

# Teaching and Learning through a Foreign Language

## A Challenging Task

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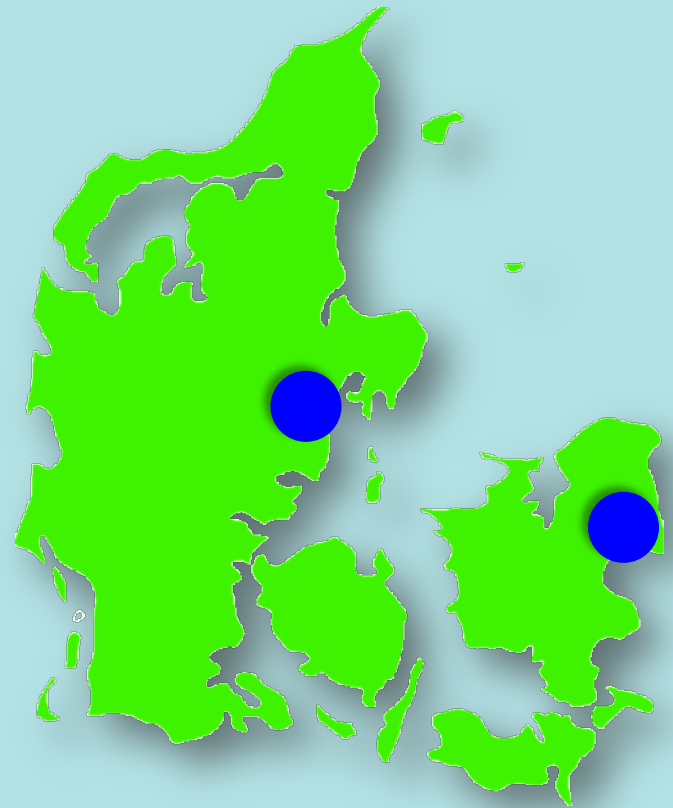
## The Presenter

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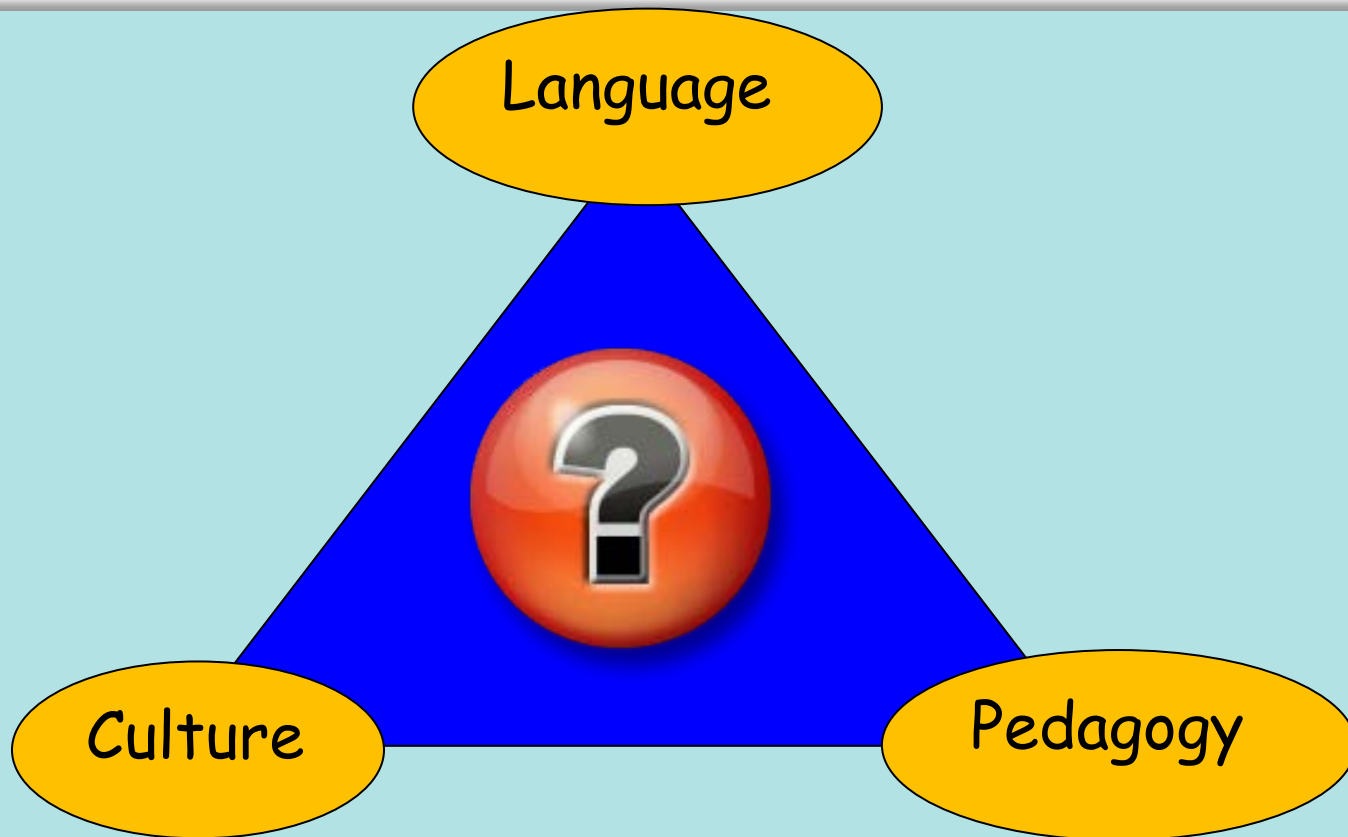
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# The Bermuda Triangle

