

CURSIV • NR. 6 • 2011

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# Adult Learning

## Teachers as Learners

Department of Curriculum Research  
Danish School of Education  
Aarhus University 2011



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Skriftserie udgivet af Institut for Didaktik, Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitetsskole, Aarhus Universitet.

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# Editorial

Venka Simovska

## **Lifelong Opportunities for Competence Development: "Learning" or Back to "Education"?**

This special issue of *Cursiv* provides readers with a glimpse into the research done within the National Research Centre for Competence Development at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University. The National Research Centre for Competence Development (NCK) plays an important role in strengthening adult education, further education, and professional guidance in Denmark by conducting theoretical and empirical research, as well as by systematising the existing knowledge in the area. This contributes to establishing a solid, research driven evidence base for policy and decision makers in the field, and also provides inspiration to the research and practice communities for innovative research and professional development concerning adult education and lifelong learning.

The special issue includes the following four articles authored by members of the NCK:

- *Professionalisation processes among adult educators: a comparative investigation of three Nordic-Baltic countries*, by Marcela Milana and Anne Larson
- *Academic shock - Towards a transnational academic culture*, by Søren Ehlers and Lis Hemmingsen
- *Counselling on a Practice-Based Education used as Competence Development among Mentors*, by Linda Kragelund
- *Training of adult education teachers* by Bjarne Wahlgren.

Drawing on inspiration from Richard Edwards and Gert Biesta, in the following, I employ two key concepts, or metaphors, to outline a broad framework for



considering the four articles featured in this issue: (a) the learning society; and (b) the language of learning.

## The learning society

The concept of *the learning society* has become a buzzword within the field of adult education and lifelong learning, especially in policy discourses, and has been interpreted in different, sometimes contradictory ways. Typically, “learning society” refers to a conceptualisation of learning which looks beyond formal educational environments and interprets learning as a feature of whole systems, rather than solely a quality of individual learners (Smith, 2000). Edwards (1997) provides a useful mapping of this multilayered territory by identifying three key discourses embedded in the conceptualisations of the learning society: modernist discourse, technical-economic discourse, and post-modernist discourse.

The modernist discourse of the learning society, according to Edwards (*ibid*), is underpinned by the values of citizenship, equal opportunities, and liberal democracy. Consequently, the purpose of adult education is to widen the opportunities for all members of society to meet the challenges of social change and democracy.

The technical-economic discourse, in his view, dominates current debate; it is focused on supporting economic growth and national competitiveness by providing opportunities for individuals (both employers and employees) to continuously develop and renew competences needed within the labour market. The performativity of adult education and training is the primary underlying value, with the ultimate goal being reduction of complexity and mastery of the future, and of the knowledge economy (Edwards, 2010).

The post-modernist discourse, according to Edwards, goes a step further by emphasising the contingent, the ephemeral, and the heterogeneous. The technical-economic competitiveness rationale and the normativity of the modernist values of liberal democratic society are replaced by a concept of *participation*; members of the society of all ages are seen as active participants in learning processes through which they, as individuals or as groups, can navigate their heterogeneous, negotiated, and dynamically changing interests.

Thus, within this discourse, the learning society is focused on providing opportunities for its citizens to adopt a learning approach to life. This brings us to the second concept, *the language of learning*, which is beneficial in outlining a framework for considering adult learning and professional competence development in the era of learning, as discussed in the following section.

## The language of learning

Closely linked to the concept of the learning society with lifelong opportunities for competence development is the new language developed over the last decade, signifying a shift from *education* to *learning*. This shift in emphasis, and the omnipresence of the concept of “learning” followed by the decline in popularity of the concept of “education”, is one of the silent but radical changes in the theory and practice of education (Biesta, 2006: 15). Students, regardless whether in schools, colleges, further education, universities, or other settings, have become *learners*. Adult *education* shifted to adult *learning*, and the concept of learning came to be integrated in international policy discourses (e.g. OECD, 1996; European Council, 2000), even proclaiming 1996 as the “European Year of Lifelong Learning” (Milana and Larson, this issue).

Biesta (2006) makes an important point when stating that this new language is not the result of one particular pre-determined agenda, but rather the outcome of a variety of, sometimes inconsistent developments. He identifies four trends that in combination contribute to the dominance of the language of learning, as different from the language of education, in educational discourses:

The first trend concerns the emergence of constructivist, situated, and socio-cultural theories of learning (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991). These theories have changed the focus from the activities of the teacher to the activities of the learners, and, more importantly, to the interactions between all actors in a particular learning environment.

The second trend is linked to postmodernism in more general terms. Similar to Edwards’s argument mentioned earlier, Biesta (*ibid*) notes that the influence of postmodernism on educational theory and practice is reflected in the postmodernist claim about the “end of education”, and the fundamental doubt it raised about the feasibility of the modernist idea (or ideal) that education can emancipate learners through the fostering of rationality and critical thinking. Learning, claims Biesta (*ibid*), might then be what is left?

The third trend shaping the language of learning is the rise of a market logic in the sphere of education, or the “silent explosion of adult learning” (Biesta, *ibid*: 18). Consequently, people of all ages increasingly engage in learning through various forms of formal and non-formal qualification endeavours. The individualised, consumer-like nature of these activities seems to make the concept of *learning* more appropriate than *education*.

The final, closely linked to the previous trend identified by Biesta is related to socioeconomic and political developments, particularly the rise of market economy and the *erosion of the welfare state*. Corresponding to the dominant, technical-

economic discourse of learning society discussed by Edwards (1997; 2010), this trend results in the development of a culture of accountability and control. This, in turn, transforms education into a commodity and focuses on the educational provision, or on the user, the consumer of education – that is, the learner.

Biesta points to two major problems with these developments related to the new language of learning, which can also be related to the learning society discourses outlined by Edwards, discussed above. Both problems are linked to the market logic; the first is reflected in the way of “misconstruing the dynamic educational relationship” (Biesta, *ibid*: 24) characterised by the priority of the education provider to satisfy the customer; the second problem consists of the danger of putting educational professionalism at risk by following market trends.

Thus, he suggests re-establishing and revitalising the language *for* education. It could be argued that the four articles featured in this issue of *Cursiv* contribute to making the case for this revitalisation.

### **Adult learning, or back to education?**

In the following, I briefly introduce each of the four articles featured in this issue against the backdrop of contested rhetoric and practices relating to the concept of a learning society, and the increased focus on lifelong learning, as outlined above. The articles raise important questions concerning the proliferation of adult education, adult educator as a profession, and the teaching-learning processes involved in competence development that target adults.

It is important to note that, even though the title of this special issue of *Cursiv* is “Adult Learning: Teachers as Learners”, all the articles use the term adult *education* rather than *learning*. The question is whether this could be seen as indicative of a value stance inclining towards Biesta’s call for a revitalisation of the language for education, or whether it is simply a reflection of the existing tensions in the field?

In the first article, *Professionalisation processes among adult educators: a comparative investigation of three Nordic-Baltic countries*, Milana and Larson raise the question of whether adult educator is a full profession, or whether it should be considered as a kind of “semi-profession”, indicating its social struggle to achieve a higher professional status. The question is based on a comparative analysis of policy and practice relating to the professionalisation of adult educators that the authors conducted in three geographically close and yet different countries: Denmark, Estonia, and Sweden. The analysis shows that, in spite of different socio-cultural and historical contexts, especially between Denmark/Sweden on the one side and Estonia on the other, there are some similarities in the existing policy

concerning adult education and training, mainly pointing to the fact that most of the options for training in the three countries target people already working as adult educators or interested in career change. A worrying finding of the study is that very few options seem to be available for initial qualification of prospective adult educators, despite the fact that provision of learning opportunities for the adult population is receiving increasing political attention in all three countries.

A somewhat different perspective is provided by Ehlers and Hemmingsen in their article *Towards a transnational academic culture*. Here they reflect on their experiences from a practice-based pilot research project concerning the ways in which Danish academic culture is experienced by graduate students from Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan. The authors' reflections in the article are based on the international Erasmus Mundus Masters Study in *Lifelong Learning: Policy and Management*. The authors describe these students' response to Danish university culture as an "academic shock" and support this claim with lively interview accounts by the students. The analysis shows that differences in the culture of academia are mostly experienced in relation to the style of teaching and supervision, relationships between lecturers and students, and an individual's sense of achievement, honour or loss of it over the course of his or her studies. Even though the research discussed in the paper focuses only on the students' experience of the new academic context, the authors seem to be aware that international study programmes require changes in the host culture too, and that effective academic encounter is based on a mutual, two-way process of change leading to the development of shared frames of reference conducive to learning. Evidently, in line with Biesta and Edwards discussed above, the article demonstrates that the concepts of learning society and learning gain new layers in the globalised world, where educational environments are becoming increasingly complex, heterogeneous, and contingent, and there are no straightforward answers to the questions about aims, content, and methods of learning and teaching.

The third article, *Counselling on a Practice-Based Education used as Competence Development among Mentors*, by Kragelund, discusses preliminary findings from an action research project exploring the potentials and barriers to developing regional psychiatric institutions as effective learning environments for student nurses. The project aims to contribute to the evidence base within the field of professional counselling in nursing and workplace learning in hospital settings. The "action" dimension of the project is focused on the development of counselling competences among student nurses' mentors during their clinical placement in psychiatry. A theoretical pedagogical model is used to facilitate the counselling process. The findings of the study point to the need to develop counselling competences of the mentors which would allow for learning by participating

in the community of practice of the student nurses. This means that, if student nurses are to develop professionalism, educational counselling needs to be integrated within the actual performance of nursing in practice situations under competent guidance. With reference to Biesta and Edwards discussed above, this article raises the important question of whether the workplace can be seen as a predominantly educational or learning environment. The dividing line between the two is blurred in this case, and it seems from the research discussed in this article that practice-based learning through peer mentorship and counselling has the potential to integrate them without overly reducing complexity.

The fourth article, *Training of adult education teachers*, by Wahlgren, closes this special issue of *Cursiv* by discussing the findings from an empirical research study aiming to examine the development of teachers' competences to employ a co-operative learning method following a competence development programme implemented in four major adult education centres in Copenhagen. The programme focused on the development of teachers' knowledge about the method, motivation to use it, and reflections concerning the method's possibilities and limitations. It consisted of theoretical lectures, practical assignments, and subsequent ongoing coaching. Data were generated through structured competence logs, supplemented by focus group interviews at different points of the competence development programme. All the participants in the programme were experienced adult educators. The findings, perhaps counter-intuitively, demonstrate that, although the teachers were positive towards the competence development programme and the co-operative method itself, the development of competence did not result in an increased use of the method. The actual implementation of the new method depended mostly on the perceived benefits from using it by the teachers, and related barriers within the everyday context of their practice. In the light of the two metaphors discussed earlier, this article is an exceptional example of Biesta's question "Why 'what works' still won't work" (2010), reflecting the deconstructive point that the difficulties experienced in education are not a threat, a danger, but are rather inherent to education, they make education possible. This is only possible if education is considered outside of the technological view of education, within which education is an instrument to achieve certain pre-determined goals and where educational researchers are left with the task of providing knowledge about techniques, or strategies that can contribute to reaching these goals (what works), rather than engaging in critical discussion about the aims and the goals themselves. The findings of the study discussed in this article point to the obvious but often neglected "detail" -- that teachers would not use a new pedagogical method, even if it works, unless it is relevant to their professional practice and context.

In summary, it would be fair to say that all four articles, each in their own way, raise questions rather than provide straightforward answers. In this respect, and in the light of Edwards' (1997; 2010) characterisation of the postmodernist discourse, this issue of *Cursiv* could be seen to be taking up the challenge to emphasise the contingent, the ephemeral, and the heterogeneous within adult education and professional development.

Furthermore, directly or implicitly, the articles reiterate the idea that any question concerning the content, the purpose, and the method of adult education is essentially political and is too serious a matter to be left solely to the market forces and technical logic of "what works".

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# Professionalisation processes among adult educators

## A comparative investigation of three Nordic-Baltic countries

Marcella Milana & Anne Larson

### Abstract

*In light of the increased interest in adult education and training (AET) in the EU as well as in national policy, the article looks into policy and practice when it comes to the professionalisation of those responsible for providing the AET – the adult educators. The article takes its theoretical point of departure in implementation theory as well as in theory on professionalism and professionalisation processes. The analysis is based on a comparative study involving Denmark, Estonia and Sweden. The methodological approach to the study was document analysis of mainly policy papers and strategies as well as legal regulations from year 2000 and until today. Based on the analysis, the article concludes that in spite of differences in history and AET traditions between especially Denmark/Sweden on the one hand and Estonia on the other, a number of similarities in recent policy can be found. The first is an increase in the provision of AET. A second is a tendency for official requirements for teaching adults to be higher in general and vocational AET than in liberal AE. Also, in spite of the huge interest in AET, qualification of adult educators seems to be a non-issue in the analysed policy papers and strategies, especially in Denmark and Sweden. The final common trend is a tendency that most courses and programmes for adult educators are targeted people already working within the field or people interested in a career shift. Very few options*



*exist in the three countries for initial qualification prior to entering the field as adult educator. Based on the analysis, it is questioned whether adult educator is today a full profession in any of the three countries studied or if it should rather be considered a “semi-profession”.*

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Although a European Year of Lifelong Learning was proclaimed as early as 1996, the interest in adult education (AE) policy has increased markedly within the European Union (EU) following the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2000). A parallel growth in interest has taken place regarding the qualifications of teachers – including those teaching adults. In 2006, the EU encouraged national governments to invest in “initial and continuing professional development measures” (European Commission, 2006, p. 7). In later communications, the European Commission addressed the quality of teachers and teacher education as key factors for the quality of education (European Commission, 2007b). At the same time, the Commission admitted that so far, initial and continuing education of AE staff (adult learning staff) had only received minor attention (European Commission, 2007a). That qualified teachers are important for the quality of education is also one of the messages in the Council’s conclusions regarding the professional development of teachers and school leaders (European Council, 2009). Further, the EU has invested economic resources in a study of current conditions for adult learning professionals in Europe (Research voor Beleid & PLATO, 2008), and a follow-up study of key competences of adult learning professionals (Buiskool et al., 2010).

The aim of this article is to add to our knowledge about current policy and practice in relation to professionalisation and qualification of adult educators. The rationale behind is a belief that, if adult education and lifelong learning are to play the role they have been ascribed, what goes on in the process - and thereby the professionalisation and qualifications of those delivering the education (the adult educators) – becomes very important.

The article presents a comparative study of three Nordic-Baltic countries, i.e. Denmark, Sweden and Estonia, carried out in 2008/2009<sup>2</sup>. The aim was to investigate the contribution of existing opportunity structures in sustaining professionalism among adult educators. Based on the study, the article discusses the professionalisation of adult educators, not least by looking at the qualification requirements set by law for adult educators to enter the profession. In doing so, the paper critically reviews current public policies on adult education and training (hereafter AET). Furthermore, it problematises the role of existing education

and training opportunities in providing those willing to teach adults (in general, vocationally oriented, or liberal AE) with pedagogical qualifications before entering the profession. The following section introduces some conceptual and methodological considerations that laid the foundation for the analysis presented in the subsequent sections.

## Conceptual and methodological considerations

Even though we agree with Sabatier (1991) and Zahariadis (2003) that it is not possible to make a clear distinction between different stages in the policy process, the main focus of this contribution is on the policy implementation. By implementation we here refer to the “action on behalf of the policy” rather than the actual impact of the policy (O’Toole, 2000, p. 266). We are thus interested in how the objectives mentioned in the European and national policy statements are implemented at national levels in the three countries under investigation. We also believe that policy implementation involves a number of actors (O’Toole, 2000; Sabatier, 1991). In our study they include different institutions within the EU as well as national governments, parliaments and non-governmental organisations.

