

PREPARATION OF STUDENT TEACHERS FOR MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS: REFLECTIONS ON THE DANISH TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

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Abstract: *Most European Union countries and members of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are facing increasing learner diversity in schools and are accommodating increasing numbers of children from ethnic minority and/or migrant backgrounds. International surveys from OECD indicate that teachers are in need of professional training to better prepare them for working in multicultural and multilingual classroom settings. The aim of this article is to briefly investigate how curriculum in the 2013 reform of Danish teacher education suggests that student teachers address classroom diversity.*

Keywords: diversity, multicultural classroom, teacher education preparation, Europe, Denmark

Introduction

Many European Union (EU) countries and members of Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are facing increasing learner diversity in schools and must address the needs of a growing number of children with an ethnic minority and/or migrant background [Eurostat, 2011; OECD, 2012; Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI), 2017]. Data from PISA 2003, 2006, and 2012 (OECD, 2014a) on migrant children's achievement (Christensen, Egelund, Fredslund, & Jensen, 2014) indicated that "across all participating countries, native students perform better than both first and second-generation immigrants in mathematics" (Burns & Shadoing-Giersing, 2010, p. 24). In Denmark, this also applies to science and Danish language (Christensen et al., 2014).

On the other hand, Burns and Shadoing-Giersing (2010) emphasized that "in Australia, Canada and New Zealand

second-generation immigrant students perform as well as their native-born peers" (p. 24), suggesting that "it is not inevitable that first and second-generation students perform less well than their peers" (p. 24). International surveys indicate that teachers are in need of professional training to better prepare them for working in multicultural and multilingual classroom settings (OECD, 2014b). Although OECD investigations and the PISA reports (OECD, 2014a, 2014b) address the increasing classroom diversity internationally and the subsequent need for better teacher preparation, there has been less focus on how initial teacher education (ITE) programs within individual countries prepare student teachers to deal effectively with diversity in the classroom with respect to curriculum goals.

In 2016, a European survey and research project investigating the role of initial teacher education was carried out by 28 European member states (PPMI, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). Petersen carried out

research and case studies in Denmark (PPMI, 2017b, pp. 38-42; PPMI, 2017c, pp. 23-28). The final report indicated that large variations in terms of approaches and policies existed across Europe (PPMI, 2017a). The authors of the report outlined that “strong political commitment constitutes one of the key success factors for the implementation of effective ITE based on key competences” (PPMI, 2017a, p. 54), with ITE in Denmark emphasized as an example (p. 54).

The purpose of this article is to investigate how curriculum within the 2013 reform of Danish teacher education suggested that student teachers address diversity in their classrooms (Executive Order No. 231, 2013). Based on a short introduction to the context in Europe and in particular Denmark, I introduce the concepts of diversity and multicultural education before investigating the Danish teacher education curriculum.

European and Danish Context

Over the past few decades, there has been increased migration to Europe. In countries like Germany, France, Spain, and Italy, the percentage of migrants and refugees living in these countries has increased from around 1-2% in the late 1960s to above 10% in 2010 (Eurostat, 2011). As a country member of the European Union (EU), Denmark is no exception. Since the 1970s, the percentage of migrants, refugees, and descendants in Denmark has increased from 1% in 1970 to 11.6% in 2015. Of the 11.6 % immigrants, 58% are considered persons from non-Western countries (Danish Statistics, 2015, p. 12). There also is extensive variation in the distribution of migrants in Denmark. While migrants represent 4.4% of the population in one rural part of Denmark, migrants represent 36.4% in a suburb of the capital Copenhagen. Furthermore, in the region of

Copenhagen, migrants and descendants make up 17.5% of the whole population (Danish Statistics, 2015, p. 7).

Migrant Children in Danish Primary and Lower Schools (2015)

In November 2015, 12% of all children in the Danish *folkeskole* (i.e., the Danish state primary and lower secondary school) were from migrant backgrounds (Danish Ministry of Education, 2015). The distribution of migrant children differs in various parts of the country. Most migrant children attended schools in urban districts, and in many school districts in which the migrants live, the concentration and percentage of migrant children in the schools was high (40% or more). The high percentage of migrant children in urban schools has been a common concern among politicians in recent years. The subsequent political response has been to close schools with a very high percentage of migrant children or by emerging several schools into one. In 2009 the number of schools in Denmark with more than 40% migrant children was 64, in 2015 the number decreased to 45 schools. The total number of municipal primary and lower secondary schools in Denmark in 2015 was 1290 (Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality, 2016).

