



SOLIDARIC LEARNING RELATIONS EDUCATION AS PSYCHO-SOCIAL REHABILITATION

By

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Maribo County's 'Asylum for Labor, Forced labor and Insanities' 1866
Now The Social Interprice Saxenhøj - Archivephoto [JB]

Solidaric Learning Relations

Education as psycho-social rehabilitation

Abstract

A new and different educational regime supports Saxenhøjs educational programme, focusing on solidaric learning relations and education in a perspective of psycho-social rehabilitation. *User-led education* – as an option for people with severe and complex impairments, including severe learning difficulties – is an ongoing project at the Social Enterprise Saxenhøj. It has been developed in cooperation with the Resource Centre for Special Needs Education ViSP, since 2005.

The foundation of this presentation is an analysis of 200 individual education programmes which have been carried out in our own workshops and in joint ventures with external enterprises. The number of participants at any given time is about 30 people.

The dominant forms of practice at Saxenhøj at the beginning of the project was social psychiatry and social pedagogy. These forms are supporting factors in vital areas of life. But they are also characterized by the absence of theories of learning and lack certain traditions of education. We have included contributions from the discourse of special pedagogy, thereby establishing a third uniting factor in the relations of learning.

The purpose here is to focus on these relations of learning, that is to say, on the content of the relations between counsellor and user. The goal of this focus is to develop processes of learning and achieve education based on user terms.

The headlines of this presentation:

1. An understanding of learning that removes the focus from simple solutions of problems, or one-dimensional trouble-shooting, to a reflexive learning model.
2. Cooperation and interdependency as social foundations for the process of learning – and thereby a critique of the understanding of autonomy endorsed by liberalism.
3. Developing a common goal – interaction, dialogue and communication.
4. "When Care went to work" – common but asymmetrical relations.
5. Learning is supported by expanded learning activity and scaffolding
6. The contributions and problems of the pedagogic profession, and the joint contributions of the users to relations of learning and education.



1. The approach

Certain activist features in the history of the Social Model and the tradition of critical pedagogy share a concrete utopia. Most importantly: a perspective of cooperation, the fight for the right to make choices and to avoid isolation¹

As significant categories of *Bildung* (formation), these differ in crucial ways from the pedagogy of the dominant educational systems. In these we encounter, still more intensified, the opposite: cooperation as a basic learning principle is being replaced by the idea of personal responsibility for learning and a liberalistic understanding of autonomy. In this framework, the systematic demands of learning institutions are more important than the development of independence. Seen together, these aspects correspond to an educational logic of alone-ness, which in turn leads to self-controlled isolation.

Educational thinking focuses on decoding and deliverance of special competencies, and it is linked to the labour market. The latter continues to take place, without any concern for the real psychology of labour, and therefore it stands out as an almost perverted concept.

People are being graded, sorted out and separated, and mechanisms of exclusion are growing stronger²

In the following we focus on the relations of learning and an understanding of education that stands by its heritage from the tradition of critical pedagogy.

The concept of "relation" is being used widely and uncritically: as an equal and positive social form with a dominance of superficiality. We aim at here to extract elements that support learning relations and contribute to a user-led understanding of education. Relations do not come from out of the blue. Both the professionals and the users bring something significant to these relations. What the users bring is mostly ignored. The professionals, on the other hand, do not take into account that their own professional contributions could be excluding. Our aim is building a learning programme for citizens with severe learning difficulties and other important limitations. This includes working within a practically non-existing tradition of education.

2. The development of competencies and educational programme

The project had two parts. The first part: qualification of the staff with regards to theories and methods of learning – was carried out as a two-year educational programme from 2003 to 2005, supported by the European Social Fund. We called this part a counsellor (or supervisor) education programme. We focused on developing training programmes through workshop practices. We called these training programmes vocational (or functional) education programmes.³

The counsellor education programme was based on social psychiatric and social pedagogic methodology. The second part of the project is an education programme for the users (the functional or vocational educations).

These education programmes are now an established part of the individually planned and partly user-led courses. They raise demands to the users and their counsellors with regards to changing social psychiatric practice towards psycho-social rehabilitation. This requires a particular elucidation concerning curricular thinking and continuing work with the relations of learning.⁴

So far we have completed 150 individual education programmes. The current activities correspond to about 30 individual programmes a year. Further development of the programme has been planned for the years to come.

About the framework of the project:

3. The Social Enterprise Saxenhøj – a brief presentation

Saxenhøj is a housing and support facility, and a social enterprise comprising the workshops where the programmes take place. The workshops reflect the history of the place but they have been through renovation. Saxenhøj programmes comprise organic production, farming and gardening, different crafts, graphic production, assembling and packing, transportation, service and working in our own shops. On a daily basis approximately 300 people go about Saxenhøj.

