

Papers on

- **Innovative approaches to promotion, marketing and outreach in adult learning**
- **New trends in widening participation**

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Innovative approaches to promotion, marketing and outreach in adult learning

Danish case study

The case study is about marketing, promotion and outreach concerning a new educational offer of basic education in Danish reading and writing and numeracy. It is a national programme based on legislation and guidelines from Parliament and ministry and the administration and funding is managed by the regional administrative level in Denmark, the counties.

Case study: Preparatory adult education

For the Danish case study on new approaches to marketing and outreach we have chosen the new Preparatory adult education (in Danish “Forberedende voksenundervisning”, FVU), which is an educational offer of Danish reading and writing and numeracy/basic mathematics, aimed at participants with insufficient skills in these subjects.

The case is chosen because it illustrates the way promotion and marketing of an education initiative can be an integral part of all elements of the initiative.

It should be stressed that the case is not representative for adult education initiatives in Denmark, but it can serve as an example how things can work.

The preparatory adult education was introduced in the year 2000 as part of a comprehensive adult education reform. The reform as such was prepared in several years of committee work which was concluded in August 1999 - curiously with virtually no mentioning of Preparatory adult education or similar initiatives.

Background

A little background seems to be appropriate. The course of events leading up to the introduction may well be seen as an integral part of the “marketing” since it illustrates the importance of establishing a high political profile around an educational initiative.

For many years the concept of functional illiteracy had no place in Danish educational debate or policies. People who lacked reading and writing skills were seen as dyslectics and “treated” accordingly in special education. In the 1990’ies research findings indicated that a substantial part of the adult population - in Denmark like in other western industrialized countries - had difficulties in their daily life - at work, at home and when participating in public life because of insufficient skills in the Danish language.

As a consequence a new type of Danish courses was introduced - aiming at giving adults who thought/meant that their reading and/or writing skills were unsatisfactory an opportunity to have a rather brush-up like course - a so called “reading-course”. Since sufficient reading and writing skills were recognized both as a right and a necessity the courses - unlike similar activities - could be attended without any costs for the participants.

The courses were seen as part of the general “popular enlightenment” (Danish “folkeoplysning”) and were meant to be organized by local adult education associations, evening schools etc. The whole philosophy intended to make it up to the participants themselves to decide what kind of education they wanted and legitimate for them to try to cope with their problems, without any risk of “stigmatizing”. The courses were organized with appr. 50 lessons and the teachers had to have a special qualification for this type of teaching. Apart from that there was little regulation as to the precise content etc.

SIALS: 1,5 million need better skills

While the reading courses were introduced an evaluation took place in order to control the effect of the initiative. At the same time Denmark chose to participate in the Second Adult Literacy Survey (SIALS).

As results from SIALS started to leak in the Summer of 1999 , showing that 1,5 million adults had reading skills that did not meet the requirements of the “knowledge society”, demands were raised from several parts that people with reading and writing problems should be taken better care of than they were with the “reading courses”. At this time the evaluation was not yet completed, but results and experiences were nevertheless brought forward. Among the strongest advocates were the trade unions of un- and semiskilled workers, among them one of the biggest in Denmark.

The government showed amenable to the view points - and in connexion with the general discussion of an adult education reform during negotiations about the national budget for 2000 a majority of the Parliament agreed about the introduction of the Preparatory adult education in Danish and numeracy. There are clear indications that the prime minister was an active actor in the

negotiations, and in the following time he pledged on several occasions to “people with little education” that they should have priority in the education policy.

The act on Preparatory adult education

Consequently a bill was proposed in January of 2000 - less than a month after the budget agreement, and the act was adopted in May the same year so that the first courses could take place from January 2001. As mentioned at the beginning the speed and expedience of the process of introduction was a first important element in the marketing especially in relation to the representatives of the trade unions with many members who were potential participants.

Furthermore the concrete realization of the rules determining the content and organization of the courses was to a wide extent made in accordance with the demands expressed by the trade union representatives of the target group.

Organization of the activity

The courses are the responsibility of the counties (the regional administrative level in Denmark), which are also responsible for General adult education. The adult education centres where General adult education takes place are the main entrepreneurs of the activity, but other types of educational organizations or institutions may (and should) be involved. It is assumed that a variety of different educational organizations offering the courses would make them easier accessible for the participants, because they would be more familiar with e.g. the Workers’ Educational Association than an ordinary educational institution.

In order to ensure good links to organizations representing the participants a special advisory council for Preparatory adult education must be established in all the counties. The councils have representation of local trade unions and employees’ organization, and their job is to counsel the local authorities in matters of the local educational offers.

Likewise it is stressed in the presentation of the courses that they may take place in accommodations which are familiar to the participants, e.g. at their work place or in the local premises of the trade union.

