

## **AT – Judith Wolf and Sonja Weissenböck, student teachers**

### **Report on teaching visit – Skårup, Denmark – 14.09.-23.09.2008**

Our international coordinator in Denmark, Mrs. Birgith Lotzfeldt, was very helpful while planning our visit in Denmark. She organised a hotel for us and sent her colleague Mrs. Annette Japelt to pick us up at the train-station in Nyborg. Mrs Japelt was very kind, she took us to the hotel and even invited us to have dinner with her family.

Monday morning Mrs. Japelt picked us up at our hotel to drive us to the school in Skårup and introduced Mr. Allan Østergaard, our local teacher, to us. Although Mr. Østergaard hadn't answered the e-mails we had sent him before we left Austria, he seemed to be very happy about our visit and took us to his class. In the next two math-lessons we were fully integrated in teaching. The following German-lesson was more or less held by us. This way we got to know the pupils very quickly. They seemed to look forward to their math-lessons on Thursday, although they still felt quite uncomfortable speaking in a foreign language.

The reason for their positive attitude towards the project was probably Mr. Østergaard engagement. He gave us a lot of support, organised some material that we needed for our lessons and did not have any prejudices against our way of teaching. He although seemed to be very interested in our ideas and helped us to understand the Danish way of teaching.

After the lessons we did not have any problems finding our way home because of the maps Mrs Japelt had sketched for us the day before.

Tuesday morning Mrs. Lotzfeldt took us for a sightseeing trip to Odense, where we got to know a lot about the famous Danish poet H. C. Anderson. She also invited us to a traditional Danish lunch.

When we first saw the school of Skårup we were not impressed by its outface. It looked more like a factory that was built in the fifties than a building for children. Also the corridors looked quite unfriendly although there were some paintings and some posters.

In the teachers' room it was very comfortable and there was a lot of space for communication. We also noticed that there was no space for the teachers to prepare their lessons or to store their material at school.

During our visit at the school in Skårup we noticed that the teaching-culture in Denmark is very different to the one in Austria. They seem to have no exercise books, to take notes during the lessons. It is also not common for the teacher to present something in front of the class or that pupils are doing exercises on the blackboard. They usually get some tasks to work out by themselves or in small groups. While they are doing that they can stay wherever they feel comfortable. Observing the pupils we noticed that just the half of the class was really working on the tasks, while the other half did anything else without getting disciplined.

When discussing our observing experiences with the local teacher we learned that in Denmark all children (the very smart ones as well as those who need special support) attend the same school. Therefore there is a big difference in level in every class.

In Vienna we prepared two lessons with the Pythagorean Theorem in our meetings. Two months before we went to Denmark the Danish co-operator informed us that we are going to teach 15-year-olds. We were a bit confused about this situation because in Austria we teach this issue to 13-year-olds. So we weren't sure if our exercises would be too childish and would bore the Danish pupils.

During our first lesson we realised that our scruples were completely unnecessary. Although Mr. Østergaard told us that he had already taught them the Pythagorean theorem the week before, the exercises seemed to be too difficult for them and we needed much more time for our explanations than we had thought. The language wasn't the problem, but their lack of mathematical background. Another big problem we had was the discipline of some pupils. They were just not used to concentrate on the lesson and did whatever they felt like.

As a consequence we changed our plan completely and made them work in small groups, which we supported intensively. We even gave them different tasks to do and helped them individually. This was only possible because there were two of us.

The pupils' reactions to our presence in the class were very good as their local teacher confirmed. Most of the pupils accepted English as a teaching language. Mostly they understood us very well and it wasn't any problem to explain unknown words to them, that we used during the lessons. It was just a pity that the local teacher, the coordinators and the Danish students who observed our lessons talked Danish with the pupils.

Due to this experience we got the impression that teaching mathematics in a foreign language is not a hard task to fulfil. Even the pupils did not have so many problems using the language. The real challenge was the difference in school systems. The school systems and the idea of education were so different in Denmark compared to Austria, that you could not compare the school in Skårup to any other school in Austria. An Austrian teacher, who had been educated at University, is simply not trained to handle pupils who need special support like we had found them in our class.

Nevertheless it was a great experience for us and an interesting challenge to work with pupils, which had such a difference in level, in one class. We learned a lot.