

In many ways the strangest period of my time in CIS was when we were located in a youth club in Norrebro, around 1965. I don't know what it's like now, but in those days the district was fairly rough, and an incongruous setting for an international school. As Bob Lockwood has described in his notes, in the early days we were simply sitting together while we collectively did essays for the tutors at the University of Nebraska. There was a certain amount of collusion which some of the teachers shut an eye to (one particularly upright student told me he deliberately fell behind the rest of us so as not to get involved in that), but in general the atmosphere was cozy and constructive.

What is maybe surprising in retrospect is that the system overall really worked very well. Nowadays it would seem bizarre to study on the basis that you get comments three or four weeks later, but the tutors were painstaking and detailed, and the on-site support by the CIS teachers gave us the extra zing that a pure correspondence course would have lacked. I remember a particularly charismatic history teacher, who might have been an early model of the teacher in The Dead Poets' Society, who claimed that he's been called a Communist and a Fascist, but he didn't mind what people called him so long as he was stimulating. There wasn't a lot of extra-curricular activity in those days, but one of the families ran the 'Teen Club' for evening parties (the school was just 9th-12th grade then), which were basically about pop music, cuddles and quite a lot of beer.

Once we moved to shared premises with Gladsaxe School, it all became more conventional. An experiment with shared English literature classes foundered embarrassingly when the Danes turned out to know the subject much better than we did. What did we think of DH Lawrence? Salinger? Hemmingway? Duh, who they, we said (we'd have been OK if they'd stuck to Shakespeare), and the experiment wasn't repeated. But if the curriculum was initially narrow, it was well-taught, with the immensely lovable Charlotte Metz (who really was a Communist of the old New York Jewish school, and quietly proud of it) mothering everyone but never letting her affection for students lead her to give them a better grade than we deserved. My mother, Irene Palmer, taught German, which I didn't think a good idea, since she knew when I hadn't done my homework, and enjoyed an off-beat friendship with several of the students - she kept Jill Borg's necklace of chewing-gum wrappers for years....

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