

## ”The educational task – a joint organizational effort”

Pia Bramming & Bente Elkjaer, Aarhus University, Danish School of Education

In this project, we analyze education as a task. Understanding education as a task means that we extend the understanding of education from learning in student’s bodies, to also encompassing a comprehensive organizational task demanding collaboration, division of work and coordination. We document and compare the organization and management of education in six Danish universities that provide education for graduates within the humanities and social sciences.

University education as students’ learning for the sake of knowledge and learning in itself is today an issue that seems to receive less attention and be ascribed less value in public debate. In recent years, the political focus of attention as well as allocation of funding have increasingly been dependent on student employability in a future labor market. University education is nested in a debate of the supposed usefulness of knowledge in a societal perspective. The discourse on the knowledge society and demands for innovation and creativity creates a push-pull situation where a university degree is not for the selected few, but a necessity for the many to contribute to the societal needs for competitive edges. In recent times to live up to a larger intake of students, the rise of the public mass university has made universities more resemble private enterprises with emphasis upon professional management and accountability. This is visible and manifest in numerous organizational tasks bound up in organizational functions not directly attached to current student learning, but connected to public relations, marketing and the future work situation of students. Examples are quality assessment systems, institution accreditation systems, learning management systems, career counselling, and collaboration with enterprises external to the university. In the wake of this as well as the sheer increase in the bulk of students, new forms of organizational functions arise – such as career counsellors, educational consultants, competence centers for education administration and so forth. From a teacher perspective, one can talk about both task ‘enrichment’ (increase in task elements that teachers need to take part in) and a task ‘enlargement’ (increase in collaborative relations that teachers need to deal with) embedding the student-teacher relation.

It is our assumption that different universities are grasping these conditions in similar but different ways. By highlighting the different ways for universities to organize education, we aim to produce knowledge that can benefit nuance and support university education as such. In addition, the knowledge can act as a stepping-stone for inter-university learning of how the educational task is a ‘joint organizational effort’ that may (or may not) be organized not only more efficiently but also to the benefit of students’ learning.

We have as researchers our professional background in the cross fields of organization and educational studies, which in this project means that we both focus upon education as an organizational task and as a matter of students’ learning. This means that our ambition with the project is to advance theory on the relation between organizing and learning.

We include desktop research (a literature review) and interviews with different levels of organizational members dealing with education (a strategic, a departmental and an operational level) in this pilot project.

PB/BE; 09.01.2018