The facility was constructed in 1866 as an "Asylum for Labour, Forced Labour and Retards", allegedly to get rid of the human waste from the big manors of the region where the rural proletariat worked.

Farming demanded a lot of hands. Farm workers were imported from other parts of Denmark, Sweden and Poland. But "drunks, idle and obstinate persons" were to be disposed of, which is part of the reason to build the asylum on an island in southern Denmark.⁵

Some of the old buildings are still being used, but of course the efforts are now different. The big central institutions were abandoned in the 1970s which did not occur at Saxenhøj. But the facility was separated into different functions, and the purpose of the place was redefined.

4. The participants in the education programmes

The participants are very different people but they share serious complex problems, including severe learning difficulties. Among the causes are psychiatric conditions and brain damages, often combined with social problems. With the risk of generalising, it can be said that many participants have developed a sceptical attitude towards learning and education. Many have suffered defeats. The traces of this problem somewhat loses significance though, as the education programmes carry on and they experience success.



5. Closing in

Social psychiatric practice and social pedagogical methods stand out in a number of ways. They are, for instance, characterized by the absence of a learning theory and a tradition of education. It was, nevertheless, from these fields we inherited forms of practice and understandings of relations between user and counsellor at the outset of the project.

This was the accessible knowledge at the time. That meant, despite good wills, a lack of focus on "the third common", that is to say the field where relations are to be established. That's why there is a lack of balance in the relations. The respect for the user was there, of course, but one may have missed the fact that the user - in the framework of relations in social psychiatry and social pedagogy - is both the subject and the object.

Within educational thinking an alternative is offered. It is of course dependent on one's perspective of *Bildung* (formation), out of which grows a certain understanding of education.

Our understanding of learning: if we see learning as a socially embedded concept, an increased number of significant common goals become clear. The communication gains a direction and a purpose, and ways of solving problems and reflexivity point in the same direction despite important background differences between the users and the counsellors.

In the "old" understanding of relations, stability and piece of mind were factors to secure a "good" social gathering. A state where, perhaps a bit exaggerated, the object and the self were hard to distinguish from each other. However, the very separation of self and object becomes the key to learning progression.

The possibility of the self to relate to this separation is of critical importance to the development of a conscious attainment of learning. Mere problem solving is not the answer either. In reflexive learning, an expanded liberty of action is created. If we insist that learning is a social process, this will be mirrored in our understanding of relations.**6**

That is, we can see a corresponding development between the social level and the process of learning.

We can express it like this:

<i>Being</i> →	I - object	→ random common
<i>Problem solving</i> →	I / object	→ common goal
<i>Reflexivity</i> →	I / I - object	→ necessary cooperation

In other words: The development of the learning process that follows from this captures the transformation from knowledge in itself to knowledge for us.**7**

As a matter of fact, the first bit is actually kind of excluding since the ideal representation, which belongs to the community, according to Hegel, is being separated.**8**

6. Cooperation

Through the relations that support the learning process, we develop the social dimensions. From some external and relatively random common sense, which also is about ordinary social manners and conventions, to the designation of a common goal. This entails a common understanding of equality in the relation, but not sameness. The counsellor and the user have to define common goals and approach these goals – but from different directions and different contexts. This kind of cooperation tends to stress human interdependency rather than autonomy.

The necessary cooperation becomes visible, and it does not at all represent any sort of contradiction of independence but rather a precondition.**9**

Increasing levels of hyper-individualisation of the educational systems leave many learners far away from joint efforts. This is damaging in many situations. In the tradition of working with projects and not least to the significant common building of experience for the learners.**10.**

It leads to isolation and it deprives the learners of the possibility to demonstrate choice in their own work and to exercise influence on shape and content.

The pragmatic tradition in pedagogy, the progressive pedagogy of the 1920s and the 1930s, and the influence of marxist pedagogy of the 1970s were sources of inspiration that seem to have been abandoned today, which is damaging to most people and most certainly to the weakest parts of the population.¹¹

7. Dialogue and communication

The joint efforts of the many towards a common goal ¹² is a sentence that comes from Marx. A joint effort that implies both communication and dialogue. To include this sentence in the cooperative learning process is an obvious move. The same goes for dialogue and communication. Following Spinoza, the foundation of dialogue is reciprocity and interdependency; there has to be a common goal, and emotion, empathy and friendship supports dialogue.

The simplest statement always involves two person, following Bakhtin ¹³, so that the statement does not exist outside the social relationship; yet another argument for conceiving learning processes as social processes. Developing theories on communication, the Russian psychologist Lisina defines communication as follows: *an interaction between persons, the exchange of information aiming to coordinate and connect in order to establish relations and reach a common goal.*¹⁴

We subscribe to this understanding since it clarifies the communicative intent and help us to frame our understanding of relations.

