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intrface



## **inrface - Partnerships between Secondary Schools and Museums**

This article describes a three-year development project in Central Denmark Region called inrface. Basically, the purpose of the inrface project is to develop and cultivate partnerships between secondary schools and local museums with a view to producing educational coursework for students enrolled at these schools.

In Denmark, almost every secondary school has a museum right around the corner. Often teachers are not very familiar with them and do not make use of them as a learning resource in their lessons. When museums are included in lesson plans, the ones chosen are usually large, famous museums in the capital city or abroad. Like their teachers, students often know very little about the learning potential of local museums, or of museums, period. Their cultural heritage as presented in the local museums often remains an unexplored source of knowledge and good experiences. The overall ambition of the inrface project is to do something about that.



*Kick-off conference at the Museum of Aarhus, Sept. 8. 2008*

## **What is inrface?**

The inrface project evolved out of several smaller, shorter projects, the purpose of which was to develop collaboration between a number of museums and secondary schools as well as with the University of Aarhus. Actual planning of the inrface project started in 2007 but the details of how it would be run and the funding needed to put the plans in action were not in place until early 2008. It was launched on September 8, 2008 at the Museum of Aarhus and is to end July 31, 2011.

All three museum categories are represented in inrface: cultural history museums, natural history museums and art museums. Also all four types of secondary schools in Denmark are represented in inrface. The students



*First partnership meeting Egaa Gymnasium & Steno Museum at the kick-off conference.*



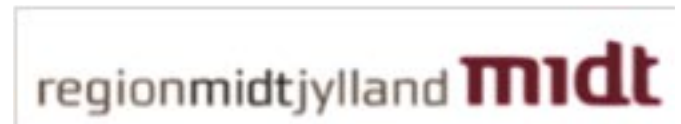
at these school generally range from 16 to 20 years of age. The schools are preparatory schools, meaning that the students who attend them will typically continue with some form of further education upon graduating.

The project is funded by the Regional Council of Central Denmark Region as well as the Heritage Agency of Denmark. It is furthermore the object of a research program carried out by the head of the Center for Museology at the University of Aarhus (<http://www.museologi.au.dk/index.jsp> ). There is a steering committee whose members are two secondary school headmasters, two museum directors and the dean of the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of Aarhus.

There is a website - [www.intrface.dk](http://www.intrface.dk) – which gives an idea of what the project is about. The website is, of course, in Danish.

The project is run by a project leader, who also acts as webmaster and as project coordinator of the intrface schools and works closely together with the coordinator of the intrface museums, who is the director of a museum himself, and who is also a member of the project's steering committee.

The intrface project fits very well with recent policies initiated by the Danish Ministry of Culture and the Heritage Agency to encourage museums and other cultural institutions to develop programs that entice young people to become more interested and involved in their cultural heritage.



<http://www.rm.dk/Om+regionen/English>



<http://www.kulturarv.dk/english/home/>

## Goals

There are two main goals of the intrface project, which are closely related. One is to strengthen and sustain collaboration between secondary schools and local museums on the development, implementation and evaluation of museum-based coursework, targeted at secondary school students and relevant to their school curriculum.

The second goal is to make local museums accessible, familiar and relevant to students by ensuring that as much of the coursework as possible takes place at the museum, with museum staff and teachers working together on equal terms to provide an immersive learning experience for the students. In many cases, museum professionals also appear in the classrooms to teach the students on their own home ground.

There are also two goals of a more pragmatic nature. The first is to convince secondary school teachers to perceive local museums as a learning resource on a par with text-



*Museum director Ole Puggaard's lesson with 1.e in their classroom. Ole Puggaard brought a boxful of museum objects with him for the class to examine. (Partnership: Horsens Gymnasium & the Danish Industrial Museum)*

books, libraries and the internet and to use them as such. The second is simply to increase the number of young people visiting museums. A recent survey carried out by the Heritage Agency showed that a great majority of museums in Denmark are visited by fewer than 10 classes of secondary school students pr. year. Because intrface coursework requires students to use their school's partner museum, it ensures that they have prolonged contact with this museum at least once during their three-year secondary education.