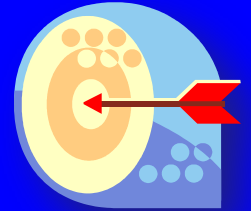


## Program



- What are the implications of teaching and learning through a foreign language?
  - A review of recent research findings in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.
  - A proposal for measures to be put in place in order to ensure the quality of teaching and learning through a foreign language.
  - What have you experienced?

## What can you expect to get out of this?



- A better understanding of the challenges of teaching and learning through the medium of a foreign language – and what can be done about it.
- An opportunity to share our experiences and learn from each other.

**1-2 minute break:**

**Check your notes – you  
might want to briefly  
discuss the topics with the  
person sitting next to you.**

**Rest your brain.**

**Stretch your arms / legs.**

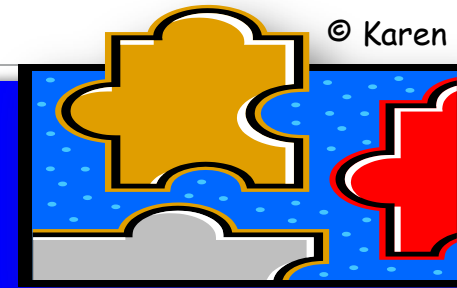
**Stand up – move around.**



## English Medium Instruction (EMI)

- The teaching of one or more courses, or an entire program in non-language subjects in English to learners for whom English is not their first language.
- The lecturers may also have English as their second or third language.
- The college or university may be situated in a non-English speaking area.

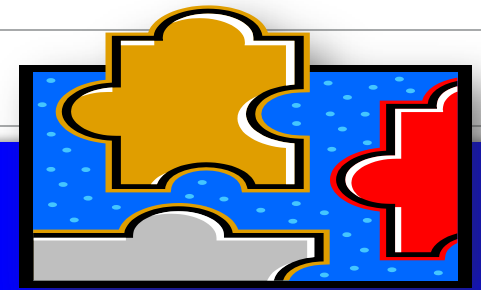




## EMI: What is the problem?

- Universities and individual lecturers – as well as students – often fail to consider, or they underestimate the implications of, the challenges of teaching and learning through a foreign language.
- This may have serious negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning, and for the learning outcomes achieved by students in EMI programs.

## EMI: What are the assumptions?



*This is only a question of language proficiency, and teachers and students have the necessary and sufficient language proficiency to teach and learn through a foreign language.*

- Language proficiency is demonstrated through
  - The upper-secondary program (high school) that students have completed.
  - Internationally recognized language tests (e.g. IELTS; TOEFL).
- More often than not, lecturers are not required to prove their language skills.

