

Karen M. Lauridsen

**Project:** *The internationalisation of higher education: Challenges for lecturers / Internationalisering af uddannelserne: Udfordringer for universiteternes undervisere*

**Conference:** *Internationalizing Danish higher education: Navigating the multicultural and multilingual classroom* – Copenhagen, 19 January 2012

**Presentation of the project and preliminary results & web site and book in the pipeline (30 mins)**

When the Berlin Wall fell at the time when some of us started the first Erasmus exchanges, we soon realized that, in Denmark, we could not attract a sufficient number of international students to our study programmes unless we switched into English.

The first incentive for offering modules in English was thus to attract enough international students to Danish universities in order have enough study places abroad in reciprocal exchanges under Erasmus or other exchange schemes. It was not – at least not always – part of an internationalisation strategy or policy as such. Some of us just thought that this was a good idea, and the students were thrilled.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, we might have observed that teaching in English was a problem for some members of faculty; but we were young and naïve – as young people tend to be – and thought that these problems would sort themselves out when the old professors retired, and a younger generation of colleagues took over. They would have more international experience and therefore also speak better English. – Or so we thought.

The early years of the new millennium saw the first full degree programmes offered in English. International programme – that is, programmes or modules taught through the medium of English were to an increasing degree considered part of the mainstream portfolio of study programmes at Danish universities.

In other words, internationalisation was no longer considered the sole responsibility of the international offices; it became part of the main university strategy and policies, and not only students but also a growing body of international Ph.D. students and faculty entered the universities.

This was also the ‘point of no return’ for the Danish universities: With so many new international students, international members of faculty and international Ph.D. students, educational programmes and course modules had to be advertised as being taught either in Danish or in English.

Jumping back and forth between Danish and English depending on whether or not there was a single Erasmus student in a course was not an option. – Well, for some of us it had never been; international programmes entail much more than just switching from Danish into English.

As we shall hear from Krista Varantola later this morning, it is a common misconception that ‘everybody knows English’ to a sufficiently high degree, and this applies to students as well as lecturers.

It is true that, in a survey carried out by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) in 2010, a majority of students and lecturers claim that English language instruction does not negatively impact the quality of study programmes.

However, there is a minority of students and lecturers who admit to having problems teaching and learning through the medium of English. The conclusions in the EVA report are corroborated by other research or development projects, surveys, etc.

The EVA report recommends that the Danish universities continue their work to ensure and further develop the quality of their English Medium Instruction – EMI – programmes, paying special attention to the students who do not have the sufficient and necessary language skills to learn through the medium of a foreign language, and to the lecturers who lack either sufficient linguistic and/or pedagogical competences to teach international programmes in English .

Note here the reference to the other issues at stake in the international classroom – that is, the necessary intercultural skills, study skills or teaching skills. In the international classroom, no one or only a small minority of lecturers or students have English as their first language; rather, they have very diverse first languages and cultural backgrounds.

In contrast to the Anglo-Saxon world, where the majority of lecturers and students are still typically native speakers of English, and where international students enjoy immersion in an English language setting, Danish – and other Continental European – universities are in a different situation.

When EMI programmes are offered, teaching and learning takes place through the medium of the lecturers' and students' second or even third language.

In addition to this, lecturers and students alike bring a diversity of cultural backgrounds and tacit knowledge into the classroom, determining factors when we consider what they mutually expect from each other. This, therefore, has obvious implications for how lecturers deal with the cultural and educational issues in addition to the linguistic ones in the international programmes.

It is against the backdrop of this rather complex situation that the project we are reporting on today was conceived.

With colleagues representing 6 of the now 8 Danish universities, we applied for funding for a development project: The internationalisation of higher education: Challenges for lecturers. We are grateful for the generous support we received from *Statens Center for Kompetenceudvikling / The Centre for Development of Human Resources*, which has made it possible for us to address some of these burning issues in Danish higher education.

At the beginning of the project about 18 months ago, we identified the issues at stake as we saw them. Within the framework of this project, we then set out to develop a total of four courses as professional development or in-service training for university lecturers, each of them in turn addressing a specific topic.

