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Recognising knowledge in the international classroom (0237)

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Research Domain: Student Experience

The concept of internationalization at home was originally coined at Malmö University in 1998 as a framework for an inclusive educational environment where all students would get an international and intercultural dimension to their education even when they stayed 'at home' (Nilsson 2003). The approach has since become widespread, especially in countries where attempts to cater for international students involve that education is offered in English.

However, research has shown that international students often experience that the academic knowledge and practices they have acquired during their previous education is not recognized by students and lecturers at the host universities (e.g. Carroll & Ryan 2005, Wilken 2007, Sullivan 2010). This experience has been assigned to a Western bias in international education which tends to construct non-Western students as passive receivers of Western knowledge and foreign students as 'deviant learners' (Jensen & Tange 2012, Tange & Kastberg 2013).

Much of the research on the attempts to include international students as part of strategies to internationalize at home have focused on the difficulties that lecturers have in recognizing 'other knowledge' as knowledge and on students' experiences with not having their knowledge recognized.

Very little systematic research so far has explored what exactly is recognized as legitimate knowledge in the international classroom by lecturers and students and how this may differ across disciplines and with reference to different teaching methods and approaches to internationalization, different educational goals and different compositions of student groups.

With reference to a larger research project about the internationalization of Danish university education at Aarhus University, Denmark's second largest university, this paper draws upon data from three international master programs to a) explore differences in how internationalization is actually carried out; b) various ways that knowledge is recognized, rejected and negotiated by the students; and c) engage in a theoretical discussion of two approaches to the recognition of knowledge.

Data and methodology

The paper discusses data from three international educations, which have been selected so that they represent educations with diverse student bodies, but also educations that appeal to different kinds of students and have different visions for internationalization.

The first education is an international business education, which appeals to national and international students who want to pursue a career in an international or foreign company. The international aspect of this education is more focused on the future work place than on the education itself. While national and international students appear to be treated as equals only few attempts are made to actively draw on the international diversity of the student body. In this program about 50 % of the students are international.

The second education is an interdisciplinary program in Human Security which appeals to students who want to work in aid-oriented international organizations or NGOs. Both international and interdisciplinary cooperation is part of the educational activities and of the discursive construction of the educational environment. In this program about 65 % of the students are international.

The third education is an Erasmus Mundus program in Journalism and Globalization which offers joint degrees in cooperation with other European universities. At this program, the international composition of the student body is stressed as an asset and a privilege. Approximately 95 % of the students are international.

Data about the way that knowledge is recognized or not was produced with several methods:

- ◆ Classroom observations focusing on how students participate, cooperate, and negotiate knowledge relating to various aspects of classroom education.
- ◆ In-depth interviews with 23 students where they reflect on their experiences in international education, on what they think they learn, on whether they feel able to draw on previous academic knowledge, on who they think make valuable contributions to academic discussions, etc.
- ◆ A comprehensive survey of students' backgrounds, (nationality, gender and age; their previous educational and work experiences; mobility experiences, language abilities, family background etc.)

Analysis

In our presentation, we will explore how the three institutional frameworks differ in terms of how/which students they recruit, the very different ideas of internationalization they promote and what kinds of knowledge authorities they draw upon. Furthermore, we will also map differences in the students' rejection, recognition and negotiation of knowledge.

Theoretical framework and discussion

As theoretical foundation for our discussion of knowledge encounters, we draw upon two different understandings *violence* and its role in the recognition of knowledge: Pierre Bourdieu's educational sociology and Emmanuel Levinas' ethics.

Bourdieu's educational sociology, which was developed in analyses of the French educational field (Bourdieu & Passeron 1979, Bourdieu et al. 1994), has in recent years gained some prominence in studies of internationalization of university education and of student mobility (e.g. Börjesson 2005, Sullivan 2010, Munk 2012, Wilken 2007, 2013).

Levinas has been widely used in pedagogical discussions (e.g. Säfström 2005, Joldersma 2001) as well as in calls for new approaches to intercultural communication in general and intercultural education in particular (e.g. MacDonald & O'Regan 2013).

According to Bourdieu, knowledge systems are reproduced because dominance and symbolic violence are misrecognized. The concepts of habitus (as an internalized practical sense of how things are), cultural capital (as recognized and recognizable assets), and symbolic violence (as the power to render a particular understanding of reality as objectively true) (e.g. Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1999; Wilken 2007, Wilken 2011, Wilken & Ginnerkov Hansen *forthcoming*, Tange, Kastberg & Wadsholt *forthcoming*) are particularly relevant in analyses of how knowledge is legitimized, recognized and misrecognized. However, this practice is challenged by inclusive ideals in international education and therefore we draw upon Levinas' concepts of the ethical encounter (the responsibility to recognize the alterity of the other) and violence (the attempt to understand the other from one's own position) (e.g. Levinas 1996).

We find that reflecting with both Bourdieu and Levinas adds a conceptual contrast which is productive in the discussion of our data seen in the light of both the wish to include the knowledge of the international students, the structural barriers and the interplay between them.

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