Naturally, the people behind the intrface project believe that the experiences the students have at the museums and with museum staff will have a lasting effect on how they perceive museums and, in a broader perspective, will give them a greater understanding of their cultural heritage, of the importance of preserving it and of its relevance to their present and future lives, not only in their local area, but also cultural heritage as such.

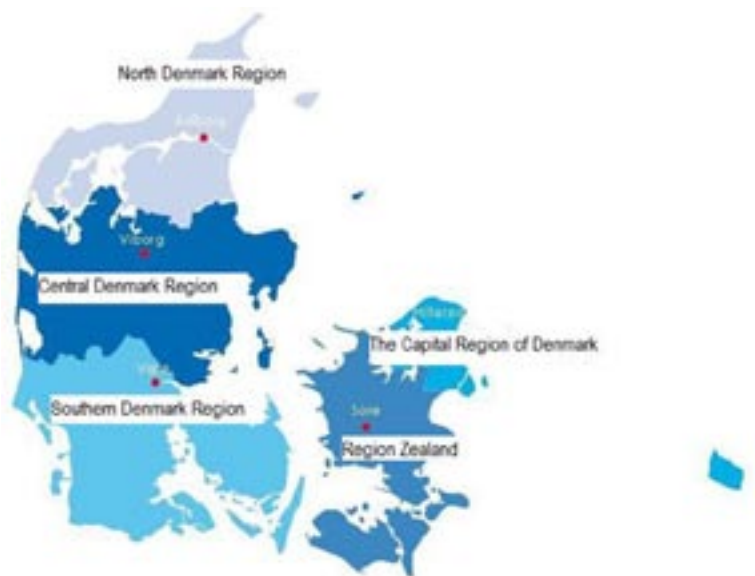


*Museum educator Charlotte Abildgaard teaching students about archaeological finds in their local area. (Partnership: Skanderborg Gymnasium & Skanderborg Museum)*

## Organization

The organization of intrface is completely decentralized, and all development work is carried out by the project's participants, who are organized in partnerships consisting of a secondary school and a local museum.

Five partnerships in Phase 1: 2008-2009, fifteen partnerships in Phase 2: 2009-2010, and thirty partnerships in Phase 3: 2010-2011. In each partnership the school is typically represented by three or four teachers, while the museum is typically represented by one or two members of museum staff. The partnerships are spread right across Central Denmark Region, which is about 200 km wide, stretching from coast to coast in Jutland. Central Region Denmark is approximately 13,150 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of about 1.25 million.



## Meetings and Conferences

**Start-up Meetings:** When a new partnership is established, the two project coordinators introduce its members to the project, for example by giving them concrete advice based on experience about how to plan and carry out the work expected of them. Emphasis is placed on how important it is for them to spend an adequate amount of time on dialogue: for example, it quite often surprises teachers and museum professionals, who have similar academic

backgrounds but very different everyday work lives, how long it takes to become familiar with each other's professional language.

As a rule, these meetings take place at the partnership's museum. One of the purposes of the meeting is for the partnership's members to start brainstorming about how the objects and exhibits at the museum can be used to expand and enhance the curricular requirements of the subject matter in question.

Status meetings: at some time during the partnership's collaboration, the two project coordinators visit the partnership again to be informed about how things are going. By this time, the partnership's members have gotten to know each other and have worked together and are very enthusiastic about their own project and the project in general.

In the course of the three-year project, various conferences are organized. There are several reasons for doing this:

- 1) To bring the project forward and inspire its participants by inviting speakers with special knowledge about topics as diverse as museum research and learning strategies, topics that can fuel new ideas for coursework
- 2) To create a forum within which the project's participants can share their experiences and be inspired by what others have done
- 3) To give teachers the opportunity to meet and learn about different museums. Though there are only three main types of museums, within each type there are many specialized museums
- 4) To give the project's participants a sense of belonging to a large group of like-minded people

Much effort is also put into telling about the intrface project at conferences organized by other institutions, writing about it in professional magazines and inviting the press to inform about the project, for example a journalist at a local newspaper writing about the opening of an exhibition produced by the students.

### **Coursework**

All educational material that is developed, tested and evaluated by these partnerships is uploaded to [www.intrface.dk](http://www.intrface.dk) for other schools and museums to use and / or be inspired by.