Contents of the courses

It was assumed that an offer of improving general skills such as reading and writing had to be very precise and well defined in order to appeal to the relevant target groups (read: men with short educational background). The subjects were defined as Danish reading and writing and numeracy. The course content was divided into modules of appr. 50 lessons each, and the content of each

module was precisely defined. A full course of Danish reading and writing consists of four modules whereas numeracy only has two. This organization aims at assuring that they have the possibility to choose just the course element which correspond to their learning needs and that the courses are manageable for the participants. In order to secure evaluation - for and of the participants - there is a formal national exam at the end of the courses. This element was also designed to give the courses a high profile as Education with a capital E - and thus securing the appeal to the participants.

At the outset of the reform there were considerations of making computer skills an element of the education because it could be assumed that this would give the offer extra appeal to the relevant target groups. At the end this idea was not realized, so that linking reading courses up with other subjects is optional (and not funded with the money reserved for the reading etc. courses).

Funding

The educational activities are as mentioned the responsibility of the counties and consequently the costs fall on them. But in order to promote the new courses the state established a transition period where the counties will receive full compensation for the costs of the Preparatory adult education. This was a strong signal to the counties that the government meant business with this act - and to the participants that the doors were open to the new learning provision.

Information activities

The counties are responsible for information activities. Considering the importance of fulfilling the information job satisfactorily the ministry has invested quite a bit in it. So among other things the ministry has initiated an analysis of the target group (a segment analysis) which indicates where to look for potential participants and how to approach the different types. The ministry stresses among other things the importance of approaching the potential participants with an emphasis on *possibilities* rather than limitations, compensation and the like.

In connexion with the national campaign the Danish national broadcasting company has had a series of programmes illustrating outcomes and results of participation (the first series titled "Read for your life" and later "Learn for your life").

On this background the ministry is carrying out a national campaign aiming at spreading information about the offer, which together with local activities is expected to raise the level of knowledge about Preparatory adult education - and thus inspire potential participants to enrol.

There is general consensus that participants should be found first and foremost in their work places. The local representatives of the trade unions and companies are very important actors in the information and outreach activities and an intensive course activity is carried through in order to train local "ambassadors" for this function.

In the total information efforts local networks of engaged actors - trade unionists, shop stewards, teachers and organizers of education - are very important. The network can spread information and also be a forum of exchange of experience which can be the starting point of development of new information activities or educational offers.

Results?

In the proposal of the bill the ministry estimated the total target group to 1,5 million of which 1 million are active in the labour force (the rest being in education, unemployed, retired etc.). Appr. 300.000 adults have grave problems with reading being unable to read and understand texts like newspaper articles or recipes.

There has not yet been an evaluation of the new provision and therefore there is no information as to the performance of the provision in terms of recruitment, output, personal outcome for the participants etc.

All there is now is the information that in 2001 (year 1) there were a total of 11.300 participants and in the first half of 2002 the number was almost 9.000 - which is seen by the association of county councils as a success.

Questions

Background

What is the name of project or case study? - Preparatory adult education

Where is it based? - The educational activities take place (primarily) in adult education centres, but other institutions and organizations contribute as well. The actual teaching may (and often does) take place in places which are familiar to the participants, e.g. at their work place or in the premises of their trade union.

When did it start? - The programme was introduced in January 2001.

What are its aims and objectives? - The aim is to offer educational opportunities to improve skills in Danish reading and writing and in numeracy in order to provide people a real possibility to participate actively in social and political life, in other educations and as man power in the economic life.

What is the context in which the case study has been developed? - The programme addresses the problems connected with substantial proportions of the adult population being unable to participate fully in several areas of life due to insufficient skills.

Who is the target population? - The target group is appr. 1 million adult with insufficient basic skills.

What are the main activities? - Educational courses in Danish and numeracy.

What is innovative about it? - From a Danish perspective the programme represents innovation in several ways, among them:

1. It addresses a problem which hasn't been recognized before
2. The contents of the programme are organized in rather specific curricula
3. Marketing and promotion are seen as very important and substantial resources are invested

How and why it was set up? - The programme was introduced politically in the wake of the Danish results of the Second Adult Literacy Survey.

People

How many staff work on the case study and what is their background. - There is no statistics as to the number of teachers working in the programme. Teachers are selected among the total teacher group in the institutions and they have to be formally qualified specifically for the work with Preparatory adult education

How are the staff trained? - The courses are organized by the ministry.

Who is involved in its management? - The programme is managed both by the ministry (rules, guidelines, teacher training), by the county (general management) and by institutions and organizations taking care of the actual teaching.

Funding and evaluation

How is the case study funded? - The programme is funded by the counties - in the first years reimbursement from the state.

How is the case study evaluated? - An evaluation will take place after a few years, but there is presently no information on any details.

Are there targets for achievement and if so what are they? - The act expresses no specific targets.

The future

How is it determined whether or not the case study is a success? - No criteria of success have been expressed.

How do the staff see the case study developing in the future? - There is no information available about the views of the staff.