

Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

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Education as Relating: The Key to Learning and Well-Being in a Time of Covid-19 Lockdown of Schools

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In Norway there is a remarkable school¹ that can inspire schools and educational systems around the world. It is called YouthInvest AIB and it practices the notion of *Education as Relating*. In 2020, 237 students, ages 16-24 years were enrolled in the school, and many of them had been dropouts from the primary schools. The array of social and mental issues, problems and issues with schools, or family issues make their lives difficult. But at this school they are perceived as *young learning colleagues*. They are met with strength-based pedagogy, and approaches and tools inspired by social constructionist ideas. The program offers extensive arts and trade curricula, as well as an academic curriculum and is designed to re-engage and re-motivate students to discover their potentials and create dreams for their futures. Thus, the program aims for higher education or a self-sufficient working life.



For years, the success rate has been extraordinarily high, and since 2010 the number of students that are in positive activities has increased from 75% to 85% in 2019. For students who attended the school year 2019/2020 as much as 87% of them are now in higher education or jobs. And this is even the year where schools and society had been locked down for months due to Covid-19. How is this possible? The key answer seems to be the persistent and consistent work with strengthening teacher-student relations and working with Appreciative Inquiry throughout all aspects of the school, understanding that knowledge of personal and communal strengths is the starting point for positive change, learning and well-being.

All over the world experts and school administrators worry about the educational outcomes and the effects on student well-being brought about by the Covid-19 lockdown – and with good reason. In Norway, the Regional County did a survey with 18,401 students from higher education about their learning experiences and socio-emotional well-being under the lockdown. In an array of indicators, the students from YouthInvest AIB - despite their difficult life situations - scored higher or much higher than the average. What is it that this school is doing that makes such wonderful and important results possible?



¹ <https://viken.no/unginvest/> and <https://www.kongehuset.no/nyhet.html?tid=158319&sek=26939>

According to a teacher survey among teachers at YouthInvest AIB, their answer is the same as above. The survey results tell us that the relational aspects of the school work and the strength-based approaches that teachers and students practice, every day, in every aspect of the school, make a difference in the lives of the students and the teachers alike. Even throughout this challenging year dealing with Covid-19, when they had to do school online and could not meet in-person with their students their efforts to keep **Education as Relating** at the forefront of all they do has been their guiding light.

So, for teachers, what would happen if we all learned how to strengthen relationships with students and among students and how to engage and motivate students in learning - online or in-person? These practices are crucial and necessary for all schools and educational settings. Putting relationships and relational processes at the center of education offers tremendous potentials – to students, teachers, communities and educational systems. And in the case of YouthInvest AIB in Norway, it is exciting and promising to share that there is now political interest in expanding the relational, strength-based and social constructionist practices to all the schools and educational settings in Norway. Let the dreams begin.



To see videos of this school, YouthInvest AIB, in Norway, visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tcx2Ph1XGDA>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30iQQmH1W6Y>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiNz84lxQ7E>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmPdVBtiELk>



For information about the Taos Institute's upcoming online conference visit:
<https://www.taosinstitute.net/education-virtual-conference2021>