In form and content the coursework must be reusable so that incorporating it in their lesson plans can easily be repeated by other teachers, also at other schools. The basic framework and concepts of a lot of intrface coursework can furthermore be adapted to fit other museums. For example, the coursework entitled "What Is the Value of Art?", which was developed by Horsens Art Museum and Toerring Gymnasium, can be re-used as educational material by any other art museum.

Here are several other examples of partnership coursework titles:



*Students from Toerring Gymnasium presenting their results at Horsens Art Museum*



### **"Young People's Lives in 2009"**

Partnership:

Randers Statsskole & Randers Cultural History Museum

Subjects:

History, Danish, Filmmaking

Graduates from Randers Statsskole hand over the documentary film they made called "Young People's Lives in 2009" to Randers Cultural History Museum to be incorporated as an artifact in the museum's collection.



### **"The Renaissance World View"**

Partnership:

Egaa Gymnasium & Steno Museum

Subjects:

Multi-subject course, History

1st year students at Egaa Gymnasium present their exhibits of different aspects of the Renaissance World View at the exhibition preview. The exhibits were inspired by what the students learned at Steno Museum.



### **"A Moment in Afghanistan"**

Partnership:

Aarhus Katedralskole & Moesgaard Museum

Subjects:

History, Social Studies

Students from Aarhus Katedralskole preparing the opening of their exhibit on Afghanistan, produced in cooperation with Moesgaard Museum.



## **"Laguthewa's Expedition"**

Partnership:

Aarhus Katedralskole & Moesgaard Museum

Subject:

History

2nd year students from Aarhus Katedral-skole dressed as Vikings stage a tableau at Moesgaard Museum.



## **"Why Do We Need (Art)Museums? And Art? And Culture?"**

Partnership:

Skive Gymnasium & Skive Art Museum

Subjects:

Multi-subject course, Social Studies, English

*Huge, dark, dangerous – spider.*

*Eight legs, gigantic, but elegant like a ballet dancer.*

*Thousands of bulbs, light up its dark body.*

*Its face sketches a lantern, covered with lozenges.*

*Lozenges in different colours, that remind you of an amusement park, and all the emotions coming through your mind.*

*You feel suspicious and excited.*

*One side is covered with sweets, candyfloss, and summer colours; another side is cold like ice.*

*Why did she go anyway?*

*There is nothing here, nothing at all. They are all idiots!*

*If they don't like her, why can't they just leave her alone?*

*Why is she such a huge part of everyday's entertainment?*



Painting by Artist Mie Olise, Spider, 2009

Poem by Heidi Soerensen, 2nd year student at Skive Gymnasium

## **"Illerup River Valley – Local History Right around the Corner"**

Partnership:

Skanderborg Gymnasium & Skanderborg Museum

Subject:

History

Students from Skanderborg Museum examine archaeological finds at Skanderborg Museum.



### **“From Graffiti to Epitaph – about Viking Runes”**

Partnership:

Aarhus Katedralskole & Moesgaard Museum

Subjects:

History, Religion

2nd year student from Aarhus Katedral-skole showing her name spelled in runes at Moesgaard Museum.



### **“Cultural Revolution in Denmark after 1945 – Young People Revolt in Struer, in Denmark, in the World”**

Partnership:

Struer Statsgymnasium & Struer Museum

Subjects: Multi-subject course, Danish, History

At Struer Museum, students from Struer Statsgymnasium dress a shop dummy in preparation for the opening of their exhibit about the youth revolution in Struer.



### **“Cultural Heritage – What Is It? And Who Defines What It Is?”**

Partnership:

Viby Gymnasium & The Museum of Ancient Art

Subjects:

English, Social Studies

2nd year students from Viby Gymnasium study how coins are displayed at The Museum of Ancient Art





**“Vanitas in Nature Morte, Hymns and Istanbul – What Do Vanitas and Hüzün Have to Do with Me?”**

Partnership:  
Randers Statsskole & Randers Cultural History Museum  
Subjects:  
Multi-subject course, Danish

3.x students from Randers Statsskole on their class trip to Istanbul



**“What Metal Reveals – About Viking Metal Found in Illerup River Valley”**

Partnership:  
Aarhus Katedralskole & Moesgaard Museum  
Subjects:  
History, Chemistry

3rd year students' experiment at Moesgaard Museum about how metal reacts in wet bog peat



