



OUR VIEW OF PEOPLE, KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIETY

RUNÖ'S APPROACH TO TEACHING



”Only the best is good enough...”

That was their motto when the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, LO, inaugurated its new school in 1952.

Since then, several hundred thousand trade union representatives have been trained at Runö, which is now LO's leading education and development centre. People come from all over Sweden to the beautiful Roslagen isthmus to take part in trade union training.

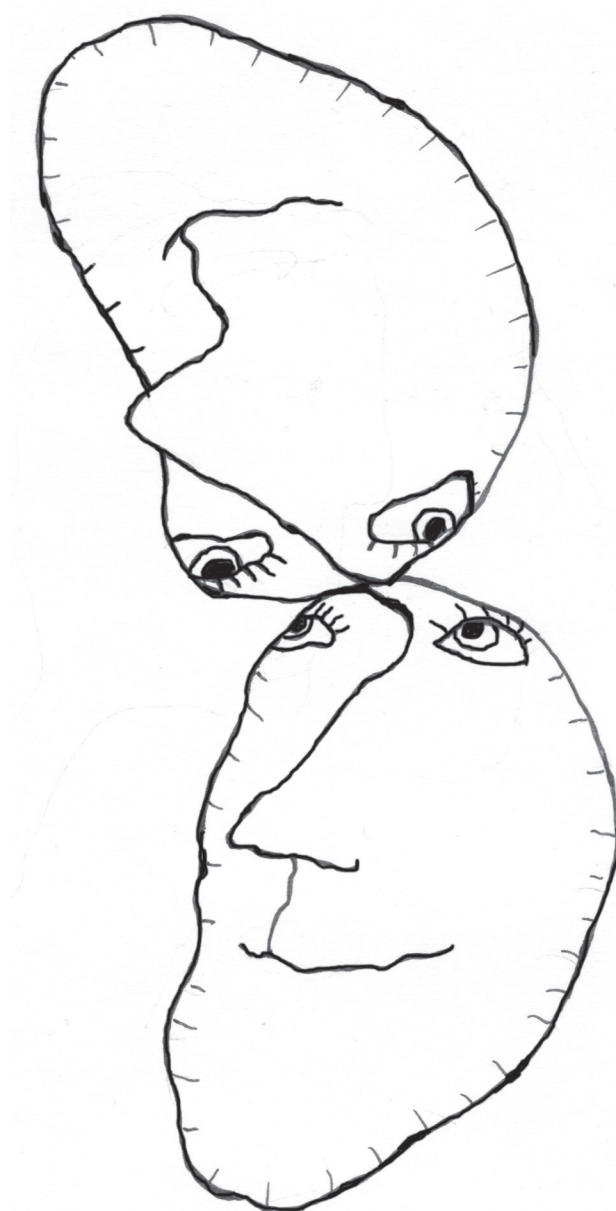
A Runö branch was opened in Stockholm in the 1980s. The branch offers a variety of one-year courses, including Swedish as a second language, graphic design, etc.

Runö: Two schools in two different places but with the same educational methods.

OUR VISION OF PEOPLE

We believe in people

“Our vision of people is based on the equal value of each individual; each is a human resource with the capacity and will to grow, develop and accept responsibility” (from LO’s view on learning and education).



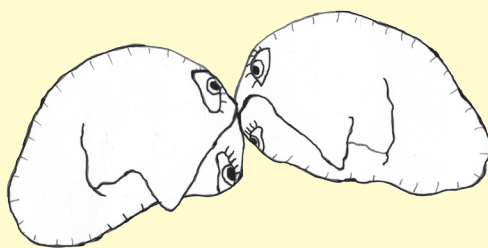
Runö teachers lead their students towards self-reliance through activities based on the principle that each individual, in his or her own way, is creative and capable of self-development and change. Participants learn to assess themselves, not to compete with fellow participants. Our students are allowed to make mistakes and their questions are always welcome.

