

Grundtvig, The Danish Folk High School and the Developing Countries

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One of the classic examples of the impression that the Folk High School (FHS) made on a foreigner was given by a Norwegian who visited Denmark in the 1880s. He tells about the many enthusiastic and optimistic young people he met; they were keen to create a great development in their country. One youngster would turn his father's farm into a model farm. Another wanted to establish a co-op dairy, a third one a slaughter house. One planned to start a free school for children, another one an FHS. The visitor asked where they had got these ideas from, and he was told that the inspiration could be traced back to the FHSs and from these schools further back to Grundtvig and Kold.

Even today you may find similar examples, for instance in a brochure to boost the Vidyapeeth movement in India: "Models of such institutions are available in the famous Danish Folk-Schools which resurrected the Danish peasant from an impoverished, ignorant and depressed state to a prosperous, enlightened and free citizenship. Danish agricultural practice has changed from a primitive state to the most scientific and the best organized in the world as a result of the People's College movement."

How to bring about change and development is one of the most important issues in the developing countries. The missionary zeal of the above example gives an idea of the kind of initiative and development the Vidyapeeth movement would like to generate. Could it be possible for the Vidyapeeth to repeat the 'miracle' of the FHS?

Not only foreigners have exaggerated ideas about the actual role of the FHS in the process which has transformed Denmark since the middle of the last century. Also among Danes opinion varies quite a lot. The influence of the FHS on the economic, social and

political development is generally held to have been significant. But the degree of influence has been challenged; it was, for example, stated at a seminar arranged in 1970 by the Danish Unesco Committee that it was not possible to prove any correlation between economic development and the FHS. On the social side some correlation could be found, and even more so in the relationship between the FHS and political identity and influence on the development. The seminar stressed the importance of much more research within this field, especially for the benefit of the developing countries.

In the following, three areas will be considered: the personal relationship between FHS educators and leaders from the developing countries, some FHS inspired projects, and against the background of the educational problems in the developing countries, the relevance of Grundtvig's ideas to development in the third world.

Personal Contacts and Courses in Denmark

At the personal level there have been numerous and useful contacts starting especially after World War One. In 1921 Askov FHS started publishing a periodical, 'Danish Outlook': the first article was written by Jens Rosenkjær, 'Where East and West Meet'. He travelled to India and other "exotic" countries, and many overseas guests were received by him. Peter Manniche founded the International People's College in 1921 and became a travelling ambassador to spread the gospel of the FHS. After World War Two he wanted to take one further step, realizing that now Asia and Africa had become a major concern. These ideas led among others to the establishment of the Rural Development College the Danish name of which was 'FHS for the Developing Countries' (U-landshøjskolen).

Johs. Novrup, who died in 1960 as principal of Magleås FHS, was chairman of the first UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education which took place in Elsinore 1949. That it took place in Denmark is primarily due to the significant contribution of Scandinavia in the field of adult education. It is interesting to note how relatively late the actual educational problems of the developing countries came into focus. The Elsinore Conference was in many ways unique, but it was very much a European con-

ference (just the composition of delegates points to this), whereas the Montreal Conference in 1960 to a much higher degree was concerned with the changing world. (The Third International Conference on Adult Education took place in Tokyo in August 1973).

In the late 40's and the 50's and 60's a number of visitors from developing countries became familiar with the FHS, and this led to much personal inspiration and, no doubt, it also had an influence on their future work.

Some visitors came in organized groups. Three examples should be mentioned. – When the first Act of technical co-operation was passed in 1962 the FHSs formed a special branch for collaboration with developing countries. From the secretariat at Vartov a programme of scholarship was organized. The programme received support from both the Ministry of Education and DANIDA, and various FHSs offered full or partial scholarships.

The programme included practical work and courses at folk high schools in various combinations. But it often led to disappointment on the part of the students to return to the home country. The studies in Denmark did not normally give employment opportunities or lead to upgrading for those who had already been employed. There were examples of students who on return to their previous jobs were paid less than they would have been if they had stayed at home. Despite these hard facts the programme was often successful at the personal level. It was closed down after some years of operation. We may compare this scheme with 'Scandinavian Seminar' from 1953 (The FHS scheme was to some extent based on the experiences of Scandinavian Seminar.) It gives American college students one year in a Scandinavian country with an FHS course as the main feature. The Americans get credit for this year. Even if this had not been the case it would have been easier for them to do without 'credit' than it is for students from the developing countries.

