

Flash groups: Copenhagen Skole Bus

We were not yet a group as we got onto the bus in Copenhagen. Here we were, second day of a study visit, six students and me, seven women in search of a destination. None of us had worked together before in this combination or in any other constellation.

Of course, we were sub-groups; in pairs and triads as we got on the bus. Each showing the travel card to the driver and the first pair asking for directions to Kofoed's Skole. Driver shaking his head, with a genuineness of not knowing rather than not caring! A passenger seated next to the students engages in conversation partly in English and mostly in Danish. There is a rustle of paper and maps; smiles, nodding, pointing, words of encouragement (?) or direction (?), it's hard to tell when you're not a native speaker.

The students engage with their colleagues, checking that the address is the same on all documents and broadening the discussion to include their own understanding of where we have been told to go. As I study the dynamics, it becomes obvious that they have also engaged a wider group of passengers around them in the quest for the destination.

'Kofoed's Skole', shouts an old woman in the centre of the bus, 'you know Kofoed's Skole, the place where they provide services for the homeless?' As this is in Danish I am engaging in a liberal translation here, but the body language and the non-verbals are very easy to read. 'No, never heard of it!' shakes the head of another woman, great face, lived in. 'Of course you do, it's on Nyrnberggade, and they have the Greenlanders there'. 'Oh yes, I know the place you mean', comes the reply which is made using a full scan of all in that section of the bus and accompanied by a big toothless grin. Someone makes a joke, probably a politically incorrect one about Greenland, and the whole bus roars laughing.

The bus driver becomes re-engaged. He joins in the repartee and soon is calling to the students that it's time to get off the bus. His English fails when he's asked which way do we go from here?. The resident

bus-group re-engage volubly, giving directions, loudly, in Danish. The driver, recognising our need in context of his timetable, asks one of the oncoming passengers if they speak English and can they direct us to Kofoeds? Sure enough, the man gets off the bus, comes to our side on the pavement and in beautifully graceful gestures points us to the right and across the road. We have arrived and we have experienced the kindness of strangers. As we stand on the path watching the bus leave, we too have been changed by the experience. Our spatial composition, for example, different than at the start of the bus journey; a sense of 'us' is beginning to emerge. It's warm and it's working. We have had our first experience together as a group!

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