8. When Care went to work

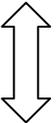
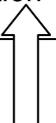
The relations of learning reflect human care in many ways. The care dimension is crucial in relational work processes of this kind. It has specific characteristics – since I don't see this care as a variation of the sort of care we find in a family, between a mother and her child, including its altruistic aspects.

Even though this sort of care has its own historical development – developing a stronger bond – care is derived from the common efforts and common relations. It carries its own purpose but also it helps to build relations (counsellor-user), stabilize identity, and not least, facilitates a certain gaze on the "other". Care in this understanding is professional but that does not entail that it means less or that it is more "cold" than care within a family. These relations illustrate my point of view on care: we are interested in you, we "want" you, you are part of the cooperation. You are an equal part of the goals of this community.

And the dialogue is important with its assumptions of friendship and empathy, and of equality, respect and understanding as part of communication. Care should of course not turn into abuse or domination. If solidaric learning relations are to be established, the approach has to be a certain understanding of the other. You can express that by saying that the weakest part always is right.¹⁵

The theories reflecting care for one self did not capture any relational understanding. They practically entailed leaving the individual to himself in a kind of upbringing project. This kind of understanding probably matches the current day and age, but it has given up on the premises of solidarity. The asymmetrical aspects of learning relations does not lead to leaving "the other" to himself. On the other hand, we should be aware of the risk of paternalism.

Cooperation, dialogue, and communication are central elements of the learning relation. The following illustration demonstrates this

<p>User <i>The other</i></p> 	<p>Contribution of the person's own experiences and knowledge Common knowledge The right to weakness Co-creator of one's own education</p>
<p>Learning activity</p>  <p>Cooperation Dialogue Communication</p>	<p>Expanded learning activity – scaffolding Choice of actions and image of self Creating and developing identity Meaning and significance</p>
<p>Counsellor</p> 	<p>Idea → process → result (choice) Professional specialized knowledge Care related to and derived from the profession</p>

9. Education → job

Our view of education does not correspond with traditional thinking. Starting out I pointed to the fact that educational programmes are not necessarily inclusive. Rather, the task is to sort out people. Of course, there are reasons for this, even though it does not seem very clear on which grounds and by which means society aims to standardize education.

We avoid exclusion by always meeting the concrete wishes for education, by developing the content with the users, thereby departing from any official approval of the acquired knowledge and competencies by society. On the other hand, we describe them very thoroughly so that we can always account for the programme, and so that we can apply for a job on a well known basis.

The relation between the concept of *Bildung* (formation) → ← and education, and personal development seems somewhat neglected these days. But it is exactly this relation that we work with.

We work with the people that have been excluded and sorted out elsewhere. There are many mechanisms of exclusion in today's society.

We stress that the jobs being created for the users, both internally and externally, are to be meaningful both to themselves and to others. This way, our view of education corresponds with the creation of identity through the job.

10. The contribution of the professions and the users

Special pedagogy as a profession is changing. The external demands to the professionals move away from the relation between the counsellor (teacher) and the user, to a relation between the professional and the authorities. This mechanism removes focus from the most important field.

The result of these mechanisms of control is a somewhat troubling removal of authority from the profession. **16**

The contribution from the profession has traditionally been knowledge about learning and compensation for learning difficulties. **17** The profession also contributes with knowledge on theory and methods. The regulations that inspire us have to be connected to our views on *Bildung* and education. These are connected to a tradition of the theory of organisations, "new apprenticeship" and elements of situated learning. **18**

Also there is a specialized methodology of special pedagogy which also supports counselling. But exclusion is being brought on by the professions as well. That is clearly to be seen in the growth of diagnostic systems and their application. An impressive growth of new diagnoses and exaggerated estimations of their importance as a guideline for practice.

Apart from that, we have an exaggerated optimistic view from the new "neuro-regime" that does not improve the practice of special pedagogy, but rather leads to odd selection processes. Despite the significance of mono-professionalism our view of solidaric learning is hardly deemed valid. The contribution of the profession is contradictory, despite the good will. **19** Counsellors and users are, as a general principle, equal, when regarding the content of relations that we have developed.

The user organisations have pointed to specific lines of knowledge that needs to be included in the joint efforts. Knowledge, that exists outside the world of the users. Examples are the model of recovery, the fight for rights, pointing out discrimination and the challenges of the social model.

Our quest is to develop an education of which the user is in the centre; where he or she learns to frame the programme and what it should comprise, learns to contribute in an active way in evaluations, and to be a reflexive part of their own programme. We try to offer an epistemological course with a clear connection between *Bildung* (formation) and education.



