

The Askov Model II

Film in Intercultural Education

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Aims

The second project brought up in Askov was defined in a completely different manner. Again it was the idea to use the opportunity that the school had a number of foreign students with different cultural backgrounds and a line of cultural mediation. But instead of defining the object, i.e. the cultural production on beforehand, we decided to have the students actively define and create the project from the very beginning – the provocative question they were asked was: “Denmark as a tribal society – how to break the vicious circle?”.

Contents and Methods

Obviously there were many ideas as to the project form: theatre, dance, photo exhibition, movie film, or a newspaper...the target groups in question were our own students, invited people from the region, home towns of the students, galleries and/or our partners in the Grundtvig project.

Besides the foreign students at the school we had the intention of attracting “new Danes”, especially Muslim citizens with a different ethnic background. We contacted a number of Danish municipalities where we knew there would be groups of refugees or second generation immigrants and had encouraging answers from a number of them. Eventually, however, it proved that these students did not show up: the explanation offered us by the municipalities that had practically granted their stay was purely bureaucratic and not very satisfactory.

So the cornerstone of the project, where the aim agreed upon was to arrange exhibitions in Danish art galleries, had vanished, and the students had to reconsider. A simple observation started the students thinking. It was noticed that in the dining hall a new kind of segregation had taken place: the Danish students were sitting at specific tables, while the foreigners, who had come to the school to learn the Danish language before returning to their respective home countries (mainly in Central and Eastern Europe), were sitting at other tables. The reason of this peculiar segregation was not “racism” in the strict sense of the word, but the phenomenon was clear enough and caused teachers and students of the cultural mediation line to consider the situation: was this the forerunner of a more serious segregation and lack of mutual understanding, or even worse, lack of will of communication between two differing kinds of culture?

Now, the first thought was of course, if this was just a misunderstanding and due to the simple fact that the foreign students spent a considerable amount of time together in a class room without Danes. On second thought the staff meeting, having discussed the

matter, decided to ask the students to confront the problem and to suggest how to do that.

The film teacher and his students then had the idea to create a film in common, a movie, which would involve not only the majority of foreign students, but also some of the Danish students as well as local people from Askov Village and its vicinity. The students contacted the local amateur theatre group called "Sløjds scenen" and put up messages in the local coop store. In this way a rather unusual example of cooperation between school and neighbourhood was established, which included not only the local stage and coop, but also local companies that allowed film crews to shoot takings on location. The obvious advantage of this

being of course a better understanding in the local population of the fact that so many foreigners were allowed to the boarding school.

The next step was that one of the students, Jens Peter Nielsen, wrote a script, which intentionally involved practically all the foreign students, either in front of the camera as actors or behind it as costume makers, make-up girls etcetera. Jens Peter Nielsen also directed the movie, a cliché, a pastiche or mixture of James Bond films, Dr Strangelove, Aliens and other globally recognized classics. The great advantage being that all students quickly realized what it was all about and how they would have to act. Consequently everybody was ready and even eager to cooperate: Bosnia-Herzegovians, Chinese, Danes, Faroe Islanders, Icelanders, Japanese, Romanians and Russians alike. The students did not only play the different roles, but also participated in cutting and mixing in our own film studio.

Best Practices and Evaluation

The final result was shown to the students and the public audience in the school cinema (120-130 spectators) and later in a the cineast cinema in a nearby town, Brørup, which hosts rather large groups of foreigners, foremost Bosnians. Finally, on June, 8, 2002 it was shown at a large film festival, which Askov organized on behalf of 8 Danish folk high schools as the first of its kind, and which assembled about 120 spectators, including well-known Danish professionals of the film trade, acting as a jury.

Services

There are videotapes available of the theatre performance and the film: please contact Askov Højskole, Maltvej 1, DK-6600 Vejen, or e-mail askov@grundtvig.dk