**“Skjern River – The Consequences of Straightening Out a River and Restoring It Again”**

Partnership:  
Vestjysk Gymnasium Tarm & Ringkoebing-Skjern Museum  
Subjects:  
Biology, Chemistry, Geography

Students from Vestjysk Gymnasium Tarm on a field trip to Skjern River



## **“Performance Theater / Site Specific and Vanitas – Performing about Death in an Exhibit”**

Partnership:

Randers Statsskole & Randers Cultural History Museum

Subject:

Drama

Randers Statsskole student's performance at Randers Cultural History Museum



As these examples reveal, the coursework developed in the intrface project spans an impressive array of topics and a great number of school subjects.

As the coursework is a product of the concerted efforts of the museum professionals and teachers, ownership of it is shared, thereby ensuring that both groups feel equally responsible for its success with the students.

### **An example of intrface coursework and partnership collaboration**

The Danish Industrial Museum and Horsens Gymnasium form an intrface partnership and have worked together as such since the project started. The following is one example of the coursework developed by the teachers and museum professionals in this partnership. There were three museum professionals involved and five teachers.

It was decided to work with a 1st year class of students called 1.e and to develop coursework for one of the multi-subject courses they were to complete that year. The subjects involved were History, Danish, Physics, Social Studies and Museology (the latter is not a subject the students normally have!). The first dialogue meeting took place at the museum, where the teachers were treated to a hearty lunch and a walk-and-talk tour of the museum. The purpose of this tour was threefold: 1) to let the teachers experience the museum inside-out, so to speak, in order for them to gain a very concrete sense of how much goes on at a museum, things which the ordinary visitor never gets to see, 2) to fuel a brainstorming session about how the coursework could be constructed to involve museum artifacts and / or exhibits as well as meeting each subject's curriculum requirements, and 3) very importantly, to provide teachers and museum staff with an inspiring context in which to get to know each other a little bit.

It did not take long to agree on the concept of what they wanted to develop. The coursework was given the title “How the Industrial Museum tells the story of industrialization” and the idea was for the students to learn not only about certain aspects of this historical period, but also about what the museum does to teach the story through its exhibits, etc.

After this, the teachers and museum staff held a series of meetings alternately at the school and the museum, where the details of the content of coursework were worked out, materials found and adapted, and a timetable for the week of the multi-subject course organized.

The next step was to invite the students to a walk-and-talk tour of the museum, very similar to the one the teachers had enjoyed. This preliminary visit took place several weeks before the mul-

ti-subject course was to be launched. For the tour, the class was split into three groups of ten, each of which was accompanied by a museum professional. Besides being given an introduction to the museum's main exhibits, the students met and spoke with staff working in the different departments of the museum. In this way, the students experienced the museum as being a building not only housing an enormous number of artifacts but also populated by people doing a great variety of work. They felt privileged as visitors, and their evaluations of the visit were very positive, the only complaint being that they would have liked to spend more time there. In every way, the visit was a good first taste of what was to come later during their week at the museum.



*1.e students working on their project in the Engine Room at the Danish Industrial Museum.*

The week of the multi-subject course arrived. Monday and Tuesday the students had classes at school, Wednesday through Friday they were at the museum all day. They worked in groups, six groups of five. All the students had been given the same introduction to all five subjects, but during the three days at the museum, each group worked more in-depth with one or two particular subjects. For example, one group focused on workers' conditions and the rise of unions during the Industrial Revolution, another worked with how the steam engine revolutionized production. Each group chose an exhibit or some artifacts which suited their specialized field. Their assignment was 1) to describe what story the museum told in their group's exhibit or by means of their chosen artifacts and to analyze that story and 2) to produce a five-minute podcast that communicated their ideas about how the story could be told, always keeping in mind that factual information was their point of departure. On the Friday of that week, their podcasts were listened to by the other groups, the teachers and the museum staff, and each group was given feedback on its podcast.



