The Folk High School has been described as a particular type of school (Gustavsson, 2009; Bernstsson, 2009; Paldanius, 2014). Unlike other forms of education it is not directed by a curriculum from above instead the curriculum is created locally on each school. The content and the form of the education can be designed by a team, an individual teacher or by influence of its participants. The mission issued by the State (Regulation 2015: 218 on government grants for non formal adult education) and from many of the descriptions of the folk high schools, is meant to strengthen democracy and equality. So this ambition is something that folk high school teachers are expected to respond to. A school without a curriculum may appear to be a school that is not as demanding, but Andersson's (2013) study shows the opposite. Many teachers working in the folk high school devote more time to their work than equivalent teachers in curriculum-driven schools.

That the pedagogic concept of the folk high school enables a special practice is seen in Harlin's (2013) study. She let folk high school teachers video record their own teaching and then they reflected on their actions in the classroom. The study showed that the teachers were well aware of the folk high school idea and its special pedagogy and that they also have the ambition to act in accordance with it. They video recorded their own teaching and saw a professional educator acting in the classroom, but they claimed that they wished they would be even more responsive to the needs of the participants. Forward the informants intend to let the participants get a greater speaking space, and generally they want to be better at giving them more influence on their education. For the teachers the video was a tool that helped them to be aware of their own actions. It gave them a real basis for reflection, something that Dewey described as a possible way to change behaviours, and also his way of defining teaching.

After two years eight of the informants in Harlin's (2013; 2014) study once again video recorded their own teaching. Seven of the eight folk high school teachers saw that they had changed their behaviour in a direction meaning that participants had greater speaking space, and also were given more influence over the education.

Their changes was described in following four categories: participants are given greater opportunity to speak; the participants are given greater own responsibility of their studies; less control from the teacher and greater focus on building relationships (between teachers and students but also among the participants). Obviously the different categories goes together but in different ways they reflect how the teachers after two years talk more about learning than on teaching. The categories thus contribute to describe how the teachers changed their teaching from in more teacher-led in the beginning to become more participant-oriented. This can be explained by the fundamental values the folk high school rests upon aiming at giving the participants a greater opportunity to participate in democratic processes.

One examples of this is given by one of Harlin's (2014) informants who says that she has developed her teaching in a way that students are given many opportunities to be heard: ’My aim is that the participants will have space and preferably feel that everyone is equally seen and heard’. The teacher also describes how she now as often as possible, divide the participants into small groups for everyone to have the opportunit to participate in the conversation. Concerning building relationships Harlin writes about the teachers in the same study ’to become aware of the participants' needs and previous knowledge, they also need to get to know them. And since the ambition is often about the participants sharing experiences with each other, the teacher must also ensure that the participants build mutual relationships’.

/Eva-Marie Harlin, Senior Lecturer Linköping University.
References:


Förordning (2015:218) om statsbidrag till folkbildningen.


