

Reflecting students.

How students of “Pedagogy” reflect in their first-year experience of higher education?

Summary:

The two papers presented in this working paper covers two projects undertaken in 2001 and 2002 with first-year students of “Pedagogy” at Lillehammer College. The first paper discusses the challenges first-year-students face when entering an academic study of “Pedagogy”, based on a rather fundamentally different didactical conception than that of Norwegian Upper Secondary school. Their experiences are compared to those of adult students with no formal post-secondary education, or a long pause from post-secondary education, in the similar programme, offered as a distance education course at the same college. The young students seemed to have a difficult time in adjusting to a problem-oriented, project-organised type of study, although Upper Secondary school has a profile on instilling students with “responsibility for own learning”. The older students had a less problematic time adjusting to group work, interdependence and co-operative learning, and contest the basic assumption that mature students primarily need flexibility and freedom to study effectively. For both young and older students the group work seem to be vital in the construction of a meaningful “community of learning” in the academic setting.

This second study sums up some of the experiences after a special follow-up-programme was designed for them. This programme comprised extra tutoring and counselling, as well as age-homogenous grouping. This paper will focus on how students experienced the transition from upper secondary education (high school) with particular reference to the role of self-directed learning. The paper argues that the age-homogenous grouping reduced the level of stress and discomfort related to group dynamics. They regretted the loss of possible benefits from speaking with more experienced and mature fellow students. They were unsure of the benefits, but managed to adjust somewhat quicker to the new learning styles required in the study than the previous study showed.

Keywords: first-year experience, self-directed learning, teaching pedagogy

Sammendrag: Pedagogikk grunnfag på Høgskolen i Lillehammer har en bakgrunn som et prosjektorganisert, problembasert studium der studentene organiserer en stor grad av sine egne studier gjennom gruppearbeid og skriving av oppgaver. De to artiklene i denne samlingen tar opp hvordan ”nykomlinger” og voksne studenter tilpasser seg en slik studieform. Den første studien sammenlikner de to gruppene og argumenterer for at ”Ansvar for egen læring”, som har vært et tema i den videregående skole siden ”Reform-94” har hatt liten praktisk innflytelse på studentenes evne og lyst til å realisere dette. Overgangen til et studium som bygger på dette prinsippet er problematisk for gruppen av studenter som tar pedagogikk som første års studium. Eldre studenter som tar studiet som del av etterutdanning, finner imidlertid gruppearbeid og prosjektarbeid langt enklere å tilpasse seg. Den andre studien sammenfatter resultatene fra studentkullet etter den første etter at det ble satt i gang tiltak for å få til mer veiledning og tettere oppfølging av første-års studentenes leseaktivitet. I tillegg til at studentene er intervjuet ble studentene pålagt å lage et ”refleksjonsnotat”. I tillegg til at vi undersøkte om tettere veiledning førte til raskere tilpasning, undersøkte vi også mer om hvordan studenter reflekterer over erfaringer i et grunnfagsstudium.

Nøkkelord: første-års erfaring, selvstyrt læring, pedagogikk

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Forord/Preface

10 months before the Bologna-declaration is about to take effect, and the new structure of higher education in Norway will be introduced in full scale, there still is a lot of confusion about the consequences for students and teacher in higher education. In these two papers we try to elicit some of the problems we think will be crucial in the transformation from the old to a new structure. A large bulk of students, normally have little concise expectations about future education and work. Unless embarking upon distinct studies for the professions: Law, medicine, or para-professional studies like teaching, nursing, child care, engineering, the students enter studies with a searching mind for possible outcomes, often vagabonding and commuting between institutions, shopping for pleasant experiences while expectations become gradually more concise and concrete. When liberal studies from next year will be presented as three- year BA-programmes the election of a three year programme will have a profound impact on the students choice for the first part of their career. The first-year-experience will have a strong effect on decisions to stay with the institution or to move on. We anticipate that a preferable experience of the first year as a student will make students stay. Colleges who retain students will have more satisfied students and spend less money on advertising and more on giving students high quality studies. The papers we publish here, have been presented on international conferences arranged by the North-American “First-year-experience in higher education” network and center at the University of South Carolina (<http://www.sc.edu/fye/>).

The first-year-experience is not well researched in Norway. We regret this, because the quality of studying is existentially and psychologically a very serious business, both for the students and for the institution. We hope to contribute to a emerging field of studies by presenting this report.

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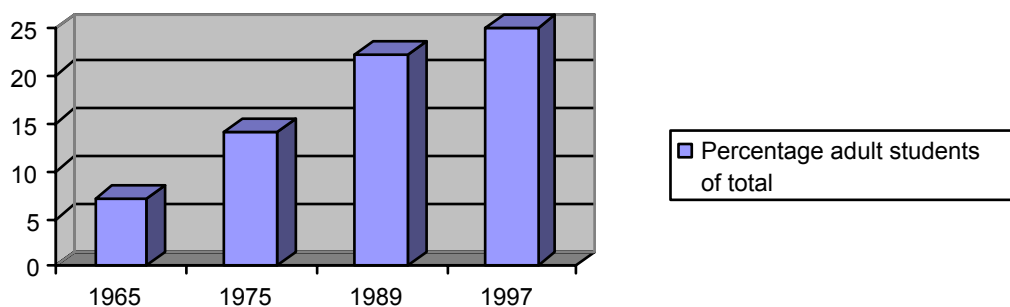
Comparing full-time and part-time students' first-year experiences in a small Norwegian higher education college.

Paper presented to The Fourteenth International Conference on The First-Year Experience, Honolulu, Hawaii, 9-13.7.2001

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Distance education programmes in Norway have gained substantial government support in the last decade, both politically and financially. The aims are to contribute to life long-learning, and to raise the level of education in the population. The argumentation given from the government and policymakers has been mainly within a "human capital"-context, particularly expressed by the powerful and politically efficient minister of Education, Research and Church Affairs, Professor Gudmund Hernes of the Social-Democratic Party (1990-1995). The increase in public funding for the establishment and development of a network for distance education in Higher Education was particularly significant in the beginning of the 1990-ies, with the establishment of a government-body to support and guide the process (SOFF).

The average age of Norwegian students is raising. More than 25% of the student population is older than 30 years.



Mancuso (2001) reports that 43% of undergraduate students in the US were older than 25 in 1996/97, and that 76% of the college students attended part-time. In Norway

51% of the total student population were older than 25 years in 1999¹. Unfortunately, statistical information on part-time students is lacking in Norway.

At Lillehammer College, the elementary year of "Pedagogy"² was transformed to a distance education programme due to the Olympic Winter Games in 1994³. Since 1994 "Pedagogy" has been taught both as a full time study and as a part-time distance education programme (two years). The study in question, "Pedagogy" at Lillehammer College, was established in 1971 as a distinct alternative to the corresponding courses offered at the universities at the time. It has a reputation as a progressive, alternative, approach to the study of "pedagogy", based on project work, seminar groups, high level of student participation and frequent production of papers, active teacher involvement and evaluation of the student's progress. This profile was carefully adapted to the needs of the distance education programme. The ideas of Progressivism has had some impact in Norway since the beginning of the 20th century, but more significantly so in the primary and secondary schools, than in higher education institutions. Lillehammer College was therefore founded on a progressive platform (Jarning 1997).

In contrast, students at the similar course at the University of Oslo, is introduced to a discipline-based course (pedagogical psychology, philosophy, educational history, child rearing), with marginal offers in direction of seminar work, collaborative work, written papers or oral presentations during the two-semester study. The offers given are optional. The students sit their exams two times six hours at the end of the two-terms-study. The courses in other universities are similarly organised, still.

¹ Upper Secondary education ends at 19 years of age. Male 19-years also face conscription for up to one year, which postpones their college education.

² The academic subject of "Pedagogy" is equivalent to the Anglo-American term "Educational studies". The reason why this term is better suited to English speaking countries is rather complex.

³ The practical reason was that the total number of students at the time - 1200- had to evacuate the college entirely to give room for the media production related to the Games. The reward was the take-over of the newly built Radio and television centre - rebuilt to serve as a college in 1995.

University teaching in Norway.

A British visiting professor to Norway allegedly once said about universities and their teaching traditions in Norway that their campus-teaching had all the features of a British distance education programme: little teaching offered, minimal tutoring and contact between student and teacher, examination once a year. Drake (1996) comments that the typical essay-writing is absent in the Norwegian tradition, and that the Norwegian university is *much less a school* than British universities. The British students are younger, and Norwegian students are not looked after in the same way.

It would be unjust to say that the Norwegian tradition is student-friendly, caring and supporting. Its tradition is based on the German Humboldtian university – even established at approximately the same time (1811). On the other hand, Norwegian students appear to have established their own powerful tradition in coping with this. Croxford (2001) compares Japanese and Norwegian students as regarding their attitude to teaching at the university. While the Japanese student is described as eager to please the professor and disapproving of discussion, the Norwegian student will be almost resentful of discussion with the professor, meeting encouragement to participate in discussion with "a wall of silence". The Norwegian students "do not appreciate being held to account by a class of which they have to attend all sessions and that assigns regular homework" (ibid. p.59). They consider teachers childish if they want to do so, as if they challenge their independence and maturity. They rather organize their work independently, "free to associate with the group formed by their compatriots in the manner that they choose". Croxford states that the Japanese and Norwegian traditions in this respect is a positive alternative to American liberal arts work habits, but surely not favourable from a first year-student perspective. Cowan (1996) have similar remarks about Norwegian students.

How do Norwegian full-time students conduct their academic work?

Apel (1999) suggests that in the beginning of the 18th century the basic assumption about learning in universities shifted from "handing over the canon" to "training the students to think for themselves", it seems obvious for anyone who has any

knowledge of the higher education system in Norway that this shift has yet to be fulfilled.

A survey conducted at the University of Bergen revealed some general features about how Norwegian students want to study. The majority of the students wanted more opportunities for discussion, tutorials, seminars and small-group teaching. The majority also wanted to write more papers and other assignments with comments from their teachers. One third of the students felt there was too much emphasis on the lectures and one-way communication. The first-year students found the university lecturers to have about the same level of teaching qualities as their former teachers in upper secondary education, and they requested a greater sensitivity towards the problems particular to their group. More than 1/5 of the cohort quit further studies after their first term, and almost 1/4 failed their first exam. The involvement of the students in their first-term study was generally regarded as so superficial that the working habits from upper secondary school neither was seriously challenged nor altered (Gjessing & Wilhelmsen 1989). As far as the work habits of Norwegian students are concerned, some penetrating studies have been made in particular subjects. Gynnild (2001) has revealed that civil-engineer-students tend to work primarily directed towards examinations, learning stuff incoherently and in superfluous manners. Outdated procedures and rigid traditions for examination invite students to learn in instrumentalist and atomist manners. Students with one or two exams for the whole year will then practice what Norwegians call "Skippertak-mentalitet" – postponing the work until it is almost too late, and then work like mad the last few days.

