

The Open School program: Exploring the educational qualities and challenges

Resumé

This AUFF Starting Grant for assistant professors application concerns research assistance and equipment for a research project on Åben Skole ('Open School') in Næstved and Copenhagen. Open School is a part of the new school reform in Denmark in 2014 making schools subject to organize partnerships with local youth clubs, music-school, arts- and culture institutions, sports associations and businesses (external agents) to enhance theory and practice cohesion, to strengthen local cohesiveness and to inspire to creativity. Partnerships of this sort are well-known, but since the reform has made it mandatory to base the teaching on the subject specific learning objectives an underlying paradox has been deepened: School originally means 'freedom from work', but in the Open School program work and production (in a broad definition of the terms) are invited to be a part of the school.

Research questions

So how is this paradox dealt with educationally in the open school program and partnerships? How is the didactics of open school to be understood? What are the qualities and prospects for Open School as a part of the Danish school reform and in the western countries (Scandinavia, Germany, England, USA and Canada) where similar programs are being implemented?

This research project is important now because the school reform is still new and the open school partnerships are at the rim of being established which means that researchers can observe if or how practices of the pre-reform practices clash or combine with early reform practices.

This situation calls for a cultural analysis (Haastrup & Knudsen 2016) of how open school is thought, planned and practiced, and how are the student's outcome identified. It also invites for arts-based research (Leavy 2009, Knudsen 2016b) analysis on how to understand the educational intentions and practices of these partnerships in order to clarify the educational qualities of the open school program.

Background for the research project

From 2014 I have conducted a research project on Open School. I have written two articles for international peer reviewed journals, made two conference presentation at NERA, Helsinki 2016, and in November 2016 I am publishing a special issue of *Unge Pædagoger* that I have edited and am contributing to. In January 2016 I organized a research unit ('Forskningsenhed for Åben Skole') at Department of Didactics. I plan and chair the research unit's meetings once every month where we present, discuss, and develop each other's research. In the fall 2017 I am making scholar visit at University of British Columbia, Vancouver on out of school learning and arts-based research. Professor Rita Irwin has agreed to be my host.

My research so far has focused on how Open School is interpreted politically and practically before and shortly after the implementation (Knudsen 2016a). Document-analysis of policy papers and fieldwork on Open School courses bare witness of great differences on the purpose of Open school even between Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture but also between the local municipalities and the external agents.

Sweden and Norway have similar programs, and research has shown great confusion among teachers on how to collaborate and organize the courses. In Denmark the municipalities are very focused on Open School, but so far this have only generated funding for development projects. These underline that the establishment and the practical collaboration between teachers and local institutions are challenged by the lack clarity of funding, organization and educational priorities (Knudsen 2016).

Appendix A: Research plan: The Open School program: Exploring the educational qualities and challenges By Lars Emmerik Damgaard Knudsen

Methods

The research questions are answered through a qualitative fieldwork design of interviews before, during and after courses at local youth clubs, music-school, arts- and culture institutions, sports associations and businesses in Copenhagen and Næstved combined with video-recordings during the courses. There is a special focus on newly and well-established department of learning resources of Rønnebæksholm and Arken. All observations and interviews are triangulated by collections of background documents; policy papers, lesson plans, contracts, homepages, and teaching materials. The fieldwork is taking place from the spring 2016 to the fall of 2017.

Theoretical approach

There is only very limited amount of research specifically on this topic, and even though the literature on didactics of museums is extensive none is specifically designated for the Open School. This research project is based on cultural and philosophical theory on theory and practice in education in the book 'Teori- og praksisdidaktik' (Haastrup & 2015), arts-based research (Leavy 2009), and a/r/tography (Springgay, Irwin et al 2008).

Expected output

The analysis is meant to clarify the differences and variables of both the intentions and practices of Open School in order to identify both the educational and cultural differences and similarities between school and external agents. This analysis could help to understand the educational qualities of Open School better and how to turn the differences into educational advantages.

Further funding perspectives

I intend to apply Carlsbergfondet, Augustinusfonden, and the AUFF Supplementary pool for a 5 months scholar visit on out of school learning and arts-based research at University of British Columbia.

Publication plan

Two international peer review articles on: 1) Open School in Denmark: Collaboration and didactical qualities, 2) Out of school learning in Canada: International perspectives on the Danish Open School.

Two international peer reviewed articles on: 1) Arts-based research and open school: Didactics. 2) Arts-based research and open school: Methodology

References

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