Diversity and Multicultural Education

The concept of diversity has been developed and discussed in various contexts. In accordance with Burns and Shadoing-Giersing (2010), diversity is defined as “characteristics that can affect the specific ways in which developmental potential and learning are realized, including cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and socio-economic difference” (p. 21).

The degree to which countries and teachers

have responded to the growing diversity is partly historical and partly due to the challenge of diversity in the classroom (Burns & Shadoing-Giersing, 2010). The authors indicate that the presence of one student in the class who is “not fluent in the language of instruction” is “a very different issue for a teacher than five or ten” or even more students in the class “who not only do not speak the language of instruction but also may or may not share the same first language as each other” (p. 23).

The response to growing diversity in the classroom is often connected to the concept of multicultural education. Multicultural education grew out of the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s in response to widespread institutional racism and ethnic discrimination (Banks, 1999). According to Banks (2004), multicultural education is “an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups will have equal chance to achieve academically in school” (p. 1). Banks continued,

The major goal of multicultural education is to change teaching and learning so that students of both genders and from diverse cultural, ethnic, and language groups will have equal opportunities to learn in educational institutions. This goal suggests that major changes ought to be made in the ways that educational programs are conceptualized, organized and taught (p. 13).

Banks (1999) identified different approaches to multicultural education including:

1. **Content integration** (i.e., including content about racial, ethnic, and cultural groups into the curriculum);
2. **Prejudice reduction** (i.e., reducing stereotyping, increasing inter-group relations by targeting students’ racial attitudes through teaching);
3. **Equity pedagogy** (i.e., using appropriate teaching strategies by recognizing diverse ways of learning and knowing);
4. **Knowledge construction** (i.e., viewing concepts, events and issues from the perspectives and experiences of a range of racial, ethnic and cultural groups, and understanding how different cultural frames of reference influence the construction of knowledge); and
5. **Empowering school culture and social structure** (i.e., examining and restructuring school culture and organization to foster equality and empowerment) (p. 53)

Other researchers have elaborated on the concept of multicultural education. Rios and Stanton (2011) outlined “that it is not who the teachers and the students are in a particular school but what they do that makes an education multicultural” (p. 4). In a similar way, Vranješević emphasized that “the aim of education for diversity is not to understand what is wrong with others who do not fit into the existing system (the deficit theory), but rather to understand the ways in which to transform the system so that differences become acceptable and all children have equal chances” (Vranješević, 2014, p. 475).

Rios and Stanton (2011) further stated the importance of identity as follows,

Importantly, multicultural educators also understand that identities are changing and developing (i.e., fluid and dynamic). They also understand that those within the same identity group do not all share

the same worldview....multicultural educators also assert that people do not have one identity but rather have many identities. Some of these identities are more important than others, often depending upon time and place (that is, context). They recognize that teachers and students also can make choices about which identities to emphasize, depending upon context (pp. 4-5).

Multicultural Education Revisited

Some researchers have discussed the multicultural education paradigm. For example, when discussing the rising and ebbing focus on multiculturalism within European countries, Kymlicka (2010) noticed that many countries interpret multiculturalism differently. He also noted that many European countries have critiqued multiculturalism as impossible to realise, and instead, have begun to impose assimilatory attitudes and politics. Others have emphasized that multicultural education provides an essentialist perception of culture that may reinforce students' cultural bias (Petersen, 2011).

Over the last decade in Europe, the notion of multicultural/intercultural education and diversity has been perceived as a problem rather than as a positive challenge. As Luciak (2010) suggests, the attitude in many European countries is that "diversity is still regarded as a problem much more frequently than it is perceived as a resource or as a right" (p. 56). Similarly, Alleman-Ghionda came to the following conclusion on intercultural education in various European member states,

In all member states, the implementation of intended policies tends to be difficult. One problem is the successful instruction and integration of migrant and minority pupils...The other problem is a contradiction between intercultural ideas and the national and mono-cultural

thinking as well as cultural prejudice present in societies and schools (Alleman-Ghionda, & Deloitte Consulting 2008, p. 56).

Accordingly, teachers are often left to themselves to develop methods for accommodating diversity in the multicultural classroom, and they "need to decide which model best addresses their students' needs, fosters their education, and has the potential to minimize social inequalities" (Luciak, 2010, p. 56).