The traditional Norwegian first-year-experience at the universities includes taking a compulsory course in history of philosophy, argumentation and philosophy of science: to study for the *examen philosophicum*. This course of study is not mandatory for college students until they enlist for masters studies – after three or four years. The above mentioned Bergen-study suggested that the most important factor influencing success in the first year-examinations were the examination results from upper secondary school. The Oslo-study conducted in 1991 on students in their first term (*examen philosophicum or ex.phil.*) suggests that time spent on studying is a significant influence. The average time spent by students was 28 h/week, but varying

from 2 – 68 h/week (Berg 1992, p.120-121). But the dependence between time invested and examination results was not strong. In fact, ten hours more time spent on studies resulted in only 1/30 improvement in grades.

Anton Havnes conducted a very thorough ethnographical study on how seven *ex.phil.* students experienced their first-term study in the mid-90-ies at the University of Oslo. Havnes' study was based on learning psychology, and a framework of activity theory and situated learning. He suggests that to understand the learning of these young university students one must leave the conventional cognitivist perspective and investigate student's learning as a process depending of their practical activities. He suggests that shifting emphasis from «mind» to «practice» in relation to student learning involves a fundamental reorientation in the underpinning pedagogy of higher education. One needs to emphasise that:

- knowledge is a feature of social practice rather than «inner thought»
- knowledge is not only integral to the person, but also to a culture
- learning implies expansion of participation in joint social practices
- all knowledge is related to some practice as its invisible prerequisite

These perspectives sums up to the term «situativity» as the core aspect of learning and knowledge (Havnes 1997, p. 140). According to the situativity approach learning environments should be organised to «.. foster student's learning to participate in practice of inquiry and learning and to support the development of student's personal identities as capable and confident learners and knowers» (Greeno, Collins and Resnick 1997, p.20, quoted from Havnes 1997, p. 147).

Havnes' comprehensive and detailed analysis gives a very rich background for the interpretation of Norwegian students' first-year-experiences, to which we cannot refer in great depth in this paper. He found numerous problem areas as to how the *ex.phil* study was organised: lack of teachers' teaching skills, unfriendly and overcrowded lecture theatres, lack of facilities for group work (called colloquia), textbooks were very formal, a voluminous curriculum, lack of student involvement in colloquia, minimal contact with teachers etc. The students' coping strategies varied. Their primary goal was to pass the exam, but also hoping to learn how to study and to

understand some philosophy. Havnes focussed on their motivation, their learning processes, their atonement and development as learners, processes they were often let alone to engage in and develop. The learning style acquired in upper secondary school was often inadequate or even contrary to what is usually seen as favourable for university studies, i.e. they were often functional for meeting short term learning challenges, but not long term challenges. Havnes' criticism was that *ex.phil.* needs to engage students in learning contexts that involves the student as a resource in a "community of learners" where students are given opportunities to experience, reflect, read and discuss their learning in groups. In general, Havnes urges us to develop learning contexts that cater for meaningful, situated learning.

In this respect, the aim of Lillehammer College was originally to move closer to a progressive, liberal arts programme. But, at the time (1970), this was programme was established in a more, politicised and critical sense. Student radicalism of "1968", had one of its most characteristic off springs at the Institute for Educational Research, University of Oslo. An important core of young aspiring educationist took refuge in the newly established Lillehammer College, building the entire college on the new radical ideas, partly American progressivism, partly critical theory and anti-positivism (Jarning 1997, Ålvik 1986, Tangerud 2000). The study in question was therefore an attempt to break away from the traditions described above, and turn in the direction of what Havnes describes as building "communities of learning".

The Norwegian part-time student.

Since Knowles (1980) coined the term *andragogy* a body of research on adult learning has emerged in that field. Central to much of this research are still the basic assumptions presented by Knowles:

- a) adult learners prefer to be self-directed in their learning process
- b) adults have rich experiences which they try to employ in experience- related processes of learning
- c) adults prefer "life-centred approaches" and to solve problems
- d) adults prefer to acquire competencies they can apply to their immediate circumstances (Copland 1989)

The characteristics of adult learners are that they have a stronger desire to use the knowledge immediately, to participate actively in the learning processes, that they have a high motivation to learn and that they prefer to use their experience extensively in the learning process (ibid. p.307). Except for the amount of experience, many first-year students share the same desires. The learning style models generally distinguish between four or more learning styles, and the models become more complicated when age, gender, class and cultural background is taken into consideration. It seems necessary at least to combine considerations regarding learning styles and age when the adult freshman is in question.

Norwegian part-time students enlisting on distance education programmes are typically, between 35 and 45 years old, in a full time job (37,5 hrs/week), married and with at least one child, and more often female than male (Rognstad 2001, p.73). "The triple-working condition" is a term that applies to this group of learners, when being a student often conflicts with other demanding tasks as being a mother or father, and an effective worker. Multiple identities, competing partial identities, and a highly structured everyday-routine in the home puts very strong demands on the mature student. They develop abilities to negotiate the conflicting demands on their time, to be a student, to spend time with the family and do their job. In many respects the part-time students are "invisible", because they visit the college at night and in week-ends, use the phone or internet to talk to their tutors, don't use the library much, and seldom voice their complaints. The tradition of part-time, distance education courses at tertiary level in Norway has been to divide up the study in 10-20 courses with independent exams after each course, structured paper writing with direct responses from the teacher and are generally highly individual oriented (Støkken 1998, p. 206). Research on student's preferences underline the needs of the learner to be independent and have flexibility. Introducing campus sessions or required participation dramatically reduces the number of students attracted to distance education courses. If campus sessions are optional, often less than 20% of the students enrolled turn up (Paulsen 2001, p. 69). Flexibility is usually very important for distance students, e.g. the option to start and end the study at their own liking.

Accordingly studying part-time and full-time should be very different experiences in Norway. With increasing numbers of part-time-adult students the question is how

traditional higher education institutions cater for the mature student. The established research in the field concludes that the characteristics of part-time adult students and full-time students are very different and "...as a result, their needs are very different as well" (Mancuso 2001, p. 166).

Brief introduction to the course-design.

The first year study for full-time students of pedagogy commences in late August with a three weeks introductory course. The first days contain general introductions to the college, library, computers and other facilities. A general adoption-process, whereby mature students introduce first-year-students to the college's social adventures is a mandatory element in the first week. The teaching rapidly focuses on the academic subject of pedagogy, and primarily on "collaborative learning" - adopted from Johnson & Johnson (1987). The students are introduced to group work on day three, and the students have their communication-skills assessed by their peers, and their skills improved in the following days through carefully designed assignments. Their group becomes the primary cell in the organisation of their study. The teaching sessions (in auditoriums) are gradually phased out, and after their first two and a half weeks the students are assigned a paper, to be composed by groups of 3-5 participants. The paper is then read and commented on (not marked) by the assigned tutor after two days, and a plenary session in which the introductory course is being evaluated ends the course. This introductory session then sets the course and rhythm for the rest of the study. The content of the full year is divided into four problem-areas (history of socialisation and education, project-work, didactics, and education and social change), each covering five-six weeks of work, and ending with the handing in of individual or collectively written papers, a teacher commentary and a plenary session evaluating the area of study.

The students suggest their own examination topics for the final exam, and they write one collective paper and an individual paper (each a two week assignment). The papers are defended in oral examination.

The parallel course for part-time-students commences with a far more concentrated course for three-four days, and the formation of the groups is based on the students'

ability physically to meet between the campus-sessions. Similarly, their assigned group is their basic unit for the rest of the course. The teaching load in the part-time study is divided into two: one half consist of videotaped lectures and the other half consists of lectures given during mid-term campus-sessions lasting for three days. The students cover one problem-area per semester and complete the course in two years.

One consequence of the extensive group organisation is that the first year for full-time study offers comparatively few lectures - about 130 'slots' of 45 minutes, which is about half of a similar offering at the University of Oslo. In the part-time study the amount of lectures is even less - about 90 'slots', but videotaped lectures are generally far more compact than lectures given in "real time", so the comparison is not quite fair. Another consequence is that the amount of time allocated to individual and collective tutoring is higher than in comparable studies. The tradition of the study is to make tutors available for discussions on an informal basis, in addition to scheduled tutoring, group wise or individually, during their writing processes, as well as in evaluation and discussion of the papers⁴. For the part-time course loud-speaking telephones are available for students who have possibilities to participate in tutorials in groups, but generally part-time students consumes less of the available time resources than their full-time colleagues.

Hopefully, it will appear that this course of study is quite different from the average Norwegian first-year study (the examen philosophicum as described above or other courses in general), and is based on rather different ideas than those Croxford observed in practice (see above). Even if the course was established long before recent research on self-directed learning, co-operative-learning, or constructivist learning psychology, it seems that those ideas that has been articulated by Havnes (1997) above are fundamental to the curriculum.

⁴ With a class of about 80 students, which has been the average during the 1990-ies, 162 full hours are devoted to contact-time with students in groups, and about 160 hours contact-time towards individual students. In addition to this comes time to reading and evaluation.

Student satisfaction with "Pedagogy"

Since the inception of the course, the formative evaluation element has been a founding principle. Student participation in evaluation and planning was mandatory from the beginning. Alas, as the time has gone by and the students attracted to "pedagogy" no longer are explicitly politically engaged nor left wing oriented, active participation is now confined to "elite-students". Part-time working, family responsibilities and convenience have disrupted the image of the devoted student. Since 1993 the college has implemented a mandatory student-evaluation of studies at the college, in which "pedagogy" is compared with other studies on vital areas as "students' time allocated to study", satisfaction with lectures, tutorials, evaluation, physical and social conditions, library services etc. The survey consists of 67 questions, in 10 groups, in which students score on a Likert-scale. The results are then grouped to some main areas of satisfaction, such as "pedagogical quality and structure", "learning environment" and "social satisfaction". Results from 1995-98 indicate that the full-time students are average in the three areas.