It is vital for each participant to be seen, listened to and recognized as an active contributor, rather than a passive receiver. Individual growth is encouraged through study challenges suited to each participant's capacity.

Trust, support, respect and confidence are important ingredients of our approach to the individual participant. Each participant has a central place and, with help from fellow participants, finds the answers. For this reason, we work in small groups which dedicate a lot of time to each participant.

Active learning means learning controlled by the participants themselves, starting with their own personal reality and how it relates to the overall context. Our aim is to open doors and contribute to "Aha!" experiences.

There are so many different ways to bring about a good life and society.



OUR VISION OF KNOWLEDGE

Learning through meetings and communication

"Everyone has knowledge, albeit in different fields and to different degrees, depending on personal experience and circumstances. Learning is a lifelong process where knowledge is not handed out but acquired by each individual. Our knowledge increases, based on our own experience, curiosity and reflection..."
(from LO's views on learning and education).

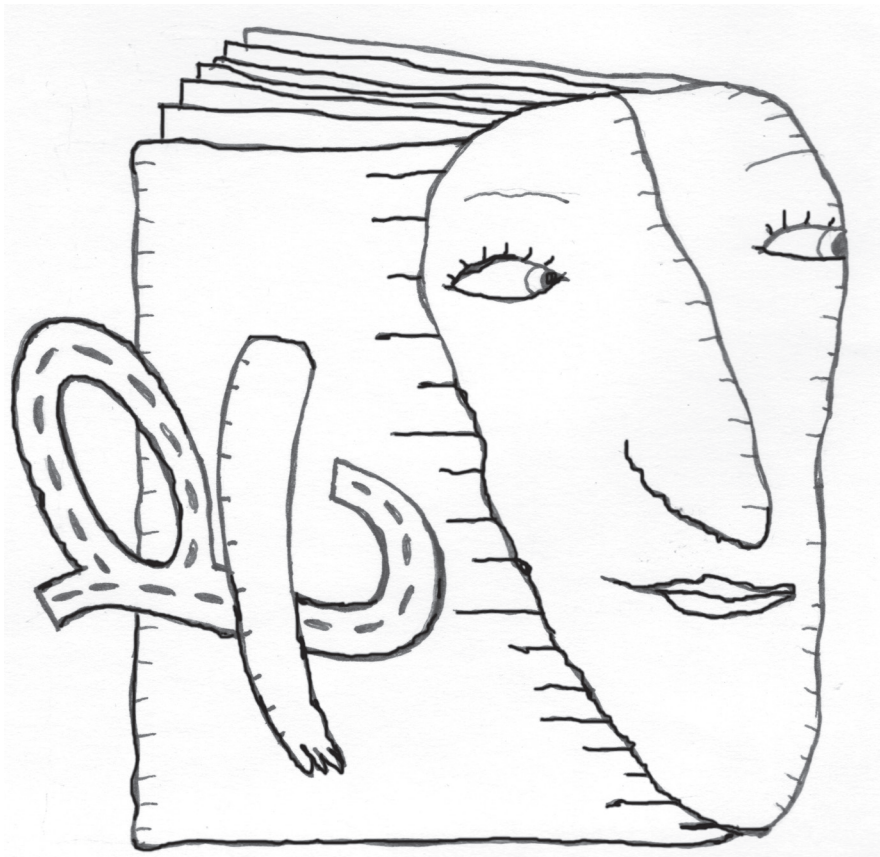
We believe we should all listen to one another. Learning is not controlled by the teacher; it is a collective process based on cooperation between equals. We use group oriented teaching methods where carefully designed group work, based on purpose and objectives, is the core, as are supportive assessment and discussion of outcomes.

New knowledge feeds on the experience of all participants. We believe in the many-voiced classroom and adapt our studies to the circumstances. This implies achieving a balance between chaos and order on the one hand and freedom and governance on the other.