The courses were offered – free of charge – to lecturers at the participating universities. They were generally well received and were subsequently evaluated in the following way:

- All course participants were asked to complete an electronic questionnaire.
- All instructors were asked to offer their own observations as regards the positive aspects and those that needed improvement in their own courses according to a standard template.

- 1-2 members of the project steering committee sat in on and observed other colleagues' courses, which resulted in a report, again based on a standard template.

On the basis of this, in the autumn of 2011, it was decided that we would not recommend a specific set of courses; what might be needed in a given university context might be a variety of possible combinations of modules from the project's courses.

I myself have had the pleasure of testing one such combination at Aarhus University together with two of my colleagues from the project steering committee, Stacey Cozart and Pete Westbrook. – This course was also well received and, in addition, it provided invaluable information to us – the instructors - as to how we may further develop the course or course modules in the future.

The outcomes of the SCKK project are threefold:

Firstly, a revised version of the materials used for these courses as well as some additional materials are currently being put together in an open resource web site for university lecturers teaching international programmes. These again address the 3 major challenges for Danish as well as international lecturers: Language, culture and pedagogy / didactics.

In addition, there are quite a few links to other resources, including an introduction to higher education in Denmark specifically for international faculty with teaching obligations in Denmark. Furthermore, on our web site, there will also be a point of contact for colleagues who are seeking instructors for in-service training courses on these topics.

The web site will be available shortly, and you will then all receive an email with a link to the website. – We hope that you will circulate this information in your own institutions and networks at that time, thus making more colleagues aware of these resources, which are available free of charge.

Secondly, we are preparing a textbook addressing these issues in a Danish context as well. We plan to publish it in the second half of this year, and we see the web site and the book as complementary hands-on resources for lecturers.

Finally, there are some further lessons that we have learnt from this project, and which I would like to just briefly mention.

A good part of the research and development work that has been carried out in this field has been documented in books and articles from English-speaking countries. Among the results from such projects is a book on *Teaching International Students*, which has proved popular in Denmark, and which Janette Ryan, whom you will meet in a few moments, has co-edited with Jude Carroll.

We in Denmark can learn a lot from these publications from the English-speaking part of the world, but we also need to translate it into our own linguistic, cultural and educational context, and our project should be seen in this perspective.

Another lesson learnt is a partial answer to the question, originally posed by our sponsor, the Centre for Development of Human Resources: How do we get highly specialised faculty to participate in professional development courses – courses about teaching, not research? Is that at all possible?

The answer is both yes and no. What we have seen with the courses that we offered last spring is probably not very different from what others have experienced as well. Some senior members of faculty (associate and full professor) did participate, and participated very actively in the courses, and there was also a relatively high number of international Ph.D. students with very little or no teaching experience at all.

However, it would appear that most assistant professors were busy establishing themselves as researchers and participating in the mandatory pedagogical training programmes for assistant professors offered at all Danish universities.

Looking at the lists of participants in our courses, one might get the idea that the senior members of faculty who participated, come from academic units (departments, schools, faculties) that – obviously – have quite a lot of EMI programmes, but also from units where the challenges that we have addressed in our project are openly discussed as issues that need to be dealt with.

There is thus also a role to be played by university management in not only raising lecturers' awareness of these issues, but also in stressing that they should be actively addressed.

From my own university I also know that 'money talks'. Professional development courses where participants are allowed to count the time spent on professional development courses as part of their work load for the time sheet in a given semester, or who are offered a bonus on their pay check if/when they complete the course, seem to be more attractive than others. And if university management is serious about these issues, this may be the way to go. Who knows?

In the light of what I have just said, it is abundantly clear that if we are to benefit long-term from the results of this project, Danish universities need to address these issues in an open manner and encourage faculty to engage in educational development – also as regards the issues of the international programmes. – In the time reserved for discussions this afternoon, we may have an opportunity to return to this.

I have obviously spent most of my time this morning focusing on issues that need to be addressed. However, not everything in the internationalisation of higher education in Denmark is doom and gloom.

On the contrary, Danish universities have been quite successful, and I would like to end this talk by paying tribute to those colleagues who have made this possible over the past couple of decades, and who I see in the audience here today. This gives us all a solid platform on which to tackle the problems that are still out there.

Thank you for your attention.