A national evaluation was initiated by four large regional newspapers, who engaged "Norsk Gallup" (NG) and "Norsk Institutt for studier av forskning og utdanning"(NIFU), to carry out a survey with the purpose of "improving the information base for applicants to higher education". The survey is given the title: "Studentenes tilfredshet med studietilbud og lærested". The first survey was introduced in the academic year 1998/1999, and has later been repeated in 1999/2000 and 2000/2001. The survey contains 88 questions in eight groups: general satisfaction, satisfaction with teaching, tutoring and evaluation, satisfaction with physical conditions, libraries and computer-services, administrative routines (including assessment and examination), student welfare, leisure and social activities, as well as general socio-economic background information.

The national survey of 1998/1999 covered 4909 students enrolled in courses at 22 colleges and universities nationwide. The universe included the 85 students of "pedagogy" at the Lillehammer College. The lovely surprise was that among the 22 studies, "Pedagogy" got the highest ranking of them all. In the comparison made with the University of Oslo's corresponding course, "our" students scored (on a 0-6 scale)

an average of 5,1 and the Oslo students scored 4,3. Since then, after 109 studies have been surveyed, "pedagogy" is still ranked as nr. 13 of all studies investigated so far, regarding "quality of teaching and learning environment" and nr. 4 in overall satisfaction⁵. Other studies at our college have also received a very high ranking, and the four newspapers and the two research institutions behind the survey declare Lillehammer College to be the "best place to study" in Norway⁶.

Time devoted to task.

After the heydays of these fabulous results, which gave the college an enormous boost for future recruitment in times of general decline in student enrolment, a critical review of the results might be in place. In general these surveys have revealed that Norwegian students devote a mere 30 h pr week to studies. This figure alone has alarmed the Minister of Education, Research and Church Affairs, Trond Giske, who finds that measures must be taken to make students more "effective". The "pedagogy" students allocate only 22 h pr week, while the University of Oslo students reported an average of 31 h (note 5 and 6 above). Wicked tongues have suggested that the student satisfaction is the result of low academic expectations and the presence of Olympic slalom and down-hill-slopes in the vicinity. Other have suggested that studies of a progressive conception, with minimal didactic structures, mislead students into believing that "hard work" is no longer required.

The amount of time spent on studies is a rather general indicator of intensity and rigour of a students' learning activity. Spending 10 hours more pr week on studies improved the result with 0,1 point on the 30-graded Norwegian scale (Berg 1992, p.121)⁷. The focus on learning style has given us a broad picture of the varieties of activities, the pace and structure that can be productive for the individual learner. It is generally believed that higher education demands a redirection of learning styles, from the "atomistic" style that generally is stimulated in Upper Secondary School, as well as in traditional undergraduate studies (at least in a Northern European context),

⁵ (http://www.studmag.com/index.cgi?show=ranking&rankingtype_id=2 23.4.01)

⁶ <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/d197561.htm> (12.03.01) and <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/d197564.htm> (12.03.01). A quotation from the last referred article could be illustrative: "The two best colleges are in a division above the rest"

⁷ The grades are from 1,0-4,0. 4,1 is failing the exam.

towards a "holistic" style that is invited and gradually rewarded in graduate studies. A learning style was defined by Scarpaci and Fradd (1985, quoted by Swanson 1995, p.2) as "ways in which individuals perceive, organize, and recall information in their environment". Several attempts have been made to operationalise ways to describe and measure learning styles, and to design courses to accommodate a variety of students' learning styles (Swanson 1995, Reed & Oughton 1998, Dwyer 1998). Research also suggests that groups should be balanced as regards the group members learning styles, but this is not always the case. Huxham and Land's (2000) experience was that non-balanced groups and balanced groups performed equally well. The groups in the studies discussed here have either been randomly composed or geographical vicinity has been the crucial factor.

The Norwegian student and self directed learning.

How well prepared are the Norwegian students to take responsibility for their own learning? The comprehensive reform of the upper secondary education from 1994, had enhanced student activity as a central goal, coined as "Student's responsibility for their own learning" (STROL). The underlying psychological theory, developed by Professor Ivar Bjørgen of the Norwegian University for Science and Technology, has been instrumental both for this aspect of the reform and for the initiative for distance education. The challenge has been to develop STROL from a rather moralist conception into a practical and stimulating format of learning within an academic context.

In a study conducted between 1994 and 1998 as an evaluation of the curriculum reform of upper secondary schools, one of the authors (Monsen 1999) found a very consistent pattern in student responses both in surveys and interviews: most of the students preferred the traditional pupil role where the pupils don't take part in anything connected with the teaching. They regarded it as the teachers' job to plan, carry out and evaluate the teaching. In the new "Core curriculum" (of 1993) a new relationship between teachers and pupils was stipulated in which the pupils had those responsibilities and were expected to be an active participant in the classroom. Even if many of the pupils could sympathize with this new obligation, they found it more realistic to continue in the more traditional role relationship. The main reason was

their fear that their active involvement in the classroom would be too time consuming and therefore reduce their time-on-task with learning what they needed for exams. These considerations were in harmony with their teachers' thinking: whereas they too would like more active involvement from their pupils, they also found their pupils too immature or poorly motivated for extended responsibilities. In a group interview with three teachers they were asked what experience they had with pupils taking part in the planning of the teaching. This little excerpt transmits many teachers' feelings about this new expectation in the curriculum:

O: The pupils are involved gradually, asked how they would like blackboard teaching or independent work. They aren't involved in the planning itself.

R: I haven't been able to get them to participate actively. It is something I have had to work with at home in the evenings.

O: There are as many views in the class as there are pupils.

N: I don't think it is just the pupil's background abilities, but also their attitudes which are the problem. We have experienced pupils who are clever and enjoy their subject, can make their own plans and work independently, but it is very difficult if they aren't interested. They fall by the wayside.

R: How much teaching time shall we allocate for such students?

O: Yes, it is the strongest who have the ability, not the others. Quotation from another colleague: "It is a good reform, but not for our pupils".

N: Yes, it is a big problem.

And the pupils give a similar description of the situation, but from another perspective, their desks on the classroom floor:

The situation as regards cooperation in English is quite poor. Lesson plans for two months are given out. In the beginning of the year we were asked if we wanted to take part, but we haven't seen any sign of this since.

We aren't included in any decision making; the teachers make all the decisions. It does happen that we make some objections now and then, but we haven't discussed any method for this.

Monsen found that some teachers are trying very hard to involve their pupils in the teaching-learning process, and that some of them succeed. Over the four years it was found that about 25% of the teachers could be categorized as a successful in achieving active pupil involvement in the teaching- learning process(1999).

Preliminary expectations.

According to the research and experiences reviewed above it is a fair expectation that both full-time students and well as part-time students will face problems when embarking on "pedagogy" as their first year experience. First, the profile of this course is rather different from what upper secondary school has trained them for: few lectures, lots of group work, collaborative learning processes, paper-writing; which all demand strong abilities to take control and use the situation for the students' own purposes. It is reasonable to expect that young students will have difficulties to adjust to this quite different learning environment.

Part-time students will probably meet other types of problems, but one might expect that the profile of the course meets with many of the demands Copland refers to: self-directed learning, problem solving and real world application. However, group-work and collaboration hampers individuality and flexibility.

We assume that adult students will find it well suited to their needs, in accordance with the literature. However there is a conflict between the need for independence and flexibility and the need to develop "learning communities". The interviews gave vital information about how this conflict was experienced. The full-time first-year students must be assumed to have difficulties adapting to this rather dramatically different learning environment.

About the interviews

Ten full time students of the 2000/2001 cohort reported interest in participating in a research project. Among them, eight were 19 or 20 years old. They were interviewed after their final examination papers were handed in, between May 25 and June 13. Six part-time students replied with interest and were interviewed after their final examination on June 14. and 15. The interviews were structured and conducted in the offices of the authors, and lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. The part-time students had mixed backgrounds in terms of previous education. Three of them had degrees from social work, nursing and the Air Force academy. The remaining three had not completed any formal education after upper secondary school. Lars Monsen has

taught this course since 1972, except between 1984-88 when he served as provost of the college. He also taught the interviewed students. Yngve Nordkvelle was a student of Lars Monsen in the academic year 1978/79 and was hired at Lillehammer College in 1992. He has taught the course since 1991, but is presently on leave.

The interviews were taped, and then transcripts were made by the authors. The texts were then condensed in a two-step process, to a three pages list of notable and significant findings, grouped into sections: motivation for the course, former learning strategies, transitional problems, experiences with group work and writing, reading and lecturing and time consumption.

Motivation for studying "Pedagogy" at Lillehammer College

Studies in education is probably not seen as an attractive area of study among 19 years old students. Having been students for 12 years, it is not terribly likely that studying "schooling" or "learning" sounds very tempting. The interview data support this expectation. Only one full time student – he was also 21 - reported that he had applied for this course only. An older female friend of his, who had taken the course the year before had recommended it to him. The rest took the course either because it would give them higher entrance points for studies in nursing, social work or teacher education, or simply because they wanted to start "somewhere" on an academic track and get "the flair" of "academia".

The part-time students however, had an occupational background that made "pedagogy" a reasonable track of studies to follow. They sought generally "pedagogy" as a means to embark on further education, either on the basis of a professional background, or because they were formally unqualified and made plans for a career change.

Former study strategies.

The full time students reported massively that their learning strategies in upper secondary school were dictated by their teachers, and this strongly support the findings above. Inger said: "... I didn't feel we were given any responsibility,.. I felt in

a way that doing one's homework is equivalent to take responsibility for your own learning" (Inger, 20) One interesting exception were students who had previously completed two years in the upper secondary school's branch for social work and health. Instead of completing their third year with an apprenticeship, they had moved to take a third academic year, with intensive courses in Norwegian, foreign language, history, math and science, to qualify for higher education. These two years were experienced as learner centred, where they had been actively engaged in planning and fulfilling their own learning activities, with use of collaborative learning, projects and opportunities to develop personal opinions. These years had also given them experience as to what "Student responsibility for own learning" meant. But, when taking their final academic year, which opens access to tertiary education, the old fashioned autocratic teachers were back in place. In general, the full-time students felt that STROL had had little impact on the practical experiences of their upper secondary education⁸. Although a majority of them suggested that they preferred to learn by cooperation, in project work and seminars, they all felt that upper secondary was dominated by teachers lecturing, and students being paced through the year by frequent tests, with final exams as their target.

Part time students had rather vague memories of how they used to learn in formal settings. They remembered reading and doing homework, but very little of discussion, group work or projects. The social worker, the nurse and the military officer had encountered a wider range of learning activities in their initial training, elements they met again in their study of "pedagogy", to their satisfaction.

The transition – dramatic or conventional?

