Title: Moving forward or not? ‘Bias Aware Teaching and Learning’ in a Danish university

Relation to the conference theme (up to 50 words)

This proposal highlights challenges associated with encouraging bias aware teaching and learning at a Danish university and the implications for socially just practices and students’ and colleagues’ agency. It also suggests the need for more Nordic research into bias aware teaching and learning, if it is to be taken seriously.

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Abstract and 3 – 5 keywords (up to 150 words)

Without Bias Aware Teaching and Learning (BATL), how do we ensure socially just teaching, learning and assessment practices? And, in turn how do we facilitate students’ and colleagues’ bias-aware agency when they pursue professional development and careers? In one of my roles as an Academic Developer I am intent on raising a Danish university’s commitment to BATL and eliciting more specific articulation and strategic commitment to universal BATL goals and practices. However, without such strategic commitment to implementing and sustaining BATL coupled with engagement by teachers and students, its take-up is limited to the few champions. Higher Education (HE) is not exempt from biased practices (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974), which provokes the question: whilst there is a growing number of HE institutions researching and addressing BATL why do these tend be non-Nordic HE institutions? Is BATL perhaps less necessary in the Nordic context or is it time to find out?

Keywords: ‘bias-aware teaching and learning’

Description of the problem/challenge including what are the help and feedback you are looking for? (350 words)

A Danish university’s Centre for Teaching and Learning portfolio of support for Bias Aware Teaching and Learning (BATL) includes its integration into the mandatory pedagogic programme for Assistant Professors; the online resource http://unlimited.sdu.dk/ a voluntary course on BATL available to all teachers and study programme leaders and access to bespoke consultancy. However, to date there has been limited take-up by teachers, gatekeepers and policy makers and little evidence of BATL practices. Engagement with BATL seems to be limited to the converted, teachers who are already aware of the need for it in their courses. The reasons for this must include ever present time pressures, even teachers who value BATL may not have the time to address their values-practice gaps. But might there also be cultural barriers? What about the value attributed to teacher autonomy in Nordic HEIs, wherein advocates for BATL may encounter resistance by teachers who regard BATL principles and practices as superfluous and intrusive (Solomonides, 2016)? Whatever the contributing factors, the situation raises a concern, as current research reveals the unsustainable and even negative impact of short-term unconscious bias training. Current recommendations are for longitudinal team-based approaches to addressing conscious and unconscious bias (Atewologun et al., 2018), which needs systemic and sustained commitment within departments, programmes and faculties, but how to move this forward? What would be the most effective approach to engaging the university with BATL?
Internationally, more universities are embracing the need to raise awareness of bias and to provide practical tools to mitigate its effects on peers and students (Muneer, Cotton and Winter, 2015). But why is it that research into bias in teaching, learning and assessment practices tends to come from non-Nordic countries. Would we not expect research on bias in teaching and learning practices to emanate from countries, which lead the way with equal opportunities practices and legislation? Might expectations of bias in Nordic Higher Education’s pedagogic practices be so incongruent with regional equal opportunity norms and legislation, that the Nordic lens limits receptiveness to BATL? Is it time for more research into bias in teaching, learning and assessment practices within Nordic universities?