The question that was explored here is how the 2013 Teacher Education Order in Denmark within the Teacher Education Institution at VIA University College in Aarhus was implemented in order to address challenges future teachers may face in the context of increasingly diverse and multicultural classrooms.

Investigation on the 2013 Danish Teacher Education Order

In 2013, the Danish Teacher Education Order was adopted which introduced a range of changes to former acts (Executive Order No. 231, 2013). Most prominent was the alignment with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and a focus on skills requirements (Petersen & Carlsen, 2014). A number of mandatory and elective modules/courses also were introduced. The program is presented in Figure 1.

Basic teacher professional skills consist of two parts that are compulsory for all student teachers: Part A consists of general education/philosophy/ citizenship and religion (abbreviated as KLM), and Part B consists of four modules, including education of bilingual children, special needs education, and knowledge about teaching and student development. The Education of Bilingual Children (Basic Teacher Professional Skills Part B) and the

KLM module (general education, philosophy, citizenship and religion) are of particular importance with respect to how initial teacher education programs in

Denmark prepare student teachers to address diversity in the multicultural classroom (PPMI, 2017c, p. 23).

Modules	Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 3	Semester 4	Semester 5	Semester 6	Semester 7	Semester 8
Module 1 (Danish or Mathematics)	Basic 1	Basic 2			Basic 3	Basic 4		
Module 2		Basic 1	Basic 2	Basic 3				
Module 3						Basic 1	Basic 2	Basic 3
Specialized module			Specialized module	Specialized module				
A. Basic teacher professional skills: Philosophy/citizenship/religion (Danish: KLM)	KLM (5)	KLM (5)						
B. Basic teacher professional skills: 1. Student learning and development; 2. Teaching knowledge; 3. Special needs education; 4. Education of bilingual children - PL (Danish: LG)	PL (5)	PL (5)	PL		PL (5)	PL (5)	PL	PL
Optional module					Optional			
Practice (in-service training)	Practice			Practice			Practice	
Bachelor project					Bachelor (5)	Bachelor (5)		Bachelor
Total ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS

Figure 1. Organization of the teacher education in Denmark according to the Executive Order No. 231 (2013). (Reproduced with permission from Petersen & Carlsen, 2014, p. 127).

Note. All modules are 10 ECTS credit points unless otherwise indicated in brackets

Education of Bilingual Children

The aim of the Education of Bilingual Children module is to prepare future teachers to teach bilingual children, to “identify educational challenges linked to second language in the teaching of subject knowledge and to favor bilingual pupils’ linguistic and academic development in linguistically diverse classrooms” (Order on Bachelor of Science for School Teachers, 2013). A detailed description of the module is presented in Figure 2.

The introduction of the compulsory course (10 ECTS) Education of Bilingual Children, was a new initiative in the 2013 Danish Teacher Education Order. All student teachers now need to complete this module.

In the previous Teacher Education Act from 2006, only those ITE student teachers who voluntarily chose the Danish as a Second Language module dealt with educating bilingual children (Act, 2006). In the 2006 Act, the Danish as a Second Language module covered the equivalent of 36 ECTS points. Thus, it may be seen as progress that all future student teachers must attend the compulsory Education of Bilingual Children course. On the other hand, it has been questioned whether a 10 ECTS point course can adequately address all the challenges future teachers will meet in increasingly diverse classrooms (PPMI, 2017c, p. 25).

Knowledge: The [ITE]student has knowledge about	Skills: The [ITE]student can
Second language acquisition, bilingual children's language development	Assess second language acquisition in children's practice
Interlanguage	Support interlanguage development in the bilingual child
Language and literacy in subject teaching in a second language pedagogy perspective	Plan teaching that encourages bilingual children's language and subject knowledge and development
Language diversity and bilingualism, and language's impact on identity formation	Involve bilingual children's linguistic abilities in the classroom
Research about second language pedagogy and language development	Identify second language pedagogy challenges to teaching
Legal framework, regulations, acts and the organization of the subject Danish as a second language in primary and lower secondary school (Folkeskole)	Cooperate with Danish as a second language teachers and other teachers of the class regarding the bilingual children's language and subject knowledge and development, and their academic and professional language development

Figure 2. Education of bilingual children module in the 2013 Danish Teacher Education Order (Adapted from the Executive Order No 231, 2013).

The following is an example of how VIA University College (2016) implemented the 2013 Teacher Education Order requirement that student teachers complete modules on the education of bilingual children:

Through lectures, group work, case studies, classroom discussions, hands-on techniques, the module focuses on the development of inclusive educational and didactic practice in which Danish as a second language is a dimension of the learning processes in all subject teaching in primary and lower secondary school education (p. 15).