All ten full-time students told us that they had struggled to get by with the new way of studying. They cherished being regarded as mature and responsible students and "discovered a new world" (Lars 21 yrs.) of learning. This new status is, however, a mixed bag of experiences. The growing sense of uncertainty regarding what "it takes" to master the student-role, was experienced as confusing and frustrating.

⁸ A colleague told me he once discovered his daughter was asleep after school had begun in the

Even if the students felt that the course gave them a more direct experience of what STROL was all about, they were well into the fall term before they realised their own responsibilities. Marie (19) said:

”Well it has been lovely to be here and not have that ”push, push” from Upper Secondary. But I realise today that if this course had had more of that pushing, I might have gotten a better mark, but I think I’ve learned a lot, still”.

The search for relevant information for their first papers in the first term alerted them, but in an instrumentalist sense: producing the paper was more important than experiencing the process of reflection, reading and learning.⁹ They had, early in their study, experienced that group work works, but used their group in a more limited way for the writing of papers, rather than for a more process oriented purpose.

Different aspects of life helped students reorient and start serious studies: ”I realised it was all about children and their lives” Sissel (19) stated, or ”The guest lecturer that talked about the discrimination of women in our schools” (Yvonne, 20) were discoveries that created a personal spark in the direction of making the study a personal experience. It was felt to be cumbersome to get along with reading, discussing and writing.¹⁰ In many ways the first term was painful, and they returned after the holiday brake determined to face the challenges in new ways.

The part-time students did not experience a dramatic shift. They felt it to be demanding to embark on a course with rusty qualifications regarding reading and note taking, but discussing and collaborating was more or less part of their working habits from their occupations. However, as a strategy for learning, group work was unexpected, but welcomed. It helped them organize their work from week to week. They all considered that experiencing a sense of purpose about the course was important for them, and that they were invited to relate their experiences to the theory taught in the course.

morning. He alarmed her, but her reply was: Relax Dad, I have a STROL-lesson now.

⁹ In a survey conducted on the class of 1998/99 in October (after 1/4 of the course has been fulfilled) only 2/3 of the class said they had read more than 50% of the required reading, and only 6,4% had read the whole menu (unpublished report by Yngve Nordkvelle).

Experiencing group-work

The interviewed full-time students felt that their need for collaboration and peers to engage in discussions were met through the formal group organisation. Sissel (19) said: "It was very useful because when we discussed, there were always persons who came up with something useful so that you learn from it, and I think I learn a lot from working in groups..." Group work became their new "pacemaker". The organising of day to day activities became a task driven by the needs of the group. However, they felt that many of their classmates, particularly the more mature students, were too hung up in their everyday-activities, so that they in practice were more inclined to work with the other young students, Marianne (20):

..my group was very socially oriented and we liked that. Sometimes we were on campus from 8 in the morning to 2 in the afternoon (...) but the other group wanted to be here only for 2 hours and go home, and then meet again and work effectively (...) while we liked to sit in the cafeteria and have a good time".

This didn't match the formal set-up, which demands that groups are constructed on a more heterogeneous basis. Consequently some of them felt that the "heterogeneous group" was an obstacle in giving their preferred learning style better conditions. All in all the facing of reality was a rather harsh experience. Realizing the dryness and level of abstraction of the course was one thing, starting to read without day-to-day instructions from the teacher was difficult, and distractions were often welcomed. Learning to live by oneself, leaving friends and family, was emotionally demanding.

Generally the students seem to have become comfortable with the shifting rhythms of the various learning activities. They subscribe to a view that this gave room for diverse learning activities which suited them quite well.

Part-time students are quite elaborate in their responses to whether the course initiated a personal engagement. They tell with enthusiasm how particular topics have initiated deep involvement and reflection:

¹⁰ One student reported that her disappointment with the course not being a part of a teacher training programme, made her almost quit immediately. She "left the course as empty as she came".

”In the kindergarten where I work, we have a climbing tree and we are not allowed to help the children. But then I realised that this is the zone of proximal development, and it takes so little support for them to master something they wouldn’t master alone. I thought: this is Vygotsky in the Kindergarten!” (Janneke, part-time).

But also full-time-students think they have experienced the process of developing their own ”voice” as pedagogues:

”Yes, well I have felt that with the papers we have written, that we have departed from the course literature and discovered some other things – a bit on the side of what the course literature suggested, not necessarily what we were supposed to know, but what was interesting to us and .. we found out things that not everybody knows” (Inger, 20)

Particularly when they were asked about the emphasis on writing in the course, part-time students sounded their enthusiasm. Full-time students had experienced that writing papers was stressful, but meaningful and demanding. But it also became a routine that triggered strategies of coping. Part-time and full-time students were equally positive about their learning outcomes from writing in pairs or groups of three and four, but reported a wide range of coping strategies developed through their course of study. It was particularly difficult in the beginning to manage the formal set-up of the paper: references, alignment, fonts, literature, numbering of paragraphs, chapters and the like.

One part of this problem was about coping with the dynamics of the groups they were assigned to. Three of the ten full-time students felt they had ended up in groups that served more instrumental needs, while other students reported that they had developed new friendships with people from whom they learned a lot. The instrumentalist groups were less focused on qualitative discussions, and more goal-directed: let’s finish this paper!

I: The quarrels you mentioned, - did they end with bad feelings?

R: Not, really, it was mostly about how to put things in the papers, what should stand as conclusions, it was 2 against 3, in a way” (Mette, 21)

But even these students were satisfied with group-work. All students seem to have reconciled with the usefulness of group work, even if they feel inadequate as competent group-members, and even sense that they failed to use the full potential of the group.

Reading the course literature was, however, mostly done individually, and not within a collaborative framework (two exceptions was found). The part-time students reported a little more interest in using the group to study the course literature. But in general the whole body of students focussed their reading in preparing for the papers, and reading the course-literature separately. Part-time students appeared to use the course-literature more directly in their papers, while the full-time-students to a higher degree exploited the potential of the college library, or their local library, as well as the internet.

Part-time students allotted time to read the course literature in between their daily activities, while full-time students made surprisingly little use of the library. They also preferred sitting in their rooms in private and read. Certain books attracted most interest: the books with a broad character as an introduction, soon got the status as "the Bible"¹¹. The "difficult" books were often omitted by the full-time students, including the compendia. The part-time students were more loyal to the course literature, and managed to read most of it.

Lectures

The students were surprised that the lectures were few in numbers and organised as they were. The initial period with two and a half week with 2-3 hrs daily lectures Monday through Thursday, and then three weeks without lectures and only tutorials with the groups, was initially interpreted as a liberating experience: "It has been lovely to have lectures four times a week at maximum, and never starting before 9 (a.m.) Yippee!" (Stephen, 20), but then was seen as a part of a problem. The lectures were also unexpected as to style, topics and structure. They detected the various

¹¹ Professor Gunn Imsen of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology has issued two large books (translated) "The Student's World" and "The Teacher's World", both widely read in Scandinavia, and also as course literature for "Pedagogy".

teaching styles exercised by the teachers: "the structuring organiser", "the caring mum", "the abstract academician", "the high brow ideologue", were soon conceptions circulated among the student group, depicting the different colleagues teaching the course. The teachers related differently to the course literature, and taught sometimes with close references to the literature, and at other times closer to their own research. The students soon became picky and avoided lectures with uninteresting titles. They cherished the good moments in the lecture theatre, but were critical of the message: "I've been there and taken notes every time. It has helped me to avoid the sense of being a lazy student" (Stephen, 20), "...some lectures were interesting and other I learned nothing from.." (Tone, 20)

The part-time-students watched videotaped lectures, but did generally not like them: they were boring, time consuming and exploited little of the potential of the medium. The lectures at the college, however, were embraced. One student said she wanted more lectures: "I think it is lovely to be back in the college, and I sense that the competence flows around me. I love to walk down those broad stairs to the lecture theatres, one gets such a good self-esteem from it." (Bertje, 40).

Intensity of studies: Full-time/Part-time?

The full-time students admitted that the intensity had varied significantly over the year. None of them said they had studied as diligently as in upper secondary school. Going to college was a far more relaxing experience: "In the beginning I was a little lazy, and I thought: I'll manage! That's no big deal!. But then I realised I had to open those books on the bookshelf." (Sissel, 20). When asked to estimate their work-load they generally suggested from less than half up to 75% of what they considered a "full-time-workload". The obligatory papers had caused peaks in their activities the weeks before they were handed in to the teachers for comments. Some reported that the spring was a lot tougher than the fall, work wise. The part-time students have difficulties evaluating their time investments. They had full jobs (only one with 60%), and took the task seriously to find opportunities to meet for group work (one had more than 200 km to drive for meetings).

Discussion

The interview data reveal many differences between full-time and part-time students. It appears that full-time first-years students need considerable time to adjust to the new reality of being a college student. The new reality seems to be dominated by three sets of problems: The new organisation, the development of group-relations, and establishing a functional learning style.

They were used to a visible "pacemaker" in the shape of a host of teachers that organised 36 hours of studying in classrooms with little support for group work or practical activities. The much less formally demanding teaching schedule of the college was fundamentally confusing, but also liberating and, yet, causing anxiety and uncertainty as to understand what the way studies were organized demanded from them in terms of workload, qualifications and mental focus. The gradual discovery of their group as an important resource for organizing their work, took time. It was difficult to establish satisfying relations to the other members of the group. Most often the students focused their work on gathering information, discussing the problem they were focussed on, and writing for the papers. The group was less used as a working unit for preparing for lectures and reading course literature. But gradually they improved their usefulness in these respects. Students eventually coped better with the groups (some in happy relationships, some in business-like), they found ways to write together and experienced group work as beneficial.

The part-time students had other problems adjusting to taking up studies, but managed rather quickly to adapt to the new situation. They regarded themselves as experienced team-workers through years of work and had smaller problems with adjusting to the group as their environment for studying. Their lack of routine regarding reading was compensated for by the exchange of ideas and discussion in the group about course literature, which they used in a more systematic way to write their assignments. The group was not without its problems, but they managed to make meaningful use of it. The part-time students' groups were more vulnerable in the sense that geography and preoccupations with work and family made meetings hard to organize, but through trial and error they managed to establish firm working relations.

The reading behaviour of the full-time students was significantly changed. The gradual reading of a wide menu of books, with pace and intensity dictated by a highly visible teacher, was no longer functional. It meant a loss of sense and purpose to them not being directed in their reading any longer, and when no one controlled them, many lagged quickly behind in their reading of the course literature. The new type of control, e.g. the paper, demanded new reading strategies more along the lines of searching information to solve a theoretical problem. Reading for the paper became instrumental. Reading course literature suffered because the paper did not control for how this was read and interpreted. It appears that ordinary reading of course literature became more organized after some time, but on an individual basis.

