

Problem solving and intercultural dynamics in a PBL context: Challenges and solutions



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Abstract

- Recent years has witnessed an increased internationalization of universities including AAU Copenhagen's study programs where 25% of the students are Non-Danish.
- This survey investigates if Danish and non-Danish students differ in their participation in the problem identification phase of group work.
- The study finds that non-Danish students face significant challenges in the forming phase primarily because they are less trained in 'out of the box-thinking', have less self-efficacy, are more concerned about speaking out, are more concerned about reputation effects.
- The student survey also indicates that group supervisors might be too task focused and that they need to pay more attention to group and intercultural dynamics.
- We propose several recommendations for students, supervisors and study boards, including among other things the need for identifying (or developing) appropriate pedagogical supervision. The supervision needs to focus explicitly on overcoming creativity constrains, limiting fear of speaking out, building up psychological safety etc.

Theoretical background

- From Organizational behavior we cover
 - Psychological safety
 - Implicit Voice theory
 - Self-efficacy
 - Cultural intelligence/strategies
 - Creativity
 - Personality
 - Power distance
 - Using the psychometric scales from this field, modified to PBL

Some results

| | Danish vs non-Danish | Mean |
|--|----------------------|---------|
| Thinking out of the box. | Dan | 1,39 |
| | Non-Dan | 3,01*** |
| Easy accomplishing my goals | Dan | 3,01** |
| | Non-Dan | 2,76 |
| Self-confidence in unexpected events. | Dan | 3,37*** |
| | Non-Dan | 3,10 |
| Fear of offending experienced PBL students | Dan | 1,81 |
| | Non-Dan | 2,20** |
| Silence fearing bad reputation | Dan | 1,86 |
| | Non-Dan | 2,49*** |

Methods

- Questionnaire (psychometric Likert scales 1-5)
- Open ended interviews with supervisors
- Open ended interviews with students
- Focus group interviews

| | Number | Percentage |
|--------------------|--------|------------|
| Participants total | 169 | 233 |
| Danish | 78 | 46.4 |
| Non-Danish | 90 | 56.6 |
| Response rate | NA | 22-25 |
| Female | 83 | 49.6 |
| Male | 85 | 50.6 |

- Only the most important background information is presented.

Some results (continue)

| | Danish vs non-Danish | Mean |
|---|----------------------|---------|
| Students from MORE hierarchical countries tend not to be active | Dan | 3,00*** |
| | Non-Dan | 2,43 |
| Supervisors should decide | Da | 1,44 |
| | Non-Dan | 1,95*** |
| Psychological safety | Dan | 1,60 |
| | Non-Dan | 1,92** |
| Cultural intelligence Enjoy cultural diversity | Dan | 3,18 |
| | Non-Dan | 3,82*** |
| Awareness of cult. difference in problem-solving | Dan | 2,88 |
| | Non-Dan | 3,38** |
| To diverse groups. | Dan | 1,81 |
| | Non-Dan | 2,28** |

Study programs

| Program | Number | Percentage |
|---------|--------|------------|
| GRS | 30 | 17.9 |
| GDS | 12 | 7.1 |
| IS | 2 | 1.2 |
| MEDIA | 3 | 1.8 |
| OIM/GM | 25 | 14.9 |
| OIM/MM | 26 | 15.5 |
| OME | 21 | 12.5 |
| TOURISM | 43 | 25.6 |
| NONE | 6 | 3.6 |

| Satisfaction w Study | Number | Means |
|----------------------|--------|-------|
| Danes | 71 | 3.76 |
| Non-danes | 87 | 4.13 |

Conclusions

- Significant differences between Danish and Non-Danish students across almost all meta-dimensions
- Need to take action for supervisors
- E.g.need to design exercises related to intercultural awareness, psychological safety, easing speaking out
- Study board should make intercultural challenges mandatory in coordination meetings and evaluations
- Program coordinator should ensure cultural training of supervisors
- Pedagogical courses should be better integrated in our teaching/supervision courses