From the late 50's till 1968 adult education seminars were organized in Denmark in collaboration with UNESCO. During the first years the content was a study of Danish adult education, emphasizing the FHS aspects, the Danish experience of 'education for life'. Later on the adult education problems of the developing countries became the main concern but even after this change the seminars were given up as a regular programme of Danish development aid.

The third example from Denmark is the Rural Development College (RDC), established in 1964 in the tradition of the FHS, but in fact operating as a professional college for in-service training for civil servants from English-speaking countries south of the Sahara. RDC used Denmark as a social laboratory, and took the interaction between adult education, co-operatives and agriculture as one of its main features. But the history and process of Danish development, supplemented by field studies, was only used as an example of rural development, which for that matter could be taught anywhere in the world – but the story of rural development in Denmark becomes much more meaningful when students are exposed to it in the homeland of Grundtvig.

The students came from 10–12 English-speaking countries south of the Sahara and were civil servants, i.e. district officers from adult education, agricultural extension, co-operatives, community development and health education. This implies an interdisciplinary course arranged as in-service training. The main theme of the Diploma Course was the integrated approach to rural development.

Only a relatively short time was spent on studies of Danish development, but the Danish environment provided an interesting background for the studies of rural development in Africa.

In the late 60's DANIDA adopted the principle that long-term training for middle level personnel should no longer take place in Denmark, but only in the developing countries themselves, and the DANIDA support to the Diploma Course was withdrawn from 1973. When RDC-Holte was closed down it had had 338 participants from 17 African countries on 9 long courses and 4 UN seminars (6–8 weeks). RDC has had the rewarding experience that its pioneering approach to integration, based on a happy marriage between FHS and Community Development ideas, is much more recognized now than 9 years ago, and that many experts have commented most favourably on its programme.

The assets of the RDC, including the RDC-Library, have been transferred to Grundtvig's Folk High School Frederiksborg, and it is the intention that this FHS in the future shall provide extended courses in development education for Danes as well as arrange international seminars which may still be sponsored by DANIDA. It is the intention that Grundtvig's FHS, among others

based on the RDC Library, should be able to offer foreigners a chance to study the FHS movement and Danish adult education in general.

FHS-inspired Projects

Two attempts to apply the FHS principles in the developing countries should be mentioned, very briefly Ghana and in more detail India.

Tsito is a village 140 km north of Accra, the capital of Ghana. The villagers were keen to expand their educational activities, and when an English tutor told them about the FHS they got so excited hearing about its achievements in Denmark that they decided that this was the very thing they needed.

Through self-help and fund raising Awudome Residential College opened its first course in 1954. It had some Danes on the staff and received also material assistance through the Danish Association for International Co-operation.

It should be noted that it was a local initiative, receiving some assistance from Denmark. A variety of courses were run successfully for a number of years. But political difficulties more or less put an end to the College. I visited it a few days before the fall of Nkrumah in February 1966 – and met only the caretaker!

There have been a lot of contacts in the educational field between India and Denmark, and the most sincere attempt to draw on the FHS has been made in Mysore, India, in the form of the Vidyapeeth, a People's College.

The first Vidyapeeth was set up in 1947, modelled on the pattern of the FHS, but also on the ancient system of Gurukulashram where the pupils learnt their lessons living together with and under the personal guidance of the teacher (guru).

The main objective of the Vidyapeeth is to reorient the life of the village youth by providing cultural and rural education through training for good citizenship and rural leadership to enable him to revitalize the villagers.

The main activity has been 5-month courses. There are certain restrictions on admission. A candidate should be a male; have lived in a village; be fully literate in Kannada (the local language); be carrying on the traditional occupation of the family, mainly agriculture on his own or his parents' land; be above 18 and below 30

years old; have good health and physique; have aptitude for social service; go back to settle down in his native village after his training and render his service to his community in the way he can, and not seek any employment outside his village.

Technical training in agriculture and crafts is provided, but the aim is furthermore to develop the mind of the individual, to enlighten him regarding the community to which he belongs. It is the same dual purpose as was found in the early Danish FHS for smallholders.

The school day begins at sunrise with a morning service and gymnastics. The normal curriculum contains one cultural and two technical (mainly agricultural) lessons a day. Three-four hours a day are used for practical work.

One afternoon every week is set aside as a project day on which every one – staff and students – is supposed to join in performing some work to the benefit of the community.

Living together, eating around the same table, and participating in the same manual training irrespective of caste or religion is supposed to diminish the barriers between castes and the aversion towards manual work.