Most of these students seem to have gained a personal relationship to their subject, in which they could develop their own topics to discuss and write substantial and long papers about. But the admitted lowering of intensity in their studies is still an unsolved problem. The students admit to working hard for periods and less at other times, dependent of the distance in time to when the next paper is due. This suggests that what Gynnild (2001) found to be examination driven behaviour in this context relates to the pacing set by the mandatory papers throughout the year.

Time spent on studying among full-time students is surprisingly low. Even if research suggest that more hours invested in studying does not pay off to any significant degree, this result is challenging to our conception of what it should take to fulfil the required reading and working. The average of *examen philosophicum* students was 28 hrs/week, while the "pedagogy"-students of 1999 studied 22 hrs/week. One possible explanation would be that they have developed effective new learning styles. They seem not to sit long hours reading, but spend apparently more time together discussing. The discussions lead to writing of papers and are obviously efficient in that sense. The question of efficiency and time-on-task will remain a challenge in the coming year whether how to interpret it.

Conclusion.

It appears that the first-year of "pedagogy" successfully manages to become a "learning community" for their students, both for part-time distance education studies,

and for full time students in their first year. However, part-time students seem to get along with the learning environment with less difficulty and seem to exploit the opportunities with more diligence and enthusiasm.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the full-time students experience the liberal situation as too different from what they were used to and too difficult to cope with, and that they need a more careful follow-up, at least for the first term, in order to redirect their learning strategies towards more long-term goals. They obviously need more specific exercises in the arts of reading, writing, discussing and problem solving in a more goal-directed and yet academic manner, in order to develop their potential as competent members of the "learning community". Whether their problems are greater or smaller than the experienced students (with one or more years of studying experience) is not a question in this study. A particular problem concerns the reading of the course literature and the role it is meant to play in the course. Another fundamental problem is whether the course of study involves students to a sufficient degree when many students admit to only investing between half and two-thirds of their time to the study. Maybe the course is not demanding enough?

The group processes need more attention both for part-time and full-time students. Even if conflicts are seen as fruitful and necessary for emotional and cognitive development, students should avoid unnecessary troubling experiences and be able to optimise collaborative learning for the learning of the subject. However, with a subject such as "Pedagogy" (or Psychology) dealing with problems relating to communication and its skills, the relationship between emotions and cognition, conflict management etc. should be easily incorporated in the curriculum. The part-time students did not complain that working in groups hampered their sense of flexibility and independence, which suggests that their sense of "learning community" might compensate for the constraints that it may have put on their personal freedom.

It is also reasonable to conclude that the different character of the study of "pedagogy" enables students to develop their strategies for learning in a personal way, giving them opportunities to define their course and use themselves and their peers as resources, both in its distance education as well as campus version

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Age-homogenous students in an age-heterogenous setting. How do Norwegian first-year students of “Pedagogy” reflect on learning ?

Paper prepared for a roundtable discussion on “First-year students in an age-heterogenous setting”

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Abstract

The study is a follow-up of research performed in 2001 comparing students in full-time and part-time courses of the same academic subject: “pedagogy” at a small Norwegian college. This study revealed that first-year-students suffered from a number of problems adjusting to the academic study. This second study sums up some of the experiences after a special follow-up-programme was designed for them. This programme comprised extra tutoring and counselling, a literature seminar, as well as age-homogenous grouping. This paper will also focus on how students experienced the transition from upper secondary education (high school) with particular reference to the role of self-directed learning.

The particular problems in adjusting to this study arise from a rather marked difference between the pedagogy of Norwegian Upper Secondary schools and that of this college. The college – and the study in question, “Pedagogy”, was established in 1971 as a distinct alternative to the parallel courses offered at universities. “Pedagogy” in this national context is an academic field similar to the Anglo-American term: “educational studies”. It has a reputation as a progressive study, based on a project work, seminar groups, high level of student participation, and frequent production of papers, active teacher involvement and evaluation of the student's progress. The data the study will use based on interviews with 15 first-year students and their written reflection reports.

The results indicate that the age-homogenous grouping reduced the level of stress and discomfort related to group dynamics. They regretted the loss of possible benefits from speaking with more experienced and mature fellow students. They were unsure of the benefits, but managed to adjust somewhat quicker to the new learning styles required in the study than the previous study showed. It also showed that this process of studying made students reflect on their experiences as learners and developed essential study skills, such as critical reflection and writing, critical treatment of sources, oral discussion and argumentative skills.

Introduction

Researching the first-year experience is not a common task in the Nordic setting. Some studies have been undertaken (Berg 1992, Braten & Olaussen 1998), but generally the problems associated with first-year experiences, does not seem to worry institutions or researchers much. Three factors might illuminate why this has been of low concern. The first is that mass recruitment to higher education is a fairly new phenomenon – at least in Norway – and second – that the structure of academic programmes seldom makes distinctions about first-year students, so that the academic career of students from their first year has been difficult to trace. That means that the rate of retention has not been a critical issue. The third factor is the division between

colleges being traditionally specialised institutions for engineering, teacher training or nursing (etc.) and the universities. The colleges have had a strongly regionalized structure with small numbers of students. Local recruitment and a caring, intimate atmosphere has potentially made dropout a minor problem. On the other hand, the universities have institutionalised a first-semester programme in the foundations of philosophy, which traditionally has had a high rate of student failure. This course – the “examen philosophicum” has therefore operated as a filter by which “unable” students have been effectively excluded from further university studies. The belief that “examen philosophicum” had a positive function in this respect was widely held until the last decade.

The academic branch of Norwegian Upper Secondary education has a long tradition from the Latin schools of the 19th century. However, Latin was abolished in 1896 as an obligatory subject. The character of being a preparatory school for higher education has been challenged through several reforms throughout the 20th century, but with minor effects. One major reform introduced as “Reform ‘94” implemented an element called “Student responsibility for own learning” (Norwegian acronym AFEL). AFEL introduced procedures for involving students in planning, organising and supervising their own studying activities. According to the professor of psychology who introduced the concept with much success, Ivar Bjørgen, AFEL would mobilise the student’s potential to more actively seek knowledge, make their studies more meaningful and strengthen their self-esteem as learning persons (Bjørgen 1991). This reform was also seen as a genuine preparation for studying in a more university-like sense.

This paper has to foci: first-year-students’ adjustment to a progressive academic curriculum and what type of information students’ reflections on studying represents. When students compare previous experience from upper secondary school with those of first year on a college we will try to elicit signs of meta-cognitive reflection according to Mezirow’s hierarchy of reflective thinking.

The students we interviewed were first-year students in a foundation one-year-course of “Pedagogy”, which equate “Education” in the Anglo-Saxon language. This implies that they read and study several texts on learning as well as the importance of

reflection and experience, for instance in studying the implementation of AFEL in Norwegian Upper Secondary schools. The study in question has a long reputation for its progressive curriculum; being problem-oriented, project-based and focused on group-work and co-operative learning. Students write essays on topics they formulate and are examined on the basis of a portfolio of writings of various genres collected through the year.

In a previous study it was discovered that students moving from upper secondary schools to studying under a progressive regime have a hard time adjusting to the study in question. The contrast was challenging and difficult to comprehend (Nordkvelle & Monsen 2001). This paper examines how the transition is interpreted when the course organised the first-year-students in designated groups in order to facilitate their transition.

Students' meta-cognitive and reflective skills – how are they promoted in upper secondary school and in first-year-programmes today?

Reflection and meta-cognition are central skills in the analysis of learning and cognitive development, not only in higher education. While the various faculties of logical thinking is stimulated and sought improved through a variety of school subjects, reflection and meta-cognition is probably first and foremost enhanced through communicative subjects such as mother tongue, literature, foreign languages or more expressive subjects.

For more than a century the essay has had the position as the prime expression for the personal growth and maturity of the upper secondary school student. Johnsen (1997) interprets the position of the “examen artium” essay in Mother Tongue as the hallmark of the student's abilities and prospects of surviving further studies. Students' written assignments have by tradition been closely associated with writing essays in Norwegian. In the academic branch of upper secondary pupils are expected to hand in an essay every third week, on topics suggested by the teacher. The final examination from upper secondary school consists of writing two essays – each in six hours writing periods as two out of five written examinations for the “examen artium”. Writing is therefore almost entirely conceived of as a personal process. Learning to

write is about learning to write on your own. The preferred style of writing has changed, as demonstrated by Johnsen (1997), but the essential assumption about the writing of essays as a means to formation of attitudes, knowledge and civility appropriate to become an educated civilian has remained unchanged. Examen artium is, however, an examination of writing skills, and not about handling sources, reading critically, making resumes, comparing literature and arguments, retrieving information etc. that are typical of writing essays in higher education. Johnsen (1997) demonstrates that the essay for examen artium did change in the direction of more analysis of text, rhetoric and literary criticism. But still, the main genre was writing on your own, without particular preparation, and without aides, sitting six hours and writing by hand.

The “examen artium” was originally the entrance test for university studies. The classical reason for introducing philosophy as the first-semester study in “Examen philosophicum” has been the need for students to be familiar with the history and method of scientific thought. Traditionally the curriculum has been divided into three: History of Philosophy, Scientific theory and Logics & Argumentation. The last subject has been a training in practical logic and examination of argumentation and language-in-use. While the curriculum of “examen philosophicum” has been debated and changed in its details, this still holds as the central core for the persistence of philosophy in the first term.

What is well documented from earlier studies is that the ”examen philosophicum”, which has been obligatory for university students, has functioned well as a preparation for the traditional university study, ironically preparing students for solitary reading, mass lecturing and examinations that test students’ memory. The fact that many students quit after this first semester has not been seen as alarming until the beginning of the 1980-ies. The white paper on “Quality of studying” of 1990 was indicative of this new concern. The initiatives from the Ministry for Education, Church and Research in the direction of improving the quality of studying were significant (Handal & Lycke 2000). All higher education institutions established initiatives for quality control and development from 1995 on. However, parallel to this, a colossal rise in student enrolment – from 100 000 in 1990 to 170 000 in 1993,

caused other problems which probably not contributed to significant improvements in this direction.

