

AT – Christine Brunner, teacher
Report on teaching visit – Skårup, Denmark – 21.09.-04.10.2008

Introduction

My journey starts with a visit at *Skårup Seminarium*. Skårup College of Education is the oldest institution for teacher training in Denmark. It was founded in 1803 by the local vicar. It is a University College that prepares future teachers in all disciplines. I observe courses in Chemistry, German and, of course, Maths.

Colleges of Education are the only institutions authorised to educate teachers for the Danish *Folkeskole*, a municipal school combining primary and lower secondary education and running on a comprehensive basis for children between the ages of 7 and 17.

The education takes four years. Each study year is divided into two terms with an annual workload of 1,680 hours. The education consists of seminars, lectures, study weeks, teaching practice periods and project periods including tutorials. (taken from http://www.ucl.dk/content/dk/servicemenu/international/skarup_college_of_education)

The second institution I am invited to is *Vejstrup Ungdomskole* (V.U.S). V.U.S. is a private Boarding School with a focus on sports. I spend two full days there, following several lessons in English, Danish, Maths and Sports. The Danish team sent me the e-mail address of the teacher I was going to visit. I asked him about equipment in the classroom, details about students' knowledge on fractions and other specific circumstances. I felt very welcome with all my questions and I was told to feel free about realizing my lesson plans.

205 students attend V.U.S. in the school year 2008/2009, Vejstrup is located about 7 kilometers north of Svendborg. The best way to reach the school is probably by car, because it is quite far away from Svendborg.

Students at V.U.S. start at the age of 15 and can only stay there for two years maximum. The school can be seen as an orientation level, where the students can come to a decision where they'd like to pursue their school career. Most of the students are Danish natives.

Nearly every V.U.S. student owns a notebook, which is used very often. All classrooms are equipped with wireless LAN, some with a *Smartboard*, an interactive touch-sensitive "blackboard,,.

According to my observation Danish students are much more used to work for themselves than Austrian students. They are allowed to leave the classroom in small groups in order to deal with a mathematical problem together. I'd say the academic level is quite similar to Austrian students in the same age group (at least in the classes I followed a lesson) The relation between teachers and pupils is more relaxed, I had the impression that a teacher is much more a *coach*, but I didn't notice any loss of respect in any situation. (Which probably also depends on the class.)

The lessons are very student-oriented. The students work in groups on their projects. There's also a Math course in English. The teacher tells me that it is important that only interested students can take a Math class in English. Otherwise it would be too frustrating to study a subject they have already difficulties in.

Today he does some statistics with Open Office. Students who already have good skills in Open Office and Excel are invited to go to an empty class to continue their work on their own. Those who still have problems stay with the teacher. The students also try to ask their questions in English. I notice that they have, on average, very good English skills.

I also notice the very friendly atmosphere at V.U.S. The teachers and the principal seem very open-minded. Students call both teachers and principal by their first name, which is common in Denmark. I do not notice disrespect, however. A teacher tells me that it is also very common that students are supposed to work in small groups outside the classroom without teacher supervision. (This is very unusual for Austrian schools, because teachers are afraid that this may mean mischief.)

At V.U.S. each teacher is especially responsible for eight students. He/She is a *Buddy* teacher for them. Once a week there is a meeting where the small group of students can speak out on their ideas, problems and programs for events. This week *open house* has to be prepared.

There is a school restaurant at V.U.S. which is also open to the teaching staff. (Teachers' meals are taken into account in their wages.) The restaurant-philosophy is healthy eating. Delicious fish, vegetables and salad is on the menu every day.

On my fourth day in Denmark I take a day off for a trip to Odense, Hans-Christian Andersen's birthplace.

I spend the weekend in Copenhagen.

Skårup Skole, where I am going to teach by myself, is a public comprehensive school (Folkeskole) for 6 to 16-year-old students. This year 338 students attend Skårup Skole. Since Skårup Seminarium is just a few minutes away, lots of student teachers do their internships at Skårup Skole.

Most students and children are from middleclass families. Almost all parents are employed as it is very unusual to be a full-time housewife in Denmark.

I observe a Music lesson in the 0th grade (6-year-old children) and two Math lessons.

Teaching Mathematics in English

I teach four Math lessons in English in a 7th grade (13-year-old students) on the topic of *Equivalence of Fractions*.

In the very beginning I have severe doubts not to reach the kids because they are not used to follow a Math lesson in English and also doubts of not being able to speak Mathematics in a foreign language. Fortunately it works out satisfactorily.

I introduce myself and try to involve them in conversation and asking questions. I think this is a good idea to find out about their English skills and this gives me an impression whether they will be able to understand what I am talking about.

In my very first lesson students were very quiet and curious about their temporarily new maths teacher. They seemed very concentrated on understanding what I was talking about. Some of the students (particularly boys) tried to answer my questions in English or even asked me something in English. I'm very happy to say that some students try to express their mathematical thoughts in English. Unfortunately most of the girls don't participate in conversations. They just write down and seem to be a bit overwhelmed. In the second lesson Nikolas, the teacher who normally teaches the

class in Maths, points out to me that I explain things too fast. So I encourage the students to tell me instantaneously if they can't follow me.

After some time the students lose their shyness and participate lively in what's happening in the classroom. From time to time they whisper some words in Danish, but Nikolas doesn't interfere too often. Students had to focus on both language and content, which seemed more or less difficult. As a whole I think students understood what I was talking about but sometimes the Danish teacher translated some new words from English into Danish.