

## **Introduction to the International Classroom**

### **Further Resources I Denmark**

#### **Marianne’s international classroom**

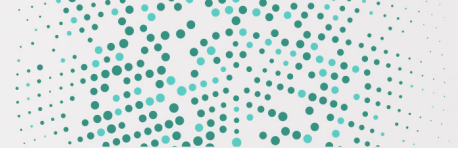
Marianne Thomsen is an associate professor of Media Studies at a Danish university, with 10 years of research and teaching experience. Last year she was asked to teach her first course in English: a Master’s level course in Digital Identities and Social Media. She had enjoyed teaching the Danish version of this seminar-based course to Danish students in previous years, and had developed a number of effective teaching and learning activities over the years, including group discussions, short writing assignments, and student presentations. Her main concern was about teaching the course in English. She felt that she was pretty good at speaking English and was used to reading research literature in English, as well as sometimes writing in English. However, she did not feel entirely comfortable with the idea of teaching in English as she was not certain that she would be able to express herself precisely enough when teaching. Nevertheless, since she had so much experience teaching the same material in Danish, she was cautiously optimistic about the outcome.

Similar to previous years, there were about 30 students in the class. This time, however, the class consisted of 16 Danes and 14 international students, the majority from Europe, a few from Asia, and a couple from North America.

The course unfolded quite differently from what she had expected. First of all, Marianne noticed that she was spending more time on the course than usual. The international students sent her emails with all kinds of questions, not only about the course but also about housing matters and other personal issues affecting their lives in Denmark.

Marianne also had to spend much more time preparing for her course by looking up words in English and writing out her lectures and shorter presentations. But all in all Marianne felt that her lectures and other teaching activities went well, and by the end of the course she was feeling more confident about her ability to teach in English – at least the students didn’t complain, but she also noticed that they weren’t keen to ask questions in class.

The classroom dynamics were also quite different. The international students and the Danish students spontaneously formed separate discussion and project groups,



and at first this seemed to work well, at least for the Danish students because it gave them the chance to speak in Danish in their discussion activities; on the other hand, she noticed that in the international student groups, some of the students said very little. Similarly, in the class discussions, the Danish students contributed more frequently, and she had to spend much time and effort eliciting answers from some of the international students – often failing to really engage them. It seemed as though they were unprepared or had difficulty expressing themselves. However, about mid-semester the students all gave oral presentations in class, and Marianne found that the students’ abilities to present in English varied considerably regardless of nationality. Even so, during an oral evaluation at the end of the course, one of the Danish students announced that while the Danish students liked the international students and in principle didn’t mind having them in class, the Danish students thought it was a waste of time working with some of the international students and listening to their presentations due to their ‘poor language skills’. The discussion got heated, and a couple of the international students accused the Danish students of ‘ethnocentrism’.

Finally, the results of the written exams – a 15-page paper on a topic of the students’ choice – were less than satisfactory. The scores were lower than in previous years, and a few of the students were caught plagiarizing. Many of the international students’ papers did not contain enough critical analysis, and some excessively cited Marianne’s own work and her comments made in class. A few of them used translated sources from their local contexts that Marianne had never heard of. In general, the English-language reports were simply not as well written as the ones she had previously assessed in Danish in terms of their content, structure and language.

Marianne realized that there were quite a few things she needed to change next time she was to teach this course.

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