Qualification of adult educators, in our view, is closely related to the professionalisation processes. Consequently, this paper also builds on theory on professionalism (e.g. Barber, 1963; Cervero, 1992; Collins, 1990; Elliott, 2004; Etzioni, 1969; Greenwood, 1966; Tawney, 1920; West, 2003; Whitehead, 1933; Wilensky, 1964). Although professionalism has been assigned different meanings in different vocational areas and socio-cultural settings, two common features emerge across perspectives: (i) professionalism is a precondition for a competent, specialised practice that takes place in a work context; and (ii) professionalisation is the process leading to professionalism.

If we look specifically into the area of AE, several studies highlight the multitude of educational and occupational paths individuals follow in order to become adult educators (e.g. Sabatini et al., 2000; Przybylska, 2008; Research voor Beleid & PLATO, 2008; Buiskool, Lakerveld & Broek, 2009). Building on these studies, we understand an adult educator’s professional development as a process that involves, among other factors: (i) the acquisition of a specialised body of knowledge, generally attained through initial education and training; and (ii) the formation of personal teaching-learning theories grounded both on theoretical principles, acquired through initial and continuing education and training, and on-the-job experience.

The study on which this article is based was designed as a comparative study involving three countries: Denmark, Estonia and Sweden. The aim of comparing

the three countries has been twofold. First of all, we were interested in finding out whether it was possible to find some commonalities in relation to policy and practice when it comes to professionalisation of adult educators in Europe. At the same time, however, we were also well aware of the potential importance of historical and cultural differences for national policy. The countries for the comparison have therefore been selected to represent both similarities and differences. The three countries are all members of the EU, and therefore part of the process launched at the Lisbon summit in 2000. At the same time, two of the countries – Denmark and Sweden – share a range of similarities both in relation to history and to the tradition for adult education policy, while the third country – Estonia – has a very different history and tradition for adult education policy. Denmark and Sweden both belong to the Nordic welfare states, and they both have a long history as independent nations. Estonia on the other hand only gained independence recently (1991) after almost fifty years under the Soviet regime. Furthermore, both Denmark and Sweden have a long tradition for liberal adult education, while in Estonia there has been greater focus on vocationally oriented education and training.

The methodological approach to the study has been inspired by Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter, 2000). Selected texts from the three countries have been analysed with a focus on how adult education and qualification of adult educators is referred (or not referred) to in the texts. The overall aim of the analysis was to identify the strategies put forward to increase the quality of AET. The multi-actor consideration mentioned above also influenced our data gathering. General policy and statements put forward by the EU were included alongside intended policy at national levels. Consequently, the analysis was performed on EU and national policy papers and reports, legal acts and executive orders. In the selection of documents, priority was given to those that in one way or another mentioned adult education and/or education and training for adult educators. Furthermore, there was a special focus on documents published after year 2000. In addition to these documents, official descriptions of the (adult) education system, mainly from the last decade, were also included in the analysis as a representation of the social practice, mapping out the adult education systems and the ways to qualify as adult educators.

## **National policy strategies for AET**

Since the Lisbon summit of the European Council (2000), AET has received considerable attention in education policy throughout Europe within a renovated discourse on lifelong learning. Although the education ministries in the Nordic-

Baltic countries were already aware of the important role played by AET at the time of the Lisbon summit, (Eurydice, 2000), the area gained further attention after the summit (European Council, 2000). This section presents and discusses recent national policy and strategies in the fields of AET and initial education and training of adult educators, whenever available, in Denmark, Sweden and Estonia.

In **Denmark**, the Ministry of Education was conscious of the importance of AET, as well as of the need for qualifying teachers of adults, well before the Lisbon summit. In 1997, at a time when a major restructuring of the national AET system was initiated, the Ministry launched a project in order to examine competences and qualifications of Danish adult educators (Danneskiold-Samsøe, 1999; Danneskiold-Samsøe & Ingeberg, 2000; Wahlgren, Danneskiold-Samsøe, Hemmingsen, & Larson, 2002). However, although AET had been part of the education policy prior to 2000, the years following the Lisbon summit saw an increased number of strategies dealing with AET, also within areas others than traditional education policy. An example is the strategy for economic growth published by the Danish Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs (2002). AET, thus, has become an important policy area at national level. The majority of the national strategies published since 2000 relating to AET are, however, primarily concerned with participation and barriers for participation in intentional learning opportunities for adults, while what is going on in the 'teaching-learning transaction' and the quality of the AET provision is more or less a black box. Moreover, when the quality of the AET provision is mentioned, it often refers to the usefulness of the courses and education programmes in terms of the need for competences on the labour market. In spite of the fact that the Ministry of Education, prior to 2000, financed projects on qualification of adult educators, political interest in the qualifications of teachers of adults seems to have faded after the year 2000. The qualification of those teaching in the AET system is seldom covered in national reports and strategies, neither in relation to present nor to prospective teachers. The main exceptions are represented by the report *Quality that can be seen* (Danish Ministry of Education, 2000), which stresses the need for 'highly qualified teachers', and reports from the so-called Tripartite committee that link teacher qualification and quality assurance in education (Danish Ministry of Finance, 2006a, 2006b). None of the reports we have been able to find specifically deal with *initial* education and training for prospective teachers of adults (Milana & Larson, 2009).

As in Denmark, at the time of the Lisbon summit, the provision of AET in **Sweden** was also undergoing major restructuring, thanks to the Adult Education Initiative (AEI) launched in 1997 by the Swedish government. The aim of the initiative was to create new study places in municipal adult education over a 5-year period. As part of the reform, municipalities became free to commission other

providers to arrange general and vocational AE, and liberal AE providers to some extent also became involved in the delivery of formal education. As Andersson & Köpsén (2009) report, in 1997, advanced vocational education, i.e. post-secondary education programmes initiated to respond to specific labour market needs, was first introduced on an experimental level, and later established as part of the state funded AET provision. In 2009, a special initiative was undertaken by the Swedish government in order to expand the vocational part of municipal AE provision. In the meantime, advanced vocational education has recently been replaced by “vocational higher education”. This type of provision will be provided by a variety of providers and governed by a national agency; hence the main innovation seems to be the introduction of stricter monitoring and governing processes by the state through its national agency. In short, present policy in the field of AET in Sweden highlights the focus on the expansion of and control over vocational education. In line with its focus on responsiveness to labour market needs, the Swedish government is expected to reform upper secondary education in 2011. Andersson & Köpsén (2009) suggest that the reform may have consequences for vocational AE too. It is anticipated, for instance, that vocational programmes in upper secondary schools will be less comprehensive when it comes to general subjects, which means that these programmes will not provide students with the basic eligibility for higher education. As a consequence, it has been debated that municipal AE should be obliged to provide not only basic adult education but also those courses on upper secondary level that give basic eligibility for higher education. The initial education and training of adult educators is, however, a non-existent issue for the Swedish government.

As reported by Jõgi & Gross (2009), in **Estonia** the Parliament passed an Adult Education Act as early as 1993 which states the principles of the legislative framework for the Estonian AET provision. The Act has been revised in 1998, 1999 and 2002. After the Lisbon summit, although Estonia was not yet member of the European Union, the political discourse incorporated AET within a lifelong learning perspective. The consolidated Act from 2002 was followed by a new strategic document issued by the Estonian Ministry of Education, in close cooperation with the Association of Estonian Adult Educators (ANDRAS): *National priorities of adult education. Recommendations for the years 2003–2004*, in which ensuring the quality of AET was identified among the priorities for the years to come. Although the priorities set by this document reflected the strategic objectives identified at the Lisbon summit, Jõgi and Gross (2009, p. 25) state that “unfortunately, the recommendations set out in these priorities were too general and were not implemented in 2003 or 2004”. After Estonia became member of the European Union in 2004, the Government issued the *Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2005–2008*. The strat-

egy describes goals, measures, and provision of lifelong learning opportunities in Estonia. Furthermore, it enacts a developmental plan for assuring quality of AET opportunities and for developing a professional qualification system. Although a closer look at the implementation of the *Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy* reveals that it is not yet fully implemented, major steps have been made in relation to the qualification of teachers of adults, thanks to the development of a Professional Qualification Standard for adult educators.

An analysis of current policy strategies across the three countries highlights that, since the 1990s, the provision of intentional learning opportunities for the adult population has received increased political attention in all Nordic-Baltic countries under investigation. This is testified by the existence of legislation that provides regulatory frameworks for public-financed AET opportunities, as well as by major reforms of existing AET provision. It is especially on the cusp of the new century, within a renovated discourse on lifelong learning, that AET has attracted the interest of national governments in order, on the one hand, to expand the typology of courses and programmes for adults and, on the other hand, to strengthen the vocationally oriented elements of existing opportunities. National strategies on lifelong learning issued, for instance, by the Danish and Estonian governments always include, among other priorities, the need to increase the quality of existing AET opportunities. In doing so, however, quality is generally linked to external processes, such as improving the compatibility of the existing AET provision to the needs of the labour market for competences and qualifications, rather than to internal processes such as the teaching-learning transaction that takes place in intentional learning contexts. Consequently, it is not surprising that, while adult learners and their presumed needs are constantly addressed by policy documents, adult educators are seldom mentioned. In Denmark, when attention has been paid to the qualification of teachers of adults, so far the primary goal has been to upgrade the pedagogical qualifications of those already working in the field of AET, hence as a question of re-qualification rather than one of initial professional qualification. The issue of initial education and training for prospective adult educators, meanwhile, seems to be a non-issue within the political discourse on AET in the Nordic-Baltic countries under investigation.

## **Regulation of competence formation among adult educators**

Since process approach models were introduced to study professionalism in modern societies (Elliott, 1972), special emphasis has been placed on the circumstances

by which an occupation professionalises, such as the role of the state in profession formation (Cervero, 1988). Socio-historical analyses of professionalisation processes have offered new insights into the geographical and cultural contingency of both the properties of a given profession and the processes for gaining higher professional status (Siegrist 2004). Professionalism has therefore been regarded as “neither inevitable, universal, nor of any single type” (Crompton, 1987:106). Against this background, official qualification requirements, set by a given society, to enter a profession, can be considered as a valid indicator of a profession’s status, which is socio-culturally bound. On the one hand, official qualification requirements regulate the degree of monopoly of specific occupations in a given societal context; on the other hand, they influence – and are influenced by – the state-funded provision of specialised education and training opportunities.

In **Denmark** the official requirements for teachers of adults differ greatly between the three sectors: general, vocational and liberal AE. In the field of general AE, only *Special education*, which includes *Education for dyslectics* and *Danish as second language*, requires not only subject specific qualifications for teachers, but also specialised pedagogical qualifications in the teaching of adults; whereas teachers of the remaining courses are required, besides subject specific knowledge and qualifications, the same pedagogical qualification as school teachers, either at primary or secondary levels. In the field of vocationally oriented AE, while both subject specific qualifications and professional experience are formally requested, no specific pedagogical qualifications are required before entering the profession. However, since January 2011, enrolment in a diploma programme specifically for teachers within vocational education and training and labour market training, has been required no later than one year after entering employment within the sector, and the diploma programme must be completed within six years. The programme, though, is not targeted those teaching adults, but all teachers within vocational and labour market education (Danish Ministry of Education, 2010). For vocationally oriented adult education corresponding to the tertiary education level in the mainstream education system, i.e. *Further adult education*, *Diploma education* and *Master education*, there exists specific criteria to be met by prospective teachers in order to be employed by relevant educational institutions, but no specific competences in teaching of adults are required before employment. In the field of liberal AE, qualification criteria for teachers depend upon specific employment criteria set by each provider.

Andersson and Köpsén (2009) bring to light that in **Sweden**, as in Denmark, teachers in general AE are required the same qualifications as primary and/or secondary school teachers. The requirements for teachers in vocational municipal AE are the same as for teachers in the corresponding courses in upper second-

ary school. In *Advanced vocational education*, there are no official requirements for teachers. When it comes to *Labour market education*, no formal requirements for teachers exist either, given that this type of education is not part of the formal AET provision. The same applies to folk high school teachers. Nor are there any formal requirements for the leaders of study circles, who often work on a voluntary basis. It is worth mentioning, however, that the proposal for a new teacher education, currently under debate, pays greater attention to teachers of adults. The official report from 2008, according to Andersson and Köpsén (2009), made an explicit reference to upper secondary school and adult education teachers as just one professional typology. Furthermore, it suggested integrating the education of folk high school teachers in study programmes for upper secondary school and adult education teachers. For teachers in vocational AE it was suggested that more emphasis should be put on the assessment of professional rather than academic qualifications. In the final proposal from 2010, however, it is no longer suggested that the folk high school teacher programme should be closed and integrated within the general teacher programme. In addition, in contrast to the report from 2008, general adult education is no longer described as a special field of practice for teachers at upper secondary levels. Adult educators in the final proposal are mentioned in a separate paragraph including adult educators in all three sectors as well as in in-service training at work places (Andersson, Köpsén, Larson & Milana, 2010).

The situation in **Estonia** is different from Denmark and Sweden as no official qualification requirements exist (Jõgi & Gross, 2009). In recent years, however, much attention has been paid in Estonia to the definition of the professional standard for adult educators, in contrast to its Nordic counterparts. According to the Professional Standard, introduced in 2004:

“The professional qualification of adult educator / andragogue could be applied by a person of any profession or vocation who teaches and/or mentors adult people as a tutor or mentor. The person could teach in adult gymnasium, in the institution of vocational education (inc. courses for adults), in continuing education centre of an institution of higher education or university, in consultation or training company, centre of popular adult education, training unit of an institution or enterprise. The official title of the adult educator could be adult teacher, lecturer, supervisor, trainer, consultant.” (*Professional standard:1*, cited from Jõgi and Gross, 2009)

Applying for the Professional Qualification Certificate is still a voluntary process and is considered as an additional qualification to subject specific qualifications acquired via prior education and training and on-the-job experience. Since 2007,



however, the Professional Qualification Standard has been competence based and applicants are required to undertake specific training in the field of AE to complement prior education and training attainments in the subject(s) they teach.

In spite of national differences, it is possible to identify common conditions and similar trends as far as the regulation of competence formation among adult educators is concerned. Firstly, official requirements for teachers of adults are stricter for those working in general and vocationally oriented AE than for teachers in liberal AE. At the same time, the boundaries between general, vocationally oriented and liberal AE are slowly blurring, due to the increased stake of liberal AE institutions in the provision of general and vocationally oriented courses and programmes for adults. Secondly, official requirements for teachers in general AE are generally the same as for school teachers, either at primary or secondary level. This may be due to national governments affording higher relevance to subject-specific knowledge possessed by prospective teachers of adults, at the expenses of the typology of learners these teachers will be addressing, hence the characterisation of AE as a distinguished field of practice from compulsory education. Thirdly, in vocationally oriented AE, as seen with general AE, teachers are expected to possess subject-specific knowledge. However professional qualifications in the vocational field of expertise also count. In Denmark, for instance, the former seems to be already on the wane in favour of the latter; while in Sweden, a similar trend is suggested for the future. Fourthly, in spite of existing official requirements, educational providers often possess a certain degree of freedom in defining their own qualification criteria, especially when there is a shortage of teachers. Estonia stands somehow as an exception when it comes to official qualification requirements, given the introduction of a Professional Qualification Standard for adult educators / andragogues (2004) which follows a quite different rationale in understanding professionalism within the field of AE. On the one hand, the Professional Qualification Standard focuses on the typology of learners that an adult educator will address, rather than on specific typologies of AE provision; on the other hand, it takes into account the multifaceted professional tasks adult educators may cover. The professional title distinguishes between four levels of qualifications; all levels, however, include 'preparing and conducting adult training' as a specific field of expertise. Although, at present, the possession of a professional title is more a measure for upgrading the pedagogical qualifications of adult educators than an official requirement for entering the profession, it is hard to assess what its relevance will be for teachers to be employed in the field of AE in the years to come (Jõgi & Gross, 2009).

## Existing opportunity structures for (prospective) adult educators

In early academic work on professionalism, an important feature emerged to depict what a profession is, the theoretical grounding of professional knowledge (Whitehead, 1933). Contemporary literature on professionalism in AE (Cervero, 1992; Merriam & Brockett 2007; Nuissl & Lattke, 2008), however, is sparse and presents different perspectives. Nonetheless, it also shows some agreement on the acquisition of a specialized body of knowledge as a central professional feature for adult educators.