The Danish support was from 1959 formalized into the Danish Mysore-Project, administered by the Danish Association for International Co-operation. The project was officially terminated in 1966, but support has continued through the Danish Volunteer Service.

An evaluation report (1969) was not too encouraging about the results of the training on the students' agricultural practices, except maybe in poultry. We know, however, that the effect of education and training is very difficult to measure, and results may show up later on.

The Vidyapeeth movement has received very complimentary comments, also from the central authorities of India. An Indian assesses the Danish contribution as follows: 'Formerly the vidyapeeth had no status. The project has given the vidyapeeths status in the minds of the people. Now it has penetrated. If it had been left to us, we might have reached that status, but it would have taken 20 years.'

We may conclude on the Vidyapeeth movement that there has

been an inspiration from the FHS (at Shivaragudda the main building is even called 'Grundtvig Hall'), and that relevant courses have been provided. But conditions in India are very different from those in Denmark when the FHS emerged. So it would not be fair to expect the same spectacular results as in Denmark.

The examples I have presented both from Denmark and from the developing countries do not point to any easy transfer or application of the FHS ideas. This could not be expected either. (The case of the Nordic countries and a few other countries is very different).

Some Educational Problems in Africa

Grundtvig always emphasized that it was the right of a people to have its own 'folkelig' development, and he fought for our right to develop our own way.

I shall now outline a few educational problems from Africa. When we mention the *British* influence on the African school system you may think of what Grundtvig said about the *Latin* influence in Denmark.

The educational system from the colonial time has been under much fire because it was based on a British model and thus had not enough relevance to the local conditions; the curriculum was too bookish; the teaching methods too exam-oriented. It encouraged a selfish attitude and thus led to a cleavage between the educated elite and the masses. The system encouraged white-collar mentality and a contempt for manual labour. President Nyerere of Tanzania has formulated a new educational policy in line with his overall national policy, education for self-reliance, pointing out that the inappropriateness of the old system was more serious than its inadequacy.

The purpose of the new system is to prepare children to live a satisfying life in a predominantly rural society. They must be able to identify themselves with all worthwhile aspects of their own culture, and at the same time be trained to effect changes necessary for creating a better life for all people in the country. Earlier attempts to introduce agricultural and vocational education into the schools have failed because the Africans felt, since it was not applied to European or Asian schools, that it was a policy to keep them down in rural serfdom.

Education for self-reliance is aimed at eradicating the school leaver problems by changing the values of the society. The Ujamaa village (with collective farming etc.) should be the norm for the new society.

The same policy is reflected in the adult education policy and that of the Rural Training Centres (RTCs).

The RTCs are an amalgamation of the former District Development Centres (for community development), the Farmers' Training Centres (for agriculture) and the proposed Rural Craft Centres of Commerce and Industry.

Such a single centre, integrating all services essential for the farmers, is to serve as a stronghold for the area it covers. There are two main aspects of the training (two to three-month courses plus one to two-week courses): to teach technical skills and ideological skills.

Education for self-reliance and the new policy of training for rural development is one of the most sincere attempts at nation building in Africa, based on a socialistic point of view.

The Village Polytechnics of Kenya should be mentioned as another example. A VP is a very simple low-cost Training Centre for school leavers, providing them with opportunities for developing their characters and changing their outlook on life. The VP should provide them with skills the exercise of which will fill a need in their home area. The aim of the training is to be self-employment and rural development.

The report on which the establishment of VPs is based discusses various name proposals, aiming at a new name, stating that they should not be called colleges or schools, 'not even Folk High Schools' (!), a very fine compliment!

At a conference in Kenya in 1969 it was said that a VP could be extraordinarily significant for its demonstration effect: creating an agrarian movement and getting people to identify themselves with the Nation:

'There have been a few cases like this – perhaps the most important ones are the Scandinavian examples in which the school (FHS) movement was part and parcel of the identification of the people as a Nation, and of their goals and aspirations. It was closely tied up with a sort of integrated concept of the development of countries which had small populations and limited resources

and had to depend upon close co-operation and close identification among all the people in order to achieve the high standard of living and the high degree of development that they now enjoy.'

The Relevance of Grundtvig's FHS Ideas

Some of the previously mentioned examples may have given a pessimistic impression. But it is important to underline that there is no easy application of the FHS ideas. The lack of results where attempts at application have been made, may partly be due to the fact that we have expected too much, and that we have not taken the local conditions into account to a sufficiently high degree.

