

The International Classroom – Teaching beyond stereotypes

Skardhamar Laura Pérez, Kling Joyce, *University of Copenhagen, Denmark*

How can we develop our understanding of engagement with the international classroom and avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping different student groups? In this paper, the presenters propose that in order to develop an international dimension in a Danish higher educational setting, classrooms should be seen as inclusive of both “home” and “international” players. From an ethnographic approach supported by participant observations, the presenters give concrete suggestions for interacting with the international classroom in reference to educational development. Current higher education research on internationalization will be discussed in relation to the topic of teaching beyond stereotypes. In relation to this, the importance of making tacit knowledge about the diverse learning experiences and academic cultures of the players in the classroom is emphasized. In addition, the presenters point to the crucial role of introducing didactics and approaches for including students’ diverse learning experiences and contextual competencies.

This paper stems from the current higher educational climate in Denmark. Danish institutions of higher education have experienced a substantial increase in enrollment of international students for both exchange and full-degree programs over the past 20 years. This has resulted in a focused action plan on the part of the Danish government in cooperation with state universities. The action plan calls for enhanced internationalization of higher education in Denmark with is a strong focus on 1) strengthening of university international learning and study environments; 2) strengthening students' language and intercultural skills; and 3) enhancing recruitment and retention of the most talented international students. The vision behind the Government’s action plan is based on the premise that increasing globalization leads to a need for proactive implementation of supportive programs for internationalization in both business and public education.

This sharp focus on internationalization of university education is reflected in the University of Copenhagen’s (UCPH) Strategy 2016. The increased focus on internationalization entails a series of changing conditions for university study and learning environments in master's programs, including the following:

1. An increased presence of international graduate students throughout the education
2. Changes in the composition of students in the "international classroom"
3. Growing need for language skills in several languages
4. Changing needs of pedagogical practices

A university wide project, entitled *Internationalization and Language Skills*, is aimed at strengthening the programs at UCPH through the development of initiatives across the University that focus on strengthening this international dimension in study and learning environments. This project comprises several subprojects which, unlike previous initiatives at UCPH, entails cooperation across four faculties, namely the Faculty of Science, the Faculty of Health and Medical Science, the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The paper presented here is a part a subproject of the former and address point 4, mentioned above: Changing needs of pedagogical practices. The subproject, *Educational Practice in the International Classroom: Suggestions for Instructing Culturally Heterogeneous Student Groups* is an exploratory project aimed at assessing and testing potential solutions to specific didactic challenges, while at the same time generating discussion and debate about the educational challenges presented by increasing internationalization at the University. The subproject takes as its starting point the following problem formulation: How can we effectively address some of the central opportunities and challenges of ‘the international classroom’ from an educational perspective? The overall aim of the subproject is to pave the way for future educational collaboration in order to address the challenges faced by university lecturers who have to communicate their subject area in the international classroom at the University of Copenhagen.

In their presentation, the speakers describe the initial findings regarding the hypothesis that teachers and students roles are always context specific. They also discuss the development of

cosmopolitan educational initiatives as a way of avoiding the danger of oversimplification and stereotyping in the international classroom.