*1.e students and teachers listening to podcasts in the Workshop at the Industrial Museum.*



The students' written evaluations at the close of the multi-subject course revealed that they were very enthusiastic about the whole concept of working with and at the museum. They felt that being given the opportunity to use each subject (History, Physics, Social Studies, Danish and Museology) as a lens through which to study 1) industrialization as a historic era and 2) how the museum teaches its guests about this historic era, gave them a very clear idea of the possibilities and limitations of each subject and about how differently these subjects are taught at school and the museum, respectively. Consequently, they also became aware of how learning in the classroom is very different from learning at the museum. The students emphasized how being at the museum gave them an almost physical sense of the historic era they were studying, and how their hands-on experiences with museum artifacts and exhibits made it much easier for them to remember the knowledge they needed in order to do their coursework. For example, a group whose podcast was to communicate knowledge about steam engines pointed out that it was much easier for them to describe the engine and how it worked because they had seen it, touched it and watched it in action.

### **infrface People**

In general, evaluations by students, teachers and museum staff indicate a very high level of satisfaction with what was gained from working together within the infrface concept.

Each partnership assesses the value of the coursework it has produced by asking the students who have completed it to evaluate it. The students' evaluations have been overwhelmingly positive. Furthermore, each partnership is asked by the project leader to evaluate its own collaboration and to evaluate the infrface project as such. Both teachers and museum professionals express a great and growing enthusiasm for the project in these evaluations. This enthusiasm is conveyed in many ways; for example, there are many forward-looking suggestions about how to improve and develop infrface, which indicates a strong interest in its continued existence.



*Partnership meeting Egaa Gymnasium & Steno Museum*

### **What the Students Gain**

Besides the coursework that the students are required to do, they also gain basic knowledge about the museum as such: its purpose and areas of responsibility, who works there and what they do, how museum artifacts are collected, cared for and exhibited, etc. This kind of knowledge demystifies the museum and makes it easier for students to meet it eye to eye, so to speak.

Providing the students with the opportunity of visiting the museum several times and carrying out a large part of their coursework at the museum results in the museum becoming a secure, even familiar base. The students' learning is facilitated.

Involving museum staff at every important step in the students' coursework broadens the students' concept of what academically educated adults can offer.

### **The adults: Teachers and Museum Staff**

Close collaboration between teachers and museum staff is a learning experience for both groups

and broadens their understanding of the potential of the respective institutions. Both institutions are demystified and because both institutions have been given “faces”, so to speak, it is much easier to approach each other with new ideas.

Working with museums in this way is a learning experience for teachers in much the same way as it is for students. Many teachers have the same general expectations as their students about what museums have to offer and these expectations are changed dramatically as a result of being given museological insight and working in partnership with a museum.

Teachers are given a professional upgrade when they experience how their subjects are taught at a professional institution that is not a school. They are also given a pedagogical and didactic upgrade when required to create learning situations for their students that allow the students to draw upon other learning strategies than those strictly based on theory or book-learning.

Museum staff are also given a professional upgrade. Through the intrface project, they are given a much more direct and personal access to young people than they normally have. They are given the opportunity to learn about and develop an audience whose presence at museums is remarkably infrequent. They are given access to an institution that is often perceived of as being closed and self-sufficient and to teachers, whose approach to learning and education is very different to their own.

Both groups’ collaborative skills are honed by working with people from a knowledge-based, academic institution other than their own.

### **intrface: A Permanent Association of Partnerships**

After July 2011, intrface will continue as a permanent association of partnerships with the intrface website as its virtual meeting point. Each intrface school and museum will “subscribe to” intrface, and their subscription fees will be used to maintain the website, to organize knowledge-sharing and knowledge-building conferences for intrface members, to continue to increase the number of intrface partnerships and to work towards establishing “clusters” of partnerships, with two or three partnerships located close to each other geographically working together. Furthermore, plans are in the making about how to associate intrface to the recently established Museum Education Centers, one of the latest initiatives of the Heritage Council.



*Teachers and museum professionals working together at Moesgaard Museum.*

It is gratifying to note that most of the ambitions and goals defined at the project’s commencement have been fulfilled. Students, teachers and museum professionals have all expressed great satisfaction with the eye-opening experience of working together as well as with the type and level of learning and meaning making experiences the students have acquired. Furthermore, teachers and students alike state that their local cultural heritage institution – how it works, what it does and why it is there – has become familiar and relevant to them. The people behind intrface hope that this will result in more young people visiting museums voluntarily and frequently.

Text by Sally Thorhauge and lay-out and editing Ole Puggaard  
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