In **Denmark**, people interested in entering a profession in the field of AE can acquire general pedagogical competences in teaching adults by enrolling in a variety of courses and programmes corresponding to short-, medium- and long-cycle higher education. Those with no prior pedagogical qualifications can enrol in short-cycle education run by Adult Education Resource Centres or Educational Resource Centres, often based at university colleges. For those who have not completed a short-cycle higher education, but possess a minimum of 2 years of professional experience, it is possible to acquire specialised pedagogical competencies in teaching adults by enrolling in an academy profession programme run by a university college. This qualifies for further study at diploma level. Those with a special interest in teaching adults in the field of vocationally oriented education, and who are interested in acquiring basic pedagogical qualifications prior to employment in the sector, can enrol either in the academy profession programme or in a special course run by Adult Education Resource Centres, university colleges and Educational Resource Centres. Additionally, teachers in vocationally oriented education can, once employed, enter a postgraduate vocational teacher training course. People with a relevant short-cycle education and at least 2 years of professional experience can acquire specialized qualifications in working with adults at either medium- or long-cycle levels, i.e. diploma programmes run at university colleges or master programmes run by universities (Milana, 2009).

The opportunity structures for prospective adult educators in **Sweden** are quite different (Andersson & Köpsén, 2009). The main part of the provision addressing prospective adult educators is teacher education programmes run by universities and university colleges. These programmes result in a teacher degree qualifying people to teach young people as well as adults on corresponding levels of education. Swedes willing to teach in vocationally oriented adult education have the opportunity to enrol in single-subject courses before enrolling in a shorter teacher education programme. The only course for teachers of adults runs at university level and is targeted folk high school teachers. In addition, universities and university colleges run short courses in adult education or adult

learning. These courses have a rather broad focus on issues related to different adult learning contexts, e.g. working life, rarely provide pedagogical competences in teaching adults, and do not lead to a university degree. Among the few tailor-made courses for (prospective) adult educators are: a module on adult learning offered either as a single course or as part of a teacher education programme; a supplementary course for adult educators, aimed at those already in possession of a teaching degree; a 1-year master program in adult learning; and a graduate course, generally run in distance learning modality (Andersson & Köpsén, 2009).

In **Estonia**, the opportunity structures for those interested in entering the profession of adult educator are even sparser than in Sweden. They include a course for adult educators/andragogues run at university level as part of undergraduate programmes or as a separate module provided through the Open University. The course does not lead to a university degree. Furthermore, the Association of Estonian Adult Educators (AEAE) provides a course that prepares applicants to the professional standard for adult educators. The participants in this course generally apply for the professional qualification standard after completion. In order to enrol in the course, however, participants are expected to have at least some professional experience in the field of AE. Hence prospective adult educators with no prior experience might not be eligible. Last but not least, the Estonian Non-formal Adult Education Association (ENAEA), a non-governmental organisation, also organises a course for adult educators that, similarly to the course run by AEAE, prepares participants for application for the professional qualification standard (Jõgi & Gross, 2009).

In the group of Nordic-Baltic countries investigated here, current opportunity structures for (prospective) adult educators demonstrate a high degree of differentiation: between countries, in terms of the opportunities they provide; and within and between countries, in terms of the typology of the educational providers involved, the course and programmes' content, length, entry criteria and final attestation and/or degree. At first glance, Denmark stands out as the country with the most variegated provision addressing (prospective) adult educators, followed by Sweden, which presents a relatively differentiated provision. In Estonia, very few opportunities exist for (prospective) adult educators to acquire professional qualifications through education and training. However, at a closer look, the overall picture assumes different contours. The totality of the Danish provision aimed at (prospective) adult educators is outside the mainstream education provision; hence it is primarily addressing people willing to strengthen their position in the labour market, not least through a career shift. Furthermore, it is primarily the shortest courses that specifically address (prospective) teachers of adults. Very

few courses and programmes corresponding to medium- and long-cycle education levels provide specialised pedagogical competencies in teaching adults, although they address (prospective) adult educators. Also, these typologies of provision generally require at least 2 years of professional experience; hence they are mainly addressing people already employed in the field of AE. Consequently they represent opportunities for continuing professional development rather than for initial education and training. In Sweden, in contrast, the majority of the existing provision that addresses teachers of adults is in the form of teacher training programmes that lead to a teaching degree. Although these courses do not specifically address teachers of adults, they are sometimes complemented by single-subject courses before enrolment, as is the case for prospective teachers in vocationally oriented AE. At the same time, Sweden stands out as the only country where prospective folk high school teachers currently have an option for qualifying for teaching within their field of interest and/or expertise. It is not certain, however, if this offer will continue to be run independently from university based teacher training programmes in the future. In Estonia, the current provision for (prospective) adult educators, although sparse, is more tailored to the qualification needs of the specific target group it addresses, not least due to the fact that these offers are being re-shaped in accordance with the Professional Qualification Standard for adult educators/andragogues.

## **Concluding remarks**

In spite of existing differences in the Nordic-Baltic countries under investigation, some common trends emerge from the analysis. The first trend is that, since the 1990s, the provision of intentional learning opportunities for the adult population has received increased political attention. At the same time, however, the issue of initial education and training for prospective adult educators seems to be a non-issue within the political discourse. The second trend is that official requirements for teachers of adults are stricter for those working in general and vocationally oriented AE institutions than for teachers in liberal AE organisations, despite the fact that liberal AE organisations are increasingly involved in the provision of general and vocationally oriented education for adults. The third trend is that current provisions for (prospective) adult educators in the Nordic-Baltic countries under investigation respond first and foremost to the need for continuing professional development, i.e. mainly for adult learners willing to strengthen their current position in the labour market, not least by means of a future career shift. In fewer instances, provisions respond to the need for initial education and training that qualifies prospective teachers of adults to enter the profession.

In short, although the comparison indicates that the qualification of adult educators is being given low priority in national policy, the provision of specialised courses and programmes for (prospective) adult educators has grown in recent years in at least two countries (i.e. Denmark and Estonia). This level of implementation in the qualification of adult educators affects professionalisation processes among adult educators in two important ways. Firstly, the responsibility for supporting the process leading to professionalism in the area of AE is left to the discretion of educational providers and current and prospective adult educators. This process is only being supported to a limited extent by professional organisations (e.g. in Estonia), as commonly seen in the case of more traditional professions. Secondly, given that professionalism among adult educators does not represent a precondition for work practice, it subsequently emerges as necessary in order to better cope with everyday work (Milana et al., 2010). It is in fact the need to acquire a specialised body of knowledge on the one hand, combined with the need to develop more theoretically-grounded teaching-learning theories on the other hand, that substantiates the supply and demand of most of the existing courses and programmes targeting experienced adult educators. This questions whether AE is a profession in the full sense, or if it could rather be considered a 'semi-profession' – a concept coined by Etzioni (1969) that captures the social struggle of some occupations in claiming a higher professional status. The concept seems fully applicable to the Estonian case where professional organisations lobbied to develop a professional qualification standard. It could also be applied to its Nordic counterparts when the 'silent' struggle of those seeking continuing professional development through specialised education and training opportunities is considered.

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## Notes

- 1 Parts of this article have been presented at the ECER conference (Vienna) in 2009 with Lise Søgaard Lund.
- 2 In case of important changes in policy and/or regulations, the original results from the study in 2008/2009 have been updated in this article to reflect the present situation.



## Danish summary

### **Voksenunderviseres professionaliseringsprocesser**

#### *En komparativ undersøgelse af tre nordisk/baltiske lande*

På baggrund af en øget interesse for voksen- og efteruddannelse (VEU) i såvel EU som i medlemslandenes nationale politik ser artiklen nærmere på politik og praksis i forhold til professionaliseringen af dem, der er ansvarlige for at levere VEU – voksenunderviserne. Det teoretiske udgangspunkt for artiklen er dels implementeringsteori, dels teori om professionalisme og professionalisering. Analysen bygger på et komparativt studie, der involverer Danmark, Estland og Sverige. Den metodologiske tilgang i studiet var dokumentanalyse af primært policypapirer og strategier samt love og regler fra år 2000 og frem. Baseret på analysen konkluderes det i artiklen, at det på trods af historiske forskelle og forskelle i voksenuddannelsestraditioner mellem især Danmark/Sverige på den ene side og Estland på den anden, er muligt at identificere en række fællestræk i den aktuelle politik. For det første ses der en vækst i udbuddet af VEU i alle de tre lande. For det andet er der en tendens til, at de officielle krav i forbindelse med ansættelse som voksenunderviser er højere inden for almen og erhvervsrettet VEU end inden for folkeoplysningen. Endvidere synes kvalificering af voksenundervisere, på trods af den øgede interesse for VEU, at være praktisk taget fraværende i de undersøgte papirer og strategier, særligt i Danmark og Sverige. Endelige er der en fælles tendens til, at hovedparten af kurser og uddannelsesprogrammer for voksenundervisere er rettet mod personer, der allerede arbejder inden for sektoren eller personer interesserede i at skifte karriere. Der er således meget få muligheder i de tre lande for forberedende uddannelse forud for ansættelse som voksenunderviser. På baggrund af analysen sættes der spørgsmålstejn ved, om voksenunderviser i dag er en hel profession i nogle af de tre lande, eller om der snarere er tale om en "semi-profession".

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# Academic shock

## The joint move towards a transnational academic culture

Søren Ehlers & Lis Hemmingsen

*"...I was not sure how to behave. What was appropriate? It affected my learning process in first term ..."*

*"... it was difficult to locate myself as a student and a person in a different culture..."*

### **Abstract**

*Several international students manifest "academic shock" in a variety of forms when meeting the academic culture in Denmark and develop a transnational academic culture as a result. The study describes how the academic culture at the Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus (DPU) was experienced by graduates coming from universities in Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Their academic shock was mainly related to the individual learning processes, to experiences during lectures, to the student-supervisor relationship, to situations where the international student experienced a loss of honour, and to experiences during a practicum in educational institutions. Some measures can be taken to mitigate academic shock. However, the authors recommend that international students experience the new academic culture firsthand and discuss the joint move towards a transnational academic culture with their supervisors.*

## Introduction

All academic institutions develop an academic culture of their own (Dill 1982), and this culture is mainly expressed by the faculty. However, universities are international “per se”, and students have always transferred between them and experienced culture clashes. ERASMUS MUNDUS I (the first generation of the EU mobility programme), was supposed to attract talented students from “third countries” and held a core objective of developing “intercultural” competences. Graduates who came to Copenhagen with many talents and much relevant experience met new cultures: European academia and the academic cultures of the international students, and learned from their daily lives in this cultural mix.

Several international students who entered DPU in 2006, 2007 and 2008 were born on the same subcontinent, and the strong representation from Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan is our argument for bringing these graduates into focus. EUROPEAN MASTERS IN LIFELONG LEARNING was the first joint programme carried out in the history of DPU. Most of the involved faculty had experiences from international projects, yet despite this, all encountered difficulties and challenges in working with international students and their native academic cultures. During the first term, many international students were in a kind of “culture shock” assuming various forms, from proactive to passive reactions, showing anger, being stubborn, being confused, nearly giving up.

These reactions were recognized throughout the intakes from 2006, and prompted the question: What can we call these reactions? Academic shock? How is this shock experienced, and how can this new challenge be met by students and faculty?

Our considerations before the design of the study were:

- several differences between academic cultures have been observed by non-Danish graduates admitted to DPU
- the graduates from Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan have some expression of academic culture in common
- the 19 graduates born on the same subcontinent are willing to describe some first term observations
- differences between academic cultures are becoming smaller because of globalization

Four problem areas were indentified; these are presented and discussed in the following.

## Learning: a joint process for students and faculty

One area of the learning process where academic culture shock is apparent is during lectures. The students witnessed the lectures at DPU and found them to be significantly different from their experiences at their alma mater university:

*"...The professors came and delivered lectures on the PowerPoint, gave handouts, organized group discussions, and we debated at length on a topic of discussion or a problem until we found an all-agreeable solution. At times, there were heated debates and it looked to me more as though I was in a press conference or a seminar hall in Katmandu than in a university..."*

Another student referred to the academic culture he came from as

*"...a teacher- centered education where the teachers played an active role and the students are almost passive without much interactions..."*

A third student describes the lectures at DPU as

*"...surprising and encouraging. Surprising because, it was new for me. For instance, I didn't feel the traditional hierarchical structure in the teacher-students behaviour. It was very interactive and flexible. Encouraging because, I realized that there is lots of "independent" space for your thinking, and importantly, implementing your thoughts through group discussion and class interaction..."*

A further challenge for the students came when working with their assignments. An issue which troubled many was the problem-based approach: to raise a problem, and try to analyze it with the help of different theories. The student is expected to question, discuss and have a critical approach to learning. Independence is highly valued.

It was difficult to comprehend what it meant to construct a "problem formulation" (research question). When this is explained as "problems you see in the area" it presents a real challenge for the international students, not only because theirs is a different academic culture, but also because they have to combine theory and practice. The students often reproduce a theory or part of a theory without application to practice.

The DPU exam tradition represented a challenge too if the international student arrived with experiences from sessions with "closed-books", where

*"... the teachers dictated notes, including probable answers to the probable questions asked in exams. Students were asked to memorize the answers..."*

The native academic cultures would usually bring the exam product into focus, with student assessment based on a three-hour writing test. A product-based written assessment was replaced by a process-based oral assessment:

*"...The student goes for the oral exam at DPU without his assignment, pencil or other material..."*

*"...he is very surprised discovering that the exam is not just three questions which the faculty have presented during the term but a discussion based upon his assignment..."*

In the DPU tradition, the students write an assignment which later is the core in an oral exam attended by an external examiner: A conversation between teacher (the internal examiner) and student, who may and sometimes should disagree with the teacher. The contribution of the internal examiner will be to bring out the student's strengths and weaknesses, and to encourage the student to be critical both of the theory used and of his own work (assignment).

Especially during the first term, the students have to "relearn"; a typical adult issue of learning, they do not only revise previous theory and learn new content, but also revise and acquire new approaches to learning, studying, and working processes.

Many of the students go through a 'transformative' process during their studies. According to the theory of Jack Mezirow (1991), adult learners who reflect on premises as persons, both private and professional, have to consider and in some cases revise their view of themselves as persons. The reflective process is often enhanced by the supervisor or some of the faculty members who hold the student's trust.

The faculty have also learned and revised their lectures according to the students' previous experiences and their expectations regarding lectures, working with assignments and oral examinations.

## **The student-supervisor relationship**

Several international students at DPU do not enter the supervisors' office even if the door is open. They will ask: "*Am I allowed to enter your office, madam?*" and then wait for the supervisor to respond with "*Come in*".

If the supervisor rises to retrieve a book, the student will also rise. These students will continue to address the supervisor as "Madam" or "Sir" in e-mails even if the students have got used to using the first name of the faculty, which is a custom between Danish students and their supervisors. These examples reflect the academic cultures in the students' native countries:

*"...Teachers are revered as Gurus and are always accessible to a students' need... they are highly regarded and as a student I had to respect them starting from the way we address them. I never had a friendly chat with them..."*

*"...a teacher is considered superior and highly respected by student and (even) feared at times...this tend to create a gap between teachers and students..."*

Misunderstandings in the student-supervisor relationship appear when the student who receives a low grade has difficulties in understanding the reason. When the supervisor had said *"This is fine"*, (the draft), the student understood the message as *"the supervisor approved my text"*, when in fact the supervisor was indicating that the draft was merely ready to be discussed.

The contrast to regarding the supervisor as a 'Guru' is that some international students expect the supervisor to be available whenever they want to meet. On the other hand, they are reluctant to approach the supervisor until the work is nearly complete, leaving no time for changes or improvements.