Grundtvig's FHS ideas are in many ways relevant to the needs of the developing countries. This may be exemplified in terms of the following brief points:

The developing countries are suffering from the problem of having an educated elite, high above the masses. The FHS was designed to help the ordinary man; there was a chance for everyone to join, irrespective of previous training etc., and many ex-students rose to the highest posts within the economic, social and political life of their time. The FHS has been instrumental in reducing class barriers.

The schools and other institutions in the developing countries tend to be of a too high material standard.

There has been no gap between the FHS and the daily standard of the ordinary homes. Dr. Manniche has often spoken about 'plain living and high thinking.'

Conditions are changing very fast in the developing countries, and this results in many frustrations.

The FHS is known for having a close relationship between staff and students, and this facilitates a sense of security and self-reliance in the students. Such a personal method is highly relevant in the developing countries, but it takes time to get staff who are willing to make the personal sacrifices that are necessary.

The diversity in the background of the students in the developing countries makes it difficult to provide relevant instruction for all students concerned.

The FHS lecture, the inspired oral presentation, can be grasped by all students irrespective of different background – it can even be understood by illiterate people. It is important to note that the enlightenment was followed up by attainment of relevant knowledge.

Disregard for manual work, i.e. farming, is common among many of those who have received some education. But: we know there will be no tolerable future in the developing countries if there is no rural development.

The FHS helped to make the farmers proud of being farmers, and to make them better farmers. The spiritual inspiration was converted to entrepreneurship, to practical enterprise.

'It is in the spirit of the Nordic myths, as in my youth I heard them pour from Schröder's mouth at Askov, that I tilled my land.' (Former FHS student.)

In the developing countries it is difficult to keep good staff in the rural areas.

The FHS gave rise to a country-wide popular movement which accorded the FHS high status. To be principal of an FHS was regarded as a lifelong career. In the course of time an FHS developed its own atmosphere, and former students and neighbours regarded it as *their* school.

Many developing countries have difficulties in merging different tribes into one people, to create a national feeling.

The FHS has assisted in creating a broader-based national fellowship and political participation and responsibility.

In this and the other examples it should of course not be forgotten that conditions in the developing countries are much more complex than the problems Denmark faced in the last century.

All developing countries have a host of training centres but these institutions are very often in want of many essential factors (personnel, equipment, etc.) necessary for making a successful programme. Unfortunately adult education and training for rural development are often given more attention in the development plan than what is reflected in the actual estimates. We know by

now that the FHS cannot be copied by any developing country, but also that an understanding of the development and the role of the FHS in this country should make it possible to improve the existing training centres in order to make them the necessary 'power-stations' for development.

An Encouraging Example

References to the FHS are often found in books about training as an encouraging example. It is a historic fact that the FHS has become a classic example of a successful residential college.

It is important to point out the difference between adult education aiming as far in development as is the intention of the FHS movement, and those educators who are just concerned with the techniques of instructing adults. Adult education should be more than just a second chance to get the same certificates as those gained by the students who followed the normal system although this is something very valuable, too.

Years back many people looked down their noses when hearing about liberal adult education and the FHS in the context of the developing countries. This is quite easy to understand, considering the pressing material needs. But there is a growing feeling for the necessity of self-reliance and national identity as an important factor in development. This issue is briefly outlined in the above section on some of the educational problems in Africa. According to Grundtvig and to Nyerere democracy needs a basis of enlightenment – not only knowledge – but first of all of understanding of 'the common good' and a willingness to collaborate.

It is still of importance for some selected representatives from the developing countries to get a first hand impression of how rural development succeeded in Denmark and in the other Nordic countries. Future collaboration should not be based on Danish naiveté but on a realistic assessment of the pressing needs in the developing countries. Based on past experiences one would hope for a new era in the field of international collaboration in adult education.

Some of the technocrats among the administrators and politicians may not be able to understand the significance of such a collaboration but this lack of understanding should not frustrate the adult educators and development workers. It is unbelievable that

Denmark should not be able to offer foreigners a chance to acquaint themselves with the FHS and Danish adult education in general on a permanent basis. We shall not export the FHS idea, but we shall give foreigners a chance to import it if they feel that they can gain something through such an import.

Through international collaboration we can gain a lot of inspiration for development in Denmark, and then we are, by the way, at the same time trying to fulfil one of the neglected objectives of the new Danish International Development Co-operation Act (1971): 'through cultural collaboration to promote mutual understanding and solidarity.'