11. Exit

Worrying about ever increasing removal of authority from the profession influences the profession itself, it has consequences for the learning relations that I have focused on here, and so it finally influences the user. These tendencies seem to be enforced by what have been called "the good-enough-wave", describing patterns of consumption. In this wave, the aesthetic dimension is deemed less important, and only flexibility, price and function seem to be valid factors.

The tendency in pedagogical practice is the same. Removal of authority by control and the displacement of the relations aim to challenge the professional autonomy and quality. It seems that "the good-enough-wave" has a twin in our field: the concept that works should be bought; it should be cheap, and it should be possible in an easy way to replace it by an even cheaper concept.

Thereby best practice is not so much a question of quality as a question of price. Assessments of best practice are being made by people who lack an understanding of the crucial connections between ethics (content) and aesthetics (form). The aesthetic perspective has been abandoned and ethics get a price tag. The ones who suffer from this are the same people as always.

NOTES

- 1 Den *konkrete utopi* refererer til Ernst Blochs begreb i *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*. *Kooperation* er et marxistisk begreb udviklet i pædagogik som 'kategorisk imperativ' af den østrigske pædagog O.F.Kanitz i 1920-erne. Se Bertelsen 2001. Udfoldelsen af begreberne *isolation og råderet* særligt i ty. Specialpædagogik. Se Jantzen 1990-91
- 2 Om arbejdets psykologi; se den danske psykolog Niels Engelsted 1984;1990. Arbejde som særligvirksomhedsteoretisk kategori karakteriseret ved afhængelse → almengørelse (dvs. vægtning af det uegennyttige og dermed betydning for andre) som arbejdets kerne. Lønarbejde, meningsfuldhed til trods, som fremtrædelsesform.
- 3 Kompetenceudvikling/ efteruddannelse af medarbejderne ved Den Sociale Virksomhed Saxenhøj 2003-02005 EU's Socialfond og Storstrøms Amt medvirkede i samarbejde med Videnscenter for Specialpædagogik, ViSP. Se saxenhøj.dk og visp.dk – vidensenhed
- 4 John Bertelsen *På vej mod et bruger-ledet uddannelsesprogram*. Konference om socialpolitik og handicap. Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Velfærd, SFI 2009
- 5 Arbejds-, Tvangsarbejds- og Idiotanstalten blev bygget på øen Lolland i 1866 af Maribo Amt. Tvangsarbejdet (inddømt) var særligt rettet mod de *genstridige og uværdige*. De værdige var således alene de *uhelbredelige idioter*. Se den danske handicaphistoriske forsker Birgit Kirkebæk samt Bertelsen 2010. *Gid vi aldrig se ham mer* handicaphistorisk Tidsskrift nr. 24/2010
- 6 En sproglig/meningsforstyrende fejl i eng. udgaver af L.S. Vygotskij indfanger ikke forståelsen af *læring som social virksomhed*. Her tales om at læringen først i anden række bliver social. Det mente Vygotskij ikke. Se også Schurig, Enerstved, Tolman 1988
- 7 Fra G.W.F. Hegel *Åndens Fænomenologi* 1807. da 2005, p.63
- 8 Ibid.p.58
- 9 Desværre tilbyder en del moderne socialpædagogik en slags social disciplinering som en ydre foranstaltning – uden at iagttage kooperationens nødvendighed. Man vedgår så at sige ikke arv og gæld i forhold til socialpædagogikkens historiske tilblivelse og oprindelige indhold.
- 10 Med begreberne om sociologisk fantasi og eksemplarisk indlæring fra 1970-erne leverede Oskar Negt oa inspiration til udviklingen af samarbejdsformer: gruppearbejder og projektarbejder indenfor en række uddannelsesniveauer. Standardisering og internationalisering har udhulet den pædagogiske strømning

- 11 Der går en slags linje fra Marx → Dewey → Vygotskij → Bruner → Negt m.fl. – men der er også markante forskelle
I Danmark er det særligt uddannelsesforskeren Knud Illeris der har præget den udvikling.
- 12 Marx'es bestemmelse; se også Lisina 1989
- 12 Michael Holquest *Cronotope's central role in dialogue*.
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- 14 Maja Lisina *Kommunikation og psykisk udvikling fra fødslen til skolealderen*
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- 15 Birgit Kirkebæk, Bente Dunker Bertelsen og John Bertelsen *Da omsorgen gik på arbejde* 1991
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- 17 Dansk lovgivning om kompenserende voksenspecialundervisning
- 18 Klaus Nielsen m.fl. *Praktikkens læringslandskab* 2003 ; se desuden Illeris 2007
- 19 Bjarne Bjelke Jensen *Dansen om definitionerne*
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