integrated - you name it!). Asking the students: what kind of tools do you need in acting? The answer to that is: All that you have in your backpack, your life story and the knowledge you have got from studying at college.

Another question put to the students was: If you work in an ordinary residential home, what is the most important task? Most students would answer: Helping the children to cope with others and prepare for a life outside in the society. The following question: How do you do that?. Answer: Helping them to live an every-day life. Question: What is that? Answer: To live a life like everybody else in the society. Question: What is the life everybody lives? Answer: The way you and I live our every-day life. Question: Do you know the way I live my every-day life? Answer: You follow the rules. Question: What are the rules of an ordinary residential home? Answer: To behave decently, respecting other people. Question: Who decides the parameters for good behaviour? Answer: I do.
(Socrates did not live in vain).

The importance of knowing the context of the rules

If you give rules without having any contextual knowledge of the whole situation, it is like giving instructions with your back to the other players. Imagine the picture:

The social pedagogue sits with a manual from a box of LEGO. He tries to follow the written instructions. The children sit behind and try to follow the instructions, finding all the bits to assemble the "thing". Nobody knows what is. A car? An aeroplane? The act - the end of the process - will show what the "thing" is. Giving roles for good behaviour to children who have no contextual understanding is just like asking them to use a power of abstraction they do not have.

The lecturer has the same problem. If there is no contextual understanding of the concept of democracy, students have to learn about the concept, and learn how to use it, in practice, by acting in practice, and by reflecting in practice. The reflection gives the contextual understanding and the knowledge of the necessity for democracy at the micro-, the meso- and the macro-levels.

Exit

Young male students think that their father is a rock and roll band - young female students think that their mother

is a TV commercial.

In this context, rock and roll bands are abstractions, and so are television commercials. In educating reflective students, rock and roll and television commercials are socializing factors both within and outside the backpack.

Notes

1 Habitués is a concept for a theoretical explanation. It is a classification - a tool to sort out things that are looking chaotic. In everyday language it is also used as a concept for the cultural experience that you are not necessarily able to put into words.

2 Tacit is a concept used by Polanyi back in the sixties and later by D. Schön. A very good explanation could be: when you go by bike, you do not think of how to cycle - you simply just do it. If you were to think of the knowledge you use, you would immediately fall off and crash.

3 The way most people who use the quotation shows that unfortunately they have never read the whole quotation in the right context, and therefore it is an unscholarly misuse of the very crux of the whole of Kierkegaard's works.

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