By 1993 the higher education system was drastically reformed whereby a large number of independent colleges were grouped together regionally into 23 colleges. The former regional colleges, established from 1969 on as regional alternatives to university studies, had maintained a discipline based foundation of university studies, as well as adopted more professional studies in areas like tourism, logistics, fishery and agriculture. These regional colleges were merged with colleges of nursing, engineering and teacher training from 1995 on in this new structure.

These regional colleges never made the examen philosophicum obligatory. However, in most cases the colleges could not issue degrees beyond the level of “cand.mag”, which was a four-year degree.¹² In order to compose this degree, students elected freely among university subjects in units of one-year studies, and half-year units specialising and elaborating on the basis of the foundation courses. In contrast, teacher training, nursing colleges and similar had rigid structures with limited options for elective subjects, combined with practical training in the professional fields.

While the Anglo-Saxon tradition has a fairly homogenous base for recruitment into colleges, which justified the “freshman” – label for an age-homogenous cohort of students, first-year students at regional colleges could enter any subject as their first. Subsequently the amount of 19-20 year old students fluctuated and for the study in question, has varied between 10-30% over the last years. The average age of a first-year class of teacher education at Oslo College in 1997 was 24.1 years (Braten & Olaussen 1998). The average age for students entering the study in question is about 23 years.

The tradition of having experienced and first-year students studying together has probably contributed to making the entry to college studies less stressful than entry to the university. The stress and problems related to the examen philosophicum at

¹² To proceed to higher levels, the universities had, more or less, a monopoly in issuing the Masters degrees, (after six and a half years), demanding the examen philosophicum as obligatory. Consequently, the examen philosophicum were demanded as part of a masters degree ritual.

universities has been fairly well documented. Nevertheless, the problems of the first-year student, has been hidden and not alarmed anyone because the first-year students don't appear as a cohort in the colleges.

Reform in higher education from 2003.

The White paper from 2000, (NOU 2000: 14 “Frihet med ansvar”) analysed the many facets of problems and dilemmas of higher education in Norway. The main result, which is about to be implemented from 2003, is that the model adopted in the Bologna-meeting, will be the model for higher education. The three-year BA-degree (as opposed to the four year cand.mag) and the five-year MA-degree (as opposed to the six and a half year cand.polit/philol/real) will be the ruling model from 2003 on. Subsequently universities and colleges are now about to harmonise their structures. The examen philosophicum will appear in a reduced manner as an introductory course in all BA-studies. Therefore, all BA-courses will have a much clearer homogenously recruited entry level. The other element is that modularisation will be implemented on a large scale. The traditional full and half-year studies will be sliced to smaller modules and made available on a far more elective basis than before. On the other hand the structure otherwise will recommend that the first year will be a fairly comprehensive and general course, and that elective strategies will be more adequate for the second and third years.

The colleges will then gradually be reimbursed from the State on the foundation of completion of full degrees. Therefore, their financial status will be far more dependent on the success in integrating students for three full years. While previous undergraduate studies were very flexible for students to move between colleges and explore various regions and institutions, institutions will now seek to establish lasting relationships with their students. The institutions will compete for students to a higher degree, first in recruiting them, and then retain them. Our guess is that the focus on first-year students and their experiences will gain much wider interest in the following years in Norwegian higher education.

Studying “Pedagogy” – similarities to the US Freshman seminar.

Freshman seminars can be designed in numerous ways. The suggestions put forward by Jewler (1989), includes the importance of writing, of co-operative learning, team building, getting to know the college and its environments and study skills. The success of introducing students to such seminars, have been overwhelmingly demonstrated by research (Fidler & Hunter 1989). Activities similar to those of a typical US Freshman seminar are integrated from the beginning weeks of the study of Pedagogy at Lillehammer College, and not singled out as a distinct seminar. Initially all courses at the college were supplied with the first-year-activities. In the course we have researched, writing in groups, as collective essays have been the norm since the first course in 1971, as part of what is coined a “problem based project work”.¹³ Writing is therefore seen as a collective process by which the entire group is the author, using the library extensively, seeking information and discussing the content, outlining, dispositions and conclusions. In addition the students are assigned to tutors throughout the academic year. The tutors assist the students in developing problems and themes they can handle theoretically in writing projects, participating in response-giving as well as evaluation of their essays.

The effect of these activities, have never been investigated beyond the practical level. However, in a study conducted in 2001, two of the authors conducted a study that questioned the quality of the study as a first-year seminar (Nordkvelle & Monsen 2001). The hypothesis was that while the study was eminent for critical and politicised students of the 1970-ies, the aim of fostering critical students with a strong focus on the process of studying was less functional for the “post-modern” student typical of the turn of the millennium. The hypothesis was supported and confirmed that first-year students did struggle to overcome the rather dramatic shift of teaching styles, reading and writing habits, group work and collaboration, from the

¹³ In this respect the aim of Lillehammer College was originally to move closer to a progressive, and for that sake liberal arts programme, but, at the time (1970), in a more, politicised and critical sense. Student radicalism of 1968, had one of its most characteristic off springs at the Institute for Educational Research, University of Oslo. An important core of young aspiring educationist took refuge in the newly established Lillehammer College, building the entire college on the new radical ideas, partly American progressivism, partly critical theory and anti-positivism (Jarning 1997, Ålvik 1986, Tangerud 2000). The study in question was therefore an attempt to break away from the university tradition, and turn in the direction of what now often is called ”communities of learning”.

conventional upper secondary school, while more mature students quickly adapted to the type of study that “education” represents. This might also suggest that progressive types of curricula are difficult to enter, and are more suited for older students, in general. To investigate this question further we therefore decided to pursue the research from last year by implementing some measures that would, hopefully, help the youngest students to adapt more quickly to the study. These measures were mainly two: first-year students were organized in designated first-year student-groups, and encouraged to use the tutor more extensively than normal. The other measure was to emphasize reading activities earlier in the study, primarily by introducing a two-week literature seminar after seven weeks of study. The authors all teach at the course. In some respects that position our self as “action researchers” in this context (Carr-Chellman 2000)¹⁴. Given these three new elements we assumed that studying skills and the meaning of the unexpected exercises of this study, such as group work, project writing, tutoring, discussions and literature seminars, would improve the reflection on the student’s own skills and abilities.

Research on reflecting students

The young student entering college is conventionally thought of as “raw material” and inadequately prepared for studying. Such assumptions are old and highly sustainable (Dwyer 1989). The average college teacher usually doesn’t bother to look into what academical and intellectual qualifications the upper secondary level offers. One consequence is that first-year students often report boredom due to the repetitive character of the first-year-college experience. But freshman students themselves often depict themselves as “without experience”. This is not only because of lacking self-esteem. In society at large the schooling experience is most often depicted as superficial and superfluous, in contrast to “real-life” experiences. This division of reality, schooling being less real – or even almost virtual – as opposed to the lived life – has developed for many reasons, but is quite unsatisfactory for our purpose. An alternative is to regard the students at hand as practitioners with primary experiences from learning institutions, with their expertise in the domain of learning. As all

¹⁴ This dimension needs to be elaborated on further, but is, however, briefly reflected in this paper.

practitioners, their abilities and level of professionalism vary greatly. The task of the college is then, to develop their expertise from being novice to become reflective practitioners, in line with Donald Schön's description of professional skills (1983).

Previous research indicates that persons who are trained in reflecting on their own learning have the ability to develop learning strategies (Gibbs 1981, Duke & Appleton 2000). The main activity of being a student is learning, and reflecting on learning experiences should therefore be a viable undertaking. As mentioned above, a scheme introduced to improve the reflective strategies for students in upper secondary education was introduced with the "Reform-94". Student experiences from this programme will be reported below. Much of the literature on reflecting students analyse mature students doing professional studies (medicine, nursing), and the theory of the field is developed mainly for adult education and then applied to regular programmes.

Metacognition and reflection

Becoming critical is not a mainstream curricular element of undergraduate level higher education. Although high rhetoric of higher education praises the virtues of critical thinking and creative approaches, initial studies at the university often are distinguished by the opposite values. Barnett (1997) has discussed curricular demands for the development of critical learners. First he puts the demand that it need a "critical framework", which invites "multiple frames" from different perspectives and positions, second, a "critical space" that allows students the opportunity to foster critical engagement, and, third, a "critical being" – an environment that fosters critical attitudes and practices. These elements are also prevalent in the White paper that governs the coming reform of Norwegian Higher education (NOU 2000: 14, chapter 7)

Reflection is most often defined by Dewey's statement: ". active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends " (1933: 9). Thorpe (2000) outlines three theoretical traditions that enlightens the present state of understanding reflection for the sake of learning, all with greater or less defined origin

in Dewey’s ideas: *experiential learning* – with Kolb as the prime exponent, *Perspective transformation*, with Boud and Mezirow as the prime exponents, and *Cognitive monitoring and meta-learning*, based primarily on Flavell. Kember et. al. (1999, 2000) suggest using Jack Mezirow’s models of analysing reflective thinking, for which Kember and his associates have developed by practical research in a series of articles. Mezirow makes an initial dichotomy between non-reflective and reflective action. Non-reflective action is divided into three: habitual action, thoughtful action and introspection. Reflective action is divided into content reflection, process reflection and premise reflection. The application of Mezirow’s categories to analysis of student journals and interview material, as well as questionnaires has been a major concern for Kember et al. (1999, 2000).

Mezirow defines reflection as:

“Reflection involves the critique of assumptions about the content or process of problem solving... The critique of premises or presuppositions pertains to problem posing as distinct from problem solving. Problem posing involves making a taken-for-granted situation problematic, raising questions regarding its validity (Mezirow 1991: 105, quoted from Kember et al. 1999, p. 23)

He suggests a taxonomy of reflection from habitual action to premise reflection.

	Premise reflection	
Content reflection	Process reflection	Content and process reflection
Introspection		Thoughtful action
	Habitual action	

The process of operationalising the categories for our material, took Kember et al.’s work as its point of departure. Obviously, *habitual action* is of little interest in this context, while *thoughtful action* requires thinking about, while performing “it”. The

actions conceived of as “thoughtful” are those who surface above the level of routine and habitual behaviour, but this reflection occurs only when the normally experienced do not fit with the occurring case. This level is, according to Kember et.al. (1999) aligned with Schön’s “knowing-in-practice”. *Introspection* contains an affective dimension of thinking that refers to feelings or thoughts about ourselves, but without attempts to re-examine or test the validity of prior experience. *Content reflection* means that the actor engages to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations, particularly to examining *what* the thinking and learning is about. On the other hand *process reflection* involves parallel examination of how one perceives, thinks, feels or acts and the assessments of the efficacy of its performance. The most complex level of reflection is *premise reflection*. One important dimension is that reflective skills often are met with resistance. Reflection can be experienced as painful and discomfoting.