This is a contradiction in an academic culture as the Danish where the relationship between students and supervisors is based on an understanding of an equal relationship: an asymmetrical but not an authoritarian relation. These differences in academic culture pose a challenge to the international students and their Danish supervisors. While there (still) is a power imbalance between a Danish student and a Danish supervisor the establishment of a relationship between an international student and a Danish supervisor may begin in line with the relationship between a subject and a prince.

Acquiring the Danish academic culture means that students need to conceive their supervision as a process from which they can draw inspiration, where they will need to make decisions and judgments for themselves, and in which they will not always agree with their supervisor. While the assignment remains the student's product (not the supervisor's), the students also have to meet the prevailing academic standards for assignments in their new academic culture. They need to manage the contradiction of being on friendly, near-equal terms with the supervisor while also understanding that the supervisor has other responsibilities, and is not available at all times. One of the visiting scholars in the programme has revised the supervision at his home university and is now setting up scheduled meetings for students.

## **Loss of honour**

For some of the international students failing an examination or receiving a low grade results in a feeling of shame and a loss of honour. The students explain that

they cannot disappoint their family, and feel a pressure to live up to the expectations:

*"...Do you have to inform this to my parents? Can we keep it as a secret that I have to do a reexam?..."*

This was a request from a student who had failed an exam. In contrast, Danish students are often not ambitious, being content just to pass, deciding that they will try to improve their grades later.

Another expression of honour is the expectation of intense competition about the results of assessment, as student ranking is the norm in their native cultures:

*"...Thus, a good performance was judged on the high grades of the individual student..."*

*"...Following which I had to stick to traditional academic culture of memorizing and writing without much creativity..."*

This can be recognized as a problematic issue: some international students find it difficult to comprehend the gravity of plagiarism. The faculty's view of plagiarism as a violation of moral and academic integrity lies in direct contradiction to the students' view that a direct reproduction of a text (without citation) demonstrates their respect for the original author's ideas:

*"...Some students were found producing the copied version from existing sources..."*

The concept of honour seems to be deeply integrated in the native academic cultures. To pay respect to, and honour the teacher by addressing her as "Highly Respected Madam" in e-mails or letters is a form of courtesy seldom seen in Denmark. This is contradicted by the discovery that the faculty conducts practical tasks which the international students deem unsuitable in stature for an academic.

## **Practicum**

*"...The Danes treat their children with neglect...I would never let my small children use knives to cut fruit themselves, that's far too dangerous..."*

*"...You must have misunderstood the duration of the education, it cannot be four years, it must have been four months, in my country the education for hairdresser is six months..."*

These were some of the remarks the international students could agree on when presenting their practicum experiences. The faculty had tried to deliver an overview of the history and philosophy of the Danish educational system, but to conceive the tradition acquires both knowledge and understanding of what learning is. How the tradition and the underlying theories are carried out in practice requires firsthand experience (Jarvis 2007). Thus the students took part in a one day practicum, visiting different educational sectors, including kindergarten, "folkeskole", "efterskole", vocational school and higher education.

The students prepared for their visit beforehand. They were asked to use two perspectives from the modules in the first term curricula: an individual approach and a society approach. Afterwards they presented their experiences to the whole group.

In general, the practicum was an eye-opener, and enhanced their comprehension of the philosophy of the educational tradition. Some found certain practices rather provocative: for instance very small children playing outside in the rain with sand and mud or children cutting up fruit with knives at kindergarten. The whole group agreed that this was neglect. However, the student experiences provided a good basis for discussion as to why and how children acquire experience, learn, and enhance their development as lifelong learners.

Another example was the duration and content of vocational education. A student made a comment that there must have been a misunderstanding because it cannot be true that training to be hairdresser could take nearly four years, when the duration is just six months in his country. This led to a discussion about the content of the hairdresser education: that there was much more to learn apart from how to style hair, such as equipping the hairdressing student with generic competences for their lifelong learning in the future:

*"...The initiative of providing field experiences was very helpful in developing deeper understanding of the practices in the communities with different organizations..."*

## **Academic culture**

Academic culture as we define it is a quality with norms and standards. Some of these are put in writing:

*"...Accordingly, the standards or principles which are enforced by social pressures have been called norms. They are, as it were, the touchstones by which members of a group judge each other's behavior and indeed recognize fellow members..."*  
(Stenhouse 1967)



Others, meanwhile, may not be directly expressed, but exist in the underlying structures:

*“...The underlying layer of meaning directs attention to the assumptions, presuppositions and “rule of the game” that gives plausibility and legitimacy to ongoing actions...” (Popkewitz 1987)*

Some of these are the traditional structures of an academic assignment, where they can be expressed as study regulations, while others are ‘habits’ or part of the academic culture, such as the expectation of taking a critical approach. How this approach should be carried out is not directly expressed.

Another example of an overt expression of academic culture is the Danish grading system, wherein each grade has an equivalent description or standard, for example, Grade 12 means:

*“...excellent performance, a high level of command of all aspects of the relevant material, with no or only minor weaknesses”.*

Similarly, when following the norms of the European Bologna Process (2009), different qualification aims in an academic program are expressed as “learning outcomes” within a qualification framework. The academic culture is most apparent in lectures, in the individual learning process, and in student work with assignment, supervision and oral exams. It is here the students have to break the code to understand the ‘rules of the game’. One of the factors determining such rules of the game is power relations.

Several international students experienced an “academic culture shock”. This shock may cause a process of both regression and progression. Regression can be expressed by rejecting the ‘new’ standards and criteria by insisting on writing the assignment in the “usual” way. The result is a low grade and a sad and angry student.

Coming to Europe and studying within a new academic culture has been a challenge for many international students, and one which has proved to be difficult to prepare for. Faculty can try to prepare students for some of the challenges, via introduction programmes, interviews and meetings, but not for all of them; these have to be experienced firsthand by the students themselves.

Academic culture cannot be seen as isolated culture; it is embedded in the surrounding culture, the social, general culture etc. Many things impact on the feeling of a culture clash; for instance living without the family for the first time, and having to take care of practicalities such as cooking, cleaning and shopping.

Living together with students from other cultures and academic traditions is

a challenge, but one which the international students have approached in a most respectful and caring way. As one student expressed it:

*"...We are all far away and even if we have different cultures and languages we have this in common: that we all are newcomers in the educational program and in Denmark, and we have to help each other..."*

## Perspectives

Our findings imply that several international students exhibit academic shock reactions in a variety of forms. However, all students manage to deal with the shock, and develop a new academic culture.

The point is not that the students have to change totally, but rather to adapt, combining their "first" academic culture with their "second" with the aim to develop a "third": a transnational academic culture. This process will include some of the following features: a more equal power relationship, a study focus on both product and process, a free expression of one's own opinion, and being critical but respectful of other academic cultures and opinions. Such a culture will benefit the graduates in their future life and careers dealing with networks and organizations in a globalized world.

Some measures can be taken to prevent some of the academic shock, while others have to be experienced to appreciate a full understanding of the second academic culture. One suggestion to minimize the academic shock is to set up a simulated oral exam, with faculty role-playing both internal and external examiners, and some students being examined, while the rest of the student group observes. Another is for faculty to meet with and supervise the students in a more common or equal setting, such as the canteen (rather than in the supervisor's office, with all the symbolic power that space embodies).

The experience of working with international students has had an impact on the faculty. They have in many cases been challenged to reflect on their "first" culture and have learned to see the world in a more multi-faceted way, to be humble and pay respect to the students and their cultures and to recognize that many different academic cultures exist, and that all cultures deserve consideration and respect. Actually, the graduates (the former DPU students) and the faculty (the former supervisors) develop a sense of belonging to the same academic culture.

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## Danish summary

### Akademisk chok – en fælles bevægelse mod en transnational akademisk kultur

En del internationale studerende får et chok, når de møder den akademiske kultur på DPU, Aarhus Universitet. Dette chok varierer i form og udtryk og medfører på længere sigt udviklingen af en transnational akademisk kultur.

Artiklen beskriver, hvordan DPUs akademiske kultur opleves og erfares af studerende, der er uddannet på universiteter i Afghanistan, Bhutan, Indien, Nepal og Pakistan. Oplevelsen af akademisk chok forbindes med deres individuelle læreprocesser, med undervisningens tilrettelæggelse og med deres relation til vejlederen. Der sættes fokus på de studerendes æresbegreber og på deres reaktioner, da de under et praktikophold oplevede hverdagen ude i de pædagogiske institutioner.

Akademisk chok kan mindskes ved hjælp af forskellige tiltag, men forfatterne anbefaler, at de internationale studerende gennemlever deres erfaringer og diskuterer dem med vejlederne under deres fælles udvikling af en transnational akademisk kultur.

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# Counselling on a Practice-Based Education used as Competence Development among Mentors

Linda Kragelund

## Abstract

*The purpose of this paper is to present some of the findings from the action research project 'Development of Regional Psychiatric Institutions as Learning Environments'.*

*The findings are based on data from 54 mentors who observed each other's counselling practice. A mentor is a nurse who teaches student nurses how to practise nursing. The mentors observed a colleague over two seven-hour shifts. In the first round of observation 54 mentors observed a peer's practice, with 24 completing the second observation. Observations were conducted using an observation guide developed for the purpose. The aim of the nurses observing each other's counselling practice was to develop their competences as mentors.*

*The analytical approach adopted is qualitative content analysis, and the theoretical approach is Lauvås and Handal's concepts of counselling and the 'Counselling-loop'.*

*The findings show that mentors do not use the 'Counselling-loop' as a total strategy. They also indicate that mentors prefer to counsel after the fact rather than before or during, and that they choose 'wall-to-wall' and 'knowledge sharing' rather than 'exemplary' counselling.*

*There is potential for mentors to develop their competences if they use the 'Counselling-loop' as a total strategy. Furthermore, student nurses' learning opportunities might be optimised if mentors' schedules in terms of counselling sessions are reorganised so as to use more time on pre-counselling and less on post-counselling.*

## Introduction

Denmark's nursing staff shortages and high student nurse drop-out rate, including the specialist field of psychiatric nursing, call for solutions to increase recruitment and retention levels (Pilegaard Jensen et al, 2006). The Danish government has argued that taking an interest in developing students' learning environments<sup>1</sup> would affect a solution (Danish Ministry of Finance, 2006).

International research demonstrates that, for hospital wards to serve as effective learning spaces, student nurses (students) should enjoy a caring environment with mentors<sup>2</sup> who take an active interest in their role. Nevertheless, mentors do not always meet the students' needs, and the time students spend in clinical practice is not always used effectively (Chan, 2002; Papp et al, 2003; Pearcey & Elliot, 2004; Saarikoski & Leino-Kilpi, 2002). Furthermore, research has conclusively demonstrated the importance of the student-mentor relationship for the quality of the clinical learning environment. The better the relationship, the better will be the learning environment (Saarikoski & Leino-Kilpi, 2002). Other important criteria for effective learning spaces are cooperation amongst staff, a collegial atmosphere, opportunities for professional development, and opportunities to observe and assimilate the nurses' positive work ethic (Papp et al, 2003). The unfortunate corollary is that students' observation of poor role models results in a strong negative learning outcome (Pearcey & Elliot, 2004).

In a Danish context, research has demonstrated that missed learning opportunities can be identified and exploited by using a pedagogical tool for mentors and students which is a categorisation model of student nurses' learning processes, named the 'Windmill of Learning Processes' (the 'Windmill model' - Figure 1) (Kragelund, 2006; Kragelund, 2011).

In the following, the action research project 'Development of Regional Psychiatric Intuitions as Learning Environments' is briefly introduced. Next to come is the 'Theoretical Framework' in relation to counselling and including 'Mentors' use of pedagogical counselling strategies'. Then the 'Methodology' is presented including the research design, data generation, sampling, analytical approach and ethical issues. That is followed by 'Findings' related to mentors' counselling practice. In 'Discussion' the findings are related to the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework and international research. This section also considers limitations in relation to mentors' observation of each other's practice. Last but not least follow 'Conclusions and Implications' of the findings.

## Development of Regional Psychiatric Institutions as Learning Environments

The action research project: 'Development of Regional Psychiatric Institutions as Learning Environments' is a three-year project which will finish in September 2011 (Kragelund et al, 2008)<sup>3</sup>. The purpose of the study is to develop the nurses' competences as mentors and the institutions as clinical learning environments. Furthermore, the aim is to refine existing or develop new concepts about workplace learning<sup>4</sup> (Kragelund et al, 2008).

The project started in 2008 and involved 93 mentors, 17 education coordinators<sup>5</sup> and an Assistant Professor from The National Centre of Competence Development (NCK). As of writing (April 2011), there are 67 mentors, 14 education coordinators, a PhD-student and an Associate Professor affiliated with the project<sup>6</sup>. The change in the number of participants is due to dropout among some of the participants following job changes.

The project is organised by a project steering committee and local project working groups. Members of the steering committee are the education coordinators, the PhD-student and the Associate Professor, who is the research leader. The local project working groups consist of the mentors and education coordinators, who are the leaders of these groups (Kragelund et al, 2008).

The action research is characterised as a bottom-up project, meaning that the project would not have happened had it not been for the mentors and education coordinators. They wanted the project and they joined it voluntarily after they became familiar with the 'Windmill model'. By using the 'Windmill model' as a pedagogical tool, mentors saw ways to uncover learning opportunities they were not previously aware of and, through that, optimise students' learning during their clinical placement in psychiatry. The leaders saw an opportunity for nurses to develop their competences as mentors. The NCK aimed to refine existing or develop new concepts about workplace learning. The parties agreed on cooperation and the project began in October 2008.

## Theoretical framework

The project's theoretical framework for mentors' counselling practice is inspired by Lauvås and Handal's humanistic and dialectic approach to counselling (Handal & Lauvås 1987; Handal & Lauvås 1999; Lauvås & Handal 2000). This is *firstly* because Lauvås and Handal are Nordic pedagogic researchers who address their writing to teachers/mentors/supervisors and students respectively working with or joining a practice-based education<sup>7</sup>. *Secondly*, their perspective on counselling is used in the Danish nurse mentors' training curriculum. 64 out of the 93 nurses

who participated in the project from the beginning are trained as mentors, which is why the project is founded on the assumption that the mentors use Lauvås and Handal's perspective in their counselling practice. Lauvås and Handal define counselling as:

*[... an important professional assistance to individuals' and groups of peoples' learning, and an important supplement to other pedagogic activities. Proximity, consideration and the personal relationship characterise the counselling enterprise (Lauvås & Handal 2000:15. Author's translation)]<sup>8</sup>.*

Lauvås and Handal believe it is important that mentors are curious about the students' way of thinking, and that they are more occupied by other people's thinking than their own. Furthermore, they find it important to base counselling on students' knowledge, experiences and values, even though it in some situations is also relevant for mentors to share their knowledge with students.

Lauvås and Handal have developed a counselling strategy called the 'Counselling-loop'. It consists of a counselling document and three phases. *The counselling document* is a paper written by the student before the pre-counselling and has to do with how the student has planned a forthcoming action.

The first phase is *pre-counselling*. It is hypothetical as mentor and student discuss the student's counselling document. They reflect on the student's plans and might make adjustments to them. In the ideal situation, the focus is not on the forthcoming action alone as it is more or less taken to be an example of similar acts. Lauvås and Handal describe this type of counselling as 'exemplary'. This contrasts with what they term 'wall-to-wall' counselling where many subjects are discussed at a superficial level. Lauvås and Handal believe there is more value in digging deep into just a few cases, which are selected as representative of many others, than in talking about many cases superficially. They also argue that pre-counselling is more important than 'Sitting next to Nanny' and post-counselling because students may be just as able to evaluate their own performance on their own or with the input of other students (Handal & Lauvås, 1987; Handal & Lauvås, 1999; Lauvås & Handal, 2000).

The second phase in counselling is that *the students perform the act* for which they have had pre-counselling. They can do it on their own, or they can do it, as Lauvås and Handal describe it, by 'Sitting next to Nanny', which means that the mentor joins the student in the situation.

