

Dealing with diversity in an educational institution – changing the culture of the institution

This paper addresses how pedagogical innovations can monitor diversity and facilitate the institution's ability to deal with it, by preparing the academic staff through a joint educational development project. The project "Good teaching practices for multicultural study environment" was a 3 year project (january 2008 – january 2011). It consisted of different actions undertaken for supporting students as well as highlighting diversity and increasing the knowledge amongst the academic staff at Oslo University College (OUC).

The paper discusses the challenges we faced, the results we achieved and the factors that are necessary for succession. It provides an analysis of a successful collaboration between the institution, members of the academic staff and the researchers.

"Good teaching practices for multicultural study environment"

The aim of the project was solving an existing problem in the institution as well as to generate new knowledge through action research. By building bridges between research-based knowledge and practical experience, we have contributed to monitoring diversity in the institution as well as improved practices and increased knowledge amongst the academic staff.

Through developing a language course for adult immigrant students and establishing a system of writing mentors at OUC, as well as establishing a network called "a culture for mentoring" for the academic staff, we wanted to contribute to new teaching practices as an answer to the increasing diversity at the University College. The focus of the project was:

- 1) the institution has a group of students who do not have the language and communication skills that necessary to manage a college program
- 2) the institution is not prepared for taking care of and exploiting the resource of today's heterogeneous student population
- 3) there is a need for monitoring diversity in the institution, highlighting the resources this diversity represents

Monitoring diversity and establishing appropriate educational practices when dealing with diversity in an educational institution, was essential for the design of the project.

Dealing with diversity concerns the entire institutional, the institutional frames, curricula, pedagogical practices, the staff and the students. Consequently one has to concentrate on both students and the staff, on the majority and the minority at the same time. This project therefore embraces the whole environment at OUC.

The project has therefore been organized as a collaboration between the Centre for Educational Research and members of the academic staff at OUC. Members of the academic staff are engaged as part-time project workers and are co-responsible for developing a language- and communication course for migrants applying for HE. They are also responsible for rendering their knowledge and experiences visible to their colleagues.

Findings

A common experience amongst the members of the project group is that they have learned a lot, "you learned in a way to think differently, you opened up for other opportunities." The project participants also believe that they have become more aware of the great resources that the diversity represents, and of listening actively to the students, use new methods in teaching and guidance to increase the learning outcome of all students.

Working with developing a language and communication course, has given ample opportunity for learning through academic discussions about content and educational approach. This contributed to create ripples in the different faculties at OUC. The participants tell about the effect this work has had: "[...] we are discussing and they're [the lecturers] thrilled when I come up with ideas about how things can be done to reach all [students]. "They have also learned that their colleagues now try to change their practices in lecturing and guiding students.

Key topics

Monitoring diversity, Meeting the needs of a heterogeneous studentbody, Educational developmental, Development project, interfaculty cooperation,

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