In an interview carried out as part of a 2016 Danish research project and case study, a student teacher, who participated in the course emphasized that the module, "provided her with [a] huge learning outcome" and with "hands-on techniques, methods, training and practical knowledge about how to teach bilingual children" (PPMI, 2017c, p.25).

General/Education/Philosophy/ Citizenship/Religion (KLM)

General education/philosophy/citizenship and religion (KLM) is the second mandatory module of the Danish ITE program for the preparation of student teachers for diversity and multiculturalism. According to the Executive Order No. 231 (2013), the intention of the module is to prepare all future teachers in Denmark to address the general purposes of public school, develop professional ethics, and handle complex challenges in the context of cultural, values-based, and religious diversity. The module aims for future teachers "in a nuanced and reflective way...to relate to ethical, political, democratic and religious challenges associated with education, parent involvement and school in a globalized society" (Executive Order No. 231, 2013, Appendix 2).

The integration of the Teacher Education Order requirement into a teaching module

at the VIA University College (2016) including lectures, group activities, tutorials, and presentations is described as follows:

The module aims to introduce student teachers to “an analysis of democracy and citizenship in the history of ideas, the formation of theoretical and professional ethical perspective”. The module focuses on the students’ efforts to address the school’s values and relate them to the teaching profession with respect for cultural and religious diversity that currently characterizes the school and the community (p. 6).

The knowledge base of the module at VIA UC (2016) is outlined as follows:

Central to the module is philosophy, history of ideas, formation theory and religion. The module is located in the tension between different theories within the module's knowledge and skill. The module is based on national and international research and development, knowledge formation, democracy and citizenship, professional ethics and religion and cultural encounters (p. 6).

A Student teacher, who participated in both modules stated that this module “was fundamental in developing [herself] as a teacher being able to address diversity, cultural encounters, inclusive classrooms, cooperation with parents from various cultures, ethics, etc. (Interview with Student Teacher, PPMI, 2017c, p. 25).

As emphasized in the PPMI (2017c) report, the mandatory “Education of Bilingual Children module is important as all future ITE students must learn how to take into account the background (linguistically and culturally) of all children in the multilingual classroom” (p. 25). In comparison, the second module “prepares ITE students for

diversity in school in broad and general ways” (p. 25).

Discussion

The fact that the 2013 Danish Teacher Education Order evidences “strong political commitment” and distinct descriptions of “key competences” in mandatory modules as ways to prepare future student teachers for diversity is perceived as important and desirable for most European countries (PPMI, 2017a, p 54). There is no doubt that the introduction of mandatory modules on diversity and the teaching of bilingual and multilingual children in ITE in Europe and other places in the world are essential to prepare future student teachers for diverse and multicultural classrooms. At the same time, a closer analysis of the mandatory modules and the ITE program in Denmark reveal an ethnocentric bias. Bank’s (1999) description of the key elements of multicultural education including striving to achieve content integration, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, knowledge construction and empowering school culture and social structure are either absent or not emphasized in the Danish mandatory modules. The general module on philosophy, citizenship, and education, in its description of skills and knowledge outlines knowledge about Christianity as extremely important for future student teachers in Denmark. In the PPMI report, this is mirrored in the discussion about a limitation in the module “that individual teacher educators put less emphasis to diversity rather than to ethics and moral education, including Christianity” (PPMI, 2017c, p. 25).

Furthermore, recent education policy towards migrant and refugee children in Denmark and other European countries, such as refusing to offer all children mother tongue education and/or specific language and culture training, provide evidence of some of the complexities and challenges

facing diverse societies. To a degree these trends mirror ongoing discussions concerning recent European attitudes towards multicultural education and diversity where “diversity is still regarded as a problem much more frequently than it is perceived as a resource or as a right” (Luciak, 2010, p. 56).

Evidence indicates that the Danish initial teacher education program as outlined in the 2013 Teacher Education Order to a certain degree intends to prepare student

teachers to support bilingual children’s participation in a classroom in which the language of instruction may be challenging for them. Compared to former teacher education acts, all future teachers are now mandated to address issues of diversity in their classrooms. Despite these changes, much work remains to be done in order for future teachers to adequately and effectively address increasing diversity in Danish primary and lower secondary schools.

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(All English titles translated by Karen Bjerg Petersen)

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