Problems are seen as opportunities; for us, everyday problems are a source of knowledge. Since we believe in challenging participants' minds, we make use of a variety of forms of dialogue. Different ideas are tested in our search for knowledge leading to change and challenging established structures. We explain, analyse and question standpoints rather than defend them. Together, teachers and participants develop new standpoints.

With all due respect for the traditional lecture, a lot of knowledge can emerge from dialogue and group work. Participants can and may express themselves in other ways such as practical activities and cultural projects. Many roads lead to knowledge.

We aim to make all aspects of knowledge visible and accepted, regardless of form, so group discussion and reflection from the heart and brain are essential elements. Practice becomes theory and finally new practice. We are aware that the truth may differ according to each individual's perception of reality. Respect is our guiding principle. The questions become more important than the answers.



OUR VISION OF SOCIETY

Education is politics

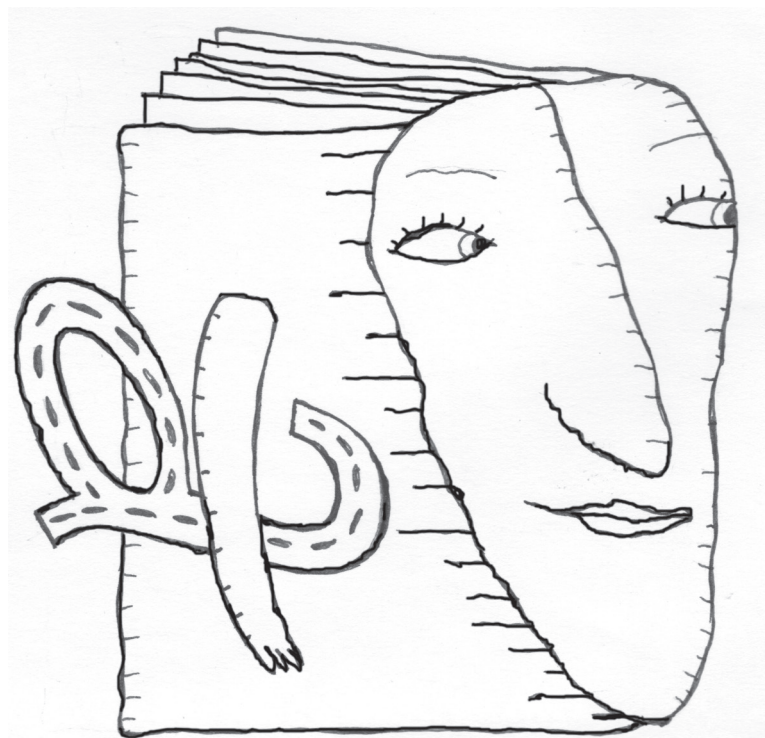
“Our vision of society is based on our belief that the future is not pre-determined but can be influenced. Together we can create a good society where everyone has the same opportunities, which entails an obligation to create this good society. Work, free time and society are inseparable from education. Development does not stop at the workplace; it carries over into our free time and social life – and vice versa (from LO’s views on learning and education).”

Learning is changing. In our school, everybody is given the tools with which they can bring about change.

Knowledge makes a difference and is the force which strengthens our capacity to deal with different situations in life. Our perspective is that of ordinary men and women. We work in close contact with the work place and the local community to be able to see concrete results of processes of change. We are permanently updated and conscious of conditions of production and work as they affect our participants.

Our values are based on justice, solidarity and freedom. Critical thinking is a fundamental pillar of a democratic society, as it is, of course, for us. Society and working life can be changed and improved, which is why we believe in action oriented knowledge. The objective of learning is to move on to a new reality rather than to a pre-determined objective. Increased learning capacity is also an important goal.

Analysis of one's own life is part of this view of society and of the global perspective. Personal issues are also universally valid issues. Once we understand ourselves and society, we have power over our own lives.



A glimpse at a course day

Runö, Åkersberga, at 10.00, Course on work environment, “Threats and violence in working life”.