## EMI: What does research tell us? (1)



- In a recent Danish survey, the majority of lecturers and students find that both parties have the necessary language skills and that teaching and learning through English does not negatively impact the quality of the program.
- Students as well as lecturers claim that they have the necessary teaching skills & study skills to adapt to the international context (the multilingual and multicultural learning space).

## EMI: What does research tell us? (2)



- However, some lecturers and students admit to having language problems.

AND

- 2 Norwegian studies tell us that students' academic English reading proficiency is not at a sufficiently high level.
- 2 out of 3 students with an upper-secondary exam qualifying them for entering higher education, did not pass the IELTS Band 6 score minimum required by British or Australian universities.

## EMI: What does research tell us? (3)



- In a case study of 578 Norwegian university students, about 30 per cent had difficulties reading English, while an additional 44 per cent found it more difficult than reading in their first language.
- Main problems:
  - Slow reading.
  - Unfamiliar vocabulary.
- Extracurricular readers and respondents who were able to guess word meaning from context had higher reading scores.



## EMI: What does research tell us? (4)



Even though students claim that it does not make any difference whether they are taught in English or in Swedish, a 2006 study tells us that:

- Students' willingness to ask and answer questions are reduced in English-medium lectures.
  - Note the assumption that students' asking questions is a part of their cognitive process towards understanding the content (learning).
  - Students come forward and ask questions (in Swedish) after the lecture.

**Learning styles!**

## EMI: What does research tell us? (5)



- Students taking notes
  - report spending a large proportion of their time concentrating on the process of writing rather than understanding the content;
  - need to critically depend on the work done outside class after the lecture in order to understand the content.
- Reading before class becomes much more critical for students if the lecture is given in English; clearly, a learning strategy for those students.

## EMI: What does research tell us? (6)



- Students need multi-representational support:  
*I personally find it difficult to take things in when I only hear it and don't get written notes.*
- PowerPoint slides or other types of lecture notes, available to students beforehand, help them concentrate on what is being said, and allows them to take additional notes more easily.

**Learning styles!**

## THINK – PAIR - SHARE

- Can you relate to the issues discussed here? Do the observations tally with anything you experience in your teaching practice?



- Share your thoughts with the persons sitting next to you?



- Does this lead to any questions or comments?

## Most students do adapt to learning through English

- A Swedish study found that above a certain threshold level of disciplinary English, students give similarly rated descriptions of disciplinary concepts in English and Swedish, regardless of the language used to teach them.
- Students probably do adapt quite well to being taught in English; however, this adaptation may take longer and/or be less accomplished for some students.



## To sum up! (1)



- Language proficiency is important; but it is not the only determining factor in the quality of EMI teaching and learning.
- Didactics – the way the lecturer delivers his/her lecture - plays a crucial role.
- The lecturers ability to speak English fluently does not in itself ensure a good lecture.
- But a less accomplished lecturer becomes even less accomplished when teaching through the medium of foreign language.

## To sum up! (2)



- Beware that students have sufficient language skills, including reading and writing skills – or offer remedial courses!



## To sum up! (3)



- When teaching through the medium of a language which is not all students' first language, the mode of delivery becomes even more important than when students are taught through their first language. It is even more crucial to e.g.
  - Use meta-discursive elements (*First we will...; I have now come to ...*).
  - Use visual support; handouts.



## To sum up! (4)



- Clarify terminology; definition of concepts.
- Consider one's pace of speech; pronunciation.
- Leave time / opportunity for students to ask questions and encourage students to ask questions (Think-pair-share; individual – small group – large group set-up).

## To sum up! (5)



- Have student activating measures in place:
  - Use Web 2.0 applications & social media (meet students 'on their own platform');
  - Encourage interaction via clickers, cell phones, etc.
  - Use these applications in class during lectures and in communication with students between lectures.
  - .....
- And do not forget the breaks!

**thank**  
your  
attention  
**you** for