The third phase is *post-counselling*. Here the student and the mentor discuss how the situation turned out compared to their plans. Lessons might be learned from the experience; for example, how the student should act in similar situa-

tions in the future. Post-counselling should ideally take place *immediately* after the event.

## **Mentors' use of pedagogical counselling strategies**

The Departmental Order of Nursing Education (Ministry of Education, 2008) mandates that all health institutions which serve as clinical placements for student nurses must develop a general curriculum for students. The mentors employed at these institutions have to assist students in developing personal study plans related to the aims of the module and the students' knowledge, skills and competences. Furthermore, the mentors need to have completed one-sixth of a Diploma of Education which is equivalent to 9 ECTS points. Last but not least, the mentors have the responsibility for planning ongoing counselling sessions for students consisting of exemplary patient and nursing situations (Ministry of Education, 2008, Study Regulation, Item Five, Seven & Eight). Apart from these broad descriptions, counselling practice is not regulated. The mentors are allowed to use whatever teaching and learning strategies they like, including pedagogical methods and tools. Each health institution works with a University College, which has some preferences for particular teaching and learning strategies.

Two common teaching strategies used in clinical practice are: reflection based on Kolb's model of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), and different types of portfolio (which is also a study method) based on texts written by Dysthe et al (2001) and Kristoffersen (2001). It is not within the scope of this paper to explore these teaching strategies further.

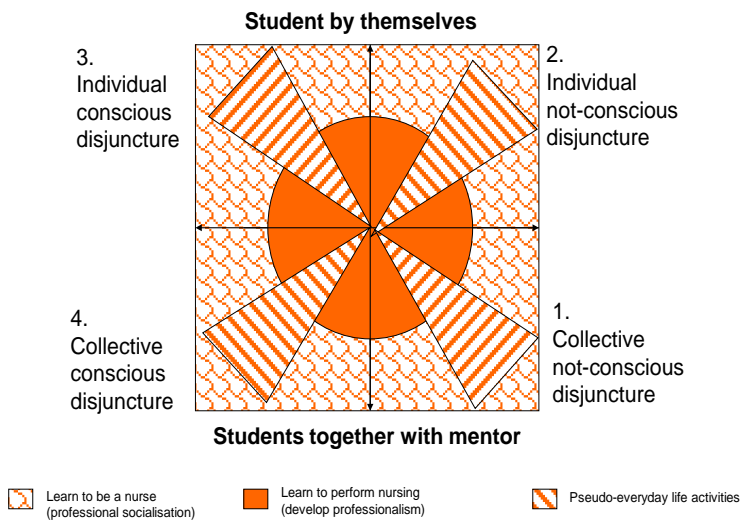
Another pedagogical tool which has had some influence in student nurses' clinical learning recently is the 'Windmill model' (Figure 1). It is a model which offers a new way of looking at, and talking about, student nurses' learning in clinical practice. Furthermore, it provides a discourse for talking about learning opportunities that students and mentors are unaware of. It is a tool which can be used both in pre- and post-counselling. Students can also use it on their own to analyse a forthcoming situation where they are going to take care of a patient, or they can use it in reflecting on a situation they have been part of. The 'Windmill model' is a result of a research project on student nurses' learning processes during their clinical placement in psychiatry (Kragelund, 2006). Central to the model is Jarvis' concept of disjuncture, which briefly can be defined as a social situation dissonant with a person's experiences (knowledge, skills, attitudes etc.). Such situations are potential learning situations (Jarvis, 2005). The concept of disjuncture is equivalent to the empirical phenomenon 'non-routine situations'.



One reason that mentors joining the action research presented in this paper were motivated to implement the ‘Windmill model’ in their own counselling practice was that it is evidence-based. They also assumed that using it would enable them to develop their competences to become aware of learning opportunities which at that time were unknown to them. Their wishes were to work with the first quadrant in Figure 1 named ‘collective not-conscious disjuncture’. This quadrant illustrates non-routine learning opportunities for student nurses which are unknown to both students and mentors.

Mentors thought that, by using the ‘Windmill model’ together with reflection, they could develop their own competences as mentors and optimise student nurses’ learning in clinical practice. These are some of the reasons why it is important that the mentors volunteered to join the project (Kragelund et al, 2008). It is not within the scope of this paper to describe the ‘Windmill model’ in greater detail: interested readers are directed to Kragelund 2006 and 2011.

**Figure 1: The Windmill of Learning Processes**  
 Students fall into one of these four quadrants depending on the situation they are in



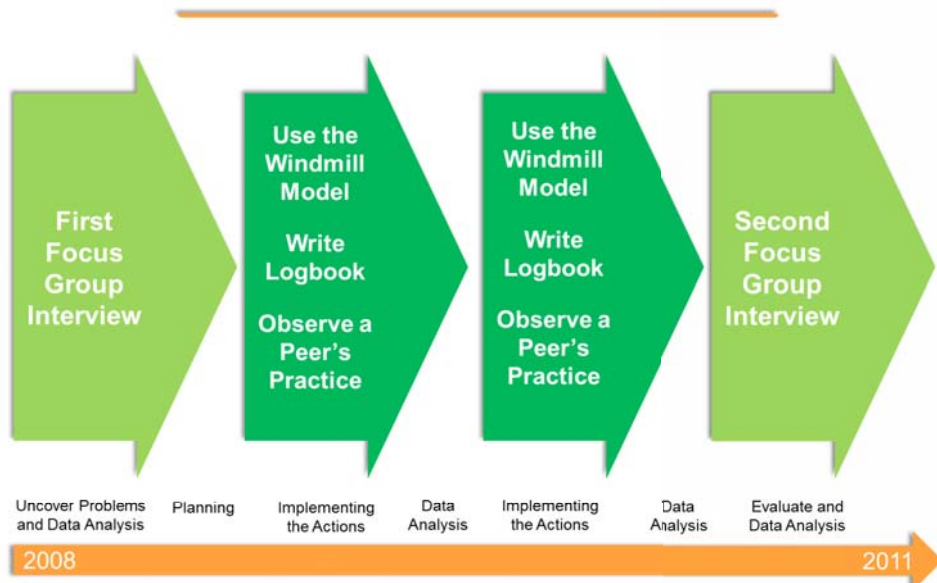
## Methodology

### Research Design and Data Generation

Action research is a research strategy designed to draw connections between existing knowledge in a field, the purpose of the investigation, research questions, theoretical framework, methods of data generation, and analysis. However, it is acknowledged that ‘...there is no generally accepted definition for action research’ (Hyrkäs, 1997:802).

One of the aims of undertaking action research is to minimise the gap between theory, research and practice. It requires cooperation between researchers and practitioners in order to uncover problems in practice, to design action strategies and to implement them. The purpose is not only to develop and change practices, but also to develop and/or refine existing theories (Holter & Schwartz-Barcott, 1993; Hyrkäs, 1997). The process related to the action research presented in this paper is illustrated in Figure 2 and the phases in the project are related to it. Mentors' logbooks and observation notes form both part of the 'Actions' and data in the project. That is why 'Research Design' and 'Data Generation' are intertwined in this section.

**Figure 2: The Action Research Process**



This action research project has five phases:

### 1. *Uncovering problems*

Problems were uncovered by undertaking 13 focus group interviews with 71 mentors (Figure 2: The first arrow). The aim was to reveal the mentors' understanding of learning opportunities that they are aware of, but, for various reasons, might or might not use in the students' clinical training. The interviews were conducted by the education coordinators and the Associate Professor. An interview guide was developed for the purpose. The data analysis showed that some mentors seem to lack competences in identifying and using the learning opportunities at their workplaces and in counselling and reflecting with students;

## 2. *Planning the whole project*

After uncovering the problems in practice, the whole project was planned (Figure 2: 'planning' written in relation to the time frame). A project description was developed, and a contract was signed by regional psychiatric institutions and NCK. It described the decisions taken about how to carry out the research;

## 3. *Implementing the 'Actions'*

There were three 'Actions' mentors had to follow: *First*, they needed to employ the 'Windmill model' as a pedagogical tool when counselling students; *Second*, they had to write logbooks about their practice; and *third*, to observe their peers practice. These logbook and observation notes formed part of the project data. The mentors had to complete two rounds of the 'Actions': once for each of two separate student groups. This is indicated by the two middle arrows in Figure 2. Mentors kept logbooks about their own counselling for two eight-week periods. First-run compliance was 57, while second-run completion was 32. A guide to writing logbooks was developed. Mentors observed a colleague over two seven-hour shifts. In the first run, 54 mentors observed a peer's practise, with 24 completing the second observation. A guide to observations was developed;

## 4. *Conducting qualitative content analysis of data*

One could say that analysing data is not a phase, but it is, nevertheless, seen as such: *firstly* because it has been done by the education coordinators, the PhD-student and the Associate Professor together; and *secondly* because the mentors have been involved in the analysis, and member checking has been undertaken. 'Member checking' is a method of validating the credibility of qualitative data through debriefings and discussions with participants (Polit & Beck, 2004:723).

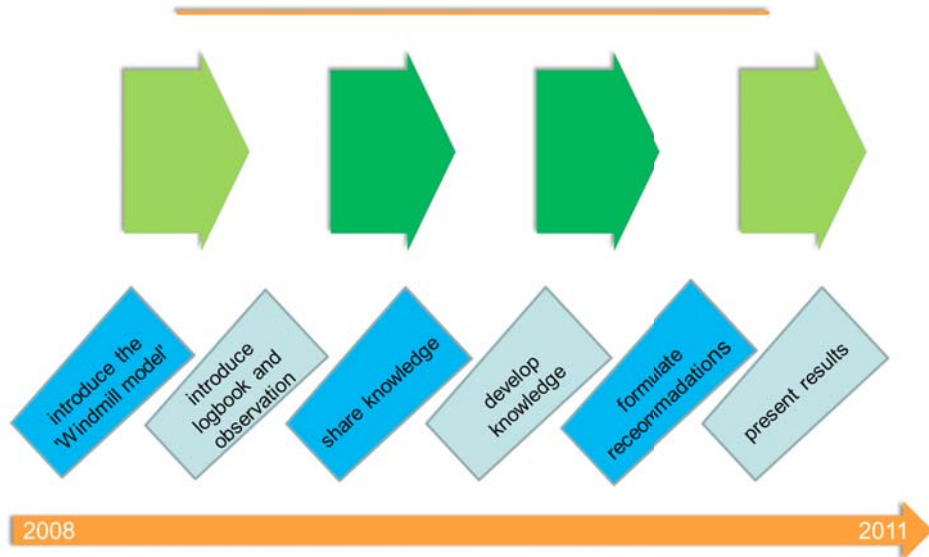
Analysing data continues throughout the duration of the project. It is indicated in Figure 2 by writing 'Data Analysis' four times along the time frame. See 'Analytical Approach' for a description of how the qualitative content of analysis of data was done; and finally;

## 5. *Evaluating the consequences of the 'Actions'*

The aim of the evaluation is to find out what results the 'Actions' have had in terms of developing nurses' competences as mentors, regional psychiatric institutions as learning environments, and concepts regarding workplace learning. 12 focus group interviews were conducted in which mentors were probed for their reflections on the 'Actions' in relation to their competences (Figure 2: the fourth arrow). An interview guide was developed for the purpose. The qualitative content analysis is still ongoing.

An important part of the project is working seminars for all participants. They enable participants to discuss their challenges, dilemmas and work in progress, and knowledge is shared and developed. In all, six seminars will be held during the three year period (Figure 3). At the *first seminar*, mentors were introduced to the 'Windmill model' and worked with it. At the *second one*, their opinions were solicited on a working draft of both the logbook and the observation guide which were edited based on their views. At the *third seminar*, the mentors shared their experiences of observing each other in practice and of keeping logbooks. The aim was to learn from the experiences before they were going to act again. At the *fourth seminar*, the preliminary results were presented to the mentors, and member-checking was undertaken. The preliminary results were discussed and shaped in relation to the mentors' feedback. The *fifth seminar* will take place in May 2011. The mentors and education coordinators aim to develop recommendations for counselling, based on the results of the project, for their leaders, their colleagues and themselves. The *sixth seminar* is scheduled for September 2011. Here the results of the project will be presented to both participants and a wider audience.

**Figure 3: Working seminars**



## Sampling

There are no rules in qualitative research about how many participants are needed, but the numbers sampled have to be weighed against the purpose of the research. A guiding principle is to reach data saturation, which is: '*...sampling to the point at which no new information is obtained and redundancy is achieved*' (Polit & Beck, 2004:308). Reaching data saturation ensures the internal validity of the re-

search (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2002:614). A volunteer sample of 93 mentors joined the project from the beginning, and data saturation was achieved.

## **Analytical Approach**

All data has been and/or will be analysed according to qualitative content analysis inspired by Graneheim and Lundman (2004). There is no one right way to do qualitative content analysis. Nevertheless, in all kinds of research, a fundamental condition is that the researchers have identified their research questions, theories, and assumptions and have consciously selected the empirical data they will analyse.

The education coordinators, the PhD-student and the Associate Professor carry out all the analysis. There are four groups with each their own area of responsibility: one for the first focus group interview, the second for the mentors' observations of their peers, the third for the mentors' logbooks, and the fourth for the second focus group interview. The Associate Professor is, in different ways, a member of all four groups. The analysis follows seven steps: reading the data (interviews, logbooks, observation notes); identifying units of meaning, i.e. words, sentences or paragraphs containing aspects related to each other through their content and context (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004); condensing units of meaning; interpreting the condensed units of meaning; developing categories (manifest content); developing sub and main themes (latent content); and identifying the results. Steps one to five are completed by individuals before each group develops the main theme(s) and results together.

Qualitative content analysis includes deduction, induction and abduction (Cavanagh, 1997). Deduction was used as the analysis took point of departure in the research questions and the purpose of the project. It gave no new insight except for what was already known because of the assumptions which the project is based on (Patton, 1980), but data were categorised and reduced, which is an important part of qualitative content analysis (Blakie, 1993; Jensen & Johnsen, 2000). All units of meaning were identified and primarily analysed through induction. The themes primarily emerged based on abduction. Abduction can be described as a swing of the pendulum between empirical data and theoretical concepts (Bitch Olsen & Pedersen, 2003).

Through the qualitative content analysis of data from mentors' observation records, nine categories and three sub-themes emerged about the mentors' counselling practice (Box 1). Empirical findings were confronted with Lauvås and Handal's concept of counselling and the 'Counselling-loop' and with mentors' use of different pedagogical tools such as the 'Windmill model'. Transcripts of

the observation notes were read and re-read in order to undertake the qualitative content analysis.

Theme: Counselling		
Sub-themes		
Content in counselling	Counselling strategies	Conditions for counselling
Categories		
Psychiatric nursing; Professional socialisation; Study-related subjects	Pre-counselling, 'Sitting next to Nanny', Post-counselling;  Counselling planned according to time;  Counselling together with or away from patients;  'Wall-to-wall' counselling;  +/- using the 'Windmill model'	The double role of mentor and psychiatric nurse

Box 1: *The emerged theme together with sub-themes and categories as a result of the analysis of mentors' observation notes*

## Ethical Issues

Informed written consent was obtained from the nursing managers of the regional psychiatric institutions. The mentors and the education coordinators were invited to participate in the project. Those who volunteered have been guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, and so numbers instead of names have been used for all participants.

The Danish Data Inspection Institution reviewed and approved the project. As the issues investigated by the project are not within the remit of the Danish Ethics Committee, its approval has not been sought.

## Findings

The findings of the peer observation are presented in Box 2 and expanded with analysis of empirical examples. These are based on 76 observation notes generated by 54 mentors. Some of the findings can be categorised according to the following concepts by Lauvås and Handal: the 'Counselling-loop', and 'wall-to-wall' versus 'exemplary' counselling. Other findings have to do with where the counselling takes place and if it is planned or not. Others again relate to what degree the mentors used the 'Windmill model'<sup>9</sup>.