A thoughtfully arranged room welcomes the 18 participants. The tulips on the table were brought by the teacher to enhance the feeling of welcome. Tables and chairs are placed strategically in “islands,” which helps to get conversation going as soon as participants sit down.

The teacher purposely keeps a low profile to ensure that this short, three-day course leads to network-forming amongst participants. After a review of practical matters, the teacher asks what the participants would like to know about one another. She lists their suggestions: name, place of residence, interests and any previous experience of the course subject. This brainstorming becomes a model which the participants then make use of to introduce themselves to one another.

Another effective starting activity is to ask participants to list as many women’s names starting with “A” as they can in 4 minutes. The teacher says the world record is 56, but it does not take long for the participants, working together, to come up with 200 names. This activity illustrates the importance of group work and what can be achieved when we cooperate.

Before lunch, health and safety representatives have shared their experiences of the subject “Threats and violence”. “What do you mean?” is a recurring question the teacher asks, to make them explain more clearly what they mean.

During lunch, one of the participants jokingly says, “No other teacher has given me such a stomach-ache”, referring to the fact that she had never before dared to say anything in front of a group of people. She has now discovered that, “When I talk, everybody listens, so now I can’t stop talking!”.

Runö folk high school, Stockholm, 10.20,

“Swedish as a second language”, compulsory school level

On the wall hangs a world map with small flags pinned on the students' countries of origin: Bolivia, Nigeria, Somalia, Bangladesh, etc. Discussion is lively and here, too, participants sit in “islands”.

One woman has just said that she thinks it is right for adulterous women to be stoned to death. She is at once contradicted by an older woman who has already studied at the school for a year. She asks provocatively, “How long do you plan to attend this school? One year? Then you too will change”. The teacher continues the discussion and they talk about Swedish traditions and ways of life. The situation is characterised by continual dialogue where participants express their thoughts on the subject with the teacher.

The course includes reading, listening and writing. A recurring question is, “What does that word mean?” The teacher is careful to acknowledge all participants and constantly elicits their experiences and previous knowledge. Afterwards, they write down their thoughts in their own logbooks, which stay in the classroom for the teacher to follow their individual progress.

**Runö, Åkersberga at 10.30, Course for elected union representatives,
“Insights”**

Why do women earn less? The question is written on the whiteboard as if it were in flames. Here and there someone comments that it is probably the fault of the government or the municipalities that they are underpaid.

The teacher asks the participants to stand in a line; those with the highest salaries first and those with the lowest salaries at the back. This activity clearly demonstrates that it is the men in the group who earn most. The teacher provokes them, “It is women who do the hard, monotonous work for low wages, while men show off on their fork-lift trucks”. One male participant says that women have only themselves to blame and should make more of an effort to elbow themselves into a better position.



The whiteboard is covered with facts and figures: the average salary for men, regardless of profession, is several thousand crowns higher than women's. Of those on parental leave, 79 % are women and 21 % men. The participants laugh when they hear that men in Västerbotten (Northern Sweden) mostly take parental leave during the elk hunting season. It is also a fact that it is usually women who stay at home when their children are sick. For an employer, female workers are a risk and a risk premium is deducted from their salary. How can this state of things be changed?

“Raise the lowest salaries”, says one participant.

“But won't that make employers continue to apply the risk premium and still pay women less than men? The allocation of quotas for parental leave would increase equality between men and women”, answers the teacher. Several participants protest, “That should be for the family to decide”. Others oppose this point of view, “So we should accept that women get lower pensions because of the system? That they can't afford to get divorced? Is that reasonable? Give us a better solution then!”

The room is silent.

After a break: The group begins to intensify their studies of international trade union work. What can we do to fight economic free zones? The question of women's salaries remains unanswered.

