

Conversation with ...

Birgitta E. Gustafsson,

researcher at Linnaeus University

Throughout the duration of the CreatLearn project all the teachers and students have continually reflected over the development of the work by means of a logbook. In Kalmar, culture experts and the project leader have also been involved in this.

The logbook entries in Kalmar form the basis for a report written by Birgitta E. Gustafsson, tutor and researcher at Linnaeus University. Amongst other issues, the report places a focus on the creative process that takes place when school and culture meet.

When Birgitta E. Gustafsson was first invited to take part in CreatLearn, she immediately felt that this was something she would be interested in.

As a researcher she had purposefully focused on didactic issues related to cultural confrontations that were foundational to change and opinion forming. She has an interest in encounters between different institutions to find out what potential there is in such encounters and how they may be developed.

She believes that what is required in the pedagogical context is that we are provoked. Something has to disturb the world of our imagination if we are to achieve change and to make us think in new ways. One of the topics she speaks about is the medium of artistic languages, such as art, music, drama and writing. The artistic languages may then be the things that disturb us. They can make us think anew as well as afford us the opportunity of creating and reshaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

This presents opportunities for other perceptions of reality, says Birgitta E. Gustafsson.

The logbook as a method of reflection

When she joined CreatLearn, the foundations of the project, even the theme had already been established. Her task was then to formulate an idea about how the creative process would be tracked. At the introductory meeting in February 2012, she put forward the concept of using a logbook. The notion was that the logbook would serve as a written observation from participants as they were forced to pause for reflection at certain points and occasions.

For the students the logbook writing began with their receiving a short story containing an ethical dilemma for them to take a stand on. Then during the course of the project, the students have continued to reflect on ethical dilemmas that have arisen in their assignments,

their experiences in relation to these, how they felt and the thoughts that had been aroused.

In their entries, the teachers, cultural experts and the project leader have included their reflections on their previous experiences of culture projects in school and what potentialities they see in the encounter between school and culture. At joint workshops and seminars, they reflected on new thoughts and ideas that had arisen in and through these and whether they had changed in any way. – They looked at the shaping of the projects as well as their own perspectives of the students' learning, progress and understanding of Civil Courage. They have also reflected on how their view of culture in school has changed in and through their participation in the project.

Logbook entries have consistently been made with marked reference to the theme of Civil Courage. It has been important not to forget the theme, says Birgitta E. Gustafsson. Otherwise, there is a risk in similar projects that they deal more with form or aesthetics – that the content is almost forgotten along the way. In this case, there was however a clear content in the theme and it was brought into focus. What was interesting in this case was also seeing how the theme was dealt with in the encounter between school and culture. Did something occur in and through the encounter that otherwise would not have happened?

With a focus on learning for all

The report now being written by Birgitta E. Gustafsson takes much of its material from the logbook entries in Kalmar. It also makes use of observation notes from official gatherings of the various CreatLearn partners and from the occasions when she visited schools in Kalmar, including their project kick-off events. She has also conducted interviews with principals and compiled a questionnaire that the students completed when the project came to an end. The student survey also focused on the theme of Civil Courage, and built on the idea of the project as opinion forming. What did the students gain from the project and has it changed them in any way?

Birgitta E. Gustafsson would like the report to generate a kind of overview of a creative process. First of all, to open up for reflection around what a creative process is, and then how she thinks it is possible to follow such a process. The report will illustrate the process in Kalmar and will highlight the things that have been of particular significance. The report will discuss what is required of different partners for it to be opinion forming for both students and teachers.

The focus will be placed on edification for all, on student development and on the ability of teachers to construct creative learning environments. What does it take to get there? What obstacles might you encounter along the way? What can you do to make progress in your work and spread the knowledge you have gained to others?

The objective of the report is to give participants a voice and to highlight what Birgitta E. Gustafsson herself thinks is important: the road to the goal. Working in projects often involves a long-term goal, often a product – the result of creative efforts. But Birgitta E. Gustafsson believes that creativity is a constant process and for that reason the path to the result is equally important, which is why we need to pay attention to that too.

The report is expected to be finished in December 2013 and will then be available for downloading from:
www.creatlearn.org