Many mentors used a combination of pre-counselling, 'Sitting next to Nanny' and post-counselling, explaining why the sum of the figures in Box 2 is higher than the total number of mentors who have observed a peer's practice. The findings also make it obvious that mentors greatly prefer post-counselling (37 mentors).

An interesting finding is that 44 mentors out of 54 had *planned* the counselling according to *time*. When the Danish Nursing Training was converted to a Bachelor's degree in 2002, the Ministry of Education (2001) demanded a counselling schedule. There are *no* examples in the data to indicate that mentors planned the counselling in relation to the *content*. It may be a coincidence that this just occurred on the days when the mentors were observed, or it may be their standard practice. Example 4 below is typical of how time, but not content, was planned.

The findings also make it clear that almost all mentors use counselling in a room away from patients and are concerned with a version of post-counselling. 49 out of 54 mentors counselled in a room away from patients.

Last but not least, the analysis revealed that, even though using the 'Windmill model' for counselling students was part of the 'Actions' of the project, only three mentors used it in their counselling at a manifest level when they were observed. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the 'Model' was used 20 times at a latent level by mentors talking about its concepts. It is a surprising finding given that the mentors volunteered to join the project and agreed to use the 'Windmill model' twice during the project with two different cohorts of students<sup>10</sup>.

	Pre-counselling	'Sitting next to Nanny'	Post-counselling	Planned or not-planned counselling	Counselling away from patients	Using the 'Windmill model'
<b>No. of mentors' using:</b>	17	15 together with patients;  15 in relation to administrative tasks	37	44 planned;  20 not planned	49	3 used it on a manifest level;  20 used it on a latent level

Box 2: Findings in figures related to data from mentors observing a peer's practice

What has not been possible to show in Box 2 is to what degree the mentors use 'exemplary' and/or 'wall-to-wall' counselling, 'knowledge sharing', and/or use student's knowledge, experiences and values in their counselling practice, as recommended by Lauvås and Handal (1987; 1999; 2000). These issues will be dealt with in the empirical examples that follow.

## The 'Counselling-loop'

There is *no* sign in the data that mentors use *the 'Counselling loop'* in its entirety, which consists of a counselling document, pre-counselling, the student performing the act and post-counselling (Handal & Lauvås, 1987; Handal & Lauvås, 1999; Lauvås & Handal, 2000).

### Counselling Document

Nor is there *any evidence* in the data that mentors ask students to write a *counselling document* in which they plan a forthcoming action. Consequently, the themes of each counselling session may be *ad hoc* rather than based on students' identified needs.

### Pre-counselling

According to Lauvås and Handal (1987; 1999; 2000), ideal *pre-counselling* is hypothetical and starts with the counselling document students have written. The findings presented here show that students seldom receive pre-counselling as Lauvås and Handal understand it, and *never* based on a counselling document. What is more common is a version of pre-counselling (17 out of 54 mentors gave pre-counselling) in which the mentors and the students plan the tasks of the day, in the sense of 'who is going to do what?', rather than discussing the students' thoughts about how to perform different tasks in relation to patient care. A *typical* example of pre-counselling is:

*"The student and the mentor go through the tasks of the day in terms of acting as the patient's contact person. The patient is suffering from depression and does sometimes refuse to interact. The mentor recommends different techniques to motivate the patient for the activities of the day, and explains how the student might be able to help the patient to keep an appointment with an eye specialist"* (Mentor 92 observing mentor 90. First observation, p. 1. Author's italics) (Example 1).

This quote shows how mentor 90 reverts to 'knowledge sharing', instead of eliciting and discussing the student's thoughts about how to cope with the patient.



He/she recommends different strategies to the student for motivating a patient suffering from depression to participate in the activities of the day. The example illustrates, as Lauvås and Handal point out, how easily the focus of the counselling might switch to the mentor's knowledge instead of the student's thoughts and suggestions. The example is also *typical* because the mentor did not use the 'Windmill model' or other tools or models to discuss with the student what type of potential learning situations he/she was going to face in relation to taking care of the patient suffering from depression.

### **The students perform the act**

The second phase of counselling is that *the students perform the act*. The ideal situation is an act for which students have had pre-counselling. They can perform the acts on their own, or they can do so, as Lauvås and Handal describe it, 'Sitting next to Nanny', which means that the mentor joins the student in the situation.

In the project presented here, 30 mentors used 'Sitting next to Nanny' (Box 2). 15 did so in relation to patient care, while another 15 did so with administrative tasks. A *typical* example of the latter is:

*"Mentor 105 communicates with the student. Together they fill in some plans and calendars they use in relation to scheduling the work of the day. Mentor 105 tells the student about the morning meeting with the patients"* (Mentor 74 observing mentor 105. First observation, p. 5. Author's italics) (Example 2).

What is *typical* about this example is that the mentor's counselling strategy is 'Sitting next to Nanny' for administrative tasks, such as filling in plans and calendars. It is also a *typical* example of 'knowledge sharing'. Here the topic is the staff's morning meeting with patients.

Next follows an example where a mentor uses 'Sitting next to Nanny' for taking care of a male patient suffering from schizophrenia. The mentor and the student are together with the patient in his bedroom. The student is going to give the patient an injection of medicine:

*"First the student, then mentor 19, tries to communicate verbally with the patient, but without luck. Nevertheless the student is able to read the patient's non-verbal communication (the patient is lying down on his side on his bed in order to receive the injection). Mentor 19 gives the student some advice and praises the student throughout the procedure. The mentor makes sure that the student does the procedure correctly (for example reminds him/her to return the stamp)"* (Mentor 45 observing mentor 19. First observation, p. 9. Author's italics) (Example 3).

The example illustrates that the mentor is checking that the student gives the injection according to the standard procedure and gives the student some advice. What is not apparent from the example is that the student has been pre-counselled about how to administer the injection. The data does not make it clear if the counselling also covered the topics of schizophrenia or how to communicate with a patient suffering from such an illness. To advise the student is interpreted as 'knowledge sharing'.

### Post-counselling

The third phase in counselling is *post-counselling*. Here the student and mentor discuss how the situation turned out compared to their plans. Lessons might be learned from the experience: for example, how the student should act in similar situations in the future. Post-counselling should ideally take place *immediately* after the event. Lauvås and Handal argue that post-counselling is not as important as pre-counselling because students may be just as able to evaluate their own performance on their own or with the input of other students.

The analysis presented here revealed that mentors practise a version of post-counselling to a large extent (37 out of 54 mentors used post-counselling). Data reveal that mentors typically ask students undirected questions such as: 'What would you like to talk about?' and 'What has happened since the last time we were together?' What is clear is that while the *time* for post-counselling is planned (Box 2: 44 mentors gave planned counselling) the *content* is *not*. Post-counselling can often be characterised as 'wall-to-wall' counselling, where many subjects are discussed on a superficial level. Here is an example of post-counselling and 'wall-to-wall' counselling. It is *not* a counselling session which took place just after a specific situation the students were in, but rather a counselling session planned in advance in relation to *time*, but not to *content*:

*"Counselling with four students.*

*A round where the mentor asks the students what they would like to talk about, and what had happened since they were last together. Every student gets an opportunity to speak. The mentor interrupts with reflective questions. Common reflection takes place, and is connected with concepts of nursing, ethics, views on human beings, solutions for life, hope, stigmatisation, prognoses for patients and the role as a nurse. Furthermore there was talk about a course with the 'Girl of Glass' and with Lars Thorgaard"* (Mentor 2 observing mentor 35. First observation, p. 4. Author's italics) (Example 4).

This is an extreme *example* of 'wall-to-wall' counselling because the mentor and the students talk superficially about 12 subjects during one 60-minute session. It is evident that *neither* mentor *nor* students had prepared for the counselling session, and they did not use the *time* to ensure that the students learned as much as possible. It is also clear that the mentor did not plan the session with any didactic aims in mind. Nor is there evidence that the mentor had planned this particular session within the wider context of the counselling programme for the entirety of the students' clinical placement (Ministry of Education, 2008). The observing mentor 2 has written that mentor 35 used reflective questions, but not what these questions were. Furthermore, the observer mentioned that common reflection took place, but not what that was.

### **'Wall-to-wall' versus 'exemplary' counselling**

A pattern of 'wall-to-wall' counselling after the fact emerged as a result of the analysis. Box 2 illustrates that 37 out of 54 mentors used post-counselling, and the above four empirical examples are *typical* in relation to 'knowledge sharing', which was often combined with 'wall-to-wall' counselling. Example 4 is an extreme example of that.

In 'wall-to-wall' counselling, the mentors share their knowledge of such topics as the organisation, study-related questions<sup>11</sup> and psychiatric nursing. They avoid reflecting on a deeper level with the students about issues the latter are experiencing. This is the opposite approach to the 'exemplary' counselling that Lauvås and Handal recommend, which is counselling where a few subjects are explored in depth, and the results are then extrapolated to other issues. Lauvås and Handal also explain the importance of linking the sessions of counselling together to enable both mentors and students to identify connections between different subjects and to focus on the important elements relevant to the students' learning aims (Handal & Lauvås, 1987; Handal & Lauvås, 1999; Lauvås & Handal, 2000). In this part of the action research it has not been possible to identify 'exemplary' counselling the way Lauvås and Handal understand it.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of the peer observation was two-fold. *Firstly*, it was for mentors to develop their competences in relation to counselling. A way to do that was to use the 'Windmill model' as a pedagogical tool. *Secondly*, it was to generate data for the project.

There are some interesting findings in relation to mentors' competence development. It is surprising that mentors do not use the 'Counselling-loop' in its

entirety, and that they do not use a counselling document (written by students) on which to base the pre-counselling sessions. It is surprising because, in their training for counselling, nurses are taught Lauvås and Handal's view on counselling and are familiar with these concepts. The action research is based on the assumption that the trained mentors would use Lauvås and Handal's counselling perspective, but the assumption seems to be wrong. The reason still has to be resolved.

That leads to another unexpected finding: only 17 out of 54 mentors used pre-counselling, and as many as 37 out of 54 used post-counselling during the days they were observed. It is an unexpected finding because Lauvås and Handal (1987; 1999; 2000) argue that pre-counselling is more important than 'Sitting next to Nanny' and post-counselling. In their view, students are capable of evaluating their own actions if they have had pre-counselling for their acts and have discussed their plans for these acts with the mentors. So why do mentors seem to prefer post-counselling to pre-counselling?

The findings also indicate that post-counselling can often be characterised as 'wall-to-wall' counselling where the mentors use 'knowledge sharing'. In other words, they readily share with students their knowledge about an illness - such as depression - and how to care for patients suffering from it. Example 1 illustrates a situation where mentor 90 employs 'knowledge sharing' by telling the student how he/she can take care of a patient. In some cases, mentors talk more than they listen. As one mentor joining this project said: *'Maybe we are practising monologues rather than dialogues'* (Mentor 100 at the fourth seminar). This contradicts Lauvås and Handal's point of view that students' learning opportunities are optimised if the counselling takes point of departure in the students' knowledge, experiences and values, and if mentors are more occupied with the students' thoughts than with their own. In their use of 'knowledge sharing' to such a great extent, mentors would seem to be more interested in their own thoughts than in the students' (Handal & Lauvås 1987; Handal & Lauvås 1999; Lauvås & Handal 2000).

The findings also indicate that mentors greatly prefer 'wall-to-wall' counselling over 'exemplary' counselling. In 'wall-to-wall' counselling the mentors share their knowledge of such subjects as the organisation, study-related topics and psychiatric nursing, and discuss many subjects on a superficial level with the students. Example 4 is an *extreme* example of 'wall-to-wall' counselling where the mentor and the students talked about 12 subjects in one 60-minute counselling session. In other words, and according to Lauvås and Handal, by using 'wall-to-wall' counselling, they avoid reflecting at a deeper level with the students about issues the latter are experiencing. This is the opposite approach to the 'exemplary' counselling Lauvås and Handal recommend where mentor and student

dig deeper into a few cases which are selected as representative of many others (1987; 1999; 2000). It is also a counselling strategy which is recommended in the Danish Departmental Order of Nursing Education. This states that mentors have the responsibility for planning continuous counselling sessions for students which are based on *exemplary* patient and nursing situations (Ministry of Education 2008, Study Regulation, Item Five & Seven). It is interesting that there are *no* empirical examples of '*exemplary*' counselling in the data from mentors' observations, while there are many of 'wall-to-wall' counselling. By using counselling strategies such as 'wall-to-wall and 'knowledge sharing', and preferring post-counselling to pre-counselling, there is a risk that students do not learn as much as possible. These findings are similar to what is found in other research: the time students spend in clinical practice is not always used effectively (Chan, 2002; Papp et al, 2003; Pearcey & Elliot, 2004; Saarikoski & Leino-Kilpi, 2002).

Another significant finding is that counselling usually takes place in a closed room away from patients (49 out of 54 mentors did that). It can be assumed that the conversion of the Danish Nursing Training to a Bachelor's Degree in 2002 heralded a stronger focus on scholastic teaching than on clinical practice. Thus counselling in a closed room away from the patients establishes a quasi-didactic space (Ministry of Education, 2001). This finding is interesting because, according to the English educational researcher Jarvis, students in practice-based education only learn to do (to perform) through primary experience, which means acting in relation to the aims of the training and experiencing through their own body and senses. They do not learn to perform via secondary experience, which is experience mediated and experienced by others (Jarvis, 2005). Nevertheless, that is what students get when the counselling takes place away from patients, and mentors primarily use 'knowledge sharing'.

As shown in the 'Findings', a large number of the counselling sessions are planned in relation to *time*, but not in relation to the *content*. This indicates that the counselling sessions might not be linked together, which could otherwise enable both mentor and students to identify connections between each subject or to focus on important elements relevant to the students' learning aims. Linking the sessions together is recommended both by the Danish Ministry of Education (2008) and by Lauvås and Handal (1987; 1999; 2000). The analysis also revealed that there seems to be a relatively large amount of *time* for counselling and that mentors use much of that time for 'knowledge sharing' and post-counselling. An interesting point is that the analysis of the data from the first focus group interview (Kragelund et al, 2009), and from the mentors' logbooks about their counselling (Rasmussen et al, 2011), show that mentors ask for more time to do counselling. It is difficult to say if this reflects the mentors' everyday working

lives, or if it is due to the fact that a lot of counselling was scheduled for the days on which mentors observed a peer's practice.

Last but not least, the findings in this part of the action research have revealed that, even though using the 'Windmill model' in counselling students was part of the 'Actions' in the project, only three mentors used it in their counselling at a manifest level. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the model was used 20 times at a latent level when mentors talked about its concepts. It is a surprising finding because the mentors agreed to use the 'Windmill model' twice during the project with two different cohorts of students. The finding is similar to the one that mentors do not use the 'Counselling-loop' even though 37 of the 54 who observed each other in practice have mentoring training. It is safe to assume that they have a working familiarity with Lauvås and Handal's strategy for counselling because they have been taught about it and are meant to use it in their practice.

The *second purpose* of mentors observing a peer's practice was to generate data for the action research. It is interesting that no more than 54 out of the 93 mentors who joined the project at its start have opted to observe each other's practice. So far in the research process there is no clear answer to this lack of compliance. Some mentors have said that they failed to do the observations because they could not find the time. Another reason offered has been that they have had many other tasks to do.

### **Limitations**

54 of the mentors joining the project have observed each other's counselling practice. The number is smaller than expected; nevertheless, a substantial amount of rich data was generated, data saturation was achieved, and distinct categories and one theme emerged during the qualitative content analysis.

The mentors as observers have had an 'insider' researcher position (Kragelund, 2007), which may have influenced their observations. However, the observers have had an opportunity to discuss, with colleagues, their assumptions about their roles during the seminars, which are part of the project, and during meetings in their local project working groups.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The purpose of the study is to develop nurses' competences as mentors and the institutions as clinical learning environments. Additionally, the aim is to refine existing or develop new concepts of workplace learning (Kragelund et al, 2008).

