**Q&A with ActSHEN team**

**CEMUS organization, history, future..**

Monday October 14 2013, 15-16.

*Do students create their own courses or do we have a set of courses that we offer? Where do they come from?* *How much of the new cours ideas come from the students? Course creation? Process? When do you determine that a course is not needed anymore?*

In an ideal situation (when enough funding has existed) Course Forums have been organized where students, CEMUS staff, teachers, researchers, general public have been invited to a number of meetings to discuss and improve current courses and suggest new ones in terms of both content, form and organization. Proposals have also been collected from evaluations that all students in the courses fill out. The proposals have then been refined by CEMUS staff and proposed to the faculty board of Science and Technology (which we are administratively tied to). This process requires a balance of the input that has come from the people attending the Course Forums and what is feasible and probable to be accepted by the university boards that the proposals will go through. Also key is finding concepts and focus of courses that will attract a lot of students. A course is cancelled if student-numbers dwindle too much or if we don’t have the financial resources to offer the course. As funding and development of new courses now is limited we are looking into new ways of creating new courses (in collaboration with other faculties, master programs, universities, other partners).

*Is Sustainability the main focus of the education and courses?*

Yes and no. Not really. The focus has always been on creating transdisciplinary courses with a focus on the global issues of human and planetary survival and interlinked issues of environment and human development (in its broadest sense). The last years we have focused on the concepts of sustainability but this could change as new concepts, fields, challenges and questions arise.

*Regular teacher doing similar approaches. Principles: democracy, critical thinking, - products rather than explicit intentions. To what extent are we processing the process?*

I think that we are processing the process by reflecting in different environments (course report conferences, course coordinator seminar series, in the classroom with students, through summative and formative assessment). However, we have lately identified the interest (need?) to do more research and to document more about what happens in CEMUS courses and with the students that pass through them. There is a large interest from course coordinators and other CEMUS staff to have more research done on the education (by ourselves and/or educational researchers).

*Tools to create a safe zone to fail. How to create the open atmosphere? Is it created by chance?*

I think it is largely created by itself when you to some extent remove the didactical authority of a teacher/professor that is leading the course. The coordinators often see themselves as co-learners and a fellow traveler/guide on a journey rather than the repository of all knowledge. However, it should be noted that this does not always happen.

*The CEMUS culture… What lives in the organization? The strategies are implied/immersed?*

Many methods and approaches that have been tried at CEMUS keep reappearing in a new form. There are most likely a number of more or less visible and discernible organizational principles that underlie the culture that is created in the organization and the courses which it gives. E.g. a healthy skeptism and disrespectfulness of how things “should be done”, striving for making the most meaningful and innovative courses possible etc..

*Who monitors the progress of individual students?*

Most of it is done by the course coordinators with support from CEMUS Management team and each course´s reference-group (consisting of teachers, researchers, past studentents etc..). Also a lot of emphasis is usually put on self-evaluation through reflective exercises, formative assessment and peer to peer learning and assessment.

*How are the coordinators up to strengthening writing, argumentation skills of students?*

To a varied degree. Some are obviously better at this than others and put more or less emphasis on it. We have reoccurring workshops and seminars where we look at questions of how to give constructive feedback on assignments, give useful tips on improving writing and argumentation skills. The students in the courses are also informed that they can find extra support in how to produce academic texts etc. from the university. We have also organized workshops on these themes that we have incouraged students to go to.

*How do you evaluate the coordinators?*

The coordinators and their work is evaluated by student-evaluations. Indirectly they are evaluated by the course’s work-groups feedback on the coordinators suggestions for the design of the course. CEMUS management team also has reoccurring talks with the coordinator-pairs to plan, discuss and evaluate their work. At the end of the courses, a project report is written where the coordinators evaluate the course and their own as well as others work. At times we have also had individual “career talks” with coordinators to reflect on their work and where they see themselves going in the future.

