



DOES A NORDIC-BALTIC PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO ODL EXIST?

This is one of the basic questions in the BOLDIC project. The question is answered in work package 6, and a report dedicated to the question will soon be ready (within a few weeks, a preliminary report will be made available on www.boldic.net). The report is primarily based on seven national reports produced by the BOLDIC countries during 2003. November 2003 the question was also discussed in a week-long international on-line conference. Furthermore, the report draws on supplementary material concerning the e-readiness of the countries.

The report concludes that it is possible to identify central specificities of a Nordic-Baltic pedagogical approach to ODL. The specificities are to some extent shared by all the countries, although there are differences in emphasis. The identified specificities can be classified in five central concepts:

- *student-centred*
- *communication*
- *group or team work*
- *active participation*
- *face-to-face*

The concepts cover terms such as openness, freedom, dialogue, conversation, discussion, reflection and collaboration. The concepts are interrelated, but they stress different aspects of importance to the identity of the Nordic-Baltic approach.

The approach manifests itself in certain methods used in the organisation of ODL courses in practice. A suitable name for the basic elements of a common Nordic-Baltic method is a *blended approach*. The national reports clearly suggest that the organisation of ODL courses in all the countries is moving towards a mix of distance learning and physical meetings. The blended approach is for example reflected in courses with a few face-to-face seminars followed by the students' collaboration in smaller groups. The students have no physical meetings between the seminars but use the web as a platform for discussions.

This blended approach can to a certain extent be characterised as a *Nordic-Baltic pedagogical approach*. However, this is not a strongly founded approach in the Nordic or Baltic countries, but it does seem to reflect a trend or a tendency - a developing tradition, so to speak.

The question is how this approach should be understood - what is the nature of the approach? The historical development of a pedagogical tradition and a learning theoretical framework offer further explanations of the Nordic-Baltic approach.

A historical pedagogical tradition

It is argued that the Nordic-Baltic approach to ODL is influenced by a historical pedagogical tradition which dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. The tradition originates from a radical, democratic and critical movement and from the emerging psychology at the time. This international progressive movement was antiauthoritarian and promoted independence, freedom, respect for the individual, democracy and constructive dialogue. In the 1920s and 1930s the ideas of the movement influenced all the countries in the region. Influenced by, among others, the American pragmatist John Dewey, the movement led to the establishment of progressive schools that opposed and broke with the traditional pedagogy. The ideas of the movement are not Nordic or Baltic in origin, but are the results of international pedagogical discussions.

Learning theoretical framework

Placing the Nordic-Baltic approach within a learning theoretical framework covering behaviourism, cognitivism, radical constructivism and social constructivism does not provide an unambiguous definition or explanation of the approach. There does exist a tendency or a sympathy towards constructivistic theories, and the Nordic-Baltic approach *does* show significant signs of constructivism. Especially the emphasis of the Nordic-Baltic approach on the student-centred and communicative aspects concerning discussion and collaboration reflect a constructivist approach. But the Nordic-Baltic approach cannot unambiguously be catalogued as constructivistic.

The Nordic-Baltic approach - a shared vision

The Nordic-Baltic approach is to a large extent influenced by a historical pedagogical tradition and by constructivist learning theories. The historical background and the constructivist learning theories are influences - not a foundation. The Nordic-Baltic approach reflects tendencies - not a tradition. This means that there is a need for a further elaboration and clarification of the approach. However, the approach expresses a shared vision between the Nordic and the Baltic countries. A vision that can form the basis of future collaboration and further development of the Nordic-Baltic pedagogical approach to ODL.