Accepting Lauvås and Handal's view of counselling (1987; 1999; 2000), and having the purpose of the study in mind, it can be concluded that there is potential for mentors to develop their competence in relation to using *the 'Counselling-loop'* as a total strategy. This includes viewing counselling as a continuous process related to the aims of the module of the students' clinical placements and basing pre-counselling on a *counselling document*. Furthermore, it can be concluded that it would increase students' learning opportunities and optimise the outcome of their clinical learning if mentors reorganise the time they use for counselling. Mentors ought to use more time on *pre-counselling* and '*Sitting next to Nanny*' about taking care of patients, and less on post-counselling. It might also give students the chance to improve their learning if mentors start to use '*exemplary*' counselling. For that to happen, mentors must take into account the learning opportunities in reflecting in depth on a few important issues and generalising them to other cases. These opportunities must be seen in relation to the ones offered in 'wall-to-wall' counselling, which can often be characterised as 'knowledge sharing'.

Furthermore, findings have revealed that mentors rarely used the '*Windmill model*' as a pedagogical tool in their counselling practice. As such it is impossible to state what effect using the 'Windmill model' has had on students' learning and developing mentors' competences. Thus far in the research process, it is difficult to confirm whether or not the concepts in the 'Windmill model' will be more explicitly formulated, or if new concepts about workplace learning will emerge. What can be stated is that the mentors *are* routinely using the concepts from the 'Windmill model', notably the concepts of 'disjuncture' or 'non-routine' situations, and 'pseudo-everyday life activities'. Finally, a greater number of 'everyday life activities' than were named in Kragelund's initial research in the field (Kragelund, 2006) have emerged.

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## Notes

- 1 Learning environment is an elastic concept. The clinical learning environment, which, for the purposes of this study, means regional psychiatric institutions, includes in-patient wards and district psychiatric out-patient treatment. The clinical learning environment consists of the institutional culture, the context of nursing care, and the basic ideas and principles of teaching and learning at the institution (Chan, 2002; Saarikoski & Leino-Kilpi, 2002)
- 2 A mentor is a nurse who teaches student nurses how to practise nursing
- 3 It is run in association with the National Centre of Competence Development, Aarhus University, and various Danish regional psychiatric institutions
- 4 In this paper the concepts 'workplace learning' and 'learning in practice' are used synonymously
- 5 An education coordinator is a nurse who is employed to have the responsibility for the education of all student nurses and nursing assistant-pupils at a specific institution. A part of their job is to supervise mentors in relation to counselling students
- 6 In 2010 the Assistant Professor became Associate Professor and one of the education coordinators a PhD-student
- 7 'We have the confidence that the ideas are relevant to the training of medical doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, managers, engineers etc.' (Handal & Lauvås, 1987:2)
- 8 '... en betydningsfull, profesjonell assistanse i individers og gruppers læring og utvikling, et viktig supplement til annen pedagogisk virksomhet. Det karakteristiske ved veiledning som pedagogisk aktivitet er nærheten, omtanken og det personlige som danner grunnlaget, og som preger virksomheten' (Lauvås & Handal, 2000:15)
- 9 Findings in relation to the content of counselling, and conditions for counselling are only mentioned briefly
- 10 46 mentors wrote 67 logbook notes. In 39 of them the 'Windmill model' was used, and in 6 it was mentioned (Rasmussen et al, 2011)
- 11 In this part of the action research, 21 mentors used time on counselling in relation to study-related topics. It is interesting because counselling on such topics is not part of the mentors' job in the Danish context.

## Danish summary

### **Vejledning af studerende på en uddannelse til professionsbachelor brugt til at udvikle kompetence blandt kliniske**

Formålet med artiklen er, at præsentere nogle resultater fra aktionsforskningsprojektet 'Udvikling af læringsmiljø i psykiatrien'. Det drejer sig om resultater, der er baseret på 54 kliniske vejlederes observation af hinandens vejledningspraksis. En klinisk vejleder er en sygeplejerske, der underviser sygeplejestuderende i at udøve sygepleje. De kliniske vejledere observerede hinanden to gange syv timer. I første runde observerede 54 vejledere en kollegas praksis, i anden runde gjorde 24 vejledere det. Der blev udviklet en observationsguide til formålet. Hensigten med observationerne var, at de kliniske vejledere skulle udvikle deres kompetencer som vejledere.

Data er analyseret via kvalitativ indholdsanalyse, og den teoretiske tilgang er Lauvås og Handal's begreb om vejledning og deres 'vejlednings-sløjfe'. Resultaterne viser, at vejlederne ikke bruger 'vejlednings-sløjfen' som en samlet strategi, og at de foretrækker at give studerende efter vejledning frem for før og under vejledning. Desuden foretrækker vejlederne 'væg-til-væg' og 'viden-deling' frem for 'eksemplarisk' vejledning.

De kliniske vejledere har mulighed for at udvikle deres kompetence ved at bruge 'vejlednings-sløjfen' som en samlet strategi. Desuden kan sygeplejestuderendes læremuligheder blive optimeret, hvis de kliniske vejledere omfordeler deres tid til vejledning, så de bruger mere af den på før vejledning og mindre på efter vejledning.

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# Training of Adult Education Teachers

## Experiences from a teacher training programme in cooperative learning

**Bjarne Wahlgren**

### **Abstract**

*The background of the study was that a group of teachers should develop competences in order to apply a new pedagogical approach, Cooperative Learning (CL), in a skilled manner. The total competence development process included theoretical knowledge about the method, practical training in its use, and ongoing and extensive coaching related to the teachers' experiences of implementing CL.*

*It was assumed that the competence development process would result in a higher usage of CL as well as an increasingly professional and more reflected application of the teaching method over the year. The results from the study, as indicated by the teachers' completed logs, and supplemented by the data from the focus group interviews, show a different picture.*

*Two months into the project, the teachers were using CL on a large scale. The average level of their use did not increase during the academic year. By two months into the course, teachers already perceived themselves as being able to apply the method. They also reported that their skills were developed further during the course. They found that they became better at solving educational challenges, that they became more satisfied with their own teaching, and that they were better able to solve the problems deriving from the heterogeneous composition of the student group. The data thus document measurable but limited developments in the teachers' competences after the first two months.*

*Our analysis of the teachers' reflection skills reveals that as early as two months into the project, a high level of reflection was taking place. Contrary to our initial assumptions, there is no gradual and continuous increase in the teachers' competence. The increase in teaching competence is instead located relatively early in the academic year; after that there is only modest improvement.*

## **Introduction**

Are teachers willing and able to use the Cooperative Learning method in their classrooms? What competences are needed to successfully apply this method? These questions were investigated in a teacher training programme run by the National Centre of Competence Development, and the results are discussed here.

Cooperative learning (CL) is a teaching method based on structured group work. It encompasses a number of forms of cooperative activities, labelled 'structures' (D.M. Kagan, 1992; S. Kagan & Stenlev, 2006). The method is reported to have several positive effects on teaching and on students' learning, including developing participants' ability to cooperate, and improving their communication and social skills (Johnson, 1992; Slavin, 1996).

The method is used mainly in primary schools and universities, where there is a documented effect. It has found only limited use in general adult education. This absence called for the method to be implemented, tested and developed in a Danish adult education context. A project was designed to use CL in a series of classes in the four major adult education centres in Copenhagen, and carried out during the 2009-2010 academic year.

In order to judge the efficacy of using CL in adult education, teachers should be able to apply the method successfully. To ensure this, their teaching skills needed development. Thus, teachers' competence development formed a core component of the overall project.

What form should the teachers' competence development take? Would competence development enable them to use CL? How did the development process go? These issues are explored here.

## **Background**

Studies of continuing educational programmes often show that there is a limited effect on students' learning. Continuing education often has only limited transfer, in the sense that participants apply only some of what they have learned from their training to their daily lives (Lim & Morris, 2006). The limited effects of courses for in-service training of adult teachers have been described and documented (Wahlgren, Danneskiold-Samsøe, Hemmingsen, & Larson, 2002).

Research on transfer reveals a number of barriers to implementing what was learned. One barrier is the temporal distance between learning and application (Lim, 2000). Another is the application context, which includes the workplace conditions and the opportunities these afford for applying what one has learned (Conrad, 2008; Gitonga, 2006; Wahlgren, 2009<sup>1</sup>). The extent and quality of supervisor support in the application context is another factor that can enhance or hinder implementation (Kontoghiorghes, 1998, 2001).

Following a systemic review of a number of international studies on teacher training, Rivers (2005) found that a variety of approaches are employed to encourage teachers to improve the quality of their teaching, namely: (1) short courses to train staff in discrete skills, (2) *in situ* training for developing complex knowledge, attitudes and skills, (3) consulting, peer assessment and mentoring, (4) student assessment of teaching, and (5) comprehensive development programmes. His analysis of all the results indicates that a short, skills-based course alone is unlikely to effect significant changes. What does produce more lasting effects is a greater emphasis on assisting work groups to reflect collectively on their joint tasks. Other reviews of the literature confirm this (Larsen & Wahlgren, 2010; Wahlgren & Larsen, 2009).

In another study, the authors noted that "Research indicates that professional development programmes were accorded higher ratings when sustained and intensive – rather than short term, 'one shoot' workshops. The programmes tend to be more efficient when they provide teachers with opportunities for hands-on, active learning, and when they entail collaborative and collegial learning environments" (Torff & Byrnes, 2011, p. 27).

Continuing education in the form of a short stand-alone course, where implementation is left up to the individual participant, would, therefore, not be expected to have a lasting impact. Instead, in order to ensure the qualified and skilful use of the CL method, the training process was structured in a fundamentally different way. It was organised as an interaction between practice, and reflection on this practice. Extensive coaching was included, which has been proved effective in the implementation of learned skills (Batt, 2010; Stelter, 2004).

The competence development of the teachers in the project included:

1. An introduction to the method and the theories of CL (by way of a prescribed text)<sup>2</sup>
2. A two-day course of practical exercises
3. Group coaching seven times throughout the period of the study.

The purpose of coaching the teachers was to facilitate continual improvement of their use of CL in the classroom. Coaching sessions were designed in order for the teachers to reflect on the way they used CL, and on the problems they were encountering in implementing it in their teaching. The teachers themselves decided which topics should be addressed in the coaching sessions, which were conducted by professional coaches from a university college<sup>3</sup>.

## **Research problems and questions**

The study focused on teachers' competence development in applying the cooperative learning method. The study examined the extent to which teachers' competences were actually developed.

The first issue to be investigated was the extent to which teachers use CL in their teaching. To what extent would teachers apply what they have learned? The next issue is whether teachers are competent to apply CL. Would teachers be able to reflect in a meaningful and productive way on their application of the method? The third issue is whether teachers develop their understanding of teaching. Would the teachers develop a positive perception of CL, and of their abilities to apply the method?

It was assumed that the combination of ongoing coaching and practical application of the method would lead to a continuous increase in skills; namely, that:

1. as teachers developed their ability to use CL, they would apply the method to an increasing extent during the process;
2. the teachers would perceive themselves as increasing their mastery of the method, and so find it easier and more satisfying to use; and
3. the continuous and ongoing coaching would gradually and perceptibly raise the teachers' overall level of reflection.

By applying the method to their teaching, the participants would gain firsthand knowledge of the method's possibilities and limitations. These insights would be collected and analysed by the project in order to improve the use of CL in adult education.

## **Methodology and Data Collection**

Thirty-one teachers, all experienced in teaching adults, participated in the project. All had taught for at least one year, while twenty-one had more than ten years' teaching experience. Their subject specialties were: Danish, foreign languages, mathematics, science, psychology and religion. Some teachers took part in the

project of their own volition, while others were nominated by their schools. Most (twenty-two teachers) taught adults the upper-secondary level syllabus, while a minority (nine teachers) taught them at a lower-secondary level syllabus. None of the teachers had taught using the CL method before the experiment started.

The data were collected from focus group interviews and competence logs. *The focus group interviews* were conducted with two groups of teachers at two points in the process. The first interview was conducted two months after the start, with eleven teachers. The second interview was conducted eight months into the project, at the end of the academic year, with thirteen teachers. Four teachers participated in both interviews. The selection of teachers ensured that different disciplines and both levels of education were included. The focus group interviews aimed to identify the benefits and difficulties that teachers perceived in using the CL method, so that these could inform future implementation of the CL method. Questions about teachers' perceptions of the skills development process, and about their evaluation of the coaching, were included.

The main data were collected from *competence logs*. These were used by the teachers to describe their experiences of CL. They were asked to log how they used CL, to justify its use in relation to their teaching aims, and to indicate their perceptions of the method, including any difficulties or barriers they encountered en route. Completing competence logs required extensive and demanding work, both in terms of time and professional commitment.

Logs needed to be filled out three times during the project, in preparation for the second, fourth, and seventh coaching sessions. It was assumed that the temporal linkage between logs and coaching would increase the response rate and provide a more valid picture of the actual application and reflections. This assumption was only partially confirmed, with only two thirds of the teachers completing all three logs.

The first log was completed by all thirty-one teachers. Twenty-seven completed the second log, and twenty-two completed the third. Twenty out of the thirty-one project participants (65%) completed all three logs. A comparison of the responses of those twenty teachers with the responses of those who completed two logs did *not* reveal marked differences, either in the quality of the descriptions or the extensiveness of the responses. Against this background it is reasonable to assume that the 20 logs give a true picture of the perceptions of the whole group.

The log contained five question types:

- Identification questions about the teacher completing the log; for example, about their teaching subjects and teaching experience.



- Questions about the use of CL; for example: “How often do you act differently in your teaching given your knowledge of CL?”
- Questions about their reflection on CL; for example: “Describe the situation where you used CL in the classroom within the last month which had the highest outcome. Describe what you did and what structures you used.”
- Questions about the difficulties of applying CL; for example: “Describe a situation where you used CL in the classroom in the last month that showcases the limitations you experienced using CL.”
- Questions about the mastery of teaching; for example: “To what degree do you currently feel you are able to solve educational challenges?”

Data quality in the responses is volatile and polarised. Four out of five logs are carefully completed, providing comprehensive replies. The remaining fifth are more succinct. The logs indicate a bias: the higher the regard for the CL method, the more detail is recorded. However, there are some teachers whose enthusiasm cooled during the course, and who take care to describe the barriers they experience. The log entries become less detailed as the project progressed: data in Log 1 are generally much more comprehensive than in Log 3.

Central to this study is the extent to which teachers are competent at using the CL method. We define ‘competent use’ in terms of whether teachers are able to reflect on their implementation of CL (Jarvis, 1995, 2002). Reflection is a core concept of teacher training. The teacher training studies of the last decade “centre primarily on reflection as an instrument for change and on the various ways in which reflection can be developed” (Avalos, 2010). In other words, to improve teaching competence in the appropriate application of cooperative learning, it is vitally important to advance teachers’ aptitudes for reflection on their use of CL. If teachers are to be categorised according to their ability for reflection, they must be able to:

1. identify situations where CL has helped to increase a learning outcome;
2. describe the learning outcome; and
3. assess the extent to which CL provides different and better learning outcomes than their previous teaching.

In order to measure these criteria, the teacher is asked three related questions in the log:

1. *Describe the situation within the last month where you have used CL in the classroom with the highest outcome. Describe what you did and what structures you used.*

2. *What was - in your opinion - the main outcome of using CL in this specific situation? Describe the professional, educational or social improvement stemming from the use of CL.*
3. *How has using CL provided a significantly better outcome compared to what you want to achieve in your teaching? Describe what you normally achieve when you do not use CL.*

Based on their responses to these questions, teachers are categorised into three reflection levels: high, medium and low. We have defined the levels as follows:

*A high level of reflection* implies that: the teacher justifies the main benefits of CL in relation to **both** (A) the purpose of the present teaching situation, **and** (B) previous similar teaching situations.

*A medium level of reflection* implies that: the teacher justifies the main benefits of CL in relation to **either** (A) the purpose of the concrete teaching situation, **or** to (B) previous similar teaching situations.

*A low level of reflection* implies that: the teacher **does not justify** the significant benefits of CL as compared to (A) the purpose of teaching situation, or to (B) previous similar teaching situations.

