

COMPASSION im Dialog



Eine Gruppe von 20 Pädagogen aus den Niederlanden besuchte anlässlich einer Studientagung zum Thema „Soziales Lernen“ Freiburg und die Stiftungsschulen St. Ursula Mädchengymnasium, St. Ursula Hildastraße und das Kolleg St. Sebastian in Stegen.

In einem engagierten Dialog dieser Fach- und Führungskräfte aus den Niederlanden mit den Fachleuten aus dem COMPASSION-Projekt, sowie Lehrkräften, Schülerinnen und Schülern unserer Schulen wurden die Erfahrungen aus dieser Arbeit vorgestellt und reflektiert. Der folgende Artikel von Mirjam Stroetinga beleuchtet einerseits die Situation in den Niederlanden und ermöglicht andererseits durch einen Blick von außen auf unser COMPASSION-Projekt wichtige Beobachtungen. **Mirjam Stroetinga** ist pädagogisch-wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin eines nationalen pädagogischen Zentrums in den Niederlanden:

The winning concept of real life education

In April, twenty educators from the Netherlands visited Freiburg. In their jobs as teachers, school managers and education consultants, they work on the development of community learning in Dutch secondary schools. Interested in learning from the German Compassion project, they were given a friendly welcome by the Schulstiftung of Freiburg. In this article an impression of the discoveries and their relevance for the Dutch community learning concept is given.

Meeting the students

On the first day of the exchange program, in the quiet buildings of the St. Ursula Gymnasium, I meet the students of the 11th class. The girls have recently finished their Compassion project. "At first I really wondered what I was doing there. I could not find my instructor and a naked man was walking in the hall way. Eventually I decided to ask one of the homeless people where my instructor was and I found her. It turned out to be an amazing two weeks!" Lisa, a 17 year old student, spent her two Compassion weeks in a shelter for the homeless. Her face lights up in a beautiful smile, as she continues her story: "I used to be a bit scared of homeless people. Especially when they were drunk in the streets, I wanted to avoid them. Since my ex-

periences in the shelter, I know these people are just like you and me. When I meet them in the streets now, the homeless people say 'Hi Lisa!'" Lisa still visits the homeless shelter regularly, to see how the people are doing. During the following days I realize that Lisa's story is one of many others. Each student I speak to seems to have spent pleasant, interesting days during the Compassion weeks and expresses the necessity of this project for other students as well. Their enthusiasm illustrates the effectiveness of the Compassion project.

Social cohesion

The theoretical part of the exchange program shows that this effectiveness is not mere coincidence. In their presentations Dietfried Scherer and Prof. Dr. Jürgen Rekus illustrate the origin of the Compassion project. Initially, the project was designed as a modern, practical way of expressing the Catholic identity of the schools. It was meant to provide an answer to the current processes in German society of increasing individualism, materialism and the decrease of social cohesion as a result of that. The community learning concept in the Netherlands has originated from exactly the same processes. Like the German Catholic schools, the Dutch government acknowledges the need to encourage young people in taking responsibility for the society they grow up in. The government therefore stimulates schools to create a learning environment where students can practice their responsibility.



Prof. Dr. Kuld (rechts) und die niederländische Gruppe auf dem Weg zum St. Ursula-Gymnasium Freiburg

Scientific fundamentals

Although the phenomenons seem to be comparable, the exchange program gives an insight view of the remarkable differences between the German and Dutch con-

cepts. The presentations by Prof. Dr. Lothar Kuld and Dr. Stephan Gönzheimer teach us that the Compassion project focuses on a clearly outlined learning effect: increasing students' sense of compassion for people in social minority groups. Likewise, a clear teaching strategy has been developed, sending students off to an institution to have a real life encounter with a social minority group. During years of research several aspects of the teaching strategy have been tested. How many days should the exposure in the institutions last? Which is the best way to involve the students' parents? Which method of reflection is the most effective? The recent research has turned Compassion into an amazingly well structured concept.

Learning from Compassion

Kuld and Gönzheimer make me realize that the community learning concept in the Netherlands lacks this precise, narrow outlining. In close harmony with Dutch educational culture, schools are given lots of freedom in the way they design their community learning. Even the aims of community learning are defined in the broadest way possible: teaching students to take responsibility for a community interest. Out of this broad definition, Dutch schools create an enormous variety of community learning tasks for their students. Caring for the elderly or the disabled, but also maintaining a community garden, caring for animals, giving sports training or organising a school party, can be tasks that teach students to take responsibility for a community interest. This variety is charming and it offers great possibilities to adjust the tasks to the students' personal qual-



Gespräch mit den Schülerinnen des St. Ursula-Gymnasiums

ities. But regarding the effectiveness of the clearly outlined Compassion project, it can also be understood as a fragile element in our concept. The fewer restrictions one defines for a learning experience, the harder it will get to guarantee its actual learning effects.

As a project manager of the implementation process of community learning in Dutch secondary schools, I realize the importance of offering clear guidance to our customer schools. It will be of great importance to use the current pilot period for the analysis of successes and failures of the meaningful aspects of community learning, such as parent co-operation and reflection strategies. Only by doing that will we be able to motivate and assist schools adequately in their search for effective community learning settings.

Looking back on the days in Freiburg, I'm especially enthusiastic about the fact that in both our countries activities are being developed that concern the quality of life in our communities. Last week Lisa's story came to my mind once more. I called the volunteer centre in one of our pilot cities and their consultant was eager to tell me what happened in his community: "It is fantastic to see how students, who feel so uneasy or unmotivated in the beginning, continue their volunteer work long after their community learning time has ended." It seems to me that in Germany and the Netherlands we are well on our way finding a winning concept for the students and the community we care for.