Runö folk high school, Stockholm, 11.50, “Man and the Environment”

The group has been studying their immediate environment for several weeks: the surroundings of Sabbatsberg (an area in Stockholm). They now present their findings to students in the parallel class. They have chosen to present them in four different ways: a film, an exhibition, a leaflet and a combined open-air walk and quiz.

The teacher leaves it to each group to report their study. The film includes interviews and images which reflect the history of Sabbatsberg. One of the participants then shows the others around and explains the exhibition to them. After the presentation, each participant and teacher is given a map of the area and a multiple-choice sheet to answer questions along the way. The winner is announced when they return to the classroom.

A parent calls reception to say, “I don’t know what you do at that school, but keep on doing it! Our son didn’t want to go to upper secondary before, but now he goes off happily to the folk high every day”.

Another participant defines the difference as follows, “I feel the teachers here support me; in upper secondary I felt they only wanted to find fault with me”. He will now start his studies at the KTH (the Royal Institute of Technology).

Runö, Åkersberga 16.00, Course for health and safety representatives, “Threats and violence in working life”

In the course of the day, four different groups have produced case descriptions of threats and violence at work. They now interchange cases.

With the help of the teacher and the other participants, they try to figure out whether in each case the violence identified was physical, psychological or social. There are a number of different law texts set out on the table. What do you do when an employer, in spite of regulations, permits his employees to work alone in a closed area where there is a risk of violence? Step by step, they work their way through the various phases: dialogue, fact collection, support from legislation, contacts and finally, action taken.

The teacher is careful to stimulate participants' capacity to structure and plan projects, take initiatives and find new solutions.

During the evening coffee-break, several participants recognize that they will be going home with new ideas and methods, new perspectives and approaches and are relieved that they, as health and safety representatives, are not expected to know all the answers.

Some of them mention someone who participated in the previous course and who, thanks to the knowledge acquired, succeeded in creating a precedent on protective clothing.



The educators

The Runö teacher

A Runö teacher is a knowledgeable, inspiring leader with broad competency; a popular educator who awakens the desire to learn and who believes in people and their capacity for self-development. When the conditions are right, of course.

The teachers' objective is to stimulate participants' capacity to discover their own tools and acquire further knowledge.

Runö educators have chosen to work with our values, based on freedom, equality and solidarity.

Common to all is a genuine interest in people and knowledge. Acknowledging all participants and engaging them at their own level, with popular education ideals as the point of departure and in continuous development of their capacity for lifelong learning. Theory and practice intermingle. Their ability to take action is inspired by the ideas which form the basis of free popular education:

- Freire's liberating critical pedagogy, an investigative way of changing reality based on participants own experiences.
- Dewey's learning outside school: "Learning by Doing".
- Vygotsky's learning as a social process, learning from one another.
- Kolb's learning based on experiential learning in which theory is mixed with practice and reflection.
- The "Bifrostskolan" learning project (Denmark), where learning starts by awakening the individual's innate curiosity and willingness to learn through theme happenings which provoke questions.
- The Grundtwig School (Denmark) as a free zone for people's education and development.

Summary

Runö's view of people, knowledge and society characterize our educational activities.

Runö's view of people is typified when the teacher approaches participants with warmth, humour and respect which make them feel secure – a fundamental condition for learning. The teacher observes, listens and acknowledges participants and brings their experiences and previous knowledge to the fore.

Runö's view of knowledge becomes clear when learning is a collective process where teachers and participants together reason their way to answers. The teacher creates a lively dialogue, a meeting for participants to share their experience of their individual realities.

Runö's view of society gives participants the tools they need to influence their workplaces and society. The knowledge participants carry away with them from a course gives them the tools to bring about change.



Quotes from participants

- I took home many useful tools for developing myself and others at work.
- All participants are individually acknowledged.
- Respect for one another and great group work.
- I came away with renewed energy for my daily trade union work.
- The connection between “reality” and practical implementation was excellent!
- Personal development!
- A well-designed course where participants’ needs and knowledge were acknowledged and used in the design of course contents.



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