

A "FOLKBILDNING" APPROACH IN MEDIA TRAINING

by Svante Hektor

Should it be called 'Peoples Education,' 'Adult Popular Education' or what should it be called? In Sweden it is known as 'Folkbildning.' Yet another new pedagogical approach in order to catch attention? No, it's a concept for adult learning widely used in Scandinavia for the past 150 years which implements the democratic foundation in both theory and practice.

Folkbildning is a Swedish word for a special approach to adult learning and training with quite a long history. The folkbildning perspective that in Scandinavia, and especially Sweden, developed hand in hand with the democratisation process may be found to some extent in other parts of the world. However there is no equivalent word that matches the concept of "Folkbildning" fully. In English words like 'Liberal Adult Education' or 'Adult Popular Training' are used and there are many more suggestions. Giving a precise and full explanation of this unique pedagogical approach is not that easy since there is so much in it. I have therefore preferred to stick to using the Swedish word 'folkbildning,' and I will, in this article, try to outline some characteristics that may give a hint about the concept and its relevance to media training.

Folkbildning started in the late 19th century when industrialisation changed many people's sources of income from agriculture to industries of different kinds. Throughout history there have been different ways of gaining knowledge and skills for different professions, but also general knowledge to be used in life. The majority of people have, however, not had access to the different traditional schools, academies and universities. Still they needed more "light" of knowledge in their lives both for what they were doing as an

occupation, but also as active and responsible members of society. As the concept of democracy was introduced it also became apparent that if people were to be able to take part in the democratic process of making decisions for society, they also needed not only general knowledge but also experience of working in a democratic manner. So the folkbildning concept became one of the answers to that need.

When public radio was introduced in the early 20th century it developed into a channel that fitted very well with the folkbildning concept. Lectures, teaching and modeling were given through radio programs and listener groups were formed where people could discuss and learn together. For the first 25-30 years it was apparent that radio was to a very large extent being used for development of knowledge among the masses. (Nordberg 1998)

However what is Folkbildning really? The word consists of two smaller words, folk which means ordinary people from the masses, and bildning which broadly means general knowledge and education that provides orientation in life for the individual. For a person to have bildning does not mean that the person must have been to a number of schools or traditional training programs but it does not exclude that either. Bildning may be gained in schools but also in many informal ways, and is not focused on some speciality or specific vocation, but rather more on a general sense of understanding the world and how to navigate in it (www.ne.se). The big people movements like sports organisations; religious groups (mainly Christian movements), workers' unions and groups working against alcohol and drug addiction have been among the main players of the folkbildning in Sweden. Though supported much by the government authorities, it still has been in the hands of the people (Rubenson 1995).

The concept of Folkbildning has a bottom up approach where the learners and their needs are the main driving force for learning, and the teacher takes more of the role as facilitator and/or moderator. People learn together and the element of participation is strong. Often this happens in so called study circles, where the leader is a facilitator more than a teacher. The dialogue in the meeting point of

different people, with different perspectives, is considered a fruitful place of learning. Maybe that is why folkbildning in different ways went hand in hand with the process of democratisation in Scandinavia.

There is in fact a flavor of Problem Based Learning (PBL) and Learning Organization in the folkbildning concept, where continuous learning and self directed learning is seen. Rubenson (1995) suggests furthermore that folkbildning is always voluntary, and it models and strengthens the democratic values and ways of acting. It differs in pedagogy and methodology compared to other learning approaches and traditional marking and grading do not really fit when learning is done largely based on individual needs and desires.

Some scholars suggest that folkbildning has commonalities with andragogy, the theory of adult education proposed by the American educator Malcolm Knowles. The andragogy theory suggest that i. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their learning, ii. Experience, including mistakes, provides a good basis for learning activities, iii. Adults are most interested in learning the kind of things that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life, and iv. As in the PBL concept adult learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented (Knowles 1984). Since Folkbildning is an adult learning concept, it connects quite well with the theories of Knowles.

Folkbildning methodology may also include lots of practical activities using arts, music and games involving the different senses when creating learning experiences to reflect on and discuss in the group.

Christian Media Training

How then does the folkbildning concept connect to mass media and Christian media training in the 21st century? Media training is generally adult training and involves much more than just the different media skills. It involves general knowledge about people and life itself. The media skills may be important tools but the ability to relate to people in an appropriate way, allowing different

perspectives to be heard and seen is maybe even more important. Currently the folkbildning approach is used in development projects in places where media training is a vital part of giving a public voice to minorities.

When producers are trained in a way where respect for different views and participation of all learners is valued and encouraged, that will also most likely affect their later media programming. A radio or TV journalist needs to know the people in their intended audience. Working with the audience, learning together with them, rather than "telling" them different things, offers an opportunity for participation and appreciation where listeners also can feel ownership. That does not mean that the journalistic and investigative edge is abandoned.

On the contrary the folkbildning concept encourages discussion and learning from the sparks of the meeting point of different views and perspectives. However that is done with respect and without exploiting people. Christian media training needs to model the perspectives and ethos that Jesus himself modeled by standing up for his message, but at the same time being ready to listen and care for the need of each individual in a respectful way. The folkbildning concept offers many opportunities to model that respect and care for different kind of ordinary people, addressing their specific needs in ways similar to Jesus' approach.

References

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