Metacognition, according to Flavell (1987) depends on two essential components: knowledge about your personal cognition and control over personal cognition. The knowledge component is again divided into three levels: 1) knowledge about personal variables (e.g. comparing oneself to others), 2) task-related knowledge (calculating the nature of the task) and 3) knowledge about strategic variables (evaluation and election among possible strategies). The control component is related to the self-evaluation and self-regulating process the learner puts on oneself in facing problems when learning (in the text or context). The relationship between metacognition and reflection as theoretical and empirical fields is not examined any further here, but it appears that research on metacognitive strategies has been more focused in research on younger students. Strategies, metacognition, knowledge, motivation and self-regulation are keywords for survival as students, and analysis of expert-students’ academic performance regarding actions and thoughts in order to acquire, process and organize knowledge, focus their learning skills in these areas. One scale, the “Learning and Study Strategies Inventory” (LASSI), used to measure students’ learning results and learning strategies, is one of several instruments. Braten & Olaussen (1998) used this scale to investigate Norwegian teacher college students’ abilities in this area. The main findings were that Norwegian students generally were similar to the average US students in the areas measured, unless in two areas: Norwegian students were less motivated, but displayed a better attitude towards their

study. Their mean age was 24.1 years, which seems typical of first-year students in a teacher college. Older students employed more sophisticated learning strategies than the younger, and female students were more inclined than males to use effective learning styles than males.

The measurement of reflection.

Research on meta-cognition is fairly strongly anchored in psychological testing traditions, based on quantitative techniques for gathering and analysing data. The “reflection”-tradition is more associated with interpretive and qualitative research. However, there also exist quantitative projects in this tradition, for instance Duke & Appleton (2000). Duke and Appleton (2000) summarises the research on reflection in educational development, primarily aimed for nursing education. Their contention is that reflection abilities develop over time. They identified four levels or phases of reflection: non-reflection, reflective phase, critical reflective phase and deep reflection. For their research purposes they developed a taxonomy of eight reflective levels: description, identification of a focus, analysis of feelings, analysis of event/incident in respect to sources of knowledge, analysis of contextual factors influencing practice, synthesis, evaluation and action plan. Each level was supplied with a detailed operational description for marking of the reflection notes. The grades were then treated quantitatively. Kember and associates have employed both quantitative and qualitative strategies (1999, 2000).

Glaze (2002) reports from a course module about reflection in a MSc-programme for nurses, that little has been written about the development of reflection skills. She describes the development of such skills as “a reflective journey” – from the “entry shock” to the “internalisation”. Reflection notes can be produced for many purposes. In Duke and Appleton (2000) the reflection notes were designed as assignments written about incidents experienced in practical training related to palliative care. They were handed in and commented and treated also as a means for dialogue between student and clinical supervisor, who also encouraged student reflections. The tutors marked the notes. In Price’s report (2001) students kept a journal as well as wrote assignments and both were analysed qualitatively, but the study lacks details

about how the notes were written. Neither the structure of analysis was reported, but Price elected statements from three students to illuminate the dimensions of transformative learning he found in the material. Creme (1999), operationalised Barnett's (1997) categories for students, writing a journal of their reading and seminar reflections concerning "Death" as a literature topic. Walkner and Finney (1999) used interviews and videotaped focus group discussions as data, but failed to elaborate on the qualitative methodology employed. O'Rourke (1998) used "The Learning Journal" as tool for "developing student confidence and cognitive ability" (p. 403). This method was developed from the premise that writing about new information or ideas enables students to better understand and remember them¹⁵. These various research projects employ different techniques and are based on a variety of data gathered for many purposes.

Data collection and method in this project.

The limited number of students in the course we wanted to investigate and the possibility to obtain high quality data through interviews convinced us we should take on a qualitative perspective within a case-study framework. In our study we employed a semi-structured interview and a written report about the student's experience from studying. Our aim was to make students elaborate on concrete self-experienced situations related to their immediate interests (as opposed to the LASSI-inventory). The main areas of the interview were: 1) reflection on upper secondary education, 2) reflections on how students understand their own learning style, 3) reflections on the various learning activities. The average interview took about 30 minutes, and the average written report was six pages. The written reflection report was suggested ordered according to an outline issued by the responsible teacher and was written towards the end of their study, shortly before examinations. The report was not a part of the graded assessment. The outline prompted students to elaborate on their learning style, and how it was developed, experiences with learning activities throughout the year.

¹⁵ The journal was a part of the assessment material, handed in and commented on several times during the process before final assessment. However, even if O'Rourke refers to five topics most prevalent in the journals, she does not elaborate on methods for eliciting levels or taxonomies of reflection from this material.

For the purpose of this study we interviewed 13 first-year-students (four 20-year olds, four 21, four 22 year old, and one 30 year old) using a semi-structured scheme grouped in four areas: a) experiences from upper secondary school, b) experiences in relation to learning in the higher education context, c) experiences from group work, d) experiences from other learning activities. The interviews were taped using a tape recorder (5) and a minidisk-recorder (8). The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed by the researchers and imported for analysis using the N-Vivo-software (Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty Ltd. 2001), and the minidisk-recordings were analysed directly using QMA software (CVS Information System 2001). Then we gathered written assignments from the 13 students handed in for their examination portfolio. These assignments were specifically aimed for making students reflect on their student experience. These reports were scanned and imported to N-Vivo for further analysis. However, the time did not allow any deeper analysis of these reports.

The interviews were organised in four sections and coded for 16 items (Appendix 2). N-Vivo sorts responses to similar questions in groups with the respondents still identified, as does the QMA with sound recordings. Five transcripts and eight sound recordings were then available for analysis. Within the group we selected examples of various reflective levels expressed by students. The reflective levels we employed were outlined by Kember et.al. (2000). (See appendix 1). However, we grouped the “Habitual action” and “Understanding” as one sub-reflective level. In our analysis we were concerned about three questions: 1) did this cohort start earlier on developing their study skills compared to the previous cohort? And 2) did the measures implemented (age homogenous grouping, extended tutoring, literature seminar) have an effect? And 3) How does the key elements of the study contribute to the development of critical reflection?

Effects of measures taken.

Apparently, very few of the first year students had a primary desire to study the subject. In fact all of them took the subject for what they coined practical reasons, or to earn credits for professional studies. The motivation was therefore not particularly high as to what would be the content or process of the study. Only one student gave up other alternatives most students would see more attractive. The previous report (Nordkvelle & Monsen 2001) calculated that the students entered into more reflective stages at about four months time, nearly half way out in the full study. Reading and mastering of group work and writing developed rather slowly. These students report that this apparently was less of a problem this year. Ben (20) explained that he did find it counterproductive to be grouped with other peers because he considered himself more mature and initiating than the rest. He won arguments to easily and challenged the other members. However, he found the tutoring important and sought advice on his own initiative.

“The tutoring sessions became an important anchor for me, particularly in the initial stages. I am very satisfied with the way our tutor received our group. She showed her concern for us and gave us confidence in the middle of all confusing new elements. She gave good advices and helped us a lot” (Reflection report, p. 3).

Ben had read all the books on the list of required reading, before entering the literature seminar after six weeks. Still, being challenged to reread and present one of the books presented a totally new problem, which gave him a new angle to approach the study. The book inspired him to motivate the group to make a video about the content of the book. The fun of making it, and the effects of the success of presenting it in front of the rest of the class, boosted a new interest for the study, and positioned him as a keen and good student. And he emphasized that the experiences promoted the co-operative spirit and friendship of the group. “I thought the literature seminar probably was the best experience through the whole year” (Interview). Ben also reflects on how this experience demonstrates insights from John Dewey: “He meant that it was the quality of the experience you have, and not the activity itself, that decides its importance”(reflection report). The literature seminar was in fact the turning point for him and his group. The making of the video was also an opportunity

to use some talents he had developed in upper secondary school for arts and creative work into this theoretical work. His aim is to train as a TV- and video producer.

Betty (21) explained equally that the literature seminar became important for her, but the group process was entirely positive from the first days on: “We found each other instantly, but one of us withdrew because we became too overwhelming for her...(Group dynamics) .. We are sooo good! (Qualities of group work).” Studying with students of her own age was not a problem, but she did miss more males to discuss with. Reading took, however, a new importance when she and her group were assigned to Paulo Freire “The pedagogy of the oppressed” in the literature seminar. Understanding Freire meant a flying start to the rest of the study. Betty also embraced the tutoring, but not as a critical dimension. She admits she could have used the tutor more, but as long as the group processes were unproblematic, and studying was fun, the tutor was not an urgent factor in her adaptation. “But if I didn’t have one to meet and discuss with I don’t think we would have known were we were at all (tutoring)”.

Anna (20) was also happy for the availability and helpfulness of the tutor, but was less happy about the shift of tutor between problem areas, which she experienced as confusing. She was also not satisfied with the group process, and she missed the opportunity to study closely with more experienced students who could push her more along. Group work became a business-like event, where the members met, negotiated and distributed tasks before separating and doing individual work. Then they met again and edited the final result. She found her reading habits had changed from upper secondary, but in ways she had planned for – older friends and relatives had prepared her for the demand of reading – independently and eagerly, in spite of the absent teacher who had paced and controlled her work in upper secondary school.

“Interviewer: Can you explain how you experienced this transition concerning reading?
Anna: Well it was like.. - you just had to start. One had to read on your own. So that was OK”

These three students experienced three courses of coping with the challenges: Ben felt the group work troublesome, but was relieved by the tutoring and the positive experiences of the literature seminar, Betty started off with a happy relationship in the group and tutoring and reading of literature became added value as she grew more and

more satisfied. Anna established a steady habit of reading via advice from significant persons in her private life, but did not experience group work as a surplus. In stead, tutoring became a sort of regulating institution that kept the group together.

Reflective levels in interviews and reflection notes.

Upper secondary school revisited

All our interviewees tell us about an upper secondary school which was teacher oriented, and directed by the tests, and with a pace and process that seldom allowed them to reflect or review their abilities. In this context they responded with either attachment to particular subjects or teachers with whom they relate and seek a more intimate relationship with. Even if most students expressed themselves rather critical to the school culture and teaching styles of upper secondary school, students who had also experienced other branches of upper secondary school, such as “health and care”, or “art and design” were more positive. These students had also experienced the AFEL as a positive dimension, as opposed to those from the academic branch. Linda (21) explained: “What I am left with from upper secondary school could been a lot better if I had understood what it was all about, but I just drifted along “with the flow” and did what I was asked to do. But now I see that there were so many opportunities to become critical of what went on”. Anna was quite satisfied with the learning milieu “I assume we learnt what was required”, while Betty expresses anger: “...we were angry at ourselves because the school didn’t give us more serious challenges, - angry because we were too uncritical to what we learnt, ... but how can one be critical if one doesn’t know?”