The analysis and assessment of teachers' reflection levels are not based on the teacher's written communication abilities, or on the extensiveness of their answers. Rather, these are judged according to whether or not the teachers' descriptions consider *purposes, outcome* and *the relation to previous actions* (Wahlgren, Høytrup, Pedersen, & Rattleff, 2002).

The reliability of our reflection level assessments was measured by two researchers working independently. They each analysed the completed first logs and classified twenty-eight out of the thirty-one at the same level.

## Findings

### Can teachers use the CL method, and do they?

Teachers were asked: "How often do you act differently in your teaching after becoming familiar with the CL?", and "To what extent do you feel that you are currently able to use CL in your teaching?" They responded by selecting a number between 1 and 7, where 7 corresponds with 'almost always' / 'to a large extent', 5 with 'often' / 'to some extent', and 1 with 'virtually never' / 'no'.

Teachers report on	Log 1	Log 2	Log 3
The degree they act differently using CL	4.9	5.0	5.0
How confidently they use CL	4.5	4.6	5.2

Table 1: *Arithmetic average of teachers' reports on the degree to which they act differently in the classroom after the CL training, and how confidently they use CL*

N = 20 teachers who have completed all three logs

Note: 5 indicates that they 'often' act differently, and that they are able to use the method 'fairly competently'

As shown in Table 1 above, the teachers' average with respect to using CL to act differently in their teaching is very close to 5, indicating that they 'often' act differently after learning of CL. This was already the case in the responses in Log 1, and the magnitude of this (average) use does not change during the course of this study. However, the answers are scattered around the mean. In answering Log 3, there are thus more who answer 'almost always', and more who answer 'very rarely' than when answering Log 1.

Teachers started implementing CL two months into the process. The average use does not increase during the academic year. Most teachers use CL to the same extent during the entire course, but some teachers use the approach less, and others more.

By analysing the teachers' descriptions of their use of CL in the logs (questions 1 - 3), we can refine the picture of teachers' use of CL.

In Log 1, twenty-six of the thirty-one teachers describe using CL in their classes, and note that they have benefited from doing so. In Log 2, twenty-four of the twenty-seven recount rewarding experiences in using CL. In the third log, sixteen of the twenty-two completed logs detailed beneficial experiences with CL. The proportion of teachers indicating that they benefit from using CL declines during the course. There are relatively fewer teaching at lower-secondary level compared to those at upper-secondary level who report positive experiences by the end of the project.

The vast majority of teachers (more than three-quarters) describe teaching situations where they have benefited from applying the different CL structures. Nearly half of the known CL structures (twenty-one out of forty-six) are mentioned. Some teachers mention just one structure, while others note several.

The number of structures employed is not in itself a yardstick of the teachers' competence development. However, it does indicate the breadth of application of CL, and which structures were found the most useful.

It is also apparent from Table 1 that, as the study proceeded, teachers indicated that, on average, they became better able to employ CL in their teaching. The average rises from using the method 'reasonably well' to 'fairly competently'. However, this mathematical average conceals large variations for the 20 teachers concerned: by the end of the project, half of the teachers described themselves as 'competent' users, while two teachers indicated that they could only use the method to 'a lesser extent'.

Teachers used the CL method significantly at the beginning of the study. The average overall application rate did not increase during the academic year, although there is a small polarisation in the pattern of usage levels: while most teachers did not change their habits, four teachers used the method more often, and three less, than at the start of the study. Teachers indicated that they were better able to use CL, yet this did not result in it being used on a wider scale. The assumption of a steady increment in use as the teachers' competence developed has not been upheld.

### Do teachers perceive an increase in their competence levels?

The competence log contains three questions about teachers' experience of their own teaching at each stage. The questions are meant to clarify how teachers' general perceptions of their own mastery of teaching develop from learning and using CL.

The teachers were asked to indicate whether they were able to solve educational challenges in their teaching, the degree to which they experienced satisfaction with their teaching, and whether they were able to solve problems stemming from heterogeneity of the student group. They answered by selecting a number between 1 and 7, where 7 means 'to a large extent', and 1 corresponds with 'hardly'. The average responses are shown in Table 2.

Teachers report on	Log 1	Log 2	Log 3
Ability to solve educational challenges	5.2	5.0	5.5
Satisfaction with own teaching	5.4	5.2	5.7
Solve problems related to the heterogenous student group	4.2	4.4	4.8

Table 2: Arithmetic average of the teachers' reports on experience of their own teaching

N = 20 teachers who have completed all three logs

Note: 5 indicates 'fairly well'

The figures reflect a positive development in the teaching staff's perceptions of their pedagogical competences. However, this is coloured by the fact that their belief in being able to solve educational challenges, and their satisfaction with their own teaching, dip midway through the project, before rising to the highest level by the end.

The most striking trend is the teachers' perceptions of a continuous improvement in their ability to solve problems stemming from the heterogeneous conditions of the student group. This is noteworthy precisely because one of the main barriers to using CL is the heterogeneous composition of the student groups in adult education (see 'Teachers' experiences with CL').

## Teachers' Reflection

Improving teachers' reflection skills is part of developing pedagogical competence. The quality of reflection is judged in terms of the justifications teachers gave for their lesson plans. Based on our assessment of these justifications, we categorised reflection skills as 'high', 'medium', or 'low'.

Analysis of the first log shows that just over half of the teachers (seventeen out of thirty-one) demonstrated a *high level of reflection* regarding the use of CL in their teaching. Just under a third (nine) of the teachers displayed a *medium level of reflection*, while five were categorised as *low* or had failed to describe their choices and considerations.

Further analysis reveals a marked difference in reflection according to teaching level. Out of the seventeen 'high level reflectors', just three teach a primary level syllabus. Among the nine teachers classified as 'medium level', again, three were teaching at a primary level. Conversely, the majority (three out of five) who failed to describe their choices adequately were also primary level teachers. These teachers stand out from the start as being weaker than the upper-secondary syllabus teachers in the frequency of their use of CL, and especially in their reasons for using the method. The same picture emerges in the analysis of the second and the third logs.

Table 3 illustrates the aptitude for reflection of those 20 teachers who completed all three logs.

Teachers on that level of reflection	Log 1	Log 2	Log 3
High level	12	12	11
Medium level	5	5	6
Low level or no answer	3	3	3

Table 3: *Number of teachers divided after ability to reflect on their use of CL*  
N = 20 teachers who have completed all three logs

It appears from Table 3 that the proportions at each level of reflection are more or less constant. This average conceals very few gross changes. There are a total of just four teachers who move from one level to another during the project.

The teachers had no knowledge of the CL method prior to the process. After the first coaching session, the majority of teachers were able to apply the method competently, and reflect on their reasons for using CL structures in class. There was no increase in the level of reflection after subsequent coaching sessions, pointing to an absence of a causal link between the two.

### Teachers' experiences with CL

Teachers' experiences of using CL were identified in focus group interviews and the logs.

Teachers generally experienced a higher level of activity among students when using CL than with other teaching methods. Similarly, they found that the students' communication skills improved, and that social cohesion (in some classes) was strengthened. The method introduces variety to the teaching situations. Most teachers found using CL inspiring. However, the percentage of teachers who reported positive experiences from using CL did not increase over the course of the project.

Teachers also identified a number of barriers. The most significant were high levels of absenteeism and high dropout rates among students. These ruled out using the CL structures that require teamwork. Other notable barriers were the students' different academic qualifications, and the varying levels of preparation made by students before class. These differences in student makeup and attitudes to learning tend to reduce the quality of academic discussions and the resulting learning outcomes.

Some teachers felt the CL method to be too resource-heavy, and that the length of time the method requires to cover each subject outweighs its academic benefits.

Although teachers experienced the positives of using CL, they also encountered difficulties in applying the method. During the programme, most of the

teachers did find ways to solve these difficulties. This process is reflected in Table 2 above, where the relatively high initial level of application falls and then rebounds at the end to a higher level.

Teachers were generally very satisfied with the competence development training. They identified the coaching sessions as the most rewarding component of the project.

## Discussion

The goal of the study was that a group of teachers should develop competences in order to apply a new pedagogical approach, CL, in a skilled manner. Competence development comprised knowledge of the method, motivation to apply it, and reflection on its possibilities and limitations. It was designed in order to inspire teachers with new, effective pedagogical methods that would transform their teaching style.

Based on the findings of previous studies and practical experience, it was assumed that an introductory course would be insufficient to ensure comprehensive competences. Research on the transfer process shows that follow-up activities are essential for implementing CL. The total competence development process therefore included theoretical knowledge about the method, practical training in its use, and ongoing and extensive coaching related to the teachers' experiences of implementing CL.

It was assumed that the competence development process would result in a higher usage of CL as well as an increasingly professional application of the methodology over the year. Therefore, the purpose of the competence development training was to get teachers to apply the method more frequently, to develop their skills in using the method, and to enable them to reflect on their use of the method at a continuously increasing level.

The results from the study, as indicated by the teachers' completed logs and supplemented by the data from the focus group interviews, show a different picture.

Two months into the project, the teachers were using CL on a large scale. The average level of their use did not increase during the academic year. Some teachers used the approach more than others, and others less, but most of them applied the method at roughly the same extent during the year.

By two months into the course, teachers already perceived themselves as being able to apply the method. They also reported that their skills were developed further during the course. They found that they were better able to use CL, that they became better at solving educational challenges, that they became more

satisfied with their own teaching, and that they were better able to solve the problems deriving from the heterogeneous composition of the student group. The data document measurable but limited developments in teacher competence, in contrast to teachers' perceptions.

The emotional aspect of skills development, measured in terms of teachers' reported experiences of being able to solve the educational challenges, and of their satisfaction levels with their own teaching, dips during the course, before recovering to finish at a level higher than that at the start. This paradigm suggests that once the initial excitement and enthusiasm have died down, problems and constraints inherent in the new method become evident, experienced as stressors. The reason for the higher positive emotional reading at the project's end may be explained in terms of the journey the participants have taken: they managed to work through the difficulties, and found a satisfactory means of applying the method that enhances their teaching.

It is important to note how the data reveal that an increase in competence development does not in itself lead inevitably to a more comprehensive application of the method - in direct contrast to our original assumption. Instead, the direct factors are firstly, whether or not teachers can identify any benefits of implementing the method, and secondly, the teaching culture that they work in.

Our analysis of the teachers' reflection skills reveals that, as early as two months into the project, a high level of reflection was taking place. Reflection level is scored by studying teachers' justifications for using the method, both in terms of the teaching objectives, and of previous teaching experiences. More than half of the teachers are categorised as 'high level'; this proportion of the study group did not rise during the academic year; nor was there any documented increase in reflection levels of the group as a whole.

Contrary to our initial assumptions, there is no gradual and continuous rise in the teachers' competence. The increase in teaching competence is located relatively early in the academic year; after that there is only modest improvement.

As noted earlier, teachers report that they become better at using CL - in practice. However, their ability to justify their decisions about when to employ the method in their classrooms does *not* increase correspondingly - even though it is high. In other words, the teachers' general pedagogical knowhow, combined with the theoretical introduction and the introductory course exercises, are sufficient strategies for ensuring high levels of reflection. The continuous coaching and the actual use of CL are not causal factors.

Teachers' experiences with CL in this study correspond to similar development projects: namely, there are a number of positive results, tempered by a corresponding number of barriers impeding its application; and there are a number



of conditions to be met for its implementation to function optimally. The experiences of ten teachers implementing CL in five schools in Brisbane, Australia are summarised here:

*Data from the interviews indicated that while the teachers had positive experiences with CL, a number encountered difficulties with implementing it in their classrooms. Issues identified included students socialising during group activities and not working, managing time effectively, and the preparation required (Gillies, 2010).*

There are some methodological limitations in the analysis of teachers' level of reflection. One is that the definition of reflection as 'the ability to justify the method of choice', while reliable, is rather a rough measure, which does not allow for more precise or specific differences in reflection. In future studies, other factors, such as the teachers' ability to identify limitations of the method, or to identify possibilities for furthering the method's development or modification, should be considered for inclusion in the definition. The second limitation is the incipient reporting fatigue that sets in over the length of the study: the responses in Log 3 are generally far less extensive than those in Log 1. This reporting fatigue does not constitute a decrease in the overall level of reflection, but it may safely be assumed that it does go some way towards explaining the fact that reflection levels do not rise.

## **Conclusion**

A competence development training course, comprising a theoretical introduction, practical exercises and subsequent ongoing coaching, provides a sound pedagogical basis for applying the cooperative learning method and developing teachers' competences while teaching is underway. The subjects of this study were all experienced in adult education.

The development of pedagogical competence does not lead to an increased use of the method. The decision to employ the method (or not) depends on whether teachers perceive any benefits from using it. Some of the teaching group experienced a number of barriers to use, and so their ability to employ it was curtailed. If these teachers were to use the method more extensively, it would require that these barriers were analysed and - if possible - removed.

Teachers' experiences of being able to use the method, and of an increasing level of satisfaction with their teaching, do not in themselves lead to a more comprehensive application of the method. Nor do they result in an increase in the average level of reflection. If the intention is for skills development to strengthen

teachers' aptitudes as reflective practitioners, then the coaching must deal with theoretical reflection, and/or the skills development must be complemented with a theoretical component.

From a practical educational perspective, there are a number of important results to note. The teaching staff were very pleased with the competence development training, and they appreciated the opportunity to learn and implement a new teaching method, cooperative learning. Valuable information about the benefits and drawbacks of using CL was captured. Last but not least, the teachers reported greater mastery at overcoming the barriers presented by teaching a heterogeneous student group.

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## Notes

- 1 English summary available
- 2 Kagan, S., & Stenlev, J. (2006). *Undervisning med samarbejdsstrukturer. Cooperative Learning (Teaching with cooperative structures)*
- 3 A university college awards bachelor degrees only, unlike a university, which also awards masters and doctorates.

## Danish summary

### **Voksenunderviseres kompetenceudvikling**

#### *– Erfaringer fra et uddannelsesforløb om cooperative learning*

Baggrunden for projektet var, at en gruppe voksenundervisningslærere skulle kompetenceudvikles, så de blev i stand til at anvende en ny pædagogisk metode, cooperative learning (CL), på et kvalificeret og reflekteret niveau. Kompetenceudviklingen omfattede teoretisk indsigt i metoden, praktisk træning i at anvende den og en kontinuerlig coaching i løbet af undervisningsåret.

Det var antagelsen, at lærernes kompetenceudvikling samtidig ville føre til en stigende anvendelse af CL. Det var ligeledes antagelsen, at lærerne blev bedre til at anvende metoden og mere reflekterede over deres brug af metoden. Datamaterialet, som baserer sig på lærernes udfyldelse af kompetencelogs og fokusgruppeinterviews, viser et andet billede.

To måneder inde i undervisningsåret anvendte lærerne CL i betydeligt omfang i deres undervisning. Den gennemsnitlige anvendelse af metoden steg ikke i løbet af undervisningsåret. To måneder inde i forløbet rapporterede lærerne, at de var i stand til at anvende metoden. De rapporterede i den sidste log ved undervisningsårets afslutning, at de var blevet bedre til at anvende metoden. De var blevet bedre til at løse de pædagogiske udfordringer, de var mere tilfredse med deres undervisning, og de var bedre til at løse de problemer, der opstod på grund af heterogene kursistforudsætninger. Datamaterialet dokumenterer imidlertid kun en beskedent forbedring af kompetencen efter de første to måneder.

Lærernes evne til at reflektere over deres anvendelse af CL var til stede hos flertallet af lærerne allerede efter to måneder. I modsætning til den oprindelige antagelse, kunne vi ikke dokumentere en yderligere stigning i refleksionsniveauet i løbet af undervisningsåret.



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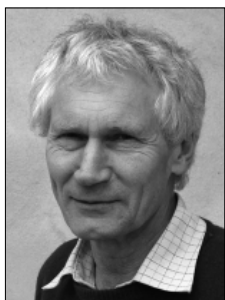
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