*CEMUS seems Radical… Set up from multiple perspectives. Students are co-authors in setting it up. What is the critical theoretical base? Implicit or explicit.. How do we arrive at it?*

First of all, I would suggest you ask David Kronlid about this and read the chapter in the book on CEMUS called Crossing Boundaries – An analytical look at CEMUS’ educational model (in Transcending Boundaries, 2011). This gives a good overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the model. There have also been a number of students who have done discourse analysis on CEMUS courses and Education that are available if anyone is interested.

*How Radical do they perceive themselves (the coordinators and students) after the process of running or participating in a course?*

I think this very much depends on the students and coordinators idea of what “radical” is. Often I think that we perhaps both are students and coordinators are less “radical” than they think. Professors and teachers from other departments that are part of work-groups and give lectures sometimes have at least or more radical perspectives than students and coordinators.

*How do they understand the process? Where do people go after taking or running CEMUS courses?*

This would be a very interesting research to look into. What we have seen is that students/coordinators end up in very different jobs and contexts and I think very different understandings of what needs to happen to move closer to a sustainable world (and their role in this work). What perhaps is universal is the feeling of responasability and will to be a part in this work (often for the rest of their lives).

*What is the minimum and maximum class size. How are the coordinators able to work with large groups?*

Smallest class that has been given was probably around 6 students. Largest class was over 300 (back in the early 90’s when CEMUS only had one class). Obviously the pedagogics, didactics and what is possible will change depending on class size. When classes had up to or over 60 students we usually allocate some extra funding to deal with the extra admin and work that a large group entails.

*Does CEMUS innovative approach trickle down to other parts of the universities?*

Yes, I think so. And in several ways. Firstly, by way of students who go back to their other studies and courses at their departments and demand (or create) a higher quality and other types of learning-processes from their teachers. Secondly, by way of teachers that lecture in CEMUS courses or take part in work-groups in the courses that are inspired by their experience at CEMUS and bring this into their own teaching and their departments. Lastly, by way of other activitiesthat CEMUS organizes or takes part (such as conferences, symposia etc.. ) in where teachers, researchers, students, admin participate and get to know and experience more about what we do

*How can CEMUS learn from other departments?*

First of all we are constantly learning and taking impressions from other departments in terms of both pedagogy/learning as well as content through the meetings we have in the courses´ work groups (which teachers and researchers from other departments are a part of). Each semester we also invite a number of people to speak in the course coordinator ESD seminar series that we organize for all new/old course coordinators to inspire and challenge them in new and interesting ways.

*What other establishement and colleges would you compare CEMUS with?*

Good question. And difficult to answer. In terms of content I think there is quite a lot in common with places like Schumacher College and also smaller Liberal Arts Colleges in the U.S. But CEMUS also tries to bridge a deep questioning of the cultural beliefs, norms, values, power relations etc.. with a constructive and creative approach to change and the possibility of creating a better world. In terms of student-run and student-centered educational approaches places like Antioch college, Evergreen state college, Quest university and Leuphana university are interesting examples to compare with..

*Has CEMUS considered collaboration with other programs? Combine with other programs?*

Yes, we are working with a number of ideas and projects at the moment. Not the least throught ActSHEN! As is now we have courses that are mandatory parts of two other masters-programs at Uppsala University and there are ideas to create a joint masters program with other international institutions (anyone interested?)

*Distance learning... why cut? How to facilitate learning in distance courses?*

We decided to cut distance courses mainly because they are easier to reiniate than other courses (we don’t need to run it through the whole byrocratic system of approvals). It is unfortunate as we reach many individuals with these courses that don’t have the possibility of taking courses here at Uppsala. We have come up with several innovative ways of facilitating learning in distance courses (discussion groups, peer to peer learning activities, critical friend set ups etc..). However, often we find that the students who take these courses are really motivated to study and go out of their way to excel and produce work way above the requirements..

*What is a reasonable size of the organization?*

This is difficult question. As is we are 5-6 more permanently employed staff (CEMUS management team for education, research and collaboration) and around 20 temporarily employed staff (Course coordinators). At our peak we were around 30 individuals. I see that we could grow more but perhaps in new ways: Staff that have a position at CEMUS but also in other departments, universities, new centres at other universities, non-formal/fringe-formal learning centres etc….