Discussion

Being critical of one’s school experiences is probably quite common and ritual. Being a college student means an opportunity to pursue ones interests in a manner that makes critical remarks of previous schooling almost conventional, if not habitual. The transformation is in many respects a *rites de passage* in which being critical of the past is conventional behaviour. Apart from this, distinctive criticism of particular elements and arguments seated in content specific terms within the pedagogical

domain reveals that some of these students have acquired a reflective distance in which they suggest that this experience might have been different and better. However, some thought uncritically about their previous experience, and felt that the study had failed to engage them in a more reflective sense. Learning in upper secondary was about improving the effectiveness and output, and not about questioning the “hows” and “whys”.

Learning to study

Facing group-work, new reading strategies and writing in groups were new ways of organizing learning to all the interviewed. All of them refer to confusion and distress at some degree, but as reported above, it was relatively easy to overcome for most of them. Adjustment and adaptation is not necessarily based on reflection, it can be quite “thoughtful action” to comply with new expectations and rules for survival. Some students expressed quite critical thoughts concerning these activities. Nils (30) felt that being in a group with students who were product-oriented and ignoring the value of discussions and processes had the consequence that he had to resign from vital serious intentions in his own plans. He felt he was not allowed to reflect and study for sufficient periods. As soon as he had identified an interesting field, the progress of the study demanded he should go on to new fields. Studying was, all in all, not fit with his serious intentions. It was not only his age that differed from the others, but also his background in Waldorf-pedagogical institutions and his work-experiences from more than ten years. Betty (21) expressed how the first year had meant a search for better studying habits. It had changed the whole time, and summed up: “And I think Pedagogy in it self is an optimal way of entering studies – to start thinking about how you learn, and put your self in focus, - I can recommend that (Changes)”. Diana (22) said:

“You can work with other students in a process for the purpose of learning. You don’t work for a product only, but the aim is to develop – both knowing more content-wise, but also personally – as a person – in a collaborative process [...] Pedagogy makes one think.. and I think that those processes in the group that I tell everybody about how interesting that is (my favourite way of learning)”

Sylvia (21) felt that studying in this manner implied adjustments that were strategic: “When we found out how the teacher wanted our essays to be written, we started to

write perfect papers (my favourite way of learning)”, but she managed to direct the topic of the essays towards her own interests. Betty regretted that some opportunities were lost: “I regret we didn’t organise the reading more in our basic groups. Using the group for literature seminars would have been most helpful. But these things you realise first after a while. (my favourite way of learning)”. “First of all”, Vivian (21) said, “ I appreciate the option we have to read what we have taken an interest for - I don’t think other studies are quite so liberal in this sense [...] I have experienced that I learn better when I follow my own tracks, in order to find out about problems (reading habits)”. “I learn very much from discussing things, it makes a lot of difference for me if I can say the things I’m concerned with (reading habits)” (Lena, 22).

Development of personal approaches and interpretations were phenomena mentioned by many. Such elements often were pursued in spite of critical discussions with their teachers. Lena (22) explained how the students in her group agreed that analysing the movie “Harry Potter” would be the most relevant thing to do for a paper due in December. “We thought that was a splendid idea, and argued strongly for it, but our tutor disagreed. When we asked: have we passed on this product, he replied: what do you think? I still don’t know what he really thought about it”. Almost all students verified that they felt they had developed as writers and took some pride in writing stuff they would show their parents, friends etc. to read. The critical remarks were focused on the tutors who refused to give grades throughout the year. That is communicating double standards, according to Jenny (20).

Discussion

The double bind of becoming critical and then redirecting the newly acquired criticism towards the “liberating source” is an interesting stage of transition. Adapting and adjusting is the wise thing to do, but developing a new criticism towards the visible teachers and tutors is also functional. Although the interviewees appreciated the “critical space” offered to them, they had employed this ability not just to celebrate it and enjoy. The critical reflections were also directed towards things they found dysfunctional or irrelevant. Those who expressed little criticism towards previous schooling experiences were equally uncritical to this new learning context. Critical reflections on the present state of studying could sometimes be interpreted as

“finally I have discovered my way” and thereby established this as a new type of conventional – or pre-reflective thinking. However, maintaining this criticism and transforming it to subject-oriented questions, such as: “what is the foundation for this knowledge claim” is probably relevant to scrutinize further – probably because the Mezirow/Kember-taxonomy in some ways seem to have problems with describing longer projects. The Reflection level describes a beginning reflection, while the critical reflection, more or less describes a new “state of mind” which might be interpreted as a stable condition. The students we interviewed are experiencing transitions, less stable than what a “Critical reflective person” might be. None of them were possible to categorize as scoring stably in one or the other category.

Writing and discussing in problem-solving activities.

The collaborative process in groups had given students both painful and hilarious experiences. An interesting finding is that few students reflect on why their groups functioned or was malfunctioning. If the group was successful, all the obvious reasons were given. If the opposite was the case, some students explained the processes of manoeuvring their way to other groups that would accommodate them, others had a story about how they tried to solve the problems of group dynamics. “I felt I had got to know three other students of my first writing group, and I was shocked when they told me they wouldn’t write the next paper with me (reflection note) (Renate 20)”. Two of the students explain they liked to write the individual paper better than writing in groups, and pointed at the troublesome group processes as the reason.

The students explain how this manoeuvring also included shifting members of writing groups, and experimenting with writing processes. With the exception of the above mentioned they report about how they established acceptable working relationships, and some friendships with the other students. Few, however, managed to establish a firmer relationship between reading and writing in the group. Writing papers became more cognitive problem solving activities related to the actual production of the paper. “I wish we had used the group more for reading and discussing, apart from the writing projects (George 22)”. Inventing a writing plan, finding stuff and filling out the blanks became emergent tasks, at the expense of deep discussions. But still, most students feel they have challenged each other and developed their skills in arguing:

I: Have you changed view in such situations?

Diana: Well, I think I have become better at opening up, being more flexible, and be open to the possibility that I am not always right. – that I can observe my own point of view from diverse angles.

I: Have you experienced that you have argued so well that other members have changed a view?

Diana: I believe so, yes, I do (Qualities of group work). (Diana 22)

Diana was mostly very satisfied with how her study had turned out to be. Others were more critical about how some group-writing processes had been overcrowded with six persons to a group, and sometimes with bothersome “free riders” that didn’t contribute. Working in groups was perhaps the most critical domain in the interviews and most often commented on in the reflection notes. But few really contested the idea, and some supported it strongly:

“I think that doing these writing projects make us work more evenly throughout the year. I visited a buddy who studied Pedagogy at the Norwegian Teacher College in Bergen They got a reading list in August, and a plan for lectures and an examination in May, and I, in contrast to our study – honestly – I think I’ve learned a lot more than him, even if I’m not particularly more keen or able than him (George 22)

This comparison helped George to identify differences that made him appreciate the conditions for his study. It probably meant more work, but more meaningful learning contexts. Most students reported that the study had demanded less work than compared with upper secondary school. But efforts measured by hours spent on being physically in school were most often not compatible with being in a process of learning. Learning about Pedagogy meant “seeing” learning processes everywhere.

Discussion.

The most critical reflections in these interviews focused on the difficulties of handling group dynamics, and develop good working relations. But in a taxonomy of reflection most of these criticisms amount to little more than emotional introspections, expressing anger and discomfort. In a few instances reflections and actions to change the situation was noted. However, the process of exploring conflicts and turning them into fruitful confrontations are delicate and difficult. Even if these topics are taught in the course, an immediate conclusion in this area, is that the positive experiences students develop depends on chance – that positive processes develop by luck and good fortune, and less because students develop this ability through studying

Pedagogy. However, when the good fortune seems to strike a majority of the group, the reflections flourish.

Conclusion

It appears from our analysis that this cohort of students responded positively to an offer of more tutoring, age-homogenous grouping and enhanced efforts to make students read earlier on in their study of Pedagogy. Applying a taxonomy of reflection on the underlying interviews indicates to us that students are capable of reflecting in diverse ways from pre-reflective to critical reflective manners. It reveals that some students resist the challenges to put previous experiences under scrutiny and find their personal way through the problems the situation pose to them. There are, naturally, many good reasons for doing so, depending on many conditions. We have identified the troublesome dynamics of group work as a possible problem generator in this context for some of the students, which means that the authors of this paper needs to look more closely into that problem and suggest means to solve it.

The presentation above hopefully describe that first year students do reflect in Dewey's sense: "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends".

These considerations develop when they are stimulated to do so. A closer look at the student interviews and reflection notes would allow a more detailed analysis of how the reflections would be distributed among students. This analysis suggest some areas where students express reflections to lower and higher degrees in a first-year experience, on their way to develop more stable critical and reflective strategies for coping with the world of learning.

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Appendix 1:
The Mezirow/Kember taxonomy

Habitual action

When I am working on some activities, I can do them without thinking about what I am doing.

In this course we do things so many times that I started doing them without thinking about it.

As long as I can remember handout material for examinations; I do not have to think too much.

If I follow what the lecturer says, I do not have to think too much on this course

Understanding

This course requires us to understand concepts taught by the lecturer

To pass this course you need to understand the content

I need to understand the material taught by the teacher in order to perform practical tasks

In this course you have to continually think about the material you are being taught.

Reflection

I sometimes question the way others do something and try think of a better way

I like to think over what I have been doing and consider alternative ways of doing it

I often reflect on my actions to see whether I could have improved on what I did.

I often re-appraise my experience so I can learn from it and improve for my next performance.

Critical reflection

As a result of this course I have changed the way I look at myself.

This course has challenged some of my firmly held ideas

As a result of this course I have changed my normal way of doing things.

During this course I discovered faults in what I had previously believed to be right.

Appendix 2

The sections for coding of interviews

Why pedagogy

Experiences from Upper Secondary

How I studied

How I conceived of “Responsibility for Own Learning”

Learning-milieu

Experiences from “Pedagogy”

Changes in studies

My favourite way of studying

Learning environments in college

Reading habits

Using the library and the Internet

Personal involvement and significant situations

Group work and –writing

Group dynamics

Qualities of group work

Writing in groups

